

THE CULTURE OF RESISTANCE: A STUDY OF PROTEST SONGS FROM 1972-1980

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During the last decade, since the imposition of Martial Law in 1972, we have been witness to many attempts by government to quell various modes of resistance and prevent the flowering of radical and progressive ideas. In the field of culture, two tactical means were employed: first was the full control of media which meant for the populace access to only one type of information, and for the serious and independent-minded writer, practically no publication outlets for his/her works; second was the neutralization of nationalist ideas — on the one hand, encouraging research into our cultural roots, and on the other, giving aid to “legitimate” Filipino artists, especially those who had gained international recognition — and by popularizing its own “New Society Ideology” wrapped in nationalist vocabulary.

Given this context, it became imperative to build a culture of resistance powerful enough to radicalize consciousness and to combat the various falsehoods peddled and forms of oppression imposed by the present regime. Because overtly political action was no longer possible, more creative means of expressing dissent and of exposing social ills had to be explored. For the committed artist, this meant a serious concern for artistry and craft, sensitivity to and close familiarity with the people to whom the art is directed, and a firm grasp of existing social realities.

One art form that has become a popular medium of protest over the last decade is the song.

Revitalizing a tradition that had been so much a part of our historic struggle for freedom and national sovereignty, poets and songwriters went beyond martial hymns, experimented with varied musical styles — contemporary as well as traditional — to unfold the bitter experiences of oppression under Martial Law, to protest present social and political ills, and to confront the urgent issues of the day. The song became the alternative press for raising issues glossed over or suppressed by government-controlled media, the forum for dissent and counter-consciousness, and significantly, the historical document of the times.

COMBATING THE POP MUSIC INDUSTRY

The break from the overtly political and ideological songs

(sloganeering, martial, generalized), characteristic of the late 1960s and early 1970s was precipitated by the migration of poets to the song art. Poets like Jess Santiago realized that, set to music, ideas expressed in their poetry would reach a wider audience. Since today the song seems to be the more popular medium (enhanced by the growth of the local music industry in the mid-1970s), it became imperative for politically-committed poets to wrest the medium from the churners of anesthetized pop music who only succeeded in trivializing social realities with their attempt to Filipinize Western pop sounds. These poets transformed it instead into an enlightening art form more critical of the social deformities in present day society, more expressive of the needs and aspirations of the majority.

Experimentation with new forms for protest songs began right after the imposition of Martial Law. However, because of the uncertainty of the times, these were not publicly performed until the late 1970s when more and more songwriters became convinced of the urgent need to offer the public alternative songs to the already well-entrenched Pinoy pop music and to seriously look for venues outside the recording industry for their songs to be heard. As the *Galian sa Arte at Tula* (GAT — Guild of Art and Poetry, an organization of socially committed poets headed by Jess Santiago) explained in one of their first public protest concerts held in 1979:

... hindi maitatwa na karamihan sa mga popular na musikang naririnig sa kasalukuyan ay likha ng halos di-pinag-isipang pagsunod sa uso at walang pakundangang pagbubumabad sa komersiyalismo.

... ang mga usong kanta ay hindi kakitaan ng intensiyong maglalarawan man lamang ng pang-kasalukuyang kalagayan ng Pilipino, gayong ang ibinabandilang pakay ng mga ito ay makalikha ng “musikong Pinoy”. Maliban sa pag-aliw (na madalas nauwi sa pag-uyam) sa tagapakinig, wala nang iba pang bagay na maka-Pilipino sa kasalukuyang musika.

— PABIGATAN Program, 10 August 1979

[... it cannot be denied that much of pop music heard today is the result of the mindless imitation of whatever is the fad, and the shameless wallowing in commercialism.

... the present pop songs are devoid of any intention to depict the Filipino's present condition, despite their avowed aim to create "Filipino music". Except for the entertainment (which often ends up in ridicule) of listeners, there is nothing Filipino in the current pop music.]

The early efforts of poets like Heber Bartolome and Jess Santiago were fresh attempts at creating new revolutionary yet poetic language for the song. In their hands, the protest song became a powerful cultural weapon for liberating minds.

THE ANGUISHED CRY OF HEBER'S SONGS

Created right after Martial Law, Heber's "Oy Utol, Buto't Balat Ka Na'y Natutulong Ka Pa" [Hey Brother, You're All Flesh and Bones and Still You're Asleep] dramatizes the conditions after the imposition of 1981: the cries of anguish and pain underneath a facade of calm and gaiety —

Masdan n'yo ang ating paligid
Akala mo'y walang ligalig
May saya at mayroong awit
Ngunit may namimilipit
At siya'y humihibik.

