

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

**Five Faces of Exile: The Nation and
Filipino American Intellectuals
by Augusto Fauni Espiritu**

Review Author: Jonathan Chua

Philippine Studies vol. 55, no. 4 (2007): 533–536

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

Filipino was tried for collaboration, the government's pursuit of the bad guys in the novel is truly ironic, with "the issue of collaboration," according to Hau and Anderson, implicating "politicians like Manuel Roxas, who went on to become the first elected president of the postwar Philippines" (xviii).

The nonreturn of the native thus becomes irrelevant. Bulosan was burdened with the exile's peculiar fever: the inability or lack of desire to forsake one's origins and be immersed completely in another country. In a sense, he never left the islands. Who could blame him? Racism in the United States served as counterweight to the mythical welcome mat laid out for the stranger. As a result, memory metamorphosed into a sanctuary, one shaped by an often wistful imagination. If *Allos* is Bulosan's bittersweet autobiographical mask, *Gar* is the white one he wishes he could claim, not out of any feelings of racial inferiority but for the sense of belonging and authority it would have conferred.

This edition contains various appendices, including a letter to Josephine Patrick—Bulosan's companion—and a facsimile of some manuscript pages of *The Cry and the Dedication*, which, although I haven't read it, sounds like a companion work to *Conspirators*. And then there's the short story "The Filipino Houseboy." In its understated elegance the tale quietly explores the power relationship in the seemingly perfect domicile of a young white writer in Hollywood. Brief, indeed, but brief as a waning though glorious fall afternoon.

Luis H. Francia

Asian/Pacific/American Studies Program Department of Social and Cultural Analysis
New York University

AUGUSTO FAUNI ESPIRITU

Five Faces of Exile: The Nation and Filipino American Intellectuals

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. 312 pages.

Given the exodus of many Filipino professionals to the United States and elsewhere, *Five Faces of Exile: The Nation and Filipino American Intellectuals* by Augusto Fauni Espiritu is a timely publication.

The book discusses the ways by which Carlos P. Romulo, Carlos Bulosan, Jose Garcia Villa, N. V. M. Gonzalez, and Bienvenido Santos "imagined the Philippines, Asia, and the rest of the world from their exile in America"

(xii). Espiritu draws on the life and the writings of the five intellectuals to describe the anxieties and contradictions they faced as well as their responses to the exilic condition. The five writers are presented in the context of “the Philippines’ history of colonialism, patron-client relations, nationalist assertion, and cultural dynamism” (xiii).

Among his findings are (1) that Romulo saw expatriation as constitutive of nationalism, what Romulo called “expatriate affirmation”; (2) that Bulosan interpreted his exile, full of physical deprivation and suffering, in the language and imagery of the *pasyon*; (3) that, while exile afforded Villa space for artistic and sexual freedom, his actuations betrayed his ethnic and class origins; (4) that Gonzalez, unlike Romulo, played down the influence of expatriation on his work, insisting on his identity as a “Philippine writer” and rejecting the labels “Filipino American” and “Asian American”; and (5) that Santos embraced such labels, although with reluctance and with a sense that he had somehow “betrayed” the nation.

The book has much to interest and to provoke readers. Such, for one, is Espiritu’s stress on the role of patronage (both institutional and personal) in the self-fashioning of the five writers. Herein are made to surface the complexities of these writers as they confront contradictory forces. In his account of Gonzalez’s life, for instance, he shows the incongruity between Gonzalez’s words and his deeds. While Gonzalez’s writings assert the value of staying in the Philippines, his fiction idealizing the Philippines and depicting the U.S. as a site of corruption, “his life exhibits a restless desire to go abroad” (119). While Gonzalez asserted in interviews the incompatibility of art and political patronage, he was nonetheless “the beneficiary of some kind of artistic or political patronage” (121).

Espiritu also notes the irony in the anti-Americanism of Gonzalez’s brand of nationalism, roughly speaking, a nativist variety, as it was the “colonial white American intellectuals [who] had encouraged and laid the foundation for it in the early twentieth century, given their interests in cultural anthropology, folklore, religion, and myth” (111). Further, during martial law, Gonzalez’s nativism, “highlighting Filipinos’ colonized culture and pre-colonial cultures’ promise of liberation, the notion of a ‘golden age’” (127), fit squarely with the projects of the Marcos regime—a government he did not wish to support.

Reading the book, one might get the impression that the writers were mercenary; or, more positively put, that they were to reinvent themselves

as the time required. *Espiritu* shows that the writers were aware that their survival depended on sponsorship, but they found spaces, too, to articulate criticism or to stay “authentic.” Romulo’s “expatriate affirmation,” *Espiritu* shows, has much that is critical of U.S. colonial policies, a fact which should soften the impression that Romulo was indiscriminately pro-American. So, too, Santos’s dealings with Leonard Casper, friend and patron who recommended him for various grants, were characterized by periodic disagreements and evasions. “While acknowledging the power of colonial patrons and seeking their approval and friendship,” *Espiritu* contends, “native Filipinos have always found ways to deflect their criticism and in turn to register their criticism of colonial authority” (158).

Less controversial maybe but certainly most interesting is *Espiritu*’s discussion of how Philippine folk traditions and values inform the way the writers negotiated their exile. Romulo saw Philippine-American relations in terms of *utang na loob*; and Santos’s idealization of maternal figures and demure barrio lasses (vs. the modern American woman) in his fiction sprang from his mother’s devotion to the Virgin of Antipolo and the notion of *hiya*.

Instructive, too, is *Espiritu*’s reading of Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* in terms of the *pasyon*. Drawing on Reynaldo Ileto’s study, *Espiritu* observes that the hero of the book is “a suffering, Christlike hero” (67). Then, as in the *pasyon*, the hardships narrated elicit empathy (*damay*) and pity (*awa*), which in turn enjoin one to do one’s share of “redemptive suffering” (66). *Espiritu* observes:

The emphasis on sacrifice, toil, and suffering symbolized by “America” seems far from the popular conception of a land of opportunity waiting for every profit-seeking immigrant or Horatio Alger. Rather, Bulosan’s America hearkens to an idiom of protest in which compassion and empathy for the sufferings of others are paramount values, alongside an alacrity for self-sacrifice that is motivated by the attempt to give back to “others” (e.g., Christ, Rizal) for their sacrifices. (68)

Liwanag or light imagery, an important element in the *pasyon*, also permeates the novel and serves a similar function.

It is perceptive of *Espiritu* to find even in Villa, perhaps the least identifiably Filipino of the writers, the persistence of the homeland traditions. While Villa eschewed ethnicity in his poetry, he performed it at social functions. *Espiritu* interprets Villa’s “obsession with food” as a result of his im-

poverished condition in the 1930s but adds that “it was also based on a mixed sense of propriety and a celebration of the sensuality he found in Filipino culture” (99). Thus, at a reception, he declared to his American hostess, “In the Philippines, one does not serve cereal and beans at a reception; several fine meats and outstanding accompanying dishes glorify the table: this food is only fit for horses!” (100).

These and many other observations Espiritu presents in refreshingly readable, dutifully documented (the notes are almost a hundred pages long) prose. The book holds a mirror up to the complex situation of the transnational writer, and the faces it reveals are bathed in various shades of light and dark. We may yet be seeing through a glass darkly, as one may inquire into the judiciousness of juxtaposing biographical and literary materials, but Espiritu must be credited for making us look and learn.

Jonathan Chua

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies
Ateneo de Manila University