REVISITING THE BAS/REVOLT OF 1807 (PIDDIG, ILOCOS NORTE, PHILIPPINES): ITS HISTORICAL AND AXIOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

JAYSON LORENZO ANTONIO BSE, MAED, Ph.D. (on progress)

ABSTRACT

This study focused on the historical and axiological relevance of the Basi Revolt of 1807. Basi is a homemade sugar cane wine of the Ilocanos.

This historical research employed archival work method in gathering and collecting data. 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 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 analyzed and therefrom, themes and sub-themes were drawn out and presented in narrative forms.

The significant events of the Basi Revolt as identified in the study 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 restructuring 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 revolt in general. An analysis of the events in the Basi Revolt of 1807 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 endeavor.

The wine monopoly, promulgated in 1786, prohibited the free manufacture of basi which was the pre-occupation of Ilocano farmers. The law prohibited the natives to drink their own home-made basi and compelled them to buy their wine in government stores at exhorbitant prices (Madamba, 1981). The uprising against government monopoly of basi broke out in Piddig on September 16, 1807 led by Pedro Mateo y Aposto and Saralogo Ambaristo.

The initial plan of the basi farmers was to march to the Alcalde Mayor of Vigan to air their grievances. The rebels marched through Sarrat and entered Laoag on September 20, 1807; passed through San Nicolas; and the unsuccessful destruction of the Garasgas Bridge in Batac by Spanish forces made the insurgents reach Paoay.
The first major armed conflict that the rebels won was on September 24, 1807 when Spanish guards led by Tomas Escobedo in Badoc were defeated. Proceeding further south, passing through Magsingal, the insurgents were met by better-armed, numerous composite Spanish forces at the Bantaoay River in Santo Domingo. The horrible battle on September 28, 1807, noon time, decided the fate of the revolt. The waters of the river turned red with the blood of the wounded and the dead; with bodies of several insurgents subjected to mutilation. The final chapter of the rebellion of 1807 ended with the capture of leaders, later brought to Vigan and hanged.

The Basi Revolt lasted for twelve days, September 16 – 28, 1807.

Key words: Basi, Revolt, History, Axiology and Values

Introduction

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. Galang (1936) noted two revolts of consequence that were caused by the monopolies: the “Tobacco Revolt” of 1788 and the “Basi Revolt” of 1807.

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. Like the tobacco monopoly, the Spanish colonial government expropriated in 1786 the manufacture and sale of baci. Ilocanos were then forced to buy from government stores. In effect, this meant the prohibition of the manufacture, traffic and sale of their homemade sugar cane wine.

There is a dearth of materials about the Basi Revolt. If ever there are existing records, these are not published. It is then 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.

This study primarily aimed to chronicle and recognizes 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?, and (2) What values are evident in the Basi Revolt?

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 revolt. Furthermore, this study serves as a service showing respect and gratitude to our local heroes.

This study may serve as a sourcebook on local history in Social Studies and in teaching Values Education; and encourages future researches to be undertaken on other historical events of our country.

Review of Related Literature

The industry and thrift of the Ilocanos are well-known. They till the soil and raise abundant cotton, rice, sugar cane, bananas, various vegetables and root crops. They are also into weaving with the cotton needed to be spun into thread and woven into cloth. Bagoong (salted fish) from Ilocandia is noted for its flavor and good taste.

The traditional major products in Ilocandia are tobacco and basi. During the milling season, much of the sugar cane sap is made into basi. Basi plays an important role in the social and ceremonial life of Ilocanos. Whenever occasion demands, cups and bowls of basi are generally passed around, especially during fiestas, baptismal and marriage celebrations. During rituals performed venerating or praying for the dead, or exhorting spirits an offering of a glass of basi is imperative. Basi is very stimulating and balmy but potent. It spurs the Ilocanos to activity and industry.

One town of Ilocos Norte which figured prominently in the Basi revolt is Piddig. The basi is produced in almost all barangays and is considered one of the town’s principal products. A degree of specialization in trade and industry was developed in each town during the Spanish period and Piddig was the center of basi-making, that is why during the wine monopoly, Piddig was the hardest hit town.

Another town where a significant event in the Basi Revolt is Vigan. Juan de Salcedo established Vigan as Spanish city in January 1574, for the purpose of controlling the neighboring country. As a reward for his services to the King, Salcedo was awarded the old province of Ylocos which then composed of the Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Abra, La Union and some part of Mountain Province as his encomienda and was accorded the title as Justicia Mayor de esta Provincia de Ylocos.

