

INTELLECTUAL PORTRAIT GALLERY: AUGUSTO FAUNI ESPIRITU'S *FIVE FACES OF EXILE*

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Abstract

Espiritu writes a book which may be described as a “collective intellectual biography” of five figures in Philippine letters whose lives and texts were influenced by their expatriation in America: Carlos P. Romulo, Carlos Bulosan, Jose Garcia Villa, N.V.M. Gonzalez, and Bienvenido Santos. With a biographer’s touch, Espiritu identifies the themes that are more or less common and played out differently among them: performativity, ambivalence, nationalism in their self-representation, cultural hybridity, and patronage relations—leading to what may be called a genuine “transnational” perspective for Asian American intellectual history. However, his use of other big terms such as “exile,” “nation,” “Filipino” and “Filipino-American,” and “intellectual” raises questions and provokes discussions that may yet inform our reading of these critical biographies.

Keywords

exile, expatriation, Filipino American, intellectual biography, intellectual history

About the Author

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Back in 1990 I had occasion to hear Filipino novelist Bienvenido Santos speak at a conference in Hong Kong on Asian writing in English. I’d been in the Philippines for the better part of a year then, had begun to read some of the country’s writers, Santos included, and I was interested not only in hearing what he’d have to say but in seeing how he would stack up against the other conference headliners, some of whom were impressively big names. He stacked up pretty well: head and shoulders above the others, in fact. He gave a mesmerizing talk, by turns challenging, charming, laugh-out-loud funny, and deeply insightful, all delivered without a note in sight. I remember one moment in particular very well. It came not during the talk but in the question-and-answer following. Someone from one of the other countries represented at the conference asked: “Mr. Santos, what has been the reception of you and other Filipino writers outside the Philippines?” The reply was as blunt as it was immediate: “We haven’t made a dent.” To illustrate, the speaker went on to cite, unflinchingly, his own inability to find a publisher for his work in the United States,

where he had resided for many years.

Of course, during the intervening time I've become aware of developments that have at least qualified the substance of Santos' answer. As he was speaking, Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* must have been just coming off the press at Pantheon. A number of Frankie Jose's novels were republished in the States over the course of the 1990s. And Ben Santos' own fiction, along with that of other Filipino and Filipino American writers, began to appear with increasing regularity in anthologies of Asian American or multicultural literature. But the spirit and tone of his reply stayed with me, helping to define the writer in my mind. What I took to be its refreshing candor stood out in sharp contrast to the prevailing sentiment of self-congratulation at the conference. And it seemed to bespeak a security in the man's sense of his own talent and achievement that was of a piece with the bravura lectern performance.

Now, though, having recently read Augusto F. Espiritu's *Five Faces of Exile: The Nation and Filipino American Intellectuals*, I'm prepared to understand that moment a little differently. What the author shows in his chapter on Santos, one of the five "faces" whose portraits he offers in this book, is first of all that the writer's skill in oratory—which Espiritu characterizes by the term "performativity"—was the product of both native traditions of eloquence and American tutelage in his early school days; as such, it represented a deeply ambivalent heritage. Secondly, he shows that Santos' writing career was haunted by fears of being a "loser," and an "excluded outsider" (149-50), fears Espiritu links to the larger feelings of "shame" which are said to have constituted one principal driving force in the writer's literary productivity and his life. By that account, the seemingly straightforward reply, "We haven't made a dent ... I haven't been able to get published in the US...," must have come only after a hard swallow of personal pain and a quick summoning of intellectual courage. On the other hand, Espiritu also notes in Santos a lifelong "penchant for self-deprecation" (147), so perhaps the admission needs to be chalked up as much to the speaker's desire to be charming as to face squarely his private demons.

This is the kind of intriguing complexity that greets the reader of all five of Espiritu's portraits of venerable figures in Philippine letters: Carlos P. Romulo, Carlos Bulosan, Jose Garcia Villa, N.V.M. Gonzalez, and Santos. Or, as the saying goes, "Is it just me?" Will people whose familiarity with these figures significantly pre-dates 1990, and/or significantly extends beyond my still outsider's acquaintance with them and their works, find this new account half so enriching and provocative as I have? More specifically, how will these portraits appear to readers of this publication? In attempt to vet these questions in a preliminary way, and ultimately to stimulate readership of a book that has just recently

been published in the States, I submit the following review essay of *Five Faces of Exile*. In it, I will offer summaries of Espiritu's accounts of all five personages, as well as of his overall argument, and I will set forth critique and evaluation where they seem appropriate.

