Abstract
The exilic condition extends not only to the Filipino who has chosen to study or live abroad, or is forced to leave the Philippines, but also the Filipino who, though he resides and works in his own country, feels himself in a state of rootless suspension brought about by the circumstances of history and colonization. In this light, all Filipinos—belonging to one or the other geographic, economic, tribal or social group—could be considered exiles, and this could be reflected in our literature. Dolores Feria states: “our literature has always been a consequence of exile.” A Filipino writer’s works could be expressions, possibly even extensions, of his own condition of exile, such that his characters portray, enact, and/or embody it. In specific stories by Jose Y. Dalisay, Jr., his intellectual, educated, middle class characters experience a particular kind of exile brought about by several factors from schooling and upbringing to culture, lifestyle, and choice of language. In his first novel, Killing Time in a Warm Place, and in his short stories “The First of Our Dead,” “Amnesty,” “Storyline,” and “We Global Men,” one could read distinct manifestations of exile and exertions to cope and to come to terms with this uneasy, irresolvable condition.

Keywords
deterritorialization, home, intellectual exile, postcolonial

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“Home with all its disquiets was wherever I was writing.” - Dalisay

Jose Y. Dalisay, Jr. writes in the preface of his book Sarcophagus and Other Stories that “it isn’t so much ‘style’ one chases after [in one’s stories], but a sense of place, or, more acutely, a sense of home: that point in the story where author and sympathetic reader recognize, with astonishment and pain, a sudden familiarity” (xi). This sense of place, this appreciation for home, this sudden pang of both familiarity and pain, may be most felt and acknowledged when one is in exile—a condition which may afflict writer, reader, and no doubt many of the characters that a writer in exile portrays. Yet what precisely is this
condition of exile? Who, particularly, suffers from such a condition?

Dolores Stephens Feria believes that the expatriate way is only one form that exile takes,¹ and that exile may also mean “escape to the more seminal intellectual centers of Madrid, Paris, Hong Kong or New York”; imprisonment (implying Dapitan or Muntinlupa); or exile into the past. One need not even leave the Philippines to experience exile. As a result of one or other of these forms of exile, a person “finds [himself or herself] suspended between two orders—natural and historic. That [he or she] can neither accept the one nor generate the other imposes a chronic state of psychic exile” (409). Psychic exile must therefore involve exile from one’s own (historical) past, which is distinct from feelings of nostalgia and an escape or withdrawal into the past.

Though Feria studies the condition of exile in the Filipino writer, most specifically in Carlos Bulosan and Nick Joaquin—all the while she mentions other writers and includes all—she also suggests that Filipino writers’ works are expressions, possibly even extensions, of their condition of exile, such that their characters portray, enact, and/or embody the writers’ particular exilic condition. Works by writers in exile are, of course, not to be confused with their theme, but may be seen as reflections of their state of mind specifically produced by colonization. Feria claims that “our literature has always been a consequence of exile.” She distinguishes between the Western, philosophic, “universal” condition of alienation, and the Filipinos’ condition of exile that “implies a historic superstructure that is uniquely Philippine, an impetus for flight and revolt which can only occur in a society in which the basic cultural components have been periodically altered by brute force” (409).

Most—if not all—Filipinos share at least the same history under colonial rule, and feel the same postcolonial confusion over a “national identity.” As Luis H. Francia states, “the question of cultural identity is a crucial one, particularly since our sense of a collective self tends to be fragmented” (xiv). He defines the modern Filipino to be “Malayan, Chinese, Indian, Hispanic, and American—somewhat like a Cubist painting with blurry lines,” so that there is a hodgepodge quality to Philippine society. To some extent, one might say that all Filipinos are in exile even in their own country: to determine what is foreign and what is indigenous in the Philippines is tricky and ultimately impossible (xiii). But to leave it at that would be to rely on an overgeneralization. Francia writes that “the most enduring legacy of the Spaniard was his religion, that of the Yankee was his language” (xi); in more colorful terms, “four hundred years in a convent and fifty in Hollywood” (xiv). This legacy, particularly that of language, concerns only a percentage of the population, those who have had the privilege of schooling.
In Kalutang: A Filipino in the World, NVM Gonzalez says that schooling allows for some kind of economic and social mobility, though as both he and Francia argue, this ultimately proves impossible for most because of Philippine feudal traditions, the Filipinos’ dependence on clan and blood ties (Gonzalez 28, Francia x-xi). Gonzalez further divides the Philippines into at least three countries, implying that the possibility of economic and social mobility also has something to do with geographical location—whether one comes from the City (Manila), the Barrio, or the Mountain (29). If one went by province, dialect, or tribe, one would have to add a hundred and more divisions. This clearly illustrates the hodgepodge quality of Philippine society.

To limit my reading of the exilic condition in Jose Y. Dalisay’s fiction, I have chosen stories that feature protagonists from a particular class. Though not all of them are writers, most, if not all, could be considered intellectuals, educated, and part of the middle class. This is not to suggest that those who are uneducated and come from the lower class do not themselves experience a sense of exile, but that intellectuals, as both Feria and Francia imply, experience a particular kind of exile brought about by several factors from schooling and upbringing to culture, lifestyle, and choice of language. On the one hand, as Edward Said says, intellectual exiles are bound to their place of birth and origin, their nationality, their profession; but on the other, they find themselves acquiring new allegiances “by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort, and willed deliberation” (The World 24-5).

I would like to begin my analysis with what I like to call the “Noel Stories,” starting with Dalisay’s novel Killing Time in a Warm Place (1992) which contains Noel Bulaong’s memories from age ten to his present age of thirty-five. At different times, he is a Mass Communications major, a propagandist, a revolutionary, a prison inmate, a journalist, a special assistant to a Deputy Minister of government, a graduate from a business college, a Master of Arts in film, and a movie critic. Then I continue with “The First of Our Dead” in Dalisay’s first collection of short fiction, Oldtimer and Other Stories (1984), which could very well be a conscious or unconscious precursor of the novel because it features a young revolutionary student named Noel. The protagonist in “Amnesty” from his second collection of short fiction, Sarcophagus and Other Stories (1992), could also count as a parallel—if older—Noel, what with the guilt he feels when he bumps into an old comrade from his university and revolutionary past. Other than the Noel Stories, there is “Storyline” from the same collection where Dalisay portrays a jaded Filipino screenwriter in the US arguing about a particular issue—the American presence and the US military bases—with a sympathetic American producer of documentaries who may never totally understand him.
Finally, I will end with “We Global Men” from *Penmanship and Other Stories* (1995), which is about a “Filipino in Scotland—neither waiter nor menial hand—[who] smugly reflects on the comforts of his upper-middle-class existence” (Remoto 556), and who prides himself on his well-received speeches in English.