During the Spanish regime, a number of armed protests, or alzamientos, took place in the Ilocos. The well known local uprisings against the Spanish colonizers that rocked the Ilocos were led by a certain Dingras in 1589; Pedro Almazan of San Nicolas in 1660; Andres Malong of Pangasinan in 1661; Diego and Maria Josefa Gabriela Silang of Ilocos Sur in 1762; and Juan Manzano of Bacarra and Laoag in 1788; and a certain Lugao of Ilocos Norte in 1811. The Silang Revolt was perhaps the most famous uprising in the Philippines under the rule of Spain.

The Tobacco Revolt of 1788 was launched against the monopoly established by Governor-General Jose Basco y Vargas in his desire to increase the revenue of the Philippine government (Antonio, et al, 2007). After a century of existence, the tobacco monopoly finally ended in 1881.

The 1896 revolution led by Andres Bonifacio also spread to the Ilocos region, counting among its leaders such prominent men as Gregorio Aglipay who also founded the Philippine Independent (Aglipayan) Church.
Then occurred the “Basi” (Ambaristo) Revolt of Ilocos of 1807 which was precipitated by the wine monopoly which prohibited the manufacture of basi, the native drink of the Ilocanos. The wine monopoly prohibited its manufacture except by those authorized by the government to do so. Its manufacture was permitted only in certain places. The indios (natives), whom the Spaniards called, were under contract to deliver their basi at such a low price that no one would want to produce it, were it not for the fact that he would surreptitiously retain part of his produce.

After the manufacture, the official authorized to receive the basi usually downgraded the quality, i.e. from first class to second class, so that the manufacturer would be paid less but which would be sold to the government as first class, thus, the middleman profited in the process while cheating the natives. The wine was classified according to its proof strength or percentage of proof. The high quality wine was reserved for the Spaniards and the officials. Basi with the lowest quality or proof would not be bought, thus the poor Ilocano was, in the end, the one who would drink the poor quality basi.

The Ilocanos were grieved by the government monopoly of wine and the prohibition of their free use. This aroused their ire and courage to raise arms against the government in open revolt. The uprising started in Piddig, Ilocos Norte, spilled to the adjacent towns, moved south to Ilocos Sur, and ended in Vigan.

The revolt was recorded by some Spanish missionaries who witnessed the event. These few accounts written in Spanish are kept at the Archivo Agustiniano in Valladolid, Spain. Roberto Blanco Andres, who read these accounts, summarized them in one journal, also in Spanish.

In addition to these written accounts, the major events of the Basi Revolt were also recorded on canvas. Esteban Villanueva, an Ilocano from Vigan (Artigas, 1916) was commissioned by the Spanish authorities in 1821, some 14 years after the revolt was quelled but having reportedly been a witness, he was able to produce vivid portrayals. The canvasses were 91.44 cm x 91.44 cm and depict the scenes of the Basi Revolt in a two-dimensional way, and patterned after the 14 panels of stations of the cross (Villanueva, 1971). The paintings of the Basi Revolt were found in the family’s storeroom in 1951 and are now housed in the Father Burgos Museum in Vigan City.

Theoretical Framework

This research study is grounded on the Conflict Theory of Karl Marx and the Interpretive Theory of Max Weber.

Karl Marx (1818 – 1833) emphasized that there are two social groups: the ruling class and the subject class. The ruling class oppresses and exploits the subject class. According to this theory, stratification exists because people occupying the upper levels of the hierarchy are able to use their wealth, power, and prestige to exploit those occupying the lower classes (Alimbuyuguen, et al, 2009).

The research study is also based on Interpretive Theory of Max Weber (1864-
1920). Interpretive theory gives the reader a feel for another’s social reality and an in-depth view of a social setting. The theory does this by revealing the meanings, values, interpretive schemes, and rules of living used by people in their daily life. According to Alimbuyugyen et al. (2009), Weber believed that conflict arises because of the presence of social stratification.

**Methodology and Materials**

The research is historical using the historical design with archival work as the primary data gathering technique. Historical research is the “systematic and objective location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events” (Cohen and Manion, 1980), as cited by Ardales (2001). Archival documents from the *Ereccion de Pueblos (1807-1897)* Book II, Spanish Documents Section, National Archives of the Philippines as translated by Maria Luisa Garcia were utilized in the study. The study was undertaken in Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur.

