There are also flaws in the referencing style used. It is frustrating when archival material and other published works are cited without full references. It would have been useful to have included individual reference lists for each chapter. Finally, the volume would have been better served by more careful editing. In this way, misspellings of personal names and places, and inconsistencies in grammar, could have been avoided.

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My complimentary copy of Vicente Rafael's Contracting Colonialism is a gift that has already put me in great "debt." Answering more questions than it asks, covering more theoretical domains than those on which it focuses, Contracting Colonialism spills out of the boundary of early Tagalog-Christian colonial society to establish itself as an authoritative model for any historical and political inquiry into colonialism, Christian conversion, and the local, indigenous responses to these processes.

For Rafael, who is himself a native Tagalog speaker, the consolidation of Spain's imperial order and Tagalog conversion in the Philippine lowlands are best understood in terms of a series of translations between the agents of a Castilian Catholic regime and various classes of Tagalog society. To conceive of colonialism and conversion "from the perspective of translation," Rafael directs the reader to the semantic relations among the Spanish terms *traducción* 'translation', *conquista* 'conquest', and *conversion* 'conversion'. Such affinities, according to Rafael, "reflect as much as they are reflected by their historical configurations" in the Spanish *Imperio* (x).

Rafael argues that translation's "configurations" reveal the Spanish intent and desire to identify, relocate, and reorder pagan (read Tagalog) ideas, words, and bodies back to their presumed positions under the hierarchy of God's Word and Kingdom. But translation also describes how various classes of Tagalog society (*maginoo* 'elites', *maharlika* 'commoners') sought to appropriate external or novel things of value with which to guard against the shock or anxiety of threatening (colonial) impositions. Here translation simulates conversion in the very process of subjecting or submitting oneself to external, foreign systems in order to "inoculate" oneself against their possible threats. But for Spaniard and Tagalog alike, the history of colonialism entailed the translation or conversion—what we might call the "restructuration"—of threatening linguistic or political conventions into safe spaces from which to speak and therefore register one's involvement in a constantly shifting social world. As a predicate of colonialism and conversion, translation, or, as Rafael prefers, "mistranslation," denotes a political
interest in both “rendering the ‘other’ understandable” and “reading into the other’s language and behavior possibilities that the original speakers had not intended or foreseen” (211).

The confluence (and the methodological and political import) of such Spanish and Tagalog desires is in the title of Rafael's book, Contracting Colonialism. For it is in the nature of both the expansive and repressive colonial order and the local interest (to appropriate, guard against, and evade the former’s full reach) to formalize specific types of authoritative relationships with one another: “contracting colonialism” names various modes of bargaining and stakes involved in it that took place in the spaces between Spaniards and Tagalogs.

For the Spaniards, conversion and translation served the consolidation of colonial power. All served an evangelical imperative—the understood obligation to disseminate the Word of God—which in turn was seen to be the only legitimate means by which to justify Spanish expansion. In the Spanish Castilian fiction, God is viewed as the determining source of power, the final “Author,” the “Eternal Creditor” from whom and to whom all actions, words, and deeds (here figured as “gifts”) would originate and return. Within this legitimizing commerce, the priest would serve as privileged administrator, mediator, or broker, whose holy task was to translate Christianity into Tagalog, and Tagalog in terms of Christian origins and eschatology. Through a metaphorical “office of Language,” colonialism contracted the Tagalog by “reducing” them to a beneficiary of God’s Word, in a transaction of indebtedness to an “Eternal Creditor.”

Contracting Colonialism juxtaposes Spanish and Tagalog interests and stakes under what can be called, in Rafael’s terms, the “common patronage” of language and discourse. This is precisely why he insists on “close readings” of various missionary and native texts, which themselves foreground the position of language and its agency in the conversion and the consolidation of Spanish Castilian empire and native notions of self and society. Beautifully and playfully written, brilliantly layered, and, I might add, historically correct, Contracting Colonialism provides enabling commentaries on missionary stakes and positions as registered in their preoccupation with artes ‘grammars’ of the vernacular (modeled on Latin via the Castilian) and vocabularios ‘dictionaries’ (which sought to index which divine referents could and could not be translated into the Tagalog vernacular). Rafael also examines the composition of devotional manuals whose intent was to ensure the proper administration of various sacraments (ie, proper confession, administration of last rites).

But what Contracting Colonialism names best is a field of local transactions and ramifications traditionally neglected in modern studies of colonialism and cultural confrontation. For in showing the different layers and stakes that constitute Tagalog responses to, or localizations of, Spanish Catholic desires, Rafael's analytic model—straight (dust) jacketed as “an application of post-structuralism”—provides a full sounding of a colonial legacy without reducing the native to a
simple “converted” object of that history. Identifying and explaining discursive links between such “responses” and the colonial order, Contracting Colonialism discloses a set of politicized relations between colonizer and colonized that furnished the vocabulary and syntax for the emergence of a Philippine “nationalist” consciousness that persists today.

