

The Master and the Federation: A Filipino-American Social Movement in California and Hawaii

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The Filipino Federation of America, Inc. was a mutual aid organization that was founded in Los Angeles in 1925 and brought to Hawaii in 1928. It was the subject of much discussion and debate among the Filipinos in Hawaii and in the larger community, particularly in the thirties during the peak of its popularity. Leaders of the Filipino community denounced the organization; members of the larger community, on the other hand, accepted it as a "peculiar" part of Philippine culture and assumed that the Filipinos brought the organization with them to Hawaii. The Federation declined rapidly after the war, but it continued to attract the interest of Hawaii's community even after its founder and president, Hilario Camino Moncado, died in 1956 and up until the early sixties, when his widow, Diana Toy Moncado passed away.

The controversy about the Federation centered essentially on the fact that its members held and promoted the belief that Hilario Camino Moncado was God and the Filipino "brown Christ." Critics of the Federation denounced Moncado for this "fakery" and for exploiting his followers. Likewise, they derided the Federation members for believing in the divinity of Moncado and strongly disapproved of what the critics perceived were the members' "bizarre" spiritual beliefs and practices.

Today, this Filipino-American organization in Hawaii consists of small factions of a dwindling first-generation membership, a loyal but negligible second-generation following, and support from a handful of third-generation youth. However, since the Federation was formed in Hawaii, the members of the organization—popularly known as "followers of Moncado" or "Federation men"—became permanent figures in the cultural landscape of Hawaii. They once occupied a very visible place in the community and partook in the development of the Filipino communities on the different islands. Now, they represent an important chapter in the history of the Filipinos in Hawaii.

This article presents an overview of selected aspects of the Filipino Federation of America which underscore the significance of the movement as it evolved in California and formed a new identity in Hawaii in the twenties and thirties. The study takes into account the perspective of the Federation members and the vantage from which they saw and interpreted events. It also places the Federation phenomenon in the context of the Filipino-American experience.

An Early Study of the Federation

The first scholarly article on the Filipino Federation of America appeared in the 1942 issue of *Social Process in Hawaii*. The study by David E. Thompson offered a sociological explanation for the phenomenon. Thompson discussed the Federation in relation to: the proclivity of Filipinos to religious movements; the oppressive conditions which confronted the Filipino immigrants in America thereby setting the stage for the birth of a movement; the strong common beliefs and practices which held the members together in a fraternal bond; the symbolism of Moncado as having achieved the “worldly success and prestige” that eluded most of the Filipino immigrant laborers (Thompson 1942). Thompson analyzed the Federation as a “control movement” in California and Hawaii: Moncado opposed organized labor and instructed Federation members not to join strikes, thereby pleasing the agri-business industries in California and Hawaii. He also placed the Federation in the appropriate framework of its California background. Thompson gave an outsider’s view of the phenomenon and was fundamentally critical of the organization, particularly its anti-labor union stand.¹

Mutual Aid Organizations

A study of the Filipino Federation of America is fundamentally a study of the experience of the pioneering Filipinos who came to America as *sakadas* in the twenties and thirties (San Buenaventura 1990). The members of the Federation were part of the thousands of Filipinos then who came seeking better opportunities in the frontiers of Hawaii and California. Like their *sakada* cohorts, majority of the Federation members came as recruited laborers for the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association (HSPA); many worked briefly in the islands’ plantations before proceeding to the West Coast. Driven by a strong desire to experience America it was common for Filipino plantation workers to break their three-year contract with the HSPA in order to work in California. The formation of large Filipino population communities on the West Coast made it an attractive destination where, through mutual dependency, it became a little easier for Filipinos to survive.

In the absence of a kin support system, the pioneering Filipinos sought the security of mutual aid, fraternal organizations to address their most fundamental needs in times of loneliness, sickness and death. These organizations functioned as surrogate families and helped in softening the impact of the painful encounter

with the new country. They also served as instruments of acculturation and symbolized the Filipinos’ collective efforts to obtain some control over their existence away from home.

The early mutual aid organizations were the precursor of the Filipino community. Due to adverse and isolated conditions and the socio-demographic character of the Filipino immigration in the early decades of this century, diverse groups of *sakadas*, without the presence of families and female cohorts, essentially formed small self-help groups among townmates and co-workers. These organizations evolved as little pockets of independent communities. In Hawaii, Filipino mutual aid organizations and hometown societies evolved within the Filipino “community groupings” in the plantations (Cariaga 1937: 59).

In addition to these informal, small societies, two organizations were brought to Hawaii in 1921 and 1922 by their respective representatives from the Philippines: the *Caballeros de Dimas Alang* and *Legionarios del Trabajo*. These groups identified themselves as fraternal organizations and actively recruited for members from among the *sakadas* on the plantation. The HSPA monitored both organizations closely and viewed them suspiciously like any outside entity involved in solicitation of any kind among the plantation workers.² The HSPA’s primary concern in the case of both organizations—and others—was whether or not they supported Pablo Manlapit’s “high wage movement activities”—specifically, the strikes against the plantations (HSPA 1921, 1922, 1923, 1934). The *Dimas Alang* and *Legionarios* were also established in California where they competed aggressively for members against a third fraternal organization, the Filipino Federation of America, Inc.³

The Federation in California

Unlike the *Dimas Alang* and *Legionarios*, the Filipino Federation was an organization with Filipino-American roots and concerns. It was formed on December 27, 1925 in Los Angeles and incorporated for fifty years in 1927 in the state of California. A factor that impressed those who joined the organization was this incorporation. It distinguished the Federation from other Filipino groups. The “Inc.” after its name gave it an image of legitimacy, importance, status, power and connoted an organization that was serious about its business and purpose.

The Federation espoused twelve objectives⁴ that reflected a fundamental awareness of the Filipinos' bicultural existence in America. In summary, these objectives defined the mutual aid character of the Federation, projected a different, positive image of the Filipinos as part of the organization's stated moral standards and Christian objectives, and addressed Philippine-American relations, specifically the issue of Philippine independence.

