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Research Note

ELMER I. NOCHESEDA

The Art of *Pusô* Palm Leaf Art in the Visayas in *Vocabularios* of the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries

An inquiry into the *vocabularios* (glossaries, word lists, dictionaries) and Spanish contact records from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century brings to light the early Filipinos' creative use of materials such as *lukay*, or palm leaves, as medium for artistic creation and, complemented by the use of indigenous techniques and sensibilities, in creating various woven forms such as *pusô*, or palm leaf pouches for boiled rice. Spanish missionaries noted, recorded, and compiled the early expressions of these woven forms and the aesthetics of palm leaf art. Several contemporary forms survive, and this essay attempts to identify their congruence with the Spanish records.

KEYWORDS: INDIGENOUS ART · ART HISTORY · PRECOLONIAL SOCIETIES · PHILIPPINES · FOLK ART

The art of weaving palm leaves—*lukay* in Cebuano, Waray, and Hiligaynon; *palaspas* in Tagalog, Kapampangan, and Pangasinan; *langkóy* in Bikolano—is widely prevalent in the Philippines, particularly in areas where there are plenty of palm and pandan leaf materials. The art evolves from the moment a pliant leaf material becomes the creative medium for artistic expression and a source of aesthetic joy (Nocheseda 2000b, 8B; 2000c, 8B).

However, in spite of these beautiful forms, not much is written about palaspas palm leaf art, in general, and the art of weaving *pusô* rice pouches, in particular. It's being ephemeral and temporary, as compared to more durable basket and mat weaving, is probably the main reason why this palm leaf art is not given the attention that it rightfully deserves (Nocheseda 2002, 22–24; 2009, 3; Nocheseda and Matthews 2003, 31–33). Most of the information remains with the actual *pusô* weavers themselves. Considering that the weaving process may involve intricate and complicated steps, there is a great possibility that some of the *pusô* forms may be completely forgotten from disuse, unless they are properly identified, classified, and recorded.

In identifying these *pusô* forms, I used both archival and oral sources as well as my own experiences, travel, and field observations. In this regard, I have noticed an apparent problem in ascribing names to these *pusô* forms, inasmuch as this palm leaf art is not yet extensively discussed in the literature. There is an obvious lack of commonly accepted identification and a generally understood nomenclature. Although some forms and figures that resemble the shape of a star, heart, bird, or shrimp submit themselves to relatively easy identification and naming, this is not the case with those that are more abstract in shape and form. Different informants give varying names. The figures are simply visualized in the weaver's mind such that, instead of giving specific names, the weaver ends up describing how the objects are made. Thus their names are usually noun-verb gerunds, that is, reflecting the process by which the figures were created or the forms they tried to mimic. Interestingly, the designation of some forms is derived from the use of creative imagination and literary comparison.

To some extent, this problem may be resolved by consulting dictionaries of several ethnolinguistic groups. Interesting entries appear in greater detail, particularly in the earlier *vocabularios* or dictionaries, as was done for this study. As noted in the ensuing discussion, the strength of the indigenous imagination results in a profusion of terms that describe the art of *pusô*,

particularly in the Bisayan ethnolinguistic groups as recorded and preserved in extant Spanish-Bisayan *vocabularios* from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. What is labeled as ordinary provides valuable insights. As Doreen Fernandez (1993, 32, 36) noted, artistic expression in food “is obviously premised on the idea that the utilitarian need not be plain, that what appeals to the palate may also give pleasure to the eye, that the ephemeral, the food wrapping to be discarded, has its moment worth enhancing . . . The packaging of food is an occasion for artistic expression.”

Palm Leaf in Filipino Life

With creativity borne of necessity for packaging and transporting boiled rice, *lukay* has been used in weaving distinctive shapes of pouches and casings, which are generally called *pusô* (also spelled *poso*, *pusú*). These heart-shaped rice pouches have regional attributes as well. It is called *langbay*, *lambay*, or *linambay* in Samar; *piyoso* in Lanao; *piyusopusu* in Mindoro; *temu* in Basilan; *tamu* in Jolo; *tam-o* in Aklan; *patupat* in Ilocos; and *katumpat* in Tawi-Tawi (Nocheseda 2004a, 31–33).

When the *lukay* leaflets are transformed into intricately woven pouches for boiled rice, they also become cultural markers, as one can have *pusô* and *sinugba* grilled meat or seafood, in towns that have predominantly Bisayan population (Nocheseda 1999, 22; 2002, 3C; 2000a, 11B.). It is a common fare in Cebu *punku-punko* (ambulant food peddlers), *tabuan* (open-air markets), and *sugbaan* (barbeque joints). In the island of Negros, *pusô* is sold in Dumaguete, Tanjay, Malatapay, Zamboanguita, and Bais. It can also be enjoyed in Cebuano-speaking towns in Mindanao like Dapitan, Dipolog, Polomolok, General Santos, Glan, and Davao (Nocheseda 2000a, 10B; 2000d, 3C). In the island of Basilan, the Yakans also serve *pusô*, which they call *temu* or *tamu*, with grilled *satti* beef or chicken as part of their offertory and celebratory food in the many rituals that mark important events in their lives (Nocheseda 2004b, 8B).

