

Doubled Nations: Narrativization of a Forgotten War in Gina Apostol's *Insurrecto*

Riley Jones

***“There Is Always an Alternate Story”***

After hundreds of years under Spanish colonial rule, the Philippines declared independence in 1898 and went to war against Spain. Fighting alongside them was their new ally the United States, thus beginning what would become a long and complicated relationship between the two nations. Given the United States' own history with defying colonial authority, this alliance was initially a source of reassurance, as the Philippines would be paired with a powerful military that historically represented the preservation of democracy. The Philippines independence movement was even modeled after that of the United States (Immerwahr 89). Naturally, this led Philippines president Emilio Aguinaldo to expect independence upon Spain's eventual surrender; instead, the United States government ratified the Treaty of Paris in 1899, annexing rather than liberating the Philippines as promised. The nation once again found itself occupied by an unwanted force, and many anti-imperialists began to argue that the United States had “betrayed its national character” by falling into the imperial tendencies it once promised to oppose (Delmendo 6).

As a result, a new armed conflict emerged—the Philippine-American War, in which the Philippines ironically fought *against* the United States for independence. This conflict began to solidify a relationship between the United States and the Philippines, in which the U.S. acted as both “military oppressor and liberator” (Delmendo 1). On September 28, 1901, unrest between American forces and local Filipinos eventually escalated into what is referred to as the Balangiga Massacre; though, there are two events that share this title. In an act of frustration over the poor

treatment of locals by American forces, Filipinos on the island of Samar attacked and killed 48 members of the US Ninth Infantry while they idly ate breakfast. To outraged Americans, this rebellion would become known as the “massacre.” To Filipinos, however, the true massacre lies in the events that followed the rebellion. In retaliation to the event, Jacob H. Smith, who is also responsible for atrocities against indigenous communities in the United States, expressed a desire to turn Samar into a “howling wilderness,” and ordered for the land to be burned and any Filipino over the age of ten be killed. While this violent response resulted in significantly more damage than the initial attack, it is generally unremembered due to what Delmendo describes as a “selective” representation of events from the United States side. This warped perspective of a specific moment in the war has grown to represent the two nations’ relationship as a whole with “a synecdoche for the unresolved tensions over U.S. historical narratives that continue to designate the Philippine Revolution an insurrection” (Delmendo 184), perpetuating a bias in favor of imperial habits.

Weaving together timelines from modern day to American-occupied Samar, Gina Apostol’s *Insurrecto* explores this historical dichotomy and the factors that went into creating it. Two protagonists—Magsalin, a Filipina translator living in America, and Chiara, an American filmmaker with ties to the Philippines, write competing film scripts inspired by the events in Balangiga. While the scripts are both products of each woman’s relationship to the Philippine-American War, their approaches are drastically different. Inspired by alleged references to the Balangiga Massacre in her late father’s Vietnam War film *The Unintended*, Chiara crafts a story that reimagines her family’s life in Samar during production, referencing real people from the Balangiga event. After reading Chiara’s script, Magsalin attempts to write her own version of the Balangiga story from a perspective that an American like Chiara would understand—

“nineteenth century Daisy Buchannan” (Apostol 122) Cassandra Chase, a fictional American photographer whose work documenting the ill-treatment in Samar earns her recognition as a hero. As multiple timelines and perspectives interact and collapse in on one another, the text explores the way that Balangiga and the war as a whole harbor competing perspectives, and why it largely remains unremembered.

Apostol’s engagement with the complexity of Philippine and United States relations goes beyond the events of Balangiga, however; though President Roosevelt declared an end to the war in 1902, the negative impact that United States presence had on the country was not so easily undone. In fact, calling 1902 the end of the war fails to recognize that an active spirit of resistance remained among peasant armies until 1912. The effects of a post-war setting have also continued since, and violence and colonial influence have remained prominent across different moments in Philippine history. In 1965, Ferdinand Marcos was elected president of the Philippines, and in 1972, he declared martial law. His ability to rise to power partially stemmed from capitalizing “on the crisis of authority generated by the traumatic changes in colonial regimes and postcolonial upheavals” (Rafael 141), which demonstrates American involvement in this twenty-year era of Philippines politics. Despite his anti-democratic rule, and the nation being independent of colonial rule, the United States government not only supported Marcos’ rule, but also provided economic aid through military funding (Rafael 139). In 2016, Rodrigo Duterte was elected to the presidency. In what Rafael claims to be a “dream of a benevolent dictatorship,” Duterte was able to rise to power under influences “rooted in the history of colonialism” (Rafael 18). During his rule, he controversially showed support for Marcos by burying him, and instituted a violent war on drugs. Even in a modern era, the Philippines citizens are still victims to violent rule.

