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The Undead

Notes on Photography in the Philippines, 1898–1920s

Photography evades me.—*Roland Barthes, CAMERA LUCIDA*

One of the more visible legacies of the wars of 1898 was the explosion of photographic images, especially those of the lands and peoples that came under U.S. rule. Lighter and more mobile cameras allowed the photographing of sites and populations at greater distances, bringing these up close to a consuming public curious to see the recent “beneficiaries” of imperialist intervention. Photography transformed native peoples into images that could be wrenched from their origins and made to appear in novel contexts. Such images gave metropolitan viewers an acute sense of the technological and material expansiveness of the state and the mechanically reproducible proximity of its new subjects. Yet, photography as a means of expanding the aura, as it were, of the imperialist state, was also put to other uses productive of other effects in the colonies. In this chapter, I look into some of the ways in which photographic images as historical documents both confirmed and confounded the modernist vision of an imperial nation in one of its new possessions, the Philippines. For not only did photographic images reflect a tendentious notion of progress through disciplinary intervention; they also suggested the workings of a force that, as I shall try to show, eluded the demands of colonial and national ways of seeing.

Dead Images of the Living Many of the recent writings on colonial photography have tended to focus on the expropriative nature of the

photographic enterprise. For this reason, they are often infused with a desire for revenge: the wish, as expressed in Malek Alloula's study of French photographs of Algeria, for example, to return the colonizer's gaze that had left its traces on the images of colonized natives.¹ In part, such projects have the effect of stirring anger, guilt, and embarrassment among contemporary readers. They remind us, whoever "we" are, of the violence that underlay the production and distribution of such images. They show the complicity of photographic representation with colonial policies as well as the ethnological and military means with which these were formulated and realized. Again and again, such approaches have demonstrated the tendentiousness of the eye that sees but remains unseen, resting on bodies that it both fixes and consumes for purposes alien to the lives of those it photographs.²

It is this capacity to convert the colonized into objects of foreign interests and subjects of colonial accounts that historically has lent to photography a predatory and cannibalistic quality. And it is all the more problematic, as critical studies have suggested, for its ability to provide an alibi of objectivity so that a photograph seems only to record what is in front of it while masking intentions, concealing selections, and rendering invisible the various frames that determine what is seen, how it is seen, and by whom. Photography has thus functioned as an apparatus of disavowal. Small wonder, then, that present-day discussions of colonial photography tend to incite an undercurrent of unease. They expose us to the relentless voyeurism that animated late imperial projects. In studying and, especially, looking at such photographs, we come into association with imperialist ways of looking and so feel unwittingly implicated in their workings. Like the gun, the camera has been part of the technology of subjugation, furnishing images to relay the workings of a prior and seemingly unassailable will. Colonial photographs seem like trophies of conquest. And to see them—even today—is to come in contact with this violence.

Looking through the photographic archive of U.S. colonial rule in the Philippines, it is not difficult—indeed, it would seem too easy—to confirm such arguments. One sees such photographs and feels compelled to respond.³ Far from rendering Filipinos "invisible," colonialism instigated the proliferation of images of Filipino bodies. As part of a



Fig. 8. “Negritos in the island of Luzon” (William S. Bryan, ed., *Our Islands and Their People as Seen with Camera and Pencil* [New York: N. D. Thompson and Publishing, 1899])

colonial regime of “compulsory visibility,” photography was crucial in the depiction of a plural society as a target of imperialist reform.⁴

Particularly instructive in this regard are what might be called ethnological photographs: pictures that construct natives into distinct types. Appearing in a variety of texts, from popular magazines to academic studies, these sought to divide and classify the population into a hierarchy of ethno-racial differences.⁵ As we saw in chapter 1, each group was situated in relation to its distance from or proximity to what was thought to be the norms of Anglo-Saxon civility. At one extreme were the non-Christian “tribes,” such as the Negritos. They were routinely regarded as the most abject group because of their dark skin, short build, “nomadic” lifestyle, and lack of clothing (fig. 8). The more Malay-looking Igorots, the generic name for ethnic groups in the mountain



Fig. 9. “An elaborate tattoo” (Albert E. Jenks, *The Bontoc Igorot* [Manila: Bureau of Public Printing, 1905])

regions of northern Luzon, elicited intense curiosity among white ethnologists, who often compared them to the Indians of North America. The Igorots—with their history of resistance against Spain, violent practices such as head-hunting, and muscular physique adorned with intricate tattoos—evoked fantasies about “noble savages” as natural allies of white colonizers on the tropical frontier (fig. 9).