The *pusô* are woven from the fresh leaflets of young sprouts of the coconut palm called *lukay* in Cebu, *uyok* in Masbate, *dugokan* in Leyte, *ugbos* in Bicol, and *usbong*, *talbos*, or *ibus* in Tagalog. When stripped off their woody midribs, these leaflets are pliant and flexible. They exhibit a pleasant yellow green color with a darker shade along the edges of their ribbon-like lamina. They are found where coconut trees abound, particularly in the so-called coconut belt of the Philippines, which begins from the fertile

alluvial plains of the Southern Tagalog region, especially in the provinces of Laguna and Quezon, and continues down the volcanic slopes of Bicol and Mindoro and the coastal sand of Samar and Leyte in the Visayas, until it stretches southward into the hinterlands of Misamis Oriental, Davao, and South Cotabato.

The practical value as well as the commercial potential of the coconut tree has been recognized early in Philippine history. While ministering in the Visayas, the Jesuit Fr. Francisco Ignacio Alcina (1668/2002, 319) boasted in 1668 that he “planted thousands of [coconut trees] in various towns in the space of more than thirty years that I have lived among these Bisayans.” While praising the many uses of the coconut tree, Fr. Alcina (ibid.) also noted the presence of coconuts in the creation mythology such that “[t]he primitive ancestors of these Bisayans gave their origin to the coconut and took great pride in such a noble beginning.”

Early References to Palm Leaf Artifacts

Given the relative profusion of palm trees in these areas, palm leaves were utilized as creative materials by the early Bisayans. They used them for various practical and ingenious purposes. Antonio Pigafetta (1491–1535), the chronicler of Ferdinand Magellan’s 1521 voyage to Samar, made an early account of the palm leaf embellishments he observed in Zubu (present-day Cebu). While describing the first baptism in the Philippines, Pigafetta (1905, 155) wrote in his 1525 journal that a “platform was built in the consecrated square, which was adorned with hangings and palm branch for his baptism.”

In the earliest created Bisayan glossary, Pigafetta listed artifacts made of palm leaves like *tagichan* (sleeping mats), *bani* (palm leaf mats), and *uliman* (palm leaf cushions). In his journal, he noted big palm leaf fans, *anime* (palm leaf torches), and large hats of palm leaves as well as baskets made from palm fronds. He also noted that in ceremonies of consecrating the swine, “three large dishes were brought in; two with roses and with cakes of rice and millet, baked and wrapped in leaves, and roast fish” (Pigafetta 1990, 139).

Fr. Mateo Sanchez (1562–1618), a Jesuit minister in the Samar-Leyte region in the early 1600s, also noted this propensity to decorate public spaces and churches using palm leaves. He noted in his *Vocabulario de la lengua Bisaya* (1711) that, while *lucay* referred to an open branch of palm leaves, *maglucay* was to decorate something with these palm fronds. The noun

“lucay” becomes an imperative verb in the following passage: [*l*]ucayan ninyo an singbahan, an altar lamang inpanlucayan ng an sang mang a harigui (Decorate the church with palm leaves, only the altar and the posts have been decorated with palm leaves) (Sanchez 1711, 340). Actually, the Spanish word *adornar*, which means to beautify, decorate, ornament, or embellish, is defined as *pagbutang sin mga lucay* (i.e., to decorate a place by putting or placing palm leaves), together with other synonyms such as *pagsab-ong*; *pahiyas*; *parayan-dayan*; *pagpuni*; *paghamo*; *paghuyas*; *pagdayan*; *paganiag*; *pagayaaya*; *pagbiray*; *pagpacaopay* (Sanchez de la Rosa 1915, 24).

Fray Alonso de Mentrída, O.S.A. (b. 1559–1637), for his part, noted in his *Diccionario de la lengua Bisaya, Hiligueina y Haraya de la Isla de Panay* (1637/1841) the proclivity of the early Bisayans of Panay to use palm leaves to construct and decorate their houses. While *lucay* are the young palm sprouts taken from the crown of the palm tree, *nagapanlucay* and *nanlucay* is to take these sprouts in order to *nagalucay* or make enclosure of branches for the house or the church. While *palongpong* refers to the branches of green leaves, *namalongpong* is to get these branches to decorate the house with them. *Pamalongpong* are the branches used to decorate their houses. However, *palaypay* are the intertwined or woven leaves or branches used as protection against the heat of the sun, and *nagapalaypay* or *namalaypay* is the act of making *palaypay* (Mentrída 1841, 253, 287–88).

Fr. Francisco Ignacio Alcina, S.J. (1610–1674), noted in his *Historia de las islas e indios de Bisayas* (1668/2002, 363) that the *indios* (colonial subjects) in the Visayas used nipa palm leaves “to make a very large kind of chains, (or *cadena muy grandes*), which when yellow look like gold.” They also used coconut fronds for these palm chains to adorn the roofs and walls of churches, which “do not appeal bad.” Alcina (ibid.) also noted that these simple decorations took the place of the brocades and tapestries of Flanders of Europe. He praised, albeit condescendingly, these artistic creations when he said, “God who did not disclaim to be born on straw and in the bed of a poor manger, it seems, has provided for the lack of these natives and their temples.” He further noted that “as time passes and culture changes, it becomes increasingly European” (ibid.).

A century later the Bisayans continued using palm leaves to decorate their churches. Fr. Juan Delgado, S.J. (1697–1755), another Jesuit minister assigned in Guiguan, Samar, described this in great detail in his *Historia general, sacro-profana, politica y natural de las islas del poniente llamadas*

Filipinas (1751/1892). During the feast of Corpus Christi they had a procession of arches. They wove palm leaves that served as *toldas* (awnings), *paredes* (walls), and *colgaduras* (hangings) that “impede the burning rays of the sun, so that when the procession passes by, we would not be scorched by the heat” (Delgado 1751/1892, 655; my translation). He noted, “it is well worth seeing the birds and flowers made of palm leaves, those ruffled (*encarrujados*) and woven (*tejidos*) ones, pretending like the real birds and flowers on the trees” (ibid.; my translation). Like Alcina, he was also fascinated by the *cadena muy curiosas* or curious chains of palm leaves made by schoolgirls to decorate the ceilings, walls, choir lofts, and gallery of the churches, which “are so delicate and interesting that they far exceed those that are made in Spain” (ibid.; my translation).

