

philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

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

Symposium Contracting Colonialism: From Thesis to Book to Ebook

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Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints
vol. 61 no. 4 (2013): 495–506

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Symposium

VERNON R. TOTANES

Contracting Colonialism From Thesis to Book to Ebook

It is rare for scholarly books on Philippine history by Filipinos to remain in print twenty-five years after they were initially published. This research note examines the publishing history of Vicente Rafael's *Contracting Colonialism*—from its origins as a doctoral thesis to its simultaneous publication by a US and a Philippine university press to its current availability as an ebook via two different platforms—to explore possible reasons behind its longevity and influence.

KEYWORDS: CONTRACTING COLONIALISM • BOOK HISTORY • CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS • ATENEO DE MANILA UNIVERSITY PRESS • DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Vicente Rafael's *Contracting Colonialism*, originally published by Cornell University Press in 1988, is twenty-five years old. Like some of the most important Philippine history books produced during the latter half of the twentieth century, *Contracting Colonialism* began as a PhD thesis (Rafael 1984). But unlike other theses that were turned into books—many of which do not attract much attention beyond their authors' loyal family and friends, and very few of which are reprinted or reissued with new covers—Rafael's book has been published and reprinted by *three* university presses on both sides of the Pacific Ocean, it remains in print and continues to sell, and it is now one of the few works on Philippine history that is available as an ebook via two different platforms. It is also the most cited history book written by a Filipino (Guillermo 2013).

This paper traces the evolution of Rafael's *Contracting Colonialism* from thesis to book to ebook as an initial attempt to understand its importance to scholars around the world in relation to its unusual history as a material object. Its publishing history, in fact, contributed greatly to its reception beyond the usual spaces in which a few Philippine history books have been appreciated and recognized as outstanding scholarly works decades after they were initially published.

The sales and printing figures provided in this paper were obtained from documents turned over by Rafael to the Rizal Library (VRP), as well as from the archives of the Ateneo de Manila University Press (AAdMUP).

From Thesis to Book

Vicente Rafael finished his PhD thesis, entitled “Contracting Christianity: Conversions and Translations in Early Tagalog Colonial Society,” at Cornell University in 1984.¹ Rafael received the outstanding dissertation prize from Cornell's Southeast Asia Program for his thesis; but as the book proposal he submitted to the editor of Cornell University Press illustrates—along with the peer review process that followed—neither the manuscript's genesis as a Cornell thesis nor the prize it received guaranteed publication by Cornell University Press (Rafael 1985). In fact, very few dissertations on Philippine history written by Filipinos had been published by university presses in the US at that point.²

It is unknown how many Filipinos trained in the United States submitted their doctoral dissertations to American presses and were rejected, or how

many did not even try, but Rafael was not one of them. He was not even aware that the odds were against him. He merely followed what his advisers told him to do, which was to send his manuscript to the Cornell University Press. Rafael later pursued the publication of a Philippine edition, but never considered submitting his work to a Philippine press as his initial publisher because doing so would have made it difficult for him to obtain tenure at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, where he began working in 1984 (Rafael 2013c).

The reviewers to whom Cornell Press assigned Rafael's manuscript both recommended publication. Later he learned that the reviewers were Renato Rosaldo and Reynaldo Ileto. Rosaldo (1986) thought it was "significannt [sic], original, and engaging. It could well find an audience beyond Filipinists, particularly among those concerned with colonialism and ideology in a number of disciplines." Ileto (1986), meanwhile, called it "a work of genius . . . At some point, students of the Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic 'conversion' of other regions of Southeast Asia will have to take notice of this work, and Southeast Asian history itself will have been revolutionized."³ Both Rosaldo and Ileto indicated that the manuscript was not easy to read and suggested that certain sections be rewritten, concerns that were easily addressed. By December 1986 Cornell Press sent Rafael the memorandum of agreement for his signature, indicating that his manuscript had been accepted for publication.

