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Multi-Directional Microaggressions:  
Filipino Students and Everyday Racism in Hawai'i's K-12 Schools

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Asian American Studies

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Professor Lucy M. Burns, Chair

This thesis examines Filipino Americans, Hawai‘i’s largest Asian Pacific Islander (API) group and their experiences with racism in Hawai‘i, specifically in its K-12 educational system. Perceptions of Hawai‘i as a model of "multiculturalism" obscure how the state’s racially diverse population lives in the condition of settler colonialism which reproduce processes of racialization enabled by the islands’ white colonizers. Through Critical Race Theory (CRT), I document how racial microaggressions, or everyday, subtle forms of racism, operate in the experiences recalled in interviews with six Filipino/a individuals who attended K-12 schools in Hawai‘i. Emerging from these experiences are recurring patterns of Filipino students’ involvement in school-based microaggressions that reflect Hawai‘i’s dominant racial discourse of "localism." The findings of this study demonstrate the complex, multi-directional nature of everyday racism as it is experienced, deployed, and resisted by Filipino K-12 students in Hawai‘i.

The thesis of Kate Kanani Viernes is approved.

Victor Bascara

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2014

This thesis is dedicated to Filipino and Filipino American students in Hawai'i's K-12 schools.

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## PROLOGUE

At the end of each first-round interview I conducted for this study, I posed the following question to the six informants: “How do you think Filipino students were treated at your K-12 schools in Hawai‘i?” While I would eventually unpack the complexity of this question in the second round of interviews, at this point I was simply looking for participants’ gut-level responses. Of these, there was a range. A few interviewees confidently offered the belief that Filipino students were treated “well” at their schools. As one reflected, “they weren’t treated based on like if they were Filipino or not... I think they were treated as kids that needed to be taught.” Another interviewee replied, almost immediately: “Poorly. Very poorly.” Two others answered within more of a gray area, with statements along the lines of “Filipinos weren’t treated bad, but...” For example, Rianna<sup>1</sup> explained:

Um (*2 sec pause*)... they weren't really treated *bad*.<sup>2</sup> I mean, I think, we were kind of all treated good as long as you, like you weren't necessarily judged, because of your race, it was just like on your performance, in school... the only thing is like, I guess we would get teased if like a kid had an accent, or something like that... Or like, the way we dress, if we had like a free dress day... 'cause Filipino parents like to dress their daughters in like the full white dresses, and the shoes and stuff (*short laughter*)... but that, I think that just comes with the generation that we're living in. Like I never had to dress like that... but I'm pretty sure like you probably did, or [my mom] had to (*short laughter*).<sup>3</sup>

Rianna’s response was intriguing to me on several levels. First, she initially stated that Filipino students at her K-12 Hawai‘i schools were viewed based on personal accomplishments rather than race. Her conviction of color-blind meritocracy seemed similar to the informant who articulated that Filipino students were treated simply “as kids that needed to be taught.” But as

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<sup>1</sup> Names and identifying features (such as names of towns and schools) have been changed to protect the confidentiality of research participants.

<sup>2</sup> In all direct quotations from participant interviews, italicized words and phrases without parentheses indicate participants’ tonal emphasis. Italicized words within parentheses indicate lengths of pauses and laughter. Ellipses indicate either a slight pause on the part of the interviewee or that a portion of the transcript has been omitted here for brevity purposes.

<sup>3</sup> Rianna self-identifies as a third-generation Filipina in Hawai‘i because her mother was also born in Hawai‘i. Here she refers to the stereotype that Filipino immigrants direct their children to wear formal, old-fashioned clothing on special occasions.

Rianna went on, she clarified that Filipino students were not always treated well at her schools. This was the case especially if they spoke in accents (assumably because they were immigrants) or dressed in old-fashioned formalwear because their immigrant parents made them. Though Rianna self-identified as a third-generation Filipina in Hawai‘i, and she herself did not exhibit the aforementioned characteristics associated with newer generations, her statement left me curious as to whether she was personally affected when other students were teased for these reasons—and if so, how. When Rianna laughed about Filipino students dressed in strange clothing, I understood that she did so out of the familiarity of this amusing situation. At the same time, she ventured that this must have been my personal experience, most likely because she thought I was a first or second-generation Filipina.<sup>4</sup> I wondered what this assumption of me meant to her, if it meant anything at all.

Of course, my particular curiosities in the experiences of Filipino students in Hawai‘i are greatly shaped by my own history and positionality in relationship to this research project. As a youth growing up on O‘ahu, I knew few other Filipinos aside from my immediate family. I was born into a geographic community of primarily other Filipinos, but by the time I was two years old, my parents had moved us to a more ethnically diverse suburban neighborhood across the island. At the elite college preparatory high school I attended in Honolulu, I could count the number of other Filipino students in my class on one hand—though I suspect now that there may have been others who had Filipino heritage in their mixed ethnic backgrounds, but perhaps purposefully hid this layer of their identities. The discriminatory statements I came across in high school were subtle. “Do Filipinos really eat dog?”<sup>5</sup> a wide-eyed female classmate of Japanese

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, I would fit Rianna’s definition of a third-generation Filipina, since my mother was born in Hawai‘i as well.

<sup>5</sup> Comments related to Filipinos eating dogs prevail in the Philippines, the United States, and Hawai‘i. Sometimes they reference “natives” of the Philippines and Filipinos’ efforts to become more Westernized (Hagedorn, 1990),

and French ancestry asked me once, in all sincerity. “Filipinos are *so* not Asian... they’re more like Pacific Islander or something,” a girl of Chinese and Japanese heritage stated at another time. While these comments were made casually, most likely with no intention to hurt me, they did hurt. What my non-Filipino, particularly Asian classmates communicated through their words was the message: *you’re not like us*. This message was reinforced when I looked around my high school campus and saw that the majority of the facilities staff there appeared to be Filipino. However, I do not recall having any Filipino Americans as my teachers.

Just as my personal experiences as a multi-layered Filipina coming of age in Hawai‘i schools informed the types of questions I asked in this thesis, they also influenced the answers I expected to find. Leading into this project, I held my own view of how Filipino students are treated in the islands’ K-12 education system; I believe I was initially seeking affirmation from the research participants that my adolescent reactions to my school experiences—often, debilitating feelings of doubt and shame surrounding a Filipino ethnic identity—were normal. While I certainly recognized pieces of my story in the informants’, I was also inspired by their narratives to begin to re-tell mine from a less victimized perspective. As I have come to better understand Filipino K-12 students’ complex experiences of and responses to everyday racism in Hawai‘i schools, I have become more self-aware of the strength and potential I possessed as a youth but did not always recognize. Completing this thesis has thus been a personally transformative process for me. I hope not only to develop my new insights over time, but also to use them to support the resilience of Filipino youth and other school-age children of color who continue to face negative racialization in the United States’ primary and secondary educational systems.

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while other times they function to racially “other” Filipino Americans as foreign-born and uncivilized (Okamura, 2010). Either way, such references are used disparagingly.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION – “MULTICULTURALISM,” COLONIALISM, AND THE FILIPINO EXPERIENCE IN HAWAI‘I

In this project I explore the impact of race, racism, and racialization<sup>6</sup> on the educational experiences of Filipino students<sup>7</sup> in Hawai‘i. Specifically, I am concerned with how “racial microaggressions,” or “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000: 60), occur within the setting of Hawai‘i’s education system. This chapter provides a context to the relationships existing between Hawai‘i’s multicultural ideology, colonial history, and Filipinos’ positionality within the islands.

### Hawai‘i as a “Multicultural Model”: Obscuring and Reflecting Colonial Traditions

I think it was sixth grade, I remember really realizing that oh, I’m, I’m Filipino... every month, a student would bring in a dish from their ethnicity... I wanna say I think I brought *bibingka*... it was cool to realize that... Hawai‘i has such a mixed plate, of like ethnicities. But like the mainland, the mainland doesn't really have that, too much... I don't know what it means to me. It's, it's just, uh I think it's cool. Living in Hawai‘i is even cooler because we have that diversity.  
- Nathan, research participant, on realizing his ethnic identity as Filipino in Hawai‘i schools

The island chain of Hawai‘i is known for its beautiful beaches, tropical climate, and laid-back lifestyle. In addition to these qualities, the diversity and benevolence of Hawai‘i’s people

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<sup>6</sup> As I examine the relationships between race, racism, and power in this thesis, I use several key and interrelated terms which I define here in order to foreground the following chapters. According to Daniel Solórzano (1998) and his reading of relevant texts, *race* “is a socially constructed category, created to differentiate racial groups, and to show the superiority or dominance of one race over another” (124). *Racism* is a set of beliefs used to oppress people of color in its justification of the dominance of one race over another, wherein one group believes itself to be superior and possesses power to carry out racist behavior against other groups. Edward E. Telles and Vilma Ortiz (2008) define *racialization* as “the ways in which particular individuals are sorted into the social hierarchy based on the meanings that members of society give to presumed physical and cultural characteristics” (131). I invoke the verb *racialize* in this thesis to describe the action of sorting students into Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy based on the perceived attributes of their ethnic or racial group within the islands’ K-12 schools. I sometimes use the term *racialized experiences* to mean students’ accounts of recognizing their placement in the social hierarchy, whether directly through their own experience, through contextual implications, or by witnessing others’ experiences.

<sup>7</sup> I mostly use the term “Filipino” when referring to individuals of Filipino ethnic background living in Hawai‘i and the continental United States, whether born within the U.S. contingent or elsewhere. In part, “Filipino” (used to describe more than one gender) reflect the language generally used between the informants and me when discussing this ethnic identity/demographic during our research interviews. The phrases “Filipino American” and “Filipina American” may also be applied, especially when citing other literature or cases when the interviewees’ themselves invoked this terminology.

are commonly referenced as part of what makes Hawai‘i so unique—a “paradise” of sorts. In academia, authors from the U.S. mainland (i.e., the continental and continuous 48 United States) have conceptualized Hawai‘i as having achieved the United States’ putative, post-Civil Rights visions of interracial, intercultural tolerance (Fuchs, 1961) and triumph over instances of systemic or interpersonal racism (Davis, 1991: 111 cited in Edles, 2004). The state of Hawai‘i, with its primary tourism economy, further markets the islands to outside visitors as a welcoming, culturally diverse and harmonious sanctuary (Labrador, 2004; Linnekin, 1997). Finally, many of those living in the Hawaiian islands also ascribe to discourses of their home as distinct for its racially-mixed, culturally-accepting qualities. As the opening quote from an informant to this study indicates, the belief in Hawai‘i as an exemplar of U.S. multiculturalism provides both a sense of identity and pride for island inhabitants.

Several factors feed the perception of Hawai‘i as the ideal “multicultural model.”<sup>8</sup>

Advocates point to the state’s great proportion of residents who identify as being more than one race—23.6 percent in 2010, a significantly larger percentage of mixed-race people than any other state in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). Hawai‘i’s large mixed-race population in part reflects the diversity of its native inhabitants—those known as Native Hawaiians<sup>9</sup>—and its subsequent settlers, including white missionaries and businessmen and later immigrant laborers from Asia, Portugal, and Puerto Rico. The unique racial demographics to result from Hawai‘i’s

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Okamura describes the dimensions of Hawai‘i’s perceived status as a “multicultural model” as “(1) a tradition of tolerance and peaceful coexistence; 2) harmonious ethnic relations evident in cordial relationships and a high rate of intermarriage; 3) equality of opportunity and status; and (4) a shared local culture and identity” (2008: 11).

<sup>9</sup> In Hawai‘i, people are considered Native Hawaiian or part-Native Hawaiian if they descend from the indigenous people who populated the Hawaiian archipelago since ancient times. Historians conclude that these indigenous people were voyagers to and from the various islands throughout the Pacific Ocean, perhaps originating from the Southern Marquesas (Kirch & Green: 2001). Some Native Hawaiians maintain that they are genealogical descendants of the physical land of Hawai‘i, resulting in their familial claim to the land and obligation to protect it from outside environmental and social destruction (Trask, 2008).

distinctive history of global migration and settlement tends to contribute to the view that people in Hawai‘i are more “open” to their fellow residents of different races or ethnicities than are people living elsewhere. Island residents, in turn, are quick to affirm this perception; many may take pride in living by the values of kindness and friendliness that are thought to define a spirit of “*aloha*”<sup>10</sup>—that which gives Hawai‘i’s its beloved nickname, the “Aloha State.”<sup>11</sup>

While not denying individuals in Hawai‘i their efficacy to be kind and respectful to visitors and one another, the idealization of respectful face-to-face interaction often overshadows micro- and group-level racial injustices that have long existed in the islands. In fact, the reproduction of Hawai‘i as a multicultural model simply provides a contemporary guise for previously overt and violent acts of U.S. imperialism, domestically and abroad, on Asians and Pacific Islanders especially (Bascara, 2006). The celebration of the supposedly peaceful co-existence of Hawai‘i’s various people and their respective cultures not only disregards Hawai‘i’s colonial past; it conceals the manner in which colonialist traditions and conditions live on in the racialized differences of Hawai‘i’s predominantly Asian Pacific Islander (API) population.

In reality, Hawai‘i is marked by its colonial past and present, wherein whites began to settle in the once sovereign nation, forcibly overthrowing the Native Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 and annexing Hawai‘i as a territory of the United States in 1898 (Trask, 2008: 46). In the process of the United States imposing its government, economic, education, and cultural systems on the Hawaiian people, “[a]nything that links us [Hawaiians] to our Native national consciousness and is in opposition to the colonizer is systematically destroyed” (Kamahele, 2008: 77). Native

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<sup>10</sup> When non-English words are used for the first time throughout this text, they are italicized to distinguish them as linguistically “foreign” but important terms to the context of the thesis. When used thereafter, these words appear in regular script.

<sup>11</sup> “Aloha” in the Hawaiian language has several meanings, including “love,” “hello,” “goodbye,” and “welcome.” According to Keiko Ohnuma (2008) and her secondary analysis of earlier texts, aloha was in fact a Native Hawaiian value, though it was not always prioritized. Accounts from older Native Hawaiians and readings of historical texts instead suggest that Western settlers and tourists invoked aloha as a benevolent yet racialized descriptor for the Hawaiian people. Over time, Hawaii residents have come to know aloha as the ideal for interpersonal treatment.

Hawaiians resisted their colonizers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, including many who continue to push for sovereignty and self-determination rights today (Silva, 2004; Young, 2004).

### **Eras of Racial Inequality: Plantation Labor and Filipino Immigrants in Hawai‘i**

Hawai‘i’s former plantation economy, patterns of Filipino migration to the islands, and the impact of this history on racial dynamics and racialization within the state provide a crucial background for my study of Filipino racialization in Hawai‘i’s schools. A burgeoning sugar planting industry appeared in the Hawaiian islands in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, wealthy white managers replaced the Native Hawaiian-majority workforce with cheaper laborers primarily from Asia, as well as from Portugal and Puerto Rico (Takaki, 1998; Fleischman & Tyson, 2000). While Portuguese laborers, as European Americans, generally rose to “*luna*” (supervisor) status by the early 1900s, Asian workers were consistently deprived of the possibilities of leadership and rising up the chain of command in the field (Fleischman & Tyson, 2000). Harsh and militaristic labor conditions, low wages, and work discrimination on the basis of national origin often led to worker rebellion and strike. Ronald Takaki (1998) notes that white managerial efforts to pit different ethnic groups against one another through “divide-and-conquer” strategies—such as paying Japanese workers 30 cents more than Filipino workers for the same job (142)—only occasionally resulted in interethnic tension and violence; the Waipahu Plantation Strike of 1906 depended on the collective labor action of Japanese and Filipinos, and the plantation era certainly boosted the social mingling of various immigrant groups with each other and Native Hawaiians.

As a result of immigrant exclusion acts and relocation to higher-paying work opportunities on the U.S. mainland, the influx of Chinese and Japanese workers—the plantations’ earliest Asian arrivals—began to slow in Hawai‘i. Filipino *sakadas* (migrant workers), the latest

cheap laborers from Asia, filled the labor void and eventually surpassed Japanese as the largest plantation worker group (Aquino, 2006; Fleischman & Tyson, 2000). Between 1898 and 1934, Filipinos were considered U.S. nationals due to the Philippines' annexation to the United States—parallel to that of Hawai'i, though the former eventually gained its independence. However, Filipinos were also eventually restricted from the United States with the passage of the Philippine Independence Act of 1934, known popularly Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934. An important exception was made in the case of Hawai'i, where the Hawai'i Sugar Planters Association used its influence in the U.S. economic and political spheres to successfully lobby for an exemption to the law. Thus, Filipinos continued to arrive in Hawai'i to work on the plantations, though these immigrants were not allowed entry to the mainland United States (San Buenaventura, 1996). A smaller wave of Filipino immigrants arrived post-World War II in exchange for their armed service in the United States military or as the last installment of *sakadas* (Alegado, 1991; Aquino, 2006). Large-scale Filipino movement to Hawai'i resumed following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which ended quota-based immigration restrictions in the United States. This occurred almost simultaneously with the islands' transition from an agricultural to a tourism economy (Alegado, 1991). Filipino workers became concentrated in Hawai'i's low-wage service sector, a group-level pattern that has continued to the present.

Today, Filipinos make up the second largest ethnic group in Hawai'i after whites and the largest Asian ethnic group in Hawai'i overall (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Approximately 80 percent of Hawai'i's Filipinos are *Ilocano*, hailing originally or descending from regions within the Philippines' island of Northern Luzon; the remainder identify as from *Tagalog*-speaking or *Visayan* regions (Aquino, 2000). In the past, Filipino plantation laborers in Hawai'i united across



regional lines over their shared subordinate position and class status. By contrast, many Filipinos who arrived after 1965 came from higher socioeconomic backgrounds than earlier migrants; this dynamic has resulted in long-standing regional and class divisions of Hawai‘i’s Filipinos, particularly between the Ilocano majority and Tagalog-speaking supposed “elites” (Espiritu, 1996). The Filipino community in Hawai‘i is further organized into several systems, including family and kinship networks, residential concentrations in rural and urban neighborhoods (with many Filipino-majority areas corresponding with former plantation towns), and various social, political, and cultural organizations (Alegado, 1991).

While many Hawai‘i Filipinos have risen into the middle and upper-middle classes, Filipinos as a group remain on the lower end of all socioeconomic measures in the islands—along with Native Hawaiians, Samoans, and smaller populations of Pacific Islanders (Okamura, 2008). More than any other country in Asia, the Philippines by far continues to send the most immigrants to Hawai‘i today, particularly those from poorer provinces and less-educated backgrounds than those that tend to settle in other parts of the U.S. mainland. As a result, Filipinos are racialized as recent immigrants on a group level,<sup>12</sup> which in Hawai‘i is popularly manifested in their stereotypical representation as accented, dog-eating, menial workers (Okamura, 2010). This is in spite of the fact that many Filipino families have resided in Hawai‘i since the plantation era.

