

“WE CAN LAUGH AT OURSELVES”: HAWAI‘I ETHNIC HUMOR, LOCAL IDENTITY AND THE MYTH OF MULTICULTURALISM¹

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Abstract

Hawai‘i’s multiculturalism and perceived harmonious race and ethnic relations are widely celebrated in popular and academic discourse. The image of Hawai‘i as a “racial paradise,” a rainbow of peacefully co-existing groups, partially stems from the fact that among the various racial and ethnic groups there is no numerical majority and from the common belief in equality of opportunity and status. Hawai‘i ethnic humor is part and parcel of the maintenance and continued reinforcement of the notion of Hawai‘i as “racial paradise” with underlying racializing and stigmatizing discourses that disguise severe social inequalities and elide differential access to wealth and power. In this paper, I examine the intersection of language, humor, and representation by analyzing the linguistic practices in the comedy performances of Frank DeLima, a pioneer in Hawai‘i ethnic humor, and excerpts from *Buckaloose: Shmall Keed Time* (Small Kid Time), a comedy CD by Da Braddahs, a relatively new but tremendously popular comedy duo in Hawai‘i. Central to these comedy performances is the use of a language variety that I call Mock Filipino, a strategy often employed by Local comedians to differentiate the speakers of Philippine languages from speakers of Hawai‘i Creole English (or Pidgin). A key component to understanding the use of Mock Filipino is the idea of “Local” as a cultural and linguistic identity category and its concomitant multiculturalist discourse. I argue that the Local comedians’ use of Mock Filipino relies on the myth of multiculturalism while constructing racializing discourses which position immigrant Filipinos as a cultural and linguistic Other, signifying their outsider status and their subordinate position in the social hierarchy and order. The linguistic practices in the comedy performances are thus identity acts that help to produce and disseminate ideas about language, culture, and identity while normalizing Local and reinforcing Hawai‘i’s mainstream multiculturalist ideology.

Keywords: Race/ethnicity, Representation, Ethnic humor, Filipino, Hawai‘i.

1. Introduction

The typical image of Hawai‘i² is that of the commoditized touristic scene of white sandy beaches, swaying palm trees, picture-perfect sunsets, and highly sexualized hula girls and surfer boys. In large part, the political, economic, and ideological machinery of

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² Following standard practice, I use the ‘okina (or glottal stop) whenever appropriate, like “Hawai‘i,” unless in a quote or name that does not use it. Also in some cases, I do not use the ‘okina in English-language derived words, like “Hawaiian.”

global tourism (specifically, the Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau) produces and heavily markets this image of Hawai'i as "tropical paradise," a tourist playground for rest and relaxation with warm and inviting "natives" who "hang loose" and happily welcome and serve visitors. Additionally, a complementary image of Hawai'i depends on its much-celebrated multiculturalism and perceived racial/ethnic harmony. In 1938, noted sociologist Robert Park suggested that Hawai'i was "the most notable instance of a melting-pot of the modern world" (see also Park 1926, 1937; Adams 1937; and Lind 1938). Since then, in popular and academic discourse various scholars, novelists, and journalists have characterized the islands as a "racial paradise," "the racial melting-pot of the Pacific" and an exemplary "multicultural, multiethnic society" (see Okamura 1998 and Rosa 2001). This image of groups harmoniously co-existing is derived partially from the fact that there is no numerical majority among the various racial and ethnic groups who have settled in the islands. Moreover, the 2000 U.S. Census indicates that the majority of Hawai'i residents are Asian and/or Pacific Islanders, giving the state population statistics sharply different from the rest of the United States.³ Because there is no numerical majority, there is a widely held misperception that "everyone is a minority" and that there is an equality of opportunity and status. This is often used as the basis for the "uniqueness" of Hawai'i. Furthermore, Hawai'i is commonly seen as "living proof" (Grant & Ogawa 1993) of the United States' "revolutionary message of equality of opportunity for all"; a prime example of racial tolerance and cultural intermixture where "peoples of different races and creeds can live together, enriching each other, in harmony and democracy" (Fuchs 1961: 449). In other words, there is a general perception that the various groups have "mixed" together and no single racial/ethnic group is politically and economically dominant despite evidence to the contrary - namely, the history of U.S. colonialism and foreign domination; the subjugation of Native Hawaiians (their displacement, dispossession, and population collapse); the exploitation of Asian workers as sources of cheap labor which facilitated the development of U.S. capitalism in Hawai'i and investment in Asia; and the racial and ethnic stratification that positions Whites, Japanese, and Chinese as elites and Native Hawaiian, Filipinos, and Samoans as subordinate (Okamura 1990).

Beyond the population numbers, the notion of Hawai'i as "racial paradise" is also constructed through the widespread promotion of the "Hawai'i Multicultural Model" (Okamura 1998). Central to the "Hawai'i Multicultural Model" is its endorsement of Local,⁴ a racialized identity category that indexes a sociopolitically constructed panethnic formation comprised of Asian and/or Pacific Islanders who were born and raised in the islands, as the unmarked normative order (Hill 1998) and the mainstream principle for collective identification. Although the notion of a "racial paradise" and the elevation of the Local as the mainstream disguises differential access to wealth and power among the various racial/ethnic groups and renders Native Hawaiians marginal, if not altogether invisible, multiculturalism as sociopolitical ideal

³ According to the 2000 Hawai'i State Department of Health Survey, Native Hawaiians constitute 22.1% of the approximately 1.2 million total population, Japanese 21.9%, Caucasians 21.1%, Filipinos 15.9%, Chinese 5.8%, and Other (mostly Pacific Islanders) 13.3%. In Hawai'i, the Department of Health survey is often perceived to be more reflective of the racial/ethnic distribution in the state than the U.S. Census.

⁴ Following convention applied to other racial/ethnic categories such as "Asian American" or "Pacific Islander," here I use the term "Local" with a capital "L". My use of "local" with a lower-case "l" refers to the more general use of the term, which in this case, points to the relatedness, situatedness, and/or typicality of an object and/or phenomenon to Hawai'i.

and frame remains an integral part of daily, lived experiences. In other words, multiculturalism in Hawai'i is not merely a political symbol of the islands, it is popularly perceived as the ideological underpinnings of everyday social, cultural, political, and economic realities in the Local ethnoscape.

In this paper, I explore the idea of Hawai'i as "multicultural paradise" and the production of Local by examining the widely popular practice of ethnic humor. Like Chun (this volume) I use comedy performances as a focus of sociolinguistic analysis. In the paper, I argue that Hawai'i ethnic humor is both a space for the production of "Local knowledge(s)" (Chang 1996) and Local ideologies and a site where identities are reproduced and the social order and racial hierarchy are enacted. While others have focused on the construction of Local as a non-White panethnic formation (Okamura 1994; Takaki 1983) and as a sociopolitical identity set in opposition to Native Hawaiians (Trask 2000; Fujikane 2000), this paper draws attention to the production of Local as a non-immigrant identity. In this regard, I examine the ways in which Local comedians appropriate the voice of immigrant Filipinos through the use Mock Filipino, commonly referred to as English with a "Filipino accent." Mock Filipino is a strategy often employed by Local comedians to differentiate the speakers of Philippine languages from speakers of Pidgin⁵ or what most linguists call Hawai'i Creole English or Hawai'i English Creole, the lingua franca of Local residents. Audience members do not necessarily speak or understand Philippine languages, yet many often recognize individual Filipino words and the shift into Mock Filipino. Although there are approximately one hundred Philippine languages and the national language of the Philippines officially is called "Filipino," the language variety mocked by Local comedians is more of an amalgamation of Ilokano and Tagalog, two of the most commonly spoken Philippine languages in Hawai'i⁶. Similar to the effects of Mock Spanish (Hill 1998) and Mock Asian (Chun, this volume), Mock Filipino produces stigmatizing discourses of immigrant Filipinos. Like Mock Asian, public utterances of Mock Filipino in the continental U.S. are rather rare outside of the comedy performances of Filipino American comics like Rex Navarrete and Kevin Camia⁷. In Hawai'i, Mock Filipino seems to have more resonance. Filipinos and non-Filipinos are more likely to publicly voice a cautionary "*Halla*," an exasperated "*Ay sus!*" or front a "Filipino accent" in everyday linguistic practice⁸. These public utterances simultaneously point to discourses of tolerance, inclusivity and acceptance which reinscribe Hawai'i's mainstream "multiculturalist ideology" (San Juan 2002) and the marking of immigrant Filipino Otherness.

