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Revisiting the *Basi* Revolt of 1807: Its Historical and Axiological Relevance

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Abstract: This study focused on the historical and axiological relevance of the *Basi* Revolt of 1807.

This historical research employed archival work method in gathering and collecting data necessary to the topic being studied. Since most of the documents were written in Spanish, the researcher sought the help and assistance of an accredited Spanish interpreter/translator. The voluminous data gathered were grouped, sorted out and dealt with according to the precipitating events, the phases of the revolt, the aftermath of the revolt, the key players, the causes of the revolts in general and the historical and axiological relevance of the *Basi* Revolt. Archival documents were carefully studied and analysed and therefrom, themes and sub-themes were drawn out and presented in narrative forms.

The humble lives the Ilocanos lived during the Spanish occupation in the Philippines changed when the Spanish authorities imposed monopoly to their products, the *basi* and tobacco. The Ilocanos fought bravely against the Spaniards. They suffered from great pain, trials, and torture brought about by the brutality and viciousness of the Spaniards.

The heroism and sacrifices of the Ilocanos proved that they are worthy of a niche. The Ilocanos today pay tribute to the indomitable courage which was the *Basi* Revolt. The Ilocanos risked their lives to give meaning to our lives. Their ideas lived on amidst the holocaust of battle.

The significant events that transpired in the *Basi* Revolt are: the disruption of the lifestyle of the Ilocanos, loss of a major source of livelihood, pent-up frustration and anger over Spanish abuses, social desperation, inspiration from the Ilocano revolts, the outbreak of the rebellion and the march toward the south, the *Garasgas* Bridge and the defeat of Escobedo, the re-structuring of the defense by the Augustinian friars, conclusion of the revolt, the defeat of the insurgents, the aftermath of the revolt and the causes of the revolts in general.

An analysis of the events in the *Basi* Revolt revealed that: blatant disregard for a treasured practice is a form of rejection; that curtailment of basic freedoms is a violation of human rights; that curtailment of the right to own property triggered revolts; that censorship is curtailment of freedom and political and economic persecution engender courage; sporadic, uncoordinated revolts are bound to fail and regionalism and lack of unity weakens an endeavour.

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The values derived from the *Basi* Revolt are courage in the face of insurmountable odds, love and concern for family, love for freedom, industry and diligence and love for country.

Key Words: *Basi* Revolt; History; Axiology; Values

1. SECTION

From the beginning of Spanish rule to the first decades of the 19th century, there were more than one hundred petty revolts in the Philippines which may be classified as religious, agrarian in nature, Spanish impositions (forced labor, tributes, monopolies), personal grievances and love for freedom.

The revolts happened in most of the provinces of the country. Ilocos Norte was not stoic or insensitive to the abuses of the Spaniards.

Galang (1936) noted two revolts of consequence that were caused by the monopolies. The first was the "tobacco revolt", an uprising that started in Laoag in 1788, and was caused by a general discontent over the tobacco monopoly. The second was the "*basi* revolt" in 1807 which resulted from the injustices of the wine monopoly.

The tobacco monopoly was instituted in 1782 which put the sale, traffic and manufacture of tobacco under government control. The Spanish authorities regulated the processing of tobacco leaves into cigars, cigarettes, and their retailing to customers. The colonial authorities in Manila made it a revenue-earning measure and in the provinces, local officials saw it as another opportunity for self-enrichment because tobacco was a major source of income.

Like the tobacco monopoly, the wine monopoly prohibited the manufacture, traffic and sale of wine except by those authorized by the government. In effect, this meant the prohibition of the manufacture, traffic and sale of their homemade sugar cane wine (*basi*). *Basi*-making is one of the industries of the Ilocanos, a source of livelihood.

The *basi* is a liquor fermented from sugar cane juice which has also ritualistic function. The sugar cane wine was part and parcel of Ilocano natives' rites of birth and death, love and marriage, victory and defeat. The abolition of *basi*-making meant to the people of Ilocos the abolition of their way of life.