### **The Educational Disadvantage and Racialization of Hawai‘i’s Filipino Youth**

The social inequalities faced by Filipinos in Hawai‘i appear to be reflected in Filipino youth’s subordinate position in the state’s education system. Filipinos are the second largest

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<sup>12</sup> In the seven weeks I spent on O‘ahu conducting my research, I learned from my interviewees as well as through personal conversations that the more recent immigrant group to be popularly targeted with denigrating and racist stereotypes in Hawaii are the Micronesians, whom I knew and still know very little about. <http://www.civilbeat.com/articles/2011/06/20/11650-no-aloha-for-micronesians-in-hawaii/> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpsPeVyuyE8> begin to shed light on Micronesian experiences in Hawai‘i.

student ethnic group in the Department of Education (DOE), Hawai‘i’s statewide K-12 public school system, making up about 22 percent of public school students (State of Hawai‘i, 2013).<sup>13</sup> Within this context, Filipino, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students predominantly attend public schools that have failed to meet national school proficiency standards (Okamura, 2008: 68). Due to their group socioeconomic disadvantage in the islands, Filipinos are significantly less-represented in the islands’ well-renowned, expensive private schools and thus have less access to the gamut of educational benefits and resources these better schools afford.<sup>14</sup>

The ethnic disparity continues to present itself in the long-term educational outcomes of Filipino youth in Hawai‘i. This group has among the lowest high school graduate, college enrollment, and college completion rates in the state (Okamura, 2008). At least one study found that Filipino students in Hawai‘i had significantly higher rates of high school dropouts than East Asians and whites (Agbayani, 1996, cited in Nadal, 2008). In higher education, Hawai‘i Filipinos face structural racism similar to that at the K-12 level. The University of Hawai‘i (UH), Hawai‘i’s public college system, enacted drastic in-state tuition raises in the late 1990s, again in the late 2000s, and closely focuses efforts on recruiting higher-paying students from out of state; as a result, young adults from Hawai‘i’s lower socioeconomic classes are systematically denied equal access to public higher education—particularly Filipino students, who had been slowly gaining representation in the UH system (mostly in community colleges) for decades (Okamura, 2013). Furthermore, UH Manoa, the largest UH campus, reported Filipino students having a 60.6 percent success rate of graduating, still above the percentages cited for Native Hawaiian and

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<sup>13</sup> Native Hawaiians comprise the state’s largest student ethnic population at 28 percent (State of Hawai‘i, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Wealthy families in Hawai‘i opt to send their children to private institutions due to the notoriously underfunded and neglected condition of Hawai‘i’s DOE system. Supported primarily by upper-class white, Japanese, and Chinese families, Hawai‘i’s private K-12 system is the largest in the nation: 16 percent of Hawai‘i’s youth are enrolled in private schools, a reality that assists in reproducing much of the state’s socioeconomic inequality (Okamura, 2008: 71).

Pacific Islander students (52.1 and 41.6 percent, respectively) but falling 2 to 19 percentage points behind all other Asian groups (University of Hawai‘i, 2009).

Just as Filipino youth may be perceived as an outlier to the “model minority” stereotype of high-achieving Asian American students (Buena Vista, 2010), they may also be negatively racialized within their school communities along other social measures. In parts of California with significant Filipino populations, such as Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area, Filipino youth have been racialized by their peers, teachers, counselors, and social workers as criminals, deviant, and gang-affiliated (Alsaybar, 1999; Teranishi, 2002; Tintiangco-Cubales, 2007 cited in Buena Vista 2010: 121). A Hawai‘i research team (Kim et al., 2008; 2009) similarly found that Filipina and Filipino immigrant teenagers felt marginalized by peers and adults at their schools when they were perceived as being from a lower class, small (in stature), or culturally inferior due to their accents or use of their native language (which was mainly Ilocano, but sometimes Tagalog) (Kim et al., 2008: 4).

The Filipino immigrant high school students in the Hawai‘i-based studies by Kim et al. (2008; 2009) made two observations regarding the racial discrimination they faced that are of particular relevance to this thesis. First, the immigrant youth reported often experiencing racist put-downs deployed by Hawai‘i-born Filipino peers. Second, if Hawai‘i-born Filipinos were not the source of peer discrimination, it usually came from Native Hawaiian or Samoan students. This research calls attention to racial dynamics typically understudied in youths’ experiences—that is, when discrimination occurs within a single ethnic group, or when it occurs between ethnic groups facing similar social disadvantages. The authors reasoned that the act of Hawai‘i-born Filipinos looking down on foreign-born Filipinos may be an effect of what Linda Revilla has called Hawai‘i Filipinos’ “identity crisis” (1997: 101), or their fear of being associated with

new Filipino immigrants and the negative stereotypes attached to them. While the authors did not comment specifically on the roots of the interethnic tension between the Filipino students and their Pacific Islander peers, they conceptualized these separate ethnic groups as facing “multiple marginalities” (Vigil, 1998; 2002; Moore, 1991) that led to each bonding to “their own” as a form of support and protection. In other words, even while the different ethnic groups were in conflict, they ironically experienced similar social marginalization and isolation in their schools.

## **CHAPTER 2: FORMULATING EVERYDAY RACISM IN HAWAI‘I SCHOOLS – CRITICAL RACE THEORY, RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS, SETTLER COLONIALISM, AND LOCALISM**

This chapter grounds the primary theoretical underpinnings used to inform the analysis in my study on Filipino students’ racialization in Hawai‘i’s K-12 education system. It begins by summarizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a principal theoretical framework, continues by providing an overview of racial microaggressions as a conceptual tool, and concludes by discussing settler colonialism as a crucial condition within the context of Hawai‘i’s racializing processes and its relationship to the popular racial discourse of “localism” in Hawai‘i. While my documentation of the personal accounts in this study relies on previous conceptions of microaggressions, I attempt to further this discussion by rethinking existing categorical distinctions of racial microaggressions in interpreting the complexity of Filipino students’ racial interactions in Hawai‘i schools—with others, with one another, and within themselves.

### **Critical Race Theory**

In this project, I take on a CRT perspective where I am concerned with studying and bringing about change to the relationships between race, racism, and power. Originating as a critical postmodernist response within legal studies, CRT has emerged as a relevant framework in fields including education, social work, and political science (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). Among its main tenets, CRT assumes that racism is ordinary, not aberrational, in our society; that racism is a social construction existing primarily for the purposes of social stratification; and that it is important to understand how other forms of oppression based on gender, sexuality, class, and other identities intersect with racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In education specifically, CRT is seen as “a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to

identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the subordination of scholars of color” (Solórzano, 1998: 123).

### **Microaggressions**

Increasingly in the past 40 years or so, scholars employing CRT have used the concept of microaggressions to study and operationalize race and racism. The term “microaggression” was first used by Chester Pierce to describe whites’ automatic, subtle, and often unconsciously racist put-downs of Blacks. Familiar examples include when a white person clutches their personal items more tightly in close quarters with a Black person, or when a white person comments to a Black coworker along the lines of, “You’re not like other Blacks,” somehow intended to be taken as a compliment. Pierce and his colleagues maintained that the pervasive experience of daily microaggressions has a cumulative, negative impact on the mental health of Blacks. Importantly, they also observed microaggressions and their subtlety as having commonly replaced more overt acts of racial discrimination in the years following the civil rights movements,<sup>15</sup> as these more obvious and deliberate forms of racism had been and continue to be seen as less socially acceptable (Pierce, 1974; Pierce et al., 1978; Solórzano, 1998).

Since this seminal work, discussions of racial microaggressions have shifted from their initially Black/white focus to studying the everyday racism experienced by multiple people of color (Solórzano, 1998), including Latino/as, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and American Indians. The concept has also been expanded beyond racism to apply to other marginalized groups whose members experience subtle and unconscious oppression based on sexuality, gender, disability, class, and religion (Sue, 2010). Microaggressions have been defined as “the everyday verbal, behavioral, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or

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<sup>15</sup> Examples of “overt” racism include the existence of racially segregated schools prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* landmark court decision of 1954, as well as race-based hate crimes. Certainly the latter still occur, though by contrast not as frequently or as insidiously as do microaggressions in their instead daily, subtle nature.

unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership” (Sue, 2010: 3).

Previous research has focused on qualitatively exploring different types of microaggressions, categorizing them, and demonstrating their harmful impacts. In typifying microaggressions, researchers have highlighted delicate but important differences between those that occur consciously versus unconsciously, or verbally versus nonverbally (Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010). Importantly, they have distinguished “environmental microaggressions” as systemic-level injustices interpreted by individuals as personally offensive at the micro-level. An example of an environmental microaggression is the overcrowding of schools in communities of color, which might convey to students of color that they do not or should not value education. Thus, although microaggressions usually manifest interpersonally, at times they can instead be communicated through environmental or systemic conditions (Sue et al., 2007: 277).

This body of literature has also been especially useful in classifying the most common messages conveyed through microaggressions, including the ascription or assumption of a marginalized individual’s inferior intelligence, second-class citizenship, or criminal status, as well as the invalidation of stigmatized experiences through familiar “color-blind” assertions or outright denials of individual discrimination. A wealth of research has connected the experiences of subtle racial, gender, and sexual identity discrimination to marginalized individuals’ difficulties in emotional and cognitive adjustment, constrained achievement in education and the workplace, and poorer health and mental health outcomes overall (Sue, 2010; Nadal et al., 2011).

While the aforementioned research has been significant in increasing our understanding of racial microaggressions, it has also posed some limitations to the ways we might think about how racism operates in society. Inherent in the phraseology and very wording of

*microaggressions* is a one-way deployment of racist action from the criminalized “perpetrator” unto the targeted “victim.” The assumption of the victim’s “injured identity” (Brown, 1995), constructed in relation to those who wish to save the victim, is problematic both in terms of its disempowerment of the affected party and its function to justify actions to “fix” and “heal” them. E. San Juan has argued that these and the pacification of oppressed insurgents are the inherent flaws of fields such as education and psychology, which focus on changing the individual rather than the unjust society (1994; 2006). Finally, the understanding of microaggressions as a one-way, unidirectional process misses the complexity arising from when a marginalized individual is instead on the giving end or simultaneously “guilty” and a “victim” of microaggressions. As I acknowledge my use of this existing framework in my study, I consciously avoid reproducing binary depictions of situations I consider microaggressions, instead reframing them as interactions in which multiple parties engage.

Existing studies attempt not only to describe the manifestation and effects of microaggressions, but also individuals’ responses to microaggressions by incorporating frameworks of resilience and resistance (Watkins, Labarrie, & Appio: 2010; Hill, Kim, & Williams: 2010). While psychologically-based research tends to focus much more on the descriptive aspect of microaggressions, research on microaggressions in educational institutions and its strong CRT perspective refocus the importance of marginalized individuals’ active responses to microaggressions, which in turn brings about change within society.



## Racial Microaggressions in Education

The field of education and its interdisciplinary research has made significant contributions in studying the pervasiveness and subtlety of racism. A few specific examples of racial microaggressions recorded as occurring within educational settings include:<sup>16</sup>

- College faculty and classmates' low expectations of Black undergraduate students' academic performance, including assumptions of their cheating on assignments when receiving high marks or their enrollment only as the result of racial affirmative action (Solórzano et al., 2000; Watkins et al., 2010)
- A non-Asian college student remarking, "If I see lots of Asian students in my class, I know it's going to be a hard class" (Sue et al., 2007)
- When a white teacher at a California public middle school knows Spanish but refuses to use it to explain the day's schedule to a new transfer student from Mexico, who knows little to no English (Pérez Huber, 2011)

Daniel Solórzano and related scholars have contributed a wealth of scholarship that conceptualizes racial microaggressions in education from a CRT perspective. Through CRT, educational researchers echo other studies' qualitative approach to understanding microaggressions, specifically by recognizing the value of experiential knowledge. However, a CRT perspective in education also emphasizes the importance of challenging dominant ideologies imbedded in educational theory and practice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001 cited in Pérez Huber, 2011). In contrast to the literature on microaggressions discussed previously, studies of

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<sup>16</sup> In creating this non-exhaustive list of microaggressions, I attempted to find a representative example each for African Americans, Latinos, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans documented in educational research scholarship. Unfortunately, I could only locate one study (Hill et al., 2010) on racial microaggressions against Indigenous Peoples, which itself lacked concrete examples of microaggressions experienced by Native Americans in educational settings. This points to the great need for additional racial microaggressions research on this particular marginalized racial group in education.

microaggressions in education put equal weight into describing the microaggressions themselves (i.e., their type and context) and identifying the outcomes of microaggressions (i.e., their effects on individuals and how individuals respond to them) (Solórzano, 2012). This literature acknowledges that simply naming an occurrence as a microaggression is the start to resisting it, as this gives the recipient of the microaggression a voice and inspires others with similar experiences to name it as well (Solórzano, 1998).

Solórzano does add that “acknowledgement as a problem has to be followed up with analysis, reflection, and action” (1998: 131). This statement speaks to the transformational goals of the CRT perspective. For college students of color and other students of oppressed identities, the creation of both academic and social “counter-spaces,” such as ethnic studies classes and student-organized study or support groups, are one such demonstration of the process from acknowledgement to action. Through a supportive community environment, counter-spaces provide individuals with the resilience and strength to resist oppression. Therefore, CRT in educational research has moved discussions of microaggressions forward by combining descriptions of microaggressions as told by marginalized individuals, their proactive responses to microaggressions, and implications for systemic change and social justice.<sup>17</sup>

While CRT-focused works on racial microaggressions in education do better at avoiding the use of victimizing terminology, their critique of simplistic “Black and White binary terms” (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009) in discussions of racism could be taken even further. This work has made gains in documenting and analyzing racial microaggressions in the lives of

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Solórzano does well to summarize this through his outlining of a four-part CRT model for studying racial microaggressions in education. This includes looking at 1) types of racial microaggressions; 2) the context of racial microaggressions; 3) the effects and consequences of racial microaggressions—physical, emotional, and psychological; and 4) responses to racial microaggressions. This model can be found in more detail in Pérez Huber, 2011: 386.

various people of color; however, the originating agents of these automatic, sometimes unconsciously racist interactions continue to be identified only as whites. The continuation of a dichotomous understanding of how racism operates—with whites on one side and people of color on the other—remains limiting. It obscures cases of interpersonal microaggressions where both parties are people of color, or even within the same ethnicity (Kim et al., 2008; 2009). Inter- and intra-ethnic tensions have not yet been approached through this model of microaggressions, nor have the concepts of vicarious racism or internalized racism.

While most critical race theorists will maintain that the ideology of white supremacy functions to rationalize the existence of racism, I reiterate Solórzano's definition of racism used within this project: it is a set of beliefs used to oppress people of color in its justification of the dominance of one race over another, wherein one group believes itself to be superior and possesses power to carry out racist behavior against other groups (1998: 124). Thinking about racism in this way becomes especially useful in considering the unique API-majority landscape of Hawai'i, where a racial/ethnic pecking order certainly exists but where whites are neither the majority nor the most socioeconomically advantaged group. Reframing the focus from a white/person of color binary to the racializing processes that create a hierarchy between various people of color advances our understanding of Filipinos as situated in a subordinate social position in Hawai'i, relative not only to whites but primarily to other Asian groups in the state. This project looks at how larger structural processes of racism and inequality play out in the everyday experiences of Filipino youth in Hawai'i's K-12 education system.

### **Settler Colonialism**

In my study, I am interested in drawing a comparison between the intergroup stratification and conflict among Hawai'i's API population and Hawai'i's history of white settler

colonialism as described in chapter 1. I call upon the concept of settler colonialism,<sup>18</sup> which is defined as “a society in which the indigenous culture and people have been murdered, suppressed, or marginalized for the benefit of settlers who now dominate” (Trask, 1993 cited in Fujikane, 2008). Settler colonialism consists of “acts of erasure”, or the process through which evidence for past and present colonialism is distorted and eliminated, so much that those participating in settler colonialism are unaware of it (Kosasa, 2008). A particular body of scholarship describes Asian settler colonialism as Asians’ settlement in the islands of Hawai‘i and their complicity in and benefiting from the ongoing colonial project that denies Native Hawaiians their rights to self-determination (Fujikane & Okamura, 2008). Settler colonialism, an often unintentional but unfortunately common condition of Asians who grow up in Hawai‘i, thus complicates the perception that Hawai‘i is an ideal model for interethnic, interracial relations.

While the condition of Asian settler colonialism is useful in understanding the patterns of racialization that emerge between and among ethnic groups in Hawai‘i, there is also a risk in attaching settler colonialism to people who have resettled largely as the result of being pushed out from their lands of origin, such as Asian migrants to the Hawaiian islands. Nandita Sharma cautions against settler colonialism’s function to conflate forced migration with colonization, arguing that the relationship between “migrants” and “natives” cannot parallel that between “colonizers” and either subordinate group, as the former two categories were strategically created by colonial states in order to distinguish and divide them (2010: 108). Further, the implication that Asians’ challenging of their settler colonial condition equates with their agreement that Hawai‘i must gain national sovereignty from the United States ignores other

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<sup>18</sup> Settler colonialism is a global phenomenon which includes a particularly vast body of literature, including Lorenzo Veracini’s theoretical overview (2010) and Patrick Wolfe’s analyses of the European and Australian colonial contexts (1999). My study employs the condition of settler colonialism with specificity to the context of Hawai‘i as a former and current U.S. colony/settler colony.

potential decolonization projects that would instead “challenge capitalist social relations and those organized through the national state” (Sharma & Wright, 2008: 131). In other words, there is a danger in assuming that recognition of settler colonialism necessitates political agendas that are unproductive in fostering mutually beneficial relationships between Native Hawaiians and their Asian allies residing in the islands.

I agree that the process of human migration itself should not be viewed as colonization, nor should the very presence of Asian migrants in Hawai‘i. I also adopt the stance that national sovereignty is neither the only nor the optimal resolution to decolonizing Native Hawaiians and rebuilding interethnic relations in the Hawaiian islands. However, I maintain that the process of intergroup racism in Hawai‘i, whereby one group that holds power racializes another group as inferior, is an act of exploitation similar to colonization. Therefore, conceptualizing Asians’ settler colonial condition is useful in understanding the subtle, insidious acts of racial microaggressions occurring between and within Hawai‘i’s multiple student ethnic groups. Settler colonialism is understood as the process that youth growing up in Hawai‘i are subject to in the absence of criticism against Hawai‘i’s multicultural model. Due to acts of erasure, Filipino youth in particular may be unconscious of their own history, the colonizing project that facilitated the movement of older generations of Filipinos from their country of origin to places like Hawai‘i. In turn, Filipino youth might take part in actions or ideology that continues to colonize, exploit, and devalue Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders without having made a connection between Filipino and Pacific Islander U.S. colonial histories.

