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Melba Padilla Maggay, A Clash of Cultures: Early American Protestant Missions and Filipino Religious Consciousness

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validation of McMahon's overall project—that of showing the plasticity of the texts and consequently of colonial relations, which operate through texts.

This is not the space for a full account of Paz Marquez Benitez's story (or of the novels), or indeed for a critique of the method of the "political allegory" in general. Suffice it to say here that *Dead Stars: American and Literary Perspectives on the American Colonization of the Philippines* is a significant contribution to the scholarship in Philippine-American relations. In going back to the primary materials and sharpening its focus on the key texts, it is certainly one of the most lucidly written. No burden this, white man's or brown brother's.

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Melba Padilla Maggay, *A Clash of Cultures: Early American Protestant Missions and Filipino Religious Consciousness*
(Mandaluyong: Anvil, 2011), 235pp.

Reading Melba Padilla Maggay's *A Clash of Cultures: Early American Protestant Missions and Filipino Religious Consciousness* gives one a sense of trepidation at the magnitude of the subject's scope. Maggay admits as much in presenting her work as "an initial reading of the immense material gathered from the insights and works of these esteemed colleagues and various other sources."(xix)

Nonetheless, the book sets lofty goals for itself by proposing to study the resulting reaction when a religion insinuates itself into a host culture that is in the process of political turmoil and social upheaval. The author outlines her main concern of analyzing the consequent patterns of cultural transactions between American Protestant missionaries and Filipinos during the early American period. According to Maggay, this requires a study in two separate tracks: the first, a study of the efforts of the American protestant missions in their attempt to bring a different brand of Christianity into the Philippines; the second, an attempt to discern patterns of indigenous religious consciousness by looking into oral and written traditions during the same period.

For the first track, the book relies on materials gathered from the archives of the missions, most of which are correspondences and reports of the missionaries who came to the Philippines. The book also uses interviews with surviving missionaries or their descendants. In terms of data sampling, the study includes seven of the nine Protestant missions that came to the Philippines between 1899 and 1905. The author explains that these missions were selected mainly for geographic coverage. She specifies the selected ministries as those of the Presbyterians in Manila, Southern Tagalog and Negros Oriental, the Baptists in the Visayas region, the Untied Brethren and Disciples of Christ in the Ilocos and Cordilleras, the Congregationalists in Mindanao, the Methodists in Northern and Central Luzon, and the Episcopalians in the Cordillera Region (particularly Sagada).

The second track, according to Maggay, takes data from Filipino literary traditions such as myths, folklore, songs, stories and novels contemporary to the period to provide a sketch of Filipino religious consciousness at the time. She is less specific about the sources used for her construction of the indigenous religious template.

A third track tries to draw meaning from the complicated cultural interface between the first two tracks. The book itself, in the author's own words, is "a highly generalized sketch of the third track's findings." (xvii)

The first part discusses the role Protestant missions played in William McKinley's benevolent assimilation policy. It is in her discussion of this early American Protestant missionary effort at evangelization in the Philippines that the author proves herself a deft guide in navigating the treacherous waters of intercultural religious transactions between the missionaries and Filipinos. Notably, Maggay sets the first part of her book against the backdrop of American conquest and colonization in the Philippines. She begins by exploring the notion that the missionaries were, as William Howard Taft succinctly put it, the "best soldiers of the American occupation" even though they found themselves in a position that was both advantageous and precarious. This predicament was bounded by two extremes: on one end the missionaries found themselves proffering to the Filipinos a religion that did away with the repressive practices of the "abusive friocracy" and that democratized access to Christian scripture; while on the other end, the same missionaries found themselves unable to sustain the "revolutionary spirit" their presence represented because of the exigencies of colonization.

Despite being identified as representatives of the ruling colonial power and despite the general consensus in the missionary community that independence for the Filipinos was ill-advised at the time, the Protestant missions still carried on the task of evangelization.

In the second part, Maggay weaves a profusion of accounts into an outline of the strategies chosen by the missionaries to carry out their work of evangelization and the varied reactions exhibited by Filipinos along geographic, class, and gender lines.

Interestingly, she points out that most of the early converts into Protestantism came from two very different socioeconomic classes: the masses who suffered disillusionment with the oppressive religious corporations under Spanish rule, and quite a few ilustrados who observed correctly that the Protestant agenda in the Philippines was ultimately tied to the colonization process.

