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Political Music as the Soundtrack of Philippine Political Activism

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ABSTRACT

It is the event that history will show every protest movement in any country or culture will give rise to songs of protest because they can organize and mobilize the masses. Whether it is silent or active revolt does not matter, but protest movements are birth amongst situations where there is oppression and the curtailment of liberties and freedoms. As in any art form where art imitates life, it can be said that birthing protest songs come from artists and musicians who see the reality, see the struggle, see the inescapability and futility of the battle, and pens an art and a communication tool to deliver the message to the audience to inspire action to change the situation. The author concludes that music is indeed a tool for unifying people. People need music not just for the aesthetics of it but more so to communicate the truth and allow discernment of injustices of the times. They serve to remind us that there is nothing impossible when people become united. Unity will enable them to tread the impossible path to pursue noble causes such as freedom and human rights. Protest songs will remain popular so long as people need to be united in one purpose. It is used to inspire confidence, boost morale, and serve as a beacon of hope amidst the uncertainty of the times and situations.

Keywords: *Political Music, Soundtrack, Philippine, Political Activism*

I. THE LYRICS OF POLITICS

Ryan Mayfield, as posted on the website of the York College of Pennsylvania, did research on the lyrics of politics and how music is able to convey political ideology. This understanding is essential since the mass appeal and identification of political music among the masses is an enigma in itself. It is necessary to understand that given the universal appeal of music, the political side of music written to push the political ideology is worth the consideration to explore, especially that this type of music has a purposive element to directly send a message meant to conjure a reaction from a mass of people. The author explores in his article that his research has shown specific structural music composition makeup has provided for these kinds of music to become the avenues and platforms for political messages. The research that he has

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presented has given evidence on how music is able to influence so much, and he says that it is because music impacts our human emotions. This attribute of music and how music and songs influence to a large extent, our emotional state of being is what is intrinsic in the way songs can pave the way for us to alter and influence our political thinking. Music, as his research has stated, taps the human emotion, and because of this, a change in thinking leads them to action. This has been evident in many music and songs used to push a political ideology. The human reaction through the emotional response prompts people to act out the emotion triggered by the political music in physical response. It may even be contrary to what one would do in a typical case. This is what the author wants to convey as the driving force behind any artist or musician wishing to drive the message across. His music created with his own self-expression can project to the listener through a play of structural components within the music, within the songs, and lodges it into the subconscious of the listener or the audience that the music or song wants to influence. By structural component, the author, in his researcher, refers to the rhetoric power of music. An example given of this is the repetitive theme or content that is written in lyrics and played like a refrain of a song. When this is processed in the listener or audience, what is really happening is that the message is being lodged into the listener's subconscious, and this process creates subliminal conditioning of the thinking pattern in the listener through the music he hears. Done repeatedly, this conditioning makes a forward momentum process, and thus, the audience or the listener receives the message and progressively accepts the message in time, and can relate to it in a way the artist or the musician wants the announcement of the song received. This is, in essence, and the way music is able to move the message it wants to convey to the listener. In this way, the musician's purpose when he created the music for this specific purpose is achieved. The potent power of music is realized this way. This is the reason that music has remained a very effective way to drive the political message across. Music creates a relationship between the artist or musician and the listener or audience. Once this is established, music is the force that somehow preys upon the emotional state of the listener, thus making the listener a captive participant in the relationship where the music can drive his message and conjure the necessary movement of action that the music wants the listener or audience to do. In this manner, the author seeks the link between different music genres and their influence on the political ideologists of governments and how they commission artists or musicians to play a part in conditioning the minds of the more significant population.