He also noticed the palm called *pitogo*, “a very beautiful plant, with leaves that are thick, always open on one side of the stem, long, dark green and shiny as if sprayed with varnish. As such, they strip them continuously and use them as ornaments in the festivities, when they erect altars for births and even monuments during their gala funeral services” (ibid., 672–73; my translation).

The observant Father Alcina noted as well the use of palm leaves in decorating not only Christian churches but also the *paganitu* rituals performed by the *baylan* priests to commune with the animist *diwata* spirits. They would consecrate a space called *pararatgan* or “the place where the diwata had to arrive or come to” by building a temporary structure called *pantaw* using *bahi* bamboo and palm leaves that were “designed rather curiously and depending upon the skill” of the one making it. They would decorate it with *cadena*s, or garland chains, and other *arreos*, or trimmings, made of palm leaves “from which they make various toys and decorations called *sariman*” (Alcina 1668/2005, 283). However, while praising the same palm leaf decorations in Christian churches, he seemed to not have appreciated the palm leaf decorations in pagan rites when he noted, “[t]his, in turn, was all their draperies and cloth; for such gods, such altars!” (ibid.).

Father Alcina (ibid., 329–31) also noted that during these rituals they served *posos* (*pusô*) not as everyday victual but as important instruments in many animist offertory practices. They used *poso* offerings in the *paganitu* rituals to communicate with the *diwata*. Perhaps in the same vein the 1613 Tagalog *vocabulario* of Fr. Pedro de San Buenaventura (1613/1994, 451) translated *ofrenda*, or offerings to the spirits, as *dahon* since most of the food they offered

to the spirits were wrapped in leaves and, once offered and consecrated, should never be unwrapped, or *badbaran*, by mortals. Alcina (1668/2005, 327) also noted that the *baylan* priests took hold of *banay*, or anahaw leaves, during their rituals to make all sorts of actions when they prepared sacrifices and offerings. As such, these leaves became the mark of their office and were used as symbolic memorial for their graves when they died.

Pusô* in Bisayan *Vocabularios

In present-day Cebu, the term *pusô* has been conveniently translated in tourist brochures as “hanging rice,” as these usually appear tied in a bunch and hanging on store beams and posts. *Pusô* also means fast food to go; easy to carry anywhere; easy to eat at the beach, with no need for plates and cutlery. The shape, intricacy, and utility of *pusô* continue to fascinate local and foreign tourists alike. It is perhaps with this same fascination that the early Spanish missionaries in the islands of Cebu, Panay, Samar, and Leyte noticed the *pusô*. They included the term in their lexicographic journals and defined it further by enumerating several examples.

a. Fr. Mateo Sanchez, S.J. (1562–1618)

An early Samaron-Lineyte Bisayan lexicon is the classic *Vocabulario de la lengua Bisaya* prepared in Dagami, Leyte, by Fr. Mateo Sanchez, S.J., in 1615–1617. It remained to be used in manuscript form until Gaspar Aquino de Belen printed it in Manila a century later in 1711 (Medina 2005, 50–51). Sanchez (1711, 422) noted that women usually made the *poso* (*papamosoon co nin iton mangã babaye*), a practice that persists to the present.

Sanchez (ibid., 422–422 verso) not only defined *poso* but more importantly mentioned several examples, enumerating at least fourteen shapes known in the region. Short of describing each one of them, he listed the names of the different kinds of *pusô* that came to his attention, indicating the wealth of samples of woven pouches. By looking at the meanings of these words, which were provided as separate entries in his *vocabulario*, one can envisage how these forms might have looked.

Some names of *pusô* suggested parts of the human anatomy: (1) *Cumol sin datu* might have the size and round shape of a *cumo*, or the clenched fist of a man, specifically a *datu*. (2) *Linalaqui*, on the one hand, was probably made for, or by, men and might have had the shape of the male genital. On the other hand, (3) *binabaye* was made for, or by, women and had

the shape of the female genital or breast. (4) *Sinaop* had the shape of two hands clasped together made of two sets of coiled leaflets woven together. (5) *Tinico* acquired the form of the sole of the foot, probably a triangular pyramid with a flat bottom.

Geometric shapes were also suggested by the other *pusô*. (6) *Langbay*, that is, *linangbay* or *linambay*, had the roundabout character of a *lambay* or crab. (7) *Binitoon* imitated the shape of a star. (8) *Tambong* was flat and rectangular like the tamales called *tambon* or *tambol*, while (9) *binairan* was rectangular like a whetstone. (10) *Bayobayo* was long and cylindrical like a small pestle.