Apostol looks at both a specific moment in the Philippine-American war, and this lasting effect that the wartime relationship between United States and Philippines by setting the novel in three different time periods—1901, 1970's, and 2018. The primary story, following Magsalin and Chiara, is set in a Duterte-influenced 2018, but the plot also jumps between this modern setting and each woman's script. Magsalin's script is a war story set in 1901, following American photographer Cassandra Chase as she arrives to Samar with the desire to unmask the poor treatment of locals. Chiara's script is set in a Marcos-influenced 1970's, following her father's life during the making of *The Unintended* through the perspective of Filipino school teacher Caz. Within this long colonial and neo-colonial relationship between the Philippines and the United States, Apostol's three timelines point to a cyclical pattern of U.S. colonial violence in the Philippines. By tracing the two versions of the "Balangiga massacre" and exploring the complexity of the Philippines and United States relationship, Apostol seeks to highlight the role that perspective and narrativization play in how we remember history.

In this thesis, I will look at the ways in which Apostol utilizes various narrative techniques, including doubling, weaving, and cyclicity, to engage with these historical issues. Throughout the novel, Apostol frequently draws on the idea of the double in various ways. She follows two protagonists, who are foils of one another, and structurally, the novel switches back and forth between conflicting scripts about Balangiga, containing characters that are modeled after one another and real-life people. Doubling is also present in reference to visual technologies, including doubled stereocards in the 1901 script and Ludo Brasi's film *The Unintended* in the 1970's script. By engaging with these ideas, the novel ultimately reveals a parallel between two nations and highlights an incongruity between their historical narratives, and the ways in which this disagreement influences how tragedy is remembered.

While the text places a strong focus on parallel narratives (and histories), history is often not so simple. For this reason, merely viewing conflicting perspectives next to one another is not sufficient; one must also recognize how they are interwoven and dependent on one another. To illustrate this, *Apostol* draws on the imagery of an abaca weave, and structurally creates a narrative that contains woven narratives by mixing doubled chapters. In doing this, there are several chapters that collapse the barrier between perspectives, and others where chapter titles are reused across different timelines. These chapters are scattered out of order, often in ways that make it difficult to distinguish one timeline from another. Employing this structure illustrates the idea that remembering history accurately requires recognition of multiple perspectives, but more importantly, how these perspectives work together.

Finally, the novel looks at how the progression of Philippine and United States relations over time exhibits a continuous cycle of violence. Throughout the novel, there are multiple thematic references to the idea of cyclicity, including the development of an image of a carousel as a symbol for continuity. The novel's unique structure also illustrates a sense of repetition across timelines, as all three plots—1901, 1970's, and 2018—follow similar thematic ideas, and establish a presence of colonial influence, even in timelines that occur in a post-colonial Philippines. It is important to note that these techniques do not operate independently of one another; rather, they work together to craft a narrative that accurately represents the nuance of the subject matter which it engages with. Because of this, my analyses of them, though addressed separately for organization's sake, will occasionally overlap—for example, the weaving section draws on doubled concepts that have been woven together. In crafting a novel on a foundation of doubled, woven, and cyclical storylines, *Apostol* creates a formal structure that effectively parallels the nuanced role that historical narrative and perspective plays in understanding history,

ultimately illustrating the Philippine-American war as a forgotten war for those unaffected by it.

***“Everything in the World is Doubled”***

In her opening chapter, Apostol includes the phrase “a word has at least two meanings, all of them correct” (Apostol 3), an idea which largely drives both the structure and theme of the novel. By utilizing the idea of a double, the novel addresses the role that perspective plays in crafting a narrative. Perhaps the most prominent use of doubling in the text is through its two protagonists, Magsalin and Chiara, who are written as direct character foils. Both women are products of their relationships with the United States and the Philippines and share a similar experience of being bound by more than one culture. Although Magsalin is Filipina, she has lived in the United States for many years and has a cultural connection to it. Similarly, Chiara is American (which Apostol heavily leans into) but spent a significant number of her childhood years emersed in Filipino culture on Samar. These experiences mold their perspectives, which are used to parallel the historical dichotomy of the Philippines and United States versions of Balangiga. At the beginning of the novel, Magsalin notes that their bags are “exactly the same” (Apostol 164). Later, each woman accidentally takes the other’s bag, and at the end of the novel “the women give each other their rightful bags” and “In each, of course, is a script” (Apostol 284). In this scene, the bag is representative of the idea that although they have different perspectives, they are still bound to one another. Each are able to uncover “the story she wishes to tell” (Apostol 284) in this moment; by swapping scripts, or perspectives, the women discover that temporarily adopting the perspective of the other is the only way to see a bigger picture.

