

## The Katipunan Movement in CEBU: Significance to the Philippine Struggle for Independence

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### ABSTRACT

The study focused on the Katipunan movement in the province of Cebu and its significance to the Philippine struggle for independence. This qualitative research utilized a historical research approach in gathering and analyzing historical evidence. The primary source of data of this study was the research informants. These informants were chosen based on their knowledge of the study. Likewise, the Cebuano Studies Center of the University of San Carlos, Cebu Historical Association Office, Patria de Cebu Archives, and the Historical Association of Cebu (HACE) Office were utilized as sources of data. Books and articles written by expert historians, as evidence of past conditions were also used as secondary sources of data. The main instrument of the study was the researcher and the key informants. However, an informal interview guide with open-ended questions was utilized to aid the researcher. This research was able to ascertain that national history is a product of local history, and that local history provides the foundation and the substance of our true national history; two, the Cebuano Katipunan was patterned after and influenced by Manila, especially in its organizational structure and objectives; third, though influenced by Manila, the Katipunan in Cebu was a struggle of the Cebuanos and some leaders from other parts of the Visayas in the name of independence of the Philippines from Spain (the credits of its victory must be given to Cebuanos and not to the Tagalogs); fourth, women contributed a lot to the success of the Cebuano uprising; fifth, the Cebuanos fought with little else but bravery; some Cebuano secular priests were not passive spectators in Cebuano uprising, and the Katipunan movement in Cebu was an integral part of the national struggle for independence in the annals of Philippine history.

### 1. Introduction

History deals with events that took place in the past. It generally presents the known past. The recording and analysis of experiences of a society comprise the totality of people's history (Montebon, 2010). If we study about what has happened in the past, we always look at important figures, events, groups, ideas, and movements. History is so broad that it can include everything from what has happened anywhere in this world. Learning about history is important because by knowing a bit about what has happened in our world, you can help see why things are the way they are as of now and what will happen in the future.

History is not just about forgettable dates, strange names, and unknown places. It is not just telling students funny stories. History is making us see our past, thereby giving us a sense of being Filipinos. If memory gives us our individual identities, then

history will contribute to a national memory and our national identity. History can serve as mirror that we can use in looking at the world and how to deal with it and its many problems.

History contributes to our being Filipino. When we know about Philippine history, we can understand what it really means to be in the shoes of our Filipino heroes. By reading about the history of the Filipino people, we can understand the pain, the joy and more that people feel when they do something difficult or amazing. History is like a book that we are reading which is filled with many real stories.

There have been a number of books written about the history of the Filipino people. But it is sad to note that these are mostly from the point of views of Manila-based authors. There are only few attempts to discuss the country's history from the local perspective. This is one of the reasons why history lessons are not interesting, but are dull. One of the reasons for this dullness is remoteness, the content of the lessons has no contact, emotional or material, with the students' lives and experiences (Bersales, 2013).

One has to remember that national history is a product of local history. Before there was national history there was local history (Ocampo, 2011). Local history deepens our understanding of national history. It provides the foundation and the substance of true national history.

The researchers' decision to focus on local history are personal. Personal, because ever since they are fascinated with historical figures and events, especially that of Cebu. One area of the history of Cebu that they are particularly interested is the Katipunan movement in the province of Cebu and its significance to the Philippine struggle for independence. The Philippine revolution of 1896-1898 was a national struggle of the Filipino people for freedom. This revolution was waged by the Katipuneros under the leadership of Andres Bonifacio and later on by Emilio Aguinaldo. Surely, Cebu being a very important province in the Visayas took an active part in this historical event. It is but appropriate that general considerations of the Cebuano's participation should be taken into account as a major component of the struggle for Philippine independence.

The researchers hope that this study would help make the study of Philippine history more meaningful and useful.

## **2. Literature Review**

History is the study of things in the past that helps people understand what is happening in the world today. By studying people of the past and their planned "moves", one discovers which moves lead to success or bring to destruction or future decadence. However, each person has to make a fundamental decision whether he or she wishes to be an active player or a "pawn" in the game of history. Active players try to improve the world in which they live through the use of relevant historical accounts. This situation would create a bifurcated notion in the aspect of historical discovery whether it is a fact or a myth, which a historian has to be necessarily objective rather than subjective.