Before beginning, just to up the ante on possible reactions by readers here to the book under review, it might be pointed out that Espiritu is among a group of young Filipino American academics who, in the words of one of them, Vicente Rafael, have become "significant interlocutors in the political debates and formation of knowledge about Filipinos in the Philippines and elsewhere" (Rafael 2). Now of course Rafael is not imputing any monopoly over that role to these commentators, who include, in addition to himself and Espiritu, Sharon Delmendo, author of another recent contribution to Philippine Studies. Certainly "Filipinos in the Philippines" have themselves been busy in the "formation of knowledge" to which Rafael refers, witness for example Isagani Cruz's experimental biodrama, *The Lovely Bienvenido N. Santos*, published like Espiritu's book just this past year. Nevertheless, the contributions of the American-based scholars probably deserve to be reckoned with: first because they usually come armed with the latest conceptual and methodological apparatus of the discipline in which they are framed; second because they occupy a political, intellectual, and cultural position potentially mid-way between that of the traditional "Philippine hands" in the American academic establishment and that of the local producers of local knowledge. Like any other, this position is not a privileged one; it comes with limitations, liabilities, and outright blindnesses built in. At the same time, it may afford perspectives and illuminations on Philippine experience not available from anywhere else. In fact, it is a position not unlike that achieved by the five figures whom Espiritu studies, and whom he calls "Filipino Americans." Furthermore, in his reading, their achievement helped to create the ground from which the new generation of scholars now operates. Let us turn then to *Five Faces of Exile*.

First, a few words by way of general characterization of the book. It may be described as a collective intellectual biography of the five figures mentioned. Espiritu focuses on the experience of expatriation and its impacts on their writings, careers, and lives. He identifies five themes relating to this experience and more or less common to all his subjects, although playing out differently in individual cases. Two have already been mentioned in connection with Santos: one is "performativity," a complex concept denoting one type or another of conspicuous oral discourse, inscribed within a system (such as the colonial) of unequal power relations; the other is a deeply felt "ambivalence" with respect to the competing pulls of metropole and homeland. The further three are the "persistence

of nationalism and other discourses of the nation” in these writers’ self-representation; serving as a “bridge of understanding” between East and West, later generalized to mean qualities of “cultural hybridity” in their expressive work; and the demands of patronage relations in shaping their career and political choices (xiii, 179). Espiritu succeeds in demonstrating the relevance of these themes. He also manages to advance an additional thesis, seeing in the experience of these five Filipino expatriates grounds for establishing a genuinely “transnational” perspective for Asian American intellectual history.

As icing on the cake of these solid disciplinary contributions—and *Five Faces* is an impressive piece of scholarship, thoroughly researched and documented, methodologically self-aware, conceptually *au courant*—Espiritu writes with a biographer’s touch. He brings his subjects to life with telling details from their professional lives and personal relations. We learn, for example, that during his years at Cal State Hayward, N.V.M. Gonzalez struggled with the public transportation system, never having learned to drive, and that Villa, while living the rarefied lifestyle of the international artist in New York City, would slip over to New Jersey frequently to feast on Filipino food in the homes of newly arrived immigrant families. What’s more, like any good biographer, Espiritu is unsparing of conflicts, evasions, and awkward moments. We hear of Romulo’s falling out with his first patron, Manuel Quezon, Bulosan’s quailing before the plagiarism charge brought before him, the rationalizations Santos offered for taking American citizenship. Through it all, we get biography’s greatest gift: clear-eyed but compassionate understanding of individual lives situated in their social, cultural, and historical contexts.

All that said, the book does have its weaknesses. One of the most general of these is the absence of a comparative perspective. Espiritu does not stack his group of expatriate writers up against similar figures from another transnational setting, or against non-intellectual migrants (he wants to claim his five as precursors of today’s Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), nurses, and mail-order brides, but his bibliography contains no references to such works as Catherine Choy’s *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History*). He also offers little with respect to non-expatriate Filipino writers. On this point, Sharon Delmendo’s recent analysis of the work of F. Sionil Jose, a novelist who has remained in Manila but who stands in other respects the peer of the writers under study here, reveals a degree of “cultural hybridity” and “ambivalence” not easily reconcilable with the thesis of *Five Faces of Exile*. Finally, there is no comparison on basis of gender. One longs for some relief from the unremitting maleness of the subjects here (although some variation may be found in a perhaps too-fleeting exploration of Villa’s apparent homosexuality). It is even possible to wonder how the book would have read

had Espiritu been able to persuade Jessica Hagedorn, say, to sit for one of his intellectual portraits. In fairness, though, this would have jimmied his existing chronological frame, defined by writers whose careers spanned the colonial and post-independence periods.

