



COPYRIGHT NOTICE

This work shall solely be used for academic purposes and shall not serve any personal gain or commercial advantage. Further, distribution and/or reproduction in any form or means is not allowed without the permission from the author or publisher.

departamento ng
aralin sa sining



art studies

ART
STUDIES
JOURNAL[®]

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 1
DECEMBER 1994

668 100 10
OCT 1999
LIT

© All Rights Reserved.

This Journal may not be reproduced, in whole or in part
from the respective authors and the Department
UP Diliman

ART STUDIES
JOURNAL

vol. 2, no. 1 D 1994

RED

8 1/2 x 11

NOTES ON SOME PANGASINAN FOLKSONGS

ROSA MARIA MAGNO ICAGASI

The first time I collected Pangasinan folk songs it was for my undergraduate thesis requirement. At that time my professor was interested only in the lyrics and not the music so that I did not need to lug my father's enormous six-kilogram tape recorder to the places I went to, some of which could be reached only by foot. The portable cassette recorder was not yet available (at least to me) then. That was way back in 1960. I only had to bring with me ballpens and notecards, and all I had to do was practice a kind of pleading charm or a charming plea so my informants would not mind repeating their songs until I got the words down on paper.

When I needed to study Pangasinan traditional music in 1973, I realized I could no longer recall the melody of many of the songs whose words I had carefully jotted down in 1960. In order to retrieve the forgotten melodies I had to go back to the field. This time I already had a portable cassette recorder. Still, it was not small or light enough, so it was not very comfortable carrying it around. But that was a very minor inconvenience compared to the burden of looking for new informants; for many of the old ones had already died or had left the country, having been petitioned by their children who had landed jobs abroad.

The fact that in the 70s there were already record discs of Pangasinan folksongs did not really solve my problem for what had been made available in records were those whose melodies I already knew, precisely because these were the more popular folksongs. Which brings us to the question: are the songs popular because they have been made available in record form or have they been

recorded because they are the favorite, and therefore, popular folksongs?

The answer to both questions is yes. Or, to be more precise, one can say that the already popular songs become even more popular (in the sense that they are made available to more people — both those who are already familiar with the songs and those who still are not).

This brings us to another question: can we consider folksongs which had been made popular through modern media pop songs? Why not? What exactly is pop music? Before answering that question we have to clarify first what we consider as folksongs, and even before this, what we mean by Pangasinan folksongs.

We must make here a distinction between Pangasinan as a province and Pangasinan as a language. Non-Pangasinenses and non-Ilocanos generally think that the language of Pangasinan province is Iloko. It is not so, but I am afraid that in the not-so-distant future it might just become a fact.

For instance, in April of 1982 I went to Mangatarem, a town in western Pangasinan after I had read an announcement about a contest in pasyon-singing to be held there, hoping to be able to tape the pasyon sung in Pangasinan language. To my great disappointment all the contestants sang in Iloko. This incident underscores the fact that both Iloko and Pangasinan are spoken in the province of Pangasinan, and that more and more people speak Iloko rather than Pangasinan, especially in the western and eastern parts. The central region is still largely Pangalatok.

One of the reasons for this situation is that Pangasinan is a very difficult language to learn, and even more so, to speak; and that on the other hand, Iloko is much easier to learn. With the 19th century migration of Ilocano peasants who were forced to leave the barren soil of their land of birth to eke out a living in the more fertile lands of Pangasinan began the latter's "Ilocanization;" for while the native Pangasinenses learned to speak Iloko, the emigrant Ilocano peasants, which grew in number, did not learn Pangasinan.

Thus even as early as the 1920s Pangasinan was represented by an Ilocano folksong in the Progressive Music Series (these are graded anthologies of folksongs from different countries as well as various regions of the Philippines, which are used for music instruction in the elementary school level).

One of the songs I included in my 1960 undergraduate thesis was

Sampagita

*Sampagitan napnoy liga
Samyong moy mapalpalna
Balingit moy andi mipara,
Makatangoyong na linawa.*

*Sa lanti limgas mon matua
So anaeg ed sayan rosa
Say balet pandamaan yon dua,
Ta rosas iman et anghel ka.*

(Sampaguita, joyous flower
So mild is your fragrance,
Without equal is your perfume,
One's breath it takes away.

It is your shining purity
Which won over this rose
The difference between you two
is that. The rose is just a flower
but you are an angel.)

Several informants had this song in their repertoire. Indeed I even heard it sung by my mother and aunts several years before I did

research. Now I consider its status as a Pangasinan folksong as problematic. If we take the definition of folk-song as "a lyric poem with melody which originated anonymously among unlettered folk in times past and which remained in currency for a considerable time," we would certainly strike out "Sampaguita" from our list. For we now know that it was originally composed by Dolores Paterno in 1879 as "La Flor de Manila" with the following lyrics in Spanish by Pedro Paterno:

*Sampagita gentil que halagas
Con tu aroma a mi Filipina
Sampagita flor peregrina
Que sus trenzas bordando estas.*

*Tu que en breve collar prendida
Dulce bess su ardiente seno
Quien pudiera de amores lleno,
Flor venturosa, cual tu gozar.*

(The song gained greater popularity when the sampaguita was chosen in the early American period to be the national flower of the Philippines).