Four years after completion, Rafael's revised thesis was finally published in the United States with a new title and subtitle, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Rafael 1988a). According to Rafael, he changed the title not because he had made major changes in the text or incorporated any conceptual shifts, but because he did not want the book to be "classified as a work in comparative religion." Instead, he preferred to have it "situated in relation to critical studies of colonialism and language so that people who weren't particularly interested in Europe or Christianity or the Philippines would still be drawn to reading it" (Rafael 2008).

The marketing strategy employed by Cornell Press reflected Rafael's desired positioning for his book. During its first three years in print, *Contracting Colonialism* was included not only in the Asian studies and history catalogs of Cornell Press but also in its anthropology and literary criticism catalogs, of which thousands of copies were mailed directly to professors, booksellers,

and librarians. In addition, review copies were sent to, and advertising specifically for Rafael's book appeared in, more than forty scholarly journals, which included titles as diverse as *American Anthropologist*, *Church History*, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, *Journal of Asian Studies*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*. It was, as Cornell's marketing manager acknowledged, "an unusually ambitious marketing campaign for a scholarly title. Because we too realized the interdisciplinary nature of *Contracting Colonialism*, we wanted to be sure to reach as wide an audience as we reasonably could. And indeed we far exceeded our budget allowance" (Gration 1991).

The interdisciplinary advertising, which often included a revised version of Rosaldo's original appraisal stating that "This is a significant, original, and engaging book that should find an audience among those concerned with colonialism, discourse, and ideology," probably played a significant role in the growth of the number of the book's citations in fields like translation studies and gender studies. Perhaps some of the interest in the book may also be traced to its title, whose first word—"contracting"—may be understood either in relation to a sickness, an agreement, or a reduction in capability, and whose second word—"colonialism"—is much more interdisciplinary than "Christianity."

The book's title and subtitle were not all that different from the title and subtitle of the thesis, and neither were its contents. Although Rafael's thesis has five chapters and the book has six, closer examination reveals that the fourth chapter in the thesis, which one of Cornell's reviewers found "too long by far" (Rosaldo 1986), was split into two chapters. In the book, the thesis chapter entitled "Conversions, Confessions, and the Terms of Reciprocity" was divided into "Conversion and the Demands of Confession" and "Untranslatability and the Terms of Reciprocity." Further textual analysis will probably reveal more differences between thesis and book, but it is unlikely that such an approach will be fruitful in terms of determining the contribution of the book's materiality to its later influence.

Of Paperbacks, Printings, and Prices

Cornell University Press published the first edition of *Contracting Colonialism* and promoted it heavily, but the editions issued by two other university presses sold far more copies than its original publisher ever did.

The only significant difference between the editions published by Cornell and the Ateneo de Manila University Press (Rafael 1988b), the

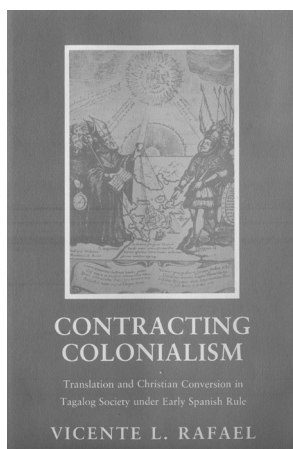
former's partner in the Philippines, was the binding. In 1988, both featured faded red covers, but the Cornell Press edition was hardbound, while the Ateneo Press edition was issued as a paperback (see page 500), and was printed using camera-ready pages provided by Cornell. The histories of both editions diverged thereafter. Whereas both university presses came out with first printings of 1,000 copies each, Cornell had sold only 746 copies by 1998, when it officially declared Rafael's book as "out of print" (Ackerman 1998). In contrast, Ateneo had ordered a second printing of 1,000 copies by 1992, followed by third (2000), fourth (2006), and fifth (2011) printings, each of which was for 500 copies (Decena 2003, 2006, 2011), and featured a new, striking black cover (page 500).

While it is certainly possible that Cornell's limited sales may be blamed on its relatively higher initial selling price of US\$26.95 (or approximately P560 in Manila, using the 1988 dollar–peso exchange rate), as compared to Ateneo's more economical P130 (or US\$6.19), it must be noted that it is unlikely that many Filipinos purchased imported copies (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas 2013).⁴ It is more likely that interest in the book's subject matter, rather than its price, was responsible for the greater number of copies sold by Ateneo Press in the Philippines than by Cornell Press in the US.