Taken as a whole, the Federation objectives represented an organizational strategy that was directed at the white establishment with one important goal: the American acceptance of Filipinos. They represented a "declaration of worthiness" coming from a group of Filipinos who believed in seeking and occupying a deserving place in America.

The Federation was also a "quasi religious" organization with strong mystical symbolisms that were derived from Filipino folk beliefs and practices. Prominent among these symbols was the number 12. It was therefore not coincidental that the organization had 12 objectives and its foundation started with 12 individuals led by Hilario Camino Moncado. The structure of the organization was planned based on what it considered was the mystical significance of the number 12: it would consist of 12 divisions; each division would have 12 lodges; and each lodge would be comprised of 12 members; the total membership would therefore come to 1728, a number which was featured prominently on the Federation logo from the time it was first designed.

This was the concept the Federation members referred to as "doce-doce" (literally, "twelve-twelve") which they used in their recruiting campaign (San Buenaventura 1990: 167-73; 1980: 14-15).

They tried to convince their peers to join by first showing them a photograph of 12 men standing side by side with their arms across their chests and their hands linked, six on each side of a thirteenth person in the center. This was the formal photograph taken of lodge 1, division 1 consisting of the founding members and Moncado. Subsequently, members of each lodge would have formal photographs taken in the same manner.

The "doce" photograph was a good recruitment strategy. Many were struck by the mystical symbolism of the image. They recalled that their elderly folks in the Philippines heeded them to join any group that had the number 12 associated with it (Blas 1980): Christ had 12 apostles; likewise, a folk belief had flourished after the execution in 1896 of the Philippine national hero, Jose Rizal, that Rizal was the second Christ and that he too had 12 disciples.⁵

The Federation's Material Component

Federation members have always defined their organization as having two "divisions": the "material" and the "spiritual." The material division encompassed the general business of the organization, including membership recruitment, the publishing and circulation of the Federation's official publication, the *Filipino Nation*, and activities that dealt with the Filipinos' interaction with the community, expatriate issues, and Philippine-American relations as pursued under the political leadership of Moncado. Material members were active in promoting the Federation in public primarily through their participation in the organization's annual convention and in July 4th parades.

Moncado conducted the "material" activities from the organization's Los Angeles office. The first major responsibility he undertook was to organize the Rizal Day celebration in December 1926. The Federation spearheaded a series of Rizal Day activities which included decorating a street in downtown Los Angeles with American and Filipino flags, an essay contest, and a special celebration of the first anniversary of the founding of the Federation (San Buenaventura 1990: 173-79; Moncado 1927). The success of this event was quite significant: it symbolized the first public association of Moncado with Rizal; it aroused emotions of Filipino nationalism and pride; it reenforced the continuing desire of Filipinos to be accepted as equals of Americans as they saw the flag of their country wave side by side with the American flag;⁶ it demonstrated potential empowerment through ethnic collective action; and it established Moncado's charismatic leadership and the ability of his followers to finance and successfully implement a significant public undertaking.

The 1926 Rizal Day catapulted Moncado and the Federation into public recognition and set its momentum as a social movement. The membership of the Federation grew astronomically: from 34 "matriculate" members in 1926 before the Rizal Day celebration to nearly 700 members by the end of 1928 representing 57 lodges (FFA 1928). Each matriculate member had to pay the required fee of \$100 plus \$10 for the Federation pin.⁷

The Spiritual Dimension

Underneath the material structure of the Federation was its spiritual component. All Federation members underwent a form of spiritual initiation upon joining the organization. This consisted of specially-constructed prayers (e.g. prayers to obtain power, for protection against dangers and to resist all kinds of

temptations), a list of instructions as to what prayers to say and at what time of the day to perform them. In addition, the members were asked to fast for as long and as frequently as they could on a voluntary basis. After this orientation, the majority continued on as material members and engaged in promoting the activities of the organization in their respective places of work and in the Federation branches throughout California.⁸

Others chose to become "spiritual" members under the guidance of Lorenzo de los Reyes, the Federation's spiritual leader and a founding member. In fall 1926, Reyes⁹ left Los Angeles to concentrate on his spiritual mission in the newly purchased Federation property in Stockton, headquarters of the Federation Branch No. 1. In no time, Stockton became the spiritual center of the Federation and was referred to as "The College of Mysteries" (Darilay 1931: 11). Those who wanted to know more about the organization's spiritual teachings and practices spent time in Stockton fasting, praying, learning "physical culture," and listening to Reyes' lectures. The "true" spirituals started the practice of celibacy, maintained a non-carnivorous and raw food diet, and did not cut their hair.

The body of Reyes' spiritual teachings was fundamentally an extension of Filipino folk beliefs and practices which the immigrant workers brought with them to America. However, as Reyes articulated Filipino nativistic beliefs he also drew symbolisms and ideas from American cultural elements, including popular culture, thus allowing the movement to take on a Filipino-American syncretic identity. He also paved the way for Moncado's dual charismatic role as a political leader and as the spiritual "Master" known as "Equifrilibrium."¹⁰ Moncado was extremely competent and skillful in performing this leadership role by himself. However, Reyes played an indispensable role in promoting the acceptance of the idea of Moncado's "Divinity: Moncado could not have assumed the role of the "Filipino Christ" had Reyes not been there as his John the Baptist."¹¹

Moncado and Reyes

The symbiotic relationship between Moncado and Reyes was best manifested in the complementary roles that each played in the development of the organization as a social movement. While Moncado stood on center stage of the Federation activities and basked in the public limelight as the charismatic leader of this Filipino organization, Reyes worked hard and quietly behind the scene to reinforce the mystic character of the Federation and the "divine" attributes of Moncado to its members: Moncado, the charismatic leader in the material world

of the Federation, was also the hidden reincarnation of Christ and Jose Rizal. As the organization's spiritual leader, Reyes' mission was to make the members come to this realization; it was essential in the process of guiding them to lead moral lives.

