

# philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

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

---

## Symposium

### **Becoming Rey Ileto: Language, History, and Autobiography**

Vicente L. Rafael

*Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*  
vol. 62 no. 1 (2014): 115–32

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies.soss@ateneo.edu](mailto:philstudies.soss@ateneo.edu).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

# Symposium

VICENTE L. RAFAEL

## Becoming Rey Ileto Language, History, and Autobiography

This article inquires into the relationship between translation and autobiography in the work of Reynaldo Ileto. In *Pasyon and Revolution*, English and Tagalog are juxtaposed in a relationship of translation, indicating linguistic complexity and a politics of language that are deflected in Ileto's later autobiographical writings. Yet, autobiography can also work like translation, but in the opposite direction of *Pasyon and Revolution*. Rather than loosen linguistic and social hierarchies, autobiography reinforces them. Ileto's narrative tells of the splitting and substitution of selves, the excavation and overcoming of the father's name, and the replacement of the "unfinished revolution" project with stories of gendered and generational succession.

**KEYWORDS: TRANSLATION · AUTOBIOGRAPHY · ILETO · ENGLISH · TAGALOG**

*“Becoming isn’t part of history; history amounts only to a set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to ‘become,’ that is, to create something new.”*

—Gilles Deleuze

**R**eynaldo Ileto is fond of telling a story about the genesis of his book *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (1979). While it is the revised version of his 1973 Cornell dissertation, “Pasyon and the Interpretation of Change in Tagalog Society,” the seeds for the book were actually planted in the course of his first overseas trip in 1965. His Chinese mestiza grandmother, who had lived through the revolution against Spain and the American and Japanese occupations, took him to Hong Kong and Japan for a ten-day tour. Although unremarkable, the trip “made [him] question what [he] was studying at the Ateneo.” It eventually led him to shift from engineering and science to the humanities. He even took a course in elementary Nippongo. Along with classes in philosophy, the “mélange of humanities subjects . . . formed the core of [his] thinking for *Pasyon and Revolution*” (Ileto 2005). What is widely acknowledged to be one of the most important works in Philippine history—and perhaps in Philippine studies for over a generation—thus had its origin in foreign sources: first in Japan, then in the United States. Furthermore, its beginnings had nothing to do with Philippine history as such, but rather lay outside of it, in the humanities, Western philosophy, even the Japanese language.

### **Tagalog and English in *Pasyon and Revolution***

Thus the striking irony of *Pasyon and Revolution*: its meticulous concern for illuminating indigenous ideas of power, structures of consciousness, and notions of futurity, comes through only from a position and perspective outside of the native and the national. Similarly, the vernacular specificity of Tagalog ideas such as *awa*, *liwanag*, *damay*, and so forth become understandable only through its explication in English.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in his essay, “Father and Son in the Embrace of Uncle Sam: Experience and Metanarrative in the American Sojourn of Two Filipinos,” Rey admits that, because he grew up like most middle- and upper-class Filipinos of his generation speaking English at home and in school, his grasp of Tagalog was weak. In his Batangueño wife, Maria Consuelo (Loolee) Carandang, he found a kind of translator—a “living dictionary” of Tagalog (Ileto 2014, 80).<sup>2</sup> Her knowledge of the

language helped Rey understand the documents he read. His spending a year living with Loolee’s family in Tanauan, Batangas, while doing research for his dissertation further sharpened Rey’s grasp of Tagalog. For Rey then the mother tongue, Tagalog, is actually an Other tongue, while the alien language, English, is far more familiar and intimate. While *Pasyon and Revolution* privileges the semantic power of the vernacular, it is the second tongue, English, that makes the first legible.

Yet, while *Pasyon and Revolution* was conceptualized and written outside of the Philippines, Rey makes very clear who its intended audience is: “we Filipinos,” meaning English-literate, Westernized and, in Renato Constantino’s terms, “mis-educated and neo-colonized” members of a small but vastly influential upper and middle class (Ileto 1979, 2–3). To “modern Filipinos” Rey directs his study of putatively premodern peasant movements in an attempt, perhaps, to disabuse them of their “mis-education” (ibid.). His project is predicated on recuperating vernacular sources from colonial archives, examining the obscure history of popular rebellions, recalcitrant nationalisms, and errant communities led by “fanatics” driven by “superstition”; and to do so while shedding light on the understanding of those “from below.” In illuminating the mind of those from below, he highlights the language of peasants by resituating key Tagalog words. Standing amid the flow of English discourse, Tagalog terms like *loob*, *lakaran*, *anting-anting*, and *liwanag at dilim* appear throughout the text in their original form.<sup>3</sup> Further intensifying their visibility are the lengthy passages from the *pyson* text as well as other accounts by peasant leaders such as Felipe Salvador that are reproduced side by side with their English equivalents. The recurring appearance of the original Tagalog words has the effect of interrupting the smooth flow of the English text. They arrest our reading by calling attention to the gap between the two languages. In this way Tagalog words seem to resist reduction and assimilation into English equivalents and, by implication, into colonial and elite categories.