This relationship is further developed, however, through the structure of the novel—in

addition to the modern timeline, the novel also alternates back and forth between the plots of the women's competing film scripts. While the scripts are inspired by the same event, they are drawn from each writer's unique perspectives. Chiara's connection to Balangiga comes from her relationship with her father, so naturally, her script is a product of that relationship, as she attempts to reason with the circumstances of his death. To do this she creates "her own version of the heroine Casiana Nacionales" (Apostol 126), Caz, a resident of Samar during the filming of *The Unintended*. Casiana is a real person, who was instrumental in the success of the initial uprising at Balangiga, yet she remains completely unrecognized for her actions and "no one can find her tomb" (Apostol 309). Chiara attempts to solve this by making her the protagonist of her script; however, in reimagining her own version and making it about herself, she erases the original's significance and perpetuates Casiana's historical lack of appreciation. Casiana represents the people of the Philippines, particularly those lost and forgotten in war, so consequently, Chiara enables the erasure of the war itself as well.

As someone much more attached to the Philippines, Magsalin's script attempts to explore Balangiga from the "right" perspective, focusing on violence against the locals of Samar during the war, but does so through an American's eyes. Her justification of this, as she informs Chiara, is that "It was the only way you could have read the story" (Apostol 291)—in other words, perhaps making the story more palatable would also make it more accessible to American audiences who are unfamiliar with the history that it engages with. Despite her focus on the massacre itself, and her inclusion of Casiana as the hero of it, she still ultimately remains in the background, and is overshadowed by Cassandra Chase. As a result, both scripts share a common quality; Casiana is ultimately forgotten. In allowing Magsalin's script to fail to tell the whole story, Apostol both recognizes the difficulty of retelling history accurately, and suggests that

while one perspective may be more accurate than the other, it is still important to take a multiple-perspective approach.

In addition to the scripts, *Apostol* doubles the characters of the novel and its films. While Magsalin and Chiara can be read as character foils, Cassandra is written by Magsalin to be a clear double of Chiara. She states that “Chiara’s world can be seen as an easy stand in, in sepia wash, for nineteenth century Cassandras” and that Cassandra has “the old brownie camera that is Chiara’s prized possession” (*Apostol* 91)—this both explicitly reveals that Chiara inspired the specific world view of the character, and also implies that Chiara and her work share a similar significance to that of Cassandra by giving her the same camera. This idea is furthered by relating Cassandra to the Brasi family as a whole. In describing Cassandra, Magsalin directly references rhetoric previously used to describe Virgine; “her otherwise embarrassingly pampered life” (*Apostol* 87). This is a direct quote from the chapter “The Model for the Photographer” which is a doubled chapter, overlapping between Chiara’s backstory in the main timeline and her 1970’s script. In this scene, Virgine and Cassandra are being doubled, but as Virgine and Chiara’s stories begin to intersect, so do Chiara and Cassandra. For Magsalin, Chiara represents a privileged American, “whose own childhood” parallels “that of her possible heroine” (*Apostol* 90), attempting but failing to uplift the unrecognized stories of war. By this assessment, Chiara is everything that Cassandra was built to symbolize— “the white savior story” (*Apostol* 290).

Doubling is not just used in the narrative structure of the text; it is also connected to the visual technologies used during the Philippine-American war. Particularly, *Apostol* draws attention to the use of doubled stereocards as a key influence in how we remember events from the time. As noted in the novel, much of the photo evidence from the Philippine-American war is in the form of stereocards, a doubled image that, when viewed under a stereoscope, presents the

illusion of being three dimensional. This was a popular form of photography during the time, which allowed middle class Americans to comfortably view and be entertained by war from the comfort of their homes. To view them, the viewer takes the two individual photos and layers them, simulating a three-dimensional depiction of the event pictured; however, the message that the photography portrays is dependent of the captioning left by the company, for example Underwood and Underwood (both a real company and the one that Cassandra works for in Magsalin's script). These photos largely supported the American perspective and allowed the commodification of the dead while also erasing their suffering by glorifying American triumph (Rafael). Interest in the stereocard popularized sensationalism of war, a "fascination for what were then new imperial "technologies of vision." (Balce 52)—as a result, such technology became an agent of imperialism.

While Apostol frequently highlights the ethical implications of the photos that exist (and can be bought), which show "dead bodies" and illustrate that "history is not fully annotated or adequately contemplated in online archives" (Apostol 81), she also specifically draws on the process of the photography as a representation of how history can be viewed. The stereocard is especially significant throughout Magsalin's script. In a conversation between the Chief and Griswald, we are introduced to the science behind the stereocard, in which "Depth is only an impression" and "that's how we see, through illusion" (Apostol 158). This process of viewing a stereocard properly is also indicative of historical analysis—to see the full picture, it is important to view all sides of the story. Even then, one only experiences the "illusion" of enlightenment due to the complexity of historical perspective. Ultimately, the men come to the conclusion that the invention is "very American," as "we have manufactured how to see the world" (Apostol 159), rhetoric which both continues to commodify the stereocard and highlights the historical

dominance of the American perspective in Philippine-American conflict—photography illustrates an “abject status of the Philippine-American War in the American popular imagination as well as in its official history” (Balce 49), which tell two different stories.