In addition to this general shortcoming, specific issues arise in connection with the book's treatment of individual figures, and will be addressed as they appear. I also plan to offer some concluding reservations and assessment. But for now let's proceed to the portrait gallery.

Carlos P. Romulo is, after Rizal and along perhaps with Nick Joaquin, one of the Philippines' most celebrated "public intellectuals," in Russell Jacoby's term. Anyone familiar with the outlines of his career, the long periods spent in the United States, the books addressed as much or more to American than Filipino audiences, the late defense of what he took to be the joint interests of the US and the Marcos Administration, will not be surprised to learn that Romulo coined the term "expatriate affirmation" and that he saw himself as a "bridge" to transpacific understanding. What may be less expected, however, is the knowledge that, first of all, the "coinage" occurred in context of an attempt to define nationalism. "Nationalism in the Philippines," Romulo wrote, citing the example of the ilustrados, is "for better or worse, an expatriate affirmation" (Espiritu 37). Reflecting on his own experience, he went on to say, it was only in a state of expatriation, "as a member of the exile government in Washington during the war years ... that I began to be more analytical about our situation ... with a culture and government somehow not our own ... and to have the psychological experience of longing for identity even though I knew that I manifested it everywhere." Secondly, Espiritu points out that the author of *Mother America* was often pointedly critical of US foreign policy and American society. Even in that book Romulo regretted the "interruption" of Filipinos' fight for freedom in 1898 and lectured colonial administrators on their attitudes of racial condescension. In subsequent writings he went on to deplore race relations in America itself, to protest eloquently (if privately) the US intervention in Vietnam, and to issue warnings against imperial hubris and ignorance and the "illusion" of an Americanizing world mission (21-34).

In the main, Romulo appears to have offered these criticisms in a positive spirit, as a true believer in the principles of the liberal democracy he had absorbed through expatriation, and in exhortation of America and Americans to live up to these ideals (a position not unlike the one seemingly taken by Bulosan at the end of *America Is in the Heart*

and more recently by F. Sionil Jose in his novel *Viajero*). However, Espiritu depicts him as having shifted toward a significantly new intellectual and political direction during the 1960s, corresponding to his presidency of the University of the Philippines (UP). Within the University itself Romulo determined to set a distinctive nationalist tone, lining hallways with portraits of Philippine heroes and martyrs, costuming the ROTC brigade in native garb, and renaming the administration building Quezon Hall. He also sought links with other Asian universities and strove to open minds and curricula to traditions of Asian thought, for example Gandhi's. In his broader writings and addresses during this time he appears to have been dropping the role of friendly adviser to Americans and instead "charting a path for the emerging Asian nations," steering clear of the interests of both Western and Communist blocs (36).

Nevertheless, Espiritu points out, the path charted for Asian nations was marked by the signposts of liberal democracy; Romulo would or could not surrender that aspect of his expatriate heritage. And despite the changes in tone ushered in at UP, his administration foundered on substantive charges of favoritism paid to American professors on the faculty and to US aid projects in the release of research funds. This sets the stage, in the book, for the treatment of the most infamous stage of Romulo's career, his lengthy service to the Marcos regime. Even here, *Five Faces* is able to show a complexity behind, and to cultivate an understanding of, what is in the minds of many a reprehensible record. For one thing, the stated ideals of the New Society were not so different from the nationalism Romulo had begun to nurture in exile and to promote actively while at the helm of the university. For another, his loyalty to Marcos appears to be of a piece with his earlier attraction to powerful, charismatic men—Quezon, MacArthur—who served as his patrons and enabled him to exercise the mix of intellectual expression and political power-brokering that answered the deepest needs of his genius. Still, Espiritu concedes that loyalty to this last patron led Romulo to abandon liberal principles and a good many other convictions of his earlier career, and he concludes by characterizing him in more structural than substantive terms as a classic man in the middle, a "true 'Filipino-American' ... his national identity shift[ing] between the two poles of the hyphen" (45).