In reading *Pasyon and Revolution* one has the sensation of moving between two languages and the worlds they contain. But one is also conscious of a persistent and unbridgeable rift between the two. This is because the Tagalog terms, although given English approximations, nonetheless remain visible and unchanged. They seem then like proper names, as they traverse but do not morph into different languages.<sup>4</sup> In their original form Tagalog words seem to insist on their singularity, giving them a certain agency apart from the claims of English. However, the agency of the vernacular—it

capacity to withstand and exceed translation into another tongue—is discernible to “us” only as long as it remains suspended in English. For it is through English that Rey is able to see in Tagalog words a kind of uncanny power to mobilize a mass of interests and commitments at odds with those of the educated and the wealthy ruling classes. In other words, English provides the discursive context within which to see the textual power of Tagalog; but Tagalog’s power to resist reduction into English is simultaneously reliant upon the latter’s explication. Throughout the book, English and Tagalog are thus less opposed, as juxtaposed, to one another. As the language of American colonial rule and postwar elite nationalism, English furnishes the scaffolding with which to support and make visible the power of Tagalog. Bristling in practically every paragraph of the book, Tagalog emerges as the semantic lodestar that forces “us, modern Filipinos,” to rethink the limits and necessity of English in conveying a “Filipino” past.

For Rey the stakes of this translation project could not be higher. By deciphering the masses’ terms for understanding and acting upon their given conditions, “we” can better decide on the direction of “social reform”:

[W]e can either further accelerate the demise of “backward” ways of thinking . . . in order to pave the way for the new, or we can graft modern ideas onto traditional modes of thought. Whatever our strategy may be, it is necessary that we first understand how the traditional mind operates, particularly in relation to questions of change. This book aims to help bring about this understanding. (ibid., 3)

Here we arrive at a curious contradiction. The implicit political aim of the book—to contribute to “social reform” in a time of growing unrest and recurring class warfare in the Philippines—assumes that “we,” the readers and the author of the book, are obliged to understand “them,” the masses whose words and acts make up the objects of the book’s study. And in comprehending the deep structure of their seemingly fanatical actions, we are led to see them as rational actors, every bit as human as “we” are. Thanks to the work of translation, we can come to recognize the Other as an aspect of ourselves. Rather than accursed others, we can see them as *kapatid* or siblings, with whom we share a common national bond and to whom we bear a moral obligation. Hearing their words, “we” take on the duty to “reform” and “rescue” them from historical forgetting and social injustice.

It is worth noting, however, that although we might sense the Other as akin to ourselves it is much less certain that the reverse is ever true; that is, that we see ourselves to be like them. This political project of reform invariably places “us” necessarily in a hierarchical relationship with “them.” It is “we” who come to understand the “traditional mind” from below (rather than the other way around) from our position above. The social construction of the book’s readership is thus at odds with its linguistic features. “We” readers attend to those from below in order to comprehend them and better intervene in their lives without necessarily altering their positions.

But the politics of translation moves in a different direction. In the book English highlights Tagalog in order to give way to it. It defers to Tagalog, acknowledging its capacity to organize experience and actualize a world steeped in the ethos of *utang na loob*, *kalayaan*, and *damayan*.<sup>5</sup> From the perspective of language then, the great accomplishment of *Pasyon and Revolution* is not only to chronicle those historical moments when social hierarchy was periodically challenged, but also when linguistic hierarchy was loosened. In fact, it enacts this very linguistic movement. It shows how the translation of Tagalog into English leads not to the substitution of one for the other but to the decisive displacement of the latter’s hegemony to speak for and about the former. In contrast, from the perspective of readers, translation also becomes a way of consolidating social hierarchy, reinforcing “our” position as English-literate Filipinos to represent and intervene in the lives of those other Filipinos inhabiting largely vernacular worlds. Put differently, whereas English posits the power of Tagalog to make the world, the English-literate author and readers posit *their* power to understand and remake the world of Tagalog speakers.

### Ileto’s Autobiographical Turn

Translation, therefore, produces discrepant effects, leveling linguistic hierarchy at one moment, only to shore up class inequality in the next. This tendency, at once contradictory and productive of certain possibilities, is perhaps inherent in translation, especially in the case of the Philippines, as I have already suggested elsewhere (e.g., Rafael 1993, 2005). It also manifests itself in other aspects of Rey’s work. We see this tendency, for example, in his autobiographical writings. In the course of Rey’s post-*Pasyon* career, we can discern an intriguing turn to the autobiographical.<sup>6</sup> Consciously inserting himself into his texts, Rey has sought to evoke his milieu as a way of accounting for his particular approach to and understanding of such topics

as popular movements, contemporary politics, and comparative imperial legacies in Spain, the United States, and Japan. By objectifying the social conditions of his work, Rey has sought to establish his own life as the context against which a series of historical topics are read and interpreted.