Contracting Colonialism reveals, first, that the Spaniard did not have exclusive claims to translation, conversion, and political consolidation, and second, that such processes on the Tagalog side of the political-linguistic ledger were also qualitatively different from Spanish intentions and conceptions of language and authority. Ordered on different notions of language and authority—a cultural preoccupation, for instance, with the play of “tendentious” or “random” meanings (present, too, in Rafael’s own analytical style)—an amorphous Tagalog vernacular alternately submitted to, evaded, or resisted the attempt to “sublate” Christian ideas into its ledger. An example is found in Tagalog translations of terms such as Dios, Santos, Jesus, Maria, Jose, which were deemed by the Spanish priests to be “untranslatable.” Such terms were dutifully kept in the Castilian by the priests to institutionalize a preferred hierarchy of meaning under God, to ensure the semantic integrity of what was perceived to be their incontrovertible referents (God the Father, Litany of Saints, Jesus, and so on), and, finally, to guard against slippage into native abusos ‘superstitions’. Yet such untranslatable terms are shown to have been not only localized, but recon-
tained in such a way as to evade the full political and religious force and intention of the Spanish mission while deferring to those very colonial conventions and practices. “Jesus, Maria, and Jose,” for example, becomes translated, converted, into magpajesusmaria and further “contracted” into susmaryosep. Rafael then points out that susmaryosep “to this day [remains] a common Tagalog expression to register shock or signify amazement.” Another example—and one that holds a dear place in my own childhood recollections—is the translation of Viatico ‘host’. Where viatico as transsubstantiation of Christ the Son is understood by the priest to guarantee the communicant’s return to God’s Kingdom, in the Tagalog’s hand (or tongue) it is instead translated and converted into bauon, a snack or a lunch that one takes along as nourishment on one’s travels. Though eternally hungry, I had always known it improper to bring bauon to Mass.

Always with a gifted feel for the political tactics of language, Rafael reveals other modes of Tagalog conversions as evidenced in various Castilian texts written by Tagalogs for Tagalogs. For instance, in Tomas Pinpin’s Librong, Rafael shows how the composition of various auit (short Tagalog “verses”) had the effect of, among other things, converting the Castilian into a “syncope” of Tagalog. Syncopated in the rhythm of these short playful Tagalog verses, Castilian could be structured through the sensations of a peculiarly Tagalog protocol of address (described as “anticipatory” by Rafael) that would ensure recognition and familiarity and serve to guard against
the possible shock and threat of being suddenly confronted by the Castilian (speaker).

If one type of translation-conversion paradoxically consisted of evading while employing the force of the Castilian Catholic political and linguistic machinery, another mode of translation amounted to sheer "opportunism." An example is how certain elite natives—maginoo or principales—discovered a host of advantages in "shuttling" between the institutionalized colonial order and the Tagalog society. Rafael rightly points out that such instances of elite opportunism were less syncretism than an active separation of two different worlds to secure a mediating and thus powerful position from which to gain political and material benefits from either side.

Commoners, too, have a history that converges with and diverges from colonial and elite desires or interests. They are the site of what Rafael calls "real" conversion, or sustained attention to the preferred meanings as imposed by the Spanish. Rather than describing a simple, unproblematic submission to Catholic tenets, Rafael demonstrates how such deference to the semantics and intentions of the mission system also was a form of indigenous appropriation and translation: in deferring to Spanish reinventions of, among other things, the meaning of Tagalog notions of self (loob), shame (hiya), and death, the "real" convert also saw the possibility of anticipating and thereby containing the real threat of death. In this way could the real interest in "real" conversion be understood: securing entry into a Christian paradise for one's soul.

Tagalog translations, conversions, and (re)consolidations ranged from evasion and elision, to outright submission to Spanish intentions and interests. These were always figured both as ways to protect oneself from sudden dangers and as ways to bargain or contract with similarly contracting systems of colonialism.

Contracting Colonialism has certain costs. The preface, afterword, and six chapters teem with riveting, sometimes elusive readings of the historical record, giving the book a tendency to exhaust, at times, overwhelm even the most interested reader. If being overwhelmed is a condition of confronting the new, the unfamiliar, as Rafael suggests, it arises precisely because Contracting Colonialism successfully juxtaposes seldom understood, yet often marginalized (alien) "native" stakes and positions with a still unfamiliar analytical preoccupation with language and discourse. It is as if the book and the reader are condemned to reverberate among what to many would be a flurry of unfamiliar sounds and echoes, twists and turns, of the Castilian, Tagalog, English and "post-structural" vocabularies and grammars. But we should be so condemned, particularly because such anxious, theoretical, and discursive soundings are what predicate and consolidate the colonial legacy to begin with. What remains overwhelmingly clear is that Contracting Colonialism itself begins to provide the very feel for the pleasures by which the displeasurable might be surmounted.

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