The article also has stated that this power of influence that music exerts in political settings has also been utilized in social movements. The author cites several types of research in the article that gives evidence on how music is effective in articulating the thrust of groups and lending

itself to be an integral part in the process of forming social movement groups. Social movement groups gravitate on shared interests, shared experiences, and shared goals; when music comes into play in this process, music again amplifies the sentiments of these groups and allows them to establish a forum of expressing feelings that are resonated within the groups. Music allows them to effectively push their clamor through music that they choose to play in their movement activities. This is their way to make their message of social change across a wide variety of audiences. This is the same way music plays a part in effecting social change. Songs have become a crucial part of progressive social movements; the soundtrack of these social movements had become the soundtrack of the generations when they were played. History again is replete with soundtracks pushing issues of black activities, gay rights, human rights, animal rights, rights of the unborn, etc., and songs carry these themes have resonated with them. While music can be averred by its role in creating the setting for political protests and motivated action, it is also the same in social movements, becoming the catalyst for changing the discourse of the times.

In conclusion, after the author's presentation of his research, he presents that there exists a correlational relationship between music and political ideology, and this he anchors on music's power to be a compelling force. Its power arises from what he deemed the structural component that enables the mind and emotion to induce subliminal conditioning. This author says, cuts across different genres of music. The persuasive power of music lies in creating the conditions in the listener's or the audience's emotions, and through this, conditioning provides the venue for action to be taken. Thus helping to create a shift in thinking, a shift in relating to the message lodged through music and lyrics of a song biased towards any political ideology being conveyed, thus establishing the correlational relationship between the two: music and political ideology.

II. POLITICAL MUSIC AS THE SOUNDTRACK OF PHILIPPINE POLITICAL ACTIVISM

A book was published by Zeny Sarabia-Panol and Rosario Maxino-Baseleres (2017) entitled: *Music as a Platform for Political Communication* and posted on the website of IGI Global Publisher of Timely Knowledge. The authors conducted an exploration using historical analysis on the content of various songs that were used in paving the way for the awakening of Filipinos in actively participating in the political discourse that marked the time of social awareness and political machinations in the Philippines. The study focused their interest on the genre of popular music, which they explored as having the ability to drive the message to the Filipino audience. It explored, among others, concepts that somehow merged popular music

with popular culture, and the use of this kind of music cut across boundaries that usually marked the political environment in the Philippines. The research aimed to show the universality of language as a communication medium. Despite the prevailing politicized environment that has prevailed in Philippine politics and culture, the universal element of the medium has negotiated itself to move beyond the status quo and became a soundboard for student protests that marked much of the Philippine history from the sixties to the nineties leading up the People Power Revolution. The research presented music and lyrics as a communication medium that has inspired purposiveness of aim in ensuring change among Filipinos who have endured so much in a repressive era. The silent revolt has been attributed to be triggered by the songs of the times, political songs that communicated the message effectively. It paved the way for a peaceful revolution to be born where people were organized and mobilized a movement. Through this movement, changed was put in place, and music, for the most, played a part in Filipinos taking action.

The thesis of the book is that, by nature, Filipinos are fond of singing, and this fondness is somehow ingrained in the soul of a Filipino. Philippine history is filled with Filipino music that has endeared itself to the masses. Every aspect of Philippine life has music fleshed out the emotions of Filipinos of these different times. There are love songs called the "kundimans" to Western tunes. There is a vast diversity of music genres that Filipinos love and identify with. Filipinos relate to lyrics and rhythm because music captures the emotions of the Filipinos. Filipino music is a diverse multitude of music and songs, as different as the nation's regional differences, but despite these differences, the underlying themes of Filipino music remain the same. Dialect seems to have little influence. The universality of music transcends idiom giving Filipino music a unique language that is accepted across the vast archipelago.

Concerning protest songs, Filipino protest songs have been around for centuries. As a nation colonized by different countries, the research infers that protest songs are songs of political and social activism. They are songs that mark the revolt against Filipino colonizers Spain and the United States. These protest songs have themes that speak of injustice and human rights violations; the artists or musicians were eloquent enough to pen the music as art but with radical messages. These messages were aimed to recruit, incite revolt, organize the masses and boost the morale of the people who were being suppressed by the nation's colonizers.

