**Municipal Hymns as Expressions of Social Dreams and Aspirations**

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**Abstract**

Music is the food of the human soul. As a more rhythmic kind of poetry, music helps to capture and express the complex experiences of human life and reality. Municipal hymns are a type of music with a didactic purpose; they seek to promote the collective knowledge and moral uprightness in society. Yet, there is a dearth of scholarship on how such songs reflect the dreams and aspirations of their source communities. Therefore, this study analysed municipal hymns to determine how they express social dreams and aspirations of the Ifugao people. The study was conducted in the province of Ifugao in the Philippines. In particular, the Local Government Units were involved especially in obtaining the official local/municipal hymns. Thestudy was qualitative and adopted an analytical design. The research further deployed structuralism and textual analysis for data collection and analysis. The findings of the study revealed that the hymns capture the dreams and aspirations of the Ifugao people. Through the hymns, the Ifugao express nostalgia for the good times of their history. They also express their desire for a morally upright society. The hymns further capture the aspiration for national values. The study provides a framework for interpreting municipal hymns and similar music to understand the collective value they have in society.

**Keywords:** Municipal hymns, dreams, aspirations, structuralism

**1.0 Introduction**

Music is ubiquitous and there diverse reasons for its existence. According to Mashayekh and Hashemi (as cited in Romero, 2017), music promotes communication across diverse cultures and languages globally. Other scholars have also highlighted the cognitive, affective and linguistic benefits of music; specifically, that music develops automaticity and promotes genuine language interactions because it has weak affective filter (Romero, 2017).

The Colonial North America was permeated with music, just like the rest of the colonized world. The colonized subjects realized that music has the power to move the human heart regardless of culture or geographic location. For instance, they sang hymns in German and Mohican to celebrate birthdays, baptisms and community meals. Songs were also sung to and by the sick and the dying. They were sung at gravesides, during hunting, to bring comfort in times of grief, to invoke spiritual power and to create and fortify the community. Hymnody (hymn singing and hymn writing) was an important means for the native peoples to navigate the conditions of colonialism while also creating a new and indigenized form of Christianity (Wheeler, 2017).

Among the indigenous African communities, music expressed in form of religious songs and hymns was rooted in the belief in the spirits. According to Rafapa (2009), African rainmaking rituals actually brought about rain whenever certain songs were sang as part of those rituals. Regardless of the target audiences during the ritual singing, both Europeans and Africans in the colonial period recognized the role of hymns in the spiritual experiences and functions of the natives. Further, in the African art, songs share common features with poetry. As such, their interchangeable social use among the Africans justifies the cultural functions of oral poetry as identical to the cultural functions of songs and hymns.

According to Lems (2018), music is universally pleasurable and valuable. No known society is without music. Music predates the homo sapiens since flutes have been found around campfires in Neanderthal cave sites among artefacts that date back 53,000 years. Lems asserts that music is part of human life in ways both profound and trivial, from musical rites of passage to the “wraparound” musical landscape people can now programme in the earbuds.

Dincel (2017) argues that music is very essential in the life of human beings because it penetrates their inner world. In particular, music is instrumental in the process of raising and culturally training or socialising children. Accordingly, music provides a developmentally sound way for children to voice, understand and control their emotions.

Music, according to McGarvey (YEAR), is that which expresses the sentiments of the hymn or song, and a good hymn is also good poetry. Songs are thus literary compositions developed and expressed using musical notations. As a literary piece, song lyrics must be analysed and interpreted according to the literary principles of form and content. Such an analysis focuses on the stylistic features, specifically the choice of words that reflect actual and implied conditions of society from which the song emanates.

Everyone loves music in varied degrees. Music is part of language and life. Soon after birth, babies are exposed to numerous lullabies. As young children, they play, sing and dance to a myriad of nursery rhymes. At adolescence, they are exposed to diverse beats of popular music from around the world. During exercises, work, play, worship, etc., music is always present to affirm or change every mood and emotion (Abidin, 2011). Given the ubiquitous nature of music, this study examined the municipal hymns as expressions of the Ifugao people’s dreams and aspirations.

Fagsao (2019) conducted a study in Mountain Province, Philippines, to examine the understanding of Tokwifi’s *‘Antoway*,’ Bacwaden’s‘*Ayyoweng*,’ and Khensay’s *‘Chag-ay*,’ which are commonly regarded as songs of the Bontoks sang during wakes and funerals. The study took into consideration the songs’ intrinsic potential in terms of literary themes and musicality. Results revealed that the selected songs expose the cultural, spiritual and aesthetic values of the *Bontok* community. In addition, these songs play a vital role in shaping the social and religious life of the *Ifuntuks,* since they capture themes related to the community’s social life, such as spirituality, love, relationships and lamentations. The most prominent stylistic features used in the songs’ composition are neologism, imagery, repetition, simile and personification.