### **“Localism”: Hawai‘i’s Dominant Racial Discourse**

Hawai‘i’s ideology of “localism” is important to the interpersonal microaggressions that are likely to occur between and among different student ethnic groups in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools.

Possessing an identity that can be legitimately considered “local” in Hawai‘i is a source of pride and belonging for Hawai‘i residents. While some figure that being local simply means you are from or familiar with a particular geographic area, the meaning of local goes much deeper in Hawai‘i. In 1979, Eric Yamamoto described the term *local* as a “label [that] refers to distinguishing Hawai‘i people from mainlanders, to a blending and sharing of ethnic cultures, to a community value-orientation, and to an emerging multi-culture in reaction to an oppressive dominant culture.” He then went on to define *localism* as “a composite of ethnic cultures, emerging in reaction to domination by Western institutions and culture, composed of people of Hawai‘i with community value-orientations” (105). Thus, the identity of local and the accompanying ideology of localism began as political functions, as a way for Hawai‘i residents to demonstrate their cultural solidarity and resistance of the dominant U.S. mainland culture.<sup>19</sup>

In the next five chapters, I argue that localism is Hawai‘i’s dominant racial discourse. However, in examining the racialized experiences of Filipino students in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools, it becomes apparent that the local identity is no longer used for its original purpose of distinguishing island residents and culture from those of the U.S. mainland. Rather, localism as a discourse is used to create new racialized categories—among them, “local,” “immigrant,” and “*moke*”<sup>20</sup>—that appropriate, exploit, and distort the meaning of Hawaiian culture in their attachment to individual bodies. The word “discourses” refers to “the institutionalized ways we perceive, understand, and make sense of the world around us” (Pérez Huber, 2011). Therefore, localism is the primary institutionalized way in which people in Hawai‘i perceive, understand, and make sense of the real and imagined differences between locals and “others” on the island.

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<sup>19</sup> At least one assumed distinction between “mainland culture” and “island culture” is that on the U.S. mainland, people tend to value the individual over the family. By contrast, islanders take on “a more communitarian, equalitarian orientation” (Kuroda, 1998 cited in Haas, 1998: 296).

<sup>20</sup> “Moke” is the racialized colloquial term for an individual fitting an extreme variety of local—pidgin-speaking, aggressive, and academically lacking. This label is usually attached to Native Hawaiians or Samoans.

Values are assigned to these differences, justifying the perceived superiority of locals over others, including Filipino immigrants and Native Hawaiians.

### **Microaggressions in Hawai‘i Schools: Research Questions and Chapter Outlines**

Using CRT as a framework and settler colonialism as a condition in which to examine racial microaggressions in the educational experiences of Filipino students in Hawai‘i, I argue over the next few chapters that localism operates as a discourse in the racialized, everyday interactions of these youth in their K-12 schools. The three overarching questions this study seeks to answer are:

1. What are the racialized experiences of Filipino students in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools in the context of Hawai‘i as a U.S. colony, Asian Pacific Islander majority state, and Asian settler colony?
2. What dominant racial discourses emerge in these experiences, and how do these discourses reinforce white settler colonialism?
3. Through the lens of racial microaggressions, how are Filipinos in Hawai‘i affected by their racialized experiences in K-12 schools, and how do they respond to their racialized experiences?

Though my use of racial microaggressions as a conceptual tool is grounded in previous work on the subject, I also challenge our understanding of microaggressions to become more inclusive in considering the vast range of complex interactions where subtle racism might occur—especially in the unique racial landscape of Hawai‘i. I have thus organized chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 by my own categorical distinctions of the microaggressions that made the most consistent appearances in the participants’ narratives.

Chapter 3 lays out the research methodology and procedures I used within this study. It also provides descriptive profiles of the six research participants.

Chapter 4 discusses *intergroup microaggressions*, or the racial microaggressions that occur between Filipino students and students of other ethnicities within the setting of Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools.

Chapter 5 looks at *intragroup microaggressions*, or instances of racial microaggressions occurring between fellow Filipino students in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools.

Chapter 6 discusses *school staff and school system microaggressions*, which respectively are interpersonal racial microaggressions of which school staff play a part, and group-level situations that subtly convey Filipinos’ racial exclusion.

Chapter 7 considers the prevalence of *vicarious microaggressions*, which refer to Filipino students’ common narrative of observing other Filipinos’ experiences of racism or racial microaggressions at school. These racial microaggressions are thus experienced vicariously, or through others.

Chapter 8 closes with individuals’ *resilience to microaggressions* and the educational policies and practices that are implicated by examining how Filipino students are both affected by and actively resist microaggressions in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools.



## **CHAPTER 3: DOCUMENTING MICROAGGRESIONS – STUDY METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

This chapter describes the research design implemented in this study to better understand Filipino students' racialized experiences in Hawai'i's K-12 education system. I explain the methods and procedures I used to learn more about my subject of interest, including my theoretical and personal rationale for specific decisions made about the study's methodology. In preparation for the upcoming chapters of data analysis, I also introduce the study's research participants, a sample of six Filipino young adults who attended K-12 schools in Hawai'i.

### **Interview Methodology**

In chapter 2, I discussed how the CRT framework for understanding racial microaggressions in educational settings emphasizes the importance of experiential knowledge and the challenge of dominant ideology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001 cited in Pérez Huber, 2011). Considering these points, this project lent itself to a qualitative methodological approach aimed at gathering rich, in-depth, and meaningful data from primary sources. Guided by CRT, I considered it vital to document and foreground participants' experiences in order to begin to challenge the dominant discourses that typically disregard or silence such experiences. Specifically, interview methodology was employed in order to document the lived and experienced racialization of Filipinos in Hawai'i's K-12 education system. The primary research for this project took place on O'ahu, Hawai'i, over the course of about seven weeks in July and August of 2013.

### **Sample**

In this project, I was interested in the experiences of Filipino students' racialization in Hawai'i's K-12 schools. While it was an option to interview current students in grades K-12, I

decided instead to interview young adults ages 18 and older on their past experiences as students in Hawai‘i’s primary and secondary schools. This decision was based on easier access to young adults than to children through my networks in Hawai‘i, as well as my wanting to avoid any challenges related to the necessity of parental consent for minors’ participation. As generalizability of the study was not as important as achieving a new and deeper understanding of racial microaggressions within this setting and population’s experiences, I chose a relatively small sample size of six informants ( $n = 6$ ). Six participants also seemed like a manageable number for an individual researcher with a limited timeframe.

I employed a purposive network sampling method, in efforts to target participants who would be “information-rich” and able to articulate the areas I meant to explore (Patton, 1990 cited in Croteau et al., 2002). Basic requirements for study participants included (1) Filipino ethnic/racial heritage (in full, or partial); (2) 18 to 26 years of age (preference given to younger candidates closer to school-age); (3) attendance in K-12 schools in the Hawaiian islands (in full, or a majority of years); (4) willingness to participate and talk about the topic; and (5) availability for the allotted time frame and duration of the study. Once I was able to confirm three research participants contacted through a professional network, I became more selective in the personal attributes of the remaining three. I sought a range of identities and positionalities within the basic required characteristics, specifically individuals who identified with marginalized or understudied statuses within mainstream society, such as being an immigrant, mixed-race, LGBTQ, a current or past member of the U.S. military, or someone who did not pursue or complete a degree in higher education. This second half of informants was located exclusively through personal and social media networks. Prior to their selection, their eligibility for the study was screened with the same tools used for the first three participants (Appendices A & B).

In the end, my sample included six people who fit all of the required characteristics, with most also fitting one or more of my more specific characteristics. The one exception was the educational background characteristic; all participants had either completed or were in the process of completing a four-year college degree. As this group was not necessarily representative of the educationally disadvantaged Filipino youth population of Hawai‘i, this may be considered a limitation of the study’s sample.

### **Procedure**

In-depth interview methodology was used to capture the “insider” perspectives and lived experiences of Filipino students in Hawai‘i (Padgett, 2008: 16). Some might consider the decision to interview young adults on their previous school experiences rather than youth currently in the K-12 system to be a risk to the study’s trustworthiness, as there may be potential respondent bias in recalling past events. However, the oral history tradition tends to trust the power of interviewees becoming historians of their own “‘personal account’—memory, discourse, the text and its construction” (Holbrook, 1995: 21). An oral history perspective also accepts that “when a person recalls their past, they are doing so through dynamic interaction with the present, [and] they are making sense of their past” (28). Thus, the interactive process between past and present has particular value and meaning to the oral historian. Of course, the interviewer must also strive for internal trustworthiness and validity by maintaining neutrality and consistency across and within interviews, while also remaining flexible and reflexive to an interview’s flow (Padgett, 2008).

In order to increase the likelihood of gathering in-depth data on my targeted areas of interest, I developed a two-part data collection procedure requiring informants’ participation in two interviews on separate dates. The first interview consisted of gathering a general picture of

the informants' life, family, and school context. The second interview had three separate parts: first, it included a section to clarify informants' self-described identities in terms of race, ethnicity, generational status, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, religion or faith, and socioeconomic class background. This section was intended to assist in clarity and categorical ease in the future data analysis stage, as well as placed strategically in the second interview after the researcher had theoretically built some rapport with the participant. Next, a customized list of follow-up questions to the participants' first interview was asked, with the intention of gathering richer details on areas of interest to the researcher. Last, a set list of questions regarding participants' racialized experiences in Hawai'i's K-12 schools was asked. The preparation of the questions and probes within the two interview protocols (Appendices C & D) was informed by the original three research questions and the global goal to have them answered. Given the detail of many of the questions in Part III of Interview Protocol 2, all participants were emailed a copy of this specific set of questions ahead of time and invited to think about them prior to the second interview.

I interviewed participants at a location of their choice, using a semi-structured style in order to focus them on intentional areas of interest but also allow them the flexibility to delve into unexpected territory. While the same data protocols were followed for each participant, spontaneous probes and requests to "go deeper" differed greatly from interview to interview, depending on each participant's response to each question. Interviews ranged from 50 minutes to two hours each. All participants agreed to my audio recording of their interviews using a digital recording app on a smartphone. Due to circumstances outside of the study's control, one of the six informants was unable to participate in the second of the two interviews. However, given the informant's detailed and concise focus to the questions in the first interview, I decided I had

enough information to include this narrative in my analysis. While slightly less in-depth data from one research participant comprises another limitation of the study, the overall data collection phase maintains its rigor.

### **Analysis**

Eleven interviews total were each transcribed in full. The second interview protocol's inclusion of follow-up questions to an informant's first interview necessitated the transcription of their first interview and a brief analysis prior to meeting the informant the second time. Narrative analysis and mapping were used to identify salient responses in each interview, based on the overarching research questions. Over time, these methods were also used to identify and connect participants' responses to one another according to larger themes. Though many of these themes confirmed previous research on related subjects, the inferences made here have been reached inductively.

### **Profile of Research Participants**

Kat was born in 1991 on O'ahu to Filipino immigrant parents. She grew up on the "leeward side" of the island (the drier areas on the island's west side), and her K-12 history includes attending public elementary, intermediate, and high schools in two Filipino-concentrated towns. In high school, Kat was an active member of student council for all four years and also played soccer. When I met Kat, she was in her last term of college, pursuing her bachelor's degree in a tourism-related field.

Matthew was born in 1991 in Manila, Philippines, which he remembers mostly for its busy city streets and how there was "never an empty table" in his childhood home." His family immigrated to Honolulu when he was five years old. After spending a week in kindergarten at a Catholic school with no prior knowledge of English, Matthew's parents pulled him out and

homeschooled him for a year. He returned to kindergarten at the same school, attended school there until the seventh grade, and in the eighth grade transferred to a public K-12 charter school in Honolulu. Matthew developed a love for music and singing in elementary school, which he carried on as a serious hobby throughout high school. At the time of our interview, Matthew was in his last year of college, majoring in Biology and hoping to continue on to medical school.

Nicole was born in 1991 in Manila, Philippines and lived in Nueva Vizcaya province until the age of five. Nicole's family settled in a Filipino-concentrated town in leeward O'ahu, where she attended public schools from the first grade through high school. She remembers being pulled from the regular school day and staying after school for ESL classes in her first year of elementary school. She spent her sophomore through senior years of school as a member of student council. When we met, Nicole was a college student, where she began as a Nursing major but switched to a bachelor's in Social Work.

Rianna was born in 1991 on O'ahu. She grew up moving between two Filipino-concentrated towns on the leeward side and a suburb of downtown Honolulu. Rianna's mother and father, a second-generation Filipina from Hawai'i and a Filipino immigrant, respectively, divorced when she was four years old. She attended kindergarten through eighth grade at an independent Christian school near downtown Honolulu, followed by ninth through twelfth grade at the public high school in her suburb. Rianna was involved in many clubs and activities in her K-12 schooling, though she was particularly inspired by her high school involvement in poetry and the hip hop music scene. At the time of our interviews, she was balancing working for the U.S. army reserves, going to college for her undergraduate degree in Marketing, and recording and performing music. She identifies as a lesbian.

Nathan was born in 1989 in Honolulu to his father, an immigrant from the Philippines, and mother, a mixed Chinese Portuguese woman born in Hawai‘i. He identifies as both “Filipino” and “mixed,” but more often the former. Nathan grew up in a suburban city in the center of O‘ahu, where he attended elementary, middle, and high school at DOE public schools. When we met, Nathan had recently received his degree in education and was about to start a counseling-related graduate program in Honolulu. He identifies strongly as a Christian, and he is also very involved in recording and performing rock music.

Jason was born in 1987 in Japan. His father, a fourth-generation Filipino from Hawai‘i, met his mother, who is native Japanese, while serving in the U.S. military in Japan. When Jason’s parents divorced when he was nine, he moved with to O‘ahu, where he settled in his father’s Filipino-concentrated hometown. Jason attended preschool and his first few years of elementary school in the Japanese public school system. In Hawai‘i, he attended several public elementary schools in his town of residence on O‘ahu. He went to DOE intermediate and high schools in this town as well. Jason received bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Hawai‘i. At the time of his interview, he was working as a professional in politics and public policy. He identifies himself as half Filipino and half Japanese, and he also identifies as gay.

## CHAPTER 4: INTERGROUP MICROAGGRESSIONS – RELATIONS BETWEEN “LOCALS,” “BUK-BUKS,” “MOKES,” AND “BLACKS”

This chapter examines the manifestation of a racialized discourse of localism in the everyday interactions between Filipino students and their non-Filipino peers in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools. In my study, I found that acts of interpersonal racialization and racism, in the form of racial microaggressions, occur regularly between Filipinos and students of other ethnicities. I distinguish this category of racial microaggressions as *intergroup microaggressions*.

Reflecting on their past experiences as Filipino K-12 students in Hawai‘i’s schools, the individuals I interviewed described both the intergroup microaggressions directed at themselves and those in which they engaged in against non-Filipinos. They thus revealed the complex, multi-directional nature of microaggressions as a whole. When experiencing microaggressions *vis a vis* their peers, Filipino students encounter acts of being put down or covertly excluded based on their race. At other times, Filipino students participate in the microaggressions experienced by non-Filipino students, including Pacific Islander and Black students. Whichever side of the transaction Filipino students find themselves on, the racialized discourse of localism serves to racially “other”<sup>21</sup> particular subgroups of Hawai‘i’s youth. In this way, intergroup racial microaggressions in Hawai‘i schools reproduce the racial hierarchies of white settler colonialism.

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<sup>21</sup> The concept of the racial “other” has been prominently theorized in the area of postcolonial theory and criticism. As Edward Said, author of the seminal postcolonial work *Orientalism* (1978) theorized, “othering” is the “system of discourse by which the ‘world’ is divided, administered, plundered, by which humanity is thrust into pigeonholes, by which ‘we’ are ‘human’ are ‘they’ are not” (1976: 41). With this in mind, I use “other” as a verb or “[racial] others” as a noun periodically throughout this chapter.



## **When Filipinos Experience Intergroup Microaggressions**

### *Racialized Put-Downs and Name-Calling*

As discussed in chapter 2, an important distinction often made between a racial microaggression and an act of overt racism is the more implicit, covert nature of a microaggression. However, some racial microaggressions are still direct, obvious, and deliberately intended to cause harm. According to Sue et al. (2007), a “microassault,” one of three broad categorizations of microaggressions, is a verbal or nonverbal attack intended to cause some level of emotional harm to its recipient. Microassaults look the most similar to old-fashioned, blatant forms of public racial bigotry, though they are more often communicated privately or experienced by individuals rather than groups. An example would be when a person of color is referred to using a derogatory racial epithet; this may happen either in person or through written communication, anonymously or not.

Fortunately, the Filipino individuals I interviewed reported few incidents of peers targeting them with racial microassaults that were direct and intended to hurt them emotionally. When it did happen, it typically came in the form of derogatory name-calling or put-downs, from classmates whom interviewees did not consider their friends. Kat described one such instance in our second interview together. When I asked her to talk about the first time she felt different from her peers on the basis of being Filipino, Kat evoked being repeatedly called a “*buk-buk*” by a fifth grade classmate in elementary school, a mixed-race Native Hawaiian boy she described as being known as “kind of a bully.” The word “*buk-buk*,” literally referring to a type of insect in the Ilocano language, became a derogatory term for Filipinos in Hawai‘i prior to World War II. Today, it is used colloquially to describe immigrant Filipinos or even Hawai‘i-born Filipinos and their racial, cultural “otherness” compared to Hawai‘i’s locals (Okamura, 2010; Labrador, 2004).

Buk-buk carries a meaning of stigmatization for Filipinos in Hawai‘i similar to the way the terms “fresh off the boat” and “FOB” do in the rest of the continental United States.

By this time in her life, Kat was familiar with the derogatory meaning of buk-buk and understood that her classmate’s intent was to provoke her. While over time she learned to simply ignore his taunts, her initial reaction to being called buk-buk was to be insulted and deny the implication that she was a foreigner:

Well he would just call, uh me "buk-buk." I was like, what do you mean? I'm Filipino but I was born here... and I would be like "I'm not buk-buk." Yeah, so I would get offended, I would be a little upset, like, why is he calling me... and I guess I would kind of relate being buk-buk to like someone who came straight from the Philippines, yeah. So, I was like I'm not that kind of Filipino I guess, yeah.

Kat’s account of the clearly negative associations with being labeled by peers as buk-buk is telling of the way that the discourse of localism operates between peers in Hawai‘i’s schools. When targeted with name-calling or putdowns implying their individual or group-level foreignness, Filipino students experience a racial othering similar to traditional racial binaries of the American versus foreigner, white versus person of color. Uniquely, the dominant racial discourse in Hawai‘i ascribes power to “locals” and inferiority to those who are not.