⁵ In this paper, I use the more common name, Pidgin, to refer to the language variety that is spoken by the majority of residents in Hawai'i.

⁶ Most Local comedians do not distinguish between Ilokano and Tagalog. Rather than self-conscious code-switching between Ilokano and Tagalog, "Filipino" words and phrases are often haphazardly combined. For example, in Da Braddahs' song, "We are Filipino," the line "*haan nga babait, haan nga babait*" combines the Ilokano words *haan nga* (it's not) with the incorrect *babait* (the appropriate adjective form is *mabait*), which is derived from the Tagalog root word *bait* (virtue). In the song, what's important is not the grammatical accuracy of the phrase, but its linguistic force as an index of "Filipino" speech and a humorous frame.

⁷ For example, see Navarrete's "Marites vs. the Superfriends" available at <http://www.fractalcow.com/rex>.

⁸ Outside of Local comedy, examples of Mock Filipino can also be found in local greeting cards (Da Kine Cards) and heard in the various morning radio shows in which deejays tell jokes using a "Filipino accent."

In this paper, I situate the use of Mock Filipino in Hawai'i ethnic humor as part of the broader racializing and stigmatizing discourses of Filipinos in Hawai'i. Although media depictions often criminalize and misrepresent Filipinos as prone to violence (Quemuel 1996) as well as focus on "Filipino male sexual violence" (Fujikane 2000), in this paper I focus on discourses that highlight immigrant Filipino linguistic and cultural difference. I argue that Local comedians use Mock Filipino as a "strategy of pejoration" (Hill 1993) to construct discourses which position immigrant Filipinos as cultural and linguistic Others, signifying their outsider status and their subordinate position in the social hierarchy and order. Through Mock Filipino, Local comedians perform the voices of immigrant Filipinos, which illustrates one of the ways that Locals construct the linguistic incompetence and subordinate identity of immigrant Filipinos. Although positioned as "innocent" and "harmless" joking in which "we can laugh at ourselves," Hawai'i ethnic humor in general and Mock Filipino in particular simultaneously produce stigmatizing and "racially interested" discourses (Hill 1995) that uphold the positive self-image of Locals, especially their membership in Hawai'i's "multicultural and racial paradise," while lowering that of immigrant Filipinos. The linguistic practice in the comedy performances are thus identity acts that help to produce and disseminate ideas about language, culture, and identity while normalizing Local and reinforcing Hawai'i's myth of multiculturalism.

In this paper, I intervene on the broader discourses of language, humor, and representation by examining the portrayal of Filipinos in Local humor. Specifically, I examine the linguistic practices in the comedy performances of Frank DeLima as well as excerpts from *Buckaloose: Shmall Keed Time* (Small Kid Time), a comedy CD by Da Braddahs, a relatively new but tremendously popular comedy duo in Hawai'i. Frank DeLima, who self-identifies as Portuguese, Hawaiian, Chinese, English, Spanish, Scottish, Irish, and French, is a pillar of the local comedy scene and is commonly referred to as the "king of ethnic humor in Hawaii" (Coleman 2003). Da Braddahs is comprised of two Hawai'i-born and raised comics, James Roaché, who is Filipino and Italian, and Tony Silva, who is Hawaiian, Chinese, Portuguese, and Irish. In *Buckaloose: Shmall Keed Time*, Da Braddahs follow the template of local comedy established by the pioneering comedy team of Booga Booga in the 1970s and 1980s that included jokes based on racial/ethnic stereotypes familiar to Hawai'i audiences (e.g. cheap Chinese, dumb Portuguese), used Pidgin as the primary medium of communication, and included song parodies and character sketches involving wild costumes, racial/ethnic caricatures, and overstated accents. In addition to their comedy CD, Da Braddahs have four self-produced videos and four DVDs, a thirty-minute show (called "Da Braddahs and Friends") that airs on local cable TV six nights a week, and they host a live weekly comedy show which depicts "the comic underside of contemporary local living" (Berger 2002a). Da Braddahs are also responsible for two catch phrases, "Jus Buckaloose" (just bust loose or just go buck wild) and "Ey, no get nuts" (don't go crazy), that appear on a range of merchandise from bumper stickers to hats to shirts. Da Braddahs' character sketches play off of longstanding racial/ethnic stereotypes and a review of *Buckaloose: Shmall Keed Time* notes that the "Chinese, Filipino, 'haole,'⁹ and other characters here are staple types" where "the characters and situations are almost all basic Booga/Rap bits that have been used and abused by almost all local comics for the past 20 years" (Berger 1998). Although there are other

⁹ "Foreigner" in Hawaiian, but refers to "White" in its more racialized contemporary usage.

problematic characters in the videos and on the TV show, like Keoki and Kakio who play on the image of the gay male kumu hula¹⁰ and his alaka'i¹¹, Bush and Bully (the mindless Samoan tree-trimmers), and Pocho and Tanda (two Local boys), here I focus on the Filipino character, Tata Cayatmo, who has a more prominent role in the CD, and his interactions with the Local character, Joe.¹² Da Braddahs' Tata Cayatmo functions as the stereotypical elderly male Filipino immigrant whose linguistic incompetence is positioned against Joe's Pidgin, drawing attention to the use of language in the othering of Filipinos and to the overall politics of identity in Hawai'i.

2. Local matters and the myth of multiculturalism

The idea of "Local" is crucial for understanding ethnic humor and the politics of identity in Hawai'i. Analyses of race and ethnic relations in contemporary Hawai'i society invariably lead to discussions of the notion of Local. San Buenaventura (1996) suggests that to understand Hawai'i "is to know the meaning and nuances of 'local' identity and the continuous contradistinctions that are made between the local and the 'non-local' *other*" (San Buenaventura 1996: 38, emphasis in original). As San Buenaventura notes, Local operates in a field of ongoing relational oppositions that form a Local/non-Local binary. In the Hawai'i context, the idea of "local" extends beyond simple place-based affiliation that indicates living in a particular area, being born there, or living there for a long time. Local has become a racialized social identity category; a panethnic formation composed primarily of the various non-White groups that usually trace their entrance into the islands to the plantation era – namely those of Chinese, Japanese, Okinawan, Filipino, and Korean descent. In this way, Local is the label for those who are usually classified as "Asian American" or "Asian Pacific American" in the continental United States. For many Hawai'i residents, particularly those of Asian ancestry, Local is the most salient category for political and cultural identification. So what and who is Local? Various scholars have focused on the cultural (Ogawa 1978, 1981; Takaki 1983, 1984; Grant & Ogawa 1993), structural (Okamura 1980, 1994, 1998), and political (Trask 2000; Fujikane 2000) to examine the nature and dynamics of Local. Despite their differing emphases, a common feature among these various approaches is that each locates the emergence and development of Local in Hawai'i's labor history (preceded by the entry of European and American capital investment and the shift from mercantilism to large-scale agricultural production) and the shared experiences among the mainly Asian plantation labor force.

A key aspect to the emergence of Local is the development of Hawai'i Pidgin, the language that now serves as the lingua franca of those who identify themselves as Local and is often used as the primary marker of being Local. Although Okamura (1980, 1998) relegates Pidgin to the "symbolic aspect" of Local culture and identity, the language is a crucial element in the formation of the pan-ethnic identity:

¹⁰ In Hawaiian, *kumu* means "foundation," "source," "tree," or "teacher." In this sense, *kumu hula* means "hula teacher."

¹¹ In Hawaiian, *alaka'i* means "leader" or "to lead."

¹² It is also interesting to note that in their videos and on the TV show, Da Braddahs also have a character named "The Governor," a caricature of the former governor of Hawai'i, Benjamin Cayetano. Cayetano is a Filipino American who by most standards speaks mainstream American English, but has a "Filipino accent" in the sketches.

As pidgin English became the common language of plantation laborers and their families, it enabled people from different countries to communicate with each other and helped to create a new island identity for them...Speaking Hawaiian English or pidgin, the immigrants and their children were no longer only Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Puerto Rican, or Portuguese. On the plantations, pidgin English began to give its users a working class as well as a Hawaiian or "local" identity, which transcended their particular ethnic identity (Takaki 1983: 119).

