

# Composing Ideals: The Incorporation of the Ideals of the Philippine Revolution to the Musical Compositions of Julio Nakpil

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## ABSTRACT

Julio Nakpil was a revolutionary and a famous composer who grew up in the Philippines during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time when liberalism was beginning to influence the minds of educated native Filipinos. Ideas of equality, representation, and identity were the main trends in Philippine liberalism and these led to the realization of national identity, the root of the revolutionary group *Katipunan*. The group had a set of beliefs and ideals that saw the Philippines as a nation for them, the native Filipinos, and a nation that would be better off without the intervention of the Spanish government. Julio Nakpil was an active member of the group and fought in the battles, he shared the same ideals and beliefs as those of the other members of the *Katipunan*, which he incorporated in his musical compositions. Thus, this chapter examines liberalism in the Philippines, the ideals and beliefs of the revolutionary group, and how Julio Nakpil fused these into his compositions, guided by cultural nationalism as the theoretical framework.

**Keywords:** Nakpil, Music, Philippine Revolution

## Liberalism in the Philippines

rt, the musical arts, in particular, is often regarded as a way of expressing one's innermost feelings and desires. Most of the time, the artist does not merely depict a picture but instead narrates a story: an abstraction of a story. Thus, in most cases, artists find art as a way of calling out or reaching out for help, although not necessarily for themselves sometimes for their country. This is how most Filipino intellectual nationalists styled their works. With the opening of the Suez Canal, the inflow of liberal ideas through the works of well-known figures seeped into the Philippines and the minds of these educated men known as the *propagandistas*.

From these men's experience in Madrid and other countries in Europe, being mistaken as Chinese or Japanese, they identified themselves as *Indios*. Thus, this idea that they are different people of a different race separate from the Chinese and the Japanese began. This led them to their campaigns of promoting national consciousness.

The *propagandistas* wished to, "tear down the wall of ignorance that divided the people of Spain from their colonies and to convey Philippine grievances to the highest Spanish authorities."<sup>1</sup> They wanted to expose the situation of the Philippines through manifestos, self-printed columns, novels, poems, and sometimes paintings. However, the majority of these works were made for Spanish audiences and not Filipinos. Most of them were written in Spanish and were often used to compete in international competitions, which is reasonable when taking into consideration their aspirations for the country, they wanted reforms, and not secessions, and wanted a change in treatment and governance from Spain, not a new government.

### **Luna, Hidalgo, Rizal: Their Ideals and Crafts**

The *propagandistas* used their talents and privileges to bring out the word they wanted Spain to hear. Most of the crafts produced by these men were depictions of the hard, cruel, and unjust life in the Philippines. For example, Juan Luna's *Spoliarium*, which the artist submitted to the *Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes* in Madrid in the year 1884. The painting depicted bloody gladiators being dragged away from the arena after entertaining their persecutors. (*see fig. 3.1*) For this, he won a gold medal. Garnering the silver medal from the Exposition was Felix Resurrecion Hidalgo's *Las Virgenes Cristianas Expuestas al Populacho* (Christian Virgins Exposed to the Populace). This painting shows a woman allowing herself to be stripped by the Romans for their lewd desires. (*see fig. 3.2*) These paintings and their painters' success were celebrated by Rizal in a small get together after the Exposition. Here he commended the two canvases for depicting "the essence of our social, moral, and political life: humanity in the severe ordeal, humanity unredeemed, reason, and idealism in open struggle with prejudice, fanaticism, and injustice."<sup>2</sup> These were Rizal's first attempt to openly challenge the Spanish rule, exposing their shortcomings as "mother." However, these works by the propagandists were for Spanish eyes, not Filipinos. Most of these were written in Spanish and were used to enter international competitions, again, it must be noted that these men wanted the highest authorities of Spain

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<sup>1</sup> Usha Mahajani. *Philippine Nationalism, external change and Filipino response, 1565-1946* (University of Queensland Press, 1971) 54.

<sup>2</sup> Retana, 93 cited in Leon Ma. Guerrero, *The First Filipino: A Biography of Jose Rizal* (Manila: National Historical Commission, 1974) 115.

to notice the lag of the Philippines as compared to its mother, Spain. They just wanted a change in the way of governance, not a new government. Thus, participating in international competitions were a more efficient way of getting the attention of the people of Spain. They wanted the world to know that this was the case in the Philippines and thought that if indeed the world knew, Spain would make a move.