Other groups on the southern island of Mindanao, both Muslim and non-Muslim, were regarded as slightly better-off in the ethno-racial hierarchy, given the allegedly improved nature of their material culture, but still requiring close colonial supervision (figs. 10 and 11). Finally, at the top of the hierarchy were the Christianized lowland groups, especially the Tagalogs. Thanks to centuries of Spanish rule, they had managed to come closer to the norms of civilization. But a history of racial mixing had supposedly weakened these groups, producing social divi-



Fig. 10. “Bagobos, island of Mindanao” (*Annual Reports of the Philippine Commission, 1901–1908* [Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1902–1909])



Fig. 11. “Native chiefs of Mindanao, Philippines” (Marrion Wilcox, ed. *Harper’s History of the War in the Philippines* [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1900])

sions that installed an ambitious and corrupt mestizo upper class over a helpless lower class. These conditions made for a society that was as exotic as it was in need of discipline and reform (figs. 12, 13, and 14).

Distinguishing between “uncivilized” and “civilized,” “pure” and “mixed,” “lower,” “middle,” and “upper” classes, such photographs reproduce a typology of native societies that had become commonplace in North American and European ethnology, one that viewed the world’s people in social evolutionary terms. Fixing their subjects into timeless settings, these photographs effect the isolation and dissection of native bodies, converting them into specimens of colonial knowledge and reform. Rendered as dead objects, images of natives were cataloged as discrete items and made part of what I earlier termed a diorama of white love, better known as benevolent assimilation. That is to say, they were meant to represent less the particularities of native societies as the intentions and interests that posited their poses beyond and outside the photographs’ frames. Looking at them from the standpoint of the present, we cannot but be aware of a presence exterior to the images that sets out to measure, calculate, and mummify, as it were, the bodies we see.

Ethnological photographs, then, had a kind of totemic significance. They served as supplements to a national identity in the United States that was suddenly expansive, and hence, coming under pressure throughout the late nineteenth century, but especially after 1898. Photographs of native bodies provided visual referents to the expansion of an imperial body politic in at least two ways. First, they signaled a frontier to be crossed and conquered, and second, they posed a limit to what could be assimilated into the nation. Put differently, these photographs of tribes, whether assumed to be savage or halfway civilized, functioned as fetishes of U.S. nationhood. Like the mass-produced images of Indian and African tribes on the North American continent itself, they were invested with the ability to incite phantasms of manifest destiny.⁶

For imperialist apologists, fulfilling this destiny meant not only the taking of lands and labor but also the giving back of civilization. U.S. colonization, as previously discussed, was conceptualized like other late European colonial projects as a modernizing and benevolent mission. As with any missionary undertaking, the key to success was securing the collaboration of converts and their disciplined adherence to the state.⁷ Again, photography registered the circulation of colonialism’s gifts.



Fig. 12 (above). “A pure Tagalog type of the lower class girl of Manila” (William S. Bryan, ed., *Our Islands and Their People as Seen with Camera and Pencil* [New York: N. D. Thompson and Publishing, 1899])



Fig. 13 (above left). “Filipino Boy—Upper Class” (William S. Bryan, ed., *Our Islands and Their People as Seen with Camera and Pencil* [New York: N. D. Thompson and Publishing, 1899])

Fig. 14 (left). “Type of high-class woman of Manila. The women of the Malay tribes are delicate of form and feature and more attractive than those of the Mongolian type, of whom many are found in the Philippines. The one whose portrait appears herewith has an admixture of Chinese blood.” (William S. Bryan, ed., *Our Islands and Their People as Seen with Camera and Pencil* [New York: N. D. Thompson and Publishing, 1899])

Government reports, travel accounts, and historical narratives were generously illustrated with photographs of the natives' inevitable transformation under U.S. tutelage. For example, there were pictures of savages turned into soldiers (figs. 15, 16, and 17); prisoners turned into obedient citizens (fig. 18); lazy natives turned into productive laborers (fig. 19); and local elites turned into national politicians already destined for monumentalization by future generations (fig. 20).⁸

As with ethnological photographs, these images convey the workings of an order outside their frames. We see individuals whose individuation seems to come from processes beyond what is visible. They appear as if composed by a power that is dispersed throughout the colony, inhabiting every aspect of everyday life and manifesting itself in and through the bodies of each subject. Their poses suggest their internalization of such a power. They come across as if they were recipients, and therefore also carriers, of promises that emanate from a hidden and distant elsewhere.