While photography and early film were the visual technologies of the Philippine-American war, in the 1970s plotline, Apostol points to the continued use of visual narratives in telling stories of warfare. Specifically, she draws on a history of films produced in the Philippines which reflect other imperial conflicts, producing another kind of doubling. Referenced as an existing film within the fictional novel, *Apocalypse Now* is a real 1979 film directed by Francis Ford Coppola, which aimed to bring awareness to the atrocities of imperialism, specifically within the Vietnam War context. The film is a direct retelling of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, an 1899 novel which explored the ironic savagery of colonial power along the Congo River. Much like Magsalin and Chiara’s scripts, *Apocalypse Now* recycles the names of *Heart of Darkness* characters, such as Marlow and Kurtz, and includes verbatim dialogue references such as “The horror, the horror.” Although the two stories aren’t exactly the same, when analyzed together, the intentional similarity between them conveys a continuous violence across different timelines and contexts, as the same story is equally as relevant in two very different circumstances.

In addition to the real-life doubling between Coppola and Conrad’s works, the fictional Ludo Brasi creates *The Unintended*, which Apostol heavily relates to Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*. Much like Coppola’s film, *The Unintended* draws from *The Heart of Darkness*, receiving its name from the final scene in which Marlow delivers Kurtz’s letters to his “Intended”—a scene that is further referenced in Chiara’s film about *The Unintended*, as Caz, “The Intended,” is delivered letters. Apostol heavily insinuates that Ludo is written to represent Francis Ford

Coppola and Chiara to represent Sofia Coppola, though there is a level of confusing doubling because both films exist in the universe that the novel is set in.

That being said, the two films behave similarly within the contexts of their respective realities. Both films are Vietnam War stories, intent on unmasking the violent realities of American imperialism; however, they both also disregard and exploit American imperial power in the Philippines to do so. Despite its Vietnamese setting, *Apocalypse Now* was filmed in the Philippines, and used United States funded military helicopters from the Marcos regime in the film during production. Some land in the Philippines was also destroyed in the production process. This is almost identical to Brasi's production, also occurring in the Philippines, which took advantage of American military power to create a film which would have damaging effects on local life. In the 1970's script, we see Ludo arrive with his American-funded "neocolonialist cinema" (Apostol 220) equipment, and when discussing *Apocalypse Now*, *The Unintended*, and other films like them, Magsalin asserts that there is a "political irony" to "Vietnam war movies shot in equally blighted places that are not Vietnam" (Apostol 15). Despite a supposed desire to bring awareness to the damages of colonialism, both films perpetuate colonial behavior by exerting a form of modern warfare on a location that has suffered similar atrocities. This blatant disregard for Philippine struggle against United States influence illustrates a sense of erasure surrounding the history between the countries, and further suggests that the Philippine-American war is often left forgotten by those unaffected by it.

*Apocalypse Now* is not the only entity doubling *The Unintended*, however; it quickly becomes apparent that Ludo Brasi's Vietnam War film is far from being merely that and is actually a subtle retelling of the Balangiga Massacre. As Chiara researches her father's film, she comes across an article drawing parallels between the fictional story of the Vietnam war and the

true story of the Philippine-American war, including references to real people like General Jacob H. Smith, Captain Thomas W. O’Connell, and the Charlie Company that was present on Samar. This connection between the film and the event forms a connection between the violence of the Philippine-American war and the production of films like *Apocalypse Now*, and the erasure of such films is illustrated by Chiara’s misunderstanding of this relationship. Upon noticing the connection, Chiara argues that the film “produces, for us, the horror of Balangiga,” which can be “resurrected” (Apostol 51). While this could perhaps be true if the film was more clearly intended to be about Balangiga, the references to it were so subtle that even the director’s daughter was unaware that they were present. Instead, the film borrows from Philippine history, while also erasing it in the process. Apostol’s focus on film, however, does provide us with a different perspective on the massacre, which is doubled with *The Unintended*, doubled with *Apocalypse now*, doubled with *Heart of Darkness*, as its role in the novel illustrates the complexity of understanding colonial history, and emphasizes how easily details can become lost over time based on the perspective through which it is told.

***“Sorrow is a Weave, a Sinuous Braid of Manila Hemp”***

While the use of the double is an effective tool for illustrating a distinction between conflicting historical narratives, the novel also explores how these narratives are interdependent and often difficult to distinguish from one another, and how that influences our remembrance of them. The abaca weave, a traditional weaving technique for abaca or manila hemp used in the Philippines, is an imagery device that frequently reappears throughout Apostol’s work. For example, after the uprising at Balangiga, Cassandra exclaims in her testimony “what a tangled

web we weave—this damned plait of abaca rope we have braided ourselves—this war” (Apostol 279). In these references, Apostol associates abaca weaving with the war and the relationship between opposing countries, suggesting that the war’s narrative is a product of woven perspectives.