The role of gender is also explored in this part of the book. From missionary correspondences, it is revealed that women were considered key to evangelization and an important variable in determining whether or not converts would stay in the Protestant faith or revert to Catholicism. This was largely due to the observation that Protestant men who married Catholic women usually became Catholic themselves rather than converting their wives into Protestantism.

While these are all undeniably fascinating facets of the life experienced by the Protestant missionaries during the time, Maggay proceeds through one conceptual subheading after another at such a rapid pace that the reader might feel a sense of haste in her conduct of the discussion. It seems that, true to her introductory note, the author meant the work to merely sketch a general outline of a larger work and present her hypotheses as seeds for future research. For instance, in the case of her discussion on women in the missionary movement, Maggay abruptly ends with a note that the questions raised by the sources on the role of women “could bear further investigation in subsequent studies.” (91)

The third part of the book, which discusses the interface between the American Protestant message and Filipino religious consciousness, is burdened by the same hasty treatment of topics as the second part. At this point, the overabundance of hypotheses almost muddles the overarching thesis of studying the clash between American Protestantism and Filipino religious consciousness. More troublesome than the pace of Maggay’s discussion, however, is the rising dissonance between the intended goals of the study and the nature of the material presented. This is most evident in the author’s treatment and construction of the concept of Filipino “indigenous consciousness.”

That it remained unclear throughout the third part of the book what constitutes “indigenous consciousness” made it difficult to understand how such consciousness interfaced with the American missionary message.

Once again, the author depends on citing examples of individual cases of Filipinos and their particular experiences with American missionaries and Protestantism without dealing with the issue of operationalizing “indigenous consciousness.”

By the fourth part of the book, it also becomes less clear whether the author is writing an academic study on the subject of Protestant missions during the American period, or means for the work to be a religious treatise on Christianity in the Philippines. For instance, she speaks of the need to adapt Christian scripture to the Filipino religious frame of mind when she writes: “While it is true that there is a universality to the Gospel of Christ, its meaning needs to be theologically articulated in a culture-specific way to specific peoples.” (180)

The same can be said of Maggay’s survey of “mediatorial figures” in Filipino religious consciousness. After cursory mentions of particular Filipino groups and their deities, the book turns a curious turn when Maggay states: “Jesus is like this, a reconciling God who makes peace with his blood and breaks down the dividing wall of hostility between us and those who somehow have been estranged from us. His blood is better than the blood and entrails of chickens and pigs, for it is able to appease, not just the spirits, but the high God whose displeasure has made him distant.” (181)

In this, one finds in Maggay’s postulations both purpose and cohesion as she elucidates her views on Christianity’s function in the context of a society that has experienced several cultural upheavals as a result of its colonial trauma.

Perhaps, the most telling statement in terms of the author’s own perspective can be found in the concluding section where Maggay posits: “We need to wrestle with our own culture at its point of greatest power and peril if we are to bring it under the light of Christ. Only then can we presume to say something about the uniqueness and superiority of Christ to the great cultures around us.” (198)

The statement makes it easier to understand the seemingly binary relationship between American Protestant Missions and what Maggay considers “Filipino religious consciousness.” The latter parts of the work seem to shift the focus from academic discussion to take on the role of advocating Christian beliefs.

At the risk of sounding deliberately obfuscatory, the phrase begs the question: “What defines Filipino religious consciousness?” This, perhaps, is the central issue where Maggay’s discussion falls short in terms of her stated academic goals. While there is an obvious attempt to consider Filipino indigenous religious consciousness in her work, the author neglects a proper

attempt at delineating or delimiting the parameters of what constitutes such consciousness. Thus, the work offers a wide range of elements of Filipino religious consciousness from the indigenous to the colonial without pinning down an operationalized construct.

Despite such concerns, Maggay's book is a powerful collection of stories about the Protestant missions of the time and the legacy they left behind. The detailed accounts reveal a gaping hole in Philippine historiography that needs to be filled if a better understanding of the American conquest is to be had. Perhaps, the most compelling of all the author's insights is the double-sided effect of the American Protestant missions on Filipino religious consciousness in democratizing religion while instilling American values. To Maggay, the challenge is in understanding the manner by which Filipino and American cultural values interfaced and using that knowledge to forward a more cohesive faith.

It is not hard to see *A Clash of Cultures* as the first step in a long process of reverse-engineering the cultural aspect of colonization for our own purposes. Maggay's work is a remarkable starting point for exploring any of the dozen concepts she seeded throughout her production of an accessible treatise on the history of the Protestant missions in the Philippines during the early American period.

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