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The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines. By Vicente L. Rafael. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005. 231 pp. ISBN 0-8223-3664-2. \$22.95

Building on his previous work, Vicente Rafael examines the origins of Filipino nationalism in the nineteenth-century as a product of linguistic and cultural translation. As an invention of imperialism, the Filipino nation often struggles in its meta-narrative to justify its existence as a product of that which it once despised and still must necessarily despise. The syncretism and various interdependencies that frame the Philippines' current reality are not always congruent with the exclusive and homogenizing definition of a modern nation-state. However, by drawing correlations between the Filipinos' enthusiastic embrace of foreign elements and their simultaneous desires to escape the hegemonic grip of foreign rule, Rafael offers promising new insights on the Philippines' often inchoate and paradoxical struggle for national identity.

By framing Filipino nationalism in terms of absorption and translation, rather than a rejection, of things foreign, Rafael makes a sharp departure from standard nationalist historiography. He says that

Filipino nationalism did not originate with the discovery of an indigenous identity ... Rather, its genesis lies in the transmission of messages across social and linguistic borders among all sorts of people whose identities were far from settled (19).

For Filipinos, the "promise of the foreign," as embodied by Castilian and other Spanish cultural elements, offered an invaluable "technology" for nation building. Translation was the most direct and efficient means to gain access to the meanings and functions of the various indiscernible symbols of power that defined national modernity (4-5). Hence, rather than prolonging subjugation to Spanish authority, Filipino nationalists' adoption

and translation of imperial foreignness actually resulted in subversion, empowerment, and eventually nationalism.

To illustrate the subtle processes of this phenomenon, Rafael examines Jose Rizal's two nationalist novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibustero*, as well as popular reaction to vernacular plays known as *comedias*. These mediums, he argues, tapped the potentially unifying power of common contact with foreignness while spanning the various socio-economic and ethno-linguistic spectrums that structured Philippine colonial society. Exposure to Castilian in a non-religious context subverted the Catholic priests' totalizing grip over their Filipino subjects, consequently compromising the hierarchal dissemination of knowledge (67). As more secular interpretations and concepts began to filter into the Filipinos' collective consciousness through the reappropriation of Castilian, the foreign became increasingly identified with unprecedented possibilities of modernity, integration, and national unity. Filipino nationalists were quick to recognize and cultivate these sentiments as they lobbied for more secular integration of Castilian into public schools and throughout the islands. These nationalists recognized Castilian's intimate connection to foreign authority and discerned its potential to penetrate the colonial hierarchy and unify the islands' disparate populations (14, 25).

However, Rafael also observes that, while translation had the potential for nationalism, it also contained the distinct and terrible possibility of "mistranslation." He explains, "The promise of translation brings with it the risk of betrayal even before and certainly beyond the circulation of messages, and prior to the constitution of social identities" (15). When foreign symbols were misrecognized or misappropriated by Filipinos "there was always the danger that one would be contaminated rather than immunized from one's exposure to the foreign, confounded rather than empowered by the technics of translation," thus retarding national consciousness and reinforcing imperial rule (ibid.). This tenuous negotiation between translation and mistranslation elucidates the Philippines' continual "recolonization" by foreign and domestic oppressors, as well as the country's ultimate inability to finish its revolution for independence and establish a national identity (182).

While Rafael presents an extremely insightful and erudite study, his book is in desperate need of a much broader theoretical overview of nationalism. Aside from a very limited discussion in the preface, the author makes virtually no effort to contextualize his findings within the larger historiographical debate. Rafael seemingly writes under the assumption of a common and universal understanding of nationalism, which of course is a much disputed and hotly contested topic. Establishing theoretical and definitional parameters for nationalism should generally precede examinations of its construction and functions. This omission ultimately leaves the reader struggling to situate Rafael's findings within the broader academic discourse of post-colonial nationalism. It also tragically lessens the impact of Rafael's findings. After being presented with such perceptive conclusions, the reader is only left to extrapolate and speculate concerning the ways in which Rafael's work both challenges and contributes to the overall historiography of nationalism.

Aside from this difficulty, however, *The Promise of the Foreign* is an intelligent and well-researched book. By placing linguistics at the center of the Philippines' early national history, Rafael offers a rich multi-disciplinary approach with wide scholarly appeal. As with his earlier books, this work opens a number of exciting opportunities for further research and insights into the Filipinos' struggle with their imperial legacy. For students and scholars of linguistics in particular, Rafael's work provides a profound social, cultural, and political relevance to the sometimes sterile and mundane mechanics of language study. By liberating linguistics from the periphery of historical analysis, Rafael weds two complementary disciplines, which fosters a much deeper and more thoughtful understanding of the Philippines' developing national identity. Hence, despite its theoretical shortcomings and often-complex prose, this book is a valuable addition to any library.

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