SCRIBBLING THE VOICE OF A TENDE:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHY ON THE WOMEN OF ESKAYA

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INTRODUCTION

In an effort to infuse local history to Philippine history (a subject I am teaching in the University), I brought my students for a day’s exposure sometime in 1999 to Taytay, Duero where the Eskaya community is located. My students and I expected a rich cultural past of the community intertwined with the country's historical heritage.

The Eskaya communities can be found in the southwestern part of Bohol but are dispersed among the three towns of Duero (Taytay), Guindulman (Biabas), and Pilar (Lundag) [see map of Bohol]. They are noted for their own system of writing, language, and literature although they look like the contemporary Boholanos and speak the Cebuano.

In 1621 during the Tamblot Rebellion, the center of culture was in Antequera, in the north central part of the island. Upon the defeat of Tamblot who was their “beriki” (mystical leader) and known to them as Babaylan Tumod (eloquent speaker), the Eskaya moved on to the southwestern part of Bohol where they are now located.

Many of the ways of the Eskaya are common among the island’s rural folks. What is notable, however, is that the Eskaya community strictly observes segregation of the sexes. It is this peculiar practice that has perked my interest in knowing more about them as a community.
The idea of segregation of sexes in certain activities has appalled my egalitarian senses. It is my belief that in these times, activities human beings undertake cut across sexes. It now became my foremost goal to look into how women and men of the Eskaya community relate to each other and how the life of the Eskaya woman (tende) differs from those of other women.

This study hopes to capture the diversity and richness of women’s experiences in the Eskaya community. Further, it also aims to build theoretical ideas about women and culture as well as identify gender issues concerning women in this community to serve as basis for initiating social development work in the area.

METHODOLOGY

“If we are to go beyond first world representations of third world women as passive, subservient, and lacking in creativity, then clearly one important task for feminist ethnographers alert to and respectful of the differences between women is to listen well to the stories that other women have to tell, capturing the key images and offering interpretations that mirror the narrative forms they themselves use to tell their life stories.” (Ruth Behar, Translated Woman, 1993)

I wanted to show how similar or different the Eskaya woman is from other women. To do this I conducted an ethnographic study on the Eskaya community between April 2001 and January 2002 particularly anchored on a feminist perspective in the hope of serving the immediate and long term interests of women. Ethnography as a method of research is often associated with an anthropologist who “spends some time living with, interviewing, and observing a group of people so that he or she can describe their customs” [Ember and Ember, 1988]. The conclusions of this study are based on various strategies of collecting information such as observation, participation, interviews on family life with a wide variety of informants, conversations, a focus group discussion, and the use of secondary and primary data. Also, the life history method plays a very essential and large part in soliciting the experiences of my women informants. These varied sources of data are hoped to give justice to my objective of painting a portrait of the tende.

In the course of my fieldwork, I found myself "feeling my way through" the Eskaya community of Taytay, Duero. I had little problem with the language because they already spoke Cebuano. The Eskaya language is only spoken among the Eskaya adults. Upon knowing my research intention, the barangay captain offered me a room in their house which I gratefully accepted. I tried to eat, drink, sleep and move like I was a resident around the community during field visits. I roamed around the community as much as possible when I was not engaged in activities with the family I was staying with. I talked to women at the tanke (water source), at the mini-stage, the basketball court, by the road, at the waiting shed, at the store, and other places where women usually gather or spend their lull periods at different times of the day. I went out of my usual reserved way to approach and talk to people, young and old, women and men. I visited my women informants at their own convenience and time availability. My questions were
random and exploratory at first and later on, more directed. I jotted down notes most of the time as the tape recorder was more of a strange mechanical intrusion which only emphasized the boundary between researcher and informant. It was only a hindrance to openness so I only used it to record some other information. The field notes and the recorded conversations were then transcribed and verified. I joined in the daily routine of the family like pulling weeds in their sayote farm or watching television. I tried to do my share of cooking and washing the dishes but this was always with more insistence on my part because they felt it awkward for me to help prepare the meals and clean-up. I too felt awkward in the process. I later became less of a stranger and researcher to some of the women after being a fixture in the community for the duration of my research.

In this presentation, it is my desire to explore the world of the Eskaya woman, to let her speak through my descriptions of her world. I wanted the voice of the Eskaya woman to emerge, with my own faintly following through as she describes her perception of her world and as I, on my part, explore and scribble it for her. Scribbling the voice of the tende is my own approach to an ethnographic representation of the Eskaya woman.