By following the chapter on Carlos Romulo with one on Carlos Bulosan, the creator of this portrait gallery sets into relief the sharpest contrast among these five figures. From following the career of the scion of an elite family whose first stop in the United States was Columbia University, and who rose to the corridors of highest power in Washington, New York, and Manila, we contemplate the struggles of the son of impoverished Ilokano peasants, who came to an America of hard jobs and miserable treatment, and

who remained, as an activist, in the fields and factories of laboring people. Indeed, as Secretary of Information for the exiled Philippine government during the war, Romulo was positioned to act as a patron for the writing talent that distinguished Bulosan from his “Pinoy” compatriots, but he somehow overlooked or snubbed him. Bulosan, for his part, applied directly to the sources Romulo himself cultivated: Manuel Quezon, whose request for a report on conditions of Filipinos on the West Coast became the germ of *America Is in the Heart*, and American publishers and reading audiences. Espiritu’s treatment focuses on an episode that severely strained the second relationship, a charge of plagiarism leveled at the popular Filipino author for a story published in the *New Yorker* in 1944.

The charge, which hung like a weight around Bulosan’s neck (he never attempted to defend himself against it, and the magazine settled the matter out of court), apparently precipitating what he himself described as a “decade of silence and heartbreak” (54), provides the key to Espiritu’s interpretation of this expatriate’s literary output and life. Investigating the charge, he finds evidence not only of plagiarism in the technical sense, but of an “underside” of Filipino folk culture and spirituality beneath Bulosan’s more well known commitments to the values of socialism, democracy, and modernity. Espiritu distinguishes three aspects of this folk connection. One is orality, in the fashioning and transmission of stories. Bulosan’s immersion in this tradition effectively exculpates him, in this reading, from the plagiarism charge. The second is animism, belief in ghosts, supernatural beings, charms, faith healing, and other legacies of pre-Hispanic spirituality. The final is commitment to the ideals of *pasyon*, the complex folk myth first analyzed by Reynaldo Ileto. Espiritu discerns motifs of martyrdom, of suffering and death with the implicit promise of resurrection or redemption, in *America Is in the Heart* and especially in the late novel *Power of the People*, as well as in Bulosan’s characteristic self-presentation. In short, while other commentators have “constructed a Bulosan consonant with the project of modernity, whether defined in terms of progress, ilustrado nationalism, socialism, exile, or mobility” (Espiritu 72), *Five Faces* gives us a Bulosan “pre-modern,” and indelibly Filipino, at the core.

I myself find the Bulosan chapter the least satisfactory in the book. This is not to gainsay the merit and even the need of such a revisionist reading of this important figure. Still less is it to deny that a writer like Bulosan could have rooted himself, imaginatively, even more deeply in his native soil from a situation of expatriation. Romulo’s reflections on the emergence of nationalism and identity in his thinking while in wartime Washington suggest a similar dynamic at work. But the nearly exclusive emphasis placed on this reading undermines Espiritu’s own thesis, which holds out precisely for “exile” (note the

appearance of this term, found in his own title, on the list of “other” readings of Bulosan) as the seminal experience in the lives and expression of these Filipino writers.

Moreover, Bulosan’s experience of America was particularly intense and sustained. Unlike his more well-heeled counterparts, he could not bounce back to the Philippines, even after an interval of years; indeed, he never returned home. Also unlike them, his nose was in it—American reality—on a daily basis, as opposed to being in the books, or in the classroom, or on the lecture or cocktail circuit, as theirs often were. Surely this experience affected him in some deeply inward ways, touching on his world- and self-concepts, the springs of his creativity. At the conference I mentioned at the outset, the Korean writer Richard Kim, who migrated to the US as a young man, reported that his first novel germinated from his contemplation of the possibilities of the English pronoun “I,” counterposed against the collectively oriented Korean concept of *Han*. Yet we get no inkling here of anything like that having happened with Bulosan, even though *America Is in the Heart* is rife with evidence of a highly creative and forward-looking engagement not just with “democracy” (as Espiritu acknowledges), but with the possibilities of what would become known as multiculturalism, incipient in the intellectual and political landscape to which he had transported himself in the 1930s.