Whether it is writing about the postwar development of Southeast Asian studies (Ileto 2002), the preface to the Japanese translation of *Pasyon and Revolution* (Ileto 2005) or, more recently, the American empire from the perspective of his father's experience in the 1930s to the 1950s and the son's travels through the 1960s and the 1970s (Ileto 2014), Rey's use of autobiography seems to mark a departure from the linguistic concerns of his earlier work. Only rarely does he bring up questions of language and translation, and only then as an adjunct to the more pressing questions of self-discovery and self-transformation amid changing geopolitical and material conditions. In the earlier work, the fetish quality of the vernacular to produce and not simply represent the world in which it figured was a major motif. In later writings Rey seems to sidestep the vernacular world in favor of tracing the self's movement outside and around it. Yet, there is, I think, a way to see in the later texts a retracing and working through of the unresolved tensions between the linguistic and the social that remains characteristic of *Pasyon and Revolution*.

How, then, do we think about autobiography in the context of Rey's work? Before proceeding any further, I should make it clear that the remarks that follow do not make up a historically accurate (if there is such a thing) account of Rey in all his worldly complexity. It is rather a close reading of Rey's construction of Rey—the textualization of his own life, as it were—which, after all, is what constitutes an autobiography. At no point, therefore, is my reading meant to refer to the “real” Rey, whose singularity doubtless exceeds even his own textualization, but only to the figurative “Rey” who emerges from his own writings. Selective, partial, and retrospectively regarded from shifting perspectives and interests, autobiographical writing tends to share some of the elements of fiction, if by “fiction” we mean the imaginative (re)creation of a world related to but always at a tangent from the real one we inhabit. We can think of Rey's autobiography then in this way: as the documentation of a life that, seen from the vanishing point of the present, necessarily entails the work of imaginative recuperation. Autobiography as the self-conscious reckoning with one's own past thus stands midway between the genres of history and literature. In the writing of the self (in both senses of the genitive), the empirical and the fictional are inextricably bound.

How then does autobiography work in Rey's writings? It does so in two related ways: as anti-imperialist critique and as nationalist affirmation. In this sense, we can think of Rey as part of a long line of Filipino thinkers from Rizal to Mabini, from Aguinaldo to Recto, from Constantino to De la Costa. Indeed, these writers serve as the ethico-political points of references in Rey's work, even as his historiographic and theoretical orientation owes to a large extent to his British and American teachers at Cornell and the European philosophers he read at the Ateneo.

We can see Rey's affiliation with this nationalist generation in one of his most oft-repeated stories about Cornell. He tells of his initial encounter with Prof. Oliver Wolters (1915–2000), who was perhaps one of the most important authorities on early Southeast Asian history at the time. Rey recalls how this former British colonial official, who had been involved in suppressing the communist insurgency in Malaya during the Emergency, sternly warned the young Filipino student in 1967 against writing nationalist history:

Seated behind his desk, [Wolters] reached back and pulled out of the bookcase behind him a book titled *A Short History of the Filipino People*, authored by a certain Teodoro Agoncillo. Agoncillo was at that time one of the Philippines' most prominent historians, based in the University of the Philippines' History Department. Born in 1912, he was just three years older than Wolters. I didn't know much about this Filipino historian in 1967, because I had attended the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila, a rival of the University of the Philippines . . . I couldn't grasp the full implications, then, of Wolters' warning about this Agoncillo textbook: *Mr Ileto, you are not going to write history like this!* (Ileto 2002, 5; cf. Ileto 2014, 99)

Here the professor tells the student what *not* to write. Learning begins with a negative injunction. Forbidden to write like Agoncillo, Rey nonetheless comes to develop a deep, albeit critical, appreciation of his work. He is especially captivated by Agoncillo's (1956) book on the Katipunan: *The Revolt of the Masses* (cf. Ileto 2011a, b). The figure of Andres Bonifacio as it emerged in the book gives Rey a glimmer of what his dissertation would be about. The professor's “no” thus lays the groundwork for a “yes.” It stirs the student's interest precisely toward what he was barred from. Setting aside this prohibition, his disobedience proves to be productive. He discovers a

thesis topic and writes what would become an astonishingly significant book that years later would place his professor in a position of deferring to him in admiration. In this scene of transgression, the lowly brown student initially accedes to, but eventually dispenses with, the order of the white professor. Autobiography allows Rey to imagine himself divided into two: a younger, naïve “I” who does not know what he is not even supposed to know, and an older, more knowledgeable “I” who looks back in amusement and pride at how the former overcomes his own ignorance and insecurity. He does so by engaging in a dialectical struggle with his professor and eventually prevails, even as he conserves the authority of the former, making it into an aspect of his own self. The young Rey becomes a professor himself, much admired and cited like the older Wolters.<sup>7</sup> Relaying this story to us here today allows the older Rey of the future to recuperate and safeguard the memory of the younger Rey for a readership in the present. As readers and listeners of the story, we come to register and validate the unification and consolidation of this divided self into a self-authorizing figure, who signs his name in books and articles as “Reynaldo Ileto” across space and time.