[Observe our surroundings
You'd think there's no trouble
There is joy and music
But someone is wrenching in pain
And he's moaning.]

the hunger, the repression, the fear that has gripped the populace —

Kay hirap nang tumawa kung hungkag ang iyong tiyan
Kay hirap nang mangusap kung bibig mo'y may tapal
Kay hirap nang mabuhay kung kalagaya'y ganyan
Kay hirap nang lumaban kung takot ka sa kalaban.

[It's hard to laugh when your stomach is empty
It's hard to speak when your mouth is muzzled
It's hard to live when conditions are like these
It's hard to fight when you fear your enemy.]

The song decries the passivity prevalent among Filipinos today and chides the populace for not doing anything about their situation of unfreedom, inequality and suffering:

At kung tayo'y nananahimik
Huwag kayong magalit
Ang dapat sa atin ay tawaging
Mga gago!

[And when we remain complacent
Don't get angry
But what we deserve is to be called
Morons!]

But the song does not end on this note. The cry of pain in the beginning becomes a shout of protest in the end:

Subalit hindi ganyan
Hindi tayo dapat ganyan
Marami nang nahihirapan
Marami nang sumisigaw
Marami nang namimilipit

Marami nang humihibik
Maging ako'y nahihirapan
Kaya ako'y sumisigaw
Sumisigaw!

[But this should not be the case
We should not stay this way
Many are suffering
Many are already screaming
Many are wrenching in pain
Many are crying
Even I am in pain
That's why I'm shouting
And screaming.]

"Oy Utol . . ." was Heber's first composition and remains his most powerful one apart from his "Awit Ko" [My Song]. It is perhaps the earliest protest song created during the early Martial Law period using rock instrumentalization as embellishment to an essentially Western folk form (much like Bob Dylan's fusion of rock and folk). The form enables the songwriter to progress from mere observation to chiding. The music reinforces the lyrics' quiet but disturbing opening, building up to the inevitable explosion in the end.

"Awit Ko" [My Song] tackles the graver issue of imperialism as concretized in the presence of US military bases in the Philippines. Protest is immediately established in the image of babies born with clenched fists in the opening stanza:

Noong tayo'y ipanganak
Ang kamao'y nakakuyom
Habang umiiyak.

Yao'y pagtutol sa kinagisnan
Isang bayang uto-uto
Sa mga dayuhan.

[When we were born
Our fists were clenched
As we cried.

That was to protest what we awakened to
A nation of puppets
Beholden to foreigners.]

The indignities Filipinos have to bear in their own country (such as being mistaken for wild boars by US military servicemen), even the search for happiness and peace, can only be resolved by correcting the condition of enslavement. As Heber bitterly proclaims to the world:

Ako'y Pinoy, ako'y may kulay
Ako ay tao, ako'y hindi
Isang baboy-damo!

[I am a Filipino, I have my own color
I am human, I'm not
a wild boar!]

The song ends with a call to involvement for every one to help change societal conditions:

Kayong lahat, pakinggan n'yo
Itong mundo'y humihingi

Ng pagbabago

Pakinggan n'yo ang awit ko
Ito'y ikaw, ito'y kayo
At ako . . .

[Listen, all of you
This world is asking
For change.

Listen to my song
This is you, all of you
And me.]

Like "Oy Utol . . .", "Awit Ko" is an anguished cry. Its music is meant to disturb the conscience. There is bitterness in the tone and a sense of frustration over the impotence of the Filipino to act. Heber sparingly uses colloquialisms, but when he does, it is to jolt the listener to a recognition of the ugly truth, as in his use of "uto-uto", a colloquialism for puppets, to describe the country.

The tragedy of Heber as a protest singer, however, lies in that in his desire to penetrate the music industry with socially-conscious songs (where he became successful for a time), his energies were sapped by the industry that would only allow him to go as far as songs that were harmless social commentaries on overpopulation ("Buhay Pinoy" [Filipino Life]), the fate of prostitutes like Nena, the crowded buses and traffic situations ("Pasahero" [Passenger], etc. "Oy Utol . . ." could never get recorded; "Awit Ko" and the popular "Tayo'y mga Pinoy" [We're Filipino] were allowed because anti-Americanism was a posture the Marcos government assumed for a time. But the plaintive "Tagulaylay" [Song of Lament] which was Heber's first attempt at a traditional form and which hinted at a farmer's sacrificing family and land to join the liberation struggle in the hills remained confined to protest song concerts and folkhouses.