Living Images of the Dead So far, so obvious. What I've said about colonial photography in the Philippines could perhaps be said about photographic practices in many other colonial societies at the close of the nineteenth century and through the first half of the next one. That photography has been used to typify the relationship between colonizer and colonized, expanding the purview of the former while constraining that of the latter; that it has yielded images for the sake of compiling an encyclopedia of colonial visibilities; that it has served as a medium for the generation of imperialist desires and nostalgia: all these are true, and thus only partially so.

We might ask: what are the other sides of photography's truth? In treating colonial photographs as historical documents, to what extent do we find ourselves sliding into the temptation of seeing them as transparent emanations of the photographer's will? In insisting, as perhaps we must, that such images are conveyors of ideology chained to the determinations of sociopolitical contexts, do we risk reducing photographs to their frames, seeing them only to the degree that we look away, behind, or beyond that which appears in front of us? Seeing them by looking away from them, regarding them as mere appearances that carry messages whose meanings are already laid out in advance, do we



Fig. 15 (above left). “Evolution of a Bontoc Igorot constabulary soldier—1901, when he was a head-hunting savage” (Dean C. Worcester, *The Philippines Past and Present* [New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1914])

Fig. 16 (above right). “Evolution of a Bontoc Igorot constabulary soldier—1902, after he had been for a year in contact with Americans” (Dean C. Worcester, *The Philippines Past and Present* [New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1914])



Fig. 17 (left). “Evolution of a Bontoc Igorot constabulary soldier—1903, when he was a well disciplined and competent sergeant of a company of Philippine constabulary made up of his fellow tribesmen” (Dean C. Worcester, *The Philippines Past and Present* [New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1914])



Fig. 18. “The prison band ‘sounding off’ at retreat, Bilibid Prison” (U.S. Philippine Commission, *Annual Report of the Philippine Commission, 1901–1908* [Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1902–1909])



Fig. 19. “Typical scene in a trade school. In institutions like this, young Filipinos are being taught the dignity of labor and are learning useful trades” (U.S. Philippine Commission, *Annual Report of the Philippine Commission, 1901–1908* [Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1902–1909])



Fig. 20. Filipino elites in the colonial legislature, 1918 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of the Philippine Islands, 1918*, 4 vols. [Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1920–1921])

not also submit to the force of a colonial reading practice that we might have wanted to expose and negate? And arriving at this moment of virtual complicity with colonial ways of seeing, as in fact nationalists tend to do, could the urge for a kind of violent separation not arise, fueled by the phantasms of humiliation and revenge, embarrassment and anger, critical smugness and moral superiority?

Perhaps there is no definitive way one can avoid turning to and returning the imperial gaze. It arguably continues to inform modern ways of seeing.⁹ Nevertheless, it may be possible periodically to see otherwise. Images emerge at times from the archives that contain certain intractable elements, peculiar details, or distinct sensibilities that do not easily fit into the visual encyclopedia of colonial rule. Seeing them, one tends to linger, as I do, over those things that seem to peel away from one's expectations. Detaining one's eye, they give one pause about the nature of their illustrative function in narratives of various sorts. One looks, but isn't sure what one is looking at exactly. One feels the call to respond, but to what and to whom remain in doubt. As with



Fig. 21. “Dead insurgent officer and soldier on the road to San Pedro Macati, after the charge of Gen. King’s brigade” (Marrison Wilcox, ed., *Harper’s History of the War in the Philippines* [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1900])

all photographs, one senses a message. But not knowing what it might be, one is left with a communicative force suspended in the world.

There are, for instance, a number of arresting images from the Filipino-American War of 1899–1902. The most problematic—that is to say, persistently inconclusive—of these are the numerous photographs of Filipinos killed in battle. Images of death pervade photographs of the war. There are pictures of corpses left on the roadside (fig. 21), corpses lined up for mass burial (fig. 22), corpses on hillsides (fig. 23), and corpses dumped in mass graves (fig. 24). The circulation of these photographs was fairly widespread. They appeared in the private albums of colonial officers, newspaper accounts, and popular narratives of the war as well as historical studies of more recent years.¹⁰ And at one point, anti-imperialists in Boston were given to displaying these photographs as a way of decrying the brutality of the war.¹¹