In discovering Agoncillo’s *Revolt*, Rey, like Bonifacio before him, engages in a series of other revolts against a number of authority figures. Once at Cornell, he rebels not only against Wolters but also against the Jesuit fathers who “had hidden from me” knowledge of the student movements at the University of the Philippines, as well as Agoncillo’s nationalist history. Intrigued by the idea of the “unfinished revolution” in the book, Rey remarks how “[a]s a student at the Ateneo, I don’t think I ever became aware of [this] notion . . .” (Ileto 2014, 101). In reading Agoncillo, Rey not only finds “inspiration” for his dissertation; he also “wakes” up from the ideological slumber induced by the Jesuit fathers (ibid., 100–1).<sup>8</sup> Finally in Chapter I of his book, Rey manages to take aim at Agoncillo himself. While acknowledging the importance of *Revolt* in the writing of *Pasyon and Revolution*, Rey nonetheless remarks that something is missing in Agoncillo’s book:

Although I found the story of the Katipunan and its supremo, Bonifacio, vividly reconstructed by Agoncillo, I remained intrigued by the relationship of the title of the book to its body. The physical involvement of the masses in the revolution is pretty clear, but how did they actually perceive, in terms of their own experience, the ideas of nationalism and revolution brought from the West by the ilustrados?

Agoncillo assumes that to all those who engaged in revolution, the meaning of independence was the same: separation from Spain and the building of a sovereign Filipino nation. (Ileto 1979, 5)

The title of the book, which is to say its head, seems to be at odds with its body. It names one thing but refers to another. Rey regards this gap as a shortcoming on Agoncillo’s part, one that he shares with other *ilustrado* thinkers. For while Agoncillo seeks to speak of the masses he in fact fails to hear them and, like his predecessors, imposes his interpretation of events on them instead. The masses—avowed agents of the revolution—end up unheard. *Pasyon and Revolution*, insofar as it seeks to “simply let Bonifacio and the Katipunan speak to us” (ibid., 5), corrects the shortcomings of this other father figure. Rey acknowledges his debt to Agoncillo’s book, simultaneously negating and subsuming it as something that his own book will one day come to surpass.

### Father and Son: Translation and Autobiography

Containing “Agoncillo”—the name as well as the work—within the boundaries of his work leads Rey to engage in yet another dramatic struggle, this time with his biological father. Rey writes that “Agoncillo,” aside from setting him apart from Wolters and the Jesuits, also opened up an ideological rift between him and his father, Rafael Ileto (1920–2003).

In his recent essay, “Father and Son in the Embrace of Uncle Sam,” Rey writes about his father in great detail (Ileto 2014). He tracks the different ways in which he and his father encountered the American empire as they traveled from the Philippines to study in the US. Throughout the essay Rey contrasts his father’s response from his. Where the father enthusiastically participated in the defense of American empire against its enemies in the 1940s through the 1980s, the son, arriving in the US amid the turbulent 1960s, was deeply skeptical of imperial claims that it was a benevolent and civilizing force. Reflecting the generational divide between Filipinos who grew up under US and Japanese occupation and those who came of age in the postcolonial era, Rey’s account of his life is a stark contrast to his father’s. It is a stance that is perhaps not atypical of many Filipino postcolonials (indeed of entire generations of postcolonials in many other places in the world) growing up in an era of decolonization and dissent. In what follows, I want to trace the dynamics of their relationship for what it might say about the varying constructions of nationhood, on one hand, and the unresolved



issues between language and social hierarchy that we saw in *Pasyon and Revolution*, on the other.

Educated at West Point, Rafael Ileta was lauded for his wartime heroics against the Japanese as part of the combined Filipino–American liberation forces led by Gen. Douglas MacArthur.<sup>9</sup> He would go on to play important roles in the making of the postwar Philippines as one of the leaders of the counterinsurgency war against the Huks in the 1950s, serving in the administrations of several presidents.<sup>10</sup> Steeped in the ideology of anticommunism, General Ileta was deeply suspicious of anything remotely associated with the Left. Agoncillo, as Rey points out, had been sympathetic to the Huks, a communist-aligned, peasant movement that began as an anti-Japanese guerilla resistance movement during the Second World War and escalated into an anti-Republic rebellion mostly focused in Central Luzon until the early 1950s.<sup>11</sup> This was one reason why the publication of *Revolt* was initially blocked by the Committee on Un-Filipino Activities (CUFA), which was led by no less than Ramon Magsaysay. “To my father, who was assigned to the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) in the early 1960s, *The Revolt of the Masses* was one of those “subversive” writings that ought to be banned for spreading communist propaganda in the schools” (ibid., 100). Aggravating Rey’s alienation from his father was the son’s decision to teach at the UP, which his father “considered a hotbed of communism” (ibid., 111). Worse, in 1978 Rey traveled to Red China with a group of Filipino historians, which “was a bit too much for [his father]” (ibid.).