Moreover, the development of Pidgin as a shared language among the various non-White plantation workers facilitated their shift from "sojourners to settlers," from individual ethnic groups to an overarching panethnic consolidation. Although "standard English" or mainstream U.S. English continues to be the language of power and prestige, Pidgin has come to function as the language of Locals, enjoying "covert prestige" as a "badge of honor" marking Local-ness (i.e. belonging to Hawai'i) and becoming the primary medium of communication for Local comedians (Da Pidgin Coup 1999; see also Lum 1998). In addition, Pidgin has come to symbolize Hawai'i's multiculturalism and the ideologies of mixing, acceptance, equality, and assimilation. Pidgin reflects the islands' history of interracial harmony: "Pidgin is inclusive, a reflection of our historical attitudes and the value placed on getting along and trying to find common ground. It is non-hierarchical, and puts people on an even footing" (Da Pidgin Coup 1999). The language exemplifies the "common ground" on which Locals stand, with both feet firmly and equally planted; it illustrates that everyone can indeed get along. Pidgin is also causally linked to the formation of the panethnic Local: "It is a language that has brought people together in spite of their differences in ancestral culture and language and has created a 'local' culture which blends ideas and flavors. It has taught us to be not just tolerant but accepting. It has allowed immigrants to begin new shoots without losing old roots" (Da Pidgin Coup 1999). Pidgin epitomizes the "blending process" associated with the development of Local identity and culture. In this way, Pidgin and Local are inseparable, constituting the symbolic, cultural, and linguistic aspect of multiculturalism in Hawai'i. As Local comedian Frank DeLima puts it: "Hawaii is local. Hawaii is Pidgin" (in Coleman 2003).

Local also involves a type of cultural assimilation, a "blending process" resulting in various "points of commonality" (Grant & Ogawa 1993), an inventory of cultural traits and characteristics. Included among these cultural points of commonality are shared food preferences (represented by the "mixed plate" which includes different culinary items from the various plantation groups), social customs and traditions (e.g. taking off shoes before entering a home), application of the concept of *'ohana* (or "family") as part of extended family networks, folk beliefs (e.g. the prevalence of ghost stories), and ethnic joke telling.¹³ These "points of commonality" have served as the bases for the seemingly low-keyed social interactions and smooth interpersonal relationships among Hawai'i residents. This understanding of the Local highlights the atmosphere of mutual respect, consideration, generosity, friendliness, tolerance, and harmony in the islands (Okamura 1980; Grant & Ogawa 1993).

However, from a political perspective that highlights the islands' history of Native subordination and settler domination, Local also points to sources of division and opposition. According to Trask, Hawai'i's history of colonization is "a twice-told

¹³ In this regard, Blake suggests that "[t]he tradition of ethnic joking is an integral part of the social fabric that makes Hawai'i society unique. The joke lore reflects this uniqueness especially in the way it plays on stereotypes" (1996: 7).

tale, first of discovery and settlement by European and American businessmen and missionaries, then of the plantation Japanese, Chinese, and eventually Filipino rise to dominance in the islands" (Trask 2000: 2-3). The development of Local is part and parcel of the "twice-told tale" and the formation of Hawai'i's settler society. For Trask, Local is the name children of Asian settlers call themselves, which feeds the American ethnic myth of success and helps to justify immigrant hegemony:

In truth, 'local' ideology tells a familiar, and false, tale of success: Asians came as poor plantation workers and triumphed decades later as the new, democratically-elected ruling class. Not coincidentally, the responsibility for continued Hawaiian dispossession falls to imperialist *haole* and incapacitated Natives, that is, not to Asians. Thus do these settlers deny their ascendancy was made possible by the continued national oppression of Hawaiians, particularly the theft of our lands and the crushing of our independence" (Trask 2000: 4).

Thus, the use of Local locates Asians outside of the White and "settler" category and elides Asian participation in U. S. colonial domination and Native Hawaiian subjugation. For Trask, Local equals Asian but not Native Hawaiian. Thus the development of Local obscures the history of Hawai'i's indigenous people while staking a settler claim. In this sense, Local excludes Native Hawaiians while asserting a competing claim of rightful belonging to the islands. The idea of Local espouses a "land of immigrants" rhetoric that depends on a multiculturalist ideology and purports an ethos of racial diversity, heterogeneity, tolerance, and harmony while masking the islands' settler history of foreign domination and Native subordination.

Political and economic changes in Hawai'i since the mid-1960s, including the Native Hawaiian sovereignty movement, have enhanced the continuing salience of Local. According to Okamura, these structural factors are the backdrop for the field of relational oppositions in which Local identity is constructed:

"[L]ocal identity is based on the categorical opposition between groups considered Local and those considered non-Local, including *haole*, immigrants, the military, tourists, and foreign investors. Local is essentially a relative category; groups and individuals are viewed or view themselves as local in relation to others who are not so perceived. From this perspective, local identity is very exclusive rather than all inclusive and serves to create and maintain social boundaries between groups" (Okamura 1994: 165).

In this sense, Local is both inclusive and exclusive, involving processes of self- and other-definition. Okamura points to the slipperiness of Local and observes that the policing of boundaries are situationally dependent on structural oppositions. The formulation and formation of Local involves a nested hierarchy of relational alterities, in which a dominant node indexes a working class background, the subordinate position of plantation workers in opposition to the dominant White planter and merchant oligarchy. In this dominant form, Local is defined as a non-White, primarily Asian Pacific Islander working-class identity. However, in this paper I foreground the relationality and situatedness of Local. Depending on the sociohistorical context and actors involved, Local can index racialized bodies ('look Local'), cultural identities ('act Local'), linguistic affiliations ('talk Local'), and political positionings. In this way, the boundaries of Local are constantly changing and continuously policed through processes of self-definition and othering. In the sections that follow, I examine the ways in which racializing imagery and language practices in Local comedy are used to construct Locals and non-Locals.

3. Constructing “*buk buk*”

*Beloved Frank de Limas,
Willy Ks,
everytime you meet me
on the narrow streets of
Waipahu or Ewa or Kalihi,¹⁴
in wedding celebrations
or birthday parties,
in the mortuaries
or pharmacies,
in the supermarkets
or churches,
even in the schools
or cinema houses,
you never failed to ask me
about that Black Dog.*

Elmer Omar Pizo, Black Dog [pinoy style], 2001

Local comedy and ethnic jokes are important sites for the practice and performance of Local identity and culture. The history of “Local comedy” can be traced to the 1950s and 1960s when Sterling Mossman, Lucky Luck, and Kent Bowman a.k.a. perpetual senatorial candidate K. K. Ka‘umanua (pronounced like “cow manure”) were popular comedic performers (Tonouchi 1999). Mossman, dubbed “Hawai‘i’s First Comedic Entertainer,” was a band leader who combined singing and telling jokes in his comedy routines. Lucky Luck, known as “Hawai‘i’s Prince of Comedy,” was a popular radio personality with his own variety show and children’s television show. Bowman, known as “The King of Pidgin English,” recorded a half-dozen albums which included his stand-up routines and children’s stories told in Pidgin. Arguably, the heyday of Hawai‘i ethnic humor was the late 1970s and 1980s. During this period, Andy Bumatai, Mel Cabang, and Booga Booga, the pioneering comedy group of James Kawika Piimauna “Rap” Reiplinger, James Grant Benton, and Ed Ka‘ahea, set the stage for subsequent local comedians and established the template for contemporary Hawai‘i ethnic humor, often referred to as “*Kanaka*”¹⁵ comedy.” Race and ethnicity and the production of Local were crucial to the popularity of Booga Booga. Their comedy sketches played up on familiar racial/ethnic stereotypes: “Ethnic identity is the key to their ability to generate material which is universally appealing to local audiences: Ka‘ahea as the laid back ‘token Hawaiian,’ Benton the reserved ‘Kabuki type,’ Reiplinger more indefinably as the hustler – the ‘token Portagee,’¹⁶ perhaps” (Smith 1977: 20-21, in Tonouchi 1999). As Sodehani observes,

¹⁴ Ewa and Kalihi are two residential neighborhoods on the island of O‘ahu with high concentrations of Filipino residents. They are ethnic enclaves usually regarded as “Filipino neighborhoods.”

