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Luwa: Entanglement in the Origin, Form, and Meaning of Balayan's Oral Tradition

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory research on *luwa*, a poetic performance held in honor of a patron saint in Balayan, Batangas. It uses the concept of entanglement, as an alternative to hybridity, in showing the overlapping in the origin, form, and meaning of luwa due to integration of sociocultural contexts and influences. It aims to prove that a tradition resulting from postcolonial relations is better understood when seen as an historical outcome of intermingling of social groups, including those beyond the colonizer and the colonized, and of the diverging cultural complexes within the colonial and postcolonial societies. In this manner, the tradition is positioned within the wider context, the complexities of postcolonial condition are considered, and the dynamics among and within social categories are explored. Data was gathered through fieldwork conducted in Balayan in April and May 2014. Performances in several villages were observed, poems were collected, and the concerned individuals, including poets, priests, and the laity, were interviewed.

Keywords: Entanglement, post colonialism, performance, oral tradition

INTRODUCTION

The term "hybridity" is often used in understanding cultural dynamics in postcolonial relations. Bhabha (154) defines hybridity as the "strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal," and the colonial hybrid as the "articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects … a negative transparency." Through hybridity, the colonized subverts the demand of the colonizers to translate culture within a single universal framework, and gains agency in articulating their traditions in the process of identity construction (Meredith 2). The resulting culture is a mixed one, as the colonized incorporates the vestiges of their culture into what the colonizer forces upon them (Huddart 4; Jay 147).

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However, the concept of hybridity itself is problematic. One, it fails to challenge essentialist and reductive assumptions (Langin-Hooper 99). Hybridity implies purity, and hybrid culture suggests pure cultures. There is no way out: to cross borders, which hybridity does, needs to recognize these very borders first. If nothing can be considered pure and everything is hybrid, then hybridity becomes a redundant term and its value as a conceptual tool is lost. The problem, however, is that the notion of purity, particularly the belief in bounded and homogenous cultures, has been used in the past to justify xenophobia and racism (Stockhammer 12). Secondly, hybridity fails to distinguish *emic* from *etic* perspectives. Creating a hybrid may mean subversion for a scholar, but it can also mean the unconscious, neutral fusion of sociocultural traits for the community (Pappa 36). The meaning and value of hybridity, therefore, may differ depending on which perspective will be used. Thirdly, hybridity is rarely located within the interplay of material and geographical processes (Lorente and Tupas 69; Acheraïou 8) so that the differences in experiencing cross-cultural contact due to positions in social groups, other than the colonizer-colonized dichotomy, are often set aside. Society involves various groups with conflicting interests due to diverging life circumstances in specific locations. The treatment of an external culture by these groups, along with the concomitant effects on social conditions, will differ within a society. For some, hybridity may be liberating, but for others, it can be alienating. In some instances, it challenges the status quo; in other cases, it perpetuates inequalities. In fact, while adherents of hybridity emphasize resistance against colonial power, critics argue that it ignores brutal realities of conquest on the ground, including the exploitation of resources and repression among institutions (Parry 12). Even more, they contend that hybridity legitimizes the capitalist strategy of considering cultural mixture as a market, while eliding economic domination by the imperial power (Kraidy 6).

Because of the limitations of hybridity and the confusion it creates, literary critics and social scientists use the term "entanglement" as an alternative (van Pelt 6; Langin-Hooper 102; Nuttal 1). Entanglement means a condition of "overlaps … blending or mixing together" (Tiatco 129), "being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited." It "gesture[s] towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness" (Nuttal 1). It suggests that social groups, all of which are located in particular spatial-temporal contexts, are not apart from each other, but in a "meshwork of interwoven lines of growth and movement" (Ingold 4). A social group is like "a knot whose constituent threads, far from being contained within it, trail beyond, only to become caught with other threads in other knots" (Ingold 6). When two or more

social groups interact, what is brought into contact is the entire set of identities, spaces, and histories (Nuttal 1) that each group has, together with the influences of the other groups with which it has interacted in the past. A social group makes sense of the other groups based on its multifaceted sociocultural composition, and it makes use of the cultural influences that their interactions generate based as well on this dynamic and diverging complex. A cultural influence from one social group can be given another meaning without changing its form by another social group, or it can be combined with another cultural influence to create a new taxonomic entity (Stockhammer 16-17; Hitchcock and Maeir 58). In this case, culture develops through continuous integration of various groups of local and foreign origins (Hitchcock and Maier 53), and the society becomes transcultural, an intermingling of all existing cultures and interweaving of all present identities (Grosu 108).

When seen in the more inclusive light of entanglement, the colonial encounter is no longer limited to the colonizer and the colonized; instead, it includes the other groups, which affect the sociocultural characteristics and dynamics of relations. Furthermore, the colonizer and the colonized are understood as consisting of various distinct cultures, with diverging identities, power structures, value systems, and collective interests, resulting from differing historical circumstances in their particular locations, and molding the meaning and form of cultural influences each group exerts during the encounter (Stein 23-24). The resulting culture is distinct to a social group positioned in spatial-temporal contexts, but always it will be the outcome of the integration of that group with the other groups.

Entanglement provides a more nuanced understanding of postcolonial relations. First, by including groups other than the colonizer and the colonized, it positions the colonial encounter within a wider context, and it considers the complexities of colonial relations due to historical circumstances preceding the encounter or simultaneously happening with the encounter. By positing the colonizer and the colonized as consisting of multifaceted sociocultural complexes, it provides space for various social categories, and it resists the almost automatic and generalist assumption of subversive stance by the colonized. Finally, by looking at society as transcultural, entanglement overcomes the notion of purity implied in the definition of hybridity.

This paper explores *luwa*, a poetic performance held in Balayan, Batangas,[1] in honor of patron saints, as a case of entanglement. It describes the form of luwa as poetry and performance, as a result of integration of various cultural influences. It analyzes

the meaning and value of luwa to different social groups all involved in the tradition but positioned in different institutional and geographical locations. Primary and secondary data were obtained through fieldwork in Balayan, Batangas, in April and May 2014. Poems were gathered, performances were observed, and performers, trainers, and church officials were interviewed.

BALAYAN'S GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY: CONTEXT OF A TRADITION

The present town of Balayan is in the western part of Batangas. Its distance from Manila is 107 kilometers, and from Batangas City, the provincial capital, is 48 kilometers. It is bounded on the north by Tuy and Nasugbu; on the east by Calaca; on the west by Lian and Calatagan; and on the south by Balayan Bay. The primary productive activities are farming and fishing, while the most common produce includes sugar cane, rice, fish, and fish sauce, locally known as *Bagoong Balayan*. The population in 2010 was 81,805, and more than 70 percent of the total population was considered rural. The dominant religion is Roman Catholicism, and the parish church is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception (Municipal Government of Balayan n.p.).