Beginning with the proper name “Agoncillo,” the son finds a way to challenge and eventually exceed his father as he did with his Cornell and Ateneo professors. He escapes their influence and overcomes their authority after waking up to certain truths that had been kept from him. Banking on Agoncillo’s name and work, he writes his dissertation and produces a book that comes to establish his name for posterity, distinguishing it from his better-known father’s. In the battle of proper names, “Reynaldo Ileta,” the product of split selves that come to be united through the mediation of another proper name, “Teodoro Agoncillo,” survives “Rafael Ileta” into the future.

Let us take a closer look at the father’s name as that which organizes the difference between father and son. Rey calls attention to the shifts in Rafael’s name as he moved from humble provincial beginnings in Nueva Ecija to positions of metropolitan prominence as a graduate of the Philippine Military Academy in 1939; then, as a graduate of West Point in 1943. This journey from the periphery to the center of the American empire brought

about a radical transformation in his father’s identity. The change was most palpably registered in his father’s name. Rafael Ileta was known as “Apeng” in the Philippines, but his efforts to “belong” to Mother America culminated in a name change” while he was at West Point (ibid., 79). At first “they started calling him ‘Ralph’ but since Ralph was already the name of a roommate, they settled for a nickname that he would carry for the rest of his life: ‘Rocky’” (ibid.). As Rocky, Rafael sought to assimilate into the “American Dream” at a time of intense racial wars both within Jim Crow America and beyond, in the Pacific War against Japan. He played lacrosse and learned how to box, often defeating much larger white opponents. He worked hard to improve his English and “his dream was to escort an American girl to the West Point ball” (ibid., 77). He even became an honorary citizen of the small Missouri town he visited regularly as a guest of his roommate and with whose sister he exchanged numerous letters.

By contrast, Reynaldo Ileta was always known as Reynaldo Ileta, or Rey for short. While his father came to the United States as a bachelor desiring white girls, Rey arrived in Ithaca accompanied by his Filipina bride of two months, Loolee. Rocky moved in a world that was overwhelmingly white and segregated, where he struggled with his English and sought to establish himself as the physical and intellectual equal of any man. As a graduate student in upstate New York, Rey became ever more tied to the Philippines at home. Coming to America meant learning, or rather relearning, Tagalog, given his ready fluency in English. He counted among his friends many Asian and Filipino students, while his white friends were invariably fellow students involved in the antiwar movement and largely sympathetic to Asian aspirations, as opposed to American ambitions. Where Rocky was anxious to assimilate into the American Dream, Rey, already steeped in the Americanized culture of the postwar Philippines, found himself awakening to an American nightmare of imperialist warfare and racial strife. Rarely venturing beyond the confines of Ithaca to make friends with other Americans the way his father had done, Rey, as if prefiguring the language of the *pasyon*, recoiled from the “glitter of empire, the false promises and the contradictions between myths and realities. [He] felt no desire to ‘belong’ to the America outside Cornell” (ibid., 81).

On the one hand, the father moved from Tagalog to English to the point of speaking only English to his children in their home. He took on a succession of names, going from Apeng to Ralph to Rocky, as he traveled from Nueva Ecija to America. The son, on the other hand, found himself

imaginatively returning to the Philippines as he physically moved to America, steadfastly remaining foreign in this foreign setting. He embraced the anti-imperialism of his campus milieu and affirmed what retrospectively he came to reckon as his obscured nationalist roots. Rocky's nationalism consisted of serving the empire in the belief that he was then furthering the interests of his people. Contrast this with Rey's nationalism, which begins with the experience of "awakening," of coming to see the real "light" or *liwanag* of truth behind the deceiving "glitter" represented by the very promises to which his own father had subscribed. In light of Renato Constantino's analysis of postwar Philippine society, Rocky and Rey were exemplars of colonial "mis-education." But there were important differences. The father's rite of passage to America transformed him into a "model soldier in the Empire's Army," whereas the son's journey to Ithaca not only turned him against the empire but also turned him toward the Philippines and, even more importantly, toward Tagalog.