The Paternos were not common peasants and certainly were not unlettered. They were very cultured *Ilustrados* from Manila. Dolores Paterno was not only a musician, she was also a painter; and Pedro Paterno was a writer and one of the early Filipino folklorists. However, my informants in 1960 did not know these pieces of information, but as far as they were concerned the song was *kadaanan* — meaning "old lore," which was part of the culture of their mothers and even grandmothers; the song was, after all, already 81 years old by 1960. It is an example of an art-song that originated in the city, becoming popular and diffused to the provinces where it was eventually vernacularized into the various Philippine languages so that now several regions claim it as their own.

This is a case of appropriation through the use of language. Not only that. Note that the Pangasinan text is not a direct translation of the original Spanish words. If it were so, then it would still bear the stamp of the original; but it is a different lyric poem altogether, which focuses on the

sampaguita as a metaphor for the beauty and purity of the Pangasinan woman.

I would like to digress here a little and explain the Pangasinan noun *limgas* (the adjective is *malimgas*). It means beauty, not merely in the physical sense, but in the moral sense as well; it connotes purity. To visualize a woman who is *malimgas* as someone who has beautiful physical attributes merely is, therefore, to miss half of what the expression aims to communicate. There is no separation between physical and moral beauty in the ideal image of a beautiful woman: in the single word *malimgas* are wed both meanings.

In "*Sampagita*" we see reflected the Pangasinan concept of woman and understand why this song has been enshrined in Pangasinan folk tradition. Thus I will not, after all, drop it from my catalogue of Pangasinan folksongs.

Another problematic song is a lullaby with the following lyrics:

*Akar ak lan aklar
Ed arawin dalin
Kanengnengnengneng koy
Abong ya di salming,
Balitok so takayan,
Samporadoy dingding,
Bangon ka la Rosing,
Bangon ka la Rosing
Ta wadya lay pinablim.*

(I had been walking and walking
In a distant land
When suddenly I saw
A house of glass,
Golden are the stairs,
Of copper are the walls,
Wake up Rosing,
Wake up Rosing
For your beloved is now here.)

Sometime in 1987 as I was scanning the pages of a 1983 published collection of folk songs of Central Luzon, I discovered that the melody of this long treasured Pangasinan lullaby is listed as that of a "nonsensical humorous folk-song" from Pampanga with the following lyrics:

*O atsi cong Rosing
Pamatulan daca, Tungi co ring batuin
Paqintas co queca,
Bangalan queng bulan
Gawan queng corona,
Iputung que queca,
Iputung que queca,
Lalam ning bioleta.*

(My lady dear Rosing
I'll offer you my love
With stars I'll make a lei
To wear around your neck.
I'll even pluck the moon
And make for you a crown,
I'll put it on your head,
I'll put it on your head
'Neath the Bियोleta plant.)

But I remember it as a sad song, the nonsensical lyrics notwithstanding. The words' lack of logic (imagine, it is supposed to be a lullaby and yet it says "Wake up, wake up!") did not bother me. You see, I was responding to the melody, rather than the words, for my mother used to sing it soft, slow and legato, adding further to the longing, yearning tone of its minor key. I am not of course saying here that at two or three years old I was already aware that the lullaby was in a minor key. I was at that time simply reacting instinctively.

The transcription of the Pampanga version in the published collection indicates the tempo as *moderato*; and since the emphasis is on its being light and humorous I imagine it as probably sung staccato, or at least not legato as in the Pangasinan version. Not only that — the beginning melodic line of the second half of the Pampanga version is different from its Pangasinan counterpart. Up to this point I have not yet discovered which one is the original. But does it really matter who borrowed from whom? It is even possible that both are adaptations from some other region's folksong — perhaps Bikol or Visaya or Iloko? If so, the song can then be considered as a national folksong instead of merely a local or regional one. (I would like to emphasize here that when I say merely I do not mean it in a deprecatory way. To me, local is just as significant as national.)

The disseminators/popularizers in the past of such songs were probably the traders — the travelling merchants of blankets or tobacco from the Ilocos, of the *bagoong* and *asin* from Pangasinan, the embroidered clothes from Batangas, jewelry from Bulacan, etcetera; and of course, the migrants who leave one place to settle in another, either temporarily or permanently.