In 1786, the Spanish colonial government expropriated the manufacture and sale of *basi*, effectively banning private manufacture of the wine. *Ilocanos* were then forced to buy from government stores. However, the people of Piddig (a town in Ilocos Norte) rose in revolt on September 16, 1807, with the revolt spreading to nearby towns like Sarrat, Laoag, San Nicolas, Badoc, and with fighting lasting for weeks. Spanish troops eventually quelled the revolt on September 28, 1807, though with much force and loss of lives on the losing side.

The participants of the *Basi* Revolt died about two centuries ago. So, there is a dearth of materials about the event. If ever there are existing records, these are not published. Therefore, it is high time that this event be properly recorded, documented and preserved so that the present and future generations may appreciate the sacrifices of their forefathers in fighting for their grievances. In addition, this is also one way of giving justice to the courageous acts of valiant men and women in their quest for freedom which we now enjoy.

Hence, this study is conceptualized to know the historical and axiological relevance of the *Basi* Revolt of 1807.

Statement of the Problem

This study primarily aimed to chronicle and recognize the nature of the *Basi* Revolt in terms of its historical and axiological relevance.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What significant events transpired during the *Basi* Revolt?
2. What values are evident in the *Basi* Revolt?



Significance of the Study

History gives us knowledge of the past that helps us understand the present. It also allows us to understand the present and prepare for the future (Foe, Parco, & Coronado, 2006). Some great world leaders are known to be students of history. They study the past in order to gain fresh insights in solving the problems confronting them. All people in the past have been confronted with serious problems during their time. Some were able to devise time-tested solutions to problems which are often adopted by today's leaders.

Any leader, whether belonging to the student council, class, or nation, must use history on a day-to-day basis. When thinking of making a project, or implementing a law, the basic questions are historical in nature, like: Has these been tried before? What were the results – success or failure? Who did this before, and under what circumstances? Will the same results work for us?

George Santayana (1863-1952), a philosopher, said that those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Indeed, the importance of history lies in providing lessons about life. History then is the teacher of life. Regrettably, ignorant or evil men do not learn from the past. War continues and prejudice remains.

Knowledge of the *Basi* Revolt by the Filipinos in general and the Ilocanos in particular comes mainly from history books, but these history books give very little account on the revolt. Thus, the documentation of the experiences of the Ilocano soldiers during the said revolution would shed light of what truly transpired for a better understanding and appreciation of the *Basi* Revolt.

Hopefully, this study serves as a service showing respect and gratitude to our local heroes like Saralogo Ambaristo and Pedro Mateo for their unending quest for freedom and independence of our country against the unjust and cruel practices of the Spaniards, and to recall to mind their valiant acts. This research will open the hearts and minds of the Filipino people to be proud and give due honor to their townmates and provincemates who joined the revolt.

This study may serve as a sourcebook in Social Studies, particularly on local history. The valuable lessons from the *Basi* Revolt could also be used in teaching Values Education classes.

Up to now, there continue to be very few historians on this, not that they have not referred to it, but they have only explained it minimally. The majority of the books or articles that mentioned this only discuss it in passing as a protest against the *basi* monopoly, but have not stated anything about its development, its phases, events or protagonists.

The usual study of the *Basi* Revolt is told in our history books as an uprising against oppression without considering other angles and possibilities of the events surrounding the revolt. The pattern is one-dimensional so that other facets are not included in the history of the *Basi* Revolt. From this old pattern, this new shift of revisiting or putting fresh life into the *Basi* Revolt is introduced as a new direct operating system – from the locked-type to the democratic type. Hence, other possibilities of learning are applied to give students freedom to think and present new perspectives. If history is written alive, reading is more interesting.

This significant event must be portrayed with touch, sight, hearing and feeling. Thus, the meaning of the Ilocanos fight for freedom will be set vividly into the Ilocanos mind and heart.

The study encourages future researches to be undertaken on other historical events of our country. Lastly, this study is very significant to the researcher for he is a resident of the historic town of Piddig where the famous revolt started.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research is a historical research. The historical method is employed by researchers who are interested in reporting events and/or conditions that occurred in the past. An attempt is made to establish facts in order to arrive at conclusions concerning past events or predict future events.

Archival work was used to gather information from Spanish documents. Since most of the documents were written in Spanish, the researcher sought the



help and assistance of an accredited interpreter/translator in Spanish.