**MYTH OF ORIGIN**

*Noko Tomao*³

The Eskaya believe that their people originated from the egg of a butterfly called Pinya Paypay Pling. Somewhere in the forest, where large trees called ‘dakit’ or ‘litid’ abound, the Pin met a lion and a lioness. Out of their union came a monkey. The monkey met another monkey and from them were born Edam (woman), Adam (man), and a monkey. Their world is divided into the eribilis (animals), epilis (real people) and jatot (spiritual beings).
Leaving the city to my destination of query brings a shift to my senses. I permitted that change to engulf me as the scenery became more vivid and three-dimensional. The sticky heat of the lowlands gradually ebbed away as the motorcycle I rode on went up the long, winding rode higher in the mountains. Casting a glance at the still-blue sea peeping behind the lush mountainside, I relished everything that my small eyes could see.

A pattern of comforting silence and cold air mingled with the exuberant, unrestrained laughter of children playing in the open court fills the air. This aura never fails to greet and beckon many a visitor to Taytay.

Situated in Duero, a coastal yet mountainous town in Bohol (which is the tenth largest island of the Philippines found in Central Visayas), Taytay is located some 73 kilometers from Tagbilaran, the capital city and 12 kilometers from the town proper. Bounded on the north by barangay Lundag, on the south by Bangwalog, on the east by Guba and the west by Abachanan, Taytay stands atop some rows of mountain peaks overlooking the Pilar Dam, the Mayana Transmitter Site and the Camp Verde mountain ranges. A Provincial Board member passed a resolution in 1951 to separate Taytay from Guindulman and be a part of the town of Duero. It was a sitio of Bangwalog until 1985.
2. Duero

The early settlers used to pass the place by walking on its mountain tops which became a mountain trail for people going to the neighboring barangays. As the people do so, they say “Ah, manaytay mi.” They preferred the mountaintop trail for they were afraid of the wild animals in the forest. That is how the place came to be called ‘Taytay’.

Fresh air engulfed the whole place since it is mostly covered with the thick forest; thus preventing soil erosion. The inhabitants make use of the cool place as haven for vegetable track gardening. Rice fields have taken little part in Taytay.
Most of the houses are small made of wood, nipa and galvanized iron. A number of the houses already have electricity and some have modern amenities too, such as television and radio. Fresh water for drinking is tapped from a nearby spring.
SOCIAL MILIEU

The Eskaya community of Taytay lies hidden beneath the ridges of mountain range. Presently, it consists of 87 households with a population of approximately 500 people. The Bag-o family lives in Taytay. I have chosen them to be the characters of this narrative about some elements of the Eskaya life; particularly focusing on the feelings and experiences of the women. They are real life characters. What goes on the Bag-o family throughout this narrative is a reflection of the Eskaya life.

The two-storey house owned by the Bag-o family is a mix of weathered brown wood, gray hollow blocks, some bamboo lattice by the window, and corrugated galvanized iron roofage. The house strategically stands a good view of the barangay stage, volleyball court, basketball court and the barangay hall. It is higher than most of the other houses in the area. Behind the house is a small sayote patch owned by the family. On one side is an ukban (travesty) tree and on the other side is a row of anthuriums below a canopy of sayote. The sayote is the most important cash crop of the community.

The Bag-os consist of four family members. Capitan Pinong is the father and is called Capitan because he is the incumbent barangay captain in Taytay. Nay (short of nanay or mother) Titing is the wife and mother of two children, Tring and Wendel. While Captain Pinong exudes strength of character behind a jestful disposition, Nay Titing too displays a disarming aura of gentle smile and tranquility. Tring, a sophomore in college is overly timid. She only speaks when spoken to, oftentimes, just giving a nod or sheepish smile as an answer. Her serene disposition matches the manner by which she silently goes about her chores around the house. It does not disturb Tring whether more of the workload in the ba-o (farm) and at home is left to her and less to Wendel. Nay Titing worries more about her and regularly scolds Wendel for not helping her sister. Tring, however, covers up for her brother as Nay Titing observes. She believes that aside from being older, she is also the female thus she has to do most of the household chores. Wendel, on the other hand, a junior in high school, is a hard worker.
when he wants to be. Because he is younger, he tends to pass on to her *manang* chores such as feeding the animals and washing the dishes. He makes up excuses to dodge away from chores and some errands.

The prevalent mindset is that girls and women are expected to be tolerant towards the misbehavior of boys. Consequently, the *tende-saclay* (girl-child) does more chores than the *eros-saclay* (boy-child).

Other houses surround the public structures in the community while a few can be spotted in some hill from afar. Right in the center of the community is the old school for adults and some young members who study the *Eskaya* language. The *Eskaya* is a language with a 46-letter alphabet called *Aspormos Menemé*. But the study of the language came to be non-compulsory. Spoken only among adult *Eskaya* folks, aside from the *Bisayan*, the Eskaya language serves to distinguish the community as an indigenous group of people.