The following is the most popular Pangasinan love song:

*Malinak ya labi, oras lay mareen,
Mapalpalnay dagem, katekep toy linaew,
Samit lay ugip ko, binangonan kon
tampol,
Ta pilit na poso ya sika so amamayoan.*

*Lalo la bilay no sika lay nanengneng,
Napunas lan amin so ermen ya akbibiten,
No nanonutan ko lay samit na ugalim
Ag ta ka nalingwanan anggad kauyos na
sayan bilay.*

(Quiet is the night, calm is the hour,
Softly blows the breeze while gently falls
the dew
Suddenly from my sweet slumber I
awaken
For my heart yearns to play with thoughts
of you.

And when my life, a glance of you I'll
finally have
All the sorrows I bear will disappear,
When I contemplate your sweet ways
Never shall I forget you until the last
breath of this life.)

It is one of the very few songs that Pangasinenses who have been living abroad for some time can still sing completely.

What I would like to stress at this point is the style of the "untrained" folk singers of Pangasinan. They sing very legato and very slow, and drag and curl the melodic line, especially if they are singing a love song; that is their idea of being expressive, their way of showing that the sentiment is deeply and truly heartfelt. If they were to sing "*Bayan Ko*," for instance, it would sound similar to

their rendering of "*Malinak ya Labi*," that is why Freddie Aguilar's choppy version of the song would probably be jarring to a Pangasinense's ear.

For further illustration, here is another song, one which is sung on the eve of a wedding:

*Asabi lay bansal ya panliket tayo,
Anak yon marikit bunga ray puso yo,
Galilan miliket, mitoyao, mirongo,
Bisperas na bansal, manlaktip irayan
puso.*

*Di amam tan di inam ya nankawalo ed
sika,
Antiktikey lay oras na pan ola-ola dad
sika,
Nabuas na kabuasan isulong day aras
Adios las amam, inam ya nankawalo ed
sika.*

(It has come, the wedding that we shall
celebrate,
Of your daughter, the fruit of your love,
Come now, you who shall celebrate, chat
and dine,
It's the eve of the wedding, the union of
two hearts.

Your father and your mother who have
cared for you,
Too short are the hours left for them to
love and caress you,
Tomorrow morning you will be married,
Farewell to your father and mother who
have cared for you.)

If you were to match the music with the words it ought to be sung in a livelier, or at least, less sad tone. But I guess what the singers are focusing on is the seriousness of the occasion and the awesome responsibilities facing all concerned. Thus we have the slow, dragging, curling manner of singing. Prof. Edru Abraham said that he has observed this same style in other regions as well. Perhaps we could generalize and say that this is Filipino (Filipino as in National) folk style of singing.

Even when the songs are not Filipino in origin the same style is used. For instance, if we listen closely to some versions of the popular

Christmas song "Little Drummer Boy" we would notice that the line "parampapampam rampapampam rampapampam" is slurred and curled instead of being sung with precise, crisp tones since it is supposed to imitate a drum roll. It would appear that the Filipino drummer boy has limp wrists! But I suppose the Filipino singers are focusing on the heartwarming gesture of the offering of the boy to Baby Jesus, not on the sound of the gift itself.

There is a common misconception that all Filipino (including Pangasinan) love songs are *kundimans*. The song which follows is a love song that is not a *kundiman*.

*Nen sakey ya labi katlekay ogip ko
Akogkogip taka
Kunwari inaro wala kad abay ko
Sikay kasalsalita
Maruksa yan kogip nen siak so aliing
Tampol ya anapen ka
Maermen so posok, maermen so posok
Ta sikay nansengegan.*

*Insan la onlasor ya sika lay anapen,
Pilodlureyan koy
Mapalnan sibok na dagem
Galala inaro, galala inaro
Ta sambot mon sibegan
Inarom ya maermen.*

(One night while I was in deep slumber
I dreamt of you,
You were beside me, my love
And I was talking to you
How cruel is this dream for when I awoke
I missed you so;
Oh, sad is my heart, sad is my heart
And it's all because of you.

When I went out to look for you
My imagination played with
The soft kiss of the wind,
Oh come now my beloved, my beloved
come,
And take pity on
Your loved one who is sad.)

The song is a *danza*. How does it differ from a *kundiman*? The *kundiman* has a slow tempo and triple meter. The *danza* is also slow but the

meter is duple. And it has this characteristic underlying rhythm played by the accompanying instrument, usually a guitar.....

Note that the broken or choppy effect of the accented rhythm of the accompaniment is neutralized, nay dominated by the flowing line of the main melody carried by the singers.

The Tagalog serenade "O Ilaw" is also a *danza*, not a *kundiman*. But not all love songs in slow triple time are *kundimans*. I had always thought that "Malinak ya Labi" was a *kundiman*. I realized I had forgotten to consider another feature of this form — that is, the second beat is usually accented. But in "Malinak ya Labi" we note that the accent falls on the first beat. The rhythm is that of a *balse*; however it is not meant to be a dance tune. It is, simply, a serenade.