Figure 1 – *Spoliarium* by Juan Luna, which can be found at the National Museum of the Philippines



Figure 2 – *Las Virgenes Cristianas Expuestas al Populacho* by Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo, which can be found the Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas

These artworks inspired Rizal into producing a novel, which would, later on, become the famous *Noli me Tangere* (Touch me not). In this novel, Rizal depicted the current state of the country. It is said that he transformed the painting of the *Spoliarium* into a literary work.<sup>3</sup> This novel, on the other hand, was made by the author for Filipinos, to induce his fellow countrymen. Rizal aspired for his fellow Filipinos to open their eyes to the current issues that prowl about their country and know their rights so that together as a whole Filipino, they can raise these issues and hopefully be heard. However, in order to fully relay his idea of a suppressed Filipino, Rizal had to give his readers an idea of how the inhabitants of the islands lived before the coming of the Spaniards. Thus, Jose Rizal annotated Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, which was the first published books about Philippine pre-Hispanic time. He wanted the Filipinos to see that the natives of the Philippine islands were not uncivilized, questioning the Spaniards' treatment.

This specific event in Philippine History allowed the formation of a social consciousness, which was achieved after the emergence of the idea of nationalism. Thus, this sentiment of love for country that the *propagandistas* showed through their desire for reform sparked a want for independence within the masses of the Philippines. It must be noted that these intellectuals did not want a revolution but merely a reform, which they expressed through their craft. From this moderate organizational nationalism of the intellectuals who called themselves *propagandistas*, a militant nationalism was developed, which later on sparked into a war of independence,<sup>4</sup> the Philippine Revolution.

### **The Ideals of the Philippine Revolution**

The ideas and ideals of the Philippine Revolution was an avenue and a great inspiration for Filipino composers like Julio Nakpil to write patriotic musical compositions, "it was an epoch marked by the vigorous expression of the people's passions and aspirations."<sup>5</sup> Similar to the propagandists, Nakpil expressed his sentiments through a medium, this time it was music. Although Julio Nakpil uses the Western style of music in his compositions, the contents and messages of most of his compositions were very Filipino. Moreover, western art forms do not have a monopoly of song forms. Filipino pre-colonial cultures already have rich traditions of chanting and singing, as exhibited in the

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<sup>3</sup> Leon Ma. Guerrero. *The First Filipino: A Biography of Jose Rizal*. (Manila: National Historical Commission, 1974) 120.

<sup>4</sup> Mahajani, 57.

<sup>5</sup> Raymundo Bañas, *Pilipino Music and Theater* (Quezon City: Manlapaz Publishing Company, 1969) 41.



works of Nakpil. Indeed, his works exhibit elements of the native Filipinos, at the same time the titles and lyrics of most of his compositions during the revolution were in *Tagalog*; thus, his crafts echo the patriotic sentiments of the Filipino fighting for independence from Spaniards well. Nakpil did not use his music to be noticed by the oppressors in order for them to recognize the situation of the Philippines. His works were mainly addressed to the people, calling out to them, giving them a command or serenading them to love the country. He did not want the Filipinos to become aware of their current situation but instead wanted them to get up and act in order to achieve a change. This viewpoint, which Nakpil uses in his compositions is very much aligned to the ideals of the revolutionary group, *Katipunan*, given that he was a member and a loyal companion of the founder of the said society. In order to exhibit the connection between the ideals of his music with that of the *Katipunan*, his composition *Marangan na Dalit ng mga Katagalugan*, which he composed upon the request of Andres Bonifacio for a National Anthem, shall be assessed.

The ideals of the *Katipunan* were sourced from Jose Rizal's annotation of Morga's work. They saw a Filipino race that was magnificent without the intervention of foreign people. That before the Spaniards came, the Philippines was a peaceful place where everyone was treated equally, and everyone was literate.<sup>6</sup> From here, they based the struggle of the Philippines and the Filipinos on the *Pasyon* or the Passion of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

The above presents some parallelism of the Philippines that have fallen and would eventually have a rebirth, similar to what had happened to the garden of Eden, or Jesus Christ. The initiation rites of the *Katipunan* requires the new members to view the situation of the Philippines in this way. Also, in order to become accepted in the society, one must answer questions that query the condition of the country yesterday, today, and tomorrow,<sup>8</sup> emphasizing on a fall and a rebirth. In order to fully understand how the *Katipuneros* viewed the situation of the Philippines, it is important to examine the literary works of the men behind the society from their organ called *Kalayaan*, which is best translated to libertinage or libertine. The *Kalayaan* was first reproduced in January of the year 1896, the year that marked the beginning of the Philippine Revolution. It can be said that the spread of this organ, although very few,

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<sup>6</sup> Reynaldo Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2016) 83.