As a nation's memory, history gives the citizens a shared experience with every other person who ever took part in the events of the past. This history gives each citizen a shared experience with every other person living in the present and who may live in the future. It is the link that unites the past with the present and the present with the future.

With this, history ideally shows how a nation was born where previously there was none. It seeks to uncover the emerging forces concealed by prevailing myths and obstructed various forces of actions, reactions, and interactions that entail scrutiny in its quest for truth – a scientific process that makes historians obtain the highest level of objective judgment. It becomes a weapon to people who want to learn lessons of the past in order to ascertain the security of the future.

History is the memory of a nation (Avila, 2009). Memory enables the individual to learn, to choose goals, and stick with it; it avoids making the same mistake twice or repeated many times. History is one of the ways by which a nation builds its identity and direction (Ileto, 1998). The future arises out of the past, and a country's history is a statement of the values and aspirations which, having forged what has gone before, will now forecast what is there to come in the future without any sense of doubt.

History is also a dialogue between the past and the present (Mitchell, 2008). As a nation's people respond to vents in this world, they bring the concerns of the present to their study of the past, which of course, is what determines their present. For where one stands determines what one sees. This is especially true with history. If one stands within the Western tradition

exclusively, he or she may be tempted to see its history as the only story, or at least the only one worth telling. The perspective one takes is also critical. From the point of view of the rich and powerful, the events of history take one shape; through the lens of the poor and powerless, the same events can appear quite different. Mitchell (2008) reiterated that history is not a once-and-for-all enterprise. Each generation will have its own questions and will bring new tools to the study of the past.

Basically, there are two approaches of history: oral and written. Oral history is the term given to any rehearsed and formal accounts of the past that are presented by culturally sanctioned tradition-bearers; to informal conversations about “the old days” among members of the family, ones neighbors, or colleagues to printed compilations of stories told about past times and present experiences; and to recorded interviews with individuals deemed to have important stories to tell (Mojares, 1998). Any individual who is conscious of history can be a potential bearer of the country’s historical heritage.

The tradition of oral history and storytelling as a way to record events reaches back thousands of years ago. Throughout the world, indigenous peoples have orally recounted history for millennia. In the fourth century B.C., Thucydides recounted much of the twenty-seven-year history of the Peloponnesian Wars by relying on oral interviews and recollections (Horsfall, 2002). This fact does show that history is not a mere concoction out of one’s imagination, which some would believe without any form of validation. There must be compelling evidence worth scribbling which would result to an authentic historical manuscript.

It is without doubt that people throughout the ages have learned about the past through oral accounts. Moreover, for many generations individuals who are conscious of history have preserved other firsthand accounts of the past for the record, often precisely at the moment when the historical actors’ memories were about to pass from the scene with exact interpretations. Though of considerable value, early efforts to record firsthand accounts of the past can be termed as “oral history” with most authentic value. While methods of drawing out and recording them were more or less demanding in any given case, the absence of audio and videotape recorders or digital recording devices necessitated reliance on people who would jot down notes and this would raise the questions of accuracy and reliability of what was recorded. Many early interviews were also extemporaneous efforts, conducted with no intention of developing a permanent archival collection by all means to safeguard the veracity of interpretations (Ocampo, 2009).

Nevins started an organized and determined effort to chronicle, safeguard, and make available for future use research collections that are seen to of historical importance. In order to supplement the written record, he came up then with the idea of conducting interviews with participants in recent history. In 1948, he organized his first interview with George McAneny, a prominent figure in New York, and both the Columbia Oral History Research Office – the largest archival collection of oral history interviews in the world – and the contemporary oral history movement was born (Fenner, 1985). This supports the notion that interview is one way to ascertain objectivity of findings not just by relying on mere intuitions of reality.

Oral history, in this study is closely linked to the Katipunan movement in Manila and the Katipunan movement in the Province of Cebu, because some accounts of these events are based on the unstructured interview with people about their lives or events on or before the advent of the Spaniards, or as a continued resistance.