Mahirap Nga Pala

*Mahirap nga palang mabuhay sa mundo
kung dukha rin lamang
Lalo't di masunod ang tibok ng pusong
may pagsintang tunay
May pag-ibig ka man sa isang binatang
pangarap sa buhay
Di mo rin masabi dahil sa pangambang
kutyain ka lamang.*

*Paris ng lagay ko sa lagay ng iyang
pinaparaluman
Ang lupa at langit ang agwat ng aming
mga pagmamahal
Kung ako'y wala na't payapa na ako
sa aking libingan
Ay siguro doon maipagtatapat
yaring pagmamahal.*

*Sa bawat sandali inapi ng tadhana
Libingang mapanglaw ang aking akala
Huni ng mga ibon ang magbabalita
Na ako'y pumanaw sa balat ng lupa.*

These are the lyrics of a Batangas folk song recorded by Dr. Elena Mirano the melody of which is the same as that of the Pangasinan love song "Nen Sakey Ya Labi." Again, just like in the case of "Akar ak lan Akar" I do not let myself be bothered

by the question of who borrowed from whom. However, I have a suspicion that the original comes from a Tagalog song sung in a movie and soon after adapted and adopted by both Batangueños and Pangasinenses, and possibly other Filipino groups as well.

The song "Uula," I am almost sure, came from a Tagalog movie. The song has been appropriated by the Pangasinenses by providing Pangasinan lyrics and singing it in various socio-cultural occasions, usually during fiestas, when short *zarzuelas* and the debate-in-song-form called *cancionan* are staged. In the *cancionan*, improvised texts are usually set to popular tunes. In the *zarzuela*, some of the songs, though not improvised, may use already known melodies.

This kind of appropriation is not unique to the Pangasinenses, nor to the Filipinos as a whole. It is also done in other parts of the world — in modern as well as older times. For instance in Medieval Europe, the melodies of originally bawdy, even downright obscene, songs were used in church hymns. Of course, there are also some religious texts set to more lofty music — like the Protestant hymn "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee," which borrowed "The Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. And the borrowing does not stop there. I vaguely remember having read that this tune was also borrowed by Beethoven from a folksong.

Closer to home: Prof. Elena Mirano states in her published article on the *pabasa* of San Luis, Batangas that the *pasyon* is sometimes sung to the tune of "Aloha Oe." This is not surprising, for this Hawaiian farewell song, after all, is sung in a manner similar to that of Filipino "folk" singers. Moreover, the Hawaiians use the "slack-string guitar" technique where the individual notes are played not precisely, but seem to slur from one to the other.

Speaking of Hawaiian tunes finding their way to Philippine folk tradition, "*Perlas ed Baybay*" is sung to the tune of "Pearly Shells." I remember in the fifties and sixties, and even up to the seventies, the Hula dance became very popular in the Philippines. "Pearly Shells" was a favorite among young girls who would sway their hips to the delight of their proud mothers and grandmas, and to the snickers of their unimpressed brothers. Many T.V. programs included hula performances and even hula contests.

"Pearly Shells" has been vernacularized into Pangasinan language. Also, what has come down to us is the English text, not the original Hawaiian. So already we are two degrees removed from the "primeval" source. Besides, the Pangasinan text is not even a direct translation of the English words. Nevertheless, we cannot really consider this as a pop-turned-folk song, for using the criterion of time, its provenance is still within the memory of this generation. Or, maybe, we can consider it as standing midway between pop and folk.

What exactly is pop? It is short for popular; but not all popular songs are considered pop. Strictly speaking, the term applies to music that can capture a large segment of the listening public by means of commercial mass media like radio, t.v. and cinema where the focus is in the profit aspect of the production.

The songs of George Canseco, Ernani Cuenco, Ryan Cayabyab, or Jose Mari Chan, which "flood" the airwaves (relative to songs of other Filipino composers) may eventually be considered folk after they shall have been vernacularized into other Philippine languages, and after a generation or two have passed. And provided the original provenance can no longer be traced by the majority of the people. However, this last criterion is a possibility which is remote because today the presence of compact discs and books tracing the history of popular culture will never allow the original creators to fall into the anonymity of folklore.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art. Vol. VI Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1994.

Folk Songs of Central Luzon. Manila: Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, 1983.

Magno, Rosa Maria. *Urduja Beleaguered, Essays on Pangasinan Language, Literature, and Culture*. Manila: Kalikasan Press, 1992.

Mirano, Elena R. *Kumintang, Awitin ng mga Tagalog na taga Batangas*. Quezon City: 1987.

..... "The Pabasa of San Luis, Batangas" in *Asian Studies* Vol. XXII-XXIV, 1984-86.

Romualdez, Norberto and Griffith, Charles. *Progressive Music Series*. Manila: 1924