Others had more difficult shapes to imagine, as they copied images of plants and animals. (11) *Bunġan gapas* was like the fruit of a *kapok* cotton tree (*Ceiba pentandra*), that is, tapering on both ends and bulging in its midsection. (12) *Binaobao* was probably in the shape of an overturned carapace of a squash bug or turtle but smaller than (13) *pinavican*, which was in the form of a sea turtle's carapace. (14) *Ynamo* (or *inamo*) was quite difficult to imagine as it was in the form of an *amo*, or monkey, but probably round as a monkey's head.

b. Fr. Alonso de Mentrída, O.S.A. (1559–1637)

Fr. Alonso de Mentrída (1841, 304) compared *poso* to the Mexican “tamales, although made solely of rice.” Like Sanchez, he defined it by example and listed the various shapes of the *pusô* he found in the island of Panay in his *Diccionario de la lengua Bisaya, Hiligueina y Haraya de la Isla de Panay*. This vocabulario was first published in 1618 in Manila. Luis Beltran and Andres de Belen later reprinted it in 1637. Felix Dayot published what may be considered a fourth edition in Manila in 1841–1842 (Medina 2005, 54–55). In this vocabulario, Mentrída (1841, 304) enumerated at least six kinds of *pusô*. We can safely assume that these *pusô* were quite common and familiar for the compiler to have included them in the vocabulario. The names are as interesting as they are intriguing. Their names denoted intricacy in form. However, without extant samples, it is difficult to imagine how the *pusô* shapes might have looked exactly.

Like Sanchez, Mentrída also mentioned *poso nga linalaque*, a masculine *pusô*, which he described as a rice pouch that was *esquinado*, or with angular corners. Interestingly he did not mention its feminine counterpart. He also added that *nagalalaqui* was the act of making these *poso nga linalaque*. By

its name, it was not clear whether it was just a *pusô* meant for or made by men, or whether it was indicative of a shape representing the masculine sex. Even up to the present, Fred Eiseman Jr. (1999, 216) has observed that Balinese weddings have offerings of boiled rice wrapped in coconut leaves with a shape that is “symbolic of the male genitalia.” The early Filipinos might possibly have also woven a similar shape of *pusô* for ritual purposes.

Also like Sanchez, Mentrída mentioned *poso nga pinaouican*, which was made in the shape of a sea turtle; moreover, he mentioned *poso nga binouaya*, which could have been a very intricate form that mimicked the crocodile with its four legs and long tail, which could also have been used as offertory victuals in certain rituals.

The following shapes identified by Mentrída could have been the same as those mentioned by Sanchez, although he might have called them by different names. *Poso nga ibaiba* was woven in the shape of an *iba* or rice basket or earthen jar. *Poso nga galangan* was made in the shape of a *galangan* (*balimbing* or star fruit). This might have been a very interesting form considering the star-shaped fruit. *Poso nga paholan* took the shape of a small piece of wood fastened at the back of the fishermen's waist where they attached the cords for fishing; thus, *pinaholan* was something made in the shape of a *paholan*. This also hinted at the way the fishermen brought these boiled-rice pouches hanging from their waists to their sea journeys.

c. Fr. Francisco Ignacio Alcina, S.J. (1610–1674)

Fr. Francisco Ignacio Alcina, S.J., noted in his *Historia de las islas e indios de Bisayas* (1668) that in the *pagabo* or *saragunting* rituals for the diwata of the fireplace, two kinds of *pusô* were offered. One was the *linangang*, which Alcina described as “a kind of *juguete*, or plaything, fashioned into the shape of a *pajaro* bird which they made of the whitest possible palm leaves.” The other was called *ginawig*, which was woven in the shape of a large hen (Alcina 1668/2005, 286–87).

To mark the end of a burial ceremony, those who outlived the deceased would weave *pusú*, the size of a *mano cerrada* or clenched fist, and tie and bunch them together in a large plate of water. Then the *daitan* would cut and separate them from each other while praying that those who had outlived them would not join the departed. This was the ceremony called *pagbutas*, which meant to set apart, that is, to separate the living from the dead, as symbolized by cutting separate the *pusô* (ibid., 329–31).

d. Fray Juan Jose Delgado, S.J. (1697–1755)

Fray Juan Jose Delgado arrived in the Philippines in 1711 as a Jesuit missionary. He started writing his book, *Historia general, sacro-profana, politica y natural de las Islas del poniente llamadas Filipinas*, in 1751 in Guiguan, Samar, and continued writing it in Palapag until 1754. However, it was published only in 1892. Delgado (1751/1892, 656) noted the *pusô* and recalled that he was “used to taking it with me whenever I go to the mountains in order to cut some wood, and I eat them with much appetite, served in the same palm leaves as table cloths and plates.”

He noted that they were not only convenient to carry anywhere but also kept the rice fresh for a longer time. He also noted the many forms of *tejidos* (weaves), either *redondos* (round), *cuadrados* (square), or like ordinary *flambreras* (lunchboxes). He noticed that “one puts in it rice and meat, in such a way that not a grain is ever spilled; they cook them in a *baon*, or large cauldron, and bring them as provisions when they had to make some journey: so that within what one weaves each puts meat and rice that is well cooked and no longer necessary to pause along the way just to cook it. They call these weaves *posó*; its form is like a heart or ventricle where the necessary sustenance is locked in” (ibid., 655; my translation).