On the other hand, written history involves collecting and investigating historical information and graphic documentation. As much as possible, historians have to base their reports on primary source materials such as inventories, company records and annual reports, correspondence, letters, trade catalogs, period newspaper accounts from professional and trade journals, and relevant secondary or published materials. Published materials provide general background and set the overall context for controversial historical accounts.

However, an uncritical acceptance of everything that is written about individuals and events may distort historical impressions and mislead students of history in their attempts to understand certain periods. Ocampo (2011) stated that it is only within the context of a people’s history that individuals can be correctly appraised. In a written history from the point of view of the people or any individual will be seen in proper perspective within the generality of a historical process and only then specificity of these records will be correctly understood.

These points try to show both the importance and the relationship between oral and written history, which does not only yield certain problem but transcends an antidote to establish a better world order in perfect harmony of everybody. The scribbled words of individuals about their past pertaining their lives or experiences are based on memory becomes a precious piece of historical recollections (in the form of memoirs, autobiographies, and interviews). Because memory is imperfect, recollections

are often distorted in some ways that primary sources are not. Two of these many volumes of written sources like the books and articles by expert historians present a maze of details and interpretation which are not theory-free. Obviously, granting without simply admitting, most of the historians' concepts lack a rigorous definition, are dubbed as vague, applied inconsistently, are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. They organize evidence as they write works, and follow their rules for seeking evidence and asking questions in the context of their own upbringing or orientation. Thus, there is an urgent need for thorough verification and validation.

## **5. Statement of Objectives**

This study aims to:

- a. trace the Katipunan movement in Cebu based from the oral and written sources;
- b. determine the significance of the Katipunan movement in Cebu to the national struggle for independence; and
- c. develop a module on the Katipunan movement in Cebu.

## **3. Methodology**

This is a qualitative study that utilized the historical research approach. With this approach, a descriptive method of historiography was used in gathering and analyzing historical evidence. The primary source of data of this study were the research informants. These informants were chosen using theoretical sampling because the purpose of the study is not to establish a random or representative sample drawn from a population but rather to locate people who possess the characteristics relevant to the phenomenon being studied or people who lived during the historical era subject to the study. Likewise, the Cebuano Studies Center of the University of San Carlos, Cebu Historical Association Office, Patria de Cebu Archives, and the Historical Association of Cebu (HACE) Office which are repository letters, diaries, newspapers, novels, and photographs, which are found in archives, in private collections, in family and in museum were also be utilized as sources of data. The main instrument of the study was the researcher and the key informants. However, to aid the researcher an informal interview guide was utilized. This interview was checked by three experts in history to ascertain its content validity.

The researcher wrote letters of request to the key informants of the concerned areas of the study, as well as to the administrators of archives and museums, to formally ask for approval to visit and conduct interviews. When the approval was secured, the researcher did the following: 1) design interview guide schedules; 2) interview key informants; 3) visit local library records, archives, and museums for support information on various aspects and issues of the study. The gathered data were organized, analyzed, and interpreted.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4. 1. Objectives of the Katipunan Movement in Cebu**

Oral and written accounts on the objectives of the Katipunan in Cebu revealed similar intentions, as conceived by the Katipuneros, in Manila: that is to put an end to the abuses of the Spaniards against Filipinos in general and the women in particular, to secure the independence of the country, as well as to help the injured comrades in arms by giving them the proper medical attention they deserve. The aforesaid objectives correspond to the society's three primary objectives: civil, political, and moral. Though these terms have not been used by oral historians who have focused less on taxonomic enumeration of events than on clear declarations of ending abuses against women, ending the rule of Spain, and extending helping arms to fellow Katipuneros as compared to written accounts, these objectives are clearly elucidated. The abuses committed particularly by Spanish priests against Filipino women surfaced in the accounts of all informants. The most emphasized objective, though, in oral accounts is the ignorance of relationship with Spain, that is, to struggle for the independence of the Philippines.