*Racial Exclusion: “There’s Filipinos, and there’s Asians”*

Another type of intergroup microaggression that the informants encountered in their K-12 schools were experiences of feeling racially excluded from their Asian peers. For a number of reasons, U.S. Filipinos have not always been comfortable claiming an Asian or Asian American identity. During the Asian American pan-ethnic movement beginning in the mid-1960s, Filipino Americans struggled against marginalization by Chinese and Japanese Americans, who held more political resources and whose interests were represented more dominantly in the movement (Espiritu, 1992) In an interrelated sense, Filipinos sometimes self-identify more closely to Latinos or Pacific Islanders than Asians, sharing with these groups certain historical and cultural

influences as well as similar racialization processes (i.e., sometimes Filipinos are racialized as deviants and criminals, rather than as the model minorities commonly associated with East Asians) (Scharlin & Villanueva, 2000; Ocampo, 2010; Nadal, 2008; Teranishi, 2002).

The nebulous nature of Filipino American racial identity tends to be reflected in the experiences of Filipino youth in Hawai‘i, who sometimes feel excluded from their East Asian peers. For the informants, this racial dynamic was communicated in their K-12 settings in several ways. Sensing one’s racial exclusion from other Asians seemed to happen more implicitly than the previous type of intergroup microaggression, as well as more frequently. Sometimes this happened interpersonally, though interviewees were more general than specific in explaining how this was communicated. The following exchange I had with Nathan in our second interview demonstrates this idea:

KV: Um and, you are ethnically both Filipino and Chinese. So, are you Asian?

Nathan: Um, I think, yeah by definition I'm Asian. By like the legal [definition], 'cause, Filipino's... Southeast Asian and, yeah.

KV: Ok. So legal definition you are. Um...

Nathan: You mean in school? Like in terms of school?

KV: Well um, do you... when you were in school, did you consider yourself Asian?

Nathan: No. Yeah. L-, it's weird because Filipino is Asian, in reality. But for some reason there's always that separation, there's, Filipinos and there's Asians. And I was on the Filipinos side. Yeah. People would categorize me.

KV: And, why would they categorize you as that? Well I know you identified *yourself* as Filipino.  
Nathan. Yeah. Yeah I guess, 'cause that's like all our friends. Like um, there, they just happen to be that race for some reason so we're all together. And then, it was weird looking back on it (*short laughter*). Yeah.

KV: Mmhmm. Ok, um, so, you did not consider yourself Asian. And other people did not consider you Asian or see you as Asian, right?

Nathan: Yeah.

Nathan’s narrative brings up two important and interrelated points. First, although he is aware of the geographic location of the Philippines as a country in Southeast Asia, he felt this was not reflected in how Filipino students were racialized at his school. Second, Nathan suggests that Filipinos’ identification in a racial category separate from Asian was both externally and self-ascribed. It is unclear whether Filipino students are more often racialized by others or

themselves. What *is* clear, in spite of the ambiguity of which act of racialization came first or the arbitrary nature of Filipinos' racial distinction in general, is the Filipino Americans I interviewed understood through their interpersonal experiences at school that they were not Asian.

Of all the informants, I found that Nathan in particular was hard pressed to recall many incidents in which he was positive he encountered some sort of racial discrimination in his K-12 schools. Although Nathan is ethnically mixed (Filipino, Chinese, and Portuguese), he self-identifies as Filipino over anything else. He described all of his schools as having Filipino student majorities, but also significant numbers of Native Hawaiians, Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans, as well as Black and white students from military families stationed in Hawai'i.<sup>22</sup> Though he generally did not consider himself having experienced racism at school, he did talk about a personal instance of liking a girl in high school that conveyed his racial exclusion as a Filipino:

I guess this could count as racism, I don't know. I, in freshman year I do remember one instance where I liked this girl. But she, I think she liked me, but then her and her friends, I guess she influ-, got influenced by her friends, that, they only dated like Asian guys. Like, soap opera Korean-looking guys. So that's why, I got upset at that... She's Japanese. And um, sh-, yeah she, she wouldn't date you unless you were like, Japanese or Korean, and you looked it (*short laughter*)... I remember feeling so bad, like, like I'm not good enough, kinda thing. And it's, it's not my fault, that I'm not, I don't look like that.

While it is tempting to write off Nathan's unrequited romance as a typical case of adolescent heartbreak, the meaning of this experience went much deeper for him in its racializing implications. Through the act of his love interest refusing him, Nathan specifically sensed being undesirable, physically and perhaps in other ways, due to his race. The experience of romantic

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<sup>22</sup> While the racial dynamics between Black students from military families and Filipino students are briefly discussed in this chapter, racialized interactions with military-associated students of other races are not. This omission accurately reflects the lack of mention in the informants' narratives of interactions with white, Latino, or other students from military families. However, the racial dynamics between students of color from Hawai'i and *haole* (white) students associated with the military is an important topic deserving of extended discussion elsewhere. See Judy Rohrer's work (2008) for background on the racial politics between island residents and *haole* members of the U.S. military and their children.

rejection across racial lines is indicative of one possible way Filipinos' racial exclusion plays out among peers in a school system. What is interesting is that Nathan's Chinese ancestry did not make a difference to the object of his affection, who clearly saw him as Filipino and not East Asian-looking as she preferred (or was influenced by her friends to prefer). In this way, Nathan confronted a microaggression where his ethnicity and race intersected in creating a uniquely painful emotional blow.

Matthew also seemed to have a general sense at his schools that Filipinos and Asians were racially separate. However, it seems he also came to recognize this through institutional definitions of Filipinos as a distinct racial category. When asked whether Filipinos were considered Asian at his K-12 schools, he ventured:

Um, from what I remember, I don't think so because they would always say "oh you're Filipino," or if you were Asian, so I guess they meant Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese. Yeah so I guess those countries. But I always thought that Filipinos would be Asian too since they, they're within the same, area as Japan and, you know China, so... but, I guess they separate the two... Filipino, Asian, so they would separate the two. Yeah... Because I mean, even when you're filling out a form there's, you have blocks that said "Filipino" or they'd be "Asian American," you know like "European" or some other, or "Indian," some other race or ethnicity.

In Matthew's statement, there is once again vagueness as to why Filipinos are not Asian and whether this is more the result of outside or self-identification. Additionally, there is an uncertainty of whether interpersonal definitions of Filipinos' race come from institutionally-imposed distinctions in Filipino students' environments (such as census data forms) or vice versa. It is not necessary to figure out what causes what, since the more likely explanation is that both influence one another. In either case, interpersonal or environmental, it is the everyday, individualized experience of feeling racially othered from Asians that make the experience a microaggression.

For Matthew, the categorical distinction of Filipinos from Asians was understood not just as difference but as hierarchical, according to socioeconomic class. Within his grade school, he came to see Asian families as financially more advantaged than Filipinos, particularly because he believed them to be more likely to own their own businesses:

I guess I felt different in that sense where um, when I would be dropped off at school I would see uh... these kids who'd have like really fancy cars and I thought oh wow, wonder how much their parents made. And then I looked at my car and it was like you know, midsize car you know Mazda, it's kind of been old already or is getting older. And I was like oh I wonder oh how much, how much money they make or if they were well-off and, that's how I, I felt different in that sense, was um, economic status, when it came, and then types of jobs their parents probably worked... a lot of them were you know Chinese, Japanese and, you know my parents said "Oh they probably have their own business, so that's why they're doing well." ... And then, I was like, oh my parents don't have their own family business so what if, what if that's the case like oh Filipinos don't usually have their own family business... from what I remember and thought, Japanese and Chinese or the Asian community did well with like restaurants and all those kind of um, businesses.

Given Matthew's relative socioeconomic position as the son of new immigrants to Hawai'i, working multiple jobs just to make ends meet, the Asian families he knew through his school appeared to him much more financially settled. Thus, he came to understand racism as an inequality of class power. Intersecting racial and class disparities are an unfortunate reality for Filipino families in Hawai'i, who according to the 2006-2010 American Community Survey earn an average of 13,564 dollars less than Japanese families in Hawai'i (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b).<sup>23</sup> Filipino youth learn these distinctions within their schools, where visible class and status markers of more affluent groups like Asians send subtle, everyday messages such as, "you can't afford that car." Communicated on a systemic level, this type of intergroup microaggression experienced by Matthew may be considered an environmental microaggression, a consequence of systemic racial inequality rather than individual racism.

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<sup>23</sup> According to the 2006-10 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b), the median family income of Filipinos versus Japanese is 75,087 dollars versus 88,651 dollars, respectively. The median family income of Hawaii's total population is 77,245 dollars, putting Filipinos slightly below average.

Not all of the interviewees clearly expressed a racial distinction between Filipinos and Asians, or the feeling of exclusion from the Asian racial category. Rianna considered Filipinos as Asians (along with “Japanese, Korean, Chinese... Thai, [and] Vietnamese”), and this remained fairly consistent whenever she used the term “Asian” throughout her interviews. In Kat’s case, although she affirmed that Filipinos were considered Asians at her schools when I directly asked her, she used the term “Asian” mostly to refer to teachers and students who were Japanese or Vietnamese. Nicole distinguished Filipinos from those of East Asian ethnicity whom she considered Asian based on physical characteristics (at school, Filipinos did not fit “the stereotype of what an Asian looks like.”)

The variation of experiences in the racial categorization of Filipinos as Asian or not certainly confirms the arbitrary, social construction of race. It also indicates that not all Filipino students in Hawai‘i feel racially othered from Asians. However, the contextual nature of racialization in Hawai‘i schools often reveals a power imbalance against Filipino students in this process. When they are racially excluded and othered, interpersonally and/or in their environment, they experience intergroup microaggressions.

### **When Filipinos Engage in Intergroup Microaggressions**

Filipino students in Hawai‘i are not exclusively on the receiving end of intergroup microaggressions. Rather, as active agents within the interpersonal perpetuation of a higher racial stratification system within their school environment, Filipino students also participate in their non-Filipino peers’ experiences of microaggressions. The two racial groups I discuss as targets of Filipino students’ everyday acts of racism include Native Hawaiians, Samoans, and other Pacific Islanders, often racialized collectively; and Black students.

*The “Mokes”: Filipino Students’ Microaggressions towards Pacific Islander Students*

Particularly when prompted to discuss the interracial, interethnic relations at their K-12 schools, nearly all of the informants brought up Native Hawaiians, Samoans, and/or Pacific Islanders in general. Perceptions of Pacific Islander students, held both by the informants specifically and in a general sense at their schools, were not very positive. According to the interviewees, students tended to view Pacific Islander peers as the school criminals, perceiving them as “scary” and likely to start physical fights, violently bully other students, and steal other students’ things. At other times, Pacific Islander students were perceived as academically unmotivated and low-achieving. While in retrospect the informants recognized their impressions of Pacific Islander students to be stereotypes, their narratives demonstrated the opinion that negative stereotypes tended to be based on observable realities they perceived as students. In other words, stereotypes of Pacific Islanders were often thought to be rooted in truth.

At the middle school and high school attended by Kat, Nicole, and Jason, there were sizeable numbers of Samoan students in addition to the Filipino student majority. According to the informants, there was little social overlap between Filipino and Samoan students (as Jason put it, the “‘soles’ don’t mess with the ‘flips’ and ‘flips’ don’t mess with the ‘soles’”<sup>24</sup>). Jason observed this ethnic divide in violent encounters between the two groups, sometimes leading to school lockdowns, as well as in dating patterns where the romantic involvement between Filipinos and Samoans was considered fairly taboo. The two women recalled being scared of Samoan students—and to a lesser extent, Native Hawaiian students—fearing they would beat

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<sup>24</sup> “Sole” is a Samoan word for a boy or male, though in Samoan circles it is used colloquially to refer to both males and females.



them up or steal their things.<sup>25</sup> Kat referred to these students using the Hawaiian Creole term “moke,” which she described as those who “spoke pidgin, like very typical local people.” In colloquial Hawaiian culture, stereotypes of mokes are comparable to those of “rednecks” in the continental United States—rural, macho, aggressive, uneducated, and lacking cultural refinement (Hiramoto, 2011a; 2011b). Though the term “moke” may extend to describe ethnic individuals in Hawai‘i besides Pacific Islanders, the informants tended to associate mokes only with Samoans and Native Hawaiians.

Often, most of the informants described the social groupings at their K-12 schools as separated by race and ethnicity. While at times these separations appeared to occur unintentionally, at others the conscious decision to exclude non-Filipino peers from their social circles was somewhat apparent. Such was the case for Kat and Nicole with Samoans and Native Hawaiians, who they generally associated with negative stereotypes and thus did not attempt to befriend. The following discussion I had with Nicole exemplifies this:

KV: ... would you say that... the stereotypes ever changed the way you acted towards people?

Nicole: ... I think so. Like, especially like Hawaiians or the Samoans. Like their stereotype it made me like more scared, to talk to them, or to be friends with them.

KV: ... mmhmm so, you were scared so, you, just wouldn't try? Or, would you stay away from them?

Nicole: Um, I think put less effort (*laughter*) into, like trying to talk to them.

It is not insignificant that Nicole chose not to associate with Native Hawaiians and Samoans under the assumption of their aggressive behavior. Given that Filipino students greatly outnumbered Pacific Islanders within this school context, Filipinos’ racialization of Pacific Islander students as mokes and criminals demonstrates a racial hierarchy where Filipinos hold relative power. The negative racialization and resulting social exclusion of Pacific Islander

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<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, neither Kat nor Nicole had ever personally experienced such extreme interactions with their Samoan peers. But they claimed to have known or seen other Filipino students who had, or else they heard such stories told about Samoans through the social grapevine.

students in Hawai‘i schools is thus an intergroup microaggression in which Filipino students are evident participants in the reproduction of a white settler racial hierarchy.

The Filipino Americans I interviewed described other negative stereotypes they held about Pacific Islander students, both at the time of being in school and in retrospect. These generally included subtle and not-so-subtle perceptions that Pacific Islander students were academically unmotivated and low-achieving. For instance, Nathan described the mokes in his high school as “the jocks... they just don't have backpacks ever... (*short laughter*) I don't know why, I think it's like a thing.” In Rianna’s case, though she claimed as a young adult to recognize the role of systemic racism in shaping Pacific Islander students’ achievement, as an adolescent she did not always understand the role of systemic or environmental forces:

... [my high school]... it's always been like [within the] top three, public high schools in Hawai‘i ... but I found that a lot of like the Polynesian kids,<sup>26</sup> they, they were kind of like, they didn't really care [about graduating]. And... at the time I didn't [understand why], I was like, well, if you don't wanna like always live like that then, you should just get good grades and be better! ... but, [now I understand that] if you come home to an environment they're probably living in where like, they have to take care of like their grandma or something, or like, their cousins or brothers are in gangs and stuff, then that's the environment you grow up [in], and then it's hard, just to like, get a place to study.

Filipino students’ negative perceptions of Pacific Islanders as lacking academic engagement are obvious in the narratives above. What is unclear is whether Nathan or Rianna ever acted upon these racialized stereotypes—thus it may not be fair to label their perceptions alone as microaggressions. Still, the possibility that such stereotypes are communicated through rumors, gossip, or social exclusion and other nonverbal behaviors alerts us to the potential creation of a negative school climate for the targeted racial or ethnic group. In this school context, it may be

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<sup>26</sup> In a few instances, informants chose the umbrella term “Polynesian” to describe Pacific Islanders of different ethnicities, including Native Hawaiians and Samoans. While I instead use “Pacific Islander” as my own encompassing term for these groups, Polynesian is not an inaccurate descriptor; it describes a grouping of people who share origin from a sub-region of islands in the Pacific and a common migratory history, as well as a preferred political/racial identity for some. Teresia Teaiwa has discussed the politics of the “Polynesian” identity, which ranges from having “militouristic” to “counter-hegemonic” meanings depending on the context in which it is invoked (1999).

Filipinos creating this dynamic for their Pacific Islander peers to face. In others, Filipino students may find themselves as the targets of low academic expectations.

Filipino students' school experiences reflect a social separation from their Pacific Islander peers. Some of this dissonance may be accounted for by everyday intergroup racism and the reinforcement of an API racial hierarchy. While not always aware of their discriminatory perceptions of Pacific Islanders, Filipino students are actively engaged in this process of interpersonal racialization.

### *The "Watering Hole": Microaggressions towards Black Students*

As a researcher, I had initially been focused primarily on identifying within my informants' narratives intergroup racial microaggressions between Filipino and other API students. Therefore, I was surprised to find a subset of racialized interactions between Filipino students and Black students which unexpectedly revealed an important layer to the racialized discourse of localism. Because Blacks make up only 1.6 percent of Hawai'i's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), it is easy to overlook the experiences of Black students, most of whom come from military families stationed in Hawai'i, in the API-majority K-12 system. Here, I argue that the dominant racial discourse of localism masks racism against Blacks in Hawai'i, as well as perpetuates the common misconception that APIs are not active agents in systemic or interpersonal forms of racism.

Black students had a visible presence at Rianna's and Nathan's K-12 schools, which were geographically situated within short distances from American military bases on O'ahu. This resulted in the higher enrollment of students from military families (typically Black or white, and sometimes Latino students) relative to schools in other parts of the island. Rianna felt optimistic about the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population at her high school. She referenced

a particular hallway where Black students tended to congregate, popularly dubbed “Blackstreet,” as an example of her school’s intergroup acceptance and positive racial climate. While an outsider to Rianna’s school context might have interpreted the name or existence of Blackstreet as a means to segregate or isolate Black students, Rianna saw the acknowledgement and assignment of a specific space for Black students as an affirmation of their visibility. She thus stated her belief that Black students at her high school held comparable amounts of social power and status as other racial and ethnic groups.

Nathan’s account of Black students’ experiences at his high school tells a slightly different story. When asked to describe overt or subtle instances of racial discrimination against Filipinos at his schools, Nathan instead focused on the microaggressions he observed happening to Black students. He gave the examples of a high school teacher appearing to hold lower expectations and standards for Black students’ academic performance and students in high school commonly having a strong aversion towards dating Black peers. Interestingly, while Nathan expressed an awareness of subtle forms of racism against Black students, he did not consider the following more obviously racialized examples to be insulting towards his Black peers:

Like everyone has their own spot. [The Black students’] spot was by, this place called... Building B. And like, [it was] just Black people (*short laughter*). There's, they just stay there. I don't know why, I guess they feel united. But um, so there was stuff like, we would call it "the watering hole" or "Africa"... And um, but my friends, we, we'd always throw Black jokes at them and they would just laugh. Like they were cool about it.