5. Eskaya Alphabet

6. School for Eskaya adults
The *Eskaya* flag with its symbols stands beside the monuments of the founder of the *Eskaya* tribe, Mariano ‘Anoy’ Datahan located in front of the old and weather-beaten school building. The figures include, among others, women symbolizing “*Inahang Yuta*” (Mother Land) interpreted to mean that the tribal community nurtures the ‘*hiyas*’ (virtues) of a woman.

![Map of Eskaya Village](image)

3. Map of Eskaya Village

Beside the old school building is a cemented road that leads to a *barangay* hall and a basketball court. A small, grassy field beside the basketball court is used for an occasional game of volleyball. A little farther is a miniature stage used for community
celebrations. A bermuda pathway slightly zigzags up to the elementary school building. Behind it are rows of tree that hide the sun. It lead to the foot of a hill where the Day Care Center is located.

The Day Care Center has old, dark-gray wooden walls. From its roof hang a scrap hub cap that serves as a makeshift gong to signal time for the kids. Some meters away lies the cemetery where the dead rest on the hillsides underneath low-rafted miniature roofings.

There are four rooms in the second floor of the Bag-o house. Capitan Pinong and Nay Titing usually sleep separately in two different rooms. Nay Titing finds it comfortable sleeping alone. Tring and Wendel each has a room. When I am around, a room is given to me and one of them shares a room with another. Most of the time, however, Tring’s room is free as she only comes home on weekends from a college she attends at Jagna, a town some 12 kilometers away from Duero.

Posted on the concrete wall (without the overlay cement) of the room I am occupying is a calendar-poster of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Two medium-sized windows with barred panels of hard wood provide ventilation. Strips of multi-colored plastic cellophane tied evenly one after the other which serve as makeshift curtain rustle gently as the morning air fills in the room. Rays of light filter between the panels and the swaying of the curtain signals that morning has come to Taytay.

Laminated pictures set on wood of Nay Titing’s family, lineup the narrow hallway. The hardwood floor panels felt cold under my feet. Pictures of Filipino actresses, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and politicians provide color to the otherwise monotonous mix of light gray wooden walls. Fronting these walls is a door that leads to an unfinished veranda. A moderately steep staircase leads to the sala (living room) where a set of varnished dark brown wooden furniture beckon me. No wall divides the living and dining rooms. The same grey walls are decorated with colorful flower cut-outs pasted on cartolina. These are Tring’s works. A little beneath the staircase is a small door leading to the small store owned by the family. The television set is in one corner behind the set of furniture. Beside it stands an old sewing machine. Even without the flooring yet, the kitchen is already functional. Inside it is a small table where the family usually dines.

A WORKING DAY IN THE SAYOTE PATCH

After an early but sumptuous breakfast consisting of fried ampalaya with egg, ‘inon-unan na mangsi’ and a cup of hot chocolate and milk, we readied for a day’s work in the family’s sayote patch. Tring had briskly prepared the morning meal. She takes up much of the chores whenever she is home for the weekend or when school term is over. Already, the pigs and a bunch of native chicken have been fed.

On our way to the ba-o, I made a mental note of the clothing Nay Titing and Tring had worn that day. They were garbed in long skirts over long trousers, long-sleeve polo shirt, and a scarf or bonnet on the head.
The walk to the *ba-o* (approximately a hectare large) which is less than a hundred meters away from the Bag-o house was revitalizing. Aside from the fresh air and slithers of sunrise, I had a good view of the CBRM (Community-Based Resource Management) area planted in terrace-like contours with *durian* and *superjackfruit* on the way. Such was a project of the local DENR (Department of Environment and Natural Resources) for the barangay, taking advantage of the peculiar weather conditions in the area.

I carefully made my way through the *sayote* patch following a trail going to where Tring had positioned herself. Nearby stood a small hut used to shelter the family while working during rainy days. This is the same hut *Capitan* Pinong slept over when he left the house after one quarrel with Nay Titing.

Tring has covered a wide area already, with her weeding out the unwanted grasses growing between the *gabi* stalks and beneath a vast canopy of *sayote*. *Capitan* Pinong, Nay Titing, Tring, and Wendel settled in each of their places of work in the *ba-o*. I did my share of weeding as well, taking out dried leaves hanging from the canopy of *sayote*.

8. Tring weeding the unwanted grasses.

9. Farm
The *sayote* has to be planted in a conducive place where there is enough water and sunshine. A day before a moon is full, the seeds are already sown into holes beneath sturdy poles and criss-cross wires forming a trellis where the vines can hang and creep unto later to have good harvest. Prayers are also offered. The *sayote* can be harvested after a week. One sack usually contains a full 40 kilos of the succulent vegetable. The *suki* (regular buyer) down at the Jagna market buys it in bulk at P3 to P15 per kilo. Sometimes, when there is a surplus, Nay Titing herself sells it in retail.