Balayan was an extensive, booming, trading entrepot during the precolonial period, mainly because of its good harbor. Its jurisdiction included the adjacent towns of Nasugbu, Tuy, Calaca, Lian, and Calatagan, covering almost the entire western portion of the province. It was believed to be part, if not the center, of the ancient polity of Ma-i (Calili n.p.), now the present island of Mindoro, recorded in the Chinese annals as the main trading post in the entire country together with P'u-tuan in Mindanao (Junker 99). Before the tenth century, trade in Balayan and in the nearby region, albeit sporadic and low-volume, was carried out not just by Arab, Indian, and Persian merchants, but also by Malay traders from Borneo and Sumatra (Junker 187). From the tenth century to fourteenth centuries, Malays dominated trading in the early period, but the Chinese succeeded them later, bringing in iron, silver, and silk, and taking out kapok,[2] beeswax, betelnut, and textiles among others (Junker 193). In the late fourteenth to early sixteenth century, trading with the Chinese intensified, but the Malays continued to establish and strengthen socioeconomic relations especially in the western coast of Luzon. Early documents even purported that trade voyages to China and Southeast Asia were frequent in the early sixteenth century, and that Tagalog traders had significant knowledge of island Southeast Asian trading ports such as Melaka, Borneo, and Ternate. In his *Suma Oriental*, Tomas Pires, a Portuguese explorer, noted the presence of a semi-permanent colony of some five hundred

Tagalogs at Minjam on the west coast of Malay Peninsula, where the Chinese noticed Mindoro cotton in the fourteenth century (Junker 197; Scott 193-94). He also recorded that the Tagalog community in Malacca owned shops, and one of the businessmen, Regimo Diraja, was appointed police commissioner by the governor (Scott 194).

The Spaniards reached Balayan in 1570, when Miguel Lopez de Legazpi sent from Panay his grandsons, Martin de Goiti and Juan de Salcedo, to conquer Manila, a rich Moslem kingdom at that time (Zaragoza 10; Andres 11; Zaide 89). On the way to Manila, the expedition sailed across Balayan Bay, reconnoitered the region now known as the province of Batangas, and encountered the hostile Tagalogs against whom de Salcedo skirmished. The Tagalogs were forced to retreat, but de Salcedo was wounded in the leg by a poisoned arrow, already a reason for the Spaniards to leave the area and continue their initial mission elsewhere (Zaide 89). After the second conquest of Manila by Legazpi in the following year, de Goiti, together with the Augustinians, went back to Balayan. The Augustinians settled therein for a while, but later established a mission in Mindoro, making Balayan only a *visita* with a small chapel served by priests from Calapan (Archdiocese of Lipa n.p.). Balayan became a town in 1578, when de Salcedo returned with Franciscans, primarily Esteban Ortiz and Juan de Porras, regarded by the locals as the town's founders. In this period as well, the church in honor of the Immaculate Conception was constructed at the present town proper under the leadership of Fray Francisco de Sta. Maria (Archbishop of Lipa n.p.). In 1581, what is now Batangas was declared a province under the name of Balayan, and the town of Balayan was recognized as the provincial capital for not less than one hundred fifty years (Andres 11), suggesting the deep infiltration of Spanish customs and traditions into the local culture.

ENTANGLEMENT IN THE ORIGIN OF LUWA

The origin of luwa can be traced to the *loa* of Spain[3] and Latin America. Loa is a poetic laudatory that may be a brief dramatic piece or a preface to a full-length drama (Pasquariello 5), a monologue or a dialogue, and religious or secular. It is delivered either to praise God, the Blessed Virgin Mother, the saints, and the members of royalty; or to present the plot of a succeeding performance, and tell the key ideas therein (Daniel 45). The first loa writer is Juan del Encina, known for his "*Égloga de Plácida y Victoriano*." Other prominent Spanish loa writers are Pedro Calderon de la Barca and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the most prolific during the seventeenth century (Daniel 43).

Loa was brought into the Philippines by missionaries during the early colonial period. Filipinos were taught to deliver loas on special occasions, like the arrivals of officials, celebrations of the feast of saints, or inaugurations of churches and government buildings (Fernandez 5). The first recorded performance of loa in the Philippines was during the installation of relics of one hundred and fifty-five church martyrs in Manila on January 12, 1597. The nine-day festivity, which according to Pedro Chirino (41) was "never before witnessed in these Islands," opened and ended with poems in praise of the holy martyrs (Fernandez 47). The birthday celebration of Prince Louis Felipe Fernando in 1707, considered as the most extravagant held in the eighteenth century, was punctuated with performances of twelve loas. The performance of *comedia* by Sor Juan Ines de la Cruz during the feast day of Immaculate Conception in 1708 was preceded by the delivery of loas newly composed by Gaspar de San Agustin and Nicolas de San Pedro del Castillo (Irving 217-18; Tiongson 87). The canonization of San Estanislao de Kostka and San Luis Gonzaga was celebrated through the performance of "*No hay competicion en el cielo*," a loa written by Murillo Velarde. Don Ignacio Maria de Alava, an admiral from the Spanish navy, was received in Lipa, Batangas, in 1800 with a loa. Joaquin Martinez Zuñiga (quoted in Irving 145) reports:

> [H]e began to declaim his loa with great decorum, acting it out, as the actors do in the coliseum, and gave an account in his native language in praise of the one whose honor the fiesta had been ordered.
>
> This loa celebrated the naval expeditions of the General, the awards and titles with which the king had decorated him, and finished by giving him thanks and recognition of the favor which he had done in passing the town and visiting them, they being poor wretches. This loa was in verse, composed very rhetorically in a diffuse style, in accordance with the Asian taste. The verses did not fail to mention the expeditions of Ulysses, the voyages of Aristotle and the unfortunate death of Pliny, and other passages of ancient history which they like very much to introduce into their accounts.

The roots of luwa can also be found in the Tagalog culture.[4] Before the Spaniards came to the Philippines, the Tagalogs had established beliefs and practices pertaining to the sacred. They believed in a supreme God, *Bathalang Maykapal*, and in the spirits of nature and their ancestors, the *anitos*. They recognized that Bathala was remote in heaven, and they needed the anitos to serve as intermediaries (Jocano

183). To honor and implore the help of anitos, they recited musicopoetic genres in rituals and festivities (Irving 142). Juan de Plasencia (quoted in Zaide 156-57) writes:

> Their manner of offering sacrifice was to proclaim a feast, and offer to the devil what they had to eat. This was done in front of the idol, which they anoint with fragrant perfumes, such as musk and civet, or gum of the storax-tree and other odoriferous woods, and *praise it in poetic songs sung by the officiating priest, male or female, who is called catalonan. The participants made responses to the song, beseeching the idol to favour them with those things of which they were in need*.... (italics mine)

Pedro Chirino (64) explains what the poetic songs used in rituals for the sick were about:

> Next the devil took hold of her like the ancient Pythoneses, or she (referring to catalonan) pretended it with grimaces and movement of hands and feet, frothing in the mouth, and returning to herself, she declared the patient would live or die. If the first, they continued eating and *chanting the epic stories of the patient's ancestors; or to honor the anito, for whom the feast is held*, and danced until they collapsed. If death, *they mitigated the prospect of death by praising the sick, now chosen by the anito to make him one of them, because of his good qualities, while entrusting themselves to him once he was in his Kingdom, and a thousand other lies and flatteries, with which the unfortunate person could swallow death.* (italics mine)

Tagalogs wrote poems, aside from poetic chants, either to invoke the anitos, or to praise the dead ancestors, brave warriors, or beautiful women. One kind of poems, called *gulo*, was condemned by the friars, Pedro Chirino included, as it was used in making a pact with the devil (Scott 242). Another kind of poem called *bulong*, was a short incantation to environmental spirits or animals thought to possess power (Demetrio 587). One common example follows:

> Tabi, tabi po Ingkong
> Makikiraan po lamang.
>
> (Excuse me, Grandfather
> I am just passing by.)