In fact, this flaw in the Bulosan chapter reflects something of a general weakness of the book. While Espiritu is subtle and often profound in his reading of the Philippine cultural sources for his writers’ creative performances, his construction of the other side of the “hybridity” tends to be less rich, focusing on abstractions like “liberal democracy” and “modernity,” general social and literary movements like Civil Rights or the New Criticism, or on experiences of racial discrimination. But exceptions to this judgment, deft demonstrations of the role of particular American or Western influences on individual intellectual and creative growth occur often enough—I shall be taking note of certain of them presently—to make it cause for wonder why this dimension of Bulosan’s expatriate achievement was not more systematically explored.

If the portrait presented in the first chapter of Carlos P. Romulo resembles one of high society painter John Singer Sargent’s canvases, and if Espiritu’s Bulosan is a figure from a proletarian mural by Diego Rivera, the book’s next subject, Jose Garcia Villa, exhibits touches of Salvador Dali. For most of the educated public (and most educated visitors) in the Philippines, Villa’s claim to fame rests with his experimental poetry. Who has not read and puzzled over at least one “comma poem”? Espiritu looks at this poetry but keeps an arm’s distance from it. “Some of the poems perhaps give evidence of Villa’s ‘genius,’” he writes, but his significance “probably rests on something other than his

original work" (76). That something else turns out to be a special kind of performativity, involving narcissistic display (he was a man "overtaken by awe of himself" [88]), relentless theatricality ("I'm always acting," he confided to Franz Arcellana [78]), and "outrageous speech acts" (75). The chapter follows the evolution of this public persona from his student days as an *enfant terrible* at UP, defending himself, imperiously, against a charge of writing obscene literature; to New York, where to his native ilustrado style of combative hauteur were added the shock tactics of certain schools of modern artists (this is one of the points on which Espiritu's construction of the expatriate environment offers genuine illumination); and back to Manila, for extended visits later in his career, where his performances increasingly took on the homoerotic tones of the male diva, and where, according to sympathetic observer Nick Joaquin, he was "a Happening all by himself" (91).

At the same time, another, less flamboyant story of Villa's engagement with literature and life unfolds, and in it other expatriate themes emerge. One of these is patronage relations, especially complex in his case because Villa at once sought the support of powerful figures in the Anglo-American literary world in order to advance his career, and sought to preside, from a distance, over Philippine letters, running and judging contests and generally hectoring new talents coming on to the local scene. It appears that he could be as sycophantic in the one context as he was dictatorial in the other, a classic "subaltern" type of personality. In addition, Villa showed himself seriously dedicated to literary art, to the exclusion of almost every other value. He refused to accept any work unless it was directly connected to his poetic vocation, consigning himself to decades of poverty and dependency. In a 1953 poem, he scrambled information about his homeland to make it seem an imaginary place, and then went on to declare exclusive allegiance to the mythical country of "Art" (99). He also consistently refused the call of any kind of activism, save for his cause of art for art's sake.

Yet for all that splendidly declared aesthetic isolation, Espiritu finds in Villa indications of a persistent cultural and to some extent even political nationalism. His continued involvement in the Philippine literary scene was one such indication. Another was the bitter flowering in his personal manner of the seigneurial style he had rejected in his father. Then, too, the ascetic artist possessed a life-long relish for Filipino cuisine, which he indulged as often as possible. Finally, Villa never renounced his Philippine citizenship, despite nearly a lifetime (and a long lifetime, at that) living abroad. While some read cynical motives into that determination, such as his need to avail of sinecures at the Philippine Mission in New York, Villa persisted and eventually his loyalty paid off, with the receipt of National Artist Award in 1973. The citation for the award mentioned only the

artist's international reputation and poetic innovations; but it could, in light of Espiritu's findings, have touched on his supreme creation, his public persona, and on the ties of service and style that bound him to his homeland.

"There is nothing simple about Gonzalez" (102). This statement, which appears a short way into *Five Faces'* next chapter, will surely prove jarring to a number of readers. The use of the last name alone sounds a discordant note: this was a man known to nearly everyone as "N.V.M." And that cheery, avuncular, sandal-shod fellow with an encouraging word for everyone, from the aspiring undergraduate writer to the nervous new exchange professor: not "simple"? That he was complex, perhaps even disingenuous, will likely strike many who knew him as a debatable proposition. It will surely strike that way to those who know him only through the feature article written by an American journalist, in which a playful N.V.M. is quoted to have said, in reply to the question of a *kababayan* from Romblon as to when he had last been back to the province: "I never left home" (102). Yet in the case of this charming denial of the significance of his expatriate experience, as well as in other matters pertaining to his life and work, Espiritu is able to show that there was, indeed, nothing simple about Gonzalez.