Photographs of war dead date back to the American Civil War with

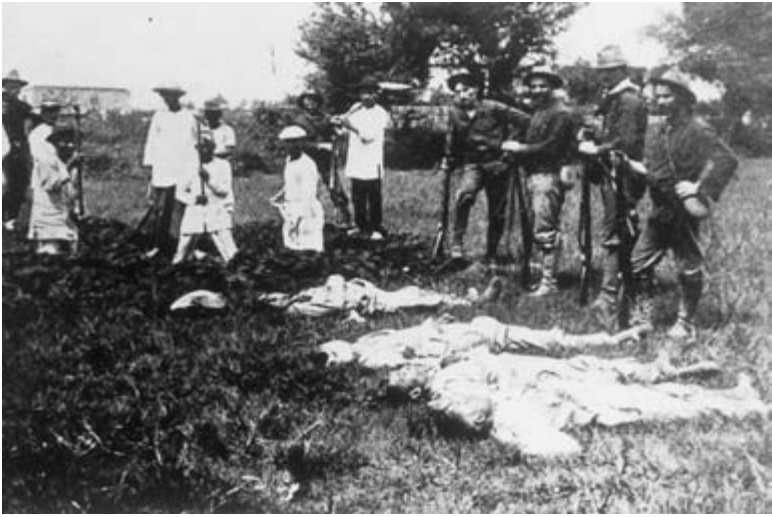


Fig. 22. “Burying the Filipino dead” (photo by J. D. Givens in General Oscar Fitzhalan Long’s photographic album, “Our New Possessions in the Philippines,” 1900, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley)

Fig. 24. “The American Artillery did wonderful execution in the battles with the insurgents. In a trench at Santa Ana the Tagal [*sic*] dead lay in piles. The group shown in the picture consisted of thirty eight bodies” (Marrion Wilcox, ed., *Harper’s History of the War in the Philippines* [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1900])





Fig. 23. “At the battle of Caloocan some shots were seen to come from a trench, and a single shell was sent toward it by the Utah Battery. When our troops advanced they found no less than ten men dead at this point” (Marrion Wilcox, ed., *Harper’s History of the War in the Philippines* [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1900])

the work of Alexander Gardner, Timothy O’Sullivan, and Matthew Brady. Most of their images did not see publication until after the war, and did not become widely available until the end of the nineteenth century. By then, such photographs—usually labeled as the “harvest of war”—had come to signify, at least to a public two generations removed from the horrors of the Civil War, the “unimpeachable witness and irreducible essence” of the war’s horrible truth.¹² Photographs of the dead in the Filipino-American War, however, to the best of my knowledge do not depict the American (or for that matter Spanish) dead lying on the battlefield. That photographic fate solely is reserved for Filipino bodies. One might think that in such a case, a different truth was at stake.

How is it possible to understand, much less look at these photographs? We might begin by speculating that such images of dead Filipinos were supposed to certify the mastery of the United States over death. Guerrilla warfare based on sporadic engagements, hit-and-run tactics, and techniques of camouflage rendered Filipino fighters relatively invisible, much to the frustration of U.S. soldiers. Photographing

them dead meant making visible what could not previously be seen, fixing their once-mobile bodies into a set of unchanging images. Such images consolidate the memory of a prior confrontation. They were meant to prove less the skill of Filipino fighters as the courage of North Americans, who in setting aside their fear of death, showed themselves capable of risking their lives as well as taking the life of an other. But such risks in order to enter into history had to be acknowledged. Photographing the dead was a way to secure such recognition from those who survived the war. The captions that accompany each picture suggest as much in their description of each scene, accounting for Filipino deaths as if these were the natural outcome of U.S. superiority—moral, technological, and military. Unlike the American Civil War photographs, those of the Filipino-American War could then be read in triumphalist terms, whereby images of dead natives stood in stark contrast to those of living U.S. soldiers now united in a common cause on the other side of the world.¹³

But to photograph corpses also meant to keep them alive, after a fashion. It entailed preserving their death as a living legacy, beyond even one's own death. Thus the ghastly quality of these images. Where the ethnological photographs of natives could be understood as the dead images of living beings, images of corpses are what Roland Barthes would call "living images of [the] dead."¹⁴ As the living dead, they refuse to be buried. Tendentious captions, colonial accounts, nationalist responses, and sociopolitical analysis can explain the conditions that may have led to such images but they cannot in the least bit transform them. For what appears in these photographs are neither individual bodies nor a body politic but a jumble of body parts that resist recognition and classification. They cannot be identified—that is to say, they cannot be read as signs or documents of a particular person or event. (In fact, calling them Filipino is itself freighted with a certain anxiety about their visibility and a wish to set them apart and put them in their proper place, or at least a place that might have some sociological depth.)