¹⁵ *Kanaka* means “person” or “human” in Hawaiian, but in contemporary usage it has come to connote “Native Hawaiian.”

¹⁶ “Portuguese” in Pidgin.

[t]heir whole act was nothing but ethnic jokes and stereotypes: families bickering at home; Hawaiian musicians, busboys, hotel workers having fun while aspiring to be more. They made visible and celebrated a sense of "us-ness" onstage. All spoken in pidgin, not school-mandated 'good English grammar'" (Sodetani 2001).

Booga Booga's "*kanaka* comedy" poked fun of social life in Hawai'i, resonating with the everyday realities of their Local audiences. In this way, although it is based on problematic racial and ethnic stereotypes, "*kanaka* comedy" and its use of Pidgin, not "school-mandated" English, is integral in the discursive construction of Local and the creation of an "us-ness" among Hawai'i's working class people. In addition, the comedy group's rise to prominence coincided with the growing legitimization of Pidgin in academic and everyday discourse during the 1980s. Furthermore, as Tonouchi suggests, the rise of "*kanaka* comedy" corresponded with the racial/ethnic consciousness-raising of the late 1960s and 1970s and the emergence of Local nationalism (Fujikane 1994): "Booga Booga's substantial popularity stems in part from being able to capitalize on dis movement creating separate ethnic identities as well as positing one collective Local identity against da mainland continent" (Tonouchi 1999: 24). The racial/ethnic awareness of this period helped to establish the idea of Local, especially as an identity positioned against "da mainland," producing a Hawai'i/continental U.S. dichotomy. Although the 1990s experienced a lull in the development of "*kanaka* comedy," there has been a recent resurgence with the rise of the next generation of young Local comedians, like Lanai and Augie T, Paul Ogata, Greg Hammer, and Da Braddahs.

Filipino jokes are part of the broader "ethnic humor" widely circulated in Local comedy. Filipinos are by no means the only targets of ethnic jokes, but some argue that they bear a disproportionate burden (Revilla 1996; Okamura 1996; Quemuel 1996). Although there is a wide variety of Filipino jokes, there appear to be two primary types: Jokes that focus on "Filipino vocabulary" (which depend on Mock Filipino) and "Filipino culinary tastes" (specifically dog-eating). The Filipino dog-eating jokes are especially prevalent. The following examples are taken from Frank DeLima's *Joke Book* (1991):¹⁷

Did you hear about the new Filipino cookbook?

101 Ways to Wok Your Dog

What do Filipinos call a dogcatcher's truck?

Meals on Wheels

What's a Filipino's favorite meal?

Mutt loaf.

What do you call a Filipino family without a dog?

Vegetarians.

What do you call a Filipino family with one dog?

A family that doesn't know where its next meal is coming from.

What do you call a Filipino family with five dogs?

Ranchers.

¹⁷ For more recent examples, see Paul Ogata's 1998 comedy CD, *Mental Oriental*, especially "Dr. Ay Seuss, parts 1 & 2" which employs Mock Filipino and caricatures the "Filipino" preference for eating black dog.

As demonstrated in the excerpt from the Pizo poem, *Black Dog [pinoy style]*, quoted above, Filipino dog-eating jokes are widely disseminated, in public and in private. They greet the poet “everytime you meet me” in the Filipino neighborhoods of O‘ahu. The Black Dog follows him even outside of the Filipino residential enclaves, illustrating the pervasiveness of Filipino dog-eating jokes in the media and entertainment industry (particularly in the references to Local comedian Frank DeLima and Local singer, Willie K.). As standards in Local comedy routines (Quemuel 1996) Filipino dog-eating jokes move from light talk in private spheres to public joking (Hill 1993) that is used as entertainment as well as to construct social hierarchy and order.

In Local comedy, a dominant Filipino character type is the *manong*,¹⁸ the elderly male immigrant who is fresh off the boat (or FOB) or Just Off the Jet (JOJ), eats dog and goats, speaks with a “heavy Filipino accent,” and holds multiple low-wage and low-prestige jobs.¹⁹ The *manong* often stumbles over his words or has poor word choice, has long pauses when he talks, and has problems enunciating (i.e. phonological and morphological exaggerations and general linguistic incompetence). What is usually belittled in Filipino jokes is the fresh-off-the-boatness and the linguistic, cultural, social, and ideological characteristics associated with recent immigrants, particularly their perceived “heavy Filipino accent,” affinity for bright clothes, culinary tastes, and their general cultural incompatibility and incompetence. DeLima’s “Filipino Purple Danube,”²⁰ a song parody using a waltz tempo that mimics the music for the *tinikling*, a traditional Filipino folk dance that uses two bamboo poles, is exemplary. DeLima begins the song with the Ilokano greeting “*Kumustakayo*” (“How are you all?”) and immediately jumps into Mock Filipino nonsensical sounds that transform into clucking sounds. The lyrics for the song are as follows:

(1) “Filipino Purple Danube”

- 01 what’s purple and brown, *buk buk, buk buk*
- 02 what squats on the ground, *buk buk, buk buk*
- 03 hold knife to your throat, *buk buk, buk buk*
- 04 and eats billy goat, *buk buk, buk buk*
- 05 who dance with two poles, *buk buk, buk buk*
- 06 has hairs on his moles, *buk buk, buk buk*
- 07 who eats *bagoong*,²¹ all day long
- 08 you are right, it’s the *manong*

- 09 who drives Cadillac, *buk buk, manong*
- 10 light show on the back, *manong, manong*

¹⁸ A kin term that means “older brother” but in Local usage, refers to “older Filipino man.” The Localized pronunciation of the term places the accent on the second syllable rather than the first as it is pronounced in Ilokano.

¹⁹ This is often the evidence used for the more “positive” stereotypes of Filipinos as hardworking and industrious.

²⁰ The song originally appears in *Frank DeLima’s Joke Book* (1991) as “The Purple Danube.” The song lyrics that I transcribe here are taken from a more recent version which appears in DeLima’s *Silva Anniversary* (2001).

²¹ In Ilokano, *bugguong*, is “salted fermented fish or shrimps used to season food” (Rubino 2000) known for its pungent odor.

- 11 who wears silver pants, *manong*, *manong*
 12 goes out disco dance, *manong*, *manong*
 13 who greases his hair, *manong*, *manong*
 14 who perfumes the air, *manong*, *manong*
 15 who mixes *opai*²² with fish eye
 16 you are right, it's the P.I.²³
 17 you are right, *salamat*²⁴

In the *Silva Anniversary* version of the song above, DeLima substitutes "who greases his hair/who perfumes the air" (lines 13-14) for "who works on Lanai²⁵/whose wife is *hapai*"²⁶ and leaves out the entire third verse that appears in his *Joke Book*. The missing verse is more of the same, referring to Filipinos as "Flips" who participate in cockfighting and wear orange socks to go with their purple shirt and silver pants. (I have been told stories about immigrant Filipinos who intentionally avoid wearing these colors for fear of being ridiculed.) "Filipino Purple Danube" helps to construct the identity category of "*buk buk*"²⁷ /*bukbuk*/, which is synonymous with immigrant Filipinos and is the primary marker of linguistic and cultural otherness. DeLima's "Danube" constructs the stereotypical *buk buk* who is dangerous (holds knife to your throat), sexualized (whose wife is *hapai*), wears bright colored clothes (purple shirt, silver pants, orange socks), conspicuously showy (the entire second verse), and maintains Filipino ethnic signs, primarily culinary tastes (billy goat, *bagoong*, and *opae* with fish eye), cultural behaviors (squats on the ground), and traditions (dance with two poles).²⁸ This stereotypical image can also be found in Local greeting cards. For instance, a belated birthday card has a picture of a "Filipino" man wearing a bright purple shirt who is accompanied by a black dog, goat, and chicken. The "Filipino" man, aghast, has his hands on his face and the caption exclaims "Ay Sus!" The inside of the card reads, "I porgot yo' bertdey." In order to get the joke in the card, the reader must find both the racialized images as well as the Mock Filipino "funny."