The researcher asked the help of a panel of at least two experts who validated the interpretation of the archival document and the paintings with regard to their historical and axiological significance.

The ample 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, the historical and the axiological relevance of the *Basi* Revolt.

**Discussion of Results and Findings**

During the 16th to the 19th century, the spirit of rebellion was widespread throughout the Philippine archipelago.

**Precipitating events.** The *Basi* Revolt was brought about by several interrelated factors.

**Disruption of the lifestyle of the Ilocanos.** The control of the manufacture and consumption of *basi* crippled the relaxation activities and ritual lives of the Ilocanos. And this made them resentful and angry. The poor quality *basi* was only made available to the Ilocanos because of the wine monopoly, hence, the cheap *basi* was regarded as embarrassing in its use during the *panangas-asawa* (betrothal ritual) and the wedding ceremony. Likewise in all rituals related to death, using cheap *basi* seemed to reflect superficial sorrow for the demise of a relative and low regard for him as a person.

Since the native wine was likened to holy water in its power to drive away evil spirits, there may have been the tendency to believe that its effectiveness depended on its strength or quality. Likewise, when used as medicine for treating snake bites, *basi* of higher quality was considered more effective.

**Loss of a major source of livelihood.** Farming was the primary source of living of many Ilocanos during the 19th century, with sugarcane as one of its major products. Sugarcane extract was turned into molasses and fermented into *basi* and *suka* (vinegar) that is why the *basi* industry was
a profitable trade. Thus, the *basi* monopoly was a double jeopardy to the Ilocanos since they lost both *basi* and *suka* (vinegar).

**Pent-up frustration and anger over Spanish abuses.** The *basi* monopoly was not the first experience of the Ilocanos regarding Spanish abuses. There were others, and a significant one was the tobacco monopoly which caused much hardship to the people.

In 1782, Governor-General Jose Basco y Vargas placed the planting of tobacco under the supervision of the government. The Spanish government designated Ilocos Norte, Cagayan, Isabela, La Union, Ilocos Sur, and Nueva Ecija (Boncan, 2006) to plant tobacco. Farmers were given quota on the number of tobacco leaves that they needed to sell to the government. If a farmer planted more than the quota, the government confiscated the surplus without payment (Boncan, 2006). The tobacco leaves were made into cigarettes in factories owned by the government.

When a similar control was made on *basi*, their political suffocation became unbearable, that the people’s frustration and anger led to desperation, so they were willing to stand up for their rights against the Spanish authorities.

**Social desperation.** The Ilocanos’ bitter experience with the Tobacco Monopoly, and the control of the *basi* industry by the Spaniards which greatly disrupted their cultural, social, and economic lives led to a feeling of hopelessness. This collective feeling and the dread that they will remain forever impoverished must have brought them to the brink of despair. They felt that the government had done something they objected to and there was nobody whom they could expect help from, except themselves. So they decided to do something about it.

**Motivation brought about by other Ilocano revolts.** The inspiration to assert and fight for their rights must have been drawn from other Ilocano and Filipino Revolts. Andres Malong raised arms against the brutality of the Spaniards in Pangasinan (1660). Pedro Almazan, who also proclaimed himself king of Ilocos, attacked the church of Laoag and Bacarra (Ilocos Norte) with his follower and ordered one Augustinian friar killed.

In 1762, Diego Silang of Ilocos Sur used the arrival of the British in Manila to urge his fellow Ilocanos to refrain from paying tribute and rendering *polo* (forced labor) and to revolt instead. He ordered the friars’ arrest and established good relations with the British. However, a follower of Silang was ordered to kill him. Despite the death of Diego Silang, the revolt continued under the leadership of his wife, Gabriela.

**Phases of the Revolt**

The events that occurred during the *Basi* Revolt which lasted for twelve days (September 16 – 28, 1807) could be divided into different stages.

**The outbreak of the rebellion and the march toward the south.** The revolt started on September 16, 1807 at the mountainous area of Piddig, east of Laoag. The initial plan of the *basi* farmers was to march to the *Alcalde Mayor* of Vigan to air their grievances.

