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Curtis Whitefield Tong  
Child of War: A Memoir of World War II  
Internment in the Philippines

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powerful imperialist enemy. Nobody, despite his or her good intentions, may be exempted and excused from the degrees of error that make revolutionary movements vulnerable. Should Pomeroy be exempted?

Pomeroy himself launches a critique of the Jose Lava-led CPP in this sequel in relation to the leadership's position toward political prisoners. He notes that their decision (with Celia) "to seek release from prison through courts has the strange effect of putting us at odds with Jose Lava and the 'Politburo group' that he heads" (204). He then continues to express his assessment of the situation in relation to the prospects of a movement that for Pomeroy "had lost the initiative and had been thrown on the defensive and was being crushed" (204). This part of the book is crucial in terms of its great insight into internal conflicts and campaign prospects for the struggle of political prisoners.

For Pomeroy, their pleading guilty, against the wishes of Lava and his "Politburo," was based on his analysis that "the movement would take at least five years to rebuild . . . and if we would be released after ten years . . . [we] could then once again play our part in the movement" (204). Jose Lava rejected this view, which for him was "MIS-inspired" (204). But, for Pomeroy, the situation "raises the question as to how revolutionaries should conduct themselves in prison so as to regain freedom and get out to resume the struggle" (205). He then sets up the "Friends of the Pomeroy's," a "committee of families of political prisoners . . . to conduct campaign for their release." His proposal was rejected by the Leading Organ headed by Lava, pronouncing "that being in prison is 'part of the game' and trying to get out would be a sign of weakness" (205).

This is far from the conduct of the current organized campaign for the 354 political detainees scattered in prisons nationwide. Samahan ng Ex-Detainees Laban sa Detensyon at Aresto (SELDA) has launched a vigorous campaign participated in by the families of political prisoners who fearlessly demand the release of their loved ones and expose the trumped up charges and various forms of torture that the latter undergo in the hands of the state. Political prisoners themselves coordinate nationwide activities, such as fasting and issuing of statements explaining the illegal and unjust circumstances surrounding their detention, among other consolidated political activities practiced behind freedom's steel doors.

The political struggle to free political prisoners is a just struggle against the capricious practices of state power in all its random suspension of rights.

It is also a struggle for protection against the current imperialist attack on peoples' freedom that has the effect of distorting and therefore limiting an international conception of human rights. *Bilanggo* demonstrates how the struggle of political prisoners is ours, too. Prison life for Pomeroy is "[e]ssentially a war of attrition" (37). But he also speaks of what sounds like a secret code among comrades in chains: "But there are other chains of which we are aware, the chains of human solidarity." His is a powerful elucidation of the saga of political prisoners in a neocolony:

[The political prisoner] has not merely breached a law but the very dikes of the social structure. In his case, the police and the armed agencies, the courts and the prison guards, are merely the tips of the whip that is swung by the landlord, the big businessman, the foreign imperialist, the political boss, the archbishop, the wielders of power in the society . . . The whip is aimed with great deliberation at him who dares to resist or try to change that power. (36)

*Bilanggo* is a rich cultural resource for the continued study and transformation of the political landscape in general and the particular and crucial struggle for freedom for all political prisoners worldwide.

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CURTIS WHITEFIELD TONG

## **Child of War: A Memoir of World War II Internment in the Philippines**

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011. 253 pages.

Born in Davao in 1934 to missionary parents (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions or ABCFM), Curtis Whitefield Tong, his mother Margaret, and his two sisters moved to Baguio City in 1941 so that he and his two sisters could study at Brent School. On 8 December 1941 the Japanese bombed Baguio. American and British civilians, including the Tongs sans the father, were arrested and imprisoned in Camp John Hay.

His father was imprisoned in Davao, but the family knew about this only after several months, before which they did not know whether or not he was alive.

From the brief period of rustic mission life in Davao, Tong swiftly narrates the outbreak of war and their internment, first in Camp John Hay, then in Camp Holmes (now Dangwa Camp) and finally in Bilibid Prison in Manila. Among the three internment camps, Camp Holmes was the least dismal, simply because of the large field where the inmates could play ball. Bilibid Prison was the most restricting, for the very reason that it was a real prison. However, during the battle for the liberation of Manila in February 1945, Tong realized it was the safest place in the city. Its thick walls protected him and the other civilian internees from bombs and snipers' gunshots.

Although the book is about war, it exudes love, friendship, caring, and a great deal of positive outlook, much more than fear, hatred, pessimism, and other negative emotions normally expected of people during war. Curtis Tong and everyone in the internment camps in Baguio and Manila experienced hunger. They were uncomfortable in their crowded cubicles. Couples led unnatural lives because husbands were separated from their wives and were allowed to commingle only at a designated hour or so in the evenings. Most were ill, Curtis's own mother suffering from swollen feet due to beriberi. In Camp Holmes, unlike in Camp John Hay, Curtis was not allowed to stay in the men's barracks, but was made to stay with her mother and sisters. This was disconcerting for him, especially when he had to use the women's toilet. But to his mother, this was a better arrangement, rather than for her son to stay in the men's barracks and face the risk of being sexually abused by Japanese guards. Such risk nearly happened to Curtis in Camp John Hay. Curtis narrates all this and other untoward incidents and miserable conditions during his internment, but he does it in a matter-of-fact manner and his words do not show resentment or grudge.

Tong indeed writes about personalities in the camp that he feared or disliked. For example, he diligently records the detestable actions, words, and mood of Maj. Mukaibo Nagahide, a commandant in Camp Holmes, much feared by Tong. He writes of "haunting memories" being "reawakened" (143) when, perhaps in his archival research and interviews in connection with this book, he found out that Mukaibo obtained his PhD in theology from Boston University School of Theology in 1938; became a certified pastor in 1949; served as president of Aoyama Gakuin Women's Junior College in

the 1950s; and was awarded the Emperor's prestigious Order of the Sacred Treasure. Tong, refusing to judge harshly the circumstances, simply describes Mukaibo's wartime record and his postwar achievements a "paradox."