Members of the Federation in Hawaii have indicated that the Federation was actually the idea of both Moncado and Reyes, not just Moncado. Part of this suggestion comes from the fact that Moncado and Reyes knew each other in the early years of their sojourn in America. They first met in San Francisco in 1916, just a year after Moncado arrived in California. According to Reyes' biography, he and Moncado went their separate ways, met several times after that and finally got together when it was time to form an organization (Darilay 1931: 9-11). Both Moncado and Reyes were HSPA labor recruits and came to California by way of Hawaii.

The Bisayan Immigrant

Moncado was born to a poor rural family in Balamban, Cebu. His birth certificate from the town's Roman Catholic parish church show that he was born Hilarion Caminos Moncada on November 3, 1895 and was baptized on November 4, 1895.¹² He legally changed his name to Hilario Camino Moncado around 1919, probably while still residing in San Francisco. He and the Federation also gave his official date of birth as November 4, 1898 (Moncado 1955: 7).

Moncado arrived in Honolulu in 1914 under HSPA contract no. 10221 with a declared age of 21 (HSPA/PA 1929). (Because HSPA required a minimum age of 18 for its recruits, it was not uncommon for underaged Filipinos to lie about their age in order to qualify to work in Hawaii.) An HSPA memo indicates that he was assigned to Kekaha Plantation on Kauai but all Federation documents, including Moncado's (1955: 7),¹³ state that he was in Koloa, where he worked for one year before heading for the West Coast. He worked in San Francisco and in an Alaskan cannery before residing in Los Angeles. Through those years prior to the founding of the Federation, Moncado supported himself through odd jobs as laborer, labor agent, elevator "boy" and the like. He put himself through high school in San Francisco and obtained a college degree in a city university in Los Angeles in 1928 at the peak of the movement. Two years later, he was conferred an honorary doctoral degree from an unaccredited university which soon became defunct. Nevertheless, Hilario Camino Moncado held the title of "Dr. Moncado."

Moncado was tall for a Filipino, about six feet,¹⁴ which immediately made him stand out among the rest of his countrymates. According to the Federation

secretary, Helen Borough (1984a), "when [Moncado] walked people would turn around and wonder who he was... Walking into the banquet room, walking to the [hotel] lobby, you could tell he was the leader. People would turn and look at him. It showed self-confidence when he walked." He was always immaculately dressed (Borough 1984b; Yap 1984; DeSeo 1931: 30-31). In addition to his charismatic personality, he was ambitious and visionary and possessed good organizational and leadership skills. Personally, however, he had "few if any intimate friends...feelings for him [were] usually those of intense loyalty or intense hatred" (DeSeo 1931: 31).

Moncado did not reveal much about himself and his personal background. This added to the "mysterious" aura that surrounded him and became consistent with his mystic persona. In the context of their indigenous world view, the Federation members linked Moncado's being a "*mysterioso*" (mysterious) with supernatural power. Thus, it was perfectly logical for members to accept the mystical background that was presented to them about Moncado: that he was trained in mysticism in India at age 9 and received "Ph.D. degrees in Kabala, Numerology and Human Nature" at age 12.

The Tagalog Mystic

Lorenzo de los Reyes grew up in Tiaong in the southern Tagalog province of Tayabas (since renamed Quezon). From the middle of the 1800s, if not earlier, this region became known for its native mysticism. It has been the center of messianic movements—or the *colorum* tradition—which flourished and continue to flourish on the slopes of the mystical Mt. Banahaw (Ileto 1979: 86-92).¹⁵ According to Darilay's biographical sketch, Reyes trained as a young child under an old Filipino mystic. Taking the appearance of Halley's comet in 1910 as a sign, Reyes left the Philippines for Hawaii that year and worked in Ewa plantation (Darilay 1931: 10; Felipe 1979).¹⁶ He proceeded to San Francisco in the early part of 1911 and earned his living on the West Coast doing manual and domestic labor.

Reyes' personal background remained undisclosed even to those who knew him personally. They could only reveal what was already known about him from the biography that was featured in the 1931 "blue book" edition of his book, *Every Day New and Wonder*.¹⁷ His loyal followers who studied under him in Honolulu have been unable to give any information about his birth date, his family, the details of his life in Hawaii and California. The material members in California could only say that he kept to himself and was always addressed as

"Mr. Reyes" by the members, except for Moncado who occasionally called him by a nickname, "Insong."¹⁸

Unlike the rest of the *sakadas* who came seeking economic opportunities and material benefits, Reyes left for abroad in search of the fulfillment of a mystic mission, reportedly to find a person who would someday be the "Master of Morality." He lived an ascetic life and did not personally or materially profit from the resources of the organization. On the contrary, there seem to be reliable indications that Reyes contributed his hard-earned savings to finance the formation of the Federation and that he may have been involved in Moncado's earlier attempt to form a Filipino organization before the inception of the Federation.¹⁹ Some members in Hawaii have also implied that Lorenzo de los Reyes was actually responsible for financing Moncado's high school and college education in the years preceding the founding of the Federation.

It is practically impossible to know at this point to what extent Reyes recognized the charismatic personality of Moncado and his special qualities, and whether or not he believed that Moncado had extraordinary powers and a messianic identity. Or, did Reyes simply nurture this belief in Moncado as far as it went in pursuit of a bigger goal which was the fulfillment of his lifetime mission of practicing mysticism and teaching others to capture its hidden meanings and spiritual empowerment? Was his mystic undertaking not dependent, after all, on having a charismatic figure as a focus and an instrument of his mission?

