

Mangyan Tagabukid Komposo: An Oral Tradition of Sibuyan, Romblon

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Abstract

Oral tradition undergoes a process through the transmission of messages by word of mouth over time. As the messages are passed down, they become oral tradition (Vansina 1985). In this view, music is a part of oral tradition that is already in the minds of the people. Music is socially meaningful because it provides the means by which people recognize identities, places, and boundaries that separate them. It also illustrates some ways in which musical performances provide the means by which ethnicities are constructed and mobilized (Stokes 1997).

The “Mangyan Tagabukid” in Sibuyan Island in Romblon is known for the “komposo” oral tradition. Several functions of music are best seen in several forms that survived through oral transmission and diffusion from other neighboring provinces because of migration. One way of expressing emotions, feelings, and ideas is done through composing “komposo” as it is locally called. This was derived from the Spanish term “composo,” meaning composition. During the Spanish times, it was used as a tool for oral mass communication.

This study is a response to the call for the inclusion of Romblomanons to the musical traditions of the Philippines. It also hopes to articulate Romblon’s cultural identity from its often-overlooked musical traditions. There are existing folk songs or komposo in the province of Romblon but these are neither written nor recorded. Few researches have been made towards this direction

The main purpose of this paper was to collect, document, and analyze the surviving komposo from Mangyan Tagabukid of Sibuyan Island in Romblon province. The komposos were analyzed textually in terms of syllabication, figurative language, and theme. On the other hand, the musical aspects of each komposo were analyzed using the western formula. The study hoped to contribute to the articulation of the collective cultural identity of the indigenous peoples of Sibuyan Island in terms of their musical tradition. Furthermore, data were gathered through interviews, fieldwork, and immersion. Ethnographic methods were utilized; the researcher became an active participant in the ethnic’s group society, collecting data through participant- observation and taking field notes. Processes such as documentation and analysis of data were considered in terms of text, and context. The collected songs were also classified according to themes.

Based on the given data, “komposo” is one of the music forms that survived through oral transmission and diffusion from other neighboring provinces because of migration. On textual analysis, “komposo” functions in several contexts and it reveals the consciousness and identity of the province.

I. BACKGROUND

Oral tradition undergoes a process through the transmission of messages by word of mouth over time. As messages are passed down, they become oral tradition (Vansina 1985). In this view, music is a part of oral tradition that is

already in minds of the people. Music is socially meaningful because it provides the means by which people recognize identities, places, and boundaries that separate them. It also illustrates some ways in which musical performances provide the means by which

ethnicities are constructed and mobilized (Stokes 1997).

The “Mangyan Tagabukid” in Sibuyan Island in Romblon is known for the “komposo” oral tradition. Several functions of music are best seen in several forms that survived through oral transmission and diffusion from other neighboring provinces because of migration. One way of expressing emotions, feelings, and ideas is done through composing “komposo” as it is locally called. This was derived from the Spanish term “composo,” meaning composition.

The “komposo” is one of the most durable forms of literary expression for the Ilonggos. It was also used as a tool for oral mass communication. During the Spanish colonial period, each barangay or town had an average of two to three “manugkomposos” who would sing in the public places, usually in the plaza during important events to spread the latest “news”. It can be said, therefore, that the “komposo” has always reflected historical and cultural realities and changes through time (Gonzales 1990).

Motivation

Romblon’s geographical location presents a problem to scholars both from the local university in the province and beyond. The three main islands of Romblon, namely: Tablas, Romblon, and Sibuyan are divided by seas which hinders efficient transportation systems in the province. The same is true to the academic aspect of Romblon’s tradition and culture that remains little studied.

The researcher himself sees the dearth of researches about Sibuyan culture, especially with the Mangyan Tagabukid indigenous group. Most existing academic books in the province investigated Asi and Onhan, but seldom Ini and Sibuyan. Hence, there is a need to explore Sibuyan as a rich ground for cultural researchers and advocates who want to preserve these intangible cultural traits of Romblon.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this paper is to collect, document, and analyze the surviving komposo from Mangyan Tagabukid of Sibuyan Island in Romblon province. The komposos were analyzed textually in terms of syllabication, figurative language, and theme. On the other hand, musical aspects of the komposo were analyzed using the Western formula. The study hopes to contribute to the articulation of the collective cultural identity of the indigenous peoples of Sibuyan Island in terms of their musical tradition.