In this process of becoming something other than what they were we see the connection between translation and autobiography. As we have seen, autobiography splits the self into two "I's" along a temporal axis: a future "I" encapsulating and speaking for a past "I," translating both into a narrative available to a third term, the addressee, who is the present reader or listener. We have seen this in Rey's story of his encounter with Wolters at Cornell. But autobiography also depends on the biography of an Other who is perhaps less enlightened, more gullible, and not quite modern against which the self establishes itself to be better educated, more attuned to the world, and more in touch with the truth. This is what we have seen in Rey's use of his father's biography as the backdrop to his own life's story.

### **Father, Son, Mother: Proper Names and a Gendered Optic**

Key to the difference between father and son is the matter of proper names. Rafael, known as Apeng, is translated into Rocky, who is then enfolded into the designs of empire. Rey, however, remains Rey. His proper name continues to be what it had always been. Unlike the father's, the son's name remains unchanged: it transfers from one country to another, from one language to another, but it does not translate. It crosses boundaries while remaining outside of and distinct from the languages and cultures that lay on either side of the divide. Like the untranslated Tagalog words that pulsate within the fabric of *Pasyon and Revolution*, "Rey" remains resistant to the seductions of empire,

escaping the totality of its embrace. The autobiographical vignettes establish a precedent for the resistance of proper names. In Rey's case, the invocation of "Agoncillo," and later on "Bonifacio," serves as talismanic weapons with which to ward off attempts to translate and reduce their lives and works into oblivion. In contrast, the history of his father's name indicates how contingent and fragile such resistance can be, as the name ceases to be "proper" altogether and becomes a common marker of another power alien to the self.

Rey writes about his father, he later says, as a way of simultaneously criticizing and paying tribute to him. He wants to "show his love and gratitude . . . without being colonized by his beliefs" (ibid., 111). The son emerges as one who distinguishes himself from his origin, yet remains faithful to it. He excavates "Apeng" underneath "Rocky" in the desire to redefine the life of Rafael en route to taking stock of his own. That is, he retranslates his father's name into its putatively proper, native context. Just as in *Pasyon and Revolution*, Rey uncovers the obscured history and hidden powers of the vernacular amid layers of English, so too does he rescue, as it were, the vernacular substrate underneath the Americanized surface of his father's name. The irony, of course, is that the significance of the Tagalog "Apeng" as the hidden meaning of the Spanish "Rafael" resonates only to the extent that it can be read—translated, if you will—from the American "Rocky."

There is, however, one final twist in this battle of proper names. The task of translating his father's life in relation to his own turns out to be something carried out for the sake of his mother. Rey writes at the end of his essay: "She understood why my career developed practically in opposition to my father's. In a sense I have merely fleshed out in this essay her sentiments about the man she loved, whose behavior she could decry as well as admire. She is the absent presence throughout this . . . narrative of father and son in the embrace of Uncle Sam" (ibid., 113).

This sudden invocation of the mother brings us back to the problem of address that I mentioned earlier in relation to *Pasyon and Revolution*. Just as the author addresses "us" about "them"—the peasants from below whose history must be heard and understood if they are to become part of "our" nation—so in his autobiography he writes of himself and his father to "give voice" to his mother. It is her "absent presence" that, like the Holy Ghost, hovers over the story of the father and the son. By subsuming the father's history, the son makes the mother heard, or at least makes known her "unarticulated sentiments." The son speaks of and for the mother, just as the author speaks of and for the "inarticulate masses," translating their language



into something comprehensible to us. The mother, like the peasants, is not so much voiceless or dumb, but blocked from speaking. Unblocking their speech, the author-son reveals them to be the secret authors of history, as well as his own narratives. She stands as the repressed origin of the two men's lives, just as peasant movements exist as the "underside" of Philippine history; that is to say, as the permanent possibility of class warfare and revolutionary upheaval itself.

However, there is also an important difference between the peasants and the mother. While the peasants are made strikingly visible and readily comprehensible within the context of nationalist history, the mother remains radically Other in relation to the stories of father and son. The mother is a heterogeneous element in the son's story, one whose centrality is belatedly acknowledged only to be withdrawn. She occupies two positions: as the absent "you" who receives and registers Rey's stories beyond the grave, and as the object of the story whose presence is assumed but remains repressed. Silent witness and voiceless interlocutor, she remains untouched and yet seems to be in touch with everything. While various father figures are challenged and subsumed in Rey's account, the mother, Olga Clemeña, remains between languages and proper names, circulating between men and their histories, yet barely visible in their autobiographies. She is what Deleuze (1995, 171) might describe as the historical, which "amounts only to a set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to 'become,' that is, to create something new." Becoming a man like Rey Ileto, or Rocky Ileto, required leaving behind the very history that made it possible for something new to emerge. But it also meant refiguring that history as a mother, for example, or as *Inang Bayan* (motherland), to whom one returns and on whose behalf one speaks, and in no less than in one's mother tongue, at once lost and found.