A Strong Spiritual Following

What certainly became clear was Reyes' success in building up a loyal following of spiritual members. One of these members, who still lives, resides in Honolulu and was interviewed in September 1979, related the task of *sacrificio* (sacrifice) which he undertook as a spiritual under Reyes in California about 1929. He was part of a group of 12 spirituals who lived in the mountains outside of Salinas without food and little water; each went separately to pray, meditate, and fast. According to this member, he did this for seven months although others were not able to last that long. This same member also said that the material members disapproved of the spirituals' physical appearance: emaciated-looking from fasting, with unkempt faces from not shaving and with long hair growing (San Buenventura 1990: 264-65). The material members felt that Reyes had gone too far and openly criticized his "superstitious" teachings

and practices. As early as 1928, Reyes became a divisive issue, and conflict ensued between the material and spiritual members (Darilay 1931: 11).

Moncado continued to support Reyes but handled the crisis by instructing Reyes and all the spirituals to move to Hawaii in 1930. This led to the establishment of the spiritual division in Hawaii and its formal separation from the material organization in California. The move did not involve the exodus of hundreds of individuals, but possibly three to four dozen hard core and well-trained followers made the journey to Hawaii—some accompanying Reyes, others following after they were able to save sufficient money for the cost of travel. Among those who came with Reyes was Geraldo Alvaro, considered Reyes' most exemplary student and noted for his spiritual prowess in fasting.

The Federation in Hawaii

Like Reyes, many spirituals had been former *sakadas* on the plantations and were no strangers to the way of life and economy of the islands. More importantly, the Federation had already established branches on Oahu and the Big Island in 1928, creating small communities of Federation members on the different plantations. The organizational mechanism and ingredients for growth were therefore already in place, with credit to Moncado's foresight; he saw the large population of *sakadas* in Hawaii as a resource for potential members very early on.

Moncado visited Hawaii two-and-a-half years after the Federation was formed with the idea of introducing the organization in the islands. On July 28, 1928, he sailed from Los Angeles to Honolulu on board the *SS City of Honolulu* as a member of an official Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce excursion group. The visitors were hosted by the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce and received due attention from the press. The presence of Moncado in the group also drew the scrutiny of the HSPA because of a letter from Mrs. R.H. Sweet of Yakima, Washington who wrote to Governor Wallace Farrington to warn him that Moncado was a "fake" and should not be allowed to "deceive" the Filipinos in Hawaii (HSA 1928). The Governor forwarded the letter to HSPA, which closely monitored Moncado's activities during the visit. The *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* (1928) reported Moncado's plans to open Federation branches in Honolulu and Hilo. In October of the same year, 24 members of the Federation from California arrived in Hawaii. A group of 12 led by Apolinario Felias stayed on Oahu to organize the Honolulu branch; the other group led by Eugenio Mabalod was assigned to the Big Island to start the Hilo branch (HSA 1928; HSPA 1928).

HSPA and the Federation

On October 20, 1928, HSPA Secretary-Treasurer J.K. Butler circulated a memo to all the plantation managers alerting them about the arrival of the Federation group from California (HSA 1928; HSPA/PA 1929). He followed this up with a confidential circular on January 30, 1929 which included a brief background on Moncado's family in Cebu gathered by HSPA agents in the Philippines. Butler also expressed concern about the recruitment of members on the plantations, particularly the \$100 membership fee and the kind of recruitment materials being circulated by the organization. Describing a Federation material that was confiscated from a member, Butler continued: "This [Federation] circular contained a lot of numbers and so-called equivalents in letters, together with a cross word puzzle or two and directions about reciting certain words seven times, certain words three times and other such cabalistic voodoo directions" (HSPA/PA 1929). He also mentioned "other [Federation] circulars which have come into our hands in which by numerology and otherwise it is demonstrated that Jose Rizal was the second Christ and Hilario Camino Moncado was the third Christ."

In a subsequent memo on September 17, 1929 addressed to Edward Broadbent, plantation manager of Grove Farm on Kauai, Butler noted "with regret" the Federation's "constant increase of membership amongst Filipinos particularly on our plantations." However, he reassured the plantation manager that "there is nothing directly conflicting with the interest of the plantations or any attempt to disrupt relations between the plantations and the Filipino laborers."²⁰

Although it continued to be concerned about Filipino laborers being "duped" into joining the Federation and paying the exorbitant membership fee, the HSPA left the organization alone to run its own course. The monitoring of the Federation seemed to have stopped once the HSPA was reassured that the organization was not agitating for labor strikes and higher wages among Filipino workers. The HSPA's concern was unfounded as the Federation turned out to be pro management and directed its members not to participate in labor strikes.

California and Hawaii Compared

Establishing branches had been a major activity of the Federation in California; the formation of the branches in Honolulu and Hilo brought the number of Federation offices to 12. There were unifying factors that made the

Federation phenomenon a universal experience for the members in both California and Hawaii: the recognition of Moncado's special charisma, a basic acceptance of the material-spiritual dimensions of the organization, and belief in the objectives of the Federation.

However, the Federation in Hawaii evolved quite distinctly from the organization in California. The relevance and meaning of the organization's objectives changed under different conditions in a different time and place.

For one thing, the mutual aid aspect of the organization became less important with the passing of the pioneering years of immigration and as the members quickly proved themselves more than capable of mutual assistance. Mutual help became even less crucial in the paternalistic plantation environment of Hawaii where, in the later years, a more cohesive Filipino community developed and added to a better sense of security for the Filipinos. The Federation objectives that became more significant to all the members dealt with issues bigger than themselves: Philippine-American relations and the issue of Philippine independence. Obtaining the independence of the Philippines was the rallying force behind membership support of Moncado in California. However, this issue lost its timely relevance once the Tydings-McDuffey Act was passed in 1934 establishing Philippine independence on July 4, 1946. While this Federation objective was nonetheless an attractive force in recruiting members in Hawaii, its timely appeal lasted for only five years between the formation of the Federation in the islands and the act of Congress. What was really left then to sustain and strengthen the movement was its spiritual promise—of mystic empowerment and millennial reward.