JESS SANTIAGO'S PORTRAITS OF OPPRESSION

In contrast to Heber's Beatle-influenced instrumentalization and his leanings to rock music, Jess Santiago draws from the tradition of the Western folk song, an extremely popular protest medium in the 1960s in the US. His songs are simple tunes that narrate the bitter experiences of the common folk under a repressive order. They particularize and concretize general issues. The stories of oppression become manifestations of the illness of a system that remains insensitive to the rights and the plight of its citizens.

"Halina" [Come] particularizes the basic issues of feudalism, capitalism and imperialism which continue to victimize the people. The plight of Lina, the textile-factory worker, represents the suppression of the workers' right to form unions and wage strikes under Martial Law. The ultimate form of exploitation is dramatized in the discovery of Lina's naked corpse after the riot which broke out during the union strike. The songwriter merely gives the skeleton of the story, but against the backdrop of present-day conditions, the listener can fill in the details:

Si Lina ay isang magandang dalaga
Panggabi sa isang pabrika ng tela
Sumapi sa unyon, sumama sa welga

Biglang nagkagulo, nawala si Lina
Nang muling makita, hubad at patay na.

[Lina was a beautiful girl
Worked the night shift in a textile factory
Joined the union, joined the strike
A riot broke out, Lina disappeared
When last seen, she was naked and dead.]

Pedro Pilapil represents the hard-working farmer whose defense of his right over his farmland causes his death. His case recalls the thousands of land-grabbing incidents, of the exploitation of the weak by the armed and the powerful:

Isang magsasaka si Pedro Pilapil
Walang kaulayaw kundi ang bukirin
Ngunit isang araw may biglang dumating
Ang saka ni Pedro'y kanilang inangkin
Tumutol si Pedro't siya'y binaril.

[Pedro Pilapil was a farmer
With no other love but his fields
One day, some men suddenly came
And claimed Pedro's harvest
Pedro protested and he was shot.]

Lina and Pedro Pilapil represent age-old problems in Philippine society. But Aling Maria's case is a fresh and everyday occurrence in Metro Manila. Families whose only piece of heaven is beside a garbage dump are rendered homeless overnight because of the government's campaign to remove unsightly scenes from tourists' eyes:

Sina Aling Maria'y doon nakatira
Sa tabi ng isang bundok ng basura
Ngunit isang araw binuldoser siya
Sapagka't darating ang mga turista
Nawalan ng bahay ang isang pamilya.

[Aling Maria's family lived
Beside a mountain of garbage
One day, their shack was bulldozed
Because tourists were coming
A family lost their home.]

The plight of Aling Maria's family brings to mind the many attempts of government to shield the tourists from the truth of poverty in this country: the building of high walls to cover squatter shanties that are all over the city, the burning down of whole communities to give way to high-rise hotels for tourists, the constant relocation of squatters to ill-equipped and far-flung areas, etc.

But "Halina" is not a mere story — it is a plea for involvement in the experiences of the exploited poor. The refrain following each stanza is meant to touch the heart and the conscience of the listener. It begs to shower tenderness on raped victims like Lina:

Damitan ang bangkay
At sa ating puso'y
Hayaang humimlay si Lina.

[Let us clothe the corpse
And in our hearts
Let Lina rest peacefully.]

to keep the memory of farmers like Pedro Pilapil alive:

At sa ating puso'y
Hayaang maghasik ng punla
Si Pedro Pilapil.

[And in our hearts
Let Pedro Pilapil
Sow his seed.]

to empathize with the plight of squatters like Aling Maria:

At sa ating puso'y
Ipagtayo ng tahanan
Sina Aling Maria.

[And in our hearts
Let us build a home
For Aling Maria.]

Lina, Pedro Pilapil, Aling Maria are symbols of oppression, but the plea for involvement is really a plea to make of these three rallying points in our struggle against injustice.

The effectiveness of a song like "Halina" lies in the fact that the issues raised through the three characters have become tangible to the listeners because these are commonly-shared experiences. When sung, other similar experiences come to mind. The melody being simple enough, the song invites the listener to write in his own experience. And Jess Santiago meant the song to encourage participation among listeners because this is how a song grows and becomes part of tradition. "Halina" can be rewritten or added to, to make it forever contemporaneous.