<sup>7</sup> Iletto, 82.

<sup>8</sup> Jim Richardson, "Initiation Rites, c.1896." *Katipunan: Documents and Studies*. March 24, 2013, Retrieved from <http://www.kasaysayan-kkk.info/membership-documents/initiation-rites-c-1896>.

contributed to the entering of more people into the society, enabling them to shout their first cry.

The first in discussion would be the work of the *Supremo*, Andres Bonifacio, entitled *Ang Dapat Mabatid ng Mga Tagalog* (What the Tagalogs<sup>9</sup> Should Know). In this manifesto of Bonifacio, it is seen how the struggles of the Philippines are compared to fall and rebirth of Eden. He begins by talking about the flourishing and magnificence of the indigenous civilization had, using the words *kasaganaan*, (abundance) and *kaginhawaan* (prosperity) to describe the life of the indigenous people before the arrival of the Spaniards. Again, a reference to Rizal's annotation of Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* can be seen, as Bonifacio was known to have been inspired by Rizal and all his other works. He then proceeds with the coming of the Spaniards to the islands, offering a better life. "*Ang nasasabing nagsisipamahala ay ang yaring nalamuyot sa tamis ng kanilang dila sa paghibo.*" (The sweetness of such enticing words seduced the leaders of the said Katagalugans.)<sup>10</sup> Bonifacio relates this moment in Philippine History as the beginning of the fall of the natives, equating the Spaniards to the serpent who had tricked Eve into eating the forbidden fruit, promising a better life, however, this act of trusting the serpent led Eve to a life of suffering. At the end of the manifesto, Bonifacio asks what must be done, again emphasizing on the idea of yesterday, today, and most importantly tomorrow. That it is not enough to know the past and understand the present, but there is a need to have a plan or look forward to in the future. To put it simply, it is not enough for the Tagalogs to know that they are oppressed, they must also stand up and kill their relations with Spain in order to achieve a new condition of wholeness. This time he uses the word *puri* to describe what the Tagalogs have to attain. This wholeness or becoming one with self is the whole concept of the word *kalayaan*, which the state of being unrestricted from convention, detaching from mother Spain and returning to the *Inang Bayan* (motherland), termed in order to give a proper translation into *Tagalog* the ideas of liberalism: liberty, fraternity, and equality.

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<sup>9</sup> It must be noted that the revolutionaries preferred to be called *Tagalogs* instead of Filipinos, for the reason that the latter is used of Spanish born in the colony that is the Philippines. In addition to this, the use of the term *Tagalog* connotes a more nationalistic set of people, using terms that are not from the Spanish language.

<sup>10</sup> Iletto, 23

## The Ideals Manifested in the Compositions of Nakpil

In the lyrics of Nakpil's "*Marangal na Dalit ng mga Katagalugan*" there is an evident sentiment of patriotism. The first four lines of the anthem are evidently repetitive:

*Mabuhay, mabuhay  
Yaong Kalayaan, Kalayaan  
At Pasulungin ang puri't kabanalan  
Ang puri't kabanalan.  
Kastila'y mairing ng Katagalugan  
At ngayo'y ipagwagi ang kahusayan.<sup>11</sup>*

Translation:  
(Long live, long live  
This liberty, liberty  
And let honor and holiness reign  
Honor and holiness.  
The Spaniards were fought by the Tagalogs  
And now let excellence be celebrated.)

In the *Marangal na Dalit ng mga Katagalugan* the word *kalayaan* is emphasized, which is most likely the same *kalayaan* the philosophy of the *Katipunan* wishes for the Philippines. Similarly, the words *puri* and *kabanalan* are in focus as well, and as it was aforementioned, Andres Bonifacio stresses on the word *puri* in his manifesto, which was previously discussed. It must be remembered that Bonifacio notes that the *Tagalogs* were already in a state of libertine before the Spaniards came and that it was only lost to them because of their subjugation. The lyrics, "*Kastila'y mairing ng Katagalugan at ngayo'y ipagwagi ang kahusayan,*" perceive that with the rejection of the Spaniards, excellence that the natives of the Philippine islands once achieved shall reign once again among the Tagalogs. Considering the title, Julio Nakpil named the anthem as an honorable *dalit* of the Tagalogs. A *dalit* is a popular form of poetry in pre-Hispanic times that has four lines in every verse and can be considered a traditional or folk song.<sup>12</sup> The use of the term *dalit*, as well as the application of