The concept of a weave also plays a structural role in the development of the novel as Apostol includes multiple timelines and perspectives scrambled together. While there are three separate narratives making up the plot of the novel, it is often difficult for the reader to distinguish which storyline a chapter belongs to, illustrating a codependence between the narratives. A prominent example of this is the chapter “A Secret, Metastasizing Thing.” At first glance, it seems to obviously be a piece of either the primary timeline or Magsalin’s script, as she is shown workshopping her script character Cassandra. On her website, however, Apostol lists all of the chapters in order, and this chapter technically falls under Chiara’s script. This reinforces the idea that Chiara and Cassandra are doubles of one another, but it also binds Chiara and Magsalin’s opposite perspectives in a way that is confusing yet permanent. Furthering this confusion, the chapter ends with Chiara workshopping *her* protagonist, Caz, without explicitly clarifying that a shift in perspective has been made. At this point in the novel, it is still unclear which script belongs to which protagonist, and in paring Cassandra and Caz’s inceptions in the same chapter, it becomes even more difficult to distinguish between the timelines, and who is writing them. The chapter doubles Magsalin and Chiara’s script writing processes and continues to double their characters, drawing on the novel’s use of doubling, but also weaves their processes, and consequently, their stories, together. Through this, Apostol suggests that the perspectives of the two women, who represent the relationship between the United States and the Philippines, are bound to one another, and thus so are those of their respective nations.

Paralleling the structural significance of this chapter, Apostol also employs a further thematic reference to weaving. Just as there is a collapse between Magsalin and Chiara's timelines, there is also a collapse between Philippine and American culture as a result of the time that the two nations spent directly and indirectly entangled with one another (Delmendo). As someone who moved to the United States later in life, Magsalin expresses the confusion that she felt upon finding that "the culture she had thought was hers...was...not really" (Apostol 124) in reference to American music that was made popular in the Philippines. In this discussion, there is a doubling of "parallel universes" (Apostol 125), but there is also a confusing sense of entanglement present, stating that "We are all creatures of translation, parallel chapters repeating in a universal void" (Apostol 126). Once again, the two nations are represented as both parallel and interdependent on one another, and in pairing this analysis with the breakdown between Magsalin and Chiara's perspectives, Apostol further pushes the idea that both perspectives are essential to understanding the nuance of the relationship between countries.

In addition to merging multiple timelines into a single chapter, Apostol also doubles and scrambles chapter titles across timelines. An example of this is the "abaca weave" imagery is referenced twice in chapter titles—once, in "The Story She Wishes to Tell, an Abaca Weave, a Warp and Weft of Numbers," told from Magsalin's point of view, and again in the penultimate chapter, "Sorrow Is a Weave, a Sinuous Braid of Manila Hemp," the final installment of Chiara's script. Magsalin's chapter opens with a meta conversation about the story of "loss" that she is crafting, with references to each plotline of the novel, including the primary 2018 timeline, an "unfinished manuscript," her 1901 script of Cassandra Chase, "an American obsessed with a Filipino war," Chiara's 1970's script, "a filmmaker's possible murder," and her mystery novel, "a wife's sadness" (Apostol 107). It also references the organizational techniques of the novel;

“chapter numbers will double up” and “points of view will multiply,” an “abaca weave” which will ultimately reveal “a solution to a crime forgotten by history” (Apostol 107). This doubles *Insurrecto* with Magsalin’s work, but it also establishes the woven organizational strategy of the novel as a means to understanding the complicated history that it addresses. The stories of the Balangiga Massacre, and the Philippine-American war in general, are muddied by the contrasting perspectives that accompany them, and the “scrambled” “puzzle pieces” of the novel allow it to parallel the difficulty of accurately representing this history.

This idea is further explored with Chiara’s chapter at the end of the novel, in which the idea of an abaca weave is revisited in the chapter title. In this chapter, however, the weave is used as a metaphor for sorrow, “a braid” that “must weave through all of us,” “rich widow” and “mystery writer Magsalin” (Apostol 287) alike. In this scene, Apostol continues to draw connections between Magsalin and the Brasi women, highlighting their inherent bond, but in its doubling of Magsalin’s chapter, she also highlights the relevance of Chiara’s section of the novel. While her script is much different from Magsalin’s, it is still a story about loss, and completes the “multiplied” perspective that Magsalin is interested in creating. In the broader context of the novel, the two scenes, and the two scripts work not in conflict with one another, but in tandem, to tell the forgotten history that each script fails to individually tell, thus, the abaca weave ultimately allows the novel to be read like the history that it addresses—with the complicated nuance in which it is written, rather than one “side” of the story.

