

# **Some Sources on Women's Participation in the Revolution in Central and Eastern Visayas**

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## **Introduction**

In 1995, two significant events took place in Cebu in preparation for a meaningful commemoration of the Philippine Revolution in 1996 and 1998. One was the 2nd National Echo Seminar held at the U.P. Cebu College in July 20 to 21, 1995. The Echo Seminar was part of the series of activities slated by the Historical Research Committee of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts which is held in various parts of the country. The main purpose of the Echo seminar was to decentralize the writing of history because for a long time it has been so Manila-centered. Local scholars were invited to share their researches and present papers on the revolutionary struggle in the Visayas (Western Visayas had its turn two months later). We set the theme "The Unknown and the Multidimensional Aspects of the Revolutionary Struggle in the Visayas" because such is the status of the struggle in the Visayas in the Philippine Revolution.

The other important event was a Visayan Theatre Festival also held in Cebu City on September 24 to 30, 1995 to give more life and light to this struggle with the theme, "Theater and the Revolution". The main feature of the festival was the staging of three plays on history and the revolution from the three regions in the Visayas. The theater group from Negros presented "Papa Isio... Tingog Sang Kadam-an" in dance drama form using indigenous materials; the group from Samar presented "Balangiga" in Zarzuela form; the Cebuano group presented "Leon Kilat". The plays were presented in their respective languages.

What role did women play in the revolutionary struggle in the Visayas? Where can we find accounts of their participation?

This paper derives its focus from the theme of the Echo Seminar and aims to make visible the contributions of women which were un-

known and multidimensional in the local revolutionary struggle. I have chosen three materials which shed light on this: "Ang Kagubot sa Sugbo 1898" by Manuel Enriquez de la Calzada published in 1951; "Balangiga Story: Massacre or Victory?" by Charo N. Cabardo, published in *Sun Star Weekend*, September 24, 1995 issue for the Visayan Theater Festival. (This was a paper originally written for the Echo Seminar mentioned above but it could not be delivered due to some technical difficulty.) The third is "Symbolic Subversion and the Eskayan Revolution" which is part of the Ph.D. dissertation of Ma. Cristina Martinez done in 1993. I chose these three sources because they are available, they present women in different periods, locales and modes of the struggle in the Visayas, particularly, Cebu, Samar and Bohol. In the first two sources, the Filipinos were victorious, all the more reason to give credit to their struggle to make visible women's contributions. The third source tells of a different kind of struggle, the battle of the mind where the women played an even more major role.

### **ANG KAGUBOT SA SUGBO 1898 (THE REVOLT IN CEBU 1898)**

*Ang Kagubot sa Sugbo 1898* is a collection of 31 accounts of the revolt of Cebu in 1898 by 27 persons who participated in and witnessed that daring revolt against the Spanish colonial government on the 3rd of April 1898. Out of the 31 accounts, only six made mention of women.

1. In the first account, while describing the valor of Tupas in dealing with Legaspi and the prominent men of San Nicolas, the center of revolutionary activities, the narrator comments on the women rather sarcastically: how they looked - their 'make-up' at that time. He patronisingly called them "mga inday" - little girls.
2. In the fifth account, the people are described preparing for the fiesta of San Nicolas. The ill-mannered Cura announced in his sermon that he would not celebrate the Fiesta because there was no *santurum*. He repeated it five times and hurriedly finished the Mass. The *santurum* is an amount paid for any activity held inside the church and this is shouldered by the sponsor of the Fiesta or the Capitania. It so happened that San Nicolas just lost its status as a Municipio and so there was no Capitana to sponsor the occasion. The Cura increased the *santurum* but the people opposed the increase. This angered the Cura. The women who were regular churchgoers were displeased with the actuations of the Cura. They went to the Cura

and they requested him not to be overcome by anger so as not to affect the annual celebration. Though the cura did not give in, the people made sure they had different sponsors for the fiesta every night.