Hawaii's rural world was more conducive to nurturing the spiritual dimension of the Federation than California's more urban and expansive surroundings and racially intolerant environment. Thus, the Federation communities in Hawaii reflected an organization that had a tightly integrated material and spiritual component. Material members who were married or who could not commit their entire life to *sacrificio* fasted whenever they could and were just as devoted in their prayers and beliefs in the *principios* (principles) of the Federation as the spirituals (San Buenaventura 1990: 267). The spiritual influence became even stronger because of Reyes and the formation of the spiritual division.

The Federation in the Community

The movement quickly gained momentum in Hawaii. Many Filipino plantation workers joined the organization and sub-branches were established on

Maui and Kauai as well. In 1931, Eugenio Mabalod listed a membership of 435 men and women on the Big Island in a special souvenir book. Unfortunately, the Honolulu branch and subsequent sub-branches did not produce similar publications. However, it has been possible to reach some reasonable approximation of the extent of the organization's membership throughout Hawaii by reconstructing a loose membership list from Federation anniversary souvenir programs and publications which contain names of members from the different islands and from talking to the members. At this point, it would be safe to say that the Federation may have had as many as 600 members (perhaps even 800) during its lifetime in Hawaii, possibly a third of whom originally joined the Federation in California. Federation members in Hawaii, however, have given their membership as high as 11,000 and at times even more.²¹ It should also be noted that like other *sakadas*, Federation members moved quite a bit between the islands; thus, members on the Big Island became members on Oahu when they changed their place of employment to Honolulu.

As membership increased, the Federation was able to maintain offices at the Watumull Building in downtown Honolulu and in Hilo. The material business of the organization was handled by its officers from these headquarters. Filipinos who wanted to join or members paying their membership fees by installment visited these offices. Lorenzo de los Reyes, on the other hand, had his own spiritual headquarters in a rented house in Makiki on Keeaumoku Street. He conducted his spiritual teachings from there, held "Sunday School" services, and taught fasting and physical culture.

The Material Members' Activities

The first major activity of the Federation in Hawaii was in August 1931 when the members welcomed Hilario Camino Moncado on his first visit to Honolulu after the organization had been formed in the islands. He was on his way back to California after a trip around the world that began early in the year through Europe and Asia, and included his first visit to the Philippines.

The Federation members organized a convention for nine days in the tradition of the Federation convention celebrations in California. Members from the different islands came to Honolulu for the occasion, and the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* (1931) reported the attendance figures (given by the Federation) as 200 delegates from Maui and the Big Island and 800 from Oahu. A special evening was reserved for a gala banquet at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel with Moncado hosting the occasion. Important people in Hawaii were invited all the

way from the Governor, Mayor to other public officials and community personalities. Those who came included Cayetano Ligot, Philippine Labor Commissioner to Hawaii. "Members proudly recalled how they decorated the streets of Honolulu with Filipino and American flags, similar to what was done in California during the early Federation conventions" on the occasion of Moncado's visit (San Buenaventura 1990: 273).

Just like California, the most significant activity of the Federation centered on observing the anniversary of the founding of the organization with a special banquet on December 27 of each year. As the organization became an integral part of the community, it participated actively in community celebrations and public concerns. During the war, it spearheaded a drive to sell war bonds among its members and in the Filipino community. Other ethnic groups in Hawaii performed their patriotic duties by selling war bonds also. However, under the able leadership of Benigno "Benny" Escobido, the organization's "Territorial Chairman for Public Relations," the Federation claimed to have outdone other community groups by selling over \$1 million worth of bonds. According to available records, the Federation sold \$130,559.25 worth of bonds in 1944. William Hanifin (1980), then Deputy Administrator of the Hawaii War Savings Staff and State Director of U.S. Savings Bond Division, did confirm that the Federation was the most organized and most productive of all the Filipino (and other ethnic) organizations in selling war bonds (San Buenaventura 1990: 382-85).

Reyes and the Spirituals

The spirituals, on the other hand, increased in membership and intensified their observance of *sacrificio*. The core group from California had now been strengthened by new devotees from Hawaii. By 1938 there were "144" core spirituals who trained under Reyes and Geraldo Alvaro (Amper 1979, Felipe 1972, Nagal 1979). They kept their activities independent of the material members but worked among them in the plantation to support themselves. The two groups were unified, of course, in supporting official Federation activities and Moncado's agenda.

However, the spirituals distinguished themselves from the rest of the membership by their ascetic life style and strict adherence to the regular practice of fasting and physical culture, eating "raw food" (uncooked food) called *simento*, and not cutting their hair—all of which were meant to sharpen their spiritual prowess and test their unlimited commitment to the Federation and

Moncado. One practice they were able to observe much more easily in Hawaii than in California was "going into the mountain" ("*na-mundok*," or "*nag-ermitanyo*," not unlike a hermit) to pray, fast and meditate. In the context of Filipino mysticism, the 49 spirituals who did this (Nagal 1979) saw it as a test (*tahas*, in Bisayan) of one's extraordinary ability to face unknown spirits and confront nature's harsh conditions, a process through which one discovered supernatural power. One member who joined the Federation when he was already married—and could technically not be considered a spiritual—was a loyal follower of Reyes. This member relayed how he went up regularly in the Waianae mountain range and in caves to pray in order "to get power" (San Buenaventura 1990: 310-15.) In addition to testing their courage and faith, the spirituals saw this exploration as an opportunity to find special magical objects (called *anting-anting* or talisman) which were considered sources of empowerment (San Buenaventura 1990: 67-71; Iletto: 28-35). Others in this group reportedly explored places on Oahu like Nuuanu and some mountainous areas on the Big Island.