Though Oscar Campomanes argues for a separate “literature of exile and emergence” for the expatriate Filipino writers in English, he agrees with Sam Solberg’s observation that “Filipino-American writing nurtured on American shores … is inextricably mixed with indigenous writing in English” (170). Indeed, the “motifs of departure, nostalgia, incompletion, rootlessness, leave-taking, and dispossession” can also be found in Philippine Literature in English (161). Feria joins fictionists and poets, both expatriate and Philippines-based, in one list: Nick Joaquin, Manuel Arguilla, Amado Hernandez, Ester Vallado Daroy, Ricaredo Demetillo, Bienvenido Santos, Alejandro Hufana, Jose Lansang, Jr., Virginia Moreno, and NVM Gonzalez (416). Dalisay could very well fit into this list, therefore I will look for “expressions of exile” and “gestures of return” in his work. How is the exilic condition manifested in Dalisay’s fiction? How do his characters cope with such a condition? In Campomanes’s terms, “How do they characteristically respond to, or even embody, the experience of exile and indeterminacy and the question of redemptive return?” (165).

It seems that Noel Bulaong in *Killing Time in a Warm Place* could be said to represent all forms of the condition of exile as defined by Dolores Feria. At the beginning of the novel, we know that he has gone the expatriate way, having lived and worked in the US through four years, five winters. We later find out that this is because he has escaped to an intellectual center, an American school in Elmyra, which has “an English Department with a soft spot for exotic writers in need of graduate assistantships” (*Killing Time* 120). He has been imprisoned in Camp Sunflower for at least seven months. He remembers himself in the past as a boy of ten, a good and obedient son to, and hero-worshipper of, at least two fathers (his Tatay and Marcos). The boy is completely different from the man he has turned out to be; that part of him, the obedient son, is an exile in the past. And finally, in the novel’s present time, he is in a state of suspension—in a physical sense because he is mid-air, on a plane above the Pacific, and in a psychological sense because he is on his way back to the Philippines, not knowing if it is for good or not, not really knowing which country to call home (clearly a case of psychic exile). This state of suspension, or of being nowhere, echoes many instances in his life:

(1) As a young boy, Noel witnesses his father—a well-respected, venerable figure
in their hometown of Kangleong—taking part in Ferdinand Marcos’s victory campaign. The boy’s mother puffs up with importance: “Without [your father] Marcos wouldn’t be here” (21). But the part Noel’s father plays is a completely trivial one; he stands at the corner of the stage, and when the sound system fails, he sees to it as an errand boy ushering in the technician. Noel shows little pride in his father here; when he loses track of his father, he easily shifts attention and loyalty to the bigger father, Marcos, “father to all of us” (24). Noel witnesses the same disparity when they move to the city: the townsfolk seek his father out for guidance and favors, but in truth he is simply a clerk, an aide, a logistics man. As a result, Noel and his family are in a neither-here-nor-there situation: his father is a big fish in a small pond, or small fry in a big sea. Either way, this isolates them from people.

(2) As a student, Noel breaks away from family and lives in the HQ, an hour away from home. He works for “the Struggle,” for a particular group in the Struggle called “the Vanguards.” Noel, speaking for the group, claims that in doing their civic duties they “saw the future and could locate [themselves] in it” (31), yet his position in this group is secondary. While Estoy, Benny, and Laurie work in the core missions of their revolutionary life—education, organization, finance—Noel claims to perform “auxiliary services at Propaganda” (29). This is the same position that Noel, the protagonist in the short story “The First of Our Dead,” occupies. Soon, Noel Bulaong also drops out of the university.

(3) At the Tambakan, where he hides out with Jong for a spell because the HQ is no longer safe, he is quite unwelcome, an outsider, unless he brings food. It is a nowhere town, “a village [that] survived on the periphery, itself peopled by refuse: ex-farmers, ex-convicts, retirees, refugees, six-fingered orphans, junkies” (61).

(4) At Camp Sunflower, he becomes quite faceless and positionless, living in a prison camp that is almost a mirror image of the barracks where the quite faceless soldiers dwell. Here he prays for a miracle in the morning, when his name might be singled out from the roster as in a lottery, and he is set free. As Campomanes suggests, waiting for a miracle is one way an exile copes (185-6).

(5) After seven months, Noel is indeed released and rehabilitated in the DM’s staff. But his work as Special Assistant to the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Public
Welfare is, one could say, in that state of indeterminacy which Campomanes, when he speaks of exile, defines as a “suspension in eternal time and alien place” (172). Noel lives alone, somewhat estranged from his father, whom he holds at a polite distance. As assistant, however, he comes closest to being like his father, a government clerk. He finds that he could sell his word, “my words,” he says, “cheap as they were but many, exhausted only by my need of sleep” (Killing Time 114). He writes up a five-page masterpiece, a fabricated biography of the Governor Segismundo Fortuno, who doesn’t deserve a Public Service Award at all. It does not make any difference in the end, as the Governor is murdered within the week.

(6) Noel leaves for graduate school and exiles himself in America. He likes it there, he says, but he has to “trod carefully on the layered ground [in autumn], as though disturbing it would hurtle [him] back in a swirl of pretty leaves to prison camp” (38). Again he finds himself in an indeterminate time and place, a tenuous one at that, which constantly keeps him unsure of his footing.

In the scheme of the novel, we could say that Marcos’ reign, specifically his declaration of Martial Law, is yet another “brute force” that has altered the Filipino’s already-altered cultural composition, and that has sent Noel and many other Filipinos into a condition of exile. Families are broken up, sons are isolated from their fathers (Estoy from his colonel father in the Constabulary, Noel from his clerk father in the Highways Ministry); students are cut off from their universities (Nina, Noel as the university later on becomes an “alien zone” to him while he works for the DM); and trusts are broken (an NPA husband has to execute his own wife, Benny is released from prison camp only to be murdered by his own comrades). Noel copes by continually changing professions, loyalties, identities. He perhaps represents the many choices people took during Martial Law: some became revolutionaries, others government workers, and yet others went abroad. These choices could be seen as the many ways in which people have tried to come to terms with their exilic condition. In Noel, we see all choices covered, all routes tried and given up.

