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## **I Remember . . . Travel Essays, by Hidalgo**

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Finally, how does an educated person today make sense of the controversy in view of present-day discussions?

Certain crucial considerations emerge from the book. Here the choices are not either/or. First, the importance of *free inquiry* is critical to science. This was something quite difficult to maintain during the martial-law years. The controlled atmosphere even of scientific investigation hardly enjoined the ethos of "methodological skepticism" which is essential to science. In fact, the "Statement on the Tasaday Controversy" which was later issued by social scientists was addressed to various interested parties, asking them to allow the academic community to conduct a thorough empirical study of the issue before any final pronouncement could be made.

Second, *media impact* is undoubtedly not to be discounted in academic disciplines, whether in the social sciences or in theology. The audiences targeted by media are rather different from those who are usually addressed by scholars. It is for this reason that "premature" disclosure of scientific investigations can prejudice the proper understanding of any single issue, and can instead foster a media circus.

A third consideration is the *probable manipulation* by certain people who are deeply concerned with ferreting out the truth. The book's contributors highlighted the exploitation of indigenous communities. When they first appeared, the Tasadays immediately became multiple symbols from various standpoints: "(1) an evolutionary symbol from the Stone Age, (2) an ecological symbol from the tropical rain forest, (3) a political symbol from the Philippines, and (4) a peace symbol with political implications from the era of the Vietnam War" (p. 202).

Whatever the final verdict on this issue, it has become clearly important that available evidence be placed under scrutiny and debate. It is the deliberate effort to assess such evidence surrounding the controversy which makes this volume a useful collection.

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**I Remember . . . Travel Essays.** By Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1992. 122 pages.

*I Remember . . . Travel Essays* is a collection of 13 previously published autobiographical travel essays by Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo. Hidalgo's recent, as well as previous, works draw on her vast and varied experiences as a U.N. expatriate's wife and as a traveller. Previous writings of the same genre include *Sojourns* (New Day, 1984), *Korean Sketchbook* (Young Ahn, 1987), and *Five Years in a*

*Forgotten Land* (U.P. Press, 1991). Hidalgo has also penned collections of short fiction entitled *Ballad of a Lost Season* (New Day, 1987) and *Tales for a Rainy Night* (DLSU Press, 1993).

Hidalgo's work has often been compared to those of Lawrence Durrell, Graham Greene, D.H. Lawrence, and Isak Dinesen. However, Hidalgo notes,

most writers of travel books (and by this I don't mean tourist guidebooks, but travel essays, such as Lawrence Durrell, D.H. Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh, and Paul Theroux, write) are from the West, for whom 'exotica' by definition is the East. And much of what they observe as droll or quaint is actually perfectly natural to the natives of the East. We of the East, on the other hand, do not write travel books . . . So when we travel, we see even our own cities through western eyes. We should write our own travel books, and we should write what we find exotic, which naturally, is the West. And the things we will find funny or odd will probably seem perfectly commonplace to the Western person. (p. 34)

Hidalgo challenges the commonly accepted definition of "exotica." Is "exotica" the mysterious, mystical East, as a male, Western Caucasian would conclude; or is the exotic really just the peculiar customs of another land witnessed by a passing stranger? Hidalgo observes that exotica has become synonymous with the Orient, because the only travel books available are written by men from the West. Due to this default, their point of view of the world has been imposed on Eastern cultures as well, to the point that even Orientals stand in awe of the culture of their own Asian brothers, rather than expressing a reaction of recognition and familiarity. "The problem with Europe is that we have read too much of it, have seen too much of it in movies. I am often both astonished and amazed by what I encounter in Asia, but my feelings in Europe is recognition as much as discovery" (p. 33). Thus, Hidalgo observes, her response to Europe is almost programmed. One is expected, due to an education that is usually classical and Christian, to be amazed by the splendor of European architecture, to note the perfect beauty of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, or to marvel at the sophistication of the Parisians before one even arrives in Europe. To do otherwise would be unthinkable.