Lorenzo de los Reyes left for the Philippines in June 1932 with a group of Federation leaders under instructions from Moncado. They were given orders to expand the Federation colonies in Mindanao where about three dozen members had gone in 1930 to pioneer the project. Part of Moncado's reason for sending his able leaders back to the Philippines had to do with his plans to enter Philippine politics. He needed loyal and trusted followers to pave the way for his campaign since he had no political base there whatsoever. Reyes died in Balamban, Moncado's hometown in Cebu on August 21, 1937 after an illness.

Reyes' absence did not leave a spiritual vacuum. Geraldo Alvaro, referred to by members by his mystic name, *Bag-ong Yuta* (Bisayan for "new earth" or "new life") succeeded him. As Reyes' right-hand person, the spirituals not only accepted Alvaro's authority but also recognized his "special powers." He introduced other forms of ritual and expanded on the *ermitanyo* practice introduced by Reyes. However, there were those from the material division who strongly opposed Alvaro. In 1933, he ran into a serious conflict with some members of the material division, served time in jail and was eventually forced to return to the Philippines in 1938 (TH/Circuit Court 1934).²²

Criticisms and Attacks on the Federation

From the very beginning, the Filipino community in Hawaii was quite critical of the Federation especially at a time when the movement was gaining

momentum among the *sakadas* on the plantation. Filipino community leaders were extremely concerned about the “unfavorable” image that the Federation was giving to the Filipino ethnic group; they also considered it a responsibility to expose the “fakery” of Moncado in order to prevent “unsuspecting” *sakadas* from joining and being exploited.

The first formal attack against Moncado appeared in 1930 in a 20-page pamphlet written and published by Primo E. Quevedo, a student on government scholarship (a *pensionado*) in Los Angeles. Quevedo’s purpose was “to enlighten the poor illiterate [sic] boys who have been misled and fooled by Moncado and his Federation.” (Quevedo 1930: 19). He also hoped to stop Moncado from misrepresenting the Filipinos and for “belittling Philippine and American officials, and God.”

Independent of Quevedo’s work, Nicolas C. Dizon’s 118-page volume was published in Honolulu in 1931. Dizon was a Tagalog Filipino Methodist minister who worked initially among the Filipino plantation workers in Hawaii and later established the Filipino Christian Church in urban Honolulu. As a Christian minister, Dizon’s indictment dealt with the “superstitious” beliefs and practices of the Federation. He considered the organization “unethical” with “harmful effects on the character of the Filipino community in Hawaii” (San Buenaventura 1990: 438). Dizon drew important information about some of the spiritual practices of the Federation from former members who had left the organization. He also criticized “Moncado’s lieutenants” for acting as if they were “wiser than lawyers and doctors” because they professed “to know some things that...other educated Filipinos [did] not know” (Dizon 1931: 50-52).

It was also not uncommon for the Filipino laborers in Hawaii to offer negative opinions about the Federation and to ridicule their peers who joined the movement. “Bonipasyo,” the subject of Virgilio Menor Felipe’s thesis (1972) did not hesitate to express his thoughts: “Wherever you went, especially on weekends in Hilo at the street corners, they preached, Let the light of Moncado guide your path in life! But these people were weak and lonely-hearted men and cowards like castrated chickens” (Felipe 1972).

“Bonipasyo” and other Filipinos perceived the Federation members as cowards because the members did not fight back even when directly ridiculed. According to them, Moncado and Reyes instructed them to be peaceful and to accept these insults as a test of their spiritual strength, just as Moncado did every time he was maligned by his enemies. On the contrary, the more criticisms were hurled at the Federation and Moncado, the more steadfast the members became in their beliefs, reenforcing the messianic nature of the movement. The Federation members took these assaults on their leader and themselves as their

form of persecution, similar to the persecution of Christ and his disciples by non-believers. The criticisms only served to strengthen their belief in the “Christ-like” persona of Moncado.

Change and Changes

The members’ conviction that Moncado was directly responsible for obtaining the independence of the Philippines was an integral part of their belief in his role as the “new Rizal” and the “Filipino messiah.” Thus, his political leadership and activities were viewed as part of the material process of accomplishing a higher, spiritual mission of liberation. The dynamism and the spiritual identity which the Hawaii Federation developed in the thirties were therefore instrumental in sustaining the movement through the decades to come.

When the goal of obtaining the independence of the Philippines had been met, the relevance of the organization was maintained and shifted to a new agenda focusing on Moncado’s political goals (which were part of his spiritual mission). The Federation members in California and Hawaii began to be intensively involved in supporting Moncado’s political candidacy in the Philippines.

Because of its proximity to the Philippines and the existence of a loyal cadre of followers, Hawaii became a crucial resource center for Moncado. Moncado’s trusted officials from California, like Andres Darilay, were instructed to move to Hawaii and eventually became the core of his campaign operations in the Philippines. More importantly, the Hawaii members—especially the spirituals—generated much of the financial support Moncado needed to run for political office. He ran for senator in Cebu against Sergio Osmena in 1934 and in Lanao province against Tomas Cabili in 1938; he was a presidential candidate against the incumbent Manuel Quezon for president of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1941 and for the first president of the Philippine Republic in 1946 against Manuel Roxas and Sergio Osmena. He did not win in any of these but was elected in 1934 to represent his district in Cebu at the Constitutional Convention.

Postwar changes and internal conflicts made the Federation a different organization after the war. Moncado suffered more than sufficient political defeat to make him realize that there was no place for him in the Philippines. He returned in 1948 to the U.S. via Hawaii and was received warmly by a loyal following but a much depleted membership. Many members went back to the Philippines before the war and were barred from returning to America because

of the immigration limitations set by the Tydings-McDuffey Act; the new law also stopped the influx of the large immigrant population from which to recruit new members. Moncado himself was faced with a crucial problem of fighting his deportation from the U.S. and was eventually forced to live in Baja California, Mexico where he died on April 8, 1956.