Gerald Burns points out that as a hired pen in a pro-Marcos or pro-regime office, Noel may very well be called a collaborator, but he may not be called a stooge. In the second phase of Martial Law Fiction, the “ironic” or “retrospective” phase (as Burns calls it), all have a choice, and all “elect to collaborate with the regime” (201). This does not mean that they are brainwashed, only that “there seems rather little left about which to have illusions” (Irving Howe qtd. in Burns 201). In prison, Noel has lost a sense of purpose.
He says, “Prison was frightening, but freedom even more so. Prison could be a warm and restful place, and all you had to do in it was to kill some time” (Killing Time 104). When one says he is “killing time,” one is just wasting it with any kind of activity, it does not matter what. All the routes Noel tries, and the choices of those around him, eventually lead to disillusionment and to “killing time.”

As a prisoner, Noel also observes that the soldier, private Diego Soria, is killing time in his own way, being lucky at camp to be away from jungle, malaria, and bloodshed. But Soria also suffers from his own condition of exile. A conscript from a town far up north, he finds “soldiering … better than husking coconuts” (100). In the jeep, he sits isolated even if Noel is beside him: he keeps his eyes on the floor and people look at him curiously; when he looks up, they look away as if they don’t see him. When Noel is released, Noel makes a choice of exile—from the Struggle and from his past and old self. Being a special assistant to the DM has made him a turncoat as much as a survivor, and Laurie says he doesn’t count as one of the comrades anymore. The university too has become an alien zone which he cannot stand because it reminds him of a past he has betrayed. His owning a right-hand drive Corolla becomes symbolic, as he is “sitting on the wrong side of everything” (109), the very posture of “sitting” implying a kind of passivity. Both he and Laurie feel dislocated, they both “kill time” in Noel’s apartment as “there [is] nowhere else to go, nothing else to do in that void of a dry and numbing afternoon” (116). His exilic condition is further emphasized by his choice of English; Jong, on his midnight visit, urges him to go back to his old friends, his comrades, telling him that “all the words in the English language won’t save you where you are” (121).

His meetings with Laurie, Benny’s re-appearance and death, and Jong’s midnight visit, spur him ever deeper into the condition of exile. He becomes an expatriate where he finds his “red” not the same “red” that Jenny, his American girlfriend, means. He is separated even from his own name which is mispronounced, misread, misheard, and misspoken, by the Americans around him; but as outsider he is able to look back in as he attempts to find meaning and absolution. Perhaps, he says, it is in the telling where he will find it, in “the telling of the sin” (128). As Campomanes explains, there are really only two choices for the Filipino in exile: “Either one is disabled and ‘waits for miracles to happen’ … or one is enabled, moving on … to tell the story (history) … through the language and experience of one’s subjection” (185-6).

To whom does Noel Bulaong tell the story, to whom does he confess? Which father does he address in the last line of the novel, “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned” (Killing Time 128)? Neferti Tadiar enumerates at least three fathers whom Noel has loved and
betrayed: his biological father, Marcos, and Marx, “the father of his defiant generation.” She suggests that God might be a fourth (468). Also, it cannot be ignored that on board the plane, in the novel’s present time, Noel speaks to an American, one who might represent a fifth, though Noel has not (yet?) betrayed America. He seems to anticipate something of the sort, however, when he questions himself, “What next would I betray?” (*Killing Time* 126). On board the plane, he thinks about how he must “gather up [his] own story, recover [his] name, deny autumns and winters, take snapshots of apples and goldenrods and print them on wet paper into mangoes and *talahib* grass” (119).

To me this shows the extremity of Noel’s exile: he presents a picture of himself as a completely prodigal son. It might be true that “Noel goes from working for the national bourgeoisie to working for an international bourgeoisie” (Tadiar 471), but this does not mean he is bourgeois himself. One could just as much say that he has fled the Dictator only to find himself in the clutches of an Imperial Master. Tadiar reads his graduate schooling in America to mean “the completion of his assimilation into power, the fulfillment of his desire for full assimilation into the privileged global classes” (471), but I can argue that this is hardly the case. Elmyra is a little town in the Mid-west, perhaps the First World counterpart of the nowhere town that is Kangleong; it certainly is not San Francisco, Chicago, or New York. He writes for an insignificant paper called the *Elmyra Cine Guide*, not *The New Yorker*. And though he likes it in Elmyra, he is not completely welcome or at home there; the possibility of racial slurs abound, and “after all this time I still cringe in the face of accusations, however clumsily delivered, and I’ve learned to walk fast” (120).

Caren Kaplan’s approach to the “Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse” might be more helpful here. She writes that “men and women who move between the cultures, languages, and the various configurations of power and meaning in complex colonial situations possess what Chela Sandoval calls ‘oppositional consciousness,’ the ability to read and write culture on multiple levels” (187). In other words, and in Bell Hooks’ terms, Noel is able to see from the outside in as well as from the inside out; he can focus on and understand both the center and the margin (187). This all has to do with “positionality” (189). Noel has moved from the Barrio to the City, from the City to the World, and he has moved up the ranks from a Bachelor of Arts to a Master of Arts. He is highly educated, and can be considered middle class, which makes him privileged from the point of view of his countrymen, but which doesn’t remove him from his second- or third-class citizenship in America, or absolve him of his past betrayals and sins.

Finally, the fact that Noel speaks to an American rather than to a fellow Filipino emphasizes his isolation. True, as Tadiar points out, he has to make substitutions in the
language to make himself understood—rain for snow, coconuts for raspberries, humidity for temperate climes—but this does not necessarily involve the act of privileging one over the other “in the completion of one’s identification with the Other [the American] to whom one’s labor and self belong” (Tadiar 471). As Kaplan says, dualities and dialectical oppositions—for or against America; subservient to or subversive against America—may no longer prove adequate in “explaining … differences and … respective positions in full complexity” (189). It is also quite possible that as a “deterritorialized” nowhere man, Noel gains from speaking to an American rather than to a Filipino. As he is forced to choose his words carefully so as to be understood by the outsider, as he is forced to take another look from the outside in, he clarifies his culture, his country, his own self, not only to the listener, but to himself.