Similar to at Rianna’s school, the Black students at Nathan’s school had their own informally designated area on campus. However, the much more derogatory nature of its name, “the watering hole” (as if Black students were animals from Africa) implies a less neutral physical separation than “Blackstreet.” His assumption that Black students were unharmed emotionally by overtly racist jokes is debatable. Overall, Nathan appeared unconscious, either at the time or in

retrospect, of his own participation in microaggressions against Black students. As I will explore in the next chapter, many informants typically engaged in racialized teasing and jokes with their peers, particularly their fellow Filipinos, and they generally viewed these interactions as harmless rather than hurtful.

Both Rianna's and Nathan's narratives indicate a layer to Hawai'i's racial discourse of localism that racism is not something that occurs towards or among APIs, though it does happen to Blacks (even though Rianna claims this was not the case at her school). While APIs face simultaneous elements of privilege and oppression because of their intermediate position in society's racial hierarchy (Okimoto, 1994), they are often left out of discussions of racism or assumed by themselves or others to not engage in racist processes. Misconceptions of racism as a dynamic largely affecting only Blacks or Latinos (while it privileges whites) is damaging for API communities. As with Rianna and Nathan, it is possible that other Filipino students in Hawai'i's K-12 schools fall into localism's trap of denying Filipinos' participation in everyday instances of systemic racism.

### **Intergroup Student Relations: Reproducing White Settler Colonialism**

According to Nandita Sharma, in the context of a colonial state, the categories of "native" and "migrant" are constructed by white settlers in order to "legally distinguish between—and divide" their nonwhite subjects (2010: 108). API students, including Filipino students, play out the islands' racialized discourse of localism by reproducing new racialized categories—"local," "immigrant" (i.e., "buk-buk Filipino" versus "local Filipino"), and "moke"—as they engage in intergroup microaggressions with one another in Hawai'i's K-12 schools. Conditioned by settler colonialism, local API students envision buk-buk Filipinos as racial others by emphasizing their cultural inferiority as compared with local culture. Further, Asian and Filipino youth born and

raised in Hawai‘i identify themselves as locals and extreme locals as mokes; this racializing process is performed without an awareness of how these terms appropriate, exploit, and distort the meaning of Hawaiian culture when attached to individual bodies.

In sum, localism as a racial discourse creates a social hierarchy modeled after white settler colonialism; this dynamic is partially observable in the intergroup microaggressions that occur in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools. As I will show next, the deployment of settler-reminiscent racialized categories is also evident in the everyday interactions between students thought to belong to a singular ethnic group.

## **CHAPTER 5: INTRAGROUP MICROAGGRESSIONS – PEER SURVEILLANCE, RACIALIZED HUMOR, AND INTERNALIZED RACISM**

Existing literature on microaggressions pays little mention of the impact of marginalizing slights and insults that occur among members of a group that is racialized collectively from outsiders. Informed by my own subjectivity as a Filipina and former student in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools, who had experienced microaggressions primarily opposite of non-Filipinos, I had not anticipated that the informants in this study would talk about discrimination within the Filipino community itself. As a researcher, I was thus surprised when interviewees spent significant time speaking about the lasting effects of experiencing subtle discrimination from other Filipino students. This chapter continues to challenge previous conceptualizations of microaggressions by demonstrating how Hawai‘i’s racialized discourse of localism unfolds covertly among and between Filipino K-12 students, in the form of what I have termed *intragroup microaggressions*.

Intragroup microaggressions are experienced in several ways. For the study’s informants, these included racialized teasing and joking between friends, direct or subtle putdowns of Filipino students who were perceived or constructed to be “more” buk-buk than their sources, and microaggressions between Tagalog “elites” and the Ilocano Filipino student majority. Interviewees’ narratives again revealed that they had both experienced and participated in intragroup microaggressions with other Filipinos. Interestingly, most informants communicated positive responses to the racial jokes and putdowns that came from their Filipino peers. That these individuals largely minimized the adverse impacts of such intragroup microaggressions suggests that this practice may be a form of resistance against negative racialization.

Although many Filipino youth are able to adapt positively to intragroup microaggressions, I continue to argue that Hawai‘i’s racialized discourse of localism manifests in microaggressions

that may serve to construct certain members of a single ethnic group as racial others. Drawing from concepts of community surveillance is useful in understanding this process. The connection made between Filipinos' intragroup microaggressions to notions of internalized racism at the end of this chapter is also important in articulating the covert consequences of adopting localism as a racialized discourse.

### **Community Surveillance**

The idea of community surveillance has been most often developed based on readings of Michel Foucault's concepts of governmentality (1991) and panopticism (1977), in which individuals of "troublesome populations" self-manage and self-discipline. In modern functioning societies, power has been decentralized from the government and dispersed among agencies and citizens to create the most efficient system of policing and discipline. In other words, the actions of "deviants" are most efficiently watched and policed by their own immediate institutions, such as the family, education systems, and communities. Under community surveillance, individuals come to conform to mainstream society's norms out of an imagined consciousness of always being watched, resulting in a lasting fear of discipline. When Filipino youth self-police each other through community surveillance in Hawai'i schools through intragroup microaggressions, acts range from obvious (a non-familiar Filipino peer's racialized insult) to subtle (a good friend's teasing based on immigration status).

Although microaggressions reflecting Hawai'i's racial discourse of localism can come from outside the Filipino community, those that happen within the community have a particularly potent power to control and discipline individuals. In her research on Filipina overseas workers, Neferti Xina M. Tadiar calls attention to the inevitable "microclass differences" present in a putatively singular "Filipina identity" (2005: 308). Recognition of these differences



induces co-existing feelings of familiarity and repulsion, leading Filipinas of higher status to look down upon Filipinas whose characteristics society assigns less value. Tadiar's discussion of "*minamata*," the action of Filipinas communicating their debasement of another as simply as paying her a humiliating look, resonates closely with the subtle acts of devaluation that arise among fellow Filipino youth in Hawai'i's K-12 schools. Recognizing the oppressed social and socioeconomic status of Filipinos in Hawai'i society, Filipino students police one another through microaggressions aimed particularly at the denigration of new immigrants.

### **When Filipino Friends Engage in Intragroup Microaggressions**

#### *"No one got offended": Minimizing the Injury of Racialized Humor*

When interviewees were targeted by peers with racialized teasing or joking, usually the sources were not only friends, but other Filipino students. Racial teasing and joking among Filipino friends at school were among the most common microaggressions reported by those I interviewed. Informants admitted to being on both the giving and receiving ends of the "you eat black dog" joke in their social circles, as well as calling friends or being called buk-buk, "Flip" (an abbreviated version of "Filipino"), "brown," and "short." All the female informants mentioned teasing friends or being teased (or both) about clothing they wore, especially where donning bright or mismatched colors was associated with being "more" Filipino. Rianna disclosed she would joke with recent immigrant friends about reporting them to the deportation department for driving without a license.

Nearly everyone who mentioned intragroup racialized teasing tended to justify this behavior. As Rianna put it, "teasing each other is how friends show they like each other." Similarly, Nathan explained, "a lot of my friends actually, are the kind that, we would, we would throw racist jokes around like crazy. And no one got offended." Matthew maintained that when

friends told derogatory Filipino jokes (such as those that incorporated the stereotype of Filipinos eating dog) “ things like that that didn't really bother me 'cause I know that, I've heard it before and it's, it's just friends being friends or, just goofing off.” Thus, between friends, racialized teasing and joking were generally seen as a well-intentioned action, lacking harmful intent.

Filipino students' common emphasis on Filipino ethnic humor as a form of bonding with their peers suggests their conscious decision to resist the assumed injurious nature of racialization. A couple of informants provided insight into why it seemed acceptable to make race-related jokes among their Filipino friends at school. Rianna and Nathan both referenced the influence of mainstream Black comedians, such as Dave Chappelle and Katt Williams, as examples of the acceptableness of teasing one's own race for the sake of humor. Nathan went on to describe how it was a positive experience for him to understand the difference between using ethnic humor for either harmful or friendly intent:

Uh it didn't mean, anything in a negative way for me I feel. Like I know it can be, if it was, I think, if it was said out of anger or something, then yeah. Then it'd be, you know different... I don't think I would change anything, with that one. 'Cause I felt like it was, if anything it was a good thing for me, to like have that insight and know that, there's prejudice, then there's people who can, who [you] can joke with, and not be so personal about it. Yeah, I think those are the coolest people, to me. It shouldn't be a joke like all the time though.

For Rianna, intragroup ethnic comedy sometimes served as a way of reminding Americanized Filipinos of the culture or struggles of Filipino immigrants in a familiar yet humorous way. Here, she explained the purpose of her kidding around with friends about their being deported:

Because it really just gives you like a reality check and like brings you back to earth like, when people start being like big-headed about things and stuff, or like, 'cause I see a lot of times, when immigrants come, like, the first ones are like really humble. And then the second or third generation like us, we start to like act all “high-nosed,” 'cause like we're born here. We have like social security and all that kind of stuff and we don't have to worry about like getting a work visa or something. And then, like, I don't know, I guess it's just a way like of like putting us in check too, like through comedy. You know?

While the identification with racialized humor is recognizably a form of conscious resistance, it may also be considered an adaptive response to typical peer dynamics. Research

considers teasing among peers to be an essential, often ritualistic feature of adolescent socialization in school (Eder, Evans & Parker, 1995). Some distinguish teasing between friends, generally viewed as intended to convey humor and playfulness, from the “biting” nature of bullying and harassment (Keltner et al., 2001; Land, 2003). This distinction was echoed by most of my research informants. From a clinical standpoint, humor is further considered one of the more adaptive coping mechanisms for various types of psychological stressors, including racism (Farley et al., 2005). A subset of the informants certainly saw value in being able to laugh with one another over Filipino jokes and other racialized humor. Thus, these actions differed from the deliberately hurtful microassaults they sometimes faced from non-Filipino peers, as Kat did when the class bully called her buk-buk.

*“But I Still Do Care”: The Underbelly of Friendly Teasing*

Racialized teasing and name-calling by friends was not uniformly accepted as completely harmless by all interviewees. Nicole shared her experience, which reveals the potential for friends’ well-intentioned jokes to work as a form of community surveillance. Nicole recalled times in high school when her closest friends, a group of mostly Filipino girls, would say things like “oh that’s so buk-buk” about the clothing she wore. She described these remarks as made in “a joking way” and initially stated that she did not take it personally. But later, she elaborated:

I don't think it really affected me. (5 sec pause) Because you're like, they're my friends so it didn't really like, in a way matter, as much... but... (5 sec pause) um... I guess the next time then I [would] like, sort of be more cautious, with how I dress. Because in the back of my mind I'm still like “well I don't care what, they think,” but, I still do care 'cause like well, if they think that way then you know maybe other people think the same.

Nicole’s statement is significant in that she links her understanding of her friends’ racialized teasing to a larger perception that other peers who were not necessarily friends might hold of her. It also reveals the subtle way her friends’ comments heightened her consciousness of her behavior and choices, thus restricting them in the future.

Negative stereotypes of Filipinos in Hawai‘i have persisted over the years and are reinforced by the islands’ large-scale practice of ethnic joke-telling. While other ethnic and racial groups in Hawai‘i have also been targeted by racialized humor, Filipinos have arguably been racialized as second-class citizens more heavily than others due to their continuously sizeable immigrant representation in the islands and associated stereotypes of being “culturally backwards” (Okamura, 2010). In their ethnic jokes about Filipinos, “local” comedians born and raised in Hawai‘i popularly utilize what some have called “Mock Filipino,” which typically consists of speaking English in a Filipino accent and invoking a number of popular stereotypes about immigrants from the Philippines (Labrador, 2004). Hawai‘i comedians of various ethnicities, including Hawai‘i-born Filipino comedians, use Mock Filipino in order to distinguish themselves from immigrant Filipinos, who are seen as having a lower social status in the islands (Hiramoto, 2011b).

Telling Filipino ethnic jokes and using Mock Filipino have clearly trickled into Hawai‘i’s education system, where both Filipinos and non-Filipinos perpetuate these traditions for various reasons. Nicole may have been the only informant who connected friends’ racialized jokes to the consequence of increased self-consciousness and adjustment of behavior. However, the larger context of negative stereotyping of Filipinos in Hawai‘i suggests that Filipino youth may internalize friendly racialized teasing in ways that are more emotionally harmful than they might articulate.

Further, while teasing is common in adolescent school culture, it is inherently complex and ambiguous. Its interpretation is highly dependent on the entire context. As was often the case for my interviewees, friends teasing friends can indicate a sense of familiarity and intimacy that mitigates a negative interpretation by those targeted (Keltner et al., 1998; 2001). On the other

hand, friends provoking friends using name-calling has been shown to be experienced as more of an interpersonal violation than when acquaintances name-call (Whitesell & Harter, 1996). There can also be variation in how peer teasing and insults are interpreted according to gender and the topic of teasing (Jones, Newman, & Bautista, 2005).

There appears to be a gap in the literature on adolescent teasing and its meaning when the topic is race. While I have only begun to scratch the surface of racialized teasing specifically in my own study, I have chosen to classify racialized teasing, whether by friends or less familiar peers, as a microaggression. That peers acknowledge their familiarity with one another based on racial stereotyping and jokes is compelling. As a form of racial microaggression, the act of friends playfully referring to one another as buk-buk is an everyday manifestation of Hawai'i's racial discourse of localism and structure of racial power. Though interviewees generally considered racialized teasing between friends to be acceptable because of its lack of malicious intent, microaggressions by definition need not be committed consciously and are in fact often unconscious acts. Racialized teasing between friends reflects the dominant racial discourse in Hawai'i that privileges "locals" while oppressing so-called "recent immigrants."

### **When Filipino Peers Police Each Other through Intragroup Microaggressions**

#### *Peer Surveillance Continues: Put-Downs of "More" Buk-Buk Filipinos*

There were times when informants recalled their racialized interactions with Filipino peers as clearly having a "biting" nature to them, more obviously unfriendly than when friends teased or joked. In these cases, informants seemed more apt to describe their negative visceral reactions to the exchanges, as well as sometimes the resulting changes in their own personal behaviors from the interactions.

One recurring type of microaggression that came up for participants in their K-12 schools was peers' put-downs of Filipino foods brought to eat at school. Sometimes the sources of the put-downs were non-Filipinos, but more often they came from other Filipinos, especially those who claimed to be more "Americanized" or "local" than their targets. In the following memory, Matthew demonstrates this:

... a lot of [the kids who would tease me] were Filipino but they didn't grow up with a mom that can cook them like oh pork adobo, or chicken adobo or, like *dinuguan*.<sup>27</sup> Like dinuguan when I brought it, they all thought, "oh, that looks disgusting, it's like black"... and, I'd tell them "oh yeah my pa-, my mom made this." ... And then, they'd kind of just tease me about, the way it looks and only Filipinos eat that, or like weird Filipinos eat that, like "why don't you eat like American food?" ... and then you know, other people would turn around and then they would try to see what I'm eating and like, that made me kind of self-conscious as to like, should I eat this in front of everybody? ... maybe, you know, I shouldn't bring this out or I should find somewhere else to eat in the classroom [where] no one will bother me... But then I have to eat it 'cause I'm hungry. So I kind of just, put my head down and just ate.

In this type of racialized peer interaction, Matthew experienced a hierarchy drawn by his U.S.-born Filipino peers between them and himself, ascribing power to "Filipinos" who ate American food and subordinate status to "weird Filipinos" who publicly ate Filipino food. Because attachments to food are closely associated with one's emotional ties to a culture, to experience the insult of one's normal food is a visceral, personal blow to one's culture and self. Feelings of embarrassment and shame are clearly present in Matthew's internal and visible reactions to his classmates' taunts. Such instances of peer surveillance are extremely common, as are their effects to make recipients feel like second-class citizens who must either change to fit accepted norms or suffer stigmatization.

Informants also spoke of being put down by other Filipinos for items they chose to wear to school. This may not be surprising, considering that youth typically make easy targets of peers who look different in terms of clothing, accessories, hairstyles, and other features of appearance.

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<sup>27</sup> Dinuguan is a traditional Filipino dish consisting of various parts of pig stewed in a thick gravy of cooked pig blood. Its consistency and dark brown to black color is often off-putting to those unfamiliar with the dish.

When I asked Nicole about the first time she felt directly discriminated against for being Filipino, the example she brought up turned out to be an intragroup microaggression.

Nicole: Um, it was in seventh grade, when I was wearing like this purple, neon-ish, or like a bright purple watch. And then, one of the kids, in my class was like "oh your watch... it looks so FOB." And at that time I didn't really know what FOB was, 'cause I just got out of elementary school. So I didn't really like, you know, think anything of it. And, so I kept wearing the watch and then... every day like he, like kept on saying it, and then I finally realized what FOB was. And... I guess, when I found out what FOB it was embarrassing. 'Cause I didn't really, like I didn't really think of myself, like that.

KV: Ok. And, what was his race or ethnicity?

3: Filipino (*short laughter*).

During the interviews, it seemed somewhat illogical and therefore funny to informants when they stepped back to recognize how much of the everyday racism they experienced in their K-12 schools came from fellow Filipino students. However, such instances were important moments for them, both as disciplinary and racializing lessons. Such forms of peer surveillance not only force subjects to change their behaviors to avoid future shaming, but teach subjects about the distribution of power in the context of Hawai'i's racial discourse of localism. In response to her Filipino peer's ongoing racialized insult, Nicole reported she stopped wearing the watch and that the experience "made me embarrassed to be Filipino and I wanted... to be more like uh... I guess American... in a way."

In another instance of peer surveillance, Kat spoke of a time when a group of girls on her soccer team, all in the grade level above her, approached her during practice and asked if she knew how to speak a Filipino language. She described the girls as ethnically "Filipino but they were raised here [in Hawai'i] so they couldn't speak the language," a description Kat herself fit.

When Kat replied that she did not speak a Filipino language, the following exchanged ensued:

... they were like "oh you can speak Filipino right?" And I was like "oh, no... maybe just a little like, words, but I don't know much." And they're like, "No, like you don't have to be ashamed, like, you can speak it right?" And I was just like, "oh, no, I don't." And... I don't know like, who did they think I was? I guess like they thought that I came from the Philippines, or like, yeah that I spoke it fluently. But I really didn't know how to speak it, like, I was raised to speak English, and, even though like my mom told me, "oh you should learn the language" like they never taught

me it. So like, I was kind of, irritated how they... [said] like, "Not. You're lying." I'm like "No I'm not, I'm pretty sure I'm not lying" (*short laughter*).

I was compelled by the sense of irritation Kat expressed when interpreting her teammates' questions as their mistaking her for her being born in the Philippines. Clearly, she considered the assumption that she spoke a Filipino language as a negative association. I asked Kat what would have happened in the same incident if she had in fact spoken a Filipino language:

Well I think, I would have been teased more, because like, if, like someone else knew the language at school I would totally talk to them in school, using the Ilocano language. And I feel like, you know if you're caught doing that or like if you are speaking another language, or, especially being Filipino, then that was like, you didn't want to be in that situation I guess.