Pictures of corpses were taken shortly after military encounters by professional photographers working for U.S. newspapers or hired by the U.S. military as well as by U.S. soldiers who had cameras. They thus preserve the shock of contact. They are less the signs of war's traumatic effects so much as they are those effects themselves. They do not serve

merely as representations of the past but relay a past event that cannot be assimilated into the present. The bodies that are scattered about are dead in a biological sense, or so we might assume, yet their status vis-à-vis the living remains in doubt. This is the source of their horror. Thanks to photography, they appear unchanged and therefore hopelessly out of place. Photographs capture their relentless dislocation and so make visible their scandalous presence. For after all, what sort of sociality could exist that did not have a place for the dead? What aesthetic practice would be possible that could not contain death but could only transmit what seemed like its unalterable and untranslatable thereness?

As enduring traces of the scandal at the heart of war, such images are eventful in their capacity to assail our present and convey the sense of something unreadable. In doing so, they act to limit not just the stretch of imperial vision and its narrative purchase over the interpretation of events; they also frustrate critical commentaries that might seek to reframe and thereby bury them in the discursive graveyard of the archives. Thus do these photographs of corpses—what we might regard as the undead—resist the closure of mourning. Unburied, they seem to have no place in the world and so cannot be put out of mind. Inhabiting the world of the living, images of the dead remain radically obscene to the viewer. Looking at them, our vision falters as we apprehend far more than we can ever comprehend. We cannot close a circle, square accounts, determine blame, much less seek revenge. Rather, we feel ourselves in the midst of spectral wanderings that recall, if that is the word for it, the trauma at the foundation of empire, the unaccountability of deaths in the course of war, and the inevitable failure to narrate the truth of a history that exceeds our capacity to see.

Photographic Survivals Photographs of the dead haunt the colonial archives precisely because they seem so excessively visible. They suggest that the dead did not have a place in a society that was violently moving from one colonial regime to another. It is as if such images communicate too much, and hence, fail to stabilize the communication between the living and the dead. Indeed, they bring up the recurring inability of the living to respond and distinguish themselves from the dead. Images of the dead come across as messages whose meanings have forever been

detained. It is this failure and the deferral of meaning at the inaugural moment of U.S. colonial rule that provides us with a context for inquiring into the photographs of the living in the years that followed. Those who survived the war, how did they take to photography? How did Filipinos, or at least those among them who could afford it, picture themselves while alive and so preserve themselves from the claims of death? Were there ways in which they sidestepped these two photographic fates: on the one hand, that of ethnological imagery—the prospect of the living affixed to dead images of native typicality; and on the other hand, that of the visibly decomposing corpses—the dead who live on, eluding mourning and memorialization?¹⁵

One of the most common ways in which Filipinos used photography was to have their own portraits taken. The popularity among the Filipino middle class of portrait painting, especially miniatures from the latter half of the nineteenth century, had doubtless paved the way for photographic versions beginning at least in the 1860s.¹⁶ Photography expanded and altered the nature of portraiture, making it available to a wider number of people. As with the bourgeoisie in many other areas of the world from the late nineteenth century on, Filipinos who belonged to or sought to identify with this class posed in studios.¹⁷ There, they had their choice of backdrops that, as one writer put it, “ranged from gardens, sweeping staircases . . . [to] cardboard sailboats and . . . crescent moons,” as well as costumes that might include “Japanese kimonos with matching parasol and fan, an Igorot outfit with a matching basket of everlasting flowers . . . or a coat or *Americana* for a small extra fee” (figs. 25 and 26).¹⁸

These portraits served as tokens of affection among friends and family. As elsewhere in the world, photographic portraiture was meant not only to convey the person’s likeness but to situate it in relation to the viewer. Such was the function of the dedications. Written either in Spanish, English, or Tagalog, these were addressed to specific recipients, evoking a sense of intimacy between the sender and receiver. “A Mi Amada Cristeta,” reads one, “Dedico este retrato en prueba de nuestra cariño, Teang” (To my beloved Cristeta. I dedicate this picture as proof of our love, Teang) (fig. 27). “To Chimang,” another says in English, “To prove once more the sincerity of my true love. Otelio” (fig. 28). And in Tagalog, “Kay Genoveva—Ala-ala ko ito sa iyo tanda ng di ko pagka-

limot. Ang iyong kaibigan, Luming” (“For Genoveva—A souvenir of me, a reminder of my never-ending memory of you. Your friend, Luming”) (fig. 29).

