

**RAFAEL, VICENTE L. 1988. Contracting colonialism Translation and Christian conversion in Tagalog society under early Spanish rule. Quezon City, Metro Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press. Pp. xiii, 230.**

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In reviewing this publication for a linguistics journal, my focus is on its linguistic import rather than its historical purport; the volume builds on the author's doctoral thesis in history at the SEASian Studies Program of Cornell University which dealt with communications between Spanish and Tagalogs from the late sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

Together with an earlier study, likewise presented as a doctoral dissertation at Cornell, a work cited several times by Rafael, Reynaldo C. Ileto's *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*, Rafael's work represents a new style of historiography which puts a premium on social reconstruction more than on bare historical facts (though not in any way belittling the latter) and borrows heavily from literary explication de texte and Post-Structuralist literary criticism.

Needless to say, among traditional historians such as Teodoro Agoncillo, in the Philippines, and Glen May, in the United States, this style of interpretative historiography has not been received well. It would go beyond the purview of this linguistically-oriented review to take a position on this basic difference of paradigms in historical writing. Hence, I am leaving this controversy aside and focusing strictly on the linguistic aspects of this study of late sixteenth and seventeenth century grammars (*Artes*) and linguistic exempla. Moreover, for purposes of this review, I dwell on the essential themes of the volume; a review article planned for the future will dwell in detail on the validity from a linguistic viewpoint of some of the claims made by Rafael in reading the texts and in coming out with interesting though controversial interpretations.

Rafael's basic thesis, developed in successive chapters, is that Tagalog society, while accepting Christianity, adapted Spanish language elements and concepts to its own language structures and world-view, in the process modifying them. In classic scholastic terms, 'Whatever is received is received in the mode of the recipient'. In dependency theory terms, one school of thought prevalent in the history of colonialism, dependence was not total but in Rafael's thesis, the foreign culture was 'domesticated' by the local culture. The title of the work, puzzling at first, was suggested to the author by William Flesch (page xiii); colonialism was prevented from becoming more dominant than it was, it was 'contracted' or reduced through its adaptation by the

local receiving culture. Rafael uses the sermon in Rizal's *Noli* as a paradigm of events. When Padre Damaso addresses the crowds in an incomprehensible mixture of Tagalog and Spanish, with the church audience accepting his tirade 'in the mode of the recipient', the priest's intended message is not communicated but what the audience mistakes for his intention comes through. Rizal used the metaphor of fishing to describe this -- the audience fished for meanings (not comprehending Spanish entirely) and accepted content selectively.

In a rather strained and contrived manner (in common with the sometimes strained interpretation of literary texts by structuralists), Rafael sees an analogous process in Pinpin's book teaching Filipinos to learn Castilian (a pedagogical manual of Spanish for Filipinos); in the *confesionarios* published by Post-Tridentine Church missionaries codifying sins and their penalties; in relationships with God (dictated by *utang na loob* and *hiya*); in social relations (status relations of different social classes); and in the Christian concepts of death and paradise (domesticated to adapt to local concepts of the afterlife) that may be gleaned from catechisms, prayer books, and *pasyones*.

My own reservations about this type of 'creative reconstruction' are these: Would it not really be more realistic to consider an alternative paradigm found in cultural anthropology, namely, that of cultural diffusion manifesting itself in some form of indigenization or local adaptation or 'taming' the foreign element for survival rather than a more or less conscious effort to play tricks on the colonizer? For example, in the somewhat strained attempts to prove the author's thesis by examining Pinpin's teaching manual, I do not see much more significance to the use of rhymes and verses by Pinpin except as mnemonic aids (we use jazz chants nowadays to teach pronunciation in English); in a summary of sins and their sanctions (common enough all throughout Christendom and not just the Philippines), I do not read anything except the results of a very legalistic interpretation of the Christian sacrament of penance; and in the Filipino interpretation of death and after-life (*anitos*, *aswangs*), I do not arrive at specifically Filipino responses but reactions common to all recipient cultures where internalization and assimilation of a non-local belief system is hardly ever complete. One suspects that the same thing happened in Asia and Africa in the process of Christianization by Catholics and Protestants; in Indonesia with the domestication of Islam; in Bali with the domestication of Hinduism; and in Sri Lanka, Thailand, China and Japan, in the adaptation of different strains of Buddhism.

Basically, the point I am making is that the process described by Rafael as 'contracting colonialism' is not specifically Filipino but an analogous process among cultures in contact and that a broader view of cultural diffusion is probably a better paradigm to use in explaining such local domestication and adaptation than claims described by terms such as 'taming' and 'contracting colonialism' which seem to indicate a subtle sophisticated and conscious resistance to imperialism which is flattering to the Filipino but which is doubtful in its reality.

By and large the book is well edited, like the typical Ateneo de Manila University press publications, except for some typos. There is an index and interesting illustrations which relieve the monotony of the running text.