He noted the various shapes that the *niños visayas* (Visayan children) would make, and that these *muchos generos de lazos* (different kinds of knots) reminded him of the proverbial *nudos gordianos* or Gordian knots, which “a more ardent and determined European would find difficult to unravel” (ibid.).

e. Fr. Juan Félix de la Encarnacion, O.R.S.A. (1806–1879)

Later vocabularios, like the one of Fr. Juan Félix de la Encarnacion (1885, 301), no longer provided an elaborate definition and no longer enumerated the *varias esquinas* or shapes of the *posó*, describing it rather perfunctorily as “a kind of pouch (*bolsa*) with the figure of a heart with several corners (*con varias esquinas*), made from leaves of *buli* (buri) and other trees or plants that the natives fill with boiled rice for them to bring to the sea or fields.” However, interestingly he made a separate word entry for *pinaoican* as a kind of leaf pouch for cooking rice, and *pinapagan* as rice wrapped in leaves flavored with salt and ginger (ibid., 290).

f. Fr. Antonio Sánchez de la Rosa, O.F.M. (1838–1900)

Fr. Antonio Sanchez de la Rosa, O.F.M., was a preacher and the author of *Diccionario español-bisaya para las provincias de Sámar y Leyte*, which was later edited and revised by Fr. Antonio Valeriano Alcázar, O.F.M. (1914). Sánchez de la Rosa (1914, 177) noted the *lambay* as *bolsa de figura de corazon hecha de hojas de coco para cocer en ella arroz ó coco con arroz ya cocido*, or a heart-shaped bag made of coconut leaves to cook with it rice or coconut with rice. Interestingly he has a separate entry for *langbay*, which he also defined similarly as that of *lambay* (ibid., 178–79).

Summary of the *Pusô Vocabulario* Entries

The abovementioned Spanish-Bisayan vocabularios provide an inventory of at least twenty shapes of *pusô*. However, it is possible that a single form might have been called by different names by different compilers, suggesting the importance of minding the distinctions made in each entry.

Delgado (1751/1892) mentioned two distinct forms: *redondos* (round) and *cuadrados* (square). Alcina (1668/2002; 1668/2005) mentioned at least four woven forms: (1) *linangang* (like a bird); (2) *ginawig* (like a large hen); and (3) *sariman* (palm leaf toy) together with the *pusô* with the size of (4) *mano cerrada*, or clenched fist used in the *pagbutas* ritual.

Sanchez (1711) provided the most number of *pusô* forms by enumerating fourteen shapes: (1) *cumul sin dato* (datu’s clenched fist); (2) *linalaqui* (for men); (3) *binabay* (for women); (4) *sinaop* (hands clasped together); (5) *tinicod* (like the foot sole); (6) *langbay* (roundabout crab); (7) *binitoon* (starlike); (8) *tambong* (flat and rectangular like the tamales); (9) *binairan* (rectangular whetstone); (10) *bayobayo* (long, cylindrical pestle); (11) *bung an gapas* (fruit of a kapok cotton tree); (12) *binaobao* (carapace of a turtle); (13) *pinavican* (seaturtle’s carapace); and (14) *ynamo* or *inamo* (in the form of a monkey).

Mentrida (1637) enumerated at least six kinds of *poso*: (1) *poso nga linalaque* (masculine *pusô*); (2) *poso nga pinaouican* (seaturtle); (3) *poso nga binouaya* (crocodile); (4) *poso nga ibaiba* (earthen jar); (5) *poso nga galangan* (star fruit); and (6) *poso nga paholan* or *pinaholan* (rectangular wood). Félix de la Encarnacion (1885), although describing perfunctorily the *varias esquinas* of *poso*, mentioned two: *pinaoican* and *pinapagan* as rice wrapped in leaves.

Survey of Contemporary *Pusô* Forms

The examples enumerated by the lexicographers should not pass unnoticed. Efforts have been made to identify them with possible existing samples of *pusô* gathered in the field and from information provided by fellow enthusiasts not only from the Visayas but also from other regions of the Philippines, particularly the Ilocos, Cagayan, Quezon, Palawan, and Basilan.

A recent survey undertaken by Romola O. Savellon and Reynaldo Inocian of the Cebu Normal University has identified seven samples of *pusô* that are still commonly recognized in present-day Cebu Province: (1) *kinasing* (spinning top-like), (2) *binaki* (frog-like), (3) *pudol* (broken or blunt end), (4) *binosa* (wine glass-like), (5) *badbaranay* (to unravel), (6) *mananaw* (phalaenopsis orchid), and (7) *minanok* (chicken-like) (Inocian et al. 2005, 24–26). Some of these *pusô* forms are still used as offertory victuals in thanksgiving rituals called *hikayan*, and in exorcism rituals called *yamyam*, both performed by male shamans called *tambalan* (Inocian 2002, 2).

In the said survey, the most common form of *pusô* is the *kinasing* (fig. 1), which resembles a diamond-shaped *kasing* or spinning top. Others equate this form to the shape of the heart or *kasing-kasing*. The *kinasing* is almost synonymous to *pusô* as this is the most common rice pouch in Cebu, Glan, Camiguin, and Cagayan de Oro. It has the very pleasing shape of a tight conical diamond, thus it is called *tinaligsok* in Anda, Bohol. Recalling the shape of the banana heart blossom, the Sama Dilaut of Sitangkai, Tawi-Tawi, call it *tungkal saging*; the Tagbanuwa, *piyusopusu*; and in Palaw-anon, *pinupuso*. In Aklan this is called *eaki tam-o*, the masculine *pusô*, perhaps referring to the same *linalaqui* listed by Sanchez and the *poso nga linalaque* recorded by Mentrída, which he described as a rice pouch that was esquinado or with angular corners.

Binaki (fig. 2), together with *kinasing*, are the two most common shapes of pouches in barbeque joints in Cebu. The *mamumuso* or *pusô* weavers in Taboan, Cebu City, compare its shape to a *baki* or squat frog. Similarly, the Palaw-anon of Española, Palawan recall the frog by calling it *kongkang*. The Mangyan of Mindoro turn a knot on its tip to create the illusion of a bird they call *piyusopusú*. For their part, the Sama Dilaut women of Sitangkay, Tawi-Tawi compare it to their pillows when they call it *uwan-uwan*. In Carcar, Cebu, some call it *binaba* as this could fill only a *baba* or a mouthful. Others call it *sinayop*, which could mean “to intentionally make a mistake.” For some it can also mean *sinaop*, or the Bisayan word for being boiled. However,



Fig. 1. The *Kinasing* found in Cebu, Glan, Camiguin, and Cagayan de Oro.