The focus of the organization veered farther away from the now outdated material objectives and energies were concentrated on the spiritual. Moncado himself foresaw the inevitable change and encouraged the new direction of the Federation. On April 4, 1956—his last visit in Los Angeles and four days before he died—he told a group of faithful followers: “The work of the Filipino Federation of America is finished. Our work now is Religion” (Mariano 1963). With this new directive, several members proceeded to organize an “Equifrilibration” religion, based on the basic beliefs and practices of the Federation. Unable to attract a sufficient following from among the general membership in California and Hawaii, the religion was established instead in the “Moncado colonies” in Mindanao where it was initially well-received by Federation members and their kinfolk and later became a recognized Philippine religious sect (San Buenaventura 1990: 408-14; Elwood 1968).

The Federation in More Recent Times

The internal conflict between the materials and the spirituals increased after Moncado’s death as part of the leadership struggle that ensued. The spirituals in Hawaii split into several factions: the mainstream chose Moncado’s widow, Diana Toy Moncado, to head the spiritual division; a new and small group called the “Liberal division” followed a young local-born spiritual leader, Raymundo Quiniones, who brought his followers to Molokai at Moncado’s suggestion; and the rest of the spirituals chose to stay independent and true to the original spirit of the Federation. They refused to recognize Diana Toy Moncado as the legitimate successor of Moncado because she was a devout Catholic and did not believe in the teachings of the Federation. The rest of the material members tried to arrive at a leadership compromise among themselves and aligned themselves with the spiritual faction of their choice. A core group of the spiritually-devoted material members who were married also formed the Filipino Crusaders World Army (FCWA) in the mid-forties, which did both material and spiritual work.

On the other hand, the material membership in California now centralized in the old Federation headquarters in Stockton saw itself as the legitimate Filipino Federation of America, Inc. In December 1956, its elected vice-president, Victor Ramajo (Moncado was considered the permanent and only president of the Federation), claimed that the Federation had ownership over the

Kalihi and Manoa properties purchased in the early forties by the spirituals for their church building and Moncado’s residence, respectively. The California group lost the battle in court and as a result, the spiritual division under Diana Toy Moncado formed a new trust, the Moncado Foundation of America. A number of spirituals named as members of the Board of Trustees belonged to the independent group of spirituals who had been committed to continuing the new Foundation in the spiritual tradition of the Federation—without the added Catholic rituals and imagery that Diana Toy Moncado introduced to the Foundation. Today, the Kalihi property and what it should be used for is still being contested in court between former spirituals and co-trustees, Alfonzo Nagal and Eleuterio Bulawan and Diana Toy Moncado’s successor and son, Mario Moncado, also a Foundation trustee. Members who have not directly been involved in the dispute continue to remain faithful to the memory of the organization in their own private ways. The different groups meet regularly like family and organize separate functions every December 27 to celebrate the anniversary of the Federation.

Conclusion

Federation members have differed and even contradicted one another in their interpretation of the many complicated aspects of the movement, leading to the creation of different factions among them. Their diverse positions have been caused by a number of factors: their individual needs and expectations and personal motives in joining the organization; the degree to which they devoted time, energy and material resources to the organization; the diverse interpretations they gave to events and the teachings of Moncado and Reyes; their positions in the structure of the organization, and whether or not they were material or spiritual members; the dynamics of their interrelationships with one another; and the historical circumstances surrounding their individual experience with the Federation.

However, inherent in this diversity was the fact that Moncado and Reyes encouraged the members to experience the Federation in individual ways. Their creative roles in putting together a unique phenomenon included allowing the members to engage in creative expressions themselves. Members were allowed to “philosophize” on their own and to unravel the Federation teachings for themselves. This was partly because the organization did not have a formal body of dogmas, and its *principios* were essentially loosely comprised of a combination of folk philosophy and myths, nativistic practices, Christian beliefs, and syncretic religio-cultural elements brought about by the Filipino-American

experience. As Moncado came up with new ideas, such as the postwar additions of *Man's Moral Concept* and the "Moncadian Calendar,"²³ the Federation members instantly incorporated these into their body of beliefs as if they had been always a part of the Federation since the very beginning. Following in the footsteps of Moncado, a number of members introduced new interpretations along the way with the intention of establishing their own group of Federation followers but met with little or no success.

Although the Filipino Federation of America legally ended as an organization at the end of its fifty years of incorporation in 1977, the members in Hawaii attempted to perpetuate the image of a dynamic movement in the successive years. The leaders of the material division in Honolulu held banquets commemorating the anniversary of the Federation and established March 5 (the date of Moncado's arrival in Hawaii) as "Immigration Memorial Day." These celebrations seemed bigger events than they actually were because they were advertised in the local dailies and in program souvenirs complete with solicited endorsements and congratulations from top public officials and community figures—in the true tradition of the Federation. As in past celebrations, prominent members of the community in Hawaii were always invited and many did attend a number of the Federation banquets at one time or another.

Today, the activities of the Federation have been drastically scaled down because of an aging and depleting membership, but the remaining members continue to perpetuate the legacy of a 75-year old movement in individual and collective ways. However, their tribute to the Federation and Hilario Camino Moncado should be seen instead as a homage to themselves and a celebration of their lifetime and extremely unique contribution to the immigrant experience in America.

Notes

1. David Thompson was the education director for the ILWU and was involved with organized labor in Hawaii for many years before his death in June 1979. He was most supportive of the initial work on the Federation which an historian friend and colleague, Michael Cullinane, and I started in 1976. Thompson shared all the information he had on the organization with us and facilitated our use of the ILWU library in 1977 when we first met him.
2. The HSPA was naturally concerned with keeping outside "agitators" like Pablo Manlapit and other labor leaders from getting to the Filipino workers and organizing them to strike. However, the HSPA also kept a vigilant watch over those Filipinos with more education but who took advantage of the *sakadas* who

could not read or write and were vulnerable to being cheated. There was genuine concern on the part of the HSPA to protect unsuspecting Filipino workers from individuals and organizations with opportunistic intentions. In those cases where it gave solicitation approval (e.g., Cayetano Ligot's collection for the the Philippine Tuberculosis Society, Filipino baseball tournaments), it established a system whereby monies were collected from the workers by the plantation manager or his representative and submitted to the HSPA, which then issued a check directly to the recipient institution or group. One separate category in the HSPA Plantation Archives pertains to the subject of "Defraud of Filipinos."