*I Remember . . . Travel Essays* provides an alternative to the works of previous Western writers. Hidalgo, a Filipino, presents a glimpse of the world through the eyes of an Oriental, an Oriental who is female. This collection is divided in two parts: "Brief Encounters," which consists of four essays by Hidalgo the tourist, followed by "Old Haunts," a collection of nine essays of Hidalgo the expatriate's wife. All the essays are written in retrospect; the author reflects on previous experiences, rather than narrating the stories as they happen. The author as a tourist notes in her opening work, "Hong Kong in the Sixties," that memories of a voyage to another country often consist of selected experiences

to create a faded, romanticized city the traveller wants to remember, rather than the grime, poverty, and squalor of the real city. And as a first-time tourist to Hong Kong, Hidalgo reflects that often the memory is more of a feeling of a place,

a feeling that remains in my mind, like a fragrance will linger about a room, even when the person wearing it has long gone. The sights and sounds hover about the shadowy edges of my memory, growing dimmer with the passing seasons. But the feeling is still so sharp and clear, that I recognize it today and give it a name . . . it was excitement with a touch of the incredulous. (pp. 3-4)

What differentiates the tourist from the expatriate? Hidalgo might say that the expatriate is more familiar with the foreign surroundings, so that one is no longer preoccupied with seeing the prerequisite sights, and is thus able to meet, observe and reflect on the culture laid before one's eyes. "For an acquaintance to ripen into a friendship, it must be allowed to develop at its own pace, in a leisurely fashion. This is true of places as of people" (p. 36). Thus the essays under "Old Haunts" come across as more reflective; these works suspend the detailed accounts of a tourist's first encounter, as the author chooses to relish the changing seasons in Korea ("Love Song"), and to revel in the tranquil beauty of a "Sunrise on the Irrawaddy" off a worn riverboat. "Flashback: Beirut '78-'80" speaks of the humdrum day-to-day life of Hidalgo's family in war-torn Lebanon. Yet the accepted presence of a constant war cannot diminish a mother's shock at discovering a sniper's bullet lying by her daughter's bed one early morning. Hidalgo examines the startling differences between Korean culture and her own as she rehashes her "Memories of the Korean Academe." The author also probes the state of Korean women. Despite the intelligence of the Korean women, they could not hope to fulfill any dream or ambition due to their simply being the so-called fairer of the sexes. This is a startling revelation to a woman accustomed to being treated as a fair equal.

*I Remember . . . Travel Essays* ends with an epilogue, as Hidalgo, although she cherishes her stints abroad, yearns someday to come home and live a "normal" life.

For gypsies like us, discarding is a fact of life. We do it every three years or so, before each move: say goodbye to friends, find new jobs for the help, give away plants, divide our personal belongings into three neat piles—one for selling or giving away, one for throwing away, one for packing. The funny thing is, instead of getting easier each time, the whole process gets tougher. (p. 122)

However, what gives the author roots and a sense of permanency despite her gypsy life are the memories. "These memories will not be thrown away with the garbage. These memories are forever" (p. 122).

The essays are travelogues written in retrospect, but woven in between the detailed narrations of side streets, architectural details, amazing nooks, hidden treasures, trinkets, and overheard conversations become stories of overseas Filipinos the author had met. Her inclusion of overseas Filipinos in her essays does not come off as contrived or pretentious, as if she were making a desperate attempt to write something socially relevant. Rather, her narrations on fascinating countries come across as refreshingly candid, told by a wandering traveller reflecting on previous experiences and punctuated by an encounter with a fellow Filipino. Thus her essays become epiphanies of sorts about the condition of the Filipino abroad. For example, in "Europe through the Eyes of a Filipina English Major," Hidalgo depicts her stay with Tina, a Filipina residing in Geneva. Within the innocent narration, Tina's words about her own life jump out toward the reader, and give one a glimpse of the true condition of the overseas Filipino.

"What do you think I'm forever trying to prove? That I'm as good as the next woman, of course. But I can only do that by doing her one better, speaking better, living better. It's either that or I change the color of my skin . . . I'm not talking of overt racism. There's none of that here. People are basically fair and courteous. But there's always a difference. And one is always aware of it." (p. 56)

*I Remember . . . Travel Essays* is a delightful collection, and Hidalgo successfully provides an alternative in travel writing, as her writing gives us a view of the world from the eyes of a Filipino woman.

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**Roles We Play in Family Life.** By Margarita Go-Singco Holmes. Metro Manila: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 1992. 286 pages.

This book is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature relating Psychology and Philippine life.

Culled from the author's daily columns in *Manila Times*, the book follows a simple format of correspondence between the letter-writer to the author and the author's response to various issues: from child-rearing to adolescent questionings, from sensitive issues like incest to alcoholism, and many more. The author presents the concerns of the letter-writer with clarity and perceptiveness. It is very refreshing to follow through some situations where the conversation between the letter-writer and the author extends to a number of columns. There