Historical account of the *Basi* Revolt is the major focus of the data gathering procedure. Analysis of the historical and axiological aspects of the *Basi* Revolt was the primary purpose of this study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study is a historical research which utilized archival work to gather information. Documents written in Spanish were translated by an accredited interpreter/translator in Spanish. Other data sources were accounts of historians and paintings made by an eyewitness to the different events in the *Basi* revolt. From these sources the events and key players in the revolt were pieced together to present a clear picture of the revolt. The description was organized according to the phases of the *Basi* Revolt. The researcher was very cautious not to alter the meanings drawn from the accounts. In the analysis, historical and axiological themes were drawn from the descriptions to highlight the relevance of the revolt.

The *Basi* Revolt erupted as a result of the monopoly of the production, sale and use of *basi*, the famous wine of the Ilocanos. Although the rebels were determined, the *Basi* Revolt including all other revolts in Philippine history failed for the Filipinos were not united. They lacked frontrunners to lead them. Since they lived in different parts of the archipelago, each group with a distinct culture, they did not consider themselves as one people and they were unprepared militarily to fight the Spanish forces.

The *Basi* Revolt of 1807, which was part of a series of peasant rebellions that recurred for more or less similar reasons in Ilocos, was a valiant reaction to the efforts of the government's struggles to impose greater administrative and economic control over the Ilocano region. The natives were discontented with the shortages and injustices generated by the liquor and tobacco monopolies, particularly the monopoly on *basi*, the local sugarcane wine, as well as the abuses of the officials in charge of managing the monopoly. The insurgents were led by Pedro Mateo and other brave men. But the rebellion lasted for a short time because the rebels did not speak with a single voice. However,

it showed that they possessed a certain organizational structure, tactics and determination.

Analysis of the *Basi* Revolt revealed certain historical themes. Blatant disregard for a treasured culture item or practice was considered a form of rejection. Curtailment of basic freedoms was a violation of human rights, thus curtailment of the right to own property triggered revolts. Censorship is curtailment of freedom, political and economic persecution engenders courage, sporadic, uncoordinated revolts are bound to fail; and regionalism and lack of unity weakens an endeavor.

The *Basi* Revolt demonstrated certain values that the Ilocanos held dear: courage in the face of insurmountable odds, love and concern for family, industry and diligence, love for freedom and love for country – to take the risk and stand for one's conviction. It directly contributed to the development of nationalism. To a certain extent, the *Basi* Revolt helped facilitate the Revolution of 1896. The revolt left a deep pondering of thoughts to the succeeding generations. Revolts, as the Filipinos were bound to learn, was not enough. There is a need to inculcate into the hearts and minds of the citizens values worth emulating for.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions may be drawn:

The *Basi* Revolt was a localized expression of protest against a particular injustice that the rebels merely sought better accommodation within the colonial framework that is why the people marched toward the capital Vigan to petition for the abolition of the monopoly.

Spain's new colonial policies which aimed to develop the local economy as a better source of revenue brought new hardships to the people. The Ilocanos were among the hardest hit because of the operations in the area of the tobacco monopoly of 1781 and the wine monopoly established in 1786.

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when the Spanish authorities imposed monopoly to their products, the *basi* and tobacco. Inspired by other Iloko revolts, e.g. Almazan, Malong and Silang, they fought bravely with the Spaniards. They risked their lives to give meaning to our lives, in spite of their being inadequately equipped and poorly armed which was no match to the Spaniards.

The precipitating events that brought about the *Basi* Revolt were the disruption of the lifestyle of the Ilocanos, loss of a major source of livelihood, pent-up frustration and anger over Spanish abuses, social desperation, and inspiration from other Ilocano revolts.

The revisit of the *Basi* Revolt revealed historical relevance as well as axiological relevance.

The historical relevance of the revolt studied are: blatant disregard for a treasured practice is a form of rejection, curtailment of basic freedom is a violation of human rights, curtailment of the right to own property also triggered revolts, censorship is curtailment of freedom, political persecution engenders courage, economic persecution likewise engenders courage, sporadic and uncoordinated revolts are bound to fail and regionalism and lack of unity weakens an endeavour.