A different kind of poem, labelled *puri*, was considered by missionary linguists and ethnographers to be the equivalent to the Spanish loa. Fray Pedro de San Buenaventura (392) defines loa as "puri," and observes that Tagalogs were praising God in songs. Domingo de los Santos (504) also identifies loa as "puri," and qualifies that it could be used to praise God or man.[5]

The origin of luwa needs to be understood as well within the context of Malay culture. The reason for this is that the Tagalogs, together with the Malaysians and the Indonesians, now form the cultural continuum of West Malay, which belongs to a vast linguistic and cultural area earlier known as Malayo-Polynesian and now usually called Austronesian (Salazar 137-39). The Austronesians originated either from the islands of Celebes Sea, sailed northward to trade in Taiwan, and dispersed toward the Pacific Islands and Indo-China; or they came from South China, reached Luzon through the Batanes Islands, and spread toward Borneo, Celebes, and the Pacific Ocean perhaps in response to limited resources. Through migration, trade, and intermarriage, peoples of various islands in the region exchanged not only goods, but also beliefs and practices; and through time they established amongst themselves an encompassing cultural ecumene. Hence, the Tagalogs, as well as the rest of the Malays, used to believe in gods, goddesses, and spirits, known as *aitu/aiku* in Polynesia; *kanitu* in Melanesia; and *anitu/hanitu/nitu* in Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines (Aung-thwin, Ricklefs, Lockhart, Lau, and Reyes 4-5; Salazar 366). They adored these spirits, or in Reid's parlance, or manipulated (342; Hernandez 86) them, through poetic speeches and songs in rituals. For instance, the Rungus in Sabah, Malaysia, recite the *ri'nait* to honor the gods and ask for help (Apell 3). The Torajans in Sulawesi, Indonesia, perform the *ossoran badong* during funeral rituals to extol the accomplishments of the dead (Revel xii; Rappoport 382).

The multicultural origin of luwa is best seen in the etymology of the word luwa itself. "Luwa" came from the Spanish word *loa*, which originated from another Spanish word "loar" (to praise). While Spaniards pronounce loa as /loRˆ/, Tagalogs pronounce it as /luwa/. The old Tagalog syllabary only had three distinctive vowels: [i, a, and u]. The "missing" vowels [e] and [o] were developed through the process of linguistic borrowing (French 3). In most Tagalog words, the vowel [o] became an allophone of [u], while in most loan words, it became an independent phoneme. Tagalogs, being more accustomed to their old syllabary, would find it convenient to change [o] with [u] in pronouncing loa. Through time, the Spanish word "loa" became "luwa." In the *Diccionario Tagalo-Hispano* (1913) by Mamerto Paglinawan and *Hispano en el Tagalog* by Adolfo Cuadrado, luwa is considered as a variant of loa. In the *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* curated by the Cultural Center of the Philippines, luwa and loa are used interchangeably.

However, it should be mentioned that Tagalog, like any other Philippine languages, belongs to the Western Malayo-Polynesian group[6] of the Austronesian language family (Reid 1).[7] The vowel system of Philippine languages, Tagalog included, developed from the vowel system of Proto-Austronesian. The Proto-Austronesian had four vowels: [i, e, a, u]. The Proto-Philippines also had four vowels: [I, hˆ, a, and u]. What happened in Tagalog, as in other Philippine languages (e.g., Atta, Biko, Ibanag, Isneg, Itawis, Kapampangan, and Malaweg), was that the vowel [hˆ] merged with the vowel [i]. Furthermore, the vowels [e] and [o] came about through the loss of laryngeals occurring between [a] and a high front or back vowel. This process was complemented with subsequent reduction of resulting dipthongs, and reinforced by introduction of loan words with phonemes [e] and [o] (Reid 21). We can say, therefore, that the transformation of "loa" into "luwa," through the phonetic appropriation by the Tagalogs, was predicated by the historic development of the vowel system of Philippine languages based on the earliest Austronesian or Malayo-Polynesian languages.

ENTANGLEMENT IN THE FORM OF LUWA

The Poetry

The poems of luwa in Balayan are all religious, being written in honor of Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, the Holy Family, or the patron saint of villages and streets in the town proper. Each poem consists of four sections, called *altar* or *yugto*. Each section tells the life story of a holy figure, focusing on Her/His miracles as proofs of unexampled holiness and overflowing kindness; and ends with one or two stanzas, aptly named *paluhod* or *kahilingan*, wherein the plea of the community for grace, salvation, or mere attention is stated.

The author of the poems varies. Some poems are believed to be written by Spanish friars, who were knowledgeable in the life story of the saints and capable of writing in Latin. Others were written by Filipino priests, like Fr. Mateo Dulce, and local poets, such as Amador Deguito and Jovito Ilao. Fr. Dulce is a native of Balayan who served as priest in the Diocese of Lipa until he retired as assistant priest in the parish church of Balayan in 1988. He wrote luwas in honor of Our Lady of Rosary and various saints, including San Lorenzo Ruiz, San Isidro Labrador, San Antonio de Padua, and San Joaquin. Deguito and Ilao, both natives and professionals of Balayan, wrote a luwa dedicated to San Isidro Labrador, the patron saint of Himalas.

The languages used in the poems are Tagalog and Latin. Most poems are written entirely in Tagalog, while other poems are written in both Tagalog and Latin. The "*Pagpupuri sa Mahal na Birhen Immaculada Concepcion*," dedicated to the town's patron, Our Lady of Immaculate Conception, has stanzas with Latin words and phrases, and with alternating Tagalog and Latin lines. Below is an example:

> *Per illam paucorum fuit liberatio*
> *Peri istam generis humani salvatio*
> *Ang kalinisan mo ay siya ngang totoo*
> Na tunay na arka nitong mundo.
>
> Your purity is the true,
> The real arch of this world.

The use of two languages in a poem is a tradition during the Spanish colonial period by native poets called *ladinos*. The first published ladino was Fernando Bagongbanta, who wrote *Salamat nang Ualang Hanga*, a preface to *Memorial de la Vida* of Francisco Blancas de San Jose. Another ladino is Tomas Pinpin, who wrote the book *Librong Pagaaralan nang mga Tagalog nang Uicang Castila*. Both Bagongbanta and Pinpin used Tagalog and Spanish in writing religious poems (Lumbera 39), as they helped the missionaries in propagating Christianity among Tagalog communities. The abovementioned luwa, together with the poems of Bagongbanta and Pinpin, was a product of cross-cultural contact, showing how foreign influences took place within native sensibility and how Spanish culture found its way into Tagalog language and literature.