According to one of the Filipino critics who honored Rafael's work with the National Book Award for History in 1989, *Contracting Colonialism* was "a highly original, theory-steeped study of history through literary and others texts" (Cruz 1989, 15). The award provided some welcome publicity, but more importantly it helped legitimize the book in the historical field. Established historians could no longer insist that a book adjudged the best publication on history in the Philippines during the previous year was not a work of history.⁵

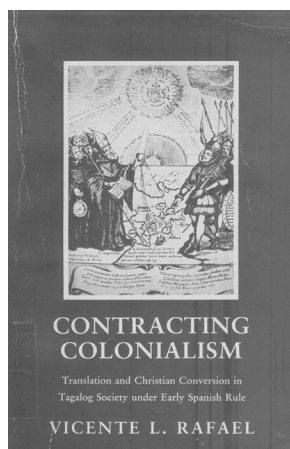
Aside from price, local interest, and publicity, it must be noted that in the United States *Contracting Colonialism* was just one more book among the hundreds of titles published annually by American university presses. In the Philippines, however, Rafael's book was one of only a handful of historical works issued by the two or three active Filipino university presses in the late twentieth century.

One additional factor that probably had a significant effect on the Cornell Press edition's sales was its publisher's 1991 decision to return US paperback rights to Rafael, who then assigned them to Duke University Press.⁶ The paperback edition issued by Duke in 1993 is essentially the same as the



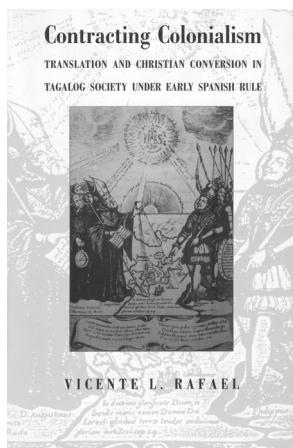
1988 Cornell University Press

1st (and only) printing



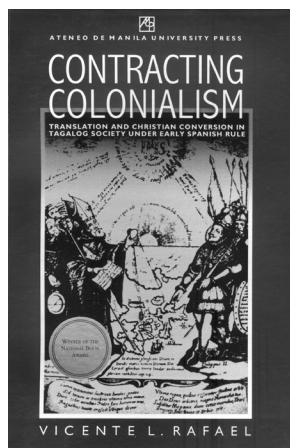
1988 Ateneo de Manila University Press

1st and 2nd (1992) printings



1993 Duke University Press

1st, 2nd (1996), 3rd (2001),
and 4th (2005) printings



2000 Ateneo de Manila University Press

3rd, 4th (2006), and
5th (2011) printings

The different covers of *Contracting Colonialism*. Scanned from personal copies of Vicente Rafael (1988a, 1993), a non-circulating copy from the Rizal Library's Filipiniana section (1988b), and a brand new copy from the Ateneo de Manila University Press (2000).

hardbound and paperback editions issued by Cornell and Ateneo, respectively, but it does feature a new—and arguably more appealing—cover, and a new preface (Rafael 1993; opposite page). At US\$15.95, the Duke Press paperback edition was considerably cheaper than the Cornell Press hardbound edition, whose selling price had increased to US\$29.95 by 1993.⁷

Maybe it was the new cover, maybe it was the paperback's cheaper price, maybe Cornell's marketing strategy finally started working, or maybe it was Rafael's continuous stream of books and articles that led to continued interest in the US. Whatever the reason may be, Duke Press has in fact reprinted its edition of *Contracting Colonialism* at least three times (i.e., 1996, 2001, and 2005), with royalty statements indicating that more than 2,500 copies had been sold as of 2012.⁸ This number is only several hundred copies lower than the total number of 3,500 copies printed by Ateneo Press since 1988.