"Meme Na" [Sleep, My Child], another early song by Jess, is a tender *oyayi* [lullaby] to a child by a guerrilla father. It is a sad scene of farewell, but the tear never quite falls. As the father rests the child on the mother's lap, the tremendous personal sacrifice of having to leave one's child and wife for the sake of the national struggle for freedom is conveyed. The song puts this personal sacrifice in the context of the larger need to struggle to build a more just and humane society in order that the personal happiness everyone is entitled to can be made possible:

Tayo ngayo'y dumaranas
Ng sanlaksang hirap
Ngunit hindi maglalaon
Sasagana ang bukas.

Paalam na, o mutya ng aking pagmamahal
Ako'y magbabalik, hintayin mo sana
Sa aking pag-uwi, tayo'y liligaya.

[We are suffering a thousand sorrows
But it will not be long
Tomorrow will be bright.

Farewell, o pearl of my love
I will return, wait for me
When I come home, we will be happy.]

The song is an outpouring of love and remains, on the whole, tender but never sentimental. The music is close to the traditional lullaby, like the rocking motion of putting a baby to sleep; but the rocking motion (produced by a

4/4 beat) is broken by the rising motion of the song's statement about the national condition. It is slowed down in the farewell lines where there is a sudden shift to 3/4, climaxing the song and signifying the promise of hope.

The scenes that Jess Santiago paints in his songs are personal, familiar, intimate scenes rendered in simple, intimate melodies. But they are always set against the backdrop of the national condition. They are moving and emotionally involving because the recognition of their significance becomes immediate to the reader. The songs allow the emotions to grow until the listener becomes totally absorbed in the songs' experience and meaning.

During these times when the newspaper prints only one type of information and blocks out the truth from the people, the song becomes the more important news bulletin. "Huling Balita" [The Latest News] sings of the widespread arbitrary arrests of civilians by the military. No reasons are ever given for the arrests, nor does the military account for the whereabouts of the arrested. The consequence is anguish and misery for the family:

Narinig n'yo na ba ang huling balita
Tungkol kay Mang Kardo, isang manggagawa
May ilang buwan nang siya'y hinahanap
Ng mga kaibigan, mga kamag-anak
Ang kanyang asawa'y walang maisagot
Sa tanong ng anak tuwing bago matulog
"Inay, ang itay ko'y ba't di umuwi
Ako'y nasasabik sa yakap n'ya't ngiti."
[Have you heard the latest news
About Mang Kardo, a laborer
How many months have relatives and friends
Searched for him
His wife has no answer
To their child's incessant question
Each night before sleeping
"Mother, why has father not come home
I yearn for his smile and his embrace."]

Jess Santiago exposes the issue of military salvaging by dramatizing the wife's long and fruitless search for her husband, her going from one military camp or police station to another, scouring the long lists of names which yield no information:

May ilang beses na si Aling Marina'y
Nagtungo sa kampo't kuwartel ng pulisya
Ilang listahan na ang kanyang tiningnan
Ngunit di makita ang hanap na ngalan
Nakapagtataka, nakapagtataka . . .

[Many times has Aling Marina
Been to camps and police stations
Many lists has she gone over
But none contain his name
How puzzling, how puzzling . . .]

The search ends with the corpse of Mang Kardo — "katawan ay tadtad/ Ng tama ng bala sa kanya'y umutas" [his body riddled/With bullets that claimed his life] — and his death is conveniently explained by the military as resulting from the prisoner's supposed attempt to escape.

The issue of salvaging, unexplained disappearances and questionable deaths is a strong case against Martial Law which has conveniently written off the writ of habeas corpus, thereby making the military accountable to no one. Its image of repression has become the "kotseng may ilaw sa tuktok" [car with lights on its top]. The case of Mang Kardo is a lived experience and a common occurrence, though this never gets to the newspaper.

On the whole, the songs of Jess Santiago serve as the social conscience of the times. Each narration reveals an aspect of life under Martial Law that will never find its way to government-controlled media. The songs are eloquent testimonies of the forms of oppression people are made to endure. They enlighten but do not preach what must be done to combat these injustices. Because they are rendered in personal and intimate terms, and because the forms of oppression are personalized in recognizable characters, they are extremely successful in making people face the truths they would otherwise shut out. Having been involved in the experiences of the characters of Jess Santiago's ballads, in the end, it is the individual who must think out for himself his political course of action. In the long run, songs like these prove to be more effective.