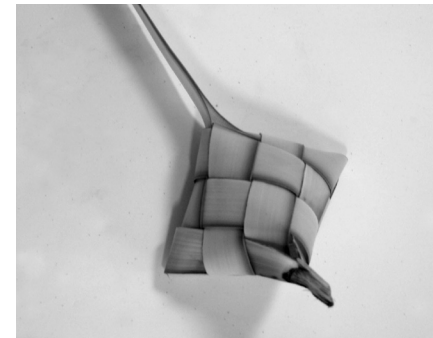


Fig. 2. The *Binaki*, found in barbeque joints in Cebu.

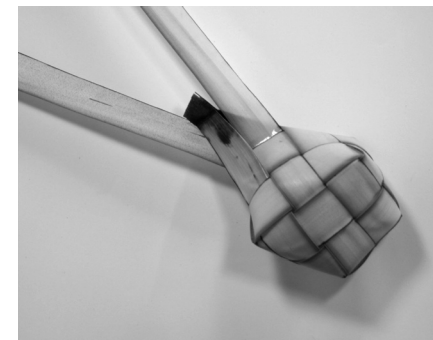


Fig. 3. The *Pudol/Tinigib*, a *kinasing* with a chisel-like blunt end, found in Talamban and Taptap, Cebu City.

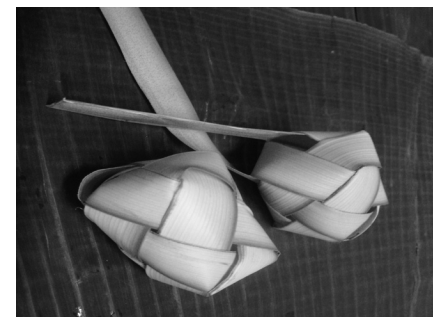


Fig. 4. *Inumol/Binosa*, the smallest kind of *pusô*, made in Taptap, Cebu.

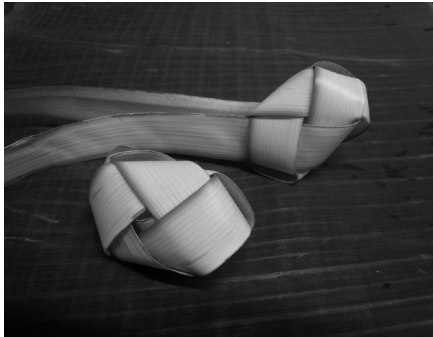


Fig. 5. The *kuma*, a closed pouch the size of a clenched fist, found in Taptap, Cebu City.



Fig. 6. The *bulasa*, found in Tanjay, Negros Oriental.

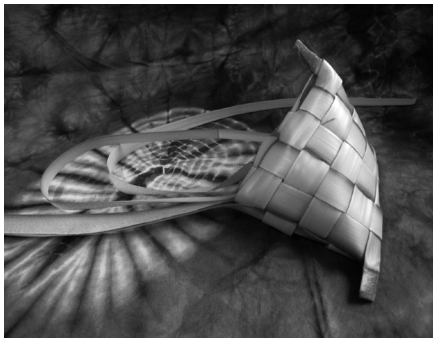


Fig. 7. The *badbaranay*, better known as *pinawikan* (seaturtle-like) in Talamban, Cebu City.

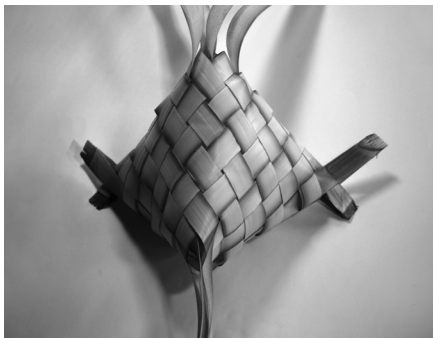


Fig. 8. The *manan-aw*, named after an orchid, found but lesser known in Cebu.

its most likely meaning is similar to the *sinaop* of Fr. Mateo Sanchez, that is, referring to the *saop*, *pagsaopan ang camot*, or hands clasped together like the two leaflets that are intertwined to weave this form. Interestingly in Aklan they call it *bayi tam-o*, the female *pusô*, perhaps similarly referring to the binabaye of Father Sanchez.

The other popular form is *pudol* (fig. 3), which is woven like a *kinasing* but with a blunt end, that is *pudol*, of a *tigib* or chisel, thus called by its other curious name of *tinigib* (chisel-like) in Barangay Binaliw in Talamban, Cebu City. However in Taptap, Cebu, they call it *dumpol*, again referring to its blunt end. Some *pusô* weavers prefer weaving *pudol* as it removes the complication of making the pointed corner in the *kinasing*. In Sitangkai, Tawi-Tawi, they call it *buwah pagung*, bringing to mind the shape of the fruit of the nipa palm. In a way, this could be the *bunġan gapas* or the fruit of a kapok cotton tree mentioned by Father Sanchez.