The *gabi* stalk planted underneath the canopy of sayote were uprooted by Nay Titing and Tring, because the *gabi*’s growth would compete with the growth of the *sayote*. The harvested *gabi* were small. Nay Titing then decided to replant the *gabi* to another site.

*Capitan* Pinong on the one hand continues to clear another patch of land where grass is tall and bushes thick for yet an extension of their *sayote* farm area. Only the sound of his sharp bolo cutting through the thick bushes reminds us of his presence while occasionally butting in our conversations with Nay Titing.

Nay Titing relates that even with enough rain in the mountains, rice, fruit trees, and vegetables are planted still in tune with the phases of the moon. For instance, rice and squash are planted when the moon is full. When harvested, these are expected to be round and full. *Mais* (corn) is planted with the new moon. *Camote* (sweet potato) is believed to be best planted when there is low tide. Farmers use egg shells when planting camote in order to reap unspoiled camote. For some other crops, ‘*tapos-tapos*’ (some kind of a weed), is used to strengthen the flesh of the rootcrop. There are times that planting is done in accordance with cloud formations. *Camote*, for example, is best planted when clouds are of the cumulus type. Sometimes, planting is done during the first Friday of the month.

Overwhelmed by the canopy of *sayote* hanging steadily from the vines, I walked some distance away from the *ba-o* and surveyed the greenery. A small rice field can be seen from afar. The rice field sits in an uncanny position amidst the thick forest and irregular terrain. A house stood at one end of the field. The house is owned by the new chieftain of the Eskaya. He is also the son-in-law of the old chieftain. Only *Tay* (short for Tatay or father) Bian (the old chieftain) owns a considerable area of riceland in Taytay. The women sow the seedlings while the men plow the field. The harvest is distributed between Tay Bian’s own family (as he has remarried) and the families of his two daughters of the first marriage.

There used to be a system of volunteerism followed by the *barangay* folks done in the areas of riceland owned by the whole community. However, some years back, work in the communal riceland has been passed unto a tenant. The tenant gets half of the harvest while the rest of the barangay gets the other half. But the practice of volunteerism has slowly waned and ended because some members of the community do not take part. These members become visible only during the celebration of the harvest.
Harvest season is always a celebration. For every harvest, the community prepares a feast. During such event, it is the men rather than the women, who are responsible for preparing the large cooking pits, and the cooking of the food.

Most of the young women take part in their main livelihood which is to till the field (magba-o), but many of them plan to go outside of Bohol (molangyaw) in order to look for a job. Tring’s friends whom I had the chance to chat sometime during the summer had all left for Manila to find work. Tring is the only one left as she is the only one fortunate enough to study because their earnings from raising sayote sustains her education. She is taking up a degree in education in the nearby town of Jagna at the Bohol Institute of Technology where she is currently in second year college.

It is admirable how Tring, apparently, balances with less effort household chores, farm work, and school at the same time. Nay Titing could very well depend on Tring for an extra hand every now and then.

Nay Titing prodded Tring to go home ahead of the rest when it was nearly dark. She had to prepare supper. When Tring was leaving, the rest slowly collected the freshly picked sayote and placed them in sacks. Each had a load of sayote to carry. Nay Titing and Tring balanced in their heads half a sack each while Capitan Pinong and Wendel had a sack each. When we reached the home, the sacks of sayote were unpacked again. The couple took turns in sorting out the sayote according to sizes and weight. Thereafter, these were again placed in sacks ready to be delivered to their suki. The transporting of these price crops is done by habal-habal (motorcycle) to Jagna or to Tagbilaran through a small bus that comes up to Taytay once a week.

10. Nay Titing weighing the harvested sayote to be sold at the market.
Tring had fed the pigs and chicken already before preparing for supper. Supper was ready when everyone reached the house. Nay Titing shares the dishes with the neighbor when there is more food on the table. This is a common practice in Taytay.

After dinner, by then dusk had fallen, Capitan took his place by a chair in front of the 14-inch black-and-white television set. Aside from the usual newscast, the current telenovelas have fascinated him more than Nay Titing and Tring. Wendel had to watch his favorite cartoon series at the neighbor’s house at times because of the conflict in the preference of shows between him and his father. Nay Titing chatted with us for a while and went up to sleep ahead. Tring had retired earlier saying her daily pangadjion (prayer).

IN THE SHADOW OF THE TRADITIONAL LAW

The Eskaya used to choose their leader solely through succession in which the oldest and wisest among them was chosen as chieftain. In 1987 the mode was changed to election. The community now elects a barangay captain; however, the position of the chieftain was retained so there are two leaders, the chieftain and the barangay captain.