***1.1 Statement of the Problem***

Music and singing are popularly considered as merely fun or pleasurable activities. However, songs have a great literacy value, which is something not yet fully explored in existing literature. There is also a dearth of research on how local songs and folk songs as literary pieces are reflective of the dreams and aspirations of their source communities. No studies have examined local municipal songs or hymns to analyse the symbolisms embedded in the songs as well as decode the Ifugao community’s dreams or aspirations embedded in the songs. This paper is limited only to the study of municipal hymns from 3 municipalities of the Province of Ifugao. In particular, the paper analyses the songs’ lyrics in order to decode the dreams and aspirations of the Ifugao people embodied in the music.

**2.0 Methodology**

The study was conducted in the province of Ifugao in the Philippines. In particular, the Local Government Units were involved especially in obtaining the official local/municipal hymns. Thestudy was qualitative and adopted an analytical design. The research further deployed structuralism and textual analysis for data collection and analysis. Structuralism holds that the individual units of any system have meaning only by virtue of their relations to one another. In other words, the meaning of a symbol is a result of its relation to other symbols. Therefore, song lyrics do not have ‘substantial’ but only ‘relational’ meanings. There are four points to note about structuralism. First, to structuralism, it does not matter that the story is hardly an example of great literature. Second, structuralism as a method is analytical, not evaluative. Third, it is a calculated affront on common sense since it rejects the ‘obvious’ meaning of the story and instead seeks to isolate certain ‘deep structures’ within it, which are not apparent on the surface. Lastly, if the particular contents of the text are replaceable, there is a sense in which one can say that the content of the narrative is its structure. This is equivalent to claiming that the narrative is in a way about itself; its subject is its own internal relations, its own modes of sense-making (Eagleton, 1983, p. 82-83).

Textual analysis is a way to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. In doing textual analysis, the researcher makes an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of a given text/song. In the case of this study, songs are interpreted in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them. Importantly, by examining the various ways in which it is possible to interpret reality, the researcher also understands her own culture better because she can begin to see the limitations and advantages of her sense-making practices.

**3.0 Results and Discussion**

***3.1 Local/Municipal Hymns***

**Lamut Municipal Hymn**

1 Gateway of Ifugao,

2 Land of peace loving people

3 Where unity, peace and harmony; treasured

4 As inspired by folks; forever reign

5 Like verdant valleys into yellow golden grains

Refrain:

6 O Lamut dear we’re fortunate

7 Mem’ries we dedicate for your sake

8 We cherish you wherever we may be

9 We hail and adore thee.

10 Cozy breeze beneath, the wispy clouds of heaven

11 Refreshes our metropolitan haven

12 The lush and green forest along mountain slopes

13 And broad rolling plains, down to the valleys of hope

Refrain

14 Vast pasturelands, rich lowland endowed

15 Murm’ring crystal waters; folksongs to behold

16 For a brighter tomorrow and hundred fold

17 This is our ancestral abode

Lines 1-5 represent a romanticist idealisation of ‘bearing testimony to the past.’ Lamut used to be a barangay of the municipal district of Kiangan. In 1959, it became an independent municipality with four barangays. As a municipality, it became the gateway, ushering people into the province through the Halsema Highway.

Lines 6-9 feature the ideal of expressing belief in the land and the produce of the land, the youth of Lamut. Lines 10-17 describe the kind of landscape that has been bestowed on Lamut. Based on the description, it evokes the moral influence of nature on the inhabitants. The landscape of Lamut has given them pleasurable memories of their homeland, which in turn motivates them to strive for the good. Further, these lines seem to imply the dual role of nature, which is another romanticist ideal. Nature may imply nurture for the people who love and cherish their land but destruction for those who mismanage their land.

The Lamut hymn is a collaborative effort of elders in the community mostly composed of retired teachers. It is now transmitted by professionals in the local government units of Lamut, and sang during barangay and municipal gatherings. Lamut as a municipality is agrarian with tilapia production as its town’s pre-occupation.