As Kat describes above, Filipino youth in Hawai'i's K-12 schools are well aware of the racism faced not only by Filipino immigrants, but Hawai'i-born Filipinos by their potential association with immigrant-like practices, such as speaking a foreign language. Again, Hawai'i's dominant racial discourse of localism serves to construct the "local" as a non-immigrant (Labrador, 2004) and discipline those who do not fit the identity of a local. This form of discipline and behavior management is often done from within Filipino youth communities in schools.

#### *Intragroup Microaggressions Regarding Regional Subsets of Filipinos*

A final type of intragroup microaggression that the study's informants either experienced or engaged in while attending K-12 Hawai'i schools was related to discrimination between Filipinos of different regional origins. To categorize all Filipinos in the diaspora as a single racial or ethnic group is misleading to the effect that this masks the regional, cultural, and linguistic diversity of different Filipino subsets. Throughout the Philippines' history, these separate factions have often deemed one another "inferior" or "uncivilized," competing for political power and prestige (Aguilar, 2005).

As mentioned earlier, the majority of Filipinos in Hawai'i identify as Ilocano, descending from the northern areas of Luzon and speaking the regional dialect Ilocano. Historically and in



modern day, Tagalog-speaking Filipinos have composed the majority of the Filipino diaspora and are considered the elites, socioeconomically and socially. In Hawai‘i, the Ilocano immigrant majority has consistently held lower socioeconomic status and less likelihood to be professionals than Filipinos who have settled in the continental United States (Kim et al., 2009; Espiritu, 1996). Within the Filipino diaspora, discrimination persists between these different subsets. This fact was not lost on the young Filipino Americans I interviewed, who recognized the existence of a Filipino American social hierarchy through their interactions with other Filipinos in their K-12 school contexts.

Rianna described her understanding from an early age that there were differences between Tagalog and Ilocano Filipinos. In particular, she was aware that some Tagalogs held a “high-nose” attitude in relation to Ilocanos. When asked how she knew this, she replied:

... at [my grade school] like I had Ilocano and Tagalog friends, and they, I didn't realize 'til like I was in middle school people like, it was like such a big deal to figure out, what EXACT [Filipino] race you are. Like I would be like, "Oh I'm Filipino." And then like, like I would introduce myself to a, my friend's parent and then they would, like talk to me in Tagalog. And I'd be like, "Oh, sorry, I don't understand." And they're like, "Oh, so you're Ilocano?" And I, and then they'd say it in *that* tone. And I'd be like, "Oh... yeah." (*laughter*)

As in the scenario above, regionally-based intragroup microaggressions may be communicated subtly, even nonverbally, and are interpreted by Filipino youth in a larger context. For instance, Rianna noted also learning of the imagined superiority of Tagalog-speaking Filipinos outside of school, such as through family conversations and Tagalog dominance in popular Filipino American media, like the television station The Filipino Channel (TFC). The power attached to these differences may be reinforced in intragroup encounters in Hawai‘i’s schools.

At other times during their K-12 school experiences, interviewees themselves unwittingly participated in reinforcing regional power imbalances in the Filipino diaspora. Kat described a time when she verbally denied the Filipino identity of a Visayan classmate:

... in sixth grade, um, my classmate, she was Filipino and something else. But then, my knowledge of being Filipino was only either being Ilocano or Tagalog. And she was saying that she was Visayan, or her grandma was Visayan. I'm like, "No that's not Filipino. That's... there's only Ilocano and Tagalog." And she was like, telling me, "No, there's like Ilocano, Tagalog, and Visayan." I'm like, "No there's not." And like, we just going, kept going back and forth about that. And I was like, "That's not, Filipino like..." Yeah. So guess that's kind of discriminating...

Looking back at the incident, Kat ascribed her act of making her classmate feel racially excluded to a general ignorance about Filipinos. She admitted to wishing she could have known more about the diversity of Filipino Americans as a youth. Still, her story is telling of a misconceived in-group binary of Filipinos as either Tagalog or Ilocano, a misconception communicated through the subtle or overt social marginalization of smaller subsets of Filipinos like Visayans.

### **Intragroup Surveillance and Internalized Racism: Consequences of Settler Colonialism**

In many cases, Filipino students in Hawai'i's K-12 schools are able to respond adaptively to intragroup microaggressions, such as when they engage in and accept race-based teasing in order to express a connection among close friends. Without discrediting their resistance to injury, the within-group act of reproducing ideas of Filipino subordination, particularly subordination of Filipinos who are immigrants or those imagined as "more" *buk-buk* than others, may be seen as a consequence of the condition of settler colonialism and its counterpart, internalized racism.

CRT scholars have defined internalized racism as "the conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy where whites are consistently ranked above People of Color" (Pérez Huber et al., 2006). Also called internalized oppression, internalized racism as theorized in the field of psychology cultivates within individuals of color concepts of inferior identity, self-hate, and anxiety (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Scholars have recognized internalized oppression throughout the Filipino diaspora as a condition of U.S. colonial projects, such as U.S.-based education in the Philippines and notions of multiculturalism embraced by Filipino Americans (Constantino, 1970; Rodriguez, 2010). The idea of a "colonial

mentality,” or Filipinos’ susceptibility to see themselves as inferior and to normalize experiences of discrimination (particularly in relation to whites and Americans), has also gained momentum by ethnically-driven psychologists (Root, 1997; David & Okazaki, 2006; David, 2011).

Internalized racism may thus also be considered a consequence of settler colonialism, the condition that hinders APIs in Hawai‘i from recognizing when they reproduce settler-reminiscent categories through their participation in the dominant racial discourse of localism. Localism, as conveyed through microaggressions, appears to communicate a particular message to Filipino students in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools: if you are Filipino in Hawai‘i, there is a great chance you will be stigmatized if you openly show signs of participating in Filipino culture—that is, culture that is not “local” or “Americanized,” including eating Filipino food or speaking or dressing like an immigrant. Even if Filipino youth use their recognition of this reality to tease their friends in a non-malicious manner, their deployment of intragroup microaggressions require that they have on some level accepted—and are willing to reinforce—the power imbalances between “local” Filipinos and buk-buks. As a form of community surveillance, intragroup microaggressions serve to instill fear within some Filipino youth that they must not be perceived as anything except local—the alternative option, of course, being rejection from their peers.

It is now clear that Filipino students’ experiences and engagement in intragroup microaggressions are sometimes external manifestations of their own internalized racism, conditioned by settler colonialism. In other cases, K-12 educational institutions in Hawai‘i and their professionals are responsible for communicating microaggressions that perpetuate the subordination of Filipino students. I explore this latter category of microaggressions in the chapter that follows.

## CHAPTER 6: SCHOOL STAFF AND SCHOOL SYSTEM MICROAGGRESSIONS – MEASURING SCHOOL RACIAL CLIMATE

A wealth of educational research has connected K-12 students' overall functioning and ability to be successful in school to the concept of "school climate."<sup>28</sup> School climate generally describes the feelings and attitudes elicited by a school's environment based on patterns of people's experiences with factors such as school norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Loukas, 2007; Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D'Alessandro, & Guffey, 2012). A couple important variables used to measure school climate at any institution include students' perceptions of relationships between themselves and teachers as well as students' feelings of connectedness to and engagement in their school systems. Research finds that students' academic performance and trajectories are adversely impacted when they perceive their school educators and systems to have low expectations of students' abilities to succeed or do not value these students' backgrounds, experiences, or culture (Slaughter-Defoe & Carlson, 1996; Austin, Hanson, Bono, & Cheng, 2007).

This chapter considers the relationship between Filipino students, school staff, and other features within the school system in shaping these students' feelings of connectedness and engagement within Hawai'i's K-12 schools. In my study, the communication of racial microaggressions through various school staff and the school system itself, in terms of systemic-level patterns of teacher representation and school curriculum, appeared to significantly impact Filipino students' perceptions of school climate. I group these types of racialized instances together as *school staff and school system microaggressions*. Hawai'i's dominant racial

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<sup>28</sup> The body of literature on school climate and its impact on student functioning and success has grown tremendously in the past three decades. A 2012 brief composed by authors for the National School Climate Center provides a useful summary and synthesis of important findings about school climate throughout the years (Thapa et al., 2012).

discourse of localism, as communicated through school staff and school system microaggressions perceived by Filipino students, reinforces white settler colonialism by implying that Filipinos lack influence and importance in Hawai‘i’s institution of education.

### **“They Were All Japanese”: Teacher Representation as an Environmental Microaggression**

As discussed in chapters 2 and 4, is possible for microaggressions to occur not only interpersonally, but also environmentally in settings that intentionally or unintentionally communicate racial exclusion or invalidation (Sue et al., 2007). While the informants in my study did recall situations where the teachers and staff at their schools were directly involved in racialized interactions, at other times microaggressions seemed more environmental in nature. For instance, when asked to describe their teachers from kindergarten through high school, Kat, Nicole, and Jason—who all attended the same public schools in one of O‘ahu’s Filipino-concentrated towns—explicitly remember most of their teachers being Japanese. In fact, these students’ observations reflect the true overrepresentation of Japanese American teachers in Hawai‘i’s public school system as a whole. In 2004 they made up 38 percent of the teachers in a school district where Filipino Americans were 20 percent of the student population (second to Native Hawaiian students, 26 percent, and nearly double Japanese American students, 11 percent) (Okamura, 2008: 65-66).

When asked how he felt about the fact that most of his teachers were Japanese, Jason described an awareness of a power dynamic in high school:

... in, grade school all the way up until, you know high school it was very obvious that a lot my teachers were Japanese. A lot of them came from upper middle class backgrounds. Uh... I remember my teacher, uh, she was our chemistry teacher. She's from [an upper middle class neighborhood on O‘ahu], and, you know... it just amazed me because... she was a great teacher, she knew her subject matter... but then, I also thought, you know... how do you prepare yourself to teach in a place where these kids, are not even taught, they were[n't] spoken to in English at home? Or, the fact that, you know the school is so poor that there's no textbooks? And, you can't even make copies of the worksheets, you have to have them copy it onto folder paper. Um... I always felt that awkward kind of like, “you don't really know what it's like.”

As Jason articulates, there is meaning behind what students observe about their teachers' demographic identities. One possible effect of teachers' ethnic, racial, class, and/or cultural backgrounds is that these may influence their philosophies and pedagogies when it comes to teaching a group of students and its unique needs;<sup>29</sup> or, students' engagement with a particular teacher might be at least partially determined by students' perceptions of the teacher, including how they perceive the teacher's motivation, interests, and capabilities. While a perfect racial or ethnic match between teacher and students is by no means any assurance that the teacher is any better equipped to teach effectively or care more about the students, research has shown that many teachers of color, as opposed to white teachers, "do in fact relate to students and parents of color in ways that are culturally congruent and pedagogically responsive" (King, 1993 citing Foster, 1989 & Ladson-Billings, 1992). In the context of Hawai'i's API ethnic hierarchy, Jason perceived his Japanese American chemistry teacher to be well-trained and capable; however, he also surmised that she did not "really know what it's like" to live in the Filipino students' home environments or to work with the limited resources at their school.

Another possible impact of the demographic makeup of teachers is that it indicates to students which types of people are best suited for authoritative, leadership positions. For instance, in the rest of the continental United States where teachers are predominantly white, all students, including students of color, are subjected to the conclusion that whites must be best suited for leadership (Michael-Bandele, 1993). In Hawai'i, Japanese Americans lead numerically in most occupations requiring significant training (such as educators) and/or those equated with significant power and prestige (such as politicians). As Jason's quote reveals, the

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<sup>29</sup> This statement does not imply that all teachers of a particular demographic background adhere to the same essential teaching philosophies or pedagogies. Rather, educators, like people in all professions and situations, engage in worldviews and practice shaped by their personal histories and identities.

overrepresentation of Japanese American teachers in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools is not lost on Filipino students. It is an example of an environmental or systemic-level microaggression.

As opposed to the 20 percent of students in Hawai‘i DOE schools who were Filipino American in 2004, only 6 percent of teachers in the system were Filipino American (Okamura 2008: 65-66). Correspondingly, when describing the ethnic backgrounds of their teachers, most interviewees identified at least one and at most a few teachers of Filipino ancestry throughout their K-12 experiences. The relative dearth of Filipino teachers was not emphasized as an unsettling situation to any of the participants when they were K-12 students—hence, while underrepresentation of educators who share students’ ethnic/racial identity could be an environmental microaggression, this was not evident in my study. Further, when the informants spoke about teachers who had left the most positive or lasting impacts on their lives—a number of which were identified as Filipino or part Filipino—informants generally did not attribute race or ethnicity as a factor in their preference.<sup>30</sup>

### **Filipino Teachers and Curriculum: Interpersonal and Environmental Microaggressions**

To have a teacher who shares one’s racial, ethnic, or cultural background is certainly not a requirement for learning or engagement. However, it can still be a motivating factor for students, as the teacher becomes a multi-faceted role model and an example of a leader who can potentially validate and understand students’ culture or experiences. Compellingly, Kat told a story of a Filipina teacher who did the opposite of validating Kat’s experience and background as a Filipina student. According to Kat, her sixth grade teacher was the first Filipina she had had since starting school in kindergarten. Kat had written an assignment where she talked about a

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<sup>30</sup> A significant portion of the interviews consisted of participants recalling memories of their many K-12 teachers, who fit a wide range of ethnicities including Japanese, Filipino, Hawaiian, white, Chinese, African American, and Korean. Participants occasionally were unsure of certain teachers’ ethnic and/or racial backgrounds, usually stating what they believed their ethnicities to be in these cases. Some teachers were described as ethnically/racially “mixed.”

past trip she took to the Philippines with her family. Knowing that her teacher also spoke Ilocano, the native dialect of Kat's family, Kat decided to incorporate the word "*karayan*" (meaning "river") in the otherwise English-written piece. However, instead of recognition or praises when she got the paper back, her teacher had crossed out "*karayan*" and replaced it with its English equivalent. When I asked how she felt when this happened, Kat described:

I thought that was weird! ...well like I thought it would, mm be ok to use it. And like I was really excited 'cause like that's, you know a word I remember (*short laughter*) that was Ilocano, back then... And yeah. I mean I didn't ask her, "oh why did you change it?" or anything. But I just kind of thought like, oh maybe, I mean ... I don't know, we do write in English in school, so, I guess that's [why]... she just fixed it to be in English.

In a rare opportunity to validate her student's cultural knowledge, Kat's teacher instead corrected her, implying that it was "wrong" to use Ilocano in school. That the correction came from a Filipina teacher herself provided a double blow; as an important authority figure and role model in her students' everyday lives, she communicated the negation of Filipino culture and reinforcement of the superiority of American culture. Though Kat appears to have accepted her teacher's actions in the way she rationalizes the English emphasis in schools, it is nonetheless striking how vividly she remembers the incident. Kat's experience was certainly an interpersonal microaggression, and its intragroup nature made it particularly confusing and devaluing of her Filipino background.

Jason and Kat interpreted an environmental-level microaggression in the absence of Filipino language classes in their curriculum when they were high school students. In their separate interviews, they both informed me that their alma mater had only recently begun to offer Ilocano as a language option (over half a decade after Jason graduated, and a few years after Kat did). Jason recalled that when he was a high school student, there were "four [or] five full-time Japanese [language] teachers... *now* there's a Filipino [language] teacher. Back when I was in school, there was nothing." In retrospect, this reality evoked from Jason resentment at the



dominance of Japanese culture at his Filipino student-majority school. Kat, who eventually took up Ilocano classes in college, stated in her interview that she wished that it had been an option to her in high school. In her other interview, she had expressed a similar desire to have known more about the cultural differences between Filipinos of different regions. While Kat perhaps did not recognize her need for culturally-relevant curricula while in high school, looking back, she was unquestionably frustrated that opportunities to foster her identity as a young Filipina were systematically denied of her in her school setting.

### **School Staff: Other Interpersonal Microaggressions**

#### *Teachers' Preference for Asian "Model" Students: Exclusion of Filipino Students*

Filipino American students are known to be racialized dichotomously: either they are perceived as prototypical model minorities who value education and work very hard, or they are seen as deviants and exceptions to the "rule" of high-achieving Asian Americans (Buena Vista, 2010; Kim et al., 2008). Congruently, informants to this study also described the coexistence of competing stereotypes of Filipino students' academic abilities in their K-12 schools in Hawai'i. For Matthew, he remembered that "Asians were mostly looked at for being smarter" at the Catholic, Filipino student-majority school he attended from kindergarten through seventh grade. When asked to clarify this, Matthew explained that his teachers were at least partly responsible for reinforcing the model minority racialization of Asian students at his school, a positive stereotype which Matthew did not feel was also applied to Filipino students. Speaking on his observations in the second grade:

... my friends who were like Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese... at least from what I, when I hung out with 'em, they would always do their homework, and they would get the right answer. And the teachers would pick on them to answer the question or to help the, to uh facilitate some of the work with other students. So then of course, you know they'd be the Asian ones and, people would like go to them and [say], "hey, can you help me out with this?" or "hey, can I copy your homework?"

Recall from previous chapters that informants reported people did not typically include Filipinos in the same category as Asians and in fact often separated the two in their colloquial understanding of racial boundaries. Matthew's quote suggests that this was the case when it came to teachers' ascriptions of intelligence to Asian students but not necessarily to Filipino students. In other parts of my interviews with Matthew, it became clear that he had been a relatively high-achieving student in his K-12 years. The practice of Matthew's teachers to consistently acknowledge his Asian peers' academic abilities and overlook his own was a very subtle and implicit way of devaluing Matthew as a Filipino student; it must have been a significant racializing experience for him.

#### *School Agents' Low Expectations and Lack of Support for Filipino Students*

An upsetting interaction Jason had with a Japanese American guidance counselor in his early years of high school proved to be one of the most explicit examples of a school agent microaggression experienced by the informants in their K-12 schools. When Jason met with the counselor to discuss his interest in law in his sophomore year, "[she] basically told me, 'Uh, maybe you shouldn't be an attorney or you shouldn't aim for law school.' Or 'maybe you should think about being a nurse assistant, or medical assistant'." For historical and political reasons of which Jason appeared to be aware, the occupations his counselor recommended to him are popular choices for Filipinos in Hawai'i and beyond.<sup>31</sup> However, besides Jason's race, the teacher had no basis to undermine his pursuit of a more socially-esteemed career path:

... like, I didn't have terrible, uh grades. I wasn't a terrible student, in fact I was in student government and all of that stuff. But I think... like if I looked at myself then, [compared to] where I am now... I would have said, "if this kid continues on this trajectory he will not be ready

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<sup>31</sup> U.S. imperialism in the Philippines, including the creation of an Americanized hospital training system in the early twentieth century, has greatly impacted Filipinos' professional patterns and migration (Choy, 2003). The transnational phenomenon of Filipino nurses and medical technicians in the United States and beyond has impacted society's professional expectations of Filipinos, as well as the career-related expectations Filipino Americans and their communities have for and amongst themselves.

for college.” ...I know that a lot of people, a lot of Filipinos are pushed into that corner. Whether it's from their parents, or whether it's from outside of our own culture, people like my guidance counselor, saying this is what a Filipino should be doing. Like we all know, like there are categories where people drop us into: nurse, military, medical tech assistant.