Another instance of chapter doubling occurs in the “Why Samar?” and “Why Samar??!!” chapters. Like the previous example, these chapters occur in different timelines of the novel, though they are both related to Chiara’s story—the first being her father’s backstory in her script, and the second, her own backstory, which reuses the same title with doubled punctuation. In the

former, Apostol gives us a first look at *The Unintended*, Ludo's film about the Vietnam war and allegedly Balangiga (which doubles *Apocalypse Now*, which doubles *Heart of Darkness*), and Ludo's obsession with his "doubled cards" and "mute histories" (Apostol 18). In this brief scene, Apostol provides a look into why Ludo may have chosen Samar as a film location for a film about a completely different war, but the chapter title may also be read as a response to Chiara's final line of the previous chapter—"I need to go to Samar" (Apostol 16). In this chapter, we see her family history with the island, and in the next "Why Samar??!" chapter, the specific catalyst that leads her to revisit this history as she uncovers new information about her father's work. This foreshadows the intent of Chiara's script, which is an attempt to connect with her father, and it also doubles the stories of both Brasi filmmakers by drawing attention to their parallel film locations and contrasting motives.

These chapter titles are not the only place where the phrase is included, however; Magsalin's backstory, in "The Story She Wishes to Tell, an Abaca Weave, a Warp and Weft of Numbers," repeats it multiple times to address her own motive for returning home to Samar. Much like Chiara, her motive seems to be personal fulfilment. Despite growing up in Samar, she had never previously felt a need to return, even upon her mother's death. What does eventually convince her is a request from a strange American filmmaker. The phrase represents a bond that Samar provides the women, and in its pairing with Chiara's chapter, it further weaves Chiara and Magsalin's stories together. It is only through this weaving that we are able to understand the meaning of the phrase.

A similar chapter doubling occurs between Chiara's "Film With a Void at Its Heart" and Magsalin's "Photographer at the Heart of the Script." In each chapter, the women describe their goals in creating a film centered around Samar, ultimately leading to an insightful conversation

about the conflicting perspectives written into Philippine and American history. Much like Magsalin, Chiara expresses a desire to include “actors with duplicating roles” and claims a trek to Samar is a “spiritual journey” (Apostol 45), yet her approach to the history of Samar is much different. In discussing the events of Balangiga, Magsalin has to correct Chiara’s understandings of the event, explaining that “they were revolutionaries, it was not an insurrection” (Apostol 45). Despite their disagreements, Apostol makes it clear that to understand one perspective, the other is necessary to consider. While Chiara’s script has a “void in its heart,” (Apostol 45) Magsalin’s film containing a “photograph at the heart of the script” (Apostol 87) completes Chiara’s perspective, and vice versa, further conveying that each script, and consequently the histories that they represent, can only be fully understood and effectively remembered when viewed alongside the other with which it is woven.

***“the infinite spiral of human aggression”***

From the constant repetition of an image of a merry go round, to the broad overarching events of the novel, Apostol suggests that *Insurrecto*, and in parallel, history, can be not just categorized as weave of varying narratives, but also an illustration of perpetual violence. The conflicting timelines of the novel are written from different perspectives, but they are also written to represent different moments across the history of Philippines and United States relations, and this structural organization allows the novel to represent the continuation of Philippine and United States relations. The clearest presence of a United States influence is in Magsalin’s wartime script, in which there is a literal conflict being depicted between the two nations; however, Chiara’s Marcos-era script and the primary Duterte-era timeline, both

occurring in a post-colonial Philippines, also depict a connection to the United States. This is because despite the very different contexts through which they take place, all three timelines are affected by a similar presence of violence. In the two newer timelines, there is still a clear influence of former United States occupation, and this continued weaving of histories suggests a presence of a cycle of violence. As Apostol engages with this idea of cyclicity, both in a thematic and structural sense, she highlights the lack of resolve for issues caused by United States presence in the Philippines, and furthermore, a lack of remembrance for them.