The lexicon of Tagalog is infused with Malay and Sanskrit loanwords. In "*Pagpupuri sa Birhen Immaculada Concepcion*," the Virgin Mary is compared with "buwan" (moon), which originated from *bulan* (moon) of Malay; and with "tala" (star), which came from *tärä* (star) of Sanskrit. In the same poem, the people of Balayan are regarded as "anak" (children), the same word for "children" in Malay. In "*Ika-apat na Altar sa Mahal na Birhen ng Sto. Rosario*," praying the rosary is believed to deepen "pananampalataya" (faith), a loan word based from the Sanskrit *sampratyaya* (faith). In several luwa, especially those written by local poets, like "*Luwa para kay San Isidro Labrador, Ang Patron ng mga Mag-aararo*," God is named "Bathala," which was derived from the Sanskrit *bhattara* (noble lord, great lord) (Scott 40). Lexical borrowing from Malay occurred due to the above mentioned connection of Tagalog with Malayo-Polynesian set of Austronesian languages, and the involvement of the Tagalogs in the Southeast Asian commerce, whose lingua franca in the sixteenth

century was Malay (Scott 192-93). Borrowing from Sanskrit, on the other hand, was only through Hinduized intermediaries, like Malaysians and Indonesians, who had trading relationship, or had intermarried with the Tagalogs (Scott 41).

Monorime is the rhyming scheme in all the poems. It allows the audience to follow the poem, and the poet to memorize the piece with ease, both of which are necessary if the poem is to be transmitted from one person to another and from one generation to the next. Orality, of course, is considered a characteristic of Tagalog folk poetry, as it is employed in old Tagalog poems, including riddles and proverbs, found in *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* by Frs. Juan de Noceda and Pedro de San Lucar (Lumbera 18). Spanish friars introduced the Western alternating rhyming pattern (*abab*), but the Tagalog poets chose to retain the local monorime. The former were forced to learn and use monorime in their poems, instead of the Tagalogs adopting the colonial pattern ("Taludtod at Talinghaga" 75-76).

Most poems are composed of quatrains with twelve syllable-lines. Others are made of quatrains with sixteen syllable-lines. The stanzas below are examples. The first stanza is from "*Luwa sa Flores de Mayo*," while the second one is from "*Luwa sa Mahal na Birhen ng Rosario*."

Ang biyayang ito sa iyo tinanggap (12)
Ng mga natuyong mabangong bulaklak (12)
Sapagka't ikaw nga ang hamog na wagas (12)
Ikinabubuhay ng halamang lahat. (12)

This grace was received from you
By the dried fragrant flowers
Because you are the pure dew
That gives life to all plants.

Kaya tayong naririto, atin sanang isaisip (16)
Ang lahat ng mga bagay, nangyayari sa daigdig (16)
Kung ito ma'y suliranin, may lunas na makakamit (16)
Sa taimtim na panalangin, buong pusong pananalig (16).

Hence, all who are here should put in mind
Everything, anything that happens on earth
Even if it is a quandary, there is always an answer
Believe wholeheartedly in a sincere prayer.

These metrical patterns provide balance in the grammatical syntax and in the ideas presented. The resulting parallelisms facilitate understanding, as the orderly arrangement assigns one half of the sense to one half of the parallel construction, and the other part to the other half (Lumbera 18).

The twelve and sixteen syllable-lines are colonial influences. Fray Gaspar de San Agustin noted in "*Compendio del arte de la lengua tagala*" that the most common measures in Tagalog poetry were heptasyllabic and octosyllabic lines, as metrical construction, like riming, was kept simple (Lumbera 46). Another friar, Francisco Bencuchillo, mentioned in "*Arte poetico Tagalo"* that the dodecasyllabic line was indeed used in Tagalog poetry, but only in poems called *prosa* or *plosa,* proof that it was indeed colonial (Lumbera 55). Early Tagalogs did not consider the dodecasyllabic quatrain as poetry that they thought of it as prosa, longer and looser than their strict heptasyllabic and octasyllabic quatrains. Nonetheless, the twelve-syllable line became invariably the measure for the loa (Lumbera 55); and together with sixteen syllable-line, it became popular in Tagalog poetry, especially in love and wedding poems; in theatrical pieces such as *komedya, senakulo*, and *tibag*; and even in narrative poems called *awit* like *Florante at Laura* by Francisco Baltazar ("Pag-unawa sa ating Pagtula" 64-65).

The specific form of luwa separates it from the *dalit*, notwithstanding the similarity in content. Dalit was an old Tagalog poem and/or song described by San Agustin as "serious and sententious, in the style of what the Greeks and Romans called epic dithyrambs" (Lumbera 32). Because of its popularity among the Tagalogs, its form was appropriated by the friars in liturgical songs like *"Dalit sa Caloualhatian sa langit na cararatnan nang manga banal,"* "*Dalit sa pagsisisi sa kasalanan," and "Dalit sa paghohocom nan gating Panginoong Jesu-Cristo,"* all written by Pedro de Herrera, an Augustinian friar (Lumbera 32). In our own times, the dalit is no longer considered a folk poem or song, but a "mournful plaint" recited or sung in novena in honor of the Virgin Mary or other patron saints (Irving 142; "Pag-unawa sa ating Pagtula" 102-03). Unlike luwa, however, dalit, for whatever purpose it is written, uses octosyllabic quatrains, and this has been the case, since the missionaries first encountered it among the early Tagalog poets.

The Performance

Luwa is performed during or after the afternoon or evening procession done in celebration of the feast of the patron saints of the parish church, the villages, and even the streets in the town proper. It is observed regularly in the whole town almost the entire year, especially in April and May. Table 1 below shows the calendar of performances with respective location and patron saint:

Table 1. Calendar of performances of Luwa in Balayan, Batangas

Month	Day	Location	Patron Saint
January	1	Brgy. Dao	Sto. Niño
	16	Bonville	Sto. Niño
	Last Saturday	Brgy. 11	Mother of Perpetual Help
February	11	Brgy. 3	Our Lady of Lourdes
April	5	Brgy. Lanatan	San Vicente Ferrer
		Sitio Munting Dilao, Brgy. Taktak	San Isidro Labrador
	24	Brgy. Dilao	Nuestra Señora de Soledad
	28	Brgy. Duhatan	Our Lady of Rosary
	Last Saturday	Brgy. Malalay	Inmaculada Concepcion
		Brgy. Sucol	San Isidro Labrador
May	1	Brgy. Dalig	Nuestra Señora de la Paz
	2	Sitio Pinalayan, Brgy. Magabe	San Isidro Labrador
	3	Brgy. Santol	Sta. Cruz
		Brgy. Sambat	Sta. Cruz
		Brgy. Canda	Sta. Cruz
		Brgy. Puntod	Sta. Cruz
	5	Sitio Munting Tubigan, Brgy. Magabe	San Isidro Labrador
		Sitio Molino, Brgy. Magabe	San Isidro Labrador
	6	Brgy. Taktak	San Vicente Ferrer
		Brgy. Navotas	Nuestra Señora de la Paz
		Inang Awa St. (Brgy. 4)	Mother of Perpetual Help
	7	Brgy. Magabe	San Isidro Labrador
	10	Brgy. Tanggoy	San Rafael Arkanghel
	11	Lipatan St. (Brgy. 6)	Nuestra Señora de la Paz
	12	Unyon St. (Brgy. 5)	San Pancracio and Sta. Cruz
	13	Sitio Loob, Brgy. Kayponce	Inmaculada Concepcion
	14	Brgy. Calan	San Isidro Labrador
	15	Sitio Munting Tubig, Brgy. Gimalas	San Isidro Labrador
		Brgy. Patugo	San Isidro Labrador
		Sitio Sales, Brgy. Pooc	San Isidro Labrador
	16	Brgy. Sampaga	Birhen La Anunciata
		Brgy. Durungao	Birhen La Anunciata
		Brgy. Caybunga	Birhen La Anunciata
		Sitio Niogan, Brgy. Calan	San Isidro Labrador
		District 7	San Juan Nepomuceno
		District 12	San Isidro Labrador
		District 6	San Isidro Labrador
		Progreso St. and Palikpikan St. (Brgy. 5)	Mother of Perpetual Help
	18	Brgy. Lagnas	San Antonio de Padua
		Brgy. Baclaran	Birhen La Anunciata
	22	Brgy. Lucban	Nuestra Señora de la Paz
	24	Sitio Concha, Brgy. Taludtod	San Isidro Labrador
		Brgy. Carenahan	Mother of Perpetual Help
		Sitio Roadside, Brgy. Cayponce	Inmaculada Concepcion
	27	Brgy. Langgangan	Nuestra Señora de la Paz

Table 1. Calendar of performances of Luwa in Balayan, Batangas (Cont'n.)

Month	Day	Location	Patron Saint
	28	Brgy. Gumamela	Nuestra Señora de la Paz
	First Wednesday	Sitio Nangkaan, Brgy. Magabe	Mother of Perpetual Help
	Last Saturday	Brgy. Kalookan	San Roque
	Third Friday	Brgy. Calzada	Nuestra Señora de la Paz
	Third Saturday	Sitio Cacawatihan, Brgy. Putol	San Isidro Labrador
	Last Saturday	Brgy. Taludtod	San Isidro Labrador
	Third Sunday	Brgy. 5	Mother of Perpetual Help
June	13	Sitio Cagayan, Brgy. Lagnas	San Antonio de Padua
	24	Kanluran (Brgy. 1, 2, 3, at 4)	San Juan Bautista
	27	Parish Church of Immaculate Conception	Corazon de Jesus and
		Mother of Perpetual Help	
	29	Brgy. San Piro	San Pedro Apostol
		Brgy. Palikpikan	San Pedro Apostol
October	8	Parish Church of Immaculate Conception	Our Lady of Rosary
November	Last Saturday	Brgy. 8, 9, 10	San Rafael Arkanghel
	Third Sunday	Brgy. Pooc	Nuestra Señora del Pilar
	Last Sunday	Brgy. San Juan	San Rafael Arkanghel
December	Saturday before Christmas	Brgy. Putol	Nuestra Señora de Seteraña

The dates of the performances, and the feasts thereof, show that the tradition has both local and colonial inflections. The celebration of the feast of the patron saints was introduced by the Spaniards through the Catholic Church, but the date of the feasts in Balayan, especially in far-flung villages, does not always correspond to the calendar of the church. The people of Balayan hold feasts mostly in April and May, when the harvesting of cash crops, like rice and corn, is done, and when farm work is to relax a little due to the scorching heat of the summer sun. No feast is celebrated from July to September, and only one is observed in October, when much is to be done in the farm to maximize the water brought by the rains, and when farmers have to tighten their belts due to the ravages caused by typhoons. For instance, the feast of Archangel Rafael is supposed to be held, according to the calendar of the Roman Catholic Church, on September 29, but it is celebrated on May 10 in Brgy. Tanggoy; on the last Saturday of November in Brgys. 8, 9, and 10; and on the last Sunday of the same month in Brgy. San Juan. The feast of Immaculate Conception is rightly observed on December 8 in the parish church, but it is celebrated on the last Saturday of April in Brgy. Malalay, and on May 24 in Sitio Roadside, Brgy. Caponce.

The setting is a makeshift stage or platform called *altares*. The altares is built inside the church or along the street, in front of the house of the performer. It is made of bamboo and softwood, and adorned with coconut palms, real and paper

flowers, lights and lamps, and cloth of various colors. It is usually constructed by the relatives of the performer, especially her father and uncles, before the feast, and removed right after or the day after the feast. Its use can be traced back to the private oratories, called *simba* or *simbahan*, of the precolonial Tagalog culture:

> For all these adorations and sacrifices it is not evident that they had any common public temple. For although these places had the name *simba* or *simbahan*, which signifies "place of adoration and sacrifice," and the people attended them and resorted thither, they were not like our temples common to all, but as it were, certain private oratories belonging to the houses of their chiefs, where those of their families, or their dependents, or those related by marriage, met to make a feast for any special object. For this purpose, they made a bower in the house itself, which they call *sibi*, dividing it into three naves and lengthening the fourth. They adorned it with leaves and flowers on all sides, and many lighted lamps. In the middle was placed another large lamp with ornaments. Such was their simbahan or oratory.... When the feast was ended and all the adornment removed, the place had no longer the name of the church or the temple, and remained a house like all others. (in Zaide 313)

The altares seems to be the simbahan, the well-lit-central nave of the *sibi*, wherein perhaps the *katalonan* performed her chant, while the *likha* stood quietly in the middle portion, beside the large, ornamented lamp. The only striking difference is, the altares is elevated, because this time what happens is not just a ritual, but also a performance, which the audience comes to see.

The performers are at least four adolescent girls and a few little girls.[8] The older girls, dressed in *terno* (gown) with gold and silver jewelry, recite the poems after a week-long training conducted by teachers, religious laity, or former luwa performers. The younger ones act as angels with their mother or sisters coaching and prodding them even during the performance. The role of young girls in luwa is rooted both in local and colonial cultures. The preference for females might be native to the Tagalogs, while the preference for children might be from the Spaniards. On the one hand, katalonans were mostly aged females. Only a few were males, and these males were dressed as females (Salazar 9). On the other hand, friars gave special attention in Catechism to young boys and girls, called *bagontauo* and *dalaga* (de la Costa 26), considering they would accept the Catholic doctrine more than their parents who used to practice another belief system. Proselytizing them would also have a lasting impact, since they would soon grow and establish their own families.