### **4. 2. The Katipunan's Organizational Structure**

Oral narratives on this feature generally rest on positive surmising that the Katipuneros in Cebu must have some kind of Constitution and By-laws. As to who must have authored such Constitution and By-laws, the key informants do not have the information. In general, oral accounts specify that the Tagalogs wrote the Constitution, and this was adopted by the Cebuanos.

Written history of the Katipunan points to the secret society's clear organizational structure. Written sources revealed that the revolutionary movement was supervised by three governing bodies; the Kataastaasang Sanggunian (Supreme Council), the Sangguniang Bayan (Provincial Council), and the Sangguniang Balangay (Popular Council). The Supreme Council, was considered to be the highest governing body of the society which comprised of a president, a fiscal, a secretary, a treasurer,

and a comptroller. The Provincial Council, and Popular Council represented, respectively, the province and the municipality or town. The composition of the council established in different provinces and municipalities or towns in the country was similar with the Supreme Council.

From his book entitled *History of the Filipino People*, Agoncillo (2010) said that the Katipunan members were of three kinds: the first grade was called Katipun and wore a black hood in the meetings of the society. This hood contains a triangle with a white ribbon inscribed with the letters Z. Ll. B., the Katipunan characters corresponding to the Roman A and B, meaning Anak ng Bayan (Son of the People) – the password of the Katipun; the second grade was called Kawal (Soldier) and wore a green hood with a triangle consisting of white lines. At the three angles of the triangle were the letters Z. Ll. B. The Kawal wore on his neck a green ribbon with a medal attached at the end. At the middle of this medal is an inscription of the letter K in the ancient Tagalog script. A crossed sword and flag is also inscribed beneath the letter K. The password used by the second grade members of the revolutionary society was Gom-Bur-Za, which was taken from the names of the three martyred priests, Gomez, Burgos, and Zamora. The third grade was Bayani (Hero) and wore a red mask and sash with green borders, symbolizing courage and hope. In front of the mask were white borders that formed a triangle with the three K's arranged in such a way that it appears to be occupying the angles of a triangle within a triangle. At the base of the mask were the letters Z. Ll. B. placed in a horizontal row. The password used by those who belonged to the third grade was Rizal. In order for the members of this secret revolutionary society to recognize each other in the street, they adopted countersigns. A member who is going to meet another member should place the palm of his right hand on the breast, and as he passed the other member he will have to close his hand and join the index finger and the thumb together. The Kawal could become a member of the Katipun class if he had recruited several members into the society, while the Bayani could become a Kawal upon being elected an officer of the society. Members who fail to keep the secrets of the revolutionary society are usually meted with the penalty of expulsion from the organization.

Initially, recruitment of new members of the revolutionary society was through the triangle system. A katipunero (revolutionary) will recruit two new members who did not know each other but both knew the katipunero. However, this method of recruitment was replaced by another method which allowed the katipuneros (revolutionaries) to recruit as many members as they could manage. The new members would have to go through initiation rites which would require them to swear to the secrets of the Katipunan and to defend the aims of the society. They would sign the Katipunan membership register with their own blood, which was an ancient ritual called blood compact.

#### **4. 3. Women's role**

Not much information appears to sum up the answer to the questions of who were the women in the Katipunan movement in Cebu, as well as what their roles were. But a general picture emerges from the oral accounts, enough to advance the view that there were active women Katipuneros informally, if not formally (that is, they may not have been official members but still actively playing important roles in support of the movement). For instance, one oral account informs that, with their husbands playing active roles in the Katipunan, the wives inevitably became part of the movement as cooks, if not tending sick or injured members who could not be brought to the hospitals to protect or maintain secrecy.

Historical records regarding the participation of Cebu's women in the Katipunan movement are scarce. Some reasons may be cited to explain this: one, the generally patriarchal orientation of society, including its writers, which tends to marginalize women or what they do; two, the tendency to take for granted such activities as meal preparations and the like, and the consequent silence of writers over such-to-do-them-quotidian cares; and, three, the only recent awakening of the producers of narratives to gender studies.