In the end, at any rate, Noel may have forgotten whom he is speaking to, as he wonders whether he will ever go back to America and see snowfall again. Why else would he describe snow in such great detail (“pretty, flat and crisp with creamy edges” [Killing Time 127]) to a person who has lived with it in his country all his life? He forgets the present as he looks forward to going home to Kangleong to bury his own flesh, his father. There are things that he would like to bury, perhaps, with his father, for he has neither found himself—nor religion—but he considers quoting from a psalm: “Let my tongue be silenced, if ever I forget” (128). Why cannot it then be his father—his own flesh and blood—whom he ends up addressing, first and foremost? He may not have come full circle, he may yet do another metaphorical orbit around the globe in search of an identity as much as to “do penance and gain virtue in due time” (126), but why should we expect otherwise? The exilic condition continues, the motifs of departure, rootlessness, and incompletion remain. To Noel, at least, “historic amnesia”—which in Campomanes means the absence of the Philippines in American history, or the Filipino’s forgetfulness of his own history (163-4)—is not an option, and he urges himself “to wake up before [he loses] everything to this silly romance with temperate hazes” (Killing Time 119), and guards himself against forgetting in the telling of the sin. If anything else, the guilt will remind him:

When they let me out of prison, I knew I didn’t want to die. It was easier to believe that I had been wrong, been forgivably juvenile, than that I had been right and so would have to persist, be a hero beyond my years, my class, my feeble wish for a feeble old age, weeping in front of a VCR over a period film of the seventies. If not now, when? Some other time. If we do not act, who will? Some others will. Others knew more, others were stronger, others had firm, blood-hallowed reasons to stalk
the enemy. So let them. This was my excuse: I was nobody. I was no body; I would not join the glorious carnage, the honored train of coffins that lit up chapels and engaged pallbearers everywhere, from Belfast to Beirut to Soweto to Buenos Aires to Diliman, trailing flowers, mothers, fiancées, diplomas, unfinished novels, garlic sizzling in the pan, hairbrushes, pinpricks, the plangent rains of August. If others fought, it was because they, too, refused to die, or at least live in ways that forced them not to be themselves; but I had no such qualms; I could be, would be, someone else, but live; I could live with my guilt, that I could, and leave goodness and its pains to others. Not that I wished to add myself to the causes of their suffering—I knew I would—but I could not relieve them, and so I chose the safe, well-trodden path of forgetfulness and minor griefs (to be spat upon, to be oneself, forgotten; no matter). (114)

Noel expresses in this passage not only his own exilic condition, but a majority’s that fought no cause during that era and who continue to do nothing in the present time, out of a sense of hopelessness. Everyone is forced to be someone else in the postcolonial/neocolonial situation: forced to accept, compromise, speak another language, and forge an identity that can survive, and even enjoy, countless paradoxes and discrepancies. Noel finds no remedy for the situation, except perhaps to struggle against forgetfulness in the end, albeit he has chosen the safe path. Perhaps writing/speaking, for him, becomes his way of going home.

This passage reflects, too, the theme or motif of guilt that runs through the two other Noel stories. In “The First of Our Dead,” Noel (Noel Bulaong’s namesake who is an AB English major rather than a Mass Communications major) defends himself before an imaginary tribunal for not feeling anything for a dead boy in their camp: “I didn’t know Delfin, and … millions of Chinese and Biafrans and Indians had died and continued to die wretched deaths everyday without my being morally bound to feel anything for each of them” (56). Like Noel Bulaong after prison, he refuses to join in the “glorious carnage, the honored train of coffins.” Noel admits himself to be a shallow, selfish comrade to Delfin, but he finds security and justification in the fact that he has never yet known death, grief, and loss. While Noel Bulaong’s excuse is his being a nobody, Noel’s is his innocence and happiness. Both admit to a fear and horror of death, and both react to this fear by playing safe. Noel’s position in HQ reveals how he distances himself from danger even as he does revolutionary work. Like Noel Bulaong, he does “auxiliary services” at propaganda and lives in HQ. Delfin’s political officer, Noel’s friend and comrade, Horace, considers Noel
an “HQ domestic, a chairbound softy” rather than a man of action (52). Even the way Noel sees his role as “jester in a court of compulsively severe Arthurian knights and ladies” (61) keeps him distant, distinct, different, and safe.

The oppositions in “The First of Our Dead” are clearly defined. Though the group in HQ decide they have to work with the police to find Delfin’s murderer, they do not trust the police, knowing that the police would rather see them all dead. Even as the group plans to join Delfin’s parents, to stage a protest rally at the boy’s funeral, they are aware of how they might be unwelcome and perceived as a threat to the “normalcy” of Delfin’s family. Finally, even as the group temporarily relieves Horace of his organizational duties as political officer in a particularly elitist high school, Noel foresees that this school will not understand Horace’s behavior, will interpret his, Delfin’s, and other students’ “deviance” as a sign of imperfection in their regulations and curriculum rather than as a symptom of a rotten government. The institutions of police, school, and family are the enemy, or at least are no help to their group’s many causes.

Taking our cue from Kaplan’s view on positionality, we find the story even more complex. At the beginning of the story, Noel’s place in the HQ’s scheme of things is clear. He stays home to write the propaganda. When he goes to join Horace and his group of protesters, it is clear that Noel is the outsider. Even Itas whose duty is also propaganda seems more a part of Horace’s group, thus isolating Noel further with her blank look or her frown of disapproval. Noel’s view of his own group as consisting of three boys and two girls, rather than “men” and “women,” reveals his ambivalent attitude towards their politics. It is as if he considers them, himself included, to be “playing” rather than “fighting” for true causes in the real world. Perhaps Delfin’s death by the blast of a homemade bomb rather than a real, military-issued one, doesn’t help any. Noel claims he is happy in HQ, he wakes up happy, until he is “reminded of [their] revolutionary mission in the unhappy world” (62). This reminder makes him uncertain. Noel could be “killing time” until he is able to make a real commitment to something.