Any attempt, however, to relate this information to the relatively high number of non-Filipino scholars who cite Rafael's work compared to its seemingly limited influence on Philippine historiography will be highly speculative. The lack of a citation index for local publications, as well as the dearth of evidence (in)validating the success of specific marketing strategies, make it difficult to determine exactly why *Contracting Colonialism* seems to be more influential outside the field of Philippine studies than within it.

The prices, the number of printings, and the number of copies of the hardbound and paperback editions printed and sold by Cornell, Ateneo, and Duke university presses are cited not to prove that *Contracting Colonialism* is a bestseller or that it has outsold all other Philippine history books ever published, but to show that—unlike most scholarly works published in the Philippines, many of which are never reprinted because the initial print run never sold out—Rafael's book has not only been reprinted multiple times since it was published twenty-five years ago, but it also continues to sell. In addition, the book's sales have not been limited exclusively to print in recent years.

From Book to Ebook

Contracting Colonialism is one of only nine books on Philippine history that may be accessed through the ACLS Humanities E-Book collection (Rafael 2013a).⁹ This ebook is a digital version of the Cornell Press edition, but there are at least two limitations that make it different from the ones that may be accessed on iPads or Kindles. First, it is not for sale. The ACLS ebook may be accessed only through libraries that subscribe to the collection. Second,

the entire ebook cannot be downloaded easily. Instead, pages must be viewed or downloaded one at a time, either as image, text, or PDF. Despite these limitations, royalties credited to Rafael by Cornell specifically for the ACLS ebook have been increasing steadily since 2009, which suggest that usage has also gone up.¹⁰

Even more remarkable, however, is the fact that *Contracting Colonialism* is actually available for download as an ebook at the iTunes Store (Rafael 2013b), which has very few Philippine history books for sale.¹¹ Rafael does not know when this arrangement started, and it is not mentioned in the papers he turned over to the Rizal Library. But it is not difficult to determine that this ebook is a digital version of the Duke Press edition, that it can be downloaded to an iPad or iPhone, and that it is selling for US\$23.99, or approximately P1,040 using the current exchange rate (which is more than double the current Ateneo Press edition's price of P495). It is unknown just how many copies have been sold through the iTunes Store, and the available data are insufficient to draw conclusions regarding the effect of ebook sales on printed book sales.

However, another source of income may be used as an indicator of the book's continuing relevance. In the royalty statements sent by Cornell Press, there is a line that says, "Permission fee from Copyright Clearance Center." No breakdown is provided, but the unspecified uses for which Rafael is being compensated, according to the website of the Copyright Clearance Center (2013), may include photocopying; republication of excerpts in books, journals, and other materials; and even electronic distribution through websites or libraries. Earnings generated from permission fees during the last two years, which amount to ten times the royalties Rafael received from Duke Press during the same period, suggest that *Contracting Colonialism* is being accessed—legally—not only through print or digital copies, but also through other means.¹²

One more source that may be used as an indicator of the influence of Rafael's book is WorldCat, a union catalog of the holdings of more than 25,900 libraries, archives, and museums around the world (OCLC 2013). The WorldCat database shows that 498 libraries have at least one copy of *Contracting Colonialism*. Of these libraries, approximately 80 percent are based in the US, while the remaining 20 percent include countries that are not known as centers for Philippine studies, such as Brazil, Israel, and South Africa. In contrast, the same catalog shows that, as of 2012, only 351

libraries own copies of the various editions of Teodoro Agoncillo's *History of the Filipino People* (1990),¹³ one of the most widely used Philippine history textbooks (Totanes 2010), and 243 have Iletto's *Pasyon and revolution* (1979), one of the most influential books on Southeast Asian studies (Hui 2009).¹⁴

While Rafael's book has a distinct advantage over those by Agoncillo and Iletto because it was published by US presses, and not by Philippine presses—further emphasizing the disadvantages faced by scholars whose works are first issued in the Global South—the reality is that it is much easier for librarians in the US to acquire books published in the US, and for American scholars to cite works available in their university libraries, than it is for American librarians and scholars to access books not published in the US.