Statement of Contribution

This study is a response to the call for the inclusion of Romblomanons to the musical traditions of the Philippines. There are existing folk songs or komposo in the province of Romblon but these are neither written nor recorded. Few researches have been made towards this direction. The songs of Sibuyan, specifically those of “Mangyan Tagabukid” could possibly bridge the historical gaps chronicled in the province’s cultures and traditions. Moreover, these songs are linked with the consciousness of the people, thus providing valuable information that would contribute to discourses in regional and national identity. Likewise, the study hopes to articulate Romblon’s cultural identity from its often-overlooked musical traditions.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study required extensive collection. Data was gathered through interviews, fieldwork, and immersion. Ethnographic methods were utilized: the researcher followed Participant Observation in the ethnic’s group society, taking field notes, and field diary. Manuel’s (1982) depth of horizontal test was used to identify the informants. The informants were composed of 8 people, with age ranging from 23-82 years old, and with average residence of 20 years in the locality. They use *Ini* as primary language but can also use other languages such as Hiligaynon and English. Semi-structured interviews were done to gather data but also allowed additional information as deemed

necessary by the researcher. Then, processes such as documentation and analysis of data were considered in terms of text and music. To ensure that the *komposo* were representative of the localities from which they were gathered, the researcher validated the *komposo* to five validators from the locale.

The 8 *komposo* were analyzed in terms of text. The existing figures of speech were identified line by line, quatrain by quatrain, song by song. In analyzing the text, Formalist literary theory was used. This allowed the researcher to fully understand the texts and their meanings and its relationship with the Mangyan Tagabukid group. Then, the *komposos* were musically analyzed according to key signature, range, leaps, contour, rhythm, harmony, cadence, and form.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

“Nang Sadto Pa Anay Si Diling Ga Eskwela” pictures the image of “Diling,” an epitome of hard work, obedience, respect and injustice as reflected in her character from the song. Just like any other story of having an ill-tempered and disciplinarian father, growing up with her elder brother was not easy for they need to abide by the rules set by the head of the family. She was deprived of self-happiness due to her father who meddled in her plan of getting married with the man of her dreams.

This *komposo* speaks a lot of a traditional type of parenting where the father, in particular, imposed strict adherence to house rules and any disobedience on the part of the children is tantamount to a grave or fatal discipline just like what happened to Diling. It portrays the strong religious belief of Christians in view of death in that peace and forgiveness of sins will be achieved through the use of the holy water sprinkled on Diling’s coffin while in the church. Lastly, this *komposo* is an example of tragedy where the main character, “Diling” died and was given a pitiful burial represented by the unequal number of tombs which is eight and casket which is five.

The theme of the song is love, courtship, and marriage. The line *“Nagaturo agay ang dugo sang likod.”* shows hyperbole. The meter count

of the song is Gansal having 13 syllables per line in the first quatrain and Pares having 12 syllables in the next four quatrains.

“Akong Komposohon Sakayan Nga Kuyon” employed a quatrain stanza break in that visual groupings of lines consists of four. This *komposo* showcases the inventive persona of the composer by being resourceful by way of converting pieces of scrap into something worth using and memorable. The manner of conversion exemplifies the ordinary trait of a rural boy who loves to play and relates his dream to the kind of toy he uses for playing. Words like *kuyon* and *papaya*, associated with the word “*sakayan*” or “*vehicle*,” are figuratively used by the author in such a way that “*kuyon*” literally means pot, an old and commonly used material for cooking while “*paya*” stands for a coconut shell. The existence of metaphor also adds color to the meaning of the toy boat like, “*Sakayan nga kuyon*” and “*Sakayan nga paya*.” In the lines where the two symbols are significantly used, both represent the dreams or ambitions of an ordinary child when he grows up. Though, the said symbols are quite distinct in certain aspect in that *kuyon* has a rounded figure while *papaya* is elongated. In a greater sense, considering the shapes of the toy boat reaching for one’s dream takes so much courage and determination knowing that it will take a young boy year before he will be able to reach his desired destinations in relation to the toy boat’s movement and pacing. On the other hand, *Romblon* and *Manila* refer to the literal places that each toy boat wants to reach. But figuratively speaking, it shows how far one wants to go and how he has a simpler dream than the other.