DeLima's stereotypical *buk buk* reappears in the comedy of Da Braddahs. In *Shmall Keed Time*, the name of the Filipino character is Tata Cayatmo. The choice of the name is particularly interesting. In Ilokano, *tata* is a term of address that is used for

²² In Hawaiian, *opae* are "small shrimp" (see Simonson et al 1981).

²³ P.I. refers to the Philippine Islands, but is often used alongside terms like *buk buk*, *manong*, and Flip to refer to Filipinos.

²⁴ "Thank you" in Tagalog.

²⁵ One of the Hawaiian islands that is heavily dependent on the tourism industry and has a large Filipino population.

²⁶ A Hawaiian term, which means "to carry," but refers to being pregnant.

²⁷ The term "*buk buk*" is derived from a Tagalog term, "*bukbok*," which means "to rot" and thus refers to something rotten (Alcantara 1981). In Ilokano, "*bukbok*" is a type of woodworm and also means "cavity (of teeth)" (Rubino 2000: 125; see also DeLima 1991: 67). The common onomatopoeic explanation for the term "*buk buk*" is that it mimics the clucking sound of chickens, pointing to how Filipinos are closely associated with fighting chickens. Take for example the following joke taken from DeLima (1991): "Official Filipino bird: Fighting chicken."

²⁸ Representations of Filipino subordination have their historical origins in the plantation era: "The stereotypes are an unfortunate historical burden of the plantation period of labor recruitment when unattached young males with little formal education dominated the Filipino population" (Okamura 1996: 3). Despite the large numbers of pre-World War II Filipino immigrants, the community was mostly composed of single men; it was a "bachelor society." At the height of Filipino immigration to Hawai'i, the male to female ratio was 3 to 1 in 1923 and 9 to 1 in 1927 (San Buenaventura 1995).

a male parent or uncle, one generation above speaker. The word “*cayat*” or “*kayat*”²⁹ can mean “to want, like, wish, desire, [or] be willing” (Rubino 2000) and *mo* is a second person informal, singular genitive possessive enclitic. The words combined, *cayatmo*, means “do you want like, wish, desire, are willing?” Thus, the name “Tata Cayatmo” can mean “old man do you like/want” and with the sexual connotations, it can mean something like “dirty old man.” By all means Da Braddahs’ Tata Cayatmo is *buk buk* and in the context of Filipino representation in Hawai‘i, he is an extension of the criminally inclined and sexually predatory men in the Filipino “bachelor societies” of the sugar plantations³⁰.

In *Shmall Keed Time*, Tata Cayatmo takes center stage in the song “We are Filipino,” which is sung with a “Filipino accent.” The song is the second track in a two-track sequence involving two characters, Joe and Tata Cayatmo. Throughout the CD, the character Joe is the Local “hero,” the protagonist in the comedy sketch who meets up with various ethnic characters. Tata Cayatmo is the Filipino character, an older immigrant Filipino man in his 50s. Tata Cayatmo’s status as an immigrant is crucial for the set up of the joke. The song is a form of speech play that heavily depends on Mock Filipino to be humorous for its audience:

(2) “We are Filipino”

- 01 ahhhh. I would like to dedicate dis song
 02 to all of my fellow countryman
 03 from the Filifeens
 04 and flease mister DJ
 05 can you flease gib me da good reburb
 06 like da one on ahhh Hawai‘i Stars³¹
 07 cause I like to be like da good kadugo³²
 08 everybody put your hand together
 09 and sing wit me the song of my countryman
 10 Jim Shapper, gib me the tunes, boy
- 11 who do you think we are
 12 we have to trabel so dam par
 13 do you understand my accent?
 14 excuse me sir, your change is ahh, fifty cent.
 15 hoy barok,³³ will you like to try some really fresh *kalamunggay*?³⁴
 16 barok, *naimas kayatmo*?³⁵
 ((The sound of chickens crowing in the background))

²⁹ The /k/ is usually preferred in contemporary standard Ilokano orthography.

³⁰ Recent depictions of Filipino male sexual violence also appear in Local literature, particularly in the works of Lois-Ann Yamanaka. For a textual analysis of Yamanaka’s most controversial work, *Blu’s Hanging*, see Fujikane (2000).

³¹ For nearly a decade, Hawai‘i Stars aired weekly on local TV. The half-hour show was a judged karaoke-style singing competition which showcased the singing talents of people from the islands.

³² *Kadugo* is an Ilokano term that can be translated as “family member” or “relative”.

³³ *Barok* is an Ilokano term that can be translated as “young man”.

³⁴ *Kalamunggay* is the Tagalog term for a vegetable often used in Filipino dishes. *Marunggay* is the Ilokano equivalent.

³⁵ The Ilokano phrase “*naimas kayatmo*” can be translated as “It’s delicious, do you want some?”

17 everyday my fighting chicken is getting stronger
18 (Joe: Tata, Tata, put the chicken down)

Chorus:

19 we are Filifino
20 we come from the Filifeens
21 we are Filifino
22 trabeling with our pamily
23 we are Filifino
24 my family name is Tangunan
25 we are Filifino
26 my grandfader's your cleaning man
27 we are a *buk buk*, a *suksok*³⁶
28 we are a *buk buk*, a *suksok*

29 boy, listen
30 *haan nga babait, haan nga babait na babai dayta*³⁷
31 excuse me, Kalihi³⁸
32 everyday my pants are getting i-higher

Chorus:

33 we are Filifino
34 we come from the Filifeens
35 we are Filifino
36 trabeling with more pamily
37 we are Filifino
38 we all squeeze in dat pink house
39 we are Filifino
40 I go PI³⁹ for one more spouse
41 we are a *buk buk*, a *suksok*
42 we are a *buk buk*, a *suksok*

43 ahhh, my hair does not moob all day
44 because I use goat pomade
45 working at da bus stop
46 we buy our clothes from the Body Shop⁴⁰
47 working 27 more year
48 so I can retarded⁴¹ here
49 da PI channel⁴² is da one por me

³⁶ In Ilokano, "*suksok*" is loosely translated as "insertion" or "penetration".

³⁷ In Ilokano, this phrase can be loosely translated as "that girl is not respectable".

³⁸ A multiethnic, urban, working-class neighborhood on the island of O'ahu that has a high concentration of immigrant Filipino residents.

³⁹ A reference to the Philippines, "PI" = "Philippine Islands."

⁴⁰ This is a local clothing store.

⁴¹ I discuss this idea of "retarded/retired" further below.

⁴² This is a reference to TFC (The Filipino Channel), a 24-hour Philippine-language channel available on cable TV. TFC broadcasts a wide range of programs from the Philippines, including news, entertainment, music, feature films, soap operas, etc.

- 50 so I can watch it on da big TV
 51 everyday my pants are getting i-higher
 ((leafblower sound))
 52 (Joe: Tata, get out of the tree. Tata, come down from the tree)

Chorus:

- 53 we are Filifino
 54 we come from the Filifeens
 55 we are Filifino ((song fades out...))

Like DeLima's "Danube," "We are Filipino" proposes to tell the listeners what it means to be Filipino in Hawai'i. For those unfamiliar with Filipinos in Hawai'i, the song serves as a brief primer on Filipino speech, culture, history, and socioeconomic status. It provides information on how Filipinos talk, what they eat, where they work, what they do for recreation, where and how they live, and what they look like; to tell the audience who Filipinos are and what they are like. For example, the song illustrates how Filipinos continue to be heavily concentrated in the more readily available, less prestigious, and lower-paying occupations. When Tata Cayatmo says, "excuse me sir, your change is ahh fifty cent" and later in the song, "my grandfader's your cleaning man," he refers to the fact that over fifty years ago, Filipinos were the largest labor force in the plantation fields and now, they dominate the low-paying, low-status work in the new plantations, the hotels and resorts of the tourism industry, as chambermaids, janitors, and gardeners, as well as workers in the retail and service industries. Thus, it is not surprising to find older Filipinos working at fast food restaurants or as groundskeepers, Tata Cayatmo's occupation. Even though, the audience may not understand all of the words in the song, they have access to the racialized imagery, and are familiar with the negative representations of "Filipinos."