From early in the novel, Apostol establishes cyclicity as a motif, and one of the ways that this is done is through the repeated imagery of a carousel as a representation for historical narrative. As Magsalin enters Ali Mall for the first time in the novel and describes its “creepy” atmosphere, she specifically points out a “creaky carousel” that “rounds out a tiresome concept of eternity” (Apostol 9). In this description, the carousel, an object of repetition, becomes associated with the broader concept of an existence which is both never ending and never changing. Throughout Part One of the novel, references to a carousel occur several more times. In a conversation surrounding the events that take place in the 1970s film *The Unintended*, the women discuss a scene in which a woman and child are killed in an attempt to save the diary of the child’s dead father—a diary which Magsalin believes actually belongs to a real soldier from the Philippine-American war—and in the diary entry, the child “rides a merry go round” (Apostol 47). The scene, in which the voices that “wrote” the words of the diary are silenced by death, is representative of the real erasure that is occurring to the Filipino voices that actually wrote the diary (as a result of Ludo’s attempts to reference Balangiga). When paired with the imagery of the carousel, Apostol further suggests a continuous element of this erasure, in which it is a recurring phenomenon. There is also a sense that this continuity is something that is

relevant to different moments in history, as the Filipino journal is used to tell a story about war in Vietnam. In the modern timeline, the women encounter a “decaying merry go round” (Apostol 61) as they explore Samar together. Despite a clear passage of time, represented both through a timeline swap and the carousel’s “decay,” the idea of an unchanging eternity is still present in Samar. The merry go round exists within what is described as a “vanished world” (Apostol 61); in conjunction with the previous carousel reference, this also suggests an unchanging sense of an erasure of this history.

In addition to direct references to the carousel symbol, the first section of the novel continues to explore this idea of cyclicity, with phrases like a “desperate loop” (Apostol 13) in reference to the Brasi’s “doubled” world. In Chiara’s research process for understanding *The Unintended* and Balangiga’s relationship with other historical events, we are provided a glimpse into an “infinite spiral of human aggression” (Apostol 34), which arises from the layering of Southeast Asian wars, the Spanish-American War, and the Philippine-American War. Here, the ideas of eternity and repetition are no longer broad concepts, but a direct reference to the unchanging outcomes of historical events, and Apostol draws attention to a theme of history repeating itself. This idea is furthered by descriptions later in the novel as well; in Magsalin’s 1901 script, the years of war experienced by Samar locals are described as “eternal,” and a product of an “endless revolution” (Apostol 153) against the Spanish, and then the United States. Once again, the idea of an infinite timeline, that is consumed by a repetition of events, is directly connected to the Philippine-American war. Balangiga, and the war as a whole, are not just an isolated moment of violence in history, but rather a piece of a long-standing cycle of colonial violence that, if it remains undiscussed, is bound to repeat itself.

Much like the novel’s doubling, cyclicity is also further developed through its

representation of film and photography, as they are established as a form of indirect warfare across multiple timelines. In Magsalin's 1901 script, Cassandra's work is established as an agent of the United States military, molding the way that the events of the war will be remembered. This is seen in cases where she knowingly alters the perception of her viewers, staging photos for the sake of "aesthetic principle" (Apostol 152), and when she unknowingly promotes falsehoods, captioning her photos with inaccurate depictions of local faith and culture "which will be translated into five languages" (Apostol 249). Despite any good intention that she believes she may possess, Cassandra is ultimately inhibited by her ignorance as an outsider and perpetuates negative wartime rhetoric through her art. Cassandra's habits are characteristic of how photography was utilized throughout the Philippine-American war, and what Rafael describes as a "predatory" practice. He suggests that "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" (Rafael 90), thus photography, though not a violent act in itself, can be weaponized as a form of indirect colonialism by manipulating the wartime narrative in favor of the oppressor.

Although the 1970's script takes place in a post-war setting, it also specifically highlights the role that film plays in altering narrativization; from early in Ludo's story, Apostol uses metaphors to quickly establish film as a form of deception. Ludo and Virgine's first meeting is on a film set at a zoo, where Virgine is "magnetized" by a "sleight of hand" (Apostol 19) being used to successfully feed the fish. She quickly picks up on a "doubleness" in the situation; although she is mesmerized, she also can see the "bait that fed it" (Apostol 20). Early in the scene, there is a clear dichotomy between illusion, and the ability to understand the reality that crafts that illusion. Later in the scene, Ludo repeats the phrase "sleight of hand" (Apostol 21) to

describe the scene that he is filming to reassure Virgine that there were no animals harmed in his production process. Ludo's films give Virgine a "disease of empathy" (Apostol 21) for the characters within the narrative that he chooses to present; Virgine's reaction to the experience suggests that film is a medium through which perspective is constructed, and in likening Ludo's process to illusion with repetition, Apostol conveys this as a form of deception. Within the broader context of the chapter, in which we see more of Ludo's work, she ultimately points out that it is not just deceptive, but that the "mute histories" that result from such illusions are a form of erasure.

This idea continues into the next paragraph of the script, in which Ludo is shown playing poker during an Elvis concert, and much like the zoo scene, Ludo's performance in the poker game can be read as a metaphor for his process as a film maker. The phrase "sleight of hand" (Apostol 31) is utilized again in reference to his skill at poker—he excels at it for his ability to dictate what his opponent does and does not see. Pairing this with the previous use of the phrase, it can also be read as a metaphor for his ability to command the eyes of his film audiences. Ludo also admires Elvis for his ability to employ "mass hallucination," (Apostol 31) and Virgine is established as the "ideal viewer" (Apostol 29) for such performance because she allows herself to be affected by "illusion." In furthering these metaphors, Apostol suggests that as a filmmaker, Ludo specializes in deception.