The printed captions that accompanied ethnological and war photographs, such as those we saw earlier, were meant to turn pictures into representations of a prior thought. In so doing, they were supposed to organize the drift of associations that such images gave rise to. Inscriptions, in contrast, carried with them the force of a desire to communicate. They transformed the photographic image into a gift whose circulation traced the reciprocal bond between viewer and viewed. Such dedications mark the movement of affect from source to recipient, and so move the recipient to respond in turn.¹⁹ The history of such exchanges is difficult to date with any precision. Nationalists in the late nineteenth century were fond of exchanging photographs among themselves and their families, as if to dwell in the daily commemoration of one another’s absence.²⁰ Such practices continued through much of the twentieth century. Photographs as gifts furnish evidence of thoughts that reach past the space and time of their circulation. They speak beyond the mortality and forgetfulness of their particular senders and receivers.

To speak beyond life and death: what could this possibly mean? How is it that portraits were thought to convey something beyond themselves? In the dedications above, the senders speak of photographs as proof (*prueba*) and memory (*tanda*) of one’s love, even and especially in one’s absence. The inscription and picture substitute for the persons speaking even as they extend the reach of their speech. They supplement the “I” or “we” who cannot be present in their image and words; but equally significant is the fact that such portraits and words survive beyond the lifetimes of those they were meant to supplement and address. Herein lies the power and persuasiveness of the proof they provide. For what they indicate is a certain communicative force at work: that at some point in time, someone speaking in the first person as an “I” or “we”—Teang, Otelio, or Luming—said something to a second, a “you”—Cristeta, Chimang, or Genoveva—in such a way as to surpass both; and in doing so, connected with some other, third receiver. What is transmitted in these photographs, then, are two messages: first, that there occurred an exchange of affection between the sender and receiver in and through their absence; and second, that such a transaction had



Fig. 25 (above). “Tating dear, Let this picture of your friend remind you of our companionship. With love, Apolinar” (E. Aguilar Cruz, “Vintage Photographs,” in *Being Filipino*, ed. Gilda Cordero-Fernando [Quezon City: CGF Books, 1981])



Fig. 26 (below). “Heartily dedicated to my dearest Enchang as a sign of everlasting friendship. Lovingly yours, Cleofe” (E. Aguilar Cruz, “Vintage Photographs,” in *Being Filipino*, ed. Gilda Cordero-Fernando [Quezon City: CGF Books, 1981])



Fig. 27 (above). “A Mi Amada Cristeta, Dedico este retrato en prueba de nuestro cariño, Teang” (E. Aguilar Cruz, “Vintage Photographs,” in *Being Filipino*, ed. Gilda Cordero-Fernando [Quezon City: CGF Books, 1981])



Fig. 28 (below): “To Chimang, To prove once more the sincerity of my true love. Otelio” (E. Aguilar Cruz, “Vintage Photographs,” in *Being Filipino*, ed. Gilda Cordero-Fernando [Quezon City: CGF Books, 1981])



Fig. 29. "Kay Genoveva—Ala-ala ko ito sa iyo tanda ng di ko pagkalimot. Ang iyong kaibigan, Luming" (E. Aguilar Cruz, "Vintage Photographs," in *Being Filipino*, ed. Gilda Cordero-Fernando [Quezon City: CGF Books, 1981])

the capacity to reach beyond them toward some other third term who is likewise absent from the scene of exchange.

Who might this third person be? Where the ethnological photographs were concerned, we can assume that this third party was the colonial state under whose authority such pictures were taken and circulated as well as a metropolitan audience in the United States eager to consume such exotic images. In these portraits, however, the identity of the third person is persistently uncertain. That is, he or she is a viewer whose identity is always yet to be disclosed; who, unknown to the sender and receiver, arrives from the future and anticipates the reception and recirculation of the photograph. What is indeed so compelling about these photographs is the way they leave open a position for an unknown and contingent addressee at some indefinite place and deferred time—us, here, today, for example—a viewer who acts to register the force of a desire that speaks before and beyond the moment of its photographic expression.