The values that could be gleaned from the study are right to life, courage in the face of insurmountable odds, love and concern for family; industry and diligence, love for freedom and love for country among the Ilocanos.

The uprising exhibited some ingenious examples of mass actions but its limited ideological horizon and absence of good leaders who know military strategy and tactics doomed it to a quick end.

The presence of Spanish priests and some *principalias* who meddled in the uprising made the Ilocano efforts futile.

The *Basi* Revolt of 1807 is a vivid illustration of the Conflict Theory of Karl Marx. The Spaniards were the ruling group. To maintain their power and domination, they oppressed the natives and treated them with cruelty. The natives on the other hand, initially accepted the authority of the Spaniards and endured their abuses, but their anger and hatred grew until it erupted in violence. They hoped in vain to completely overpower the Spaniards, but they were powerless. Nevertheless they demonstrated their

courage, love for freedom, and for their country. Thus, the failed *Basi* Revolt, though short-lived, remains a testament to the strength of character of the early Ilocanos.

Revisiting or putting fresh life to the *Basi* Revolt gives meaning to the claim of Max Weber in his Interpretive Theory where the reader gets a feel for another social reality and an in-depth view of a social setting. It's a new way of looking at established history. History must not be told like a dead thing but narrated with life so that there should be motion, truth and action.

The *Basi* Revolt is also known as Ambaristo Revolt though the leader was Pedro Mateo, a *principalia* and Saralogo Ambaristo was his right hand man, a native. The Spaniards did not like to reveal that a *principalia* was also going against them. Hence, Ambaristo Revolt.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

First, the *Basi* Revolt should be made known to all Filipinos in general and Ilocanos in particular. There should be more detailed discussion in history books so that the succeeding generations will be familiar with it and take pride of what our ancestors did for our native land.

Second, the local government units of Ilocos Norte should keep important records of the past on file in the municipal or provincial libraries. Municipal or Provincial librarians must have adequate trainings and needed skills in the preservation of rare documents. They should tie up with the National Archives of the Philippines for trainings, seminars, and related gatherings for the preservation of the early documents.

Third, a (*baton laguip*) monument of the *Basi* Revolt should be built to sanctify the meaning of those who shed their blood for the cause of the *Basi* Revolt.

Fourth, Local Historical Societies should be organized with corresponding funds thereof from the coffers of the government to take charge in the preservation of local history.



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Fifth, the Sangguniang Bayan of Municipality of Piddig should revisit the Municipal Ordinance No. 2M2-05-1706 (An Ordinance Declaring September 16 Every Year and Thereafter, A Non-working Holiday of the Municipality of Piddig, Province of Ilocos Norte in Commemoration to the Historical Event that happened in the Province of Ilocos Norte particularly in the town of Piddig, “The Historical Record, The Ilocano *Basi* Revolt”) that commemorates the Revolt annually, to make it also uphold the valiant acts of Pedro Mateo, Ambaristo and the Ilocano insurgents of the *Basi* Revolt of 1807.

Sixth, while it is true that private archives are good sources of information concerning the past, owners of these documents should share or give access to historians and researchers so people will be given the chance to read and to have an idea of the significant events that happened in the past.

Seventh, the historical and axiological relevance of the *Basi* Revolt should be incorporated in the teaching of Social Studies, particularly in Philippine and Local History. The values derived from the *Basi* Revolt could also be a basis in teaching Values Education. Educators should also give importance to the courage shown by Ilocano heroes against insurmountable odds giving them inspiration to touch lives of innocent people in a more meaningful way.

Eighth, other studies should be undertaken to recount the heroic deeds of the Ilocanos who helped shape the destiny of the Philippines.

Ninth, other researchers and writers should identify the values of other revolts so that there could be harnessed as motivators and utilized to attain affective objectives.

It is deemed significant to study the vital role of the Ilocanos to regain lost freedom. Studies should likewise be undertaken to examine more closely other Ilocano revolts like the Sarrat Rebellion of 1815; the Cry of Candon and Diego Silang’s Revolt.

It is also important that studies on the Ilocano culture be undertaken such as Fiestas; the *Sakadas* (Sugarcane Farmers) Abroad and the Ilocano Family Abroad.

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