DRAMATIZATION OF THE LAND PROBLEM

Protest songs under Martial Law continued to grapple with old social evils like the tenancy system which, despite the government's land reform, remained oppressive and exploitative. In these songs, the land which is supposed to be a source of life, becomes the source of enslavement.

"Bilanggo ang Tulad Mo" [You Are a Prisoner] by the group *Tulisanes* of UP Los Baños captures the almost desperate conditions majority of our countrymen are chained to in the image of the farmer's nipa hut as a prison cell:

Pawid na bilanguan, bihag na pangarap
Ni wala mang simoy ng hanging malaya
Kahit na isang bituin ay walang masining
Sa loob ng iyong bilanguang pawid.

[Thatched hut for a cell, imprisoned dream
Not even a wisp of free wind
Not even a star can be glimpsed
From your prison-hut.]

In the song, however, is already the realization that enslavement and poverty are products of history and an unjust social system. But rather than give in to desperation, one must rise from passivity and heed the call to freedom:

Bilanggo ang tulad mo, nabihag ng kahapon
Sa loob ng iyong munting bahay kubo
Maaring di sa pawid, marahil sa ginto
Ba't di ka tumayo at dinggin ang pagsuyo
Ng awit ko, awit ng buhay mo.

[You are a prisoner, enslaved by the past
Inside your little thatched hut
Maybe not by thatch, maybe by gold
Why don't you rise and listen
To the beckoning of my song
My song about your life.]

An even more dramatic rendering of the tenant's plight is Tony Reyes' "Matapat na Lahi" [Loyal Race] which was composed originally for a PETA (Philippine Educational Theatre Association) play but since then has been widely popularized and is a standard piece in any protest song concert.

"Matapat na Lahi" is a poignant elegy to a farmer whose death becomes the initial spark that ignites the consciousness of his son to look at the hard life his father had lived in the context of structuralized oppression. He realizes his father was a victim of an exploitative system:

Ama ko yumao kang bisig may tanikala
Balikat mo'y napipi sa maghapon paggawa
Pawis mo ay di iyo, iyong tuwa'y nakasanla
Sa panginoong umalipin, nagmamay-ari ng lupa.

[Father, you died arms in chains
Your shoulders crushed by the day's work
The fruit of your sweat never was yours
Even your happiness was pawned
To the owner of the land, the master who enslaved you.]

But this reflection leads him to the further insight that he, too, like his father, was destined to live his life in chains:

Ako ay sanga pa rin ng lahi mong matapat
Kakambal rin ay tanikala nang ako'y isilang.

[I am but a branch of your loyal race
Born with chains for a twin brother.]

Awareness leads to resolution and in rising tempo, the song explodes with the decision to take action and put an end to this long history of suffering and living in a state of false conditions:

Ako, ama, ang puputol sa lahi mong naiwan
Sa lahi mong napako hatid ko'y kalayaan
Ako ang pupunit sa dahon ng kasaysayan
Sa langit-langitang ating kinagisanan.

[Father, I will break your legacy
To your nailed race, I will bring freedom
I will tear the pages of history
This false heaven we were born to.]

The growth of consciousness is reflected in the choice of strong images: the image of the son as a branch of the same enslaved but loyal race, the image of being born with chains for a twin brother, the image of a pawned race nailed to oppression, the image of living in a false heaven, the image of tearing the pages of history to put an end to slavery. They are powerful images of the unjust and exploitative system which makes slaves of its citizens.

The movement of the song from the flickering, unsteady light to the full brilliance of a resolution in the end is enhanced by the music of the song which begins unsteadily like the "aandap-andap na liwanag" [flickering light] but rises in tempo and adopts a definite 4/4 meter as the final resolution is delivered in the last stanza. "Matapat na Lahi" remains one of the most emotionally involving and most powerful protest songs of the period.

DEFAMILIARIZATION THROUGH SONGS

One of the more important functions of the protest song

under Martial Law is that of defamiliarization: defamiliarization from the usual cultural products that train us to be impotent, from the language and the lifestyle of the New Society, from the falsities being paraded as truths, from our own lack or inability to be indignant and repulsed by the conventions that surround us.

Songs that raise issues are particularly effective in defamiliarizing. Since media are controlled, and since the music industry popularizes only one type of music, the need to constantly bring out issues to enlighten the larger public of their consequences has become the urgent task.