Horace, in spite of their friendship, serves as Noel’s foil. Noel relates: “There were a dozen things we disagreed violently on, despite our common belief that society was sick and had to be shook up. The existence of God, the nature of our ‘cultural revolution,’ the role of the intellectual, my course (AB English), the role of women, marriage, the afterlife” (52). In the end, however, Horace’s dedication and fervor do not save him from the same isolation that Noel, with his lack of dedication, feels. When Horace is relieved from his organizational responsibilities, he gets “off his high horse and [walks] by his lonesome” (59). When Noel attempts to comfort him, Noel perceives his own words as “platitudes
... rocks to the pebbles of Demosthenes” (61). The words feel thick in his mouth, but he continues to speak of the afterlife, of heaven and hell, of dying in a state of grace. He finds later on that Horace has fallen asleep before the end of his speech, but Noel pinpoints what is important in everything he has said: “the option to believe” (62).

This option calls to mind what Burns calls “choice” in the “introspective” phase of Martial Law Fiction, but also a distrust/disillusionment/disbelief/dissatisfaction in the choice one makes (Burns 201). There is not necessarily a “better” choice or a real one, in which case any choice amounts to the same undecided exilic condition and there is no choice after all. In Noel’s case, he even runs out of things to believe in. In his Christian beliefs and his disagreements with Horace, Noel proves himself not a real revolutionary with a corresponding or contradictory set of beliefs; and after his little speech on faith, which seems to him “transparently anchorless and sophomoric” (62), he is not quite sure if he believes in the afterlife either. Noel is changed—whether he likes it or not, whether he is ready or not—by Delfin’s death. At the end of the story, he finds himself on the threshold of Horace’s worse-than-hellish void. Noel moves from certainty to uncertainty, from innocence to guilt, from faith to emptiness. Delfin’s death has ushered him into the exilic condition, and as a coping mechanism, religion proves to be as ineffectual as the other institutions of security, learning, and family.

In “Amnesty,” the nameless counterpart of Noel Bulaong is older, married, expecting a second child. In some ways he is further along the safe path that Noel Bulaong has taken, for at the historical time of this story, right after People Power, Noel Bulaong is still in Elmyra USA, not yet having found a wife with whom to “play son, brother, and father” (Killing Time 126). Again, the word “play” calls to mind the idea of a role put on, a role that is not accompanied by a deep-felt belief, not unlike the role of propagandist and jester that Noel “plays” in his group of boys and girls. Like Noel Bulaong, this nameless person whom we could call N has found a new life outside the revolution, has “retrieved … a future from the chaos” as an MBA graduate and aide to a minister (“Amnesty” 49). This life, however, proves just as tenuous, for the minister has fled to Hawaii with the dictator, and N finds himself practically jobless. As a husband and father, N enumerates his many worries: “of the knife slipping in my wife’s hand and nicking her; of falling helplessly behind in my payments on the house and car; of getting caught jaywalking, and having the old subversion charges dredged up by some efficient prosecutor; of choking on my food; of meeting former comrades and hearing the same harrowing news, now and then relieved by perplexing accounts of courage in the face of certain death; of my own death, for nothing” (52). Like Noel Bulaong and Noel, he admits to fearing death, but he elaborates: a senseless
death. N’s fears seem strange, however, at the time of the story, for a new government has replaced the old one, and declared an amnesty for all political prisoners. Why then should N be afraid of efficiency in a prosecutor, or even think about subversion charges; why expect the same news of violence spawned by an already defunct government? N seems to show little faith in the new era; he has lived too long with the small choices of “juice or tea or coffee in the morning” (52). In this new era, N is on a bus, late for a job that is no longer there.

When he takes the bus, he bumps into an old comrade who has been woman, muse, and rebel in the old cause and has paid the price of losing her husband and being incarcerated. N then reenacts the guilt that Noel Bulaong feels when he meets with Laurie, after he has chosen to work for the government. On the bus is one whom N has let suffer and left the goodness and pain to, one who has joined the glorious carnage, fought, and survived. More than Noel Bulaong, N has gone further down the road of forgetfulness, drinking and toasting old comrades with ex-comrades, promising to visit this Laurie #2 “with gifts of such cakes and flowers as prison has never seen, but in the morning traffic we all forgot” (51); yet in their younger days they had “secretly pledged … to her service and to her defense, in barricade and picket line” (49).

The encounter between N and Laurie #2 uncovers a wealth of irony. Laurie #2, newly released from prison and attempting to connect with lost relations, appears to be the outsider. Her man’s shirt, rubber sandals, plastic bag, sampaguita necklace, and her one-night sleepover in Luneta all seem outside the normal or fashionable scheme of things. But her enjoyment of sampaguita and Luneta, of the novelty of roads and shopping centers, of the dream-like quality of the prison gates opening and people clapping so that she thought she had died and gone to heaven, makes her feel more welcome to the new regime than N does. For N, the new regime, the amnesty, the encounter with Laurie #2, bring to mind things from a past that he has tried to escape; he can only feel offended by the perfume of sampaguita and frightened by the thought of sleeping in Luneta. It is she who tries to assure him that he is a good man, that he will find another job, and to root him in the present: “The future. The past. I convinced myself that someday it would all come together, that we would all meet again, and start afresh, and here we are” (52). She gives him hope and lights up corners—just corners—in N’s soul. But though the story ends with hope, hope itself hangs by a thread.

“Amnesty” is filled with descriptions of the devastation and brutality that the nightmare of Martial Law wrought in the lives of countless Filipinos. Laurie #2 has lost her husband Tino (just as Laurie lost her true love Benny in Killing Time); yet even more than
losing others, Martial Law has also made people lose selves. A day’s amnesty, a change in government, is not enough to undo this—not enough for things to come together and for people to begin afresh. N seems to echo Noel Bulaong’s compromise “to be someone else, but live,” when he tries to defend his choice to Laurie #2: “I got a job … I got married. I thought I’d give it a try” (51). There is no deep commitment here, and anyway, he has lost his job and found one part of his choice ended. Laurie #2, on the other hand, despite trying to keep true to her beliefs, has lost a part of herself too, the part of her womanhood that is able to wear a dress and paint her nails. She fears that her experiences in the mountains and in prison have effaced this feminine side of her, and she fears that N might not understand.