The book encourages the readers to embark on a historical journey through the perspective of music, where it traces how Filipinos have used the freedom of expression in music to lobby for release and to fight the oppressive colonizers of the day. An analytical look is presented where the lyrics (words) and music were not meant to show an art form aesthetically or used for the

celebration. This music was to become the instruments that will move the Filipino people to action against the ills of the socio-political environment of the era they were written. The various historical periods that were presented in the book sought to show the Filipino resiliency to fight their way against oppression, where music plays a part in the resistance movement and becomes the catalyst for change.

III. FILIPINO SONGS OF PROTEST

Efren S. Cruz (2019) wrote an article in the Philippine Star Global about Filipino songs of protest. He states that these songs have been identified with political and social movements clamoring for change in the country's political and social environment. The author, for a start, mentions important pieces of protest songs used by social campaigns for their civil rights advocacy to infuse that protest songs were created with the purpose of mobilizing movements for change.

As the name implies, protest songs are songs of protest, so they play a vital role in pushing for some sort of revolt. He mentions the song "Bayan Ko" with all its nationalistic undertones. It was penned during the Philippine-American War era, originally written in Spanish by its author and later translated in Tagalog by poet Jose Corazon de Jesus with music by Constancio de Guzman. True to its form, the song was a revolutionary song to lay the ground of opposition to the colonizers of the day, which was the Americans. The power of this song to evoke nationalism for its listeners is a testimony to its timeless use. The song was even banned during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. This shows the potent power of the song to influence and mobilize people to the message it wishes to convey. It again became a mantra for the suppression being felt during the Martial Law years against the regime of then-President Marcos. Its popularity has remained undiminished, so much so that again, the incumbent administration of that time banned the song from being played at gatherings where violators face charges of sedition if they were to continue using it during public groups. Its use culminated with the assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino, where the voices of the masses cannot be silenced anymore, and it was being sung and played at every rally. People from all walks of life related to the song. It was played in every venue of the gathering. The song's lyrics evoked so much emotion that it soon became the banner song of the oppressed masses.

This author avers there is the potent power of protest songs. Their popularity continues to pave the way for people who cannot express themselves and speak freely in an environment of oppression to become united in singing themselves out as a testimony to their journey to regain lost freedoms. As the author has stated, two situations were protested against colonizers, and

the third was a period of perceived oppression where human rights violations were pervasive. The song resonated with the pressure of the times and against a multitude of societal ills linked to corruption in government, slowly but surely undermining the very fabric of society. The song finds its niche among the people who were suffering during that period, where the vast disparity among the rich and poor was the order of the day. The masses saw the song as a way to express how the country was being robbed of its freedom and liberties from within and not from a foreign colonizer.

This is the power of protest songs, and they effectively can evoke emotion and translate this emotion into action. Protest songs ignite people's sentiments; they can incite in them enough grits to take action so that change can be achieved. Even recently, the revolutionary protest in Hong Kong brought about by the reality that its administration has been turned back to China has also given rise to many protest songs, among them "Do you hear the people sing?" and others. The crowds of mass protesters sing these protest songs as a testimony to their silent voice and struggle.

It is the event that history will show every protest movement in any country or culture will give rise to songs of protest because they can organize and mobilize the masses. Whether it is silent or active revolt does not matter, but protest movements are birth amongst situations where there is oppression and the curtailment of liberties and freedoms. As in any art form where art imitates life, it can be said that birthing protest songs come from artists and musicians who see the reality, see the struggle, see the inescapability and futility of the battle, and pens an art and a communication tool to deliver the message to the audience to inspire action to change the situation. The author concludes that music is indeed a tool for unifying people. People need music not just for the aesthetics of it but more so to communicate the truth and allow discernment of injustices of the times. They serve to remind us that there is nothing impossible when people become united. Unity will enable them to tread the impossible path to pursue noble causes such as freedom and human rights. Protest songs will remain popular so long as people need to be united in one purpose. It is used to inspire confidence, boost morale, and serve as a beacon of hope amidst the uncertainty of the times and situations.

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