Conclusion

Contracting Colonialism, based on a PhD thesis entitled “Contracting Christianity,” has been in print for the past twenty-five years. It was issued by three university presses in the United States and in the Philippines, with three different covers in hardbound and paperback formats, and to date has more than 7,000 copies in print. It is now available as an ebook through a subscription database and an online store. Its author, Vicente Rafael, earns income not only from royalties on the print copies, but also from permission fees paid for copyright clearances. Finally, more copies of *Contracting Colonialism* are available in libraries around the world than those for two of the best-known Philippine history books.

This initial attempt at reconstructing the history of *Contracting Colonialism* from thesis to book to ebook provides a backdrop against which the longevity and influence of Rafael's work may be better appreciated in relation to other comparable works.

Abbreviations

AAAdMUP	Archives of Ateneo de Manila University Press, Bellarmine Hall, Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City
ACLS	American Council of Learned Societies
OCLC	Online Computer Library Center
VRP	Vicente Rafael Papers, Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City

Notes

- 1 During the early 1980s, it was not unusual for students to produce handwritten drafts that were later finalized on the typewriter. But it is worth noting that Rafael has continued to use pen and paper to write the initial drafts of his subsequent books, even as he shifted from the use of the typewriter to the computer.
- 2 The earliest known doctoral thesis on Philippine history written by a Filipino historian that was published by a university press in the US was Leandro Fernandez's "The Philippine Republic," which was issued by Columbia University Press in 1926. Using the list of important works on Philippine history drawn up by Cruikshank (1978), it is clear that outstanding PhD dissertations by Filipinos who obtained their degrees in the US were more likely to be published in the Philippines, not in the US. Notable examples, which were published after Cruikshank's study came out, include Benito Legarda's *After the Galleons* (1999, completed 1955), Edilberto de Jesus's *The Tobacco Monopoly in the Philippines* (1980, completed 1973), and Reynaldo Iletto's *Pasyon and Revolution* (1979, completed 1974), all of which were published by the Ateneo de Manila University Press. Milagros Guerrero's "Luzon at War" (completed 1977) remains unpublished.
- 3 Rosaldo's prediction would later be proven more accurate than Iletto's because, as Guillermo (2013) shows, the great majority of *Contracting Colonialism*'s citations originated from scholars in a variety of disciplines, with scholars in Southeast Asian studies constituting a relatively smaller percentage.
- 4 Royalty statement from Cornell University Press, 31 Dec. 1988, and handwritten production notes from Ateneo de Manila University Press, 15 Sept. 1988.
- 5 Doreen Fernandez (1986, 1) indicates that William Henry Scott once said that Rafael's thesis was "*Maganda* [beautiful]—but it is not history."
- 6 According to Rafael (2013d, 491 n. 11), the paperback was published by Duke University Press due to a series of accidents, in which a former housemate recommended the book to an editor-friend who had just started a series on postcolonial studies at Duke.
- 7 Duke University Press Catalog, 1993, and royalty statement from Cornell University Press, 31 Dec. 1993.
- 8 Royalty statements from Duke University Press, 1993–2012 (except for 2000 and 2002), indicate that 2,526 copies had been sold as of 2012.
- 9 Seven other titles, such as Encarnacion Alzona's *The Filipino Woman* (1934) and Mina Roces's *Women, Power, and Kinship Politics* (1998), are from the field of gender studies. The remaining title is Alfred McCoy's *Policing America's Empire* (2009).
- 10 Royalty statements from Cornell University Press, 2009–2012.
- 11 Some of the history books about the Philippines written by Filipinos currently being sold via the iTunes Store are Rafael's *The Promise of the Foreign* (2005), Samuel Tan's *A History of the Philippines* (2008), and Neferti Tadiar's *Things Fall Away* (2009). Neither *The Revolt of the Masses* (1956) nor *Pasyon and Revolution* (1979), both now considered classics in Philippine historiography, is available in the iTunes Store.
- 12 Royalty statements from Cornell University Press, 2010–2012.
- 13 See Totanes 2010 for other editions, coauthors, and publishers of Agoncillo's *History of the Filipino People*.

14 Data generated using FirstSearch, 21 Dec. 2012. WorldCat, incidentally, does not include data from Philippine libraries.

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