The chieftain manages the community together with the council consisting of seven members where one is a woman. The barangay captain together with all-male barangay councilors serve as the link with the local government. The community follows a code of laws a copy of which is prominently displayed in the Eskaya school for adults.

The Laws in the Eskaya Tribe

1. Gambling is prohibited.
2. Excessive drinking is prohibited as it leads to crime.
3. Dances are prohibited as these are bad in the eyes of God.
4. Theft is punishable; display good behavior; and live peacefully.
5. Playing and gallivanting around during work days are prohibited especially for those people in good health.
6. Taking a bath, washing laundries and chopping of wood are prohibited during rest days.
7. Don’t speak bad words.
8. Don’t make fun of other people.
9. Don’t indulge in too much relaxation.
10. Respect the elders.
11. Sunday is Christianity day and is the time for the community to pray in church.
12. Monday is the day when people donate their time and service to the community.
13. Children’s games such as playing with top, ‘buskayay’ (shellfights), kiteflying and others are prohibited.
14. People who live in this barrio must faithfully follow the Basic Law.
15. People who live in this area must bow down, in respect to the tribe or church especially the “big people” in the area.
16. People who live in this barrio should not follow foreign ways; they must follow the rules of the barrio.
17. People who serve in this barrio must fear the law of God.
18. People must follow the laws of the constitutional government of the state, town and barrio.
19. Women are prohibited from sporting a short haircut, wearing short dresses, and pants because the Virgin Mary would cry in sorrow.*
20. Women are not allowed to wear men’s clothes.*
21. Women are not allowed to enter the church without a veil and they must wear long dresses.*
22. The law and nature of the tribe should be strictly followed except by those who are sick.
23. Theft is punishable with fine and imprisonment.
24. Violation of laws is punishable with fine and imprisonment.
25. Drinking is punishable with fine and imprisonment.
26. Other sins that endanger the peace of the group and violations of the Constitution are punishable.

Social control takes up most of the traditional laws of the Eskaya. A number of activities such as gambling, drinking, dances, and even playing of some games among children are prohibited because these are seen as a form of over-indulgence. Overindulgence, as it is, leads to sin; and thus, is against the will of God. There is a high degree of relation between the law and religion. The relationship is directly proportional. Deference to the traditional law is seen as following the tradition of the church. This keeps the order in the community. The restrictions placed against women especially in their manner of dressing is a reaffirmation of the emphasis on keeping tradition and order.

With the lapse of years, however, the traditional law has gradually eased up for the Eskaya especially on the few liberties such as dances, play, work habits and more particularly on the manner of dressing of the women. Dances are now a significant part of every Eskaya celebration or special day. Children have adopted new games for themselves. Work is no longer restricted during rest days. Notably, a number of Eskaya women have come to wear men's clothing such as pants or trousers while some have cut their hair short, too. As these changes gradually seeped through, the old chieftain could only let out resignation in the end after incessantly reminding the community of respect for the old ways.

Always deferent to the old ways herself, Nay Titing struggles to maintain the ways of the community amidst the entry of new ways. She attends to her assignment in church, praying the novena at her designated day of the week, three times a day, while balancing her farm and household chores. She still wears the traditional dress. She had trouble, at some point though, when her daughter, Tring, started wearing pants. They

*Restrictive provisions specific to Eskaya women.
however came to a compromise. Tring only wears pants when she is down at the college where she is studying and then goes back to wearing the blouse and skirt when she is at home.

*Nay* Titing's respect for the traditional law with its sense of order and deference to authority is likewise manifested in how she relentlessly supports her husband. *Nay* Titing complained about *Capitan* Pinong being the *barangay* captain because aside from the endless public service her husband has to render to their community, gossip also oftentimes hound her husband which breaks her heart. But the *Capitan* just dismisses these political innuendos marring his reputation. However, *Nay* Titing could not stand all these talks. She would have preferred that her husband quit the post. When *Capitan* was still a kagawad, *Nay* Titing supported him through prayers until he was elected as *barangay* captain. Even though she felt that her husband has been doing his duties conscientiously, negative talks still spread around the *barangay* particularly complaints about the *Capitan*’s performance. Thus, she no longer prays victory for her husband who is eyeing a municipal post as *kagawad* (councilor). *Nay* Titing tried to convince him that his service as barangay captain is enough. To her mind, however, she still would support him if the *Capitan* persists. Despite her disapproval of his political ambitions she nevertheless unconditionally defends him against what she believes are unfounded allegations.

**COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE**

There was a time when the Eskaya woman was really shy to men. In this scenario, an eskaya man (*eros*) should express his love by courting the *tende* in the house where she lives. The traditional *harana* has at some point been practiced. Nowadays, there is a pervasive feeling of relative laxity because the *eros* does not strictly follow the practice of visiting the *tende* at her house. He does it at any place convenient while the *tende* finds it acceptable. She even entertains admirers at every fiesta celebration in some barrio or town.