Fray Chirino (192-93) quotes another Jesuit, Leonardo Scelsi, who documented Catholic indoctrination among children in Silang, Cavite, also a Tagalog community near Batangas:

> The first days we spent in gathering the people dispersed in their ranches, and we paid special attention in bringing the children together. From before they were grouped in three classes, one that served as sacristans and singers in the church, and were learning to read, others to pray. With renewed fervor, these ministries were carried on for all the three classes and these, as all other boys and girls, were examined again in the Catechism. Grouping them into as many groups as its sections, they were tested in one section or the other, until they learned all of them. The children came eagerly for the test, wanting to pass on to the classes of the older ones. With them, and with the rest of the young, the mission of our lady was solemnized on Saturdays ...

The body movement is precise and systematic. When the head of the procession is already near the altares or about to end, the performer goes up the altares, together with the angels, in character. The laity gather in front of the altares, and in their midst is the *carroza* (carriage) of the patron saint facing the performers. The performers one by one deliver their piece, as their mentor, standing behind the curtains, whispers the poem, making sure that they remember every word and deliver every line with the proper intonation. They stand still, but their hands move up and down, left and right, sometimes together with their head, as they throw the corresponding words or phrases. They end their performance kneeling on the ground, while fireworks are lit to create spectacles in the sky. Table 2 and Table 3 are the lists of body movements with corresponding meanings:

Table 2. Hand movement with corresponding meanings

Hand Movement	Corresponding Words in the Poems
Right hand or both hands is/are raised to the head level	*Diyos* (God), Langit (Heaven), Luwalhati (Glory)
Right hand or both hands is/are raised to the chest level	*Balana* (People), Daigdig, Sansinukuban (Earth)
Left hand or both hands is down until the waist level	Sala (Mistake), Dungis (Impurity)
Hands are clasped	Dasal (Pray), Pagsusumamo (Plead)
Right Hand points to the nose	Amoy (Smell)
Right Hand points to the mouth	Salita (Word), Sambit (Say), Panambitan, Pithaya
Right hand points to the eye	Sight
Right hand or both hands is/are placed over the chest	Puso (Heart), Mahal (Love), Handog (Offer)

Table 2. Hand movement with corresponding meanings (Cont'n.)

Hand Movement	Corresponding Words in the Poems
Hands are down Nakataob ang (Devil) kaliwang kamay	Kamatayan (Death), Delubyo, Dyablo
Right hand points to the ear	Pandinig (Sense of Hearing)
Left hand points to the ear	Bingi (Deaf)
Left hand points to the eye	Bulag (Blind)
Left hand points to the mouth	Pipi (Mute), Kagat ng ahas (Snake bite)
Hands are crossed over the chest	Adopted
Both hands point to the image (You), of the patron saint	*Birhen* (Virgin Mary) or *Santo* (Saint); *Ikaw* *Iyo* (Yours) *Referring to the VirginMary or the Saint*
Right hand points to the head	*Tarok* (Understand)

Table 3. Head movement and facial expression with corresponding meanings

Head Movement	Corresponding Words
Head nods	Sang-ayon, Tunay
Head shakes	Hindi (No), Balintuna (Irony)
Head faces to the right	Luwalhati (Praise), Umaga (Morning)
Head faces to the left	*Kamatayan* (Death), Sakuna (Accident)
Head tilts upwards	*Panginoon* (Lord)
Smile	*Ligaya* (Joy), Papuri (Glory)
Frown	*Lungkot* (Sadness), *Kasalanan* (Sin)

Noticeable in the body movement is the left and right pattern. Words with a positive meaning are expressed with either hand or head movement oriented toward the right. Words with a negative meaning, on the other hand, are expressed with a body movement leaning towards the left. For instance, the right hand is used to refer to the patron saint, and the left hand is used to refer to the works of the devil or to one's suffering on Earth. The head is tilted to the right when the performer speaks of morning, and it is tilted to the left when she speaks of death. This correlation of body movement and moral meaning is common among the rituals in the Philippines and the Southeast Asia. Batangueños from Lipa believe that seeing some birds at the right direction means good luck to a traveler (Reyes 7). The Ata Matigsalogs in Davao City continue their journey when they see the *alimukun* (*Phapitheron leucotis*) at their right and go back home when they see it at their left. The right side of the Badjao's dwelling is for sacred activities, while the left side is for profane activities (Bottignolo 70). The Malays in Malaysia enter the house with their right foot first, and they go to the toilet with their left foot first. Among the Torajans in Indonesia,

the rituals for the gods are associated with the rising sun, the east and northeast, and the right hand; and the rituals for the dead are associated with the setting sun, the south and the southwest, and the left hand (Rappoport 380-81).

Indeed, the origin and form of luwa in Balayan shows that the tradition is Spanish, Tagalog, and Malay altogether. It is neither local nor foreign, or familiar nor strange, but it is local and foreign, familiar and strange all at once. When loa came to Balayan, the Tagalogs encountered a tradition they knew they inherited from their ancestors and shared with their neighbors, albeit coated in a strange language. They recognized that the form and structure, the meaning and value of loa were almost the same, but only the words, the names of characters, and a few details of the performance were different from what they had been doing ages before. The anitos were replaced by the saints, and the poetic prayers by the poems in Spanish, but the underlying sacrosanct way of thinking and acting, generated through years of interactions with relatives and neighbors, remained almost intact.

ENTANGLEMENT IN THE MEANING OF LUWA

For the Performers

The town of Balayan, like the other Tagalog towns, is divided into *bayan* and *bukid*. The bayan includes the villages in the town proper, also called *poblacion*; and the bukid includes the villages outside the town proper, usually farming or fishing communities. The distinction between bayan and bukid originated from the *reduccion* of the Spanish colonial government. As early as 1580, the Franciscans, primarily Fr. Juan de Plasencia, resolved to bring all scattered natives together in a *reduccion bajo el son de la campana* (under the sound of the bell) or *bajo el toque de la campana* (under the peal of the bell) to facilitate Christianization and Hispanization (Medina 28-29). The villagers who used to settle in widely dispersed communities were concentrated in the *cabecera*, an enclave complete with church, convent, school, market, cemetery, and town hall. Nonetheless, they resented and opposed the policy, simply because they were subsistence farmers whose farms were located far from the cabecera. They built houses in the cabecera and participated in the affairs of the church, but almost every day, they went back to their original houses in order to attend to their farms. Recognizing the opposition, the friars did not force the reduccion, but instead introduced the *cabecera-visita* as an alternative scheme. They retained the cabecera, while they established the far-flung settlements as *visitas* and in each built a small chapel called *ermita*. In later years, the cabecera became the *poblacion*, which Tagalogs call “bayan”; and the visita, “bukid” or “barrio,” in

reference to the most common means of living—farming. The physical distance between cabecera and visita, and the difference in the ways of life therein also led to differing interpretations of Catholic symbols, beliefs, and practices (Jocano 44).