The theme of the song is Folk life. Extended metaphor is present in the line “*Sakayan nga kuyon / Sakayan nga paya*”, Hyperbole is present in the “*Sa tunga sang lawod / Naga loy lipuyon*”. “,” and Personification in line “*Suminggit ang rayet*”. The song is in Pares meter count having 12 syllables in each quatrain.

“Akon Komposohon Si Kumpadre Duro” is in a quatrain form and can be considered as a

humorous komposo. It tells about a story of a closest friend of the author who loves going to the coast. However, while on his way to the shore one day, he got in a serious accident when he got bored in the pit damaging his private part. Also, such an experience bears witness to being carefree in life at certain point and not minding what happens next. Though, it sounds lively and has an amusing effect on the ears of the listeners especially those who have a good grasp of the language, it also teaches a person to be cautious about certain things and actions and not to take them in a rush in order to be safe.

The theme of the song is folk life. Hyperbole is present in the line “Naluslos ang panit pakadto sa puno”. The meter count of the song is Pares with 12 syllables in each quatrain.

“*Ang Sulat*” is an example of a three- stanza quatrain following end rhyme in the original version. The first couplet expresses a feeling of surprise upon knowing that the young lady’s heart is torn between two lovers. The letter as the main symbol used in the title of this komposo keeps the overwhelming love that one feels for a special someone. Thus, a love that is taken for granted feels great loneliness and hopelessness. The second couplet verbalizes the pain that kills the whole being of a lover. That a forsaken love means dying on the part of a true lover whose wholehearted service for his dearly beloved is all in vain. The third couplet gives in to the feeling of desperation and vanishing in this world due to a heart break. It can be said from the lines that the persona is already madly crazy in love that he no longer sees any hope of starting over again. To him, losing the love of his life means dying for life has no more meaning when the one you truly love will not be yours in the end. As a whole, this komposo highlights the power of metonymy like in the line, “Tagipuson nga walay kalipay” by relating a lover’s heart to unhappiness due to an unfaithful love, a love that is and will never be meant for the both of them.

Love, Courtship, and Marriage are the theme of the song. The lines “*Tagipusoon nga walay kalipay.*” shows Metonymy. The song is in free verse form.

“*Ang Baro Kong Gisi*” is an example of a three- stanza quatrain. It portrays a humble kind of living and the true face of poverty in the life of a native. The first couplet purely reveals the happy mood yet touching experience of the persona of having just a ripped cloth washed with love of a mother and worn with excitement by a child. Though, sometimes still misty will not stop the child to attend school. The second couplet narrates a pitiful scenario in school where a poor child suffers from hunger and lovelessness for a fact that even during break time, she still endures the pain of a starving stomach and feels weak because all she can do is stare at those with food to eat while going through a stage of emptiness. The third couplet divulges the very reason of survival of the child’s poor family relying only on root crops to face another day while savoring the taste of rice for food only during harvest time.

The song talks about poverty. Hyperbole is present in the entire second and third quatrains. The song has 12 syllables in each line and is in Pares form.

“*Akon Ikomposo Isla ng Sibuyan*” is a quatrain by stanza break. The first couplet takes pride of the richness of Sibuyan Island in terms of natural wealth as mentioned by their ancestors. The word kanto or borders symbolically refers to the locations where treasures of the island reside. The second couplet talks about the enduring character of the Anthrowats believed to be adventurous people who love to travel places. The third couplet exalts the generosity of the KKP (World Wildlife Fund) which greatly contributed to showing the love, care and conservaton of the endangered species and even reached out to the poor residents of the place. The third couplet upholds the human rights of the indigenous people through the legal counsel. There exists a meaningful effort done by the members of the Panlipi of enlightening the natives’ minds to build a strong support for family relationship with the inculcation of unity in every family member. The last couplet challenges the listeners to take action now, more than ever, to do the necessary change for the betterment of the future

generation. For instance, the words *nalooy* or *pity* and *kahapo* or *exhausting* mean a call to action for the adults to turn away from their corrupt ways to help save the generation of youths to come and allow them experience the refreshing life that today's generation of people enjoys for free and with great comfort. Generally, this *komposo* uses Sibuyan Island as a symbol of home worthy enough to be preserved and conserved for forthcoming generation.