But he also writes about two Japanese he loved and respected. On one of the pages of the book is a photo of him with his mother and two sisters taken by Matsumoto Katsuji in Camp Holmes in April 1943. This photo is also a souvenir of the day they first heard about their father since they left for Baguio in 1941. Matsumoto Katsuji should be familiar to scholars who have done research on the Japanese in Davao in the 1930s. But while they may have known that he was the head of the Ohta Plantation, the first large abaca plantation company in Davao, it is only in this memoir that this reviewer came to know that Matsumoto was a Christian and an active member of the elder Tong's mission church. Described by Curtis as a "devoted family friend" (3), he indeed was one, for on 15 April 1943 he visited Camp Holmes. It was during this visit that he conveyed the much awaited news about the elder Tong: he was alive and was interned in Davao. Matsumoto brought no note from the father because it was risky. But he asked Mrs. Tong to scribble a note at the back of a picture of his own family he was carrying in his wallet. It was clever of him to think of this strategy of going around the strict rules of the Japanese military. And then Matsumoto took the photo and gave it to the elder Tong back in Davao. The elder Tong carried the photo with him throughout his life.

The other Japanese Tong fondly writes about is Tomibe Rokuro, who became commandant of Camp Holmes in December 1943. Tomibe allowed the teaching of history and foreign languages in the camp school, and it was only after he became commandant that Red Cross packages finally reached Camp Holmes. Under his command, handholding by couples during commingling hours and even quick kisses were allowed, although long embraces remained to be forbidden. It was under his command that two prisoners escaped and were not recaptured. As was the practice then of the Japanese military, prisoners suspected of having knowledge about the escape were tortured. It was only in their meeting in Kyoto in 1982 (photo on p. 250), decades after the end of the war, that Tomibe revealed to Tong that he knew the whereabouts of the escapees, but decided not to act because he would have been compelled to kill them had they been recaptured. He also knew about a hidden radio, but did not confiscate it on condition that the owner shared with him the news.

In February 1945, as the battle for the liberation of Manila raged, the Tongs and other civilian internees were released from Bilibid and flown to Leyte, whence they boarded a ship bound for San Francisco, from where they then took a train to New York City. Curtis, who remembers lovable things more than the opposite, narrates how during a stop the train conductor told him to toss a rolled newspaper after the conductor said “bow-wow.” Curtis did as instructed and a puppy, coming from nowhere, quickly ran after the newspaper and caught it in his mouth. According to the conductor, he had been doing this for four years. The puppy was consistently there, waiting for the train to arrive.

I recommend the book to all who already know the history of the Second World War in the Philippines because Tong’s narration is from the perspective of an American child internee, a perspective he complemented with various other written and oral accounts. The way he reconstructed his memories will deepen and broaden perspectives, which are solely focused on Filipinos. I recommend it to scholars interested in the analysis of war memories and the war’s impact on the relationship between Japan and the United States. It is common knowledge that the two former enemy states became close allies after the war. This is usually explained from the point of view of states that act for their own national interests. However, close and lasting friendship between the US and Japan is found not only at the macro level but also at the personal level, such as that between Curtis Tong and Tomibe. Perhaps there is more to state relations beyond national interests.

I enjoyed the book. It will be wise, however, for the reader to mark the pages they wish to go back to later, because there is no index that will help them do so quickly.

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MARIA LUISA F. TORRES

## **SipatSalin: TransFigurations**

Marikina City: Talindaw Publishing; Yogyakarta: Research and Community Service Institution, Sanata Dharma University, 2011. 185 pages.

*SipatSalin: TransFigurations* is a collection of thirty-five poems in English and Filipino by Maria Luisa F. Torres, Professor of English at the Ateneo de Manila University. These poems, produced starting from the 1970s and well into the 1990s, have been translated into a number of languages, among them, Iloko, Chabacano, Bikol, Kapampangan, Indonesian, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish, and German; this makes *SipatSalin*’s linguistic variety one of the more recent outstanding examples of both poetry *and* translation. In her preface, Torres remarks on the milieu which occasioned her work: the poems were forged during the martial law (1972–1981) years of “activist thought and thoughtful activism” (3) for her and her peers, a milieu that “taught [them] that faith and suspicion, like compassion and sufferance, were two faces of one and the same metaphor” (3).

Although *SipatSalin*—published a year after the author’s award-winning book of criticism, *Banaag at Sikat: Metakritisismo at Antolohiya*, appeared in 2010—puts equal emphasis on both her poems as well as their translations into multiple languages, this review will comment on the original poems (be they in English or in Filipino) and not on the translations. I claim that the poems—with their attention to aspects of the physical world and to interior feeling—are, in German critic Theodor Adorno’s felicitous phrase, “subjective expression[s] of a social antagonism” (“On Lyric Poetry and Society,” in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, 45; Columbia University Press, 1991). These expressions, moreover, propose to extend the resources of the lyric: in dealing with personal and historical materials, Torres’s handling of the lyric form troubles fixed and unitary temporal and spatial categories.

One key feature of *SipatSalin* is the lyric voice of the personae—the attentiveness to detail depicted in the interior scenes of poems such as “Letters to Mama” where things like dry leaves, a candleholder, an ashtray, and scrapbooks are assigned places in the apartment. This focus extends to aspects of the landscape, where the persona in “Sagada” describes the road leading to Bontoc as a “higanteng sawa” (110) or where the surroundings of Scotland—complete with trees, shrubs, and rivers—are typified as both “so sacred