

# Reaction paper: the undead

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“ The Undead”, third chapter of “ White Love and Other Events in Filipino History”, was written by Vicente L. Rafael, a History professor at University of Washington in Seattle. He was born and raised in Manila and studied BA at Ateneo de Manila University. Some of the researches he is working on are about some areas of Philippine history, colonialism, and language.

The Undead is about how different kinds of photographic images contributed to the “ image” of the Philippines and how these images as historical documents established and mystified how the Philippines is seen by others. It is divided into four parts which are Dead Images of the Living, Living Images of the Dead, Photographic Survivals, and Dialectical Images.

The first part of the essay which is the Dead Images of the Living showed how mystification took place in relation to the photographic images of the native Filipino people. I think it is related to John Berger’s Chapter 1 of “ Ways of Seeing” wherein he discussed mystification of images caused by reproduction. In the works of the two authors, it was stated that several writings (and captions) about the images mystified the people and hid the real meaning and value of images or artworks.

Another thing that the “ Ways of Seeing” and “ The Undead” have in common is that these both discussed the objectification of the subject of the image. In Rafael’s work, the native people which served as the subjects were fixed into timeless settings and those images turned into dead objects while in Berger’s work (Chapter 3), the naked subject (the woman) was objectified for it to become nude (work of art) and to see it as it is.

Rafael stated in the second part of the text that pictures of the corpses do not serve merely as representations of the past but relay a past event that cannot be assimilated into the present. I think this statement does not only apply to pictures of corpses but also to others like the pictures of effects of a typhoon and other calamities. Some of those pictures that I have seen showed the great damage that those calamities have caused and how the lives of those affected by the calamity changed.

I really enjoyed reading the third part of the essay because it includes the sending of a portrait of a person to someone dear to him/her. It was something that I can relate to because our relatives who live abroad used to send us portraits of their family with a dedication at the back of the photo every Christmas. It was like a form of gift to us like what was stated in the third part of the essay.

After reading the essay, I have realized that photographs play an important role in our present lives and also for our future. Photographic images are something that we can always look at and remember the messages that they bring with themselves. Through these messages, we become aware of what happened in the past and we can show those pictures to the younger generation for the future to be aware also.