The theme of the song is love of Sibuyan. There is Anaphora (repetition of lines) and apostrophe (talking to the inanimate) used in the last line of the *komposo* "*Abaw nga kahapo! Abaw nga kahapo!*" The meter count of the song is Pares having 12 syllables.

"*Ang Sadto Pa Anay*" is a stanza *komposo* with end rhyme that is filled with reminiscing. Though, the persona's tone of voice is gloomy knowing that it's a lost love he has now. Also, there is a certain feeling of disdain reflected in the phrase "*mabagsak ako*" in the last line which is a truism in a starting love relationship that all goodness is shown and expressed. However, as days go by and as a lover's heart grows weary of the demand to sustain affection, especially on the part of a man, true love also fades away. Words like *habul* (blanket) taken from *habulan* and *balhas* (sweat) symbolically bear witness to care and patience of a man to provide comfort and satisfaction for someone special to him. Yet this love is intensely crazy because if one loses the will to carry on fighting for this love, life then, has no meaning. It means that love can make or unmake a lover's dream of being genuinely happy. Although, it's full of suffering if one deserts a partner so quickly and easily.

Love, Courtship, and Marriage are the themes of the *komposo*. Apostrophe is used on the line "*Abaw man si Nonoy daw walay kaluoy*" and situational irony is used in the line "*Kamatayon ngani ang akon pangita*". The song has 12 syllables and in Pares form.

"*Sa Higad Sini Nga Bukid*" plays around two couplets with emphasis on the fun experience of the author as a drifter. Just like a mere observer,

the narrator directly describes the existing condition of a place having a fountain which is normally seen in the province particularly in the mountain. Also, it's a real experience of a wanderer that when he feels thirsty from a long trip up the mountain and when he sees a flowing water he would quickly long for the comfort of it to quench his thirst which in this case, is answered by the clear water from a fountain.

The theme of the song is folk life. There is Hyperbole present in the line "*Kag didto ko guin batyag / Ang katin-aw sang tubig*". The meter count of the song is eight and seven syllables. It is in Pares and Gansal form.

IV. SUMMARY OF TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The textual analysis of the *komposo* revealed how rich the oral tradition of Romblon. Coroza (2008) noted that syllabication of Filipino poetry. All eight *komposo* were found to heavily used Pares form. Pares is a meter count using even syllables, which in this study were 12 syllables. Among the *komposo* that followed Pares form are *Akong Komposohon Sakayan Nga Kuyon*, *Akon Komposohon si Kumpare Duro*, *Ang Baro Kong Gisi*, *Akon Ikomposo Isla ng Sibuyan*, and *Ang Sadto Pa Anay*. Meanwhile, two *komposo* used Gansal form: *Sa Higad Sini Nga Bukid* has 7 syllables and *Nang Sadto Pa Anay Si Diling Ga Eskwela* has 13 syllables.

In terms of figurative language, the *komposo* primarily used hyperbole in its lines. Five *komposo* used hyperbole: "*Nagaturo agay ang dugo sang likod*", "*Sa tunga sang lawod / Naga loy lipuyon*", "*Naluslos ang panit pakadto sa puno*", and "*Kag didto ko guin batyag / Ang katin-aw sang tubig*."

The *komposo*'s themes can be divided into four: love, courtship, and marriage; folk life; poverty; and love of Sibuyan. These imply that most topics of *komposos* sung in Sibuyan talk about their daily life, their relationships, and Sibuyan itself. The use of figurative language in poetry is a must. This is something that helps define poetry as a literary genre. Figurative language, according to Giroux (1974) uses

words in a non-traditional way. It produces a unique impression, clarifies a concept, and makes writing increasingly vivid and powerful.

V. SUMMARY OF MUSICAL ANALYSIS

The song entitled “Nang Sadto Pa Anay Si Diling Ga Eskwela” is on Key of D Minor. Its range is from E4 to G5. The melody mostly moves in wide leaps. Occasional stepwise and stationary motion can also be found. The shape of the lines is very symmetrical and balanced with repetitive melodic patterns throughout the song.