The smallest *pusô* that they make in Taptap, Cebu, is called *binosa* (fig. 4), the shape of a small delicate wine glass. They are usually offered in bunches of a dozen each and placed on round porcelain plates during *hikayan* thanksgiving ceremonies or *yamyam* healing rituals to exorcise the bad spirits called *dili-ingon-nato*. The farmers in Barangay Katipunan in Anda, Bohol, weave a similar *pusô* from a single strip of coconut leaflet they call *inumol*, the size of the clenched fist, which is another way of calling *binosa* when they consult a *tambalan*, or shaman, to perform a *pagdiwata* ritual before clearing a stretch of forestland or start erecting the first post of their new house. They usually prepare temporary altars and offer the spirits with cigarettes, candles, coconut oil, and plates of boiled *pusô* of various shapes and sizes.

Kumo (fig. 5) is created by intertwining two loops to create a closed pouch as big as a clenched fist or *kumo*. In Pinabacdao, Western Samar, they make *kumo* small enough to contain a fistful of boiled rice. It is rarely seen in markets for sale. Bunched together in a dozen and placed on a round plate, they are used in offertory rituals. The construction uses two connected overhand loops that are made to intertwine each other.

In Tanjay, Negros Oriental, they make these small rice pouches for sweet meats called *bulasa* (fig. 6), which are served during weddings and feasts. The Maranao call this form *kimes a datu*, or “lump of rice by the palm of the hand of the datu,” or simply “fist of the datu.” This pouch is small such that the boiled rice it contains is just enough for a mouthful. The Yakan use it to

boil sticky rice cakes they call *tamu lugus*, recalling the shape of the areca nut bunched on a palm tree. The cumol sin datu of Father Sanchez could either be kumo, inumol, or bulasa. Less known in Cebu is badbaranay (fig. 7), which means to unravel, although it is better known by its other name of *pinawikan* (seaturtle-like) in Barangay Binaliw in Talamban, Cebu City. It is also the preferred shape in Dumaguete City, Bais, Tanjay, and Malatapay in Negros Oriental Province, and sometimes called by other names like *pinagi* (rayfish-like) or *binalek* (returned back) as the leaflets are turned back as they are woven through the pouch. Being made from four strips of leaflets instead of just two, it can accommodate more grains of rice than the familiar kinasing or binaki. This might be the poso nga pinaouican mentioned by Fr. Alonso de Mentrída or the pinavican of Father Sanchez.

Manan-aw (fig. 8) is a lesser-known *pusô* in Cebu. It is named after an orchid, *Phalaenopsis amabilis*, locally known as manan-aw. Like these flowers they hang the *pusô* on windowsills to be admired. Just like the beauty of the orchid, it is a fitting offering used during hikayan ceremonies. It is bigger than the pinawikan as it is made from eight strips of coconut leaflets and thus a figure more challenging to make. The other lesser-known *pusô* is minanok (fig. 9), which is woven in the shape of a hen in Taptap, Cebu City. They are used for making offerings during hikayan prayer rites. The Yakan make a similar form but with a difference in the rendering of the head and tail to imitate the shape of the *kambing* (goat) (fig. 10). It is tempting to suppose that this could have been used in earlier forms of rituals as the linangang bird or ginawig hen mentioned earlier by Father Alcina. These are probably one of the *juguetes muy vistosos*, or very pretty toys, noted by Alcina (1668/2002, 379).

Another interesting shape of *pusô* recently identified in Barangay Binaliw in Talamban, Cebu, is the *binungi* (fig. 11), which means “extracted tooth” since it looks like one. Unlike the other *pusô* forms mentioned earlier, the binungi is not made as offertory victuals but rather simply to amuse.

In Anda, Bohol, a tambalan priest prepares a *lantayan* offering platform with intricate-looking *pusô* called *binangkito* (fig. 12). As its name indicates, it resembles an upturned *bangko* or low stool chair with four protruding legs. With a slight variation, this pouch is very similar to the *tinumpei* (fig. 13) of the Yakan. Although it may look like an elegant four-point star, its purpose is hardly decorative but practical. The Yakan call it tinumpei referring to the *tumpei* bag they hang on their backs to free their hands to do farmwork. They

use it as bigger rice pouches for long-distance travel to the mountain or the sea. With its interesting star shape, this might be the binitoon mentioned by Father Sanchez. The Yakan compare this rice pouch to a long *hellu* or wooden pestle (fig. 14). This form is now rarely seen in Basilan and no longer used as a rice pouch. Only a remaining few older Yakan can remember how this form is woven. The hellu might be the bayubayo noted by Father Sanchez, which is like a small pestle that is round and long like a cylinder.

The *pat bettes*, or cow’s hoofs (fig. 15), is one of the most commonly recognized rice pouches in Basilan. With the simple hurdle of making four corners for the pouch it creates the illusion of a foot sole or a cow’s hoof, thus its name. Probably this is similar to the *pusú tinicod* mentioned by Father Sanchez, which acquired the form of the sole of the foot, probably a triangular pyramid with a flat bottom.

Another interesting rice pouch is the *patupat* (fig. 16), which is rectangular in shape. Unlike *pusú*, which is simply boiled in water, *patupat* is boiled in a vat of sugarcane juice, or molasses, and is usually eaten not with viands but as sweetmeats. It is popularly prepared in sugarcane-producing areas in the Ilocos, Pangasinan, and Cagayan. It should be noted that early vocabularios of Kapampangan (Bergaño 1732/1860, 262, 336) and Tagalog (Noceda and Sanlucar 1754/1860, 205, 423) contain the word *patupat* in their entries in the same way that they appear in the vocabularios of Ilocano (Carro 1790/1849, 190; Vanoverbergh 1936, 9) and in Pangasinan (Fernández Cosgaya 1731/1865, 253). However, the present-day Tagalog of Baler, Quezon, now call it *tikob*, referring to its rectangular shape. The Maranao of Marawi City call it with the curious name of *ulona a babak* or pillow of the monkey. This rice pouch is now rarely seen in the Visayas, but it could be the *tambong* (flat and rectangular like the tamales) or the *binairan* (rectangular whetstone) listed by Father Sanchez. It may also be the *poso nga paholan* mentioned by Father Mentrída, which took the shape of a small piece of wood fastened at the back of fishermen’s waist.