Generally, for performers, luwa is a prayer. It is a thanksgiving for blessings, or a petition for health, success, or security of the performer and/ or of her family. It is a manifestation of faith in the patron saint, considered as an elder, someone who protects the community from evil and disasters, and provide them with their needs, basic and otherwise. Jillaine Cabling, once a performer, explains:

> Ang luwa, para sakin, isa siyang kanta. Kailangan i-internalize kung ano 'yung sinasabi. Kasi life history ng isang saint. Nandoon lahat-lahat 'yung mga nangyari sa kanya, mga ginawa niyang sacrifices, para dito nga, kay God…. Kailangan mo siya isapuso…ma-deliver mo ng tama….Dapat naiintindihan mo ang pinagdaanan sa buhay ng isang santo at the same time parang ka rin nagdadasal…Puwede ka magwish kung may intention ka, kung may intention na gusto ihiling sa kanya. Parang double act of prayer.
>
> (Luwa, to me, is a song. You have to internalize what it means. It is the life history of a saint. It contains everything, whatever happened to him/her, his/her sacrifices for God. You have to put it in your heart so that you can deliver it well. You need to understand the life of the saint and at the same time you are like praying. You can make a wish if you have an intention. It's like a double act of prayer).

Considerable distinction, however, can be noted in how luwa is interpreted in bayan and bukid. In bayan, performing luwa is more of an honor, while in bukid, it is more of an act of faith. Emmanuel Gamez, father of a performer in bayan, notes that:

> *Isang karangalan… kapag ikaw ay napiling luwa. Dahil hindi naman lahat – nabanggit ko nga kanina – hindi naman lahat ay kinukuhang luwa…. Ngayon, makukuha kang luwa kapag ikaw ay may kaya, kung ikaw siguro ay maganda o medyo sikat, higit lahat 'yung may pera. So, estado sa buhay kumbaga, kung bakit nakukuha ang isang luwa*. (It is an honor if you are chosen to perform luwa. Because not everybody—I have already told this to you—is chosen to perform luwa. Now, you will be selected only if you have the means, perhaps if you are beautiful or a little famous, and most of all, if you have the money. So it is because of status why one gets to be selected.)

On the other hand, Cristelle Joyce Macatangay, a performer from bukid, reasons out:

> *Para po sa santo. Para po maging maganda ang aming buhay*. (For the saint. So that our life will improve.)

This location-specific semiotic distinction is due to several reasons. One, performers in bayan are selected based on strict demands, while performers in bukid are acting based on a vow. The fiesta committee in bayan allows only the girls who can meet requirements both on age and prowess, and on beauty and social status. Nonetheless, the fiesta committee in bukid admits any girl who expresses intention to perform in order to fulfill a vow called *pangako*. In fact, it is common in bukid to have more than four performers, and for the procession therein to last for more than three hours. Two, the performance in bayan is far more extravagant than in bukid. Performers in bayan are expected to wear new terno, the cost of which ranges from P7,000 to P30,000; and authentic jewelry, handed down by grandparents or lent by aunties. The sky is lit as well by grand fireworks commissioned from nearby towns at cost exceeding P10,000. Performers in bukid, on the other hand, simply rent out ready-made gowns from local dress shops, borrow from cousins or neighbors, or pull out an old dress from their cabinet. They wear jewelry too, but these may be oftentimes cheap and fake; they light fireworks as well, though usually the simple ones locally known as *kwitis*.

The differing meanings of luwa, and the related socioeconomic contexts, pose serious implications for social relations. First, luwa, as a tradition, strengthens the public image of the wealthy as the dominant social group. To appear in public with splendor and elegance confirms the performers' high social status; but to deliver a centuries-old text on a religious platform renders her and her family not just as affluent, but also as influential and providential, highlighting their conquered spots on divine grounds. Second, luwa, albeit unintentionally, reinforces the disparity and heightens hierarchy between bayan and bukid. The lavish spectacle of the performance in bayan, and the modest but sincere declaration of faith in bukid deepens the stereotypical notion that the former is cultured and advanced, while the latter is uncouth and backward, and the false assumption that the residents of bayan are superior to those in bukid in nearly all aspects, if not in entirety, from occupation to lifestyle, and from attitudes to habits. This results in hidden ethnocentrism, in which the performance in bukid is gauged and evaluated not on its own terms, but against the standards set in the bayan. In fact, no less than the religious in bayan assume that the tradition of luwa in bukid is a later practice, only an imitation of what they have been doing centuries ago in bayan, even if the *taga-bukid* have tirelessly asserted that their tradition is also age-old, a custom of their ancestors.

Even more, the teachers of luwa in bayan belittle the poems in bukid, as those were written only by local poets, unlike their pieces, which to them have incomparable depth and sound, being authored by holy, learned Spanish and Filipino priests.

For the Audience

Ideally, luwa is a religious act. On the one hand, it is a tool used by the religious to teach the laity about the life and martyrdom of the patron saint, and to encourage them to emulate his/ her faith in the Lord and goodness to brethren. On the other hand, it is a prayer, almost a plea of the community to the patron saint to intercede for their needs and for their protection against vagaries of life or temptations of the devil.

Nonetheless, to the audience, luwa is neither a pedagogical tool nor a pious imploration, but a "show," an occasion for entertainment, not far from a pageantry or a poetry contest—more profane than sacred, more secular than religious. Guia Ada, once a performer, said:

> It is just a show. *Kasi hindi naman lahat ng ano kagaya natin na*…. (Not everybody is like us.) There are people who just go there to watch and to look at your dress. It's an entertainment for the people and they [were] just traditionally and culturally there to watch.

Indeed, the public is an audience, a discriminating one. In fact, their primary intent is to see the performance, to enjoy the artistic spectacle coming from set to costume, from jewelry to fireworks. Truly, they listen to religious pieces, but they are much keener on the details of the theatrics, and they are more interested on gauging whether the performance has met the standards ingrained in their consciousness by tradition. They might say a short prayer in honor of the patron saint, like the ancient bulong perhaps, but they also admit that the festive occasion is far from a suitable setting for a heartfelt prayer. Simply there is so much noise everywhere that there is only little space left for evangelization, contemplation, or invocation.

For the Church

Religious systems are often classified as official and popular. Official religion refers to the objective and universal faith that emphasizes the global unity in doctrine. Popular religion, also called "folk" or "vernacular," means the subjective, inculturated faith of the people, reflective of their historical condition and

sociocultural location (Gorospe 75). The former is what the Church has established—what the institution prescribes, what the canon states. The latter is what the people believe and practice, as they perceive and understand the theology of the Church (Yoder 14).

Luwa, however, is ambivalent, neither official nor popular, as situated in between the two opposites. On the one hand, it seems that it is an official activity of the Church, since it is organized by the fiesta committee, as part of the annual feast of the patron saint. In fact, in the early 2000s, no less than the bishop of the Diocese of Lipa ordered the conduct of the ritual in all parishes to deepen the devotion to the Holy Cross as the prime sacred Catholic symbol. On the other hand, it appears that luwa is not entirely accepted by the Church, as it is deemed by the religious more as a tradition of the people and less as a practice of the Church. In truth, the parish priest of Balayan declined the request of the researcher for an interview, because according to him he was not knowledgeable about it. To him, who should be interviewed was not priests like him—not the officials of the Church, but the teachers and performers of the ritual themselves—the laity. Notable as well was the fact that neither he nor the other priests was present in any conduct of the ritual that the researcher observed, showing that, indeed, their participation in the ritual was limited, if not absent. The perfect metaphor, perhaps, is the location where the act is held: usually in secular spaces, rarely within the Church.