From Sarrat, on the 20th of September, at 11:45 in the morning, the farmers
entered Laoag which is the most heavily populated locality of northern Ilocos with almost twenty-five thousand souls (APAF, bundle 98/7, Manila, 1802, Manuel Aparicio, Provincial). They encountered practically no opposition and gained more sympathizers to their cause. Pedro Mateo, together with Ambaristo, met with the parish priest of the locality, the Augustinian Manuel Arnaiz, to whom they explained for the first time – their sentiments, establishing that their complaints were due to the extortions of the guards (bantay), their opposition to the monopolies, and to the enforced enlistment of married men and those with children as recruits to enforce the monopolies.

The Garasgas Bridge and the defeat of Escobedo. To reach Vigan, they had to go south from Laoag, passing through San Nicolas. A few kilometers away from Batac, Padre Abella, the parish priest in that town tried to stop the “armed” farmers by destroying the Garasgas Bridge located at the northern approach of the town. Being unsuccessful, they were left with no choice but to escape to avoid being captured. Encountering no more opposition in Batac, the insurgents proceeded toward Paoay.

On the 24th of September, a small contingent of Spanish guards under the leadership of Tomas Escobedo, a Spanish official stationed in Ilocos Sur entered the town of Badoc and met the rebels head-on in the plains but were defeated in barely half an hour fight, losing thirty nine men and thirty two rifles, including the cannon. This was the first major armed conflict that the rebels had won, which strengthened their resolve not to compromise.

The re-structuring of the defense by the Augustinian friars. The Spanish authorities prepared for the rebels. They forced the natives in Badoc to join their ranks to fight the rebels. There were few men who evaded military conscription and the rest incited the aggrieved natives to join the rebels raise arms. In due time, the growing number of protesters became a potential striking force with strongholds in Piddig, Sarrat, Laoag and Batac.

Informed of the insurgents’ plan to attack the capital of Vigan, the Alcalde Mayor ordered 36 soldiers with a cannon and two platoons of civilian guards to repulse the rebels entrenched in Badoc. However, the rebel army proved too strong because they easily annihilated the government troops, in the process of capturing a prized weapon – the cannon – which the troopers abandoned.

Emboldened by their initial victories, the large insurgent army continued their march southward and the Spanish authorities prepared for them. The Augustinian parish priests in the rearguard, responding to an order of the Alcalde Mayor of Vigan, Senor Alonso Corrales y Lema, gathered forces and proceeded to the south, had begun to organize the defense and counter-offense.

The priest of Badoc, Padre Vicente Febres meticulously reorganized the defenses of Badoc, a town which was the retaining wall to protect the entire north. He spent much money to buy reeds or bamboo to surround the town. He fortified the belfry with rocks and placed a large supply of arrows in it as well as food and water. To avoid problems, he drilled a hole in the cannon that was called Violento, which had been left behind by the rebels (Mas, 1842).
The parish priest of Magsingal during the night thought of an ingenious trick: after sending more spies and sentries to survey the nearby places, he ordered that the beating of the drums and the lighting of lamps at night be intensified so the insurgents would believe that the number of the loyal forces was very large. He also devised a system of signals from the tower of the church to the nearby mountains to pass on any information on what was taking place among the defenders.

**Conclusion of the revolt.** Shortly afterwards, sometime that afternoon, the rebels began to leave Santo Domingo, with the intention of proceeding to the town hall of Vigan. The signal for their departure was two drum rolls and the firing of the two shots. P. Arriortua, who witnessed the scene, rushed out of the town, fearing that he would be captured by the rebels and to warn the alcalde mayor.

There was no time to do anything more. On the 28th of September, at some point in the vicinity of Santo Domingo, beside the Bantaoay River, a great crowd of rebels who in the last twelve days had traveled through the major part of the northern sector of the province, finally encountered the troops commanded by the alcalde mayor (Artigas, 1916). Up to that moment, nothing and no one had been able to stop them, not even the Augustinian parish priests and the troops in the localities through which they passed. Accounts state that the Spanish troops, comprised of natives of Batac, Santa Ana, Narvacan and Santa Maria, defeated the rebels, who from that time on, began a rapid escape toward the towns they came from.

Rebels on far side of bank were met by Spanish force riding out of Vigan. Better-armed loyalists have inflicted casualties on rebels with arquebuses (obsolete portable firearm having a matlock operated by a trigger and supported for firing by a hook) and cannon. Dead and wounded were floating on the Bantaoay River

**The defeat of the insurgents.** That horrible battle on 28th day of September, 1807, noon time, decided the fate of the revolt. The waters of the Bantaoay River turned red with the blood of the wounded and the dead. The insurgents were defeated. This was the end of the insurgents’ grandiose plan of freedom.