In Sitio Pinataray, Barangay Panitian, Española, in the island of Palawan, they make a rice pouch that is interestingly called *pinagbutasan* (fig. 17), which might be related to Alcina’s *poso* used in the pagbutas ritual after burying their dead. However, the present-day Palaw-anon story is now far removed from it and has acquired a secular mode and romantic twist. They relate a story in the past of a datu who took a second wife and gave all signs that he loved her more than his first wife. When he cut a rice pouch into



Fig. 9. The *minanok*, found in Taptap, Cebu City.



Fig. 10. The *kaming*, woven by the Yakan.



Fig. 12. The *binangkito*, found in Anda, Bohol.

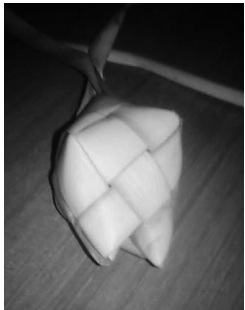


Fig. 11. *Binungi*, found in Talamban, Cebu.

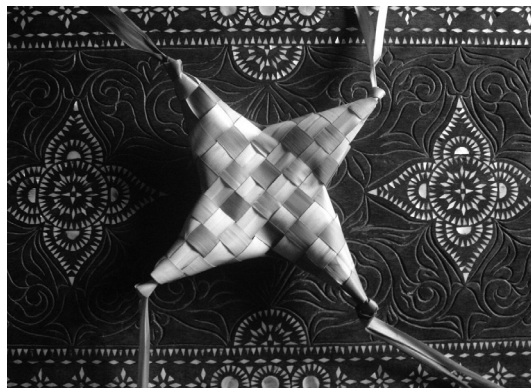


Fig. 13. The *tinumpei*, used by the Yakan for long-distance travel.



Fig. 14. The *hellu* resembles a wooden pestle, now rarely seen in Basilan.

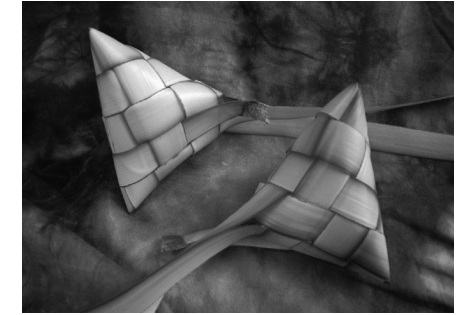


Fig. 15. The *pat bettes*, or cow's hoofs, a common pouch in Basilan.

Fig. 16. The *patupat*, found in the Ilocos, Pangasinan, and Cagayan.

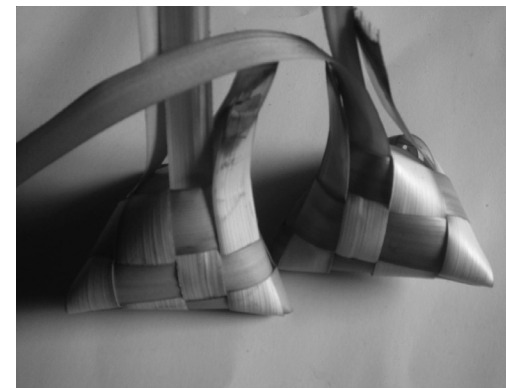


Fig. 17. The *pinagbutasan*, made in Barangay Panitian, Española, Palawan.

two and gave the bigger portion to his new wife, the old wife got angry and went into fits of jealousy. She decided that it was time for them to separate (*pagbutas*) and considered the *pusú* as the cause of their separation, or the *pinagbutasan*.

Conclusion

The *pusô* terminology retrievable from the early Spanish–Bisayan lexicons reveals the charm, intricacy, and variety of the quintessential Filipino art form of weaving palm leaf ornaments and rice pouches. The present research note has undertaken an initial inventory of these early forms, as well as some possible identification of their pertinent shapes using existing samples found in the Visayas and in other regions. While some forms readily submit themselves to possible identification, some intriguing forms such as the *bungã* gapas (the fruit of a kapok cotton tree); *binaobao* (like the carapace of a turtle); *poso nga binouaya* (crocodile-like); *poso nga ibaiba* (earthen jar-like); *poso nga galangan* (star fruit-like); *inamo* (monkey-like); *binitoon* (star-like) and *sariman* (playthings) are still to be identified in terms of currently known forms. The identifications provided here are tentative at best. Some of the words in the ancient vocabularios are no longer part of the present-day lexicon, and some *pusô* forms might have been completely forgotten, as present-day informants can no longer identify them with any of the existing forms.

Where these *pusô* forms originated, and how they were transmitted and diffused, are interesting matters for future inquiry. For instance, the *tamu* of Tausug, *temu* of Yakan, and *tam-o* of Aklan might reveal certain connections, just as the shape and weaving process for *binangkito* of Bohol and *tamu inumpei* of Yakan might point to common creative sources. These woven forms are suggestive of the shared artistic sensibilities and underlying relations among Philippine ethnolinguistic groups, which they could well share with their Southeast Asian and Pacific neighbors.

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