The invisibility of the Cebuana in the Revolution is explained by the common view that the proper subject of history are the "louder" aspects, like leadership successions, battles, elections, coup d'états, assassinations, and others, where women seldom get pieces of the action. Not that there was some grand conspiracy to exclude women from history. Let's just say that since men dominated its writing, they naturally depict those activities that interest them. But that's not all. The lack of sensitivity to women's attitudes and feelings has led to an extension of their traditional roles and images, even in such dangerous times as the Revolution: as morale boosters, cooks, waitress, nurses, laundresses, etc., as if their whole reason for being was to serve the males and become expendable when needed.

In thinking about the involvement of women in revolution, the most obvious area to explore is their place in battle, because this afforded new occasions for females to prove their worth in the males' eyes. A friar thus describes how women, though

“accustomed to the boudoir and dedicated to needlework and embroidery,” were entitled to be called “heroines” as they fought fires, carried water, and even took up guns when necessary (Alburo, 2001).

Civilian involvement in revolutionary activities provided other important avenues for female participation. Taken outside the home and placed in the service of the nation, domestic activities like cooking, became heroic and patriotic acts. One female occupation which was of immense significance in revolutionary symbolism was the production of flags and banners. Although possession of such flags was obviously a matter of great concern to individual leaders, the standard works give scant attention to the women who cut and stitched the fabric and who were responsible for translating ideas into reality. The stereotype of the elite woman who occupied her time by embroidery that served no important function was thus turned upside down. For soldiers at all levels, the Filipino flags sewed by their womenfolk and carried to battle were themselves the source of protection, the anting-anting of independence. Like the preparation of tasty food for revolutionary meetings, even when ingredients were limited or unavailable, the dedicated sewing of republican banners and uniforms until late in the evening was for women a manifestation of their commitment to the movement.

Philippine women in the late nineteenth century were provided with a range of opportunities by which they could display their “courage.” This does not mean, however, that the old ambiguities disappeared. Despite greater female participation in political life, a relationship with a woman could “constitute an obstacle to the attainment of a career. And while the Katipunan charter depicted women as potential partners, it also stressed that men should remember female “weakness.” “Partnership” did not bring women into men’s activities as equals, but as helpers, albeit valued ones (Wani, 2010).

The Katipunan was originally founded as an organization for men only, and while the organization of the women’s branch paralleled that of the men, the initiation rites omitted the blood compact, which was an essential symbol of male bonding. Although women members also wore masks, sashes, and carried side arms, they were not normally party to the secret sessions, serving instead as outside guards and decoys. The service of such women might have been valued, but they remained a support group for revolutionary action in which men were the primary players.

#### **4.4 Leadership**

Written sources seem to provide more details than oral sources about leadership in the Katipunan movement in Cebu, though both generally share in the notion that leaders occupy high ranks in Cebu society.

#### **4.5. Propaganda Materials**

Not much information on propaganda materials of the Katipunan movement in Cebu could be gleaned from oral and written narratives, beyond surmising that there must have been some leaflets or written materials. Oral and written accounts normally connects this possibility with the financial backing of the well-off members of Cebu society. The use of amulets or talismans the Cebuano katipuneros, as all oral accounts point may be viewed as contributive to advancing the cause of the Katipunan.

#### **4.6. Weapons**

Oral sources regarding weapons used by Katipuneros in Cebu mention the following: spears, bolos, rifles that constitute part of the spoils of surprise attack, as well as amulets. The Katipunan in Cebu prepared its own weapons—such as bolos, spears, a few guns, among others without help from Manila. This is supported by extant documents on the Philippine revolution that prove that the Katipuneros fought with little else but bravery, with few guns, fewer bullets, and no target practice. According to written or published historical accounts, the following constitute the weapons of the Katipuneros: bolos, knives, spears, guns, cannons, pointed stakes (placed at the bottom of hole-traps), as well as amulets. Bolos, knives, and spears were used by the Katipuneros in their encounters with the Spanish soldiers. After several encounters with pro-Spanish government soldiers, the Cebuano rebels had acquired more guns. There was always the lack of bullets and the need to reload spent or used cartridges. The Katipuneros reloaded empty cases with homemade gunpowder made from saltpeter or salitre mixed with ground charcoal and sulfur. They used primitive primers and had no way of knowing the exact proportions to make good gunpowder. Also, they did not have the right recipe for the mixture of gunpowder and the lead they beat into bullets. Naturally, some of these crude reloaded bullets exploded in their guns and injured the Filipinos rather than the enemy. Jammed guns were the least damage these reloaded cartridges caused.