In the name of the father and of the son, women emerge as ghostly presences analogous to that "other" nation imagined by "us" as the mass of peasants excluded from nationalist historiography. Whether it is the mother silently agreeing with the son's critique of the father, or the wife whose fluency in the vernacular makes her an essential supplement to the work of the author, women come to occupy an ambiguous place in both the historical and autobiographical texts. Like the "masses" they are both central and peripheral. As in *Pasyon and Revolution*, so in the autobiographical writings: the author and those he addresses become who they are by virtue of having subsumed and incorporated the Other who they are not. Seeking to broaden

the basis of nationhood and deepen the personal stakes in their imagining, both the book and the autobiography also convert nationalism into a series of stories about self-alienation and its overcoming. That process of overcoming entails the rescue of those below, of those whose names are barely heard, who have been silenced and set aside. Positioned as the privileged agents for granting agency to those below, the author-son and readers form the upper reaches of a national hierarchy and, as a matter of course, are heirs to a highly gendered colonial history.

By contrast, the linguistic play evinced in *Pasyon and Revolution* between Tagalog and English, as I have suggested, speaks to the possibility of leveling hierarchy. Rey gives a compelling explication in English of peasant movements as political projects intimately tied to ethical norms sustained by a messianic sense of history. But in doing so, he also makes clear that the specificity of their thoughts and actions can be grasped only in and through Tagalog. The juxtaposition of the two languages, English and Tagalog, thus allows for the opening of worlds hitherto invisible to "us." The autobiography, however, moves in a different direction. Recounting life as a series of struggles against authority figures, the autobiography betrays an investment in hierarchy whether by way of a Self commemorating an absent presence—the young "I," the silent mother—or a Self overcoming the Other that comes before it, in all senses of that word, whether it be a professor, another author, or one's own father. There is then the sense that autobiography forecloses the possibilities raised in *Pasyon and Revolution*. While the book speaks of a kind of unfinished social revolution evinced on the level of language and translation, the autobiography deploys a gendered optic that conventionalizes the process of transformation, substituting social revolution with a narrative of generational masculine succession.

### By Way of Conclusion

Let me end with a final autobiographical note that modulates and qualifies my observations above. It was around 1976 when I first encountered Rey Ileto's work as an undergraduate student majoring in history at the Ateneo de Manila. It was in the Philippine history class of Fr. John Schumacher that I first heard of Rey's thesis. I remember becoming so excited at what seemed to be an entirely novel approach to studying the revolution, which is to say, of studying the newness of what was new—that I borrowed the thesis from the library and paid a typist to make me a facsimile copy, which at that time was actually cheaper than getting it Xeroxed. I had the facsimile bound just like a

thesis. On the cover was the title, “Pasyon and the Interpretation of Change in Tagalog Society,” and underneath it appeared my name, “Vicente Rafael,” inadvertently placed by the typist. It was as if, in having Rey’s thesis copied, his name had been erased to make way for mine.

This desire to appropriate *Pasyon and Revolution* and bring it up close, so close as to blur the identity between author and reader, has been the ongoing experience I have had with Rey’s book. In fact, much of what I have since written has leaned, to some extent, on Rey’s ideas, at times peeling away from them, at others displacing and disfiguring them for other uses. I always return to Rey’s work whenever I am not sure how to think about the vernacular analogs for power and pity, reciprocity and revenge, shame and sovereignty, and so forth. *Pasyon and Revolution* is like a country I grew up in. One could travel abroad, read other books, and dwell in the shade of other ideas. But so long as I thought about the Philippines, I found myself meandering back sooner or later to the passages of Rey’s work. It was *Pasyon and Revolution* that first gave me a sense of the imaginative possibilities and political salience of the vernacular, especially when deployed beside, rather than merely subsumed by, English-language historiography. By delineating the power of the vernacular, Rey complicates and detains every attempt to translate Tagalog ideas into English. At the same time, he questions the adequacy of English terms to substitute for the complexity of Tagalog. Reading as the experience of translation; translation as the experience of being detained and stranded between languages; and detention as the experience of attending patiently, at times joyfully, to the play of meanings and the expectation of something to come: these are the enduring lessons I have learned—and continue to learn—from Rey’s work.

## Notes

*This article is a revised version of a paper originally presented at the “Historiography and Nation since Pasyon and Revolution: Conference in Honor of Professor Reynaldo C Iletto,” Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, organized by this journal, the Ateneo’s History Department, and Kyoto University’s Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 8–9 Feb. 2013. My thanks to Jun Aguilar, Carol Hau, and Francis Gealogo for providing the initial occasion for writing this paper, as well as to audiences at the University of Washington and University of the Philippines for their patience and sharp questions. I would like to acknowledge the help of Lila R. Shahani, whose astute reading and editing of earlier versions of this text I found more than helpful. Of course, I alone remain responsible for all errors of fact and interpretation.*