In the earlier times, the *tende* usually married within the ages 14 to 18 years of age. At present, most of them marry between ages 18 to 24 with the *eros* usually 5 to 10 years older.

*Nay* Titing was 17 when she eloped with *Capitan* Pinong. *Capitan* had thrice presented himself to *Nay* Titing’s parents for marriage but was rejected by *Nay*’s Titing father. In marriage, parents and relatives together with a prominent person in the community, exert their influence to win the hand of the girl from her parents.

*Mamresentar* is a custom whereby the parents of the man and woman agree on the marriage of their children. The parents of the young man and young woman would each bring a prominent or respected person in the community, who are to negotiate on the wedding details.

The young man’s family gives a *molig-on* in the form of money to prove that the young man is true with his intention and that he shall certainly return for the girl’s hand in
marriage. Later, on an agreed date, they come again with the manghatud whereby food is brought to the young woman’s house.

_Nay_ Titing would recall her father’s constant admonition to her not to marry a poor man because she was sickly. Nonetheless, she and _Capitan_ Pinong were eventually wedded in a protestant church. The Eskaya people, while maintaining their native belief-system, have come to embrace this Christian denomination established by one Gregorio Aglipay called Pilipinista. In such church, the priest does not have the vow of celibacy, so he is allowed to marry, unlike in the Roman Catholic Church.

After the church rites, the newlyweds are made to drink water with cotton in the glass because as cotton is light, it is believed to give a light and easy life to the newly married couple. Others drink water in the glass where the comb, used to brush the hair of the couple, is dipped. Still others break plates to ward off bad luck during the marriage. The couple then kneel together and ascend the stairs or enter the house.

On the wedding night, some couples follow the practice where the husband does not sleep yet with the wife until after nine days when the pangadion has been dutifully offered. Then the husband sleeps with his wife as the panaad (promised prayers) is over.

Usually, the youngest child whether male or female inherits the house upon marriage.

**BIRTH AND DEATH**

Certain _lihi-lihi_ (rituals) during pregnancy and birth are practiced by the Eskaya woman. The _tende_ wears a veil as she takes her afternoon walk around the village. She rubs local ointment all over her body and puts a belt made of a very thin strip of abaca around her waist to prevent the child from becoming heavy while still in the womb. When going out of the house, she wears a handkerchief around her neck because the child’s neck might get stiff when born. She is made to step on anything made of iron or pull weeds to give her strength. To keep from getting a headache, she bumps her head on the wall. She is not allowed to go out of the house whenever there is an eclipse.

Early in giving birth, the _eros_ takes an essential part. Notably, the community’s _mananabang_ (traditional birth attendant) is male who is assisted by his wife. Because of old age (he is now about 70 years old), he has passed the craft unto another male, his own son.

The _bunyag_ (baptism) is officiated by the tribal priest who intones Christian prayers as well as some native Eskaya incantations along with the pouring of water with salt. In giving a name to the newlyborn, some parents still take names from the Catholic almanac, although most do not use it anymore.

Like other Aglipayans, the Eskaya also pray for the dead and observe the Catholic nine-day prayer and _tapos_ (forty-day prayer). When somebody in the family dies, the
community helps the family through the pondo (mutual help) system where every night, food is donated to the family throughout the duration of the wake.

SPIRITUALITY AND SUPERSTITION

The Eskaya still believes in the Hukom (Judgment Day). The women pray for their community especially those who have been influenced by the ways of other groups of people. The end of the mollen (world) has not really come yet albeit it had long been predicted. Accordingly, their constant prayers have prolonged the coming of the Hukom.

Nay Titing was around sixteen and already had a boyfriend when she was scolded by her father because she was not yet well-versed with prayers. She felt utterly humiliated as she was scolded in front of her boyfriend. The incident urged her to acquaint herself with the pangadjion. She learned fast, but her first experience of praying such lengthy prayers happened while on a visit to a nearby barrio in Lundag, Pilar. During the visit, she was asked to pray the novena for the dead. It was quite an unexpected turn of event, however, she had no choice but to indulge her host. Filled with apprehension and qualm, she only became sure of herself when she overhead comments on how young the mangadjiay (prayer leader) was.

She came to be one of the 15 women assigned to pray the rosary and the novena every day in the three hours of prayer in the Simbahang Daku. Every day of each week, women are assigned in alternate. This relibo (take turns) system of prayer and worship is practiced throughout the whole year.

Seven women are assigned to pray in the Salvador Suno, one of the Eskaya houses of prayer. Salvador Suno is interpreted as Jesus Christ. Five women are separately assigned in the Simbahang Daku. They pray at three o’clock dawn, at eleven thirty in the morning, and three o’clock in the afternoon.