The revolutionaries were also known to have used power objects or amulets. Rather than directly confronting their enemies, it was important for the members of the Katipunan movement, to have a psychological support to bolster their determination

to fight. Because of these amulets, many people who joined the Katipunan felt enthusiastic about their cause and fearless of bullets. The only people who felt afraid were those who did not join the revolutionary cause, hiding in the big houses of the city (Bersales, 2012). On the other hand, the Katipuneros nourished in their hearts pure faith in what they had in their mouths and on their foreheads.

#### **4.7. Participation of Priests**

Oral history is generally silent on whether priests played an active role on the side of the Katipunan. There is also a dearth of written information relative to the participation of priests in the Katipunan movement in Cebu. Published information seems to have been limited only to at least four priests named in the historical accounts of Cebu's local historians: Fr. Toribio Padilla (Sy, 1996), Frs. Francisco Blanco and Doroteo Ayaso (Sales, 1935), and Fr. Juan Alcosoba (Sales, 1935). Even so, the nature of their involvement with the Katipunan appears to be, at best, associational (Mansueto, 2013).

#### **4.8. Local Volunteers**

Both oral and written sources point to the existence of the Battalion of Loyal Volunteers that aided the Spaniards in suppressing the Cebu uprising of 1898. Both sources also reveal that some of the members of the local volunteers are members of the secret society and it secretly supported its cause.

#### **4.9. Influences from Manila**

Both oral and written sources indicate that the Katipunan movement in Manila influenced the Cebu Katipunan in terms of the objectives of the movement. However, logistics, supplies, and funds necessary to the life of the movement were almost purely provided by Cebuano leaders.

#### **4.10. Significance to the National Struggle for Independence**

The impact of the Katipunan movement in Cebu on the national struggle for independence may be seen in oral accounts that point to the Cebu Katipuneros' ability to implement plans or activities whenever these are also implemented in Manila. This implies an underlying unity or coordination between the Cebu and Manila based movements. This is something that is difficult to quantify, it can safely be assumed that the struggle for independence in the national capital region would have been regional in scope if other places outside Manila such as Cebu did not join in the struggle. The struggle, thus, may be said to have assumed a truly national dimension with the active participation of other provinces like Cebu.

There is a sense of Cebuano kinship with Manila relative to the national struggle, or what is now known commonly as the Philippine revolution. That the Katipunan movement in Cebu appeared to have used its own resources to help advance the national cause attests to its oneness in belief with the Katipunan movement in Manila. For the Katipunan movement in Cebu did not rely on Manila for financial support. The leaders of the movement in Cebu were wealthy enough to spend for the Katipunan's needs relative to food, medicine, and similar needs on the part of the Katipunan members' families.

### **5. Conclusion**

National history is a product of local history. It is local history that provides the foundation and the substance of true national history and identity. Studying one's locality will make the study of history more alive as changes through time, and the large elements of continuity between the present and the past become clearer. Local history should be taught as one of the contents in history subject. It provides students the opportunity to investigate and to form connections between past and present, thus, giving them important life skills. By including local history in the curriculum, history lessons will be transformed from a dry chalk and talk into an experiential one.

### **6. Suggestions**

The following suggestions are given in light of the findings of the study:

1. the Katipunan movement in Cebu be included as one of the lessons in the teaching of Philippine History in schools in the province of Cebu;
2. the participation of farflung areas in Cebu like Bantayan Island, Camotes Island, etc. in the Revolution be explored by future researchers;
3. more studies on the oral history of Cebu be undertaken; and

4. more in-depth focus in teaching Philippine History be given emphasis, especially the key players in the revolution, so that students may manifest the values of patriotism and respect of one's dignity and pride in the formation of their country's socio-political past.

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