3. An exploration into the background of the *Dimas Alang* and *Legionarios* in California and their interrelationship with the Federation in the twenties and thirties will be pursued during a postdoctoral research fellowship at the University of California, Los Angeles.
4. The Federation referred to them as "Objects" rather than objectives. These were: 1) to promote friendly relations between Filipinos and Americans; 2) to develop true Christian fellowship; 3) to show the real humanitarian spirit by offering their moral, spiritual, and material aid and protection to their fellow beings, most specially to the fellow members of the Federation; 4) to advance the moral and social conduct of each member; 5) to foster the educational advancement of each member; 6) to respect the superiors and office holders of the Federation; 7) to serve in any capacity for the further advancement of the Filipino Federation of America; 8) to be loyal to the Constitution of the Federation; 9) to peacefully obtain the immediate and complete independence of the Philippine Islands; 10) to work for a fair and truthful understanding of the relations between the United States and the Philippines; 11) to be an active agency of the solution of the Philippine problems; 12) to uphold the Constitution of the United States.
5. The belief in Rizal's "unfinished mission" and its fulfillment in his reincarnation was widespread among the members interviewed, whether Bisayan or Ilokano. To reinforce this, the Federation circulated a specially constructed photograph of Rizal showing him with "12 *ilustres*" (it should be "*ilustrados*") comprised of some of Rizal's colleagues in the *ilustrado* nationalist movement but also of Filipino heroes whom Rizal had never met, like Andres Bonifacio.
6. Older members related how proud they were of the fact that the Philippine flag was "equal" to the American flag. They declared that this was the first time this had ever happened and that Moncado was responsible for it.
7. Because this was a huge amount, especially during the Great Depression and for Filipino workers earning a very small wage, those who wanted to join the Federation paid the required fee by installment or waited until they saved the entire amount. When 12 people had accomplished this, they were then formed into a lodge and officially accepted into the organization.

8. The Federation established branches in Stockton, Salinas, Santa Maria, Pasadena, Oakland, Fresno, San Fernando, Sacramento and San Diego.
9. Although his last name should technically be "de los Reyes," "Reyes" will be used instead because the Federation members referred to him as "Mr. Reyes."
10. The word stood for: "EQUI—I am the Way of Equality; FRILI—I am the Truth of Fraternity; BRIUM—I am the Life of Liberty and the Master of Equifrilibricum." "Equifrilibricum" stood for Moncado's material identity, "Equifrilibrium" was his "divine" persona.
11. Thompson had also referred to Reyes' "John the Baptist" role in his article.
12. A typewritten copy of Moncado's baptismal certificate can be found in Francisco Dalumpines' 1971 master's thesis on the life of Moncado. Michael Cullinane saw the original baptismal certificate in the Balamban parish church records.
13. If Moncado was to have been reincarnated from Rizal, it seemed only logical that the year of his birth should come after Rizal's death in 1896.
14. His approximate height has been corroborated by a number of people and from examining photographs taken of him standing with individuals and groups of people.
15. The mystic tradition of Mt. Banahaw continues to be strong to this day. See, for example, the recent study of Vicente Marasigan (1985). Floro Albuero, a Ph.D. candidate in Anthropology at the University of Hawaii, is currently completing his study of another messianic movement in Mt. Banahaw.
16. Darilay's account and Faustino Felipe's interview seem to support the idea that Reyes must have been a minor when he left the Philippines. He attached himself as a dependent to a couple from Manila whom he did not know in order to come to Hawaii (which was not uncommon practice among the underaged *sakadas*). According to Darilay: "In Hawaii, young Reyes worked in the sugar plantation with some children. His salary was fifty cents a day." Adult workers were paid one dollar a day.
17. Reyes published three editions of *Every Day New and Wonder*: red (1929), white (1930) and blue (1931). The red edition contained 173 pages, the white had 243 pages, and the blue consisted of 300 pages. The material members received copies of the red and white editions, but the "blue book" edition was reserved for only the loyal spirituals.
18. This piece of information has been provided by Ted Dumarán, a Federation member from Waiānae. He recalls a general meeting he attended in 1948 in Honolulu during Moncado's visit in which Moncado referred to Reyes by this nickname.

19. There is no clear evidence, so far, of Reyes' direct involvement with the first organization Moncado attempted to establish, the Filipino Federation of Labor, except for the fact that it was reported to have had a "one-room office" in a hotel in which Reyes was staying at that time.
20. This information was provided by Ruben Alcantara from research he did at the Grove Farm Plantation archives.
21. The Federation literature and the members all give different numbers. Cullinane (1983: 74) provides some of these figures from various sources. A January 1931 issue of *Screen Mirror* ("The Magazine from Hollywood") found among a member's collection of Federation literature a full-page ad of the Federation claiming "1,023,000 members"—"over 12,000" in the U.S., including Alaska, "over 10,000" in Hawaii, and "1,000,000" in the Philippine Islands.
22. The Federation ran a home for children, and charges of child molestation were brought against Alvaro. Spiritual members believed that this was a ploy on the part of some of the leaders of the material division to undermine the spiritual division.
23. *Man's Moral Concept* is a short essay Moncado wrote in the forties in the Philippines. Its basic idea is that "man and God are equal"—because God created man in His image and likeness but also because man created the idea of God. The Moncadian Calendar was introduced by Moncado around 1949 in California where instead 13 months in a year are given, each having 28 days.

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