- 1 Approximate English translations of these terms are as follows: pity; light; and empathy.
- 2 A slightly revised version of “Father and Son in the Embrace of Uncle Sam” appears on pp. 67 to 114 of this volume. I thank Rey Iletto for sharing the manuscript prior to publication and for granting permission to quote from this manuscript.
- 3 Approximate English translations of these terms are as follows: inner being; journey on foot; amulet; and light and darkness.
- 4 My understanding of proper nouns and proper names as heterogeneous and therefore untranslatable elements in language which, like signatures, survive their referents owes much to Jacques Derrida (1985, 1978, 2001), among other works.
- 5 Approximate English translations of these terms are as follows: debt of gratitude; independence; and mutual empathy.
- 6 Contrary to the common misconception that Iletto wrote nothing of significance after *Pasyon and Revolution*, it is worth noting that his subsequent collection of essays, *Filipinos and their Revolution* (1998), is a compelling rearticulation of his interpretive method in various historical contexts. His earlier monograph on Datu Uto (Iletto 1971) similarly anticipates and foreshadows the arguments in *Pasyon and Revolution*. In any case, this article is less about these works (all of which are driven by a common set of obsessions), as to the relationship between *Pasyon and Revolution* and his autobiographical writings.
- 7 It is worth noting that, as much as Iletto initially rebels against Wolters’s injunction to “not write” like Agoncillo, Iletto’s work will come to rely on Wolters’s notions of Southeast Asian power, especially in Wolters 1999.
- 8 It is worth noting that Jesuit historians such as Fr. John Schumacher, Fr. Mario Francisco, and Fr. Jose Cruz were some of the earliest and in most cases enthusiastic readers of Iletto’s work. Fr. Schumacher had taught Iletto’s work while it was still a dissertation and has through the years incorporated many of its insights into his own work.
- 9 Rafael Iletto was part of the Alamo Scouts of the Sixth United States Army responsible for the spectacular rescue of American prisoners of war in Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija, on 30 January 1945.
- 10 Rafael Iletto’s service included founding the first special forces unit, the Scout Rangers, in 1950, serving as operating chief of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency, commanding general of the Philippine Army under Marcos (against whom he would break), and secretary of national defense under Corazon (Cory) Aquino in 1986. He also served as ambassador to Iran, Turkey, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos at various times.
- 11 The best account of the Huks is still Kerkvliet 1977.

## References

- Agoncillo, Teodoro. 1956. *The revolt of the masses: The story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1995. Control and becoming. In *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin, 169–76. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and difference*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- . 1985. *The ear of the other*, trans. Peggy Kamuf. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- . 2001. *Acts of religion*. New York: Routledge Press.
- Ileto, Reynaldo C. 1971. *Magindanao, 1860–1888: The career of Datu Uto of Buayan*. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University.
- . 1979. *Pasyon and revolution: Popular movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- . 1998. *Filipinos and their revolution: Event, discourse, and historiography*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- . 2002. On the historiography of Southeast Asia and the Philippines: The golden age of Southeast Asian studies—experiences and reflections. *Historiography in the Philippines*, National University of Singapore. Online, <http://www.meijigakuin.ac.jp/~iism/frontier/Proceedings/08%20Ileto%20Speech.pdf>, accessed 6 Jan. 2014.
- . 2005. Preface. In *Kirisuto junanishi to kakumei: 1814–1910* [Pasyon and revolution: Popular movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910], ed. Yoshiko Nagano and Hiromu Shimizu, trans. Makito Kawada, Satoshi Miyawaki, and Kunio Takano. Tokyo: Hosei University Press.
- . 2011a. Reflections on Teodoro Agoncillo's *Revolt of the Masses* and the politics of history. *Southeast Asian Studies* 49(3): 496–520.
- . 2011b. Scholarship, society and politics in three worlds: Reflections of a Filipino sojourner, 1965–95. In *Decentring and diversifying Southeast Asian studies: Perspectives from the region*, ed. Goh Beng-Lan, 105–28. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- . 2014. Father and son in the embrace of Uncle Sam. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 62(1): 67–114.
- Kerkvliet, Benedict Tria. 1977. *The Huk rebellion: A study of peasant revolt in the Philippines*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rafael, Vicente L. 1993. *Contracting colonialism: Translation and Christian conversion in Tagalog society under early Spanish rule*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2005. *The promise of the foreign: Nationalism and the technics of translation in the Spanish Philippines*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Wolters, O. W. 1999. *History, culture, and region in Southeast Asian perspectives*. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, in cooperation with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.

**Vicente L. Rafael** is professor of history, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195–3560, USA. He is the author of, among others, *Contracting Colonialism* (1998), *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (2000), and *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (2005). Rafael's research has focused on translation and power, nationalism and technology, comparative colonialism, and postcolonialism in the Philippines and the United States. <[vrafael@uw.edu](mailto:vrafael@uw.edu)>