That he did make a determined effort, in imagination, to stay rooted in Romblon, in Mindoro, in the Philippines, cannot be doubted. Like other writers who began their careers in the Commonwealth period, Gonzalez did not initially question the use of English as a literary medium or the relevance of Anglo-American forms and models. However, developments relating to the Second World War (which, unlike the other four figures under study, he experienced in the Philippines), including the initial American military defeats, Japanese encouragement of Tagalog, and the rise of a nationalist school of thought stressing the importance of a pre-Hispanic Philippine culture, turned Gonzalez toward a decidedly nativist bent.

This predilection was only deepened—seemingly paradoxically, but by a process Espiritu shows in other cases, as we have seen—during the period of his first expatriation, beginning in 1949. Doing literary studies in the US, Gonzalez fell under the influence of a number of the "Southern Agrarians," academic New Critics who happened also to espouse a brand of militant, anti-modern regionalism that he found well matched to his provincial background. At the same time, he became exposed to the Myth Criticism of Northrop Frye and others, which, however well or poorly, ultimately squared with the text-focused New Criticism, alerted Gonzalez to the wealth of imaginative materials lying in the oral traditions and folk culture of the *kaingin* about whom he had already begun to write. The fruit of this intellectual development appears in the 1957 novel, *The Bamboo Dancers*.

The novel first of all presents the America of protagonist Ernie Rama's expatriation in far more negative terms than found in works by Romulo, Bulosan, and Villa, as a place of "alienation, ghostliness, and disembodied existence" (116). It suggests that "return to one's native land," and reintegration with its rituals and myths, "is crucial to moral and cultural regeneration" (118).

But while he was staking down this commitment to native ground in his fiction, in his life a different—and not so simple—story was taking shape. For unlike Ernie Rama, Gonzalez did not come home to stay. Moved by the "urgings of literary ambition" (104), and also by a desire for wages that could support his son's education (in this regard the California State University system proved a more generous patron than the UP salary scale), and then by the Marcos Administration's declaration of Martial Law, he embarked on an extended period of period of expatriation. True enough, all during this time he retained his citizenship, focused his writing on the Philippines, and refused identification as a "Fil-American" much less as "Asian American" writer (134). Yet when at last the Marcos era ended, Gonzalez did not abandon his expatriate ways, but rather became what Espiritu terms a "transpacific commuter" (135), even extending his residence and travel well beyond the United States. In the last decade of his life he showed some inclination to align his writing interests more closely with this aspect of his experience, exploring in new fiction such subjects as intercultural encounters in Europe.

From this account of Gonzalez's career, Espiritu extrapolates the following conclusion: "Ironically, it may be the complexity of [his] transpacific life and his wide-ranging intellectual curiosity and commitment ... that prove to have a more lasting impact than Gonzalez the master artist and proponent of a nativist poetics" (138). Whether readers in the Philippines will accept that pronouncement is an open question. Perhaps this is one point on which a "Fil-Am" perspective will differ from one of "Filipinos in the Philippines." But even those who basked directly in the glow of his sunny presence will need to acknowledge, in the wake of this new book, that little was simple about their beloved N.V.M.

Unlike Gonzalez, Bienvenido Santos did not attempt to deny the reality or the impact of his expatriate experience. He "came to recognize how important his American life was to him" (178) and allowed it to inform his fiction. What's more, he accepted the designations "Filipino American" and even "Asian American," and, alone among the five "faces," he became an American citizen. But if he did not negate it, as Gonzalez tried to do, neither did expatriation for Santos constitute a source of "affirmation," as it had for Romulo. Instead it provoked the feeling (whose name forms one half of the chapter title)

of “shame,” because it resulted from a series of decisions to go to or stay in (or become a citizen of) the United States—decisions not too differently motivated than his friend N.V.M.’s—that repeatedly left him feeling he had betrayed his primary loyalty to the Philippine homeland.