The bodies of several insurgents were subjected to mutilation by the Spanish soldiers. A third painting done by Villanueva shows the dead rebels laid on the ground and being beheaded. Their heads, placed in wire cages, were hung in the town halls to serve as a warning to future offenders. Augustinian sources provide information on the retreat of the insurgents (Vela, 1919). It is possible that the rebels tried to regroup at some points in the north. When they passed Magsingal, one of their leaders called Barrigon, still tried – unsuccessfully – to arrange for some kind of intercession with the parish priest Justo Hermosa by means of drawing up a document presenting the demands of the insurgents. The refusal of the Augustinian was met with challenging words from the insurgent: “The islands will be annihilated if we are not granted what we ask for”.

Before abandoning Magsingal, several houses were looted and a plan to assault the convent, but perhaps the fact that the troops of the Alcalde Mayor were nearby, prompted them to quickly
abandon the village, leaving behind some injured men. The rumors gathered by the parish priest indicated the movement of the rest of the rebels to Badoc, with the intention of killing a priest and subject the town to “blood and fire”, “for having allowed the soldiers to go free”. The soldiers referred to are the survivors of the defeated troops of Escobedo (Vela, 1919).

In Badoc, P. Vicente Febres, the parish priest of Badoc received a letter from the gobernadorcillo of Sinai informing him of the intentions of the rebels who were proceeding toward the north. As the enemy got closer, he distributed flags that were to be used as countersigns and gave twelve vintines (copper coins) to each gobernadorcillo to be used for communication between the troops. He inspected the positions, together with the priest P. Alvano. As a last resort, P. Febres stayed behind to wait together with his servant, Vicente Zucimo, and with Policarpo Comlejo, a discharged soldier in Manila, to protect the cannon Violento, with pistols and shotguns, and instructing that they would fight hammer and nails in case the rebels break through the defenses (Vela, 1919).

Fortunately for Fr. Vicente Febres and the inhabitants of Badoc, the rebels did not attack the locality. The final chapter of the rebellion of 1807 ended with the sentencing to death of the accused leaders. A certain source says that about five or six of the leaders were captured, brought to Vigan and hanged, and that it was in this way that the authorities put an end to the uprising (Mas, 1842).

**The aftermath of revolts**

The Basi Revolt had its tragic culmination. A picture of the revolt painted by Esteban Villanueva subtitled Decapitacion de los condenados a esta pena (beheading as penalty for those condemned) showed that the condemned insurgents were beheaded as a punishment to what they had done to the Spanish authorities. The latter intentionally let the public witness the decapitation for people to be intimidated from imitating what the insurgents had done. This left an indelible mark in the minds of people, as a consequence of rebelling against the government.

Although the Basi Revolt was a failure, the Ilocanos were not alone in their quest for freedom. All throughout the archipelago, at different periods of the Spanish colonization, the Filipinos took arms in rebellion, to free their beloved Philippines from Spanish oppression. The Katipunan was a better organized movement in the early 1900. The Filipino freedom-fighters valiantly fought against the aggressors. The revolts mirrored the bravery and strength of character of Filipinos who did not hesitate to fight the colonial government when needed.

**Key Players**

The Ilocanos especially the Piddiguenos and Spaniards played significant roles in the Basi Revolt.

**Pedro Mateo and Saralogo Ambaristo (Leaders of the Basi Revolt).** Pedro Mateo was the
principal leader of the Basí Revolt. According to an unpublished manuscript from the Municipal Library of Piddig, Ilocos Norte, Pedro Mateo y Apostol was a mestizo member of the town elite, the principalia. He was married to Juana Manuel y Guillermo.

At 40 years old, the cabeza was known as an educated man and a ranking citizen of Piddig. During his term as town chief, he was convicted for physical injuries against Mariano Estavillo, also of Piddig. On March 04, 1785, he got involved in a duel with someone in Sarrat. Both were wounded and upon investigation, Pedro Mateo was set free.