3. In the 8th account, after describing Leon Kilat's<sup>1</sup> virtues, skills and feats which are what attracted the Sugbuanon men to the cause, the narrator adds: "... and the women? At that time, they were quiet, as if not trying to do something for the future."
4. In the 16th account, the narrator describes the preparations for the revolt three days before the attack. The atmosphere was fiesta-like as the men brought weapons. The women were detained in the house to let down their hair because at that time they were not allowed to don the "pinangko".<sup>2</sup> Don Leon ordered that all the "indays" must go to Maestra Claudia Lopez, an important teacher then, because she would give them tips for survival. To escape death, the *maestra* said that everyone had to look as if nothing were affecting them by normally going about their daily chores.
5. In the 19th account, on the day of the attack on Good Friday, a bloody skirmish led the Bisaya nuns of the Colegio de la Inmaculada Concepcion of the order of Sisters of Charity (a Spanish Congregation) to attend to the wounded. The narrator describes how the nuns personally dragged the wounded to the hospital, held vigil, without a fee, without regard to the color or the background of the persons as long as their altruistic mission was fulfilled. The Spanish sisters did not bother.
6. In the 30th account - Mauricio, a farmer, was led to the execution site followed by his grieving family. As he bade goodbye to his family, the son Filomeno, exchanged places with his father. It was dark, and since father and son looked alike and had the same height and build, the exchange was not noticed. While awaiting execution, Maxima, the mother, begged to have a word with the sentenced man. Then Mauricio removed his Carmen (vest)<sup>3</sup> and put it on Filomeno. Both parents kissed him and stepped back. Drums . . . then the shots . . . and Filomeno fell. The soldiers left and the family moved close to check the fallen Filomeno. He was alive - the Carmen had saved him.

It was clear from the negative attitude of the narrator in these accounts how women were generally regarded at the time of the Spanish regime. But although he speaks slightly of women, it is clear from

his narration of events where the women participated (the fifth, 19th and 30th accounts) that far from being powerless, obedient “girls”, they were caring and active women, fully committed to the revolt.

### **“BALANGIGA STORY: MASSACRE OR VICTORY?”**

The Balangiga massacre which tells of the victory of the Warays and the bloody defeat of the American troops in Balangiga on September 29, 1901, is found in several historical accounts (see bibliography). However, Ms. Charo Cabardo’s article, “Balangiga Story: Massacre or Victory?” in the *Sun Star Weekend*, highlights the role of the women in that historical event.

### *Story of the Samareños*

After the capture of General Emilio Aguinaldo by the Americans in Palanan, Isabela, the revolutionary forces of General Vicente Lucban in Samar decided to continue their struggle to achieve independence from the new colonizers.

In January 1900 the arrival of the American troops on Samar shores marked the pacification campaign against fierce resistance led by Gen. Lucban. Atrocities were committed by the soldiers everywhere but this failed to pacify the Samareños.

On August 11, 1901, Company C, composed of 74 men fresh from the Boxer Rebellion in China, arrived in Balangiga, a town in southern Samar where they were warmly welcomed by the people. Unknown to them, the Balangiganons, headed by the town Presidente Pedro Abayan and police chief Valeriano Abanador had decided to follow a deceptive policy so that they would appear to comply with the Americans’ orders until such time as a favorable opportunity arose the people would rise up against them.

### **September 26, 1901**

Police chief Abanador and presidente Abayan suggested to Capt. Thomas Connell, head of the American contingent, that natives from neighboring towns be brought to Balangiga to work out their taxes there. The Captain agreed and 80 husky men were brought in to replace the Balangiganon prisoners that the Americans held captive to do the town clean-up.

But “the 80 prisoners brought in by Abanador were not actually tax workers but 80 of Gen. Lucban’s trained bolomen.” That day, the

women from the neighboring town of Giporlos brought in *salud* (bamboo tuba containers) to the men. Inside the *salud* were bolos instead of tuba.

### **September 28, 1901**

At break of dawn on September 28, a Sunday known as the feast day of St. Michael the Archangel, the contingent from Lawaan (6th company) hurried to the church dressed as women, with a *sundang* or bolo inside their skirts, for the 5:00 a.m. mass for St. Michael. Among the "women" in the church was a real woman, Susana Nacional (Doday Sana), the unofficial caretaker of the church, the *parapamatbat* (the one who leads the prayer) and the only woman left behind. Earlier all the women and the children had been ordered to leave quietly to remain in an isolated place outside the town. Had she gone with the women, the Americans might have thought it odd that she was absent from such an important Church service. She was prevailed on to stay behind, but the Filipino accounts would credit her active role in Balangiga. She rallied the men to fight.

At 7:00 A.M., the people of Balangiga and neighboring areas surprised and attacked Company C of the 9th US Infantry Battalion stationed at Balangiga, killing 48 of 74 American soldiers.

