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Sakada: Filipino Adaptation in Hawaii

Review Author: Susan Evangelista

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preaching his brand of messianic delusion, a Jeremiah with battle-cries and hysterical sputterings, an extravagant emotion-squeezer with his usual playhouse fustian and his naive ethical cocksureness and flabby moralizing . . . but the cardinal fact must here be admitted that our gloomy Dean has done his part in this tragic-comedy that we call life, and his performance has been achieved in the best of his faith and ability. . . (p. 95).

Which give the truer picture of Jorge Bocobo: the biography proper or these excerpts from the appendices? We do not know, but it is significant that Mrs. Olivar has included these appendices in her own book. It can be said, at least, that though the daughter has written a beautiful tribute to her father, there is still awaited a critical biography of Jorge Bocobo.

James J. Meany, S.J.

SAKADA: FILIPINO ADAPTATION IN HAWAII. By Ruben Alcantara. Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1981. 202 pages.

In Hawaii 1981 was most decidedly the Year of the Sakada, the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the arrival of the first Filipino workers in that state. This historical occasion was celebrated in many ways: Filipino dancers journeyed to Hawaii to perform, as did scholars to attend the Second Conference on Philippine Studies. Mrs. Marcos cut a few ribbons, mayors and plantation managers made a few speeches, and second and third generation Filipino-Americans sang a few songs. And several new books were published, of which Ruben Alcantara's *Sakada: Filipino Adaptation in Hawaii* is one of the best.

Alcantara is a sociologist, but sociology is after all, present day history, and this book is a very fine combination of the two disciplines. The modern historian looking back over this era may see it in rather impersonal terms, focusing on Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association hiring practices, wage levels, immigration laws, union organization. These issues are background for the central focus of Alcantara's work, which deals more intimately and personally with people's experiences and with their own perceptions of the changes brought about by the flow of history and by the adaptation process that Filipino workers in Hawaii, and their families, underwent in their new environment. A very vivid picture of the "feel" of daily life during this process emerges from Alcantara's fine interweaving of the factual information referred to above, the type of statistics sociologists commonly favor (how many houses had indoor bathrooms, how many had refrigerators, etc.), and the personal feelings, memories, and perceptions gleaned from what seems to be a very thorough and fascinating set of interviews. Alcantara has succeeded in getting *inside* the history of the sakadas, and he brings his readers there as

well, enabling them to see, through the eyes of the Old-Timers he interviewed, just how it was. He shows us how the plantation set-up was "Filipinized" as families and people from the same barrio began to congregate through a system of petitioning new workers and trading off old workers, so that in the end the Filipinos on one plantation might come from no more than two or three different barrios. He takes us through the difficult years from 1934, when the Tydings-McDuffie Act creating the Commonwealth cut off the free flow of immigrants to the U.S., to 1952 when new immigration laws made it easier for citizens and permanent residents to petition family members, pointing out that during the interim any sakada who wanted his wife to join him would have to work her into the quota of fifty per year. And he shows us from the inside what the most significant changes — those having to do with postwar unionization, and the general betterment of the working man's lot — meant to the Filipino plantation workers: more job security, higher wages, better housing, a more independent, self-respecting status, but also an end to some of the paternalistic "frills" of plantation life, like mothers' classes, youth clubs, Christmas parties. We see how Hawaii's urbanization ended the isolation of plantation life as the city limits crept out towards and eventually surrounded the plantations, so that, as plantation children went to school with city children, and plantation families shopped in commercial shopping centers (instead of the old company store) with city families, barriers were broken. At the same time another type of isolation was much modified as commercial airlines, and higher wages for plantation work, suddenly brought the Hawaiian sugar plantation within a day's journey from the Ilocos *barrio*. Alcantara does not stress the wonders of this change, but he does report some of the new options that became available: workers no longer had to choose whether they would return to the Philippines "forever" after retirement; they could go back for a month or two, during the slack season or during earned vacation time, and they could visit friends and relatives, look things over, and decide what to do. If they decided to stay in Hawaii, that was not so final either, for they could surely at least plan to visit again. (And then, of course, the Philippine government's *Balikbayan* program made such visits more feasible financially.)

Looked at currently, as history, the sakada's lot was very hard: the work was back-breaking, the wages were low, labor organization was ruthlessly suppressed, etc. But life went on: there were clubs and classes and dances and parties, and the sakadas put together a community for themselves. The value of Alcantara's view from the inside is that we see just how life went on, how *people* functioned within the flow of history. In the Honolulu Philippine Studies Conference commemorating the anniversary of the Sakada, several young professionals, second generation Filipinos in Hawaii, spoke of the happiness, the feeling of closeness and community, of their childhoods in plantation camps. On the surface it is hard to reconcile such feelings with the his-

torical facts, but Alcantara's sociology opens up a new perspective, one that easily accommodates the pleasant memories of Joshua Aagsalud and Abelina Madrid Shaw.

But at the same time Alcantara's sense of history is very vivid and it comes across strongly in both the interviews and the commentary on them. The book is historically broad, going back to the very earliest immigrants, and actually spanning two cultures and two countries. The poverty and suffering of the Filipino peasants is always there and always real, first as a motivating force for those who left, and then, perhaps even more strongly, as a reason for staying: every immigrant had an old mother, or brothers and sisters, or a wife and children in the Philippines to support. (Maxine Hong Kingston quotes the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino women workers in California's tomato fields as saying, "I cannot die: I am supporting fifty.") Ilocos is especially real in the book, from the early days when many Hawaiians were thought to have simply disappeared into a void to more modern times when a group of plantation workers flew home as Balikbayans to make a joint donation to an Ilocano barrio from which they had all come.

Sakada is touching in part too. Alcantara writes of the dilemma of the unmarried old men whom family life has passed by, and the younger immigrants who find themselves alienated when they try to return to the Philippines, and families who have been separated for many years, and a community reunion party for the welcoming of a new immigrant — a wife who had not seen her husband for thirty years.

It is also a book rich in suggestions for current relevance, as the Philippines is once again exporting laborers by the thousands, and for much the same reasons as before.

Susan Evangelista

A LION IN THE HOUSE. By Lina Espina-Moore. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1980. 142 pages. ₱14.

Rarely does a significant novel appear on the Philippine writing scene. Even more rare is the emergence of a writer of genuine talent. *A Lion in the House* is short (only 142 pages) and it is flawed in many aspects, but in the novel Lina Espina-Moore has produced a potentially powerful work, and in the process has given indications of her own considerable talents as a writer. Mrs. Moore is a sophisticated writer with a sharp eye and an even sharper tongue. She paints a picture of Manila Society, particularly the lower-middle-class-become-elite part of it, with a devastating precision. Her main theme is the hypocrisy of that society ("To be sure hypocrisy holds this society together," [p. 88]) and her main subject is the *querida* system.