Two months later, Mateo again figured in a homicide case after coming from the hut of Juan Barroga. Mateo and two of his Tingguian friends, Dodoc Macag and Salin, were joined by a mestizo, Jose Narciso. When the group ran out of basí, they agreed to look for more wine in the house of Agustin Domingo in nearby Nagtaruna (Sitio of Barangay Abucay, Piddig, Ilocos Norte). Barroga and the two Tingguian friends took separate route from Mateo and Narciso. When the two groups got near each other, Narciso, without provocation, pulled out his dagger and stabbed Mateo three times, injuring his fingers. Mateo hit back at Narciso with a dagger, killing him instantly.

The next day, Mateo faced trial in the Municipal Hall of Piddig. He pleaded self-defense. The Municipal Judge, Jose Mariano Cubillas, sentenced Mateo for five years imprisonment. Mateo’s lawyer, Don Joaquin Bernardo, filed bond of release amounting to 200 pesetas and asked for a royal pardon. His petition was granted after the family of the deceased accepted the petition. But for unknown reasons, the case was elevated to the Supreme Court in Manila on March 04, 1800.

From the groups of deserters rose a native leader named Saralogo Ambaristo, the son of a mestizo, from Laoag and a Tingguian woman. Known as a man of few words and a hardened fighter, he was not afraid of the guard of the estanco (government store) whom he held responsible for the death of his wife. Ambaristo, however, killed the two guards and fled to the mountains. His assaults against the Spaniards were matters of personal vengeance only.

One day, the fiery Tingguian met the convicted cabeza from Piddig and the two formed a pact to organize a resistance movement against the colonial authorities and their puppets. Mateo was educated while Ambaristo was unlettered. Hence, Mateo became the leader and strategist while Ambaristo was his right hand man (Unpublished manuscript from the Municipal Library of Piddig, Ilocos Norte).

Padre Agustin Diez (Parish Priest of Piddig). He was sleeping when the insurgents entered the town of Piddig. He quickly tried to stop his parishioners from joining the rebels. He confronted the rebels, scolded, and reminded them that their behavior was against the king, against God and even against themselves.

Gobernadorcillo of San Nicolas. He established contact with the towns of Piddig and Laoag to mobilize troops.

Padre Francisco Antonio Abella (Parish Priest of Batac). Upon hearing about the revolt, he made plans and succeeded in convincing many natives who from the beginning had no intention of joining the rebels (Vela, 1919). Together with the gobernadorcillo and the town leaders, they tried but failed to destroy the Garasgas Bridge in Barangay Bilboa, Batac that was built over the river of the same name, and was the connecting link with the settlements in the north.
Padre Vicente Febres (Parish Priest of Badoc). He feared for his life, but, with his heart in his throat, he faced the rebels to prevent the looting of the pantry of the convent and the capture of the rest of Escobedo’s troops. With a cross in his hand, he faced the crowd from a window, preaching to them to do penance, to reform and be calm; that if the insurgents wanted to kill him, he was there and there was no reason for them to be so rowdy and cause such a disturbance: that in the town, there were many sick people and pregnant women whose lives could be endangered because of all that audacious uproar. Many of the insurgents then dropped their bows and arrows and went down on their knees shouting that they did not wish to kill him, but were only looking for the guards who were hiding in the convent.

He wrote to the Alcalde Mayor advising the latter to send two representatives for the towns in the north, so that they may be informed in Ilocano about the falsehoods that had been disseminated about the monopolies, and the penalty that would be imposed on the transgressors (Vela, 1919). He also warned the Spanish authorities about the intention of the insurgents to enter Vigan through Santa Catalina, the most heavily-forested area where they could take refuge and prepare their artillery.

Padre Justo Hermosa (Parish Priest of Magsingal). He thought of an ingenious trick. He sent spies and sentries to survey the nearby places, and ordered that the beating of the drums be intensified and that the lights as well so the insurgents would believe that the number of the loyal forces was very large. He also devised a system of signals from the tower of the church to the nearby mountains to pass on any information on what was taking place among the defenders.

Alonso Corrales y Lema (Alcalde Mayor of Vigan). Upon hearing about the revolt, he went quickly to Sarrat to quell it, but when he arrived, several Augustinian priests, together with the local judges, had gathered a group of loyal natives who pursued and subdued the rebels and were able to take away the drums which they had seized from the guards.

He issued an ultimatum demanding that the rebels abandon Santo Domingo, Ilocos Sur before 9 in the morning of September 28, 1807, if the insurgents did not wish to be driven away with bullets and gunpowder.