That loyalty (“fidelity,” the other half of the chapter title) Santos felt keenly, and his organic ties to the culture of origin manifested themselves in a number of specific ways. One of these, already touched on at the outset, was the traditional orality that formed one base for his performativity. Another consisted in his animistic beliefs. Indeed, Santos’s devotion to the Virgin of Antipolo, complete with apparently miraculous physical conditions and cures, gives Espiritu a chance to show how he will navigate a potential cultural chasm in his own subject matter, and he handles the entire matter straightforwardly, taking Santos’s accounts of this part of his life at face value. Third, this product of the barrio and Tondo, Manila, held throughout his life and carried into much of his fiction decidedly patriarchal views on gender and family, although his own selection of a life partner contradicted that ideology. Finally, Santos nourished visceral feelings of love for his country, which he tended to express most eloquently in moments when he was experiencing the conflict of having chosen to be away from it.

At the same time, he did not allow this regret to engulf his experience of America. Whether with his family or alone, Santos bounced around considerably in the States and kept his eyes and ears open. He learned enough about his adopted country to create credible American characters in his novels. In one of these, the World War II drama *The Volcano*, both his knowledge of Americans and his “fidelity” to the Philippines come into play. He captures the liberal idealism of the missionary family, the Hunters, and the process of their literal and figurative “browning,” as they flee with the residents of a Bicolano village from Japanese invaders. But he also captures the limit of their idealism and of their integration into Filipino society, when the Hunters subvert on racial grounds the promised marriage of their daughter to Badong, a loyal helper who has acted heroically to save their lives during the crisis. In addition, Santos pays full attention to the very different cultural expectations and economic and political interests of the Filipino villagers, who eventually drive the American family out from among them, in a rising tide of postwar nationalist feeling.

The novel, thus analyzed, constitutes Espiritu’s paramount example of the power of the expatriate perspective: a “cultural hybridity” capable of discerning both national realities, and the relationship between them, with fresh vision. At the same time, his larger analysis of *Bienvenido Santos* shows at what cost such insight can come: the struggle and

pathos, and “shame,” of creating a position at once of intellectual freedom and emotional strain, of occupying the strategically central but doubly marginalized territory of the expatriate.

In closing, let me offer, first of all, some brief further reservations about the book’s overall treatment, and then a final word of assessment. The reservations, curiously, are all keyed to the title, *Five Faces of Exile: The Nation and Filipino American Intellectuals*. Nearly every substantive term in this formulation, with the exception of “faces” — a good indication of the portrait-like quality of the individual studies — raises questions.

Take “intellectuals,” for example. With the exception of Romulo, who clearly fits one common definition of an intellectual as a thinker whose concerns range over a variety of fields and issues, and who operates to some extent in a public and even political sphere, are not the figures under scrutiny here, better thought of as *writers* first and foremost, practitioners of one or another genre of literary craft (or at most, in the case of Villa and Gonzalez, literary theory)? But perhaps Espiritu owed this headlining of the i-word to his discipline, which is unmistakably intellectual history.

Another difficulty crops up with “Filipino American,” when only one of the book’s subjects took on US citizenship and consciously accepted that identity, and at least two of them pointedly insisted on being known as “Filipino” writers. Espiritu himself undercuts the applicability of the designation at times, referring for example to “Filipino expatriate intellectuals” as important presences in “Filipino American communities in various parts of the United States” (191). However, bigger fish are frying here. In a lengthy footnote, Espiritu acknowledges this difficulty and makes it clear that he means to appropriate the term to the service of his thesis. He proposes using it in an expansive sense, to indicate experience acquired and perspective developed by Filipinos as a result of their time, short or long, intermittent or permanent, in America. Moreover, as we shall see in a moment, he goes on to question the meaning and efficacy of the term in any sense.

Two other words from the title I want to dwell on more carefully, because I believe they signal unresolved issues of audience and of intellectual and political intent in the book. The first of these is “exile.” Espiritu reports at one point a complaint by N.V.M. Gonzalez to the effect that his friend Ben Santos “made too much of the word ‘exile,’ which did not apply to life of Filipino intellectuals like him” (136). I think the same complaint can be brought against Espiritu himself, for showcasing in his title a term that connotes, if

it does not denote, a condition of *forced* absence from one's homeland. His subjects were technically exiles only during the Second World War and, in the case of Santos (and at a stretch Gonzalez, who did in another context actually apply the term to himself) during the Martial Law period. Indeed, for the most part in the book, "expatriation" and sometimes "intellectual travel and expatriation" (143) are the operative terms. When looking up "exile" in the index, one finds only the note, "*see* expatriation."