During mass, women sit on one side while men sit on the other side of the chapel. There seems to be no particular explanation for that practice - save for the purpose of order and segregation. But, as in the family where the woman is expected to take care of and manage the children, this same analogy applies in the assigning of prayers, but only to women.

11. Eskaya women attending mass on the left side of the chapel.
One cannot find a priest during the ordinary celebration of the mass on Sundays because he only comes during special occasions, like fiesta, wedding or baptisms. Women and men alternately say and sing prayers to the accompaniment of a low-sounding horn and other traditional brass wind instruments.

The Eskaya spirituality extends to the belief in spirits. Stories of spirits roaming around Taytay and Nay Titing’s personal encounters with them abound. She recalled her own encounters with these spirits. She was around ten years old, when one day, while going up to a mountain river to look for some suso (snails), she and her friend passed by what they called as lungon (coffin-like), a huge white rock. When it was nearing dusk, they decided to go home. As they started down the trail, from afar, Nay Titing saw a human figure. But as they neared the rock, the figure was gone.

One time, when Nay Titing and her father passed along the Puntod, a steep and narrow pathway in one of the mountain peaks of Taytay, she hurried ahead of her father to keep from being chided as a slowpoke. Some three meters farther up, she saw three white men on the top of the Puntod looking straight at her. She suddenly felt queer, stopped and waited for her father. When asked why she stopped by her father, Nay Titing told him what she saw. Her father said that he had seen no one. She described how the three white men were dressed. It was the first time for her to see such costume. Her father noted that it was an ‘Americana’. As they came close to where the three white men supposedly stood, Nay Titing remembered how her father took a long deep breath (nanghimug-o) after which the three simply vanished into thin air. They then deliberately coursed through just one side of the narrow pathway avoiding the spot where the three white men stood. A similar incident of strange apparitions occurred when Nay Titing was also with her mother.
Nay Titing had an elder sister who was gi-angayan (fancied) by an engkanto (spirit). Right before Nay Titing's manang got pregnant for the fourth time, her manang would go to the field to work. She occasionally took naps. When her manang woke up, she would notice that her loins would all be wet. Her manang already had a strange feeling about it so much that when she was four months pregnant, she had profuse bleeding and the mananambal (local healer) said that her child was eaten by the child of the engkanto inside her womb. The fetus did not live. Her manang told her husband that if she died, he should not worry because she would just be somewhere else. When Nay Titing's manang died, they all believed that the engkanto had taken her away.

A few years later, the same tragedy befell to the husband of Nay's Titing manang. He, too, was liked by a spirit. During the second marriage of the husband, his second wife would note that her husband would ask her to hold him close because the spirit is taking him away.

For Nay Titing, the couple were taken because they were both very nice people who cannot even spit out a curse. Two of the couple’s children were albinos. They were strangely white all over.

**THE ESKAYA WOMAN TODAY**

As with the other Eskaya women, Nay Titing has a serene disposition and a gentle smile. Her prominent forehead and almost square jaw goes with her long black hair. Her brisk and determined walk has been developed over the years. She wears a plain blouse and long skirt usually of dark shades (brown and black) but of different variations. The traditional inikugan (skirt), patadyong and pinipi (blouse) is now worn only on special occasions such as on festivals or special days and for attending Sunday services and the Eskaya Sunday school. During festivals, the tende dons on her traditional clothing as she dances the siniritson, balitaw, and tango. The siniritson is articulated by brisk movements of the hands, arms, and feet all throughout while the balitaw or sangay-sangay depicts courtship. The special days include Eskaya Day (May 5), Independence Day (June 12), Bonifacio Day (Nov 30), and Rizal Day (Dec 30). On Sundays, when the tende attends church service or the adult school on the Eskaya language, she wears the traditional costume along with a bongbong or kurong (veil) which come in different colors. White is worn among women who have not married. Orange and black veils are worn by married and widowed women. Sometimes, green is also worn depending on the occasion.