Historical Analysis of the Basí Revolt

The factors that led to the Basí Revolt, the events that took place, and its tragic culmination bring to the fore certain historical realities regarding the regimented
occupation of a peace-loving people, even when tempered with the teachings of a
religion that espouses love. These realities could be vividly seen in the Basi Revolt and other
uprisings of the Filipinos against the Spaniards and other invaders.

**Blatant disregard for a treasured practice is a form of rejection.** Unreasonable
control by government authorities of the production of things that play an important role in
the cultural practices of a people is tantamount to degradation and rejection of that
cultural group. Basi is interwoven into the way of life of the people. It plays a very
important role in rituals from the cradle to the grave. Basi is always present in the
memorable festivities of the Ilocanos. Without basi, the meaning or significance of the
rituals are diminished.

Since basi was valued by the Ilocanos very much, controlling it meant
curtailment of their way of life. Banning its use meant rejecting them as people and a
consequent loss of cultural identity.

**Curtailment of basic freedoms is a violation of human rights.** The Ilocanos in the
Basi Revolt were deprived of their right to utilize their own product. Since basi-making
was a profitable industry, the basi monopoly would curtail their prosperity and prosperity is
a birthright. Since basi to the Ilocanos was very important, prohibiting it to them resulted to
restlessness and upheaval. Their right to life was even affected because the Spanish
authorities killed people who went against their will.

**Curtailment of the right to own property also triggered revolts.** The right to own
property was violated because of the land grabbing by the friars. If the Filipinos do not have
any piece of land to plant to, then they would starve and subsequently die because the
main industry was farming. If this is the case, their right to life is violated. In the Basi
Revolt, the lands owned by the Ilocanos were taken by force and this aggravated the
desire of the natives to rise in arms against the Spanish authorities (Ramirez, 1953).

**Censorship is curtailment of freedom.** In the Basi Revolt, the Spaniards restricted
the production of the Ilocano wine, basi, except by those authorized by the Spanish
government to do so. Its manufacture was permitted only in certain places. The indios were
under contract to deliver their basi at such a low price that no indio would produce basi if it
were not for the fact that he expected to retain surreptitiously part of his produce
(Ramirez, 1976).

After the manufacture, the official authorized to receive the basi classified as second
class those of the first class (down-grading) and these were sold to the government as first
class (up-grading). The high quality wine was reserved for the Spaniards and the officials.
The poor quality was sent to the government stores for sale to the indios (Ramirez, 1976).

**Political persecution engenders courage.** The sufferings of the Ilocano farmers made
them courageously raise arms even if they were outnumbered and were inadequately
equipped and poorly armed. They were armed only with machetes, bows and arrows,
sabers, halberds, (a kind of battle-axe at the end of a long staff) which was no match to the
guns and cannons of the Spaniards. With this, the Ilocanos were not assured of victory and
they were almost sure they would be killed, but still they wanted to express their
grievances and fight for their rights.

**Economic persecution likewise engenders courage.** Prolonged disruption of the
major economic activities of a people often pushes them to desperation. When people
are starved, they use force to alleviate their hunger. This is what happened when the production of tobacco and basi by the Ilocano farmers was controlled by the Spanish government.

Sporadic, uncoordinated revolts are bound to fail. Most of the leaders of the Filipino revolts, overlooked a number of important details in staging an uprising. Most of them lacked planning and acted on impulse. They were usually divided into groups. They did not have an effective means of communication, especially those living in remote places. They lacked leaders who knew military strategies and tactics. The Spaniards used to their advantage the fact that most Filipinos preferred to remain loyal to them.

Although the Basi Revolt was not successful in bringing about the awaited change, it became an inspiring episode in the Ilocano struggle for freedom. The Ilocanos found out that the people were still too weak and unorganized to put up a forceful attack against the Spanish forces (Ramirez, 1976).

Regionalism and lack of unity weakens an endeavour. All the revolts in Philippine history against Spain’s oppressive rule failed due to lack of unity among the Filipinos. The Ilocano insurgents were outnumbered because of the divide-and-rule strategy implemented by the Alcalde Mayor of Vigan that is why the Spanish troops comprised of natives from Batac, Santa Ana, Narvacan and Santa Maria defeated the insurgents.