Martial Law has been construed “as an extreme manifestation of a longstanding distortion of Philippine life” (Burns 200). Indeed, Martial Law has only added to a spectrum of brutal alterations ranging from the nation’s colonial past and stretching into its neocolonial future (Gonzalez 33). Martial Law may have altered Philippine life, but so has the restoration of (an American-type) democracy. The exilic condition persists because there are larger brute forces beyond either a collaborator or rebel’s control. More than N not being able to appreciate the scent of sampaguitas anymore, there is the quite disturbing image of him on a plane from Singapore, sucking on a salad cherry with Vivaldi humming between his ears. He thinks of “the howling murder that infested the islands below [and wishes their] flight to vanish into a cloudbank, into the forgiving arms of angels” (“Amnesty” 51-52). There is a wish for effacement here, by cherry, by Vivaldi, by Spanish-Catholic-inspired angels, but there is also a dream of forgiveness not unlike Noel Bulaong’s as he flies “thirty-six thousand feet above the black Pacific” (Killing Time 3). In the end, both return to the islands, both are unable to forget.

Furthermore, the altitude of thirty-six thousand feet represents for N, as it has for Noel Bulaong, a psychic distance between N and the islands infested with howling murder. The Philippines has turned savage, unfamiliar, and unrecognizable as one’s home so that he would rather disappear. Minnie Bruce Pratt’s idea “sensation of being homesick while at home” (qtd. in Kaplan 193), or in this case while flying home, takes on a whole new meaning. N has become homesick. In “Storyline,” something similar has happened to Jack Del Mundo, a professional screenwriter who has declared a vacation from “work, country, [and] God if that’s possible” (80). For him, the Philippines has been reduced to an experience of meanness and misery, from which, in fact, he has made his living.

Joaquin “Jack” Del Mundo—a clever name that could read “Jack-of-the-world” or “Global Jack”—might strike one as a representation, or at least a caricature, of the native who has a severe case of colonial mentality and historic amnesia. His access to America is
not through any reading of the Philippine colonial past, but through a series of textbooks in grade school called Faith and Freedom, which shows a very idyllic “Littletown” America, as well as through The Guinness Book of World Records, Ripley’s Believe-it-or-not, Reader’s Digest, and of course, TV and the movies. His intention while in the US is “to genuflect at the gates of Universal Studios” (72) and “to see tall buildings, fast cars, and busty women” (80). He carries in his heart the dream of Hollywood and the Oscars. Yet, at the same time, he is a much more complicated man than this, able to see the humor and irony in the fact that work, country, and God, have followed him anyway.

Howard Creedy, a film producer based in Swansdale, Philadelphia, has enlisted Jack to come up with a storyline concerning the US Naval Base in the Philippines “using the relationship between Bob, an American sailor, and Mylene, a Filipino prostitute, as a geopolitical metaphor” though Jack simplifies and translates this into “a love story with a tearful ending” (74). Howard is not the George Lucas-type that Jack expects. Instead, he turns out to be more like Jesus, the non-fashion plate, in his well-meaning desire to make a timely documentary aimed at making the American people “care.” Yet Jack too turns out very different from the patriotic and accommodating Filipino that Howard expects. Jack admits that he “couldn’t care less if that navy base stays or goes” (78) because caring one way or another wouldn’t make any difference, and at any rate he has already given up. He beats all—heats Noel Bulaong, Noel, and N—on the road to forgetfulness, and has chosen not only safety but apathy. He brims with even more citified cynicism than poor Apple Pie Howard does.

“Storyline” becomes a series of misreading, miscommunicating, and misunderstanding that goes beyond the simple mispronunciation of the Spanish appellation “Joaquin” (as the Americans do with “Noel Bulaong”) and the surprise that Jack speaks good English, into deeper and deeper levels of double, triple-edged arguments and inscrutability. For example, each one points out that the other has an “image” problem. Howard looks too little like the sleek Hollywood producer, and Jack seems unconvincing as a Third World Writer in his Marshall’s sportcoat. Howard further suggests to him to use his more exotic-sounding name “Joaquin” rather than “Jack.” Both are guilty of stereotyping the other/Other. Jack expects Howard to have a car, to be married to a Caucasian rather than a Vietnamese, and proclaims that all Americans stereotype Asians, even as he generalizes them all to be “kind, warm, and friendly” (79). Their stereotyping goes deeper into the level of images. Howard presents to a potential fundraising group a slideshow of the Philippines which is a succession of “beaches, coconuts, bathers, and battleships in the horizon” (74). Jack, on the other hand, sees America as Hollywood, as Laundromat
and self-service instead of washerwomen, as shopping mall with its discounted mugs, and as a big Ripley’s museum showcasing a two-headed calf and a man who strings a ton of iron coils around his body “just because.” America becomes senseless expanse and freedom, delightful diversion, a juxtaposition of New England steeples and Golden Arches/McDonald’s.

Yet Jack goes even further and reduces his own country to images of “an awful lot of Mylenes, Monas, Susans, Josephs, stock characters all with stock histories and monologues” in places like “bars, massage parlors, jails, charity wards, and fractious dinners, any place that looked like all it needed was an Arriflex grinding away in a corner, any place like Manila” (79-80). Jack himself is that Arriflex camera, and looks with a colonial master’s eyes to see what could be filmed, exploited. He prizes his provincial sentiments, for all his citified airs, because they are “good for the movies, they never fail” (79). Francia writes, “If the idea of the Other appears as an exoticized objectification of the alien in contemporary Western society, in the Philippines what has been exoticized and commodified has been the deepest part of ourselves” (xiv). Before Jack has even set foot in America to define it, he has already been defined by it, so that “Littletown, USA” becomes more familiar and welcome to Jack than himself or his countrymen as Filipino. Indeed, it becomes impossible for Jack to satisfy Howard’s demand for a “genuine Filipino sensibility” (“Storyline” 75). His attitude towards his work, towards the “material” for his work, echoes not only Howard’s detachment (Howard who does not even leave Philadelphia to put together documentaries of Somalia, Kampuchea, and Nicaragua because in the final analysis, it is only a job and he would rather stay home) but also reflects Noel Bulaong and N’s psychic disconnectedness with their work for government. He calls his fifteen scripts “potboilers mostly” (72) and couldn’t care less if his storyline pleases Howard.