Indeed, the Church considers popular piety not as a form of false idolatry, but as a true expression of the mission of the people of God. Pope Paul VI states that it "manifests a thirst for God which only the poor and the simple can know" and that "it makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of bearing witness to belief." Pope Benedict XVI, talking about popular piety in Latin America, considers it as "precious treasure of the Catholic Church" in which "we see the soul of Latin American peoples." Pope Francis emphasizes that it is an "active evangelizing power" that must be promoted and strengthened, especially during this time when the Church is advocating for new evangelization. Nonetheless, the Pope himself also admits that there are acts of devotions deviating from authentic popular piety. These include outward expressions and traditions that are least concerned with the advancement of the laity, but are being done only to obtain economic benefits or some power over others. For instance, Fr. Chito Dimaranan, rector of the Don Bosco Technical College Mandaluyong, warned the Church early this year of "paganized devotions" or "misguided popular religiosity" that are bound to ridiculous excesses and gross exaggerations. He used as an example the Santo Niño who is no longer known as a symbol of humility and simplicity, but has been personified through differing images

ranging from Santo Niño holding a walking stick or holding a teddy bear. The Pope, however, tells the religious to approach this reality "with the gaze of the good shepherd, who seeks not to judge but to love." The piety of the Christians has to undergo the process of purification and growth with affective connaturality born out of love, with deep appreciation and understanding of our sameness, rather than of our differences, as faithful believers of God.

To the Church, luwa appears to be a case of popular piety in need of purification and reform. A priest from the nearby town pointed out that luwa has excesses the Church has to curb. For example, luwa in the bukid tends to get overlong with too many performers who all wish to perform their vow at the same time. The solemnity of the occasion is lost and people get bored. Furthermore, when people convene in front of a performance, luwa ceases to be a ritual of a devotee, but a communal show created to disrupt the monotony of rural living. Following the order of the Pope and the previous autocratic instructions of other religious institutions, the Church would look at luwa as a fervent tradition of their flock, and perhaps like a patient shepherd, would lead the people to act according to the standards of what they consider as authentic popular piety.

What luwa would really mean to the Church—the doctrinal, dominant meaning of a folk tradition—would be greatly affected by the religious reformative process. Whether luwa would be considered as authentic or bogus, as delusional or devotional, or whether an aspect has to be maintained or modified, exalted or suppressed, would depend on the renewal process that ought to make the tradition more mature and to bring it to bear on daily life. Nonetheless, as the Pope claims, what would happen is not a strict, judgmental imposition of an authority, but a kind, understanding appraisal of a brethren, to be done through continuous communication and shared act of understanding. This means, the canonical meaning of luwa would be generated through a series of negotiations between the Church and the people, considered in the past as diametrically opposed, with the former at the top, and the latter at the bottom. Here will be seen a semiotic interplay between the codifying strategies of a structure and the creative moves of the agent, generative of a meaning ought to give new life and spirit to an age-old tradition.

Luwa is both polyphonic and polysemic, because it is experienced and understood across people and groups whose contexts are as varied as their histories and biographies. The manner in which luwa is approached, received, and transmitted depends on sociocultural particularities, including status and affiliations and the concomitant perspectives, expectations, and biases, all of which serve as lens through which meanings pass. Diverging meanings originate not only from two opposing

poles, like church and people, colonizer and colonized, but from any point, even within a group, where a voice, no matter how small and soft, is produced and/or heard. Even more, these meanings arise not as a complete imposition of an authority, but as a result of intermingling of structures and agencies, gestures and assumptions, learnings and experiences, strategies and tactics, forming a complex web called worldview—a setting and catalyst of a tradition and a way of life, an example of which is luwa itself.

CONCLUSION

Luwa can be considered a case of entanglement. Its origin—the history of the practice and the etymology of the word—are entwined in the Spanish theater tradition and in the Filipino and Southeast Asian ancient acts of worship. Its form both as poetry and performance is a meshwork of words and patterns in rhyme and meter, character and setting, movement and meaning, some of which are local in the Philippines but others are appropriated from the linguistic and literary conventions of the nearby region and Spain. Its meanings and intentions vary depending on the geographical and institutional position of an individual or a social group. Some elements of luwa can be assumed that they came from conscious, transgressive positions, while others seem to be from unconscious, dispassionate integration of cultural influences. Nonetheless, in all aspects, the people of Balayan, Batangas, assume agency in constructing the luwa, since it is in their consciousness where cultural expressions, local and foreign, are weighed and selected, and it is their body that gives an integrative realization to what seems at first to be disparate units of cross-cultural contact.

ENDNOTES

[1] Luwa is performed in other towns in Batangas, like Taal and Bauan, and in other provinces like Bulacan and Zamboanga (Tiongson 87-88). Nonetheless, this paper is concerned only in the tradition of luwa in Balayan, Batangas. The practice of luwa in this particular town already merits a full research.

[2] Kapok is referred to as buboy in the area.

[3] This paper construes places, like Balayan or Spain, not as bounded geographical units but as contact zones (Pratt 228) where cultures meet and grapple with each other, or where a particular entanglement of sociocultural complexes occurs.

[4] This paper understands cultures not as rigid, homogenous bodies, but as composites of various influences—results of entanglement of interacting contexts and agencies in a

particular time and space. It is open to stimuli and impressions causing changes after passing through the process of filtering and transformation by existing traditions. Hence, what is deemed as Tagalog culture is a complex set of ideas and habits produced and reproduced through "blending or mixing together" of various traditions. It is not an absolute, integrated distinction, but it is categorized as Tagalog simply because the act of entanglement happens in a Tagalog society at a certain point.

[5] Poems of related genres were also deemed equivalent to Spanish loa. Alonso de Mentrida equates *dayao* of the Ilokanos and Visayans to loa, as it refers to the rendering of praise and song. Francisco Ignacio Alcina recorded *sidai*, a Visayan poem used to relate the accomplishments of ancestors or to extol the beauty of a woman and the bravery of a man (Irving 142-43).

[6] Tagalog did not originate from Malay, as many missionary ethnographers assumed. Both Tagalog and Malay belong to Malayo-Polynesian group.

[7] The Austronesian language family includes the languages spoken in Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia, Indonesia, Madagascar, the Philippines, Taiwan, and the continental enclaves in Indo-China and the Malay Peninsula (Otsuka 13). The Western Malayo-Polynesian group, on the other hand, covers the languages spoken in the Philippines, Greater Sunda Islands of Indonesia, mainland Southeast Asia, Madagascar, and in several parts of western Micronesia (Blust 31). Austronesian languages began in what is now called Taiwan several thousand years ago, and spread throughout the Philippines and Indo-Malayan archipelago, ultimately to the Pacific in 500 AD.

[8] In other towns in Batangas, like in Taal and San Luis, young boys may be chosen to recite luwa.

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