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<sup>11</sup> *Julio Nakpil and the Philippine Revolution with an Autobiography of Gregoria de Jesus*, 91

<sup>12</sup> During the Spanish Colonial period in the Philippines, *dalit* was a Church song usually sung for the dead. The above explains why despite the martial tune and rhythm of the anthem, there is an evident plaintive melody since Julio Nakpil was born and raised in the Spanish colonial times in the Philippines, being mainly surrounded by cultures on music such as this.

the characteristics of the native poetry into the national anthem composed by Julio Nakpil, connotes that Nakpil honors and recognizes the culture which the *Tagalogs* had before the coming of the Spaniards. Nakpil showcased the greatness which Bonifacio claimed in his manifesto that the indigenous people had, making his composition as native and as overcritical to the colonizers. As it can be seen, Julio Nakpil shares the same ideals as the *Supremo*. He simply turned the ideas of Andres Bonifacio into lyrical poems, adding tune, rhythm, and harmony, making him the musical counterpart of Bonifacio.

Nakpil's *Marangal na Dalit ng mga Katagalugan* was a march, which was one of the most popular types of compositions during the period. A march has a strong regular rhythm, whose beat is followed in counting, and used for marching. This type of genre of music can be reflective of the philosophy followed by its composer, with its purpose to guide a march; it suggests the forward-looking view of the writer at the current situation. It can mean that the composer is already looking forward to the future, and rather optimistic about it. This can be related to the framework of the struggle of the Philippines as laid out by the *Katipunan*, that there is a rebirth of the once great *Tagalogs*. The lyrics are already celebrating the attainment of *kalayaan* despite the anthem being written on November of 1896, which was just the beginning of the Revolution, almost two years away from the declaration of independence in 1898. In addition to this, the Revolution is seen as a journey to be embarked in order to attain the sweet *kalayaan*. The *Lakaran of the Sons*, which is a poem attributed to the brother of Andres Bonifacio, Procopio, talks about the *lakaran*, which is a journey or struggle that has to be embarked in order to obtain freedom. In commencing in the *lakaran*, one must be willing to experience hardship, and the poem is very much engaging. The most enticing part of the poem would be the third stanza, which reads:

*Lakad, aba tayo, titigisa ang hirap  
Tutunguhin and bundok at kaluwangan ng gubat  
Gamitin ang gulok at sampu ng sibat  
Ipagtanggol ngayong Ina Pilipinas.<sup>13</sup>*

Translation:

(Let us, lowly men, walk on, each  
To experience hardship  
Head for the hills and forests

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<sup>13</sup> Jose P. Santos. *Si Andres Bonifacio at ang Himagsikan*. 2d printing (n.p.,1935) 18. cited in Ileto, 104.



Use our knives and spears  
Let us now defend Mother Filipinas.)<sup>14</sup>

With the same purpose, a march engages the people with its rhythm. Like the *Lakaran of the Sons*, Julio Nakpil's "*Marangal na Dalit ng mga Katagalugan*" provokes its audience into this mission that the *Tagalogs* must undertake in order to retrieve their motherland. It helps in sustaining the spirit of those who have the same desires for the country and engages the people to move forward and continue with the fight, calling on them, instilling in them a sentiment of love and bravery.

Julio Nakpil's music gives a glimpse of his ideals and the ideals of the *Katipunan*, which allured many men into joining them. These ideals of the revolutionaries, including Nakpil, have a specific component that touches the hearts and minds of the masses. Words are good enough to persuade an individual, however, if poetically written and attached to a tune that pulls the heartstrings of an individual is beyond more powerful. The music that is created can have an impact on the individual, inculcating in them a sense of nationalism or patriotism, which is the right fuel for the soul, the heart, and the mind, to take action for the sake of one's country.

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<sup>14</sup> Ileto, 104.

**PICTURES:**

Figure 1. *Spoliarium*. Located in The National Museum of the Philippines.

Found in <http://www.manilatoday.net/1884-j-luna-spoliarium-everglow/>

Figure 2. *Las Virgenes Cristianas Expuestas al Populacho*. Located in the Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas. Found in

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/370772981796602574/>