Similar to DeLima's use of *hapai* in "Filipino Purple Danube," Da Braddahs also highlight that Filipinos are *suksok*, a sexually-laden Ilokano word that means to insert or penetration. This portrayal of Filipinos continues a tradition of media representations which have depicted Filipinos as a "sex danger," criminally inclined, and prone to violence which have their origins in the plantation era. In the plantation camps, the image of the Filipino was that of an uncontrollable, dangerous, and sexually predatory male:

A well-educated professional of Japanese ancestry, in reminiscing about his childhood years spent in a plantation town, for example, remembered the stern warning of his parents that children should not wander too close to the Filipino camps lest something awful should befall them. He also recalled that young girls were told to avoid Filipino men because their mere gaze was said to be sufficient to cause pregnancy (Teodoro 1981: 55-56).

In the song, the character of Tata Cayatmo takes us back to the imagery of the plantation. The reference to the disreputable woman uttered in Ilokano, "*haan nga babait, haan nga babait. nataraki la unay dayta*/she's not virtuous, she's not virtuous, she's very flashy," and the line, "I go PI for one more spouse," only heightens the sexualization and deviation of Tata Cayatmo and the normalization of Joe.

We also find out in the chorus of the song that Filipinos are largely an immigrant community: "We are Filifino, we come from the Filifeens, we are Filifino, trabeling with more pamily." In fact, since the 1970s Filipinos have constituted the majority of

immigrants who arrive annually in Hawai'i. However, despite the large numbers of recently arrived immigrants, there is also an equally sizeable number of Filipinos who identify themselves as Local, those born and raised in Hawai'i and/or who trace their family's movement to the islands to the plantation era. The focus on Filipino immigrants in Local comedy helps to create a social cleavage between Locals and immigrants: "One effect [of these negative stereotypes and jokes] is that we have young Filipinos who are ashamed of being Filipino. Local Filipinos distance themselves from immigrant Filipinos because many of the jokes and stereotypes are based upon immigrant Filipino behaviors, like the accent" (Revilla 1996: 9). In this way, the constant flow of Filipino immigrants and their marked visibility, reproduced in ethnic humor and media representations, have led many Local Filipinos to dissociate themselves from their immigrant counterparts, drawing attention to their Local rather than a "Philippine" identity. As a result, Local Filipinos have undergone what is commonly interpreted as a process of cultural and ethnic disidentification, a denial of their cultural heritage (Revilla 1997). Da Braddahs' song elicits laughter because the imagery resonates with their largely Local audience. As Roache notes, "people can relate to us and say... 'I have a cousin who's like that'" (in Coleon 2001). In this particular case, "like that" refers to a cousin who is "*buk buk*." The assertion "I have a cousin who's like that" also makes the evaluative claim that "I'm not like my cousin" thereby creating a Local/immigrant dichotomy. In the end, "We are Filipino" has the effect of characterizing and naturalizing *buk buk* while constructing immigrant Filipinos as cultural others.

4. Mocking Filipino

Eduardo went to UH to learn English. First, he learned vocabulary. The teacher said, "Please use 'tenacious' in a sentence."

Eduardo thought for a minute, scratched his head. Then he said, "Ebery morning, before I go to school, I bend down and tie my ten-ay-shoos."

The teacher next asked Eduardo to use the word "window" in a sentence.

Eduardo got that right away and said, "Win do we eat?"

Finally, the teacher said, "Please use the following four words in a sentence: 'deduct...defense...defeat...and detail.'"

Eduardo was quiet for a long time and finally he said, "De duck jumped ober de fence, de feet before de tail."⁴³

An important feature in Local comedy is the use of exaggerated accents to differentiate the speech of Locals and non-Locals. Exaggerated accents are a form of speech play that rely on "the manipulation of elements and components of language in relation to one another, in relation to the social and cultural contexts of language use, and against the backdrop of other verbal possibilities in which it is not foregrounded" (Sherzer 2002: 1). In Local comedy, the use of Mock Filipino depends on this type of speech play, especially the intentional disjunctive use of puns, miscommunication and the manipulation of sound patterns in the formulation of perceived linguistic differences. Furthermore, Mock Filipino and "Filipino vocabulary" jokes (like the example above)

⁴³ DeLima (1991: 72)

depend on phonological and prosodic differences between Pidgin (or “standard English,” as is the case above) and Tagalog and Ilokano and the ensuing communicative confusion in order for the jokes to be perceived as humorous. For example, in order for the joke above to work, Eduardo’s speech must be done in Mock Filipino style. In other words, Eduardo, who is typified as an immigrant Filipino, must speak with a “Filipino accent”; he must “sound” *buk buk*. This “accent” is indicated by certain phonological substitutions: labial defrication /v/ → /b/ (<every> /ɛvəɹi/ → /ɛbΛɹi/; <over> /ovəɹ/ → /obΛɹ/) and alveolarization and defrication of interdentals /ð/ → /d/ (<the> /ðə/ → /dΛ/). In addition, Eduardo confuses syllable stress, interchanges vowel sounds and simplifies consonant clusters: <tenacious> /təˈneɪʃəs/ → /ˈteˈniˈʃus/ (“tennis shoes”); <window> /ˈwɪndo/ → /ˈwɛnˈdu/ (“when do”); <deduct> /dəˈdʌkt/ → /ˈdiˈdʌk/ (“the duck”); <defense> /ˈdɪfens/ → /ˈdiˈfens/ (“the fence”); <defeat> /dəˈfiːt/ → /ˈdʌˈfiːt/ (“the feet”); and <detail> /ˈdiːtel/ → /ˈdiˈtel/ (“the tail”). The humor in “Filipino vocabulary” jokes largely stems from the assumed humorous nature of Filipinos who speak English with an “accent” or those who sound *buk buk*. In many “Filipino vocabulary” jokes, the punchline or what elicits laughter is not so much what is said, but *how* it is said (i.e. the pronunciation); that is to say “Filipino” linguistic practices and the speakers associated with them are the objects of derision.

In Local comedy, what is considered humorous about Filipino jokes is that they highlight the different linguistic practices of Locals and immigrant Filipinos and the communicative misunderstandings that arise. In the following excerpts from *Buckaloose: Shmall Keed Time*, mispronunciation leads to linguistic mix-ups and miscommunication between Joe and Tata Cayatmo. Throughout the CD Joe is authenticated as the Pidgin speaker and it is his linguistic practices that are privileged. The first excerpt centers on the differences between the words “retired” and “retarded.”

(3) “Retarded/Retired”⁴⁴

- 01 TC: Imagine dis one *kadugu*, twenty sheben more year.
Imagine this, my friend. twenty seven more years
- 02 J: Rait, rait.
Right, right.
- 03 TC: I’m to going to be retarded?
I’m going to be retarded.

⁴⁴ Here, I use the Odo orthography to represent Pidgin and Mock Filipino (see Odo 1975, 1977; Sakoda & Siegel 2003; and Talmy, this volume), and Arial font for Standard English glosses. Other transcription conventions include:

-	sudden cut-off
<i>italic</i>	Emphasis (pitch, amplitude)
:	Lengthening
.	Falling contour
?	Rising contour
((comments))	Transcriber comments
(h)	Breathiness, laughter
[word	Onset of overlapping talk

- 04 J: Nou nou nou nou nou. yu min ritai:ad.
No, no, no, no. You mean retired.
- 05 TC: It is to be working poreber. [No? What are you sfeaking tired?
I'll be working forever. [No! What are you talking about, tired?
- 06 J: [NO:::U(h) Not- Ho?
[No! Not. What?
- 07 TC: My pamily is working two hundred shebenty sheben hours a week
My family works two hundred seventy seven hours a week
- 08 J: Tu handred seventi seven?
Two hundred seventy seven?
- ((lines 9-19 are omitted))
- 20 J: Hau *old* yu Tawtaw Kayats.
How old are you Tata Kayats?
- 21 TC: Nga in January I'm going to be making fifty-seven.
Ahh, in January I'm going to be fifty-seven
- 22 J: Lem mi si. lem mi si. Faiv seven tu, kaeri da wan
Lemme see. Lemme see. Five, seven, two, carry the one.
- 23 TC: Yas.
Yes.
- 24 J: Ho- HOU
Ho!
- 25 TC: Das da good one. Eighty-pour
That's the good one. Eighty-four
- 26 J: Das eiti for wen u ritai. E daes nuts maen.
That's eighty-four when you retire. Hey, that's nuts, man.
- 27 TC: Eighty-pour. Ay, dat age is perfect to be ritarted.
Eighty-four. Hey, that age is perfect to be retarded.
- 28 J: *Ritaiad*. Tawtaw. *Ritaiad*.
Retired, Tata. *Retired*.