As Howard and Jack exchange witty, as well as barbed, banter, they also become more and more exasperated with each other because they cannot agree on a storyline. Whereas before, Howard compliments Jack on his English and sighs with relief that they are talking the same language (76), by the end of the story they realize that they aren’t. When Jack does not give way to the happy ending Howard wants, the American criticizes him on the funny-smug way he talks, and Jack responds defensively by saying, “I wouldn’t be here in the USA if I weren’t able to speak this way!” (86). Underlying this outburst is a belief that the English language is his ticket to America (to make it big in America, what with his half-professed dreams of Hollywood), and all the while he is aware that some Filipinos spend their lives preparing to be complimented on their good English (grammar and pronunciation). He is proud of his language skills, and he feels a right to be able to use
it any way he wants, just like any American.

Jack here can be considered, in Campomanes’s terms, a bilingual or trilingual “neocolonial native” immersed in “two psychical and cultural realms’ which [generate] an irremediably conflicted and complicated condition” (Memmi qtd. in Campomanes 178). Even as Jack expresses himself in English, he runs the risk of losing himself in the translation. The assumption here is that he is translating his (native’s) experience using the colonizer’s tongue. The use of English, according to Campomanes, “is a material and symbolic mode of alienation and transformation.” As a mode of alienation, the choice of English as a language no doubt gathers a group of people/class together while leaving out or isolating another so that it becomes “a mechanism of social hierarchy” (178). It becomes more complicated as a mode of transformation because it offers a wide range of possibilities ranging from (1) being absorbed into, and losing the self entirely to, a culture that is not one’s own; to (2) finding the self fragmented, or one’s life presented as non-actual; to (3) carving out a “native clearing” to express native longings and the “sense of dislocation and ambivalence, the crisis of self-image and identity” (Strobel 64-5). In the long run, the opportunity and possibility of expressing one’s true self and situation in any language is the best one can hope for, for the national reality “is never in any language, let alone a borrowed one” (Gonzalez 36). Jong warns Noel Bulaong that all the words in the English language won’t save him, but qualifies his own statement by adding: not where he is, not at the moment when he isn’t being his true self, working for, instead of against, government. Similarly, like the empty speeches of Noel Bulaong, Jack’s potboilers and quips, his appreciation of America, and his disparagement of all things Filipino, hide a self Jack might not even be aware of, a self so good at hiding that it is in danger of being lost altogether (Francia xiv).

This self has ironically and unwittingly—even if only partially—revealed itself through Howard and Jack’s disagreements on the issue of storyline and on what Bob the Sailor and Mylene the Prostitute might represent. On one level, we see the Benevolent American argue for “some residual nobility” in everyone, just enough “to make personal relationships work” so that love and understanding can triumph. In answer, the cynical Filipino asserts the one and only possibility of tragedy and cataclysm, because in the Philippines “politics will always defeat love” (“Storyline” 85). His justification for saying this lies in his articulated thesis earlier that “America had to be better beside everything else” (80). However, the America in his thesis, the America he visits, is different from the America he perceives in his storyline, the America that is present in the Philippines. While Howard would like to emphasize mutual understanding and universal human sameness
in the language of love, Jack insists on miscommunication, on cultural barriers and misunderstanding. In Jack’s storyline, Bob the Sailor ends up murdering Mylene because he has misread her actions for love, never mind that he has paid for her time. He thinks he can buy her love, and when he can’t he murders her. America is the murderer when it isn’t loved back.

Though Jack is ready to sell his soul to Hollywood, there is a part of him that senses what America—its politics and democracy—has killed in his country. All his life the image of America, through textbooks in school and through TV and the movies, has made his own reality pale in comparison. While Tom and Ann took him by the metaphorical hand “to the drugstore and the carousel, to the hills to hunt for arrowheads, to school for an education,” he sat in a school with “a knotty mud floor and a roof of thatched straw” (81). “Storyline” may be about Jack’s whole lifetime of coping by means of his imagination and humor, as well as a resigned cynicism regarding his country and a detachment from work, and an occasional vacation from both, if not from God. He may not be as insightful or guilt-ridden as Noel Bulaong or N, may not be totally aware of his “image” problem, but by the end of the story he is “bothered no end by the dramatic necessity of murder” (87).

It is just as much possible that Howard Creedy may not have come out unscathed from this encounter with an unyielding, unapologetic, apathetic Filipino. Robbins writes:

[T]ransfers from the periphery to the center do not leave the center as it was. The transnational story of upward mobility is not just a claiming of authority but a redefinition of authority, and a redefinition that can have many beneficiaries, for it means a recomposition as well as a redistribution of cultural capital. In short, progress is possible. (32)

Jack has moved from the Barrio with his provincial sentiments and develops citified airs in the City, then takes a vacation in the United States where he gets an American to concede to the ending of their hypothetical storyline, although as a compromise Mylene is granted a speech on truth and justice before Bob murders her. It’s interesting to note that it is Mylene who gets to say the speech, not Bob, and more importantly, it is Howard who has chosen Mylene to speak his sentiments rather than his compatriot Bob. Noel Bulaong too has moved from the periphery of Kangleong nearer the center in Elmyra USA; who’s to gainsay the American sitting beside him has not listened the whole novel’s while? This becomes possible too in “We Global Men” where a Filipino—another nameless protagonist whom we could call J—who is even more global than global Jack, as well as better-educated
and better-traveled, makes two Scottish businessmen uncomfortable, however briefly, in their complacent First World seats.

J is an engineer in Edinburgh for a week’s training visit, care of a Canlubang-based manufacturing firm with ties to the central headquarters in the UK. J has moved up in the world, from being a graduate scholar to Germany, where he might have been taken “for a foreigner who would impose himself and his needs on the social security system of another country” (54), to being a world traveler who has seen China, India, and the US. At present, J has become a part “of the dizzying flow of global commerce in the late 20th century” (49). In his mid-thirties, J feels proud of his advancements and accomplishments, looking forward to a life of promotions, more children, travel, and retirement among his ornaments and curios, collected as souvenirs from places around the world “not so much to show off as to reassure himself that anything and everything was, almost literally, within reach” (50). In Scotland, his middle-class achievements and his American-accented English serves to set him apart or distinguish him from a certain class of Filipinos the Scots are used to: maids or nurse’s helpers. “He imagined that they expected him to speak in some kind of Japanese or Swahili, and he was glad and proud to disappoint them; if they knew German, well, he could speak some of that, too. He felt like an ambassador at large, from ‘The Orient, Etc.’” (53).