Paul Galang's "Pira-pirasong Balita" is an example of the song as the alternative press. As the title suggests, the song is bits and pieces of news that never find their way to press, TV or radio. Divided into two sections, the first part enumerates the various anomalies in present-day society: the corrupt policemen who victimize jeepney drivers; the supposed ban on gambling yet the presence of floating casinos, cockpits, horse races and jai-alai all around; the proliferation of labor recruiting agencies for Saudi Arabia which succeed in fooling thousands of workers with promises of work and the green buck:

Pag may pulis sa ilalim ng tulay
Mag-ingat ka baka hulihin ka
Kahit ikaw'y drayber na walang sala
Kung wala kang panlagay ay titiketan ka.

Bawal daw ang magsugal
Ito raw ay ilegal
Ngunit pag may jai-alai
At mayroong floating casino
Mga sabunga't karera ng kabayo
Kumusta ka, tumaya rito
Baka sakaling ikaw ay manalo.
May mga manggagawang pinangakuan ng pag-asa
Trabaho sa Saudi Arabia kailanga'y magsuhol ng pera
Na pambayad sa ahensiyang nanloloko lang pala.
Bandang huli, bigo ang pag-asa
Natangay pa ang perang inipon niya.

[If there's a policeman waiting under the bridge
Be careful, you might get arrested
You may just be an innocent driver
But if you have no ready bribe
You surely will be issued a traffic ticket.
They say gambling is illegal
But then there's jai-alai
And even a floating casino
Cockpits and horseraces
You're welcome to bet in any of these
Who knows, you might win.

Many laborers have been promised hope
In exchange for work in Saudi Arabia, they have to bribe
Recruiting agencies which turn out to be fly-by-night
operations
In the end, their dreams are crushed
Gone too are all their life-savings.]

And Paul Galang inserts, quite ingenuously into this whole schema, the unjust detention and execution of those who struggle for our freedom:

Kay rami nang napiit sa salang pagtatanggol
Ng kalayaan ng bayan, karapatan ng karamihan
Sa humingi ng katarungan hatol ang kamatayan.

[Many have been imprisoned for the crime
Of fighting for freedom and people's rights
To those who struggle for justice, death is the sentence.]

The recitation of anomalies in the first part is juxtaposed with the armed struggles being waged in Tawi-Tawi and Samar and with the larger problem of worsening poverty and inflation:

Sa Tawi-Tawi nagtagisan ang Muslim at sundalo
At doon sa Samar nag-alsa ang aliping magsasaka
At maging sa Maynila tao'y laging ginugulat
Ng pagtaas ng bilihan at ng presyo ng mga pagkain.

Problema ng daigdig ang panlusot na dahilan
Kung bakit naghihirap daan-libong mamamayan.

[In Tawi-Tawi, Muslims clash with soldiers
And in Samar, the enslaved farmers are uprising
While in Manila, people are constantly jolted
By soaring prices of food and goods.

Worldwide recession is always the alibi
For the continued sufferings of hundreds of thousands
of our countrymen.]

Media have indeed become tools of the present regime, churning out for mass consumption only one type of information and shirking away from the responsibility of airing worthwhile news. As Paul Galang stresses in the song, media are but games of deception:

Di ko matanggap laman ng pahayagang
Walang laya't walang bibig, natatakot magbunyag ng totoo
Balitang radyo at telebisyon, panay panloloko!

[I can no longer accept the contents of newspapers
Which have no freedom, no voice to speak the truth
Radio and television news are nothing but deceptions.]

The weakness of the song lies in its ending. Galang caps "Pira-pirasong Balita" with slogans on imperialism as the root cause of the problems, which, however, was not developed or even hinted at in the text:

Habang mayroong dayuhan, nagugulo ang sambayanan
Habang dayuha'y nananatili, sumisiklab ang digmaan
Habang dayuha'y nanlulupig magkakaisa ang taong bayan.

[As long as there are foreigners, our people will know
no peace
As long as alien interests remain, war will continue to rage
As long as there is foreign exploitation, our people will
stand united.]

The song's blending of the concrete and the agitational is sometimes necessary especially in mass gatherings when we want to rouse collective anger against the system. However, the slogans should not be tacked on artificially. To be even more effective, they must grow out of the ideas developed in the text.