The rhythm above is distinct on most lines of this komposo. There are however, variations and mutation of this. Primary chords were mostly used. These are the tonic, subdominant, dominant. Authentic cadence (Dominant to Tonic) is also observed in the piece. It is a one-part song form or strophic form.

The piece entitled “Akon Komposohon Sakayan Nga Kuyon” is on the Key of G Minor. Its range is from G3 to A4. The melody mostly moves in wide leaps. Occasional stepwise and stationary motion can also be found. The shape of the lines is very symmetrical and balanced. We can also see repetitive melodic patterns throughout the song.



The rhythm above is distinct on most lines of this komposo. There are however, variations and mutation of this. Primary chords are mostly used, the tonic, subdominant, dominant. It uses the Authentic cadence (Dominant to Tonic). In terms of form, it belongs to strophic or one-part song form.

The song “Akon Komposohon Si Kumpare Duro” is on the Key of G Sharp Minor which ranges from G Sharp3 to B4. Basically, the melody mostly moves in wide leaps. We can observe occasional stepwise and stationary motion can also be found. The shape of the lines is very symmetrical and balanced. We can

see repetitive melodic patterns throughout the song.



This rhythm above is distinct on most lines of this komposo. There are however, variations and mutation of this. Primary chords are mostly used, the tonic, subdominant, dominant. Authentic cadence (Dominant to Tonic) is also observed in this piece. In terms of form, it goes to strophic or one-part song form.

The song entitled “Ang Sulat” is on the Key of C-Sharp Minor. It ranges from C Sharp4 to E5. The melody mostly moves in wide leaps. Occasional stepwise and stationary motion can also be found. In terms of contour, the shape of the lines is very symmetrical and balanced. We can also observe a repetitive melodic pattern throughout the song.



The rhythm above is distinct on most lines of this komposo. There are however, variations and mutation of this. Primary chords are mostly used, the tonic, subdominant, dominant. In terms of cadence, it uses the Authentic one (Dominant to Tonic). Strophic or one-part song form is evident in this song.

The song “Ang Baro Kong Gisi” is on the Key of C-Sharp Minor. It ranges from C Sharp4 to E5. The melody mostly moves in wide leaps. Occasional stepwise and stationary motion can also be found. The shape of the lines is very symmetrical and balanced. We can see repetitive melodic patterns throughout the song.



The above rhythm is distinct on most lines of this komposo. There are however, variations and mutation of this. In terms of harmony, primary chords are mostly used, these are the tonic, subdominant, dominant. Authentic cadence (Dominant to Tonic) is also used in the piece. A strophic or one-part song is obvious in this piece.

The song entitled “Akon Ikomposo Isla ng Sibuyan is on the Key of C Sharp Minor. Its range is from C Sharp4 to E5. The melody mostly moves in wide leaps. Occasional stepwise and stationary motion can also be found. In terms of contour, the shape of the lines is very symmetrical and balanced. We can also see repetitive melodic patterns all throughout the song.



collective consciousness manifested in the music of their komposo, their beliefs, feelings, emotions, ideas, and attitudes are expressed. Poetic inclinations of the people are also manifested in their komposos. It was noted that songs use metaphoric devices from their environment. Figurative languages such as metaphor, anaphora, apostrophe, metonymy are present in the *komposo* which shows the richness of Sibuyan oral traditions.

Romblon as a unique archipelago with its history, cultural, and ethnolinguistic differences produce variations on the themes, and topics of the songs. The language that was utilized in the Sibuyan komposo was primarily borrowed from Hiligaynon and Kinaray-a speaking regions. The Mangyan Tagabukid people sing love songs for courtship and marriage, folk life, poverty, love of sibuyan and humorous songs as reflected in their various komposos. Songs are composed out with adeptness and creativity. They express love, joy, sorrow, disappointment, and discipline experienced throughout their lives and constructed by a society that shapes their values and attitudes- reflective of the community's culture.

Future researchers in Romblon should also identify and collect some of the existing musical traditions in other islands. They may also study the origin and history of each song so that people in the province of Romblon will be aware of their ethnic affinities. Furthermore, intensive analysis of musical performance, variants and versions of tunes and interrelationship of texts and tunes shall be studied.

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