His idea of being an ambassador or representative of whatever he means by “The Orient” has ironic underpinnings. He certainly doesn’t epitomize the majority of his country, the populous masses, which to some extent an ambassador really does not represent; but he isn’t one of the elite or ruling class either. Secondly, he isn’t at all what the Scots expect, and he is proud to surprise them with his linguistic prowess and impress them with his cultivated smartness, with the ultimate agenda of being acknowledged as one of them, as one of the global men, rather than as exemplary Filipino. Decidedly the best demonstration of this is the postcard of three young Filipino girls in native or traditional attire that J chances upon in an antique show, among others in a box marked “The Orient, Etc.” Its “oddly cool monochrome” sets it apart from “the more common sepias and hand-tinted photographs” (47) so that even among the “orientalia,” it is an isolated curio. To J, it is a reminder of a distant past from which he is already cut off, or he has already cut himself off. He buys it not for any sentimental or deep-felt connection but as a potential conversation piece or joke on his return to the Philippines. Yet he inadvertently brings it with him to a business meeting, pocketed with business cards that he no doubt believes will identify him as one of them, their equal, a global man. The postcard could very well symbolize his disconnected past and dislocated identity, and the business cards his
articulated or conscious and present but incomplete self.

Here we see what Francia refers to as “the cruel legacy of colonialism: the Other refers to what was once our familiar but now has become foreign; and what was once foreign has now become our familiar” (xiv). J does not even get to appreciate the difference Scotland offers from all the other countries he has been to. If anything, he prefers “the impersonal efficiency of American hotels” and admits that he “could forgo the bagpipes, even, as far as entertainment [is] concerned. Culture, to him, mean[s] a gift shop in the lobby and a ceremonial glass of the local brew” (51). He reveals himself just as adept as his Scottish hosts later on in reducing the other culture to internationally standard images: Scotland = bagpipes and kilts; Philippines = dancing girls in Japan. J feels insulted and shamed by McTaggart’s reference to Filipino girls in the bars of Osaka, but he recalls having taken his clients out to local bars back home and finding nothing wrong with it because he could afford it. His middle-class comforts, his impeccable English, his little speech on international economic cooperation may draw toasts and applause from McTaggart and Forsyth, but in the end he feels reduced to a performing curiosity like the dancing girls, or the postcard of Filipino children almost a century before. As Danton Remoto says, even with his double-breasted suit, his liquid accents, his plastic cards, he is still a second- or even third-class citizen (556). When he feels for the business cards later on, to hand over to his hosts, it is the postcard he touches.

Forsyth misconstrues J’s hand on his breast pocket as an indication of a heart ailment, and asks J if he is okay. But what ails J is deeper than any medical problem, the disturbance hard to reach and articulate, like Jack Del Mundo’s uneasiness over “the dramatic necessity of murder.” He may have imagined showing the postcard to his hosts as a way of distinguishing himself from the Philippine past, its backwardness and failures, its “quaint barefoot girls in their native costume,” but instead experiences himself in a “median state,” pulled by two forces or selves:

And look at me, I’m here, a man, a businessman who wears good shoes and speaks the languages of the world. Don’t you see?—I’m one of you now, we’re all in this together, we global men. But the postcard seemed to burn in his chest, to weight down his whole body, to draw him back to something he had struggled long and hard to leave. (58)

His thoughts, not enclosed in quotations, of wanting to be a global man are in the first person; his separated self is referred to in the third. Said describes the intellectual
exile as suffering from this “median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or secret outcast on another” (“Intellectual Exile” 49).

Shaken, J’s impulse is to call his wife, to retreat into family, the solace (or the dream of solace) as it seems, of many of our previous exilic protagonists. Noel Bulaong equates penance and working towards the forgiveness of his sins with buying a house beside his parents in Marikina and finding someone to marry. Here, he says, he would learn to “reattach [himself] to a new kind of responsibility” (Killing Time 126). N has already found this responsibility, expecting a second child and having “paid down payments on a subdivision house and a two-liter car” (“Amnesty” 49). J speaks of the same things in even greater detail, describing with pride his middle-class life with a wife and two kids, and enumerating his belongings: from the trinkets he brings home from all parts of the globe, to his four-bedroom bungalow and a year-old Nissan Sentra, to the stocks that give him hope of a future that, barring changes in government or business policy, is completely and financially secure (“We Global Men” 50). Should he die suddenly, he finds comfort in the fact that his family can collect from an insurance policy totaling three million pesos.

The family is where they find the consolation and the reassurance to continue despite the exile’s “global predicament of continual transition and an ongoing negotiation of competing allegiances” (Graves). On the voyage from the margins of society towards the center (as the Filipino moves from Mountain to Barrio, from Barrio to City, from City to World), instances and expressions of the exilic condition abound. The Filipino intellectual—whether Noel Bulaong or N, Jack Del Mundo or J—has to negotiate the median state, “a liminal space between the prerogatives of national interest, academic specialization, and filial piety” (Graves). Once he realizes or perceives his position to be just as shaky or tenuous in the global world, he begins to long for the voyage home. The gestures of return to at least an idea of home, comprised of a family that brings comfort or forgiveness or fulfillment, is the closest a Filipino might get to a stability in the exilic condition; for a sense of meaning and purpose, a direction, might never be fully realized in the public, political sphere continually shaken by colonial and neocolonial brute forces. As Dalisay writes in the preface of Sarcophagus and Other Stories, a sense of place in his stories, a sense of home, may finally be “the only thing to say, the only thing to go for” (xi).
NOTES

1 Caren Kaplan, in her essay “Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse,” suggests that the expatriate way or form of exile may be further divided into either a personal choice or a forced circumstance (191).

2 He could also be a parallel play on the name Nick Joaquin/Quijano de Manila (“Jack of Manila”).

3 The question of language in the exilic, postcolonial condition is another paper unto itself. Already, there are varying opinions on the subject of the transformative power of a borrowed tongue, from the most negative views and reactions as described or espoused by Campomanes and Gonzalez to the more hopeful let’s-make-the-most-of-it views of Francia, Abad (as quoted in Strobel), and Kaplan.
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