Fig. 30. "A mi distinguida y buena prima Agueda, Mi mas humilde recuerdo. La Original" (E. Aguilar Cruz, "Vintage Photographs," in *Being Filipino*, ed. Gilda Cordero-Fernando [Quezon City: CGF Books, 1981])

The sense that photographs were meant to survive the particular moment of their taking comes across even more acutely in the next set of portraits. In the first, we read, "A mi distinguida y buena prima Agueda, Mi mas humilde recuerdo. La Original" (To my distinguished and good cousin Agueda, A very humble remembrance from me. The Original) (fig. 30). And in another, "To my dear Estrella, When rocks and hills divide us / And you no more I see / Just take a pen and paper / And write a line to me. The Original" (fig. 31). Following a convention, the senders sign themselves as "The Original" as though to let the receiver know that the words come from someone who exists apart from the image. Through the photograph, "The Original" herself speaks to another, in these cases "Agueda" and "Estrella." The recipients presumably know the name of the sender and so can read in the original a particular identity. Yet this identity is already other than itself. For what the recipients read are formulaic greetings, words whose origins reach beyond the actual sender. The sender, "La Original," is not the author of these words in the sense of having originally composed them. Rather, the



Fig. 31. "To my dear Estrella, When rocks and hills divide us / And you no more I see / Just take a pen and paper / and write a line to me. The Original" (E. Aguilar Cruz, "Vintage Photographs," in *Being Filipino*, ed. Gilda Cordero-Fernando [Quezon City: CGF Books, 1981])

formulaic nature of these inscriptions suggests that she's heard them before from someone else who, in turn, has heard them from others. What she sends is a chain of repetitions affixed to her mechanically reproduced image. She passes on what does not originate from her: a photographic image taken by a camera and a formulaic inscription. She constitutes herself as both a first person—the "I" that has her photograph taken and intends the words that appear on it—and a third person, the "she" who has heard these words from someone indeterminate and anonymous (hence their conventional nature) and has taken them for her own. The second person that receives the photograph receives a surplus as well: not just the intentions of the first person, the sender, but also the words of an indeterminate third person that infuse the latter's image and words.

For our part, we receive the photographs as their unintended ad-

dressees. Our relationship to them is like that between “The Original” and the formulaic words she’s heard. The photographs were not intended for us, yet we feel compelled to look and linger on them. What we see of “The Original” is only its copy. For us, the distinction between the original and the copy has been lost. Or better yet, the copy seems to have absorbed the sense of the original so that it appears not only as a representation but as an extension of the subject.²¹ The photographs are like the words that are inscribed on them: they transmit a message about their ability to transmit messages. They hold our interest precisely because of their power to cross the “rocks and hills [that] divide us,” past the deaths of both the “I” and “you.” It is a power of transmission that breaks the portraits off from the particular origins and contexts of their circulation, conveying memories that drift away from the specific time and place of their memorialization.

Here, the function of photography differs from the needs of colonial authority. Rather than serve as receptacles for colonial intentions, such photographs suggest the existence of another world that existed within but was not wholly absorbed by colonial representation. Like dreams or secrets, such photographs unhinge identities from their received contexts, expanding the terrain of possible identifications beyond what could be surveyed and disciplined. They thereby introduce an element of playfulness and indeterminacy into the formation of Filipino identity. Now ironic, now melancholic, such poses as we see here seem all the more remarkable when considered against the grain of the encyclopedic ambitions of colonial representation. They reiterate the sense of contingency that underlies appearances and the mechanically reproducible fantasies of identification that evade ascribed categories. Filipino portraits indicate another path for the recognition of native remains. They constitute a kind of anti-ethnology in their insistence on an empirically unassailable subjectivity and the evidence of their indeterminate and unknowable reception in the future.

Dialectical Images To give a photograph of oneself to someone constituted a kind of demand: that the viewer keep one in mind in one’s absence. In evoking absent presences, portraits called forth affective ties across spatial and temporal divides, intimating the survival of figures beyond death. Whereas photographs of corpses kept alive disfigured

bodies and so brought back the disfiguring experience of war, portraits as gifts refigured native bodies as sovereign entities. Thus did these portraits appear as the bearers of messages about the afterlife of colonialism already palpable within the discrete domains of colonialism's subjects. We might think of these portraits then as theaters for the domestic staging of phantasms of independence. Eluding the need to be recognized by the state, they sought acknowledgment instead from within a network of reciprocal intimacies. And addressing themselves to an absent third viewer, portraits anticipated their afterlife in a future beyond any present reckoning.