Here, Joe and Tata Cayatmo are talking about Cayatmo's age, the type and amount of work he does and when he plans on retiring. In Cayatmo's first turn, Joe acknowledges mutual intelligibility when he says, "right, right" (line 2). In addition to Cayatmo's

phonological substitutions (alveolarization and defrication of interdental /ðɪs/ → /dɪs/, and alveo-palatalization of alveolars and labial defrication /sevən/ → /ʃebən/ in line 01) what's perceived to be humorous arises in Cayatmo's second turn. He tells Joe that he plans to retire in twenty-seven years when he is eighty-four years old but instead of saying that he is going to be retired, he says "I'm to going to be retarded" in line 03 and again in line 27, "dat age is ferfect to be ritarted." In much the same way that Eduardo's "deduct" becomes "the duck" Cayatmo is not "retired," he's "retarded." Both times Joe picks up on the mispronunciation and corrects Cayatmo (line 04 and line 28), a correction done in Pidgin. In line 4 Joe says, "nou nou nou nou nou. yu min ritai:ad/no, no, no, no, no. You mean retired." Rather than using "standard English" which would use "ritaird," Joe uses the r-less Pidgin form, "ritaiad." Even with Joe's correction, miscommunication still occurs as Cayatmo misconstrues Joe's "ritaiad" for "tired" and is offended by the insinuation that he's lazy and not hard-working (line 05). Joe repeats this correction in line 28 in a more definitive and emphatic way: "*Ritaiad. Tawtaw. Ritaiad./ Retired, Tata. Retired.*"

Tata Cayatmo's inability to differentiate between "retired" and "retarded" points to his linguistic incompetence which becomes an explicit point of communicative confusion. Is Cayatmo "retired" or "retarded"? Joe's corrections in line 4 and line 28 help to position Cayatmo as linguistically inferior and Pidgin as the linguistic norm; he speaks neither the overtly prestigious "standard English" nor the highly regarded Pidgin. Joe's corrections and Cayatmo's inability to pick up on them suggests that perhaps Cayatmo is indeed "retarded," at least linguistically.

In the next excerpt, Cayatmo's linguistic ineptitude is the unambiguous site of misunderstanding. The confusion is over the inconsistency of the phonological substitutions /f/ → /p/ and /p/ → /f/ and Joe wants to clarify who is "fat" and who is "Pat."

(4) "So hard to understand"

- 01 J: Yur bradas waif Paet Imelda
Your brother's wife Pat Imelda
- 02 TC: Yah, she sure is
Yes, she sure is.
- 03 J: Shis wat, Paet or Imelda
She's what, Pat or Imelda?
- 04 TC: She's Imelda
She's Imelda.
- 05 J: Den hus Paet?
Then who's Pat?
- 06 TC: Imelda. Imelda is Pat.
Imelda. Imelda is Pat

- 07 J: Ou fae:t? Imelda is fae:t. (hhhh)
 Oh, fat. Imelda is fat. ((laughs))
- 08 TC: Yes Imelda Fat Josefina Kabina Cayatmo. But not now because they are
 diborced.
 Yes, Imelda Fat Josefina Kabina Kayatmo. But not now because
 they are divorced.
- 09 J: Sou hawd fo andastaend. I get om, I get om. Okei okei. Sou yur pis awr
 efs aend yur efs awr pis end yur bis awr vis aend yur vis awr bis.
 So hard to understand. I get 'em. I get 'em. Okay okay. So your Ps
 are Fs and your Fs are Ps and your Bs are Vs and your Vs are Bs.
- 10: TC: Pinally, you pigure out my boice.
 Finally, you figure out my voice.

In their first three turns, Joe and Tata Cayatmo are confused over who exactly is “Pat” (the name of a person) and who is “fat” (a weight condition). Although Joe and Tata Cayatmo arrive at some type of communicative resolution in lines 7-9, Joe expresses his frustration in line 09 when he says, “sou hawd fo andastaend/so hard to understand.” More specifically, for the Pidgin speaker, Philippine languages are “sou hawd fo andastaend/so hard to understand” because the phonological substitutions make it difficult to figure out if Imelda is named “Pat” or if she is “fat.” Joe’s frustrated “sou hawd fo andastaend/so hard to understand” is an “active distancing” (Hill 1993) from Tata Cayatmo and speakers of Philippine languages. Joe’s arrival at some phonological clarity in line 09 illustrates common linguistic practices of native Filipino speakers who are second language learners of English, namely the substitution of consonant sounds (Ramos, n. d.): labial defrication /f/ → /p/ (/fæt/ → /pæt/); /v/ → /b/ (/vɔjs/ → /bɔjs/); and labial frication /p/ → /f/ (/pæt/ → /fæt/) and /b/ → /v/. This metalinguistic ideology of phonological ineptitude is affirmed by Tata Cayatmo in line 10: “Pinally, you pigure out my boice/ Finally, you figure out my voice.” In the end, the interactions between Joe and Tata Cayatmo in the excerpts, “retarded/retired” and “sou hawd fo andastaend/so hard to understand,” establish the following sets of oppositions: Local/immigrant, Local/“Filipino,” Pidgin/Mock Filipino, and insider/outsider. Joe is the young, cool Local while Tata Cayatmo is the flip side, the elderly Filipino immigrant who is linguistically and culturally the object of ridicule.

5. Conclusion

On the Mainland, you can't do ethnic jokes, people get all offended...But us local people, we live on an island, we real open, we share everything. We can look at all the dumbness of our lives and talk about it. And that's the beauty of Hawai'i. We can laugh at ourselves.
Augie T⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Augie Tulba is a popular Local comedian who is Portuguese, Irish, and Filipino. This quote is taken from an article by Naomi Sodedani entitled, “Local Humor and the New World Order,” which appears in the *Honolulu Weekly*. For a similar argument, see Lee-Ching 1998.

Hawai'i ethnic humor depends on a shared set of assumptions and ideologies about linguistic practice, cultural identity, and Hawai'i society. The "ideologies of legitimacy" (Chun, this volume) hinge on liberal pluralist ideals of racial harmony and the notion that "we can laugh at ourselves." The idea that "we can laugh at ourselves" is understood as a celebration of the islands' racial diversity and cultural differences ("all the dumbness of our lives") and positions the supposed "uniqueness" of Hawai'i against the racism and volatile race relations on the "mainland" and in other parts of the world. Hawai'i is understood as having gone beyond the "melting pot" and "salad bowl" models of race/ethnic relations and is now an Asian-inspired "chop suey nation." As DeLima explains,

Here in Hawaii, we laugh at ourselves more than most people do in other places. Hawaii is a chop suey nation - Portagee, Pake, Buddha Head, Sole, Yobo, Kanaka, Haole, all mixed up. Nobody is the majority here. We are all part of at least one minority group. Some of us are part of several minority groups. And we all laugh at ourselves. This is healthy (DeLima 1991: v).

The "chop suey nation" that DeLima imagines perpetuates the illusion of Hawai'i as a racial and multicultural paradise (Okamura 1998) where "nobody is the majority" (only on a numerical basis), everyone is racially/ethnically "all mixed up," and "we all laugh at ourselves." In this vision of Hawai'i no one can be really racist or discriminatory because everyone is considered to be equal and everyone is understood to be a minority. Ogawa (1978) suggests that the ability to "laugh at each other" and "poke fun at each other" was a key aspect in the development of Local identity and culture:

One thing each ethnic group in Hawaii had to learn was a healthy sense of humor so that they would be able to laugh at each other and not take themselves too seriously. Living on a series of small islands requires a high degree of open friendliness. Therefore, Hawaii's people are not reluctant to poke fun at each other and at themselves using words which from the mainland standpoint seem derogatory but from the Island perspective seem descriptive or simply funny. 'Buddhahead,' 'Pake,' 'Kanaka,' 'Haole Crab,' 'Bok-bok,' 'Porogee Mouth,' are just a small sampling of the words which ethnic groups often use in reference to themselves; these words are essential parts of the local Island culture (Ogawa 1978: 155-56).