Why then does the shorter term get the place of honor? Could it have been the publisher's call? After all, "exile" is shorter, punchier, politically sexier—in other words, better suited to sell books, at least in Stanford University Press' area of distribution—than the more cumbersome and affectively neutral "expatriation." However, unless I miss my bet, this marketing strategy would be a less effective one here in the Philippines—where in any case Stanford does not have an outlet or, so far as I am aware, a co-publishing agreement. Preliminary conversations around this topic with local interlocutors have flared into not a little of Gonzalez's impatience with the abrogation of the exile label by writers and others who have the resources or reputations to avail themselves of lengthy sojourns abroad. This suggests that, of the logically probable audiences for *Five Faces*, American academics, Filipino Americans, and Filipinos, the term exile is targeted, whether by publisher or author, at the first two rather than the third.

This calculus is reversed, or at any rate shifted, in the case of the final element of the title I want to discuss. "The Nation" might seem a puzzling choice in a sequence of terms that includes "Filipino American." I could assume here the naivety of an American reader and ask "Which nation?" But that would be disingenuous. For I know full well that "the nation"—the Philippine nation—is the bass note in the discourse of a good many Filipino Americans and a great many Filipinos. The use of this resonant term in the title constitutes the surest sign that the author of this book, if not the publisher, intends to reach a homeland audience.

And yet the use of the term is also deeply problematic, in view of Espiritu's findings and the conceptual framework he wants to establish. For recall that he claims to have created through his analysis of the experience of these five Filipino expatriates grounds for a "new discursive space ... [for] *transnational* Asian American intellectual studies" (188 emphasis added). Indeed, at another point in his concluding chapter Espiritu makes mention of comprehending not only "transnational" but "subnational" processes that would seem to "defy" a nation-centered approach (188). And in an earlier note he seems to go further than that, challenging the understanding of either "the Philippines," "Filipino America," or "America" as "monolithic, undifferentiated, and unchanging" entities (182-

83). He stresses the importance instead of appreciating the reality of “regional, class, ethnic, linguistic ... religious,” and historical dimensions of culture and identity (182). In other words, Espiritu appears to arrive at a point of deconstructing “the nation” as an analytical concept, that in another context Vicente Rafael approaches, on grounds of political suspicion (xiv, 2, 9-13).

Now it is also true that both writers stop short of this end, Espiritu writing, “the nation need not be eradicated” (192), and pointing out that the Philippine nation constituted a critical reference point in the lives and writings of all his expatriates. No doubt this is so. Yet it does not seem right to privilege this reference point to the exclusion of the other “themes” in the experience of these figures. And it is especially wrong to refuse a place in the title, at least alongside “the nation” or “national,” to the transnational perspective the book works so hard and succeeds so well in establishing, except in the case of Bulosan, for its individual subjects and its subject as a whole.

This is a strict accounting of the problematics involved in Espiritu’s choice of “the nation” for his title, or subtitle, more strictly speaking. A more appreciative understanding is also possible, and I will conclude with it. For the troubles with the term stem in part from the lengths to which the book extends its analysis, to the transnational, first of all, and then to the destabilizing particulars of the “subnational” (which as it happens are not much dealt with in the biographical chapters, but are mentioned in the conclusion). In fact, Espiritu anticipates this outcome, stating in his introduction, “Filipino American intellectual experiences involve complex negotiations of identity, politics, and culture that subvert the very categories that have been hitherto used to study them” (7). This happens with “the nation,” and it happens with “Filipino American.” The book’s discussion of the latter term concludes with a resolve pretty much to jettison it: “the dynamism of Philippine and Filipino American life in the United States makes the attempt to limit Filipino self-naming an impossible task, if not something undesirable” (183). Yet when every intellectual construct has been analytically sliced thin, and then run through the grinder of dense human lives and history, an author still needs a few categories to serve for a title. Perhaps the final compliment to pay Augusto Espiritu’s *Five Faces of Exile* is to acknowledge that the complexity which is its outstanding virtue appears too great to be adequately comprehended in its title.

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