But there is, I believe, another twist to these views. It is important to keep in mind that photographic portraiture was limited to the Filipino bourgeoisie and those who aspired to such status. Historically, they had come to regard themselves as the vanguard of nationhood. Having alternately fought against and collaborated with Spain in the revolution of 1896–1897, and fought against then collaborated with the United States afterward, the bourgeoisie never doubted their ability and privilege to speak for the nation. They saw themselves as its very embodiment.

If one were to see photographic portraiture as a practice that seemed to resist the genres of colonial representation, one would have to qualify the limits of such resistance. For not only did this practice leave the colonial order relatively undisturbed; it may well have contributed to entrenching and rationalizing Filipino collaboration with U.S. rule. In providing the nationalist bourgeoisie with the fantasy of an autonomous space, it furnished what we might think of as the aesthetic equivalence of independence. Indeed, there is more than enough evidence to show that Filipino nationalism as it developed under U.S. rule tended to aestheticize the politics of independence—in public education, in the work of the Institute for National Language and the University of the Philippines, to cite some examples—and hence, remained deeply complicitous with colonial rule. There will always be an element of wishfulness if not error, then, in treating Filipino portraiture as an instrument of resistance.

But this is perhaps what makes such photographs all the more compelling: they seem to escape instrumentalization and reduction into either colonial or anticolonial narratives. They do so by bringing with them a certain force that enjoins a different politics of seeing. Unlike

paintings, photographs evacuate their subjects of their presence and allow images to slide away from their original moorings. Such pictures convey the past as a series of moments that are detachable from any single appropriation in the present and are thus available for future reproductions (such as, for instance, in this book). The richness of their details, the expressiveness of faces, and the intricate precision of their surfaces give each photograph a particularity that exceeds generalization. To the extent that such photographs allow only for their mechanical reproduction, they refuse transformation short of their destruction and so elude the demands of imperialist pedagogy, on the one hand, and the domesticating pull of nationalist mourning, on the other.²² Destined for daily and private commemoration, they instead awaken in us, the unknown viewers who arrive from the future, a flood of associations that can barely find expression. Conceived from fantasies about identity, they propel their recipients to follow further identifications. They refuse to stay fixed within the circle of the private, subjective remembrance just as they seem to say more than what can be contained within a sociohistorical frame. For these reasons, they evade the work of mourning. They share instead in the haunted qualities of the corpses. Consider this: the subjects of these photographs are now all dead; yet they remain, here, in our midst, alive, preserved by the chemical action of the photographic process. We see in them the eyes of those who have seen what ours cannot: the particular moment of a past now held at a standstill.

As dialectical images, such photographs bring the past forward into our time. But in their unyielding particularity, they inhabit our present like unburied corpses. In this sense, they arrive as foreign presences, lodging themselves in the archives of our daily lives. We, the alien because unexpected recipients from the future, encounter them as images irrevocably alienated from their original contexts. Hence their affecting strangeness: they are the materializations of an unassimilable memory as much as they are that memory's eerie envoys. As material memory, portraits of Filipinos confound in their own modest way the temporality of colonial and nationalist modernity. The latter, as we saw, entail notions of progress that while abolishing the materiality of the past, conserves it as a collection of "primitive" images to be reformed and disciplined in the present. Used as documents of a colonizing or nationalizing regime, photographs are tied to the task of keeping the

past in its place in the same way that rituals of mourning keep the dead segregated from, yet symbolically available to, the living.

However, we have also seen the ways in which certain photographs put forth an alternative temporality. Neither past nor present, we might think of them as taking place in a future anterior, the sense of “this will have been.” It is for this reason that we can conceive of such photographs as always timely. Furthermore, their timeliness contains intimations of a boundless generosity: that in their having been gifts for and from someone in the past, they continue to circulate and transmit messages, soliciting responses from those who feel the pressure of their call. They make themselves available for indeterminate and contingent receptions and returns. Herein lies their historicity. They relay the force of a transmission that seems to surpass colonial and nationalist modes of surpassing. Thus, they put us within the ambience of a certain fantasy: that of a kind of freedom that defers the need for recognition and thereby always leaves open the possibility for future circulation.