But who is the "we" that is laughing and who is being laughed at? When "we laugh at ourselves" do "we" acquiesce to the extant structures and systems of White and Local domination while reducing ethnic groups to stigmatizing stereotypes that are supported by racializing discourses and a racial hierarchy disguised by a conservative myth of multiculturalism? Or is "laughing at ourselves" a way to maintain the zones of intimacy and friendliness that were initially developed in response to *haole* domination.

In November 2000, Lee Cataluna, a local playwright, comedian, former local news anchor, and columnist for one of the Honolulu daily newspapers created a spirited public debate when she criticized the "grand Hawai'i tradition" of race- and ethnicity-based humor.⁴⁶ In particular, she was severely critical of the prevalence of "Portagee jokes," the negative portrayals of Portuguese as "stupid, loud, and obnoxious." She noted that "Portuguese jokes are racist and cruel and nobody seems to give a rip" (Cataluna 2000a). In addition, Cataluna singled out Frank DeLima, who for nearly two

⁴⁶ This was not the first time the issue of Local comedy and ethnic jokes was brought up in the local newspapers. Larger scale discussions were included in the *Honolulu Weekly* in 1992, in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* in 1994 and in the *Honolulu Advertiser* in 1998.

and a half decades has based his comedy routine on Hawai'i's racial/ethnic and cultural diversity, as exemplary of the widely accepted but highly problematic brand of humor. Through his work with the Frank DeLima Student Enrichment Program, which is sponsored in part by the Hawai'i Department of Education, DeLima also does presentations for schoolchildren on building self-esteem, valuing multiculturalism and encouraging them to "study hard, stay drug-free, [and] maintain comedy as an equalizer" (Harada 2000). Despite the positive message of the importance of staying in school and valuing diversity and teaching students to laugh at themselves, Cataluna argued that DeLima's humor has a different effect: "DeLima's defense is that he's teaching kids the value of diversity and teaching them to laugh at themselves. In reality, he's teaching kids to laugh while others insult them" (Cataluna 2000a, B1).

Cataluna's initial column and particularly her criticism of DeLima generated public discussion and prompted a series of letters to the editor. In a follow-up column a week later, Cataluna observed the split in opinion about Frank DeLima and ethnic jokes more generally: "Portagee jokes, a genre of local humor beloved by some as integral to our culture and, I found, loathed by as many as tiresome, asinine and hurtful" (Cataluna 2000b). Some claimed that Cataluna's critique was nothing more than "PC *shibai*" (political correctness gone awry or simple oversensitivity) with an undercurrent of bitterness, jealousy and resentment aimed at a popular local comedian. It is also argued that in Hawai'i's "racial paradise" where "we can laugh at ourselves" ethnic jokes have the effect of "bringing us closer together by highlighting and caricaturing our differences" (Coleman, 2003) which in the end, seemingly help to ease racial tensions. In this sense, ethnic jokes function as "an equalizer" that flattens cultural differences although they do not directly challenge socially distributed wealth and power. Moreover, it is widely reasoned that since each group is an equal target of racial stereotyping and ethnic jokes, ethnic jokes are a type of equal opportunity discrimination so to speak. Those who support ethnic jokes claim that those who are critical, like Cataluna, simply need to "lighten up," have no sense of humor, or are unable to laugh at themselves.

Cataluna's criticism of "Portagee jokes" also escalated into broader discussions of race and ethnicity-based humor in Hawai'i and their emotional, psychological and social force. What began as a critique of ethnic jokes targeting one ethnic group, the Portuguese, expanded to include other racial/ethnic groups. As Cataluna wrote,

People who identified themselves as Filipino or black or Hawaiian or haole wrote about the careless insults they've been subjected to under the guise of 'Local humor.' People wrote about being the target of racial jokes at work, at school, even church. The letters that were the most painful were from parents talking about how their children were made to feel ashamed of who they are (2000b, B1).

The debate no longer centered solely on "Portagee jokes" but Hawai'i ethnic humor in general. Some asked whether the race and ethnicity based "Local humor" still had a place in contemporary Hawai'i society. Given the changing political climate, shifting demographics, and the "political correctness" movement in the continental U.S. reaching the shores of Hawai'i, some wondered whether ethnic jokes were a tradition worth maintaining. In a place fabled for its "harmonious race and ethnic relations" and heavily marketed as a "multicultural paradise," others argue that ethnic jokes "represent a powerful link to our past that we hate to lose" (Sodetani 2001: 6). But what is "our past" and who actually is included in "our past"? Are ethnic jokes still the glue that

binds the “people of Hawai‘i”? Is ethnic humor still relevant given the social, political and economic changes in Hawai‘i? Or are ethnic jokes merely nostalgic residues of a much-celebrated originary past that provided the conditions for the dispossession and displacement of Native Hawaiians and the exploitation of Asian labor as well as the basis for the islands’ contemporary multicultural social formation?

In December 1994, a similar debate, which focused on Filipino jokes and the release of a video by Frank DeLima which included a song parody called “A Filipino Christmas,” prompted public discussion, particularly in the Filipino newspapers, about the negative representations of Filipinos in Hawai‘i.⁴⁷ In Mock Filipino style, the song begins with “*Macadangdang saluyot billy goat ganga bala bod bod...*” It has been noted that “only a few Filipino words are actually in the lyrics. A lot of the words are just made up” (Seneca 1995).⁴⁸ In addition, a portion of DeLima’s song parody was sung to the traditional “The Christmas Carol” and included the lyrics “Black dog roasting on an open fire.” Critics claimed that the song was part of a decades old stigmatizing discourse which perpetuated lingering stereotypes of Filipinos. Supporters of DeLima claimed that the song was nothing more than part of the Hawai‘i tradition of ethnic jokes and Local humor; these images had been part of his comedy routine for years and thus, they were in no way racist or discriminatory. According to the *Hawaii Filipino Chronicle*, DeLima “argues that immigrant Filipinos, not local Filipinos, are the ones who object to his jokes” (1995). Thus, it is *buk buks*, not Locals who are the object of cultural denigration and ridicule.

Framed within the larger politics of identity in the islands, DeLima’s “A Filipino Christmas,” the interactions between Joe and Tata Cayatmo and Da Braddahs’s depiction of Filipinos foreground issues of power and representation, challenging who can represent whom and the effects of such representation. Explanations and justifications of the persistence of ethnic humor view language, culture and identity as objective facts in the natural order of things rather than constructions embedded in a network of social relations and underscored by struggles of power. Pidgin and Local are understood as neutral phenomena that do not help to constitute social, political, and economic realities, facilitating a depoliticized and ahistorical understanding of the foreign invasion and external domination of the islands that has led to the formation of the contemporary racial and ethnic terrain. Recontextualizing language, culture, identity, and representation by emphasizing the structures of inequality and the systems of power that underscore lived experiences and discourses points to issues of contestation and hegemony between and within racial/ethnic groups and the importance of narratives and symbols in the articulation and formation of collective identities. In Hawai‘i, this is an issue of who rightfully belongs to the islands, meaning who are legitimate members and what criteria are used to determine membership, that is to say, who can legitimately laugh at themselves. Thus, “we can laugh at ourselves” also points to struggles over representation, in terms of which images, signs, and jokes are produced, consumed and distributed. Who makes the jokes, who is made fun of, and who laughs involves discourses of inclusion and exclusion. Jokes can effectively tell us

⁴⁷ The song, “A Filipino Christmas,” was actually released three years earlier. Since then, the song has become a Hawai‘i “holiday tradition, treat.” As Harada (2003) recently observed, “As sure as there is a Christmas, there is Frank DeLima singing ‘A Filipino Christmas,’ all decked out with boughs of the jollies...making like a singing Christmas tree.”

⁴⁸ The only decipherable word in the song introduction is the Ilokano word, *saluyot*, which is a type of herb “with edible spinachlike leaves famous in Ilocano cuisine” (Rubino 2000: 528).

who belongs and in the process, they construct order and hierarchy and are thus invariably linked to power.

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