Apparently, Jason considered his counselor's advice to be “disappointing” but not entirely surprising. Filipino students receive a range of messages from various sources (including family, school staff, and peers) that both encourage and discourage their preferred postsecondary paths (Maramba, 2008; Teranishi, 2002). Fortunately, Jason did not listen to his counselor and later in life still pursued his interests in politics and public policy, which he had considerable professional experience in at the time of our interview.

### **School Climate and Filipino Students in Hawai'i's K-12 Schools**

Experiences in terms of school racial climate varied among informants depending on their individual school context. Still, it is clear that at some point in their K-12 experiences, most perceived the presence of subtly racist messages in their encounters with school staff or imbedded in certain features of their school systems. An ethnic-based social hierarchy that has existed in Hawai'i since the plantation era is reproduced in the realities of who is represented in schools' adult leadership as well as which cultures are chosen to be valued as part of school curricula. This hierarchy also exists in the stereotypes of academic and professional deficiency that are sometimes attached to the bodies of Filipino students. Informants' stories suggest that Filipino students face a negative school climate in Hawai'i—perhaps more so in certain school contexts than others—and thus shoulder many of the unfortunate consequences resulting from the reproduction of localism in Hawai'i's K-12 schools.

The successful postsecondary experiences of the individuals interviewed in this study demonstrate that Filipino students are far from victims in Hawai'i's imperfect educational system. However, in spite of Filipino youth's resilience, school staff and school system microaggressions

theoretically constrict the educational trajectories of many Filipino students in the islands. Similarly, Filipino students are not immune to the effects of consistently observing fellow Filipinos' experiences of subtle racism within their school environments. Returning to the concept of internalized racism, I examine vicarious racialized encounters next.

## CHAPTER 7: VICARIOUS MICROAGGRESSIONS – INTERNALIZED RACISM REVISITED

This final chapter of analysis contributes another layer to consider regarding the insidious side of Hawai‘i’s dominant racial discourse of localism and the complex operation of racial microaggressions. It discusses the significance of a particular set of racializing experiences common to Filipino youth in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools that occurs when they witness other Filipinos’ encounters of subtle racism. This discussion requires a basic understanding of “vicarious racism,” which describes when a person observes racist incidents happening to someone else. When individuals experience racism vicariously, they not only learn important lessons about how racism works but also may encounter considerable psychological distress (Harrell, 2000). Research suggests that instances of vicarious racism are critical in any overall assessment of how racism affects individuals (Essed, 1991; Root, 1993).

While the study’s participants reported no shortage of implicitly racialized messages in their own everyday experiences in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools, they were also likely to bring up instances of racism they observed happening to other Filipinos in their school settings. The everyday, covert nature of these vicarious instances and interviewees’ reports of how they were personally affected by them leads me to refer to these instances as *vicarious microaggressions*. Congruent with the research that highlights vicarious racism as important to understanding racism as a whole, informants often emphasized the racialized experiences of their Filipino teachers, elders, and classmates as just as salient as their own.

Some authors suggest that Filipino Americans may be more likely to experience vicarious racism than other Asian Americans. For instance, in their study on Asian Americans’ perceptions of racism, Alvarez, Juang, and Liang (2006) found that Filipinos reported experiencing higher

frequencies of both vicarious racism and everyday racism (i.e., microaggressions) than Chinese Americans. My informants' stories from Hawai'i's K-12 school system further support the finding that Filipinos encounter relatively high rates of vicarious racism. As a key shared experience of all six interviewees, vicarious microaggressions were yet another example of how Hawai'i's dominant racial discourse of localism served as a form of social control for the behavior of Filipino students and in some cases may have contributed to internalized racism.

### **Vicarious Microaggressions among Large Filipino Student Populations**

Vicarious microaggressions appeared to be especially commonplace at the public schools attended by Kat, Nicole, and Jason where both Hawai'i-born and immigrant Filipinos were highly represented. According to the informants, there were so many Filipino students at these schools that several Filipino cliques and subgroups became further identifiable. Among the Filipino subgroups, Kat named off the "popular people," "the people who came from the Philippines," and "the local Filipinos... everyone else that wasn't the popular people." Jason stated there was a "clear divide" between the "the 'buk-buks'" ("the people with the accents, or the first-generation Filipino Americans") and "the 'normal Filipinos'." He went on to say that many of those considering themselves to fall in the latter group also self-identified as ethnically mixed—"the Filipino Spanishes, the Filipino Hawaiians, the Filipino whatevers"—descriptors that Jason asserted were not always true and merely common strategies for people to attempt to dilute their "buk-bukness." Kevin Nadal, in his formulations of patterns in Filipino American psychology (2011), posits that Filipinos' practice of denying their Filipino ethnic identity or claiming to be ethnically or racially mixed is a consequence of the internalized colonial mentality.

As a Hawai'i-born Filipina at schools with many other Filipinos, Kat appeared both aware of and affected by the social positioning of her foreign-born counterparts:

Well I guess since um, [the town] is... there are a lot of immigrants that come and they're mostly Filipino... they just, it didn't seem like it was, you know... not to be proud of, but like, it wasn't seen as something that you'd want to be a part of... I guess because they were just speaking in their own, in the Ilocano or Tagalog language...and, you know, people would tease other Filipinos because of their accents when they would speak English, and, yeah, I guess I tried to deny that part of me.

Filipino immigrants at the middle and high schools attended by Kat, Jason, and Nicole were often teased for their accents and viewed as culturally “other” from U.S.-born Filipinos for speaking their native languages. For Kat, observing this dynamic drove her to consciously separate herself from the cultural otherness of immigrants and to “deny that part” of her.

Nicole talked about her experience of vicarious microaggressions specifically in seeing how her fellow students treated the “Fil. Am. Club” at her high school. As Nicole described, members of the Fil. Am. Club were almost entirely “FOBs” and were teased by Filipino and non-Filipino students alike when they performed Filipino cultural dances at school events. Referring to the club, she said it was plainly obvious that “nobody really wanted to join it,” including herself. Nicole also admitted that when she observed her classmates making fun of the Fil. Am. Club’s members, “it made me sort of... embarrassed to be, like ‘Filipino Filipino,’ or to think of myself that way.” Having come from the Philippines to Hawai‘i at age 5, Nicole seemed to have been particularly sensitive to other students’ negative perceptions of immigrants. Nicole felt both embarrassed that others would view her as a “‘Filipino Filipino’” or in the same way they did the “‘FOBs,’” as well as worried about whether or not these perceptions about her were actually true. This example demonstrates the hidden yet emotionally damaging process of internalized racism.

### **Vicarious Microaggressions in the Experiences of Adult Figures**

Just as Filipino youth both experience and participate in microaggressions, Filipino adults are not immune to being on either side of these racialized interactions. Interviewees reported being very aware of and impacted by instances when Filipino adults experienced subtle or overt

acts of racism at their schools. As suggested in chapter 6, microaggressions tended to carry significant weight especially when adults in the informants' school systems were involved as agents.

When I asked Nicole to discuss some of the teachers she remembered from her K-12 years, she spoke of a homeroom teacher in intermediate school whom her classmates would tease and mimic because he had a Filipino accent. Nicole reported feeling bad for this teacher:

'Cause nobody like listened. Or took him seriously. Or he didn't have, they didn't give him like the same respect that they would, for like other teachers... I guess I followed, like what other students were doing. Or, well not like, 'cause some people would like verbally like, talk in like an accent and stuff. But, like I wouldn't do that stuff, but I guess like, the way that they thought of him, I think I sort of started to like see him that way... like, think lesser of him.

That Nicole's classmates devalued and mistreated this teacher relative to their other teachers because of his immigrant characteristics indicates that the racial discourse of localism also penetrates youth's interactions with school authority figures. Further, Nicole again subtly implies through her story that her own sense of internalized racism was triggered when she witnessed her fellow students denigrating the Filipino teacher.

Similarly, Rianna and Nathan both recalled instances at their schools regarding substitute teachers with Filipino accents, respectively in fourth grade and in high school. In both cases, their peers were "rowdy," "disruptive," and made fun of the substitute teachers using gestures and name-calling. The two informants shared the feeling that their classmates' actions were "rude" and "disrespectful," particularly because the teachers seemed to be on the older side, and both Rianna and Nathan had been taught to respect their Filipino elders. Rianna felt somewhat personally offended in the case of the substitute because "when you disrespect her, it's like you're disrespecting my grandma, or auntie." In spite of feeling bad for the teachers at the time, neither interviewee confronted their classmates about it. While Rianna expressed in her interview



that she wished she had perhaps done more to help her teacher out, Nathan stated that he wished his classmates had had the insight to be more compassionate and less immature at the time.

For Matthew, the observation of a respected adult experiencing racism hit closer to home when it happened to his mother. In fact, this experience was so salient to Matthew that he stated it as the earliest instance he could recall having felt discriminated against in school as a Filipino, personally or vicariously. He described a handful of times in the third grade when his mother would drop him off at school; later, his schoolmates would make fun of her:

... there'd be a long hallway and then, the parents would drop off their kids. And then my mom would talk to me like "Oh make sure you study hard," but like in a Filipino accent. And they'd be like, "Why is your mom talking like that? It's kin-, sounds funny, and like, you talk like that too," and then they started talking, I'd be like, "No, I don't" (*short laughter*)... It was irritating I guess and then um, I just felt, well I felt mad as a kid too because, you know, those were my parents and you know, for you to, talk like that about my parents is disrespectful... And I was also felt embarrassed too because like oh, that, like, you know, that makes my mom... [feel] embarrassed too 'cause of the way she sp-, spoke and I didn't like that feeling, or, for, myself as well as for my mom or dad. So, yeah I really didn't like that, that time.

When I asked Matthew if there was anything he wished could have changed about this situation looking back on it now, he ventured, "maybe if my parents [had] just let me walk to the hallway by myself. And [the other kids] wouldn't really hear my parents talking." One interpretation of Matthew's response is that in retrospect, he accepted that children make fun of people's Filipino accents; the best way to have changed the situation would have required adjustment on the part of Matthew and his parents, rather than that of the students doing the teasing. Matthew's acceptance of his upsetting childhood memory reveals the power of localism as a discourse to normalize everyday experiences of vicarious racism as merely an unfortunate reality of being part of Hawai'i's racial makeup.

### **Paving a Path towards Resistance**

As the stories above demonstrate, it is hurtful indeed to witness others being targeted for racial, cultural, or ethnic characteristics that one happens to share. In addition to the informants'

personal experiences of microaggressions, vicarious microaggressions were another common school experience that occurred even less directly but in some cases impacted individuals just as deeply. There was a general consensus among informants that although vicarious encounters with everyday racism were emotionally hurtful, it was not easy for them as youth or even as adults to resist or respond to school-based vicarious microaggressions in productive ways.

While it may be typical to normalize the common experience of vicarious and other types of microaggressions, such a response is also indicative of the very nature of everyday racism—although microaggressions can be distressing, they are often difficult to identify and invisible in the ways they affect individuals. It can also be difficult to locate the very source of a microaggression or who is to blame for it. It thus may also be difficult to envision or know what to do about vicarious and other microaggressions. Implied in this dilemma is the need for additional support systems that assist Filipino students in identifying, acknowledging, and challenging the insidious reproduction and impacts of everyday racism in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools.

## **CHAPTER 8: RESILIENCE TO MICROAGGRESSIONS – BUILDING UPON FILIPINO STUDENTS’ STRENGTHS AND VISIONS**

This study’s findings on the everyday racialized experiences of Filipino students in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools have richened existing notions of racial microaggressions in a few important ways. As demonstrated through this specific population and setting, the interactional processes of microaggressions prove to be much more complex than previous conceptualizations have articulated. Filipino students experience microaggressions, but they also participate in others’ experiences of microaggressions. While the microaggressions sometimes come from or are directed towards students of other ethnicities (particularly other APIs), they are also often reproduced from one Filipino student to another. These findings challenge the assumption that agents involved in microaggressions must be identified on either side of an oppressor-victim binary; rather, student agents in Hawai‘i are actively involved in a multi-directional process of racialization. Further, the findings complicate simplistic readings of racism as a simple issue of white supremacy over people of color. Microaggressions are clearly exchanged among and within Hawai‘i’s various API student groups; these racialized interactions are telling of the regrettable ways in which the dominant racial discourse of localism and inhabitants’ inheritance of a white settler colonialist condition play out in the islands’ interethnic tensions.

As suggested in chapter 3, some literature on microaggressions also tends to minimize or pay inadequate attention to individual and group-level responses to everyday racism. Recall that CRT-based education research on microaggressions attempts to bring focus to individuals’ proactive responses to microaggressions, since resistance is crucial to the transformation of an unjust society. Driven by a CRT perspective, I explored with study informants not only the hurtful effects of their racialized encounters in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools but also their working

responses to these experiences, or what they wished could have happened instead. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight and expand upon Filipino youth's *resilience to microaggressions* in Hawai'i's education system.

While not all of the reported responses to microaggressions were necessarily productive, they all revealed or hinted at strengths that Filipino students may already possess in order to actively resist pervasive, everyday instances of racism. If students, educational stakeholders, and communities focus on building upon the following strengths and visions of Filipino students, youth will be more prepared to take action against the racial microaggressions rooted in the normalization of Hawai'i's dominant racial discourse of localism. There is no one path to resisting the reproduction of everyday racism in Hawai'i's K-12 schools; rather, a combination of systematic and creative interventions is needed in order to support the resilience of the substantial Filipino student population in this education system.

### **Ethnic Identity: A Buffer against Discrimination**

I think... a lot of the older generations like your grandparents and parents, they'll do the hard work, in order for you to not have to experience yard work. You know, to yeah to experience working at a hotel. So I feel like, Filipinos as a, as a culture and a race, they're really hardworking in that sense so that way, they can provide for their family, and they can make sure that their children and their children's children don't have to work like they do... I think that's how I tie with sacrifice and being Filipino too. - Matthew

Some of the interviewees described their close associations with Filipino ethnic culture and with the Filipino community as youth growing up in Hawai'i. Research participants did not always discuss their strong sense of Filipino identity in the context of experiencing racism, but it was clear that ethnic identity to them was a source of pride and strength. Matthew, for instance, kept returning to the ideas of sacrifice and hard work as values instilled in him by his parents; he attributed his academic successes and personal character to these values, which he saw as synonymous with the Filipino immigrant experience. Similarly, Nathan described growing up in

the “family-oriented” environment of his Filipino father’s relatives, where “family’s everything.” He contrasted this with the observably less-enmeshed family practices of his Chinese Portuguese mother’s side, and he credited his tendency to self-identify as “Filipino” rather than “mixed” or with his other ethnicities to being raised to associate most closely with Filipino culture.

Some research concludes that ethnic identity among Asian Americans may serve as a protective factor against experiences of racial discrimination (Alvarez & Kimura, 2001; Lee, 2003; Phinney, 2003). It appears, however, that having a strong ethnic identity is not a guarantee against all harmful mental health effects of racial discrimination, since the type and frequency of racial discrimination and exact forms of coping mechanisms used also play a part (Yoo & Lee, 2005). Optimistically, a large-scale study specific to Filipino Americans in Honolulu and San Francisco found that identification with one’s ethnic group, or “having a sense of ethnic pride, involvement in ethnic practices, and cultural commitment” (Mossakowski, 2003: 318) was directly associated with fewer depressive symptoms resulting from both long-term and everyday racial discrimination. This suggests that ethnic identity may act as a buffer against racial discrimination for Filipino students who experience microaggressions in Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools.

For Matthew and Nathan, their positive associations with Filipino ethnic identity may have assisted in their resistance against school-based microaggressions that may have otherwise led them to internalize messages of racial otherness. Cultivating a positive sense of ethnic identity may be easier for certain Filipino youth in Hawai‘i to do than others. In some cases, localism as a racial discourse and its manifestation in the everyday interactions and environmental realities within Hawai‘i’s K-12 schools may instead lead Filipino youth to feel shame or embarrassment about their ethnic identity. Educational stakeholders are thus implicated

to bolster the resilience of Filipino students by creating programmatic and individualized opportunities for them to foster positive ethnic identities.

### **Humor: Adaptive in Moderation**

[Using racist humor with friends] didn't mean, anything in a negative way for me I feel. Like I know it can be, if it was, I think, if it was said out of anger or something, then yeah. Then it'd be, you know different... I don't think I would change anything, with that one. 'Cause I felt like it was, if anything it was a good thing for me, to like have that insight and know that, there's prejudice, then there's people who can, who [you] can joke with, and not be so personal about it. Yeah, I think those are the coolest people, to me. It shouldn't be a joke like all the time though.  
- Nathan

Chapter 5 examined Filipino students' common use of ethnic-based humor as a form of bonding with friends over shared experiences and rejecting the injurious nature of negative racialization. While there are many ways in which Filipino youth might deal with their experiences of school-based microaggressions, coping with the stress of racism through humor is considered to be a psychologically adaptive and relatively healthy response (Farley et al., 2005). Nathan's description above of engaging in what he admitted could be seen as "racist jokes" with his peers reveals that it was a positive experience for him to distinguish between when these jokes were used for friendly versus harmful purposes.

The alternative perspective to racialized intragroup joking or teasing, also discussed in chapter 5, is that it is too ambiguous and context-specific to be dismissed as purely harmless in all cases. Some Filipino youth in Hawai'i's K-12 schools may be more apt to internalize racist messages from peer jokes about Filipinos or to lack awareness of how their own engagement in racialized humor about Filipinos reinforces larger racial dynamics and inequality. This suggests that educators, counselors, and mental health professionals in Hawai'i's K-12 school system must be aware of how ethnic-based humor might differentially affect individual students. Such nuances could be discussed one-to-one or in the school community through age and site-specific

programming—for instance, they could be integrated into school-wide education on bully prevention.