In the Basi Revolt, Vela (1919) stated that a big number of recruits from Vigan deserted the rebel cause and joined the Spanish forces as they prepared for the insurgents’ assault. This further fired the anger of the rebel leaders and their determination to attack Vigan. Some of the minority members of the principalia convinced the common people or calianes in Vigan to join them instead of the rebels.

Axiological Relevance of the Basi Revolt

The Basi Revolt of 1807, although a failure, showed certain values the Ilocanos possessed and held dear.

Right to life. This right is the foundation of all other rights. It secures individuals not only from physical harm but provides for the promotion of their economic, cultural and spiritual growth. In the Basi Revolt, the Ilocanos accepted martyrdom because they believed that what they were fighting for was of noble purpose coupled with the desire of preserving the sanctity of life. This life is to be enjoyed by the future generations.

Courage even in the face of insurmountable odds. In the Basi Revolt, young men left their families just to join the uprising. They sacrificed the opportunity to be with their families. They were not even sure if they can return to their respective homes alive.

Inspite of the public decapitation of the dead Basi rebels and hanging of their leaders, purposely to warn and frighten future rebels, other rebellions took place in other parts of the country (Constantino, 1975).

Love and concern for family. Basi is an industry which is a source of
livelhood of the Ilocanos. Controlling it meant great sacrifice for the Ilocano family. How will they support their family if the source of their income is taken away from them? How can they sustain the basic needs of the family without this major industry?

**Ilocanos are industrious and diligent.** The *Basi* Revolt highlighted the industry and diligence of the Ilocanos in earning a living, in spite of the limited and infertile soil of the Ilocos region. Planting and harvesting sugarcane are laborious activities. The sugarcane farmers used trunks of hard wood to mill the cane. They go to the forest and gather *samak* leaves to be added to the sugarcane juice.

**Love for freedom.** The *Basi* Revolt was localized in scope, it has nonetheless demonstrated the general characteristic of the Ilocanos – to take the risk and stand for one’s conviction. The revolt was a clear indication that the Ilocanos were dissatisfied with Spanish rule. The revolt was an accumulated resentment of the Ilocanos. They would like to live in a place where oppression, cruelty and lawlessness are free. Once the rights of the Ilocanos were trampled upon, they were willing to sacrifice their lives for a noble cause.

**Love for country.** Nationalism is the feeling of oneness that binds a people to attain a common goal. The insurgents of the *Basi* Revolt showed their love of country by going against the oppressive rule of the Spanish authorities. Even if they lost in the battle field, what they manifested was a fitting tribute to our fatherland for the sake of freedom.

Although all Filipino revolts against Spain did not succeed, there was a common battlecry: the love for country and freedom.

**Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations**

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. 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 hold 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.

**Conclusions**

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 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.

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 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 *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.

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.

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, the Ambaristo Revolt.
Recommendations

The Basí Revolt should be made known to all Filipinos in general and Ilocanos in particular with a more detailed discussion in history books. The historical and axiological relevance of the Basí Revolt should be incorporated in the teaching of Social Studies, particularly in Philippine and Local History, and in teaching Values Education.

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.

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 Basí Revolt”) that commemorates the Revolt annually, to make it also uphold the valiant acts of Pedro Mateo, Ambaristo and the Ilocano insurgents of the Basí Revolt of 1807.
Literature Cited


APAF, bundle 98/7, Manila, 1802, Manuel Aparicio, Provincial


THE AUTHOR

JAYSON LORENZO ANTONIO

The researcher was born on September 28, 1986 to Florentino A. Antonio and Arceli Lorenzo Antonio of Piddig, Ilocos Norte.

He completed his elementary education as class valedictorian in 1998; his secondary education in 2003; and Bachelor of Secondary Education (Social Studies) in 2007 from the Mariano Marcos State University. He successfully passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET).

He served as Municipal Sangguniang Kabataan Federation President and Ex- Officio Member of the Sangguniang Bayan of Piddig, Ilocos Norte from 2002 to 2007. He also became the District IX (Piddig – Solsona – Carasi) Youth Representative of Ilocos Norte Electric Cooperative from 2002 to 2007.

His first teaching experience was at Saint Anne Academy, Piddig, Ilocos Norte. He now teaches at the Laboratory High School of the College of Teacher Education, Mariano Marcos State University. He also has teaching assignments in the tertiary department handling Philippine History, Sociology, Macro-Microeconomics, Economic Planning and Development Strategies, Political Science, and Law-Related Studies in Social Studies.