The song "Patalastas", adapted from Rio Alma's poem

"Sa Harap ng Telebisyon" and set to music by Karina David, underline the distorting effect of advertisements on our values and our consequent captivity to multinational corporations:

Patalastas ay salamangka
Na pilit lumilikha
Ng baluktot na pagnanasa
Papuri sa banyaga.

[Advertisements are magic
That churn out false needs
And heap praises on foreign business.]

Every pair of stanzas in the song enumerates the various advertisements on radio and television that daily bombard our senses:

Puputi ang labada
Kahit na di ikula
Whiskey ba o artista
Ang puwedeng pang-romansa

May delatang fresh na fresh
Patis walang kaparis
Sigarilyong pang-macho
Pabango para sa B.O.

Tansang Pepsi at Coke
May kapalit daw na tsikot
Butter na margarina
Nagpapatangkad pa . . .

[Your laundry will turn white
Even without bleaching
Whiskey or an actress
Any will do for romance.

There are canned goods that are fresh
Fish sauce without compare
Cigarettes for machos
Scents for your body odor.

Pepsi and Coke bottlecaps
They say can be redeemed for cars
Butter that's margarine
Will even make you tall . . .]

But it is in the very enumeration of different products where we begin to realize their ridiculousness, false promises, and the warping of our consciousness by advertisements. On the whole, the song is a witty and ingenious attack on imperialist control of our economy.

There are a number of other issue songs: "Dambuhala sa Morong" [The Monster in Morong], a rock piece, brings up the issue of the nuclear power plant in Morong, Bataan, and calls on the people to unite in the fight to stop its construction; "Bobo ng Diliman" [The Moron of Diliman], adapted to Chuck Berry's "Johnny Be Good", shows the irrelevance of our educational system to our needs; "Turismo" which attacks the tourism industry that has spawned hotels and has encouraged the growth of varied types of flesh business, resulting in the dehumanization of our people.

On the whole, however, there has been a dearth of such songs. One can think of the many issues that surround us today

and which we need to enlighten our people about: the continued presence of US military bases in the country and the culture this has bred; the TNCs and agri-businesses that have suddenly mushroomed in the country, dislocating the already depressed communities of peasants and cultural minorities; the Chico Dam and other infrastructure programs of government; the rise of plush hotels that attend to the needs of the wealthy, inflation and the constant threat of bank runs; the transfer of large government funds to save bankrupt corporations of the president's cronies; the World Bank funding of our education; the violent dispersal of peaceful rallies and pickets; and a host of others. A constant drumming of these issues into the consciousness of people through songs can help tremendously in awakening minds and in uniting people to put an end to our state of unfreedom.

The other consideration is the venue for such songs. Singers and songwriters must face the reality that the music industry or mass media can never be the proper locus for propagating radical ideas or firing nationalist sentiments. The music industry is a big business enterprise whose purpose of existence is to maintain the stability of the present regime. It is futile to hope of ever penetrating it for the few efforts by young songwriters to do so have been easily doused. One would have to compromise by sacrificing political stands and issues (e.g. "Babae" [Woman] and its objectionable line of "marunong kang magpalakad ng bayan" [you know how to run the country] which can stand for both the assertion of women's strength or a concession to the First Lady; substituting radicalism with patriotism in order to remain safe as in "Tayo'y mga Pinoy" [We're Filipinos] and "Alamat" [Legend]). On all counts, the song loses.

The traditional venues for protest songs have been the occasional concerts, rallies and symposia. This exhibits some degree of conservatism by an essentially radical art. Protest songs, by their very nature, are political and propaganda tools. As such, they must be used innovatively. Songs are important cultural weapons and must be brought out to the streets, to town centers, to factories, to communities, to picket lines so they may truly serve the people.

CONCLUSION

As gleaned from the analysis of representative songs of the period, Martial Law has spawned a resistance art that shows a greater understanding of the function of song to enlighten, convince, and move. No longer pegged to one style, songs have become richer, more varied and more effective. Where once the protest songwriter generalized about political and social conditions, today, he is much more concerned with depicting the particular manifestations of these conditions. However, the creativity in songwriting must be matched by more seriousness in delivery and performance, and by a thinking out of more radical ways of disseminating them. Protest songs are functional. But precisely because they must engage in conscientizing and politicizing, they must be innovative, understood as a serious political tool, interpreted intelligently, and disseminated through more creative means. Understanding the song as an important cultural weapon, we can then build a culture of resistance that is vibrant, rooted in the cultural expressions of our people, attuned to their needs and a truly important vehicle for social change.