***3.2 Kiangan Municipal Hymn***

**Kiangan Beloved**

1 O Kiangan home of great minds

2 Charming town on friendly hills

3 Kissed by the clouds and gentle rain

4 Where springs abound like Malpao

5 Flowing brooks and rivers that

6 Give life to the lush fields and farms

7 Eden of Skyworld gods

8 Who keeps watch over our lives

9 Cradle of a noble race

10 That sprung from Old Kiyyangan

11 Who gave the Hudhud to mankind

12 And a cultural legacy

13 Beacon light of leadership

14 Mirror of Christian values

15 Whose loyal sons dare to dream

16 Who sail the seas and fly skies

17 To distant shores to excel

18 And strive to win the future

19 When we harvest ripened grains

20 ‘Tis Bakle time and all are merry

21 We beat gongs and dance tayo

22 Drink baya till day is done

23 To thank God for a season

24 Of blessings and abundance

Refrain

25 Where’er we are we’ll dream

26 Of coming back to Kiangan

27 This slice of paradise

28 We call home where we belong

One of the facets of romanticism evident in this hymn is the application of nationalistic styles. This is demonstrated by the inclusion of significant events and locations of the municipality in the hymn. Lines 13-14 reveal that the earliest Catholic ministry was established in Kiangan by Father Jerome Moerman from 1910 to 1958. Further, lines 10-11 reveal that Kiangan is the oldest town of the province and has been variously known as the Kiyyangan throughout its history. Lines 15-18 indicate that the seeds of Catholic education began in Kiangan and has spanned more than 100 years. Catholic education started with the establishment of the first elementary school, then later, a high school.

 Lines 19-24 reflect another romanticist notion ideal, namely the understanding of the reality of life. Life in Kiangan revolves around the rice farming system of the terraces that involve five major stages, each entailing several distinct rituals. The first stage is weeding, followed by land preparation, then planting of rice seedlings. The fourth stage is the protection of the rice plants from destructive pests and animals. The last stage is harvesting. The palay/rice are taken to the granaries for storage and the prime seeds are selected for the next annual cropping. As they await the next planting season and while the rice fields rest, Bakle (making of rice cakes), one of Ifugao’s traditional rice culture, is performed during the month of August as a post-harvest festival of thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest. The community uses this time to collectively thank the gods and the spirits of their ancestors for a bountiful harvest. Chickens and pigs are offered; the gods’ acceptance of the offering depends on the quality of the bile sacs of the butchered animals.

 Lines 25-28 express the people’s belief in themselves, to strive for the infinite. As such, the people of Kiangan are resilient because they never submit to limitations.

***3.3 Alfonso Lista Municipal Hymn***

**Alfonso Lista Hymn**

1 There’s a place my dear homeland

2 Alfonso Lista my cherished one

3 Where my dreams and hopes stand

4 And where my strength and spirit unite

CHORUS:

5 Alfonso Lista thee I love

6 In words and deeds I hold you above

7 I will cherish and honour your name

8 In my heart your name always be a flame

9 There’s a place where the sun at sight

10 Caresses the rivers, hills and dales

11 Cradled by the great rice terraces

12 Beneath the pathways it embrace

13 There’s a place, a melting pot

14 Where different tongues and kindred meet

15 Came to live, labour and wait

16 God’s blessing come never too late

17 There’s a place where cornfields bloom

18 Where deer and buffalos used to roam

19 Keep your name on high, Alfonso Lista

20 Ever reaching high by the great blue sky

21 Alfonso Lista, thee I love

22 In words and deeds I hold you above

23 I will cherish and honour your name

24 In my heart your name always be a flame (Repeat)

Lines 1-4 seem to be an invitation for the young to consider their land, that is, their municipality, as the setting of their dreams rather than their society. Accordingly, the fulfilment of one’s dreams and happiness is through the help of nature or the land.

Lines 5-12 reflect the romanticist principle of cultivated sensitivity to nature. The inhabitants seem to regard nature as a source of inspiration, thus they are drawn to protect and preserve their land as they cultivate it.

Lines 13-16 manifest the nationalist ethos. History is embedded in the hymn. During the Commonwealth period, Alfonso Lista was part of Marasat Grounds, which at present is called San Mateo, Isabela. This land was also inhabited by people from Ifugao, Kalinga, Isabela, Gaddang, Bontocs and Ilocanos; hence the ‘melting pot’ description. What brought these people together to this place was the land and the bodies of water. Farming is practiced along the scattered valleys, low rolling hills and mountains where corn, tobacco, peanuts, gabi, banana and vegetables are the main agricultural crops. The bodies of water accommodate the tilapia fishing culture conducted using floating cage nets.

Lines 17-20 express nostalgia. In the case of the municipality, the lines lament the loss of the abundance of their land. During the early days, the municipality was called *Mun-u-u-pag,* meaning ‘bubbles of foam.’ The bubbles referred to the land teeming with living animals.

Lines 21-24 make the romanticist connection between moral uprightness and humanity’s concern for nature. This view holds that when humanity is at its most ethical uprightness when it remains in communion with nature. Conversely, the destruction of nature is a sign of humanity’s moral depravity.

**4.0 Conclusion**

From the analysed hymns, it is evident that the people of Ifugao have many dreams and aspirations. Through the hymns, the community bears testimony of the past. They also manifest belief in their land and its productivity. The people also desire a morally upright society. To them, morality is inspired by nature and is nurtured by society. The hymns also show a desire to cherish and practice nationalist values. They urge the people to set their dreams in their homeland, to cultivate sensitivity to nature, to lament the loss of good values and to commune with nature as a means to ethical uprightness.

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