### **Counter-Spaces: The Chance to Tell Your Own Story**

... the way I got *really* into [slam poetry and hip hop] was when I told you I went to... that leadership conference [in California]... with hip hop you kind of... you have to like, just not really care what anybody says. So that's why I really like it because throughout my life... I was kind of judged a lot... like being gay, um, like divorced parents, and like how... my mom was like a single parent... I felt like, everyone, throughout, the time when I was growing up, especially like in elementary school, it felt like everyone was trying to tell my story, but not really talking to me about it. - Rianna

Discussed in chapter 3, the CRT concept of counter-spaces considers the importance for those whose identities are marginalized in the dominant narrative of society to have opportunities to tell their own stories. Especially when designated counter-spaces are shared with others who experience similar marginalization, they may provide a sense of validation, support, and empowerment. Rianna found one such counter-space when she attended a leadership conference with other youth on the U.S. mainland in the summer before her senior year of high school, where she practiced expressing herself through resistance-oriented arts. Whereas the intersections of Rianna's multiple identities brought about judgment and disapproval from others in regular youth spaces of Hawai'i, hip hop provided a forum for Rianna to reclaim her narrative as valuable, as well as to use her own unique voice to tell her story.

Based on the experiences of my study's informants, Filipino youth in Hawai'i's K-12 schools are in critical need of counter-spaces where they can process and challenge localism's assumptions of Filipino cultural, social, and academic inferiority. Not all Filipino youth in Hawai'i's K-12 schools have the privilege of being surrounded by supportive co-ethnics or allies to assist in redefining Filipino student subjectivity. However, as long as counter-spaces consist of transformative action on the part of individuals or groups, they need not be physically-bound

locations—counter-spaces may present themselves as the blank pages of a journal or sketchbook, or as meaningful conversations shared with strangers in the digital world. In cases where youth themselves may have difficulty locating their strengths to resist the dominant social narrative, school systems and the adult agents within them must initiate the organization of spaces such as clubs or groups where students can begin to explore this potential.

### **Empowering Assistance: The Roles of School Professionals and the Community**

Um I don't think [Filipino K-12 students in Hawai'i are] encouraged or engaged... there's so many of them that are *so* academically promising... but they, I don't, I feel like they don't get the support they need. Not just from the school and the teachers, but just from the community... I think that a lot of people's judgments on Filipinos are just very low, and because of that... we're creating an environment where, they don't feel like they can achieve... And I think there's, there's so much to that... teachers are not getting paid enough. Or we're not hiring teachers who are caring about kids in the classroom. Or maybe, you know kids are not getting the, the support they need through the community, whatever that is. I just feel like s-, specifically Filipinos are at the brunt of it. - Jason

School staff sometimes play a part in the exchange of racial microaggressions that affect Filipino students in Hawai'i's K-12 education system, as became evident through informants' experiences discussed in chapters 6 and 7. Although the vast and complicated role of the greater island community in reproducing localism as a racial discourse falls somewhat out of the scope of this study, Filipino youth undoubtedly encounter daily, implicit racism within the various systems of Hawai'i society. As Jason deduces in the excerpt above, interpersonal and environmental microaggressions in schools combine with racialization from elsewhere in Filipino youth's communities to create a larger social climate that lacks support for this population's success. Further, even while acknowledging the complexity of explanations for ethnic inequality in Hawai'i's K-12 schools, Jason points out that Filipino students in particular suffer from these shortcomings. If Filipino students lack engagement in school, educational professionals and the community are partially responsible. They thus are also responsible to actively work towards engaging and encouraging this student population.



While Filipino youth in Hawai‘i adopt strategies to resist racial microaggressions out of their own accord, their resilience will only be reinforced with the additional support of adults within their school system. The various professionals and staff in the K-12 system of Hawai‘i, including teachers, administrators, social workers, counselors, speech and occupational therapists, tutors, mentors, and volunteers, can resist the reproduction of microaggressions and bolster resilience in the lives of Filipino students in direct and indirect ways. As previously discussed, these adult agents can encourage the development of healthy ethnic identities, recognize the strengths and limitations of racialized humor, and assist in organizing counter-spaces for Filipino students. The remaining subsections on intergroup empathy and decolonizing education also touch on the role of school staff in responding to Filipino students’ school-based microaggressions through these specific interventions.

### **Intergroup Empathy: Rethinking Connections**

Like, especially like Hawaiians or the Samoans. Like [my] stereotype[s] [of them] made me like more scared, to talk to them, or to be friends with them... I think put less effort into, like trying to talk to them. - Nicole

While multiculturalist discourses about Hawai‘i generally emphasize that the mingling of separate ethnic and racial groups in the islands is socially acceptable, the racial socialization in certain K-12 school contexts tells a different story. Nicole, Kat, and Jason described a fairly adversarial dynamic between Filipino students and Native Hawaiian/Samoan students at their schools. Interethnic separation between the buk-buks and the mokes seemed to them a normal experience of going to school in their part of the island; considering the larger context of localism as a racial discourse and its negative implications for groups on either racialized extreme of the localist continuum, it is no wonder that these two groups would come to understand one another as polar opposites. In looking back, however, informants seemed to

recognize the social consequences of the intergroup microaggressions shared between Filipino and Pacific Islander students, as revealed in Nicole's quote above. How might it be otherwise?

In spite of a widely-held belief that Hawai'i's inhabitants bond over a shared "local" culture, this thesis has demonstrated that localism as a racial discourse renders Filipinos a group that is virtually inassimilable to becoming "true" locals. Thus, if Filipino students are to identify with Pacific Islander students, their mutual association must not be based primarily on culture but more importantly, according to common racialization. Authors have suggested elsewhere that Filipinos must organize themselves with other APIs on the basis of their common imperialist encounters vis a vis the United States (Isaac, 2006; Saranillio, 2008). Unfortunately, U.S. education and racial socialization tend to erase or distort the imperialist relationship between the United States on one hand and Asia and the Pacific on the other. In accordance with their settler colonialist condition, Hawai'i Filipinos' "colonial amnesia" causes them to forget (or never learn) how similar Filipinos' fleeing of U.S. imperialist violence for Hawai'i is to Native Hawaiians' ongoing struggle against U.S. colonial displacement in their own land (Saranillio, 2008).

Filipino students in Hawai'i's K-12 schools have much to gain from seeing themselves as connected to their Pacific Islander peers in terms of the islands' racial discourse of localism. A prerequisite to building intergroup empathy is the significant rethinking of how Filipinos, Samoans, Native Hawaiians, and other APIs have shared struggles against the long-term implications of U.S. dominance in Asia and the Pacific. What better place to educate API youth on these issues than in the school system itself? Until Hawai'i's youth can cease misunderstanding their common histories and racialization, they will continue to participate in

school-based intergroup microaggressions that reflect and reproduce localist values—a dynamic which hurts them all.

### **Decolonization: Unlearning and Liberating from Microaggressions**

I guess you [as a 2<sup>nd</sup>-generation Filipino American] would kind of join in... with the teasing of... the buk-buks. But then like when you get to college it's like, you think about what happened then... you feel so dumb for like (*short laughter*) participating in that kind of stuff... um, I don't know, the steps we take just to know our culture here in Hawai'i like, it's *hard* for Filipinos you know, 'cause like, you grew up not wanting, well... for me, I grew up, like, you know, being Filipino and then not wanting to be Filipino because of how they were treated. - Kat

At the end of our last interview together, Kat pointed out how difficult it is for Filipino youth growing up in Hawai'i to resist internalizing and perpetuating everyday racism. Indeed, Hawai'i's dominant racial discourse of localism and its manifestation in intergroup, intragroup, school staff-/school system-based, and vicarious microaggressions create a cumulative threat to the resilience and success of Filipino youth. While they envision more connected relationships with their fellow APIs, Filipino youth in Hawai'i's K-12 schools also struggle to imagine what it would look like to better understand and embrace their “Filipino-ness.” Those who go on to college have the option of eventually discovering and developing the potential of Filipino/a identity through ethnic studies courses or student organizations; however, many Filipino students in Hawai'i do not have the luxury of pursuing postsecondary education. There is thus an urgent need for more opportunities in Hawai'i's K-12 trajectory for Filipino youth to “unforget” histories they never knew and “unlearn” negative racialized messages about themselves and other Filipinos.

Though the dominant racial discourse of localism has perpetuated both Filipinos' colonial subjectivity and settler colonial attitudes in Hawai'i's K-12 schools, it is also possible for Filipino youth to resist internalized notions of localism by engaging in processes of

“decolonization.”<sup>32</sup> Decolonization describes a multi-step process summarized as the progression of naming, reflecting, and finally acting upon the oppression that has impacted a colonized subject’s identity (Strobel, 2001 cited in Halagao, 2010). The interventions suggested throughout this chapter provide potential starting points where Filipino youth in Hawai‘i may begin to decolonize and find liberation from the racial microaggressions imbedded in their daily school experiences. Adhering to a sense of ethnic identity, utilizing humor, finding counter-spaces, connecting with interethnics, and seeking support from the school and outside community may all include elements of decolonization. Several communities have found success in employing intentionally decolonizing curricula to provide a liberatory education to Filipino Americans and other students of color, both in formal and after-school K-12 settings (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2007; Halagao, 2010). Teachers, counselors, social workers, and other school staff may also find creative ways to integrate decolonizing strategies into their individual and group work with students.

The young Filipino Americans I interviewed for this study themselves were at different points in this cycle, having each experienced a unique combination of racializing and decolonizing life events that shaped the nature of their individual responses to microaggressions. For some, their paths were assisted along the way with school-based interventions or those from elsewhere in the community. Whether presented formally or informally, such opportunities fostered Filipino students’ internal resilience and empowered them to move closer towards their own version of resisting racism in Hawai‘i society.

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<sup>32</sup> Decolonization as a theoretical framework and pedagogical practice is the subject of a large body of research. Paolo Freire’s seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) introduced the concept of liberatory pedagogy which involves the student’s involvement in co-creating knowledge. Tejada, Gutierrez, and Espinoza (2003) drew a critical connection between liberatory pedagogy and the engaged learning of colonized groups, likened it to “decolonizing pedagogy.” Laenui (2000) described the process of decolonization as opposed to that of colonization in the context of Native Hawaiians.

## APPENDIX A:

### Initial Recruitment Letter to Potential Interview Subjects\*

*Email/message subject, if applicable:*

Recruiting Interviewees for Research Project on Filipino/a Students' Race-Related Experiences in Hawaii Schools

*Body of message:*

Hi [name],

My name is Kate Viernes, and I'm a graduate student in Asian American Studies and Social Welfare at UCLA. I have been in touch with [name of referrer] about my research on Filipino/a Americans and education. [Name of referrer] gave me your contact information and said [s]he briefly mentioned to you that I am looking for Filipino/a Americans to interview on Oahu this summer (July/August). I wanted to tell you a little bit more about my qualitative research project and see if you or anyone you know might be interested in participating as an interviewee.

The research I'm conducting is on the race-related experiences of Filipino/a Americans in Hawaii's K-12 education system. I'm looking for young adults/adults who identify as Filipino/a and are willing to reflect back on their earlier educational experiences as Filipino/as, how those experiences affected them, and how they may continue to affect them today.

I will be conducting my interviews on Oahu from **July 17 – August 28**. Please consider this a brief description of the study—I did not want to overwhelm you with too many details initially. If you think you are interested in participating, finding out more, or helping me recruit other young adult/adult Filipino/as in your networks into the study, please email me back to notify me of your interest. Feel free to include any questions at all. As I move through the process of finding interviewees and setting up interviews, I will definitely be providing folks with more details of the project and keeping them informed of any changes along the way.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. Hope to hear from you soon!

Best,  
Kate

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\* Recruitment letters were sent via email or social network websites. They were often adapted depending on the potential interview subject's existing knowledge of the study.

## APPENDIX B:

### Screening Questions for Potential Interview Subjects\*

1. Do you identify "Filipino/a [American]" as your full or partial ethnic/racial heritage?  
(indicate: yes/no)
2. Did you attend school grades K-12 in the Hawaiian islands?  
(indicate: yes/no)
3. If you answered "no" to the previous question, where else did you attend K-12 AND how many years total did you spend at Hawaii K-12 schools?  
(indicate: place, # of years)
4. Are you willing to participate in an unpaid research project on Filipino/a students and racial microaggressions by sharing/answering questions about your experiences in Hawaii's K-12 education system?  
(indicate: yes/no)
5. If you answered "no" to the previous question, please explain briefly.
6. Do you expect to be available on Oahu on two separate dates between Wed. July 17 and Wed. August 28 2013, for approximately 90 minutes each instance, to participate in two interviews with the researcher, at a place and time of your choosing?  
(indicate: yes/no)
7. If you answered "no" to the previous question, please explain briefly.

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\*Screening questions were sent via email, social network websites, or asked over the phone to contacts identified as potential interview subjects. In the event that contacts provided the following information but were not found to qualify for the study, their answers and personal information were deleted unless they gave authorization otherwise.

## APPENDIX C:

### Interview 1 Questions – Life Story of Family and K-12 Schooling

1. What is your name?
2. What year and where were you born?
3. Where did you grow up?
4. How do you identify racially or ethnically? If the way you have identified has changed over time, please explain. If it changes depending on the context, please describe how.
5. As I'm sure you're familiar with, many people who have grown up in Hawaii, in addition to their ethnic origin, prefer to identify themselves as "local." If anything, can you speak at all about what the term "local" or "being local" means to you?
6. What was your family like growing up?
7. Where did you go to school?
8. What did you like about your school(s)? What didn't you like?
9. Can you describe the other students at your school? (As much as you can remember about them and who they were—I'm trying to get a picture of the characteristics of your classmates) (*ask about ethnicity/race if not brought up*)
10. Can you describe the friends you mainly hung out with at school? (What did you like about your friends?)
11. What were your relationships like with people of other racial or ethnic backgrounds at your schools? (Japanese, Chinese, Korean; Hawaiian, Pacific Islander; mixed; white/haole; other)
12. In general, how would you describe the relations between groups of different races and ethnicities with each other at your schools?
13. Who were the teachers at your school? What were they like?
14. How do you think Filipino students were treated at your school?

## APPENDIX D:

### Interview 2 Questions – Identity, Follow-up, and Focus on Racialized Experiences in School

#### *Script:*

Before I get to the questions focused on your racialized experiences in school, I am going to ask you a few follow-up questions to some things you talked about in your first interview that I thought were interesting and want to hear a little more about.

But before the specific follow-up questions, I am going to ask you some basic questions related to your identity. I am expecting that the answers to each of these will be fairly brief, you don't need to go into much explanation about your answers unless you want to. The reason I am asking these identity questions is so that I can be more clear about the particular perspective you are bringing to your experiences brought up in these interviews. There are certain things I might think I can assume about your identity, given what I already know about you from the first interview, but I do not want to assume anything and I would rather give you the opportunity to state how you identify. So I am going to ask you the following questions, but know that if answering any of them makes you uncomfortable or you would rather not answer it, you can decline to answer. Ok?

#### **Identity Questions:**

(no right or wrong, whatever you identify as)

1. What do you consider to be your race? [I define race as the broad categories of White, Black, Latino/Hispanic, Asian, but you might define it differently]
2. What do you consider to be your ethnicity?
3. Is there a certain generation of Filipino (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc.) you consider yourself?
4. What is your citizenship status?
5. What is your sex/gender?
6. What is your sexual orientation?
7. Do you identify with any particular religion or faith?
8. What socioeconomic class would you say you grew up in? [lower, middle, upper, lower-middle, upper-middle, etc.]

#### **Follow-up Questions:**

*These questions varied from informant to informant, based on the researcher reviewing the transcript of an informant's first interview and determining areas the researcher wished to hear more detail about.*

*A partial sample of the follow-up questions written for one informant's second interview:*



1. In the last interview, you talked about the meaning of being “local” and said you consider yourself local because you grew up in Hawaii and know the culture of Hawaii, particularly speaking the pidgin language. You also said you consider yourself Filipino American. How does “local” differ from “Filipino American,” if at all?
2. Your parents raised you with what you considered to be values from the Philippines, such as being very strict and emphasizing the importance of education. Growing up, what did you think about your parents’ cultural values?
3. I was asking you to name the different ethnic groups at your schools, and one of the groups I asked you about was Koreans. You said that if there were Koreans, you probably thought they were just “Asian.” This got me wondering who you considered to be Asian? Who was considered “Asian” at your schools? Were Filipinos Asian, and why/why not?

### **Racialized Experiences in School Questions**

1. Can you recall the first time you felt different from your peers at school on the basis of being Filipino? [the first time you knew or understood that you were Filipino, and other people were other things]
  - a. What was that experience like for you when it happened?
  - b. How do you think this experience affected you? What did it mean to you?
2. What was the earliest instance in school you can recall that you experienced discrimination for being Filipino? Can you describe what happened and how it felt?
  - a. What was that experience like for you when it happened?
  - b. How do you think this experience affected you? What did it mean to you?
  - c. How would you say, if at all, you responded to or made sense of [rationalized; told yourself regarding] this experience?
  - d. Looking back at this experience, what, if anything, would you have wanted to change about how it played out?

[Some examples of discrimination on the basis of being Filipino:]

  - Teasing/name-calling
  - Violence
  - Differential treatment from others at school (including fellow students, teachers, counselors, administrators, etc.)
3. Any other instances in school you recall that you experienced discrimination for being Filipino? (repeat a-d)
4. You have described mostly instances of overt/obvious discrimination. Can you recall any experiences where the discrimination was possibly more subtle or implied?
  - a. What was that experience like for you when it happened?
  - b. How do you think this experience affected you? What did it mean to you?
  - c. How would you say, if at all, you responded to or made sense of [rationalized; told yourself regarding] this experience?

- d. Looking back at this experience, what, if anything, would you have wanted to change about how it played out?
- [Some examples of subtle/implicit discrimination on the basis of being Filipino:]
- People assuming or appearing to treat you like:
    - You are not from America
    - You do not speak English, speak English poorly, or speak with an accent
    - You are a criminal or deviant in your behavior
    - You are inferior educationally, job-wise, or intellectually
    - You are not “like them”
  - People invoking ethnic humor that demeans your ethnic background and assuring you “it’s just a joke”
  - People appearing to put down or demean you because of your physical appearance, skin tone, etc.
  - People appearing to put down or demean your culture or ethnic background in some other way
5. Did you ever witness other Filipinos at school, such as your classmates or teachers or others at your school, experiencing discrimination that was either overt/obvious or implicit/subtle?
- a. What was that experience like for you when it happened?
  - b. How do you think this experience affected you? What did it mean to you?
  - c. How would you say, if at all, you responded to or made sense of [rationalized; told yourself regarding] this experience?
  - d. Looking back at this experience, what, if anything, would you have wanted to change about how it played out?
6. Can you recall times when you discriminated against others at your school, either overtly/obviously, or more implicitly/subtly?
- a. What was that experience like for you when it happened?
  - b. How do you think this experience affected you? What did it mean to you?
  - c. How would you say, if at all, you responded to or made sense of [rationalized; told yourself regarding] this experience?
  - d. Looking back at this experience, what, if anything, would you have wanted to change about how it played out?

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