The Balangiga revolt celebrates the valor, courage and heroism of the Filipinos particularly in Eastern Visayas. It was the worst single defeat the Americans experienced in their entire campaign in the Philippines but to the Samareños, it was a revolutionary victory. That women participated in one of the few instances where the Filipino achieved victory is an infallible fact. The women's capacities, which the colonizers underestimated, were used to advantage in the Balangiga revolt. This story illustrates how the women's participation proved crucial in the shaping of history.

### **"SYMBOLIC SUBVERSION AND THE ESKAYAN REVOLUTION"**

It is not so extraordinary that Filipinos fought for independence in a battlefield other than that which entailed blood. Many of our heroes like Rizal had used the written and symbolic form of revolt against Spain. From the colorful history of the Eskayas, one can find that a unified community was able to do just that, with the active contribution from their women members.

*Eskaya* is the name of a cultural community in Guindulman and Taytay in Bohol. Few, if any, have done research on the subject except for Dr. Ma. Cristina Martinez who did primary research on the Eskayas for her Ph.D. dissertation. The acknowledged founder of the Eskayas, Anoy Datahan, articulated their struggle against colonial rule. Eskayan libraries document a long roster of Eskayan heroes who fought actual militaristic battles, but Anoy says that the last and longest of these battles was and still is against symbolic structures, semantic meanings, ideologies and beliefs. For Dr. Martinez, the greatest contribution of the Eskayas to the Philippine Revolution was their revolt against the canons of the cultural hegemony. It was a battle that was waged in the mind, using the ideological tools of domination. By rewriting language, religion and history, the Eskayas have succeeded in looking into the eye of Power and turning its gaze back into itself (Martinez, 1995).

The very foundation of Eskayan ideological subversion against Spain is primarily linguistic. Eskayan texts explaining their language system are assertions that the Bisayas had a highly complex language system and that Spain through a false sense of linguistic superiority, had arrogantly and wrongly leased the language. The Eskayan script, which consists of over a thousand syllabic characters, is of much significance to the Eskayans (Martinez, 1995). The veracity of their claim as to its antiquity can be questioned but no one can question the language's capacity to generate a proud collective identity among the Eskayans. At this point, it is very significant to note that the language is mainly in the hands of women — from the teaching of the script alphabet which comes from the parts of the body to the collection, translation and preservation of voluminous materials which set up their libraries. One material which they refused to show the researcher was “Ang Sagbot ni Marilen”, a kind of secret document that only chosen women of the community could have access to.

The *Eskayan* language, according to Dr. Martinez, is not a national language, it is a language they use everyday. It is more for ritual purposes, more for sacramental purposes as well as very political purposes. As caretakers of cultural materials and propagators of the language in the Eskayan battle against cultural hegemony, the women Eskayans play a very active and influential role. In battles where the use of weapons of war extinguishes women's participation, the Eskayans' ideological battle against the canons of cultural hegemony greatly involves women as cre-

ative teachers and translators as well as preservers of the voluminous materials used to counter the ideological tools of domination. This also disproves the notion that the ideological is a male domain.

Women's lives and experiences in history, particularly the Revolution, are often unknown and multidimensional just like the revolutionary struggles in the Visayas. What the Eskayan women did in the Eskayan rewriting of language, religion and history as a great contribution to the Philippine Revolution against Spain is only one of the women's roles in the unknown and multi-dimensional struggles of the Visayans during the revolution. There are more unknown and multi-dimensional struggles in the various islands of the Visayas awaiting to be discovered, to be studied, to be shared and to be cherished. Studies on these islands and their histories will definitely add life, color, and meaning to the national effort to reconstruct, rewrite, and recast our history.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Leon Kilat formally known as General Pantaleon S. Villegas was a prominent leader of the Cebu Revolutionary group. Leon was believed to have an *anting-anting* (talisman) that protected him from captivity and death. His agility and speed earned him the name Kilat, which is the Cebuano term for lightning.

<sup>2</sup> "Pinangko" refers to the usual hairstyle of the women at that time wherein the hair is woven into a bun at the back of the head.

<sup>3</sup> The *carmen*, which the Katipuneros usually wore for protection, is a thick vest made up of strong cloth and leather. Before they attack, Leon Kilat and his men staged rituals over their clothing and articles so that they would be protected in battle.

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