As the 1970's script progresses, film evolves from being represented as deceptive to an indirect agent of colonialism. Caz's first meeting with Ludo is also on the set of a film, which has arrived in Samar for the filming of *The Unintended*. From the beginning of the crew's arrival, she points out the "imperialist stink" of "neocolonial cinema" and critiques the way that film is often selfishly used to "fulfill one man's vision" (Apostol 220); however, she also likens

the American crew to “invaders” (Apostol 221), suggesting that film is its own form of warfare. As the “battalion” of crew members first arrives, they are described using language with connotations that imply a connection to warfare. For example, they don’t simply carry film equipment, but “ammunition” and “canisters of film,” and “commandeer” (Apostol 220) the riverbanks for their own purposes. While these descriptors play a role in painting the crew in a negative light, they also specifically set up a broader implication for the dynamic of an American film crew using Filipino land to film an Americanized war story. The chapter specifies that “the setting is a Third World dictatorship, propped up by American guns” (Apostol 226), suggesting that although the Philippines is no longer occupied by American forces, United States history of imperial practices in the country nevertheless continues to prop up oppressive political forces. In demonstrating that the film production process of a post-war time period shares many of the destructive qualities exhibited by wartime photography practices, Apostol further highlights the presence of a cyclical violence, which repeats itself across time.

Even in the modern context through which Apostol writes her novel (and in which the primary timeline takes place), photography is still influential in perpetuating violence. During Duterte’s drug war, photographers and photojournalists played a significant role in documenting the very gruesome and public killings that occurred as a result of the violent campaign. Despite the intentions of those choosing to document the atrocities, the impact photography during the War on Drugs is eerily reminiscent to that of the Philippine-American war, as “photographs partake in the very events they depict” (Rafael 2)—in a photograph, we can only see what the photographer allows us to see. Similarly Cassandra, though attempting to expose violent wrongdoings, unintentionally contributes to the problem that she intended to resolve by misunderstanding the content that she produces and enabling a false representation of history. By

placing a strong focus on photography in a novel that is set in three different eras of the Philippines that are negatively affected by photography, Apostol is able to further contribute to her argument that although there is no longer a literal war occurring in the Philippines, there is a cycle of violence occurring, one which is tied to an American failure to accurately remember the Philippine-American war.

### ***“The Story She Wishes to Tell”***

History is a product of the narrative through which it is told—this is evident viewing the history of the Philippines’ colonial relationship with the United States, to whom the war is largely forgotten. Through the narrative structure of her novel *Insurrecto*, Gina Apostol illustrates the complexity of this history, specifically that of Philippine and United States relations, and how it is remembered. The concept of the double is prominent in many ways, whether it be structural, physically representing the conflict between historical narratives, or thematically, looking at the relationships of characters and the role that visual technology plays in developing a narrative. Stereocards, used in the war, illustrate both a physical doubling and doubled meaning, and Ludo Brasi’s film, in a postcolonial era, parallels real life films that perpetuate an imperial influence. There is also a sense of doubling that occurs between scripts, in which both perspectives fail to recognize the unremembered hero of Balangiga, Casiana Nacionales. While these examples produce an effective way to compare narratives, it does not take into account the dependency that these narratives have on one another. This is represented through the imagery of an abaca weave, but also by applying this imagery to the structure of the novel. Chapters that have been doubled also become woven, as they are shuffled out of order and the barriers between timelines are collapsed—and opposite perspectives complete one another.

As the novel's three timelines, paralleling real eras of Philippine and United States conflicts, engage with one another, a sense of cyclicity is evident. Instruments of colonialism, like photography, exist continuously across timelines, illustrating that even in a postcolonial era, the Philippines still experiences a cycle of violence. Through these techniques, Apostol successfully accomplishes what her characters cannot—authentically representing the nuance of historical perspective, and the events of a forgotten war.

## Works Cited

- Apostol, Gina. *Insurrecto: A Novel*. Soho Press, Inc., 2019.
- Balce, Nerissa. *Body Parts of Empire: Visual Abjection, Filipino Images, and the American Archive*. Illustrated, University of Michigan Press, 2016.
- Delmendo, Sharon. *Star Entangled Banner: One Hundred Years of America in the Philippines*. Rutgers University Press, 2004.
- Immerwahr, Daniel. *How to Hide an Empire: a History of the Greater United States*. First edition., Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.
- Rafael, Vicente. *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte*. Duke UP Books, 2022.
- . *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History (American Encounters/Global Interactions)*. Illustrated, Duke UP Books, 2000.