There was a time when the tende wore her traditional clothing to go with the eros' handwoven shirt with sleeves down to the elbows and trousers down to the knees. The women were not allowed to wear pants nor bodily ornaments such as earrings and other jewelries. The sporting of short hair among women was not even allowed. The old folks looked upon it with displeasure as the woman accordingly resembles a horse with this same haircut. The old folks also extend their veneration to the Blessed Virgin Mary in prohibiting the women in wearing pants and short dresses. Regarding this practice, Nay Titing noted:
Sauna [Ma’am] di pa jud ko kahibawo musuot ug pantalon. Labi na og mosakay ko og motor, maglisud jud ko. Karon na man ning minjo na ko, magsuot na ko og pantalon. Pero hinatag ra pod ni. Wa jud ko mingpalit og pantalon o maong. Ako bitawng giingnan si Tring nga ayaw’g palabi og palit anang maong; pero moingon man pod siya nga asungogon siya sa iyang mga kauban og klasmates. Ako pod siguro nang sa sala kay sauna man gud [Ma’am] gikagid man nang bata-a. Unya lain kaajo tan-awon iyang paa, unja kawton pa jud nija, mao nang aho na lamang gipapantalon. Karon, naanad na man hinuon. Di na ganahan magsayal. [Before, I did not really know how to wear pants, especially when I rode on the motorcycle, I find it difficult. It is only now that I am married that I already wear pants. But this was also just given to me. I did not really buy one. I told Tring not to buy too many pants but she told me that her friends and classmates would tease her. Perhaps, that is also my fault because before, Tring had this skin disease which was so bad to look at. Tring would scratch it so that I made her wear pants. Now, she has gotten used to wearing it. She does not want to wear skirts anymore.]

After the second marriage of Tay Bian (the old chieftain), the practice has not been strictly followed, especially among the young when Tay Bian’s grandchildren began dressing up differently. Changing the manner of dressing was welcomed.

The young Eskaya woman finds it awkward and feels ‘different’ whenever she is with other people. Because skirts are oftentimes blown by the wind, the wearing of long skirts is gradually seen as impractical in many respects.

The young tende prefers to look like “everyone” else. In the case of Nang Concordia (one of the prayer leaders), her two daughters working in Manila have adopted with the urban lifestyle, but every time they come home to Taytay (which is only once every two years), they go back to wearing the traditional blouse and skirt. Tring, for her part, would don the ‘usual’ clothing in the lowlands down in Jagna but still wears the traditional blouse and skirt when she is home in Taytay.

More than the manner of dressing, what also concerns the young tende is the Eskaya language. Since Sunday school on the Eskaya language is not made compulsory, and the Bisaya has long been traditionally used by the community, the young tende finds it difficult to learn. This same difficulty goes with the eros, too. Hence, there is danger of the Eskaya language being gradually lost.

Education has brought more ideas to the tende apart from those that she has traditionally been exposed to. She has come to know that there is much of the world out there, outside of the Eskaya community. This pushes her to make her way to the urban communities. As what Tring’s friends had done, they tried their luck in being paid workers in Manila. They, in turn, regularly send money to the family they have left in
Taytay. For Tring herself, she plans to remain and teach in Taytay when she finishes her degree. She feels much more useful if she chooses to stay.

In sum, are women definable? The same question may be thrown to the concept of the Eskaya woman. For if, indeed, there is such definition, the tende stands in a different light. Consciously or unconsciously, she illuminates of herself vis-à-vis her role in the community. It is here that definition comes in. Essentially, the concept of 'role' in the community for the tende is not the familiar 'have to do' thing, but more of a natural course of things. These defined roles of the tende have, time and again, been susceptible to factors both internal and external to the community. Acceptance of these roles, in varying degrees, under a continuing plethora of influences, serves to redefine her.

The Eskaya woman is redefining herself. Although caught in between tradition and modern influences, she tries to maintain what for her are values essential to her role as the nurturer in the community and at the same time be liberated from the restrictions imposed upon her by the claws of culture.

Change is reaching the tende. Despite what seems like a romantic resistance, in many ways, she has begun to adopt many things outside her culture, wherefore, change is inevitable. Education, the influx of visitors in her community, mass media, and commercialism all serve as agents of change.

The restrictions imposed upon the tende by the traditional law are slowly challenged by the changes that have permeated through the Eskaya community. The short haircut conveyed the message that the young wanted to abandon the restraints of femininity. The abandonment of the tende of long skirts and her donning of trousers signaled a stride toward greater public freedom of movement. By wearing some parts of men’s clothing and by cutting her long hair, the tende signaled her admission to activities previously restricted to men.

Another facet of the Eskaya of special note and character can be well observed in their family life. In the family, where both husband and wife are pillars, the local adage, ‘Sig paminaway kay kung di, si’g pamunaway ‘ (Listen to each other so there won’t be any conflict.) describes in sum the reciprocal affection and cooperation espoused by the Eskaya tende and eros. As in the family, the farm neither holds venue for male dominance as both tende and eros tend to each of the chores to make a living. Division of labor transcends gender differences in this sphere.

In the public domain, however, the tende stands back. The eros plays a dominant role in the politics of the community though the tende’s voice is always welcomed. The initial observation on the segregation of the sexes in church ordinarily hinted nothing more than just a sense of order and decorum yet, it could be construed as a manifestation of a protectionist attitude towards the tende who may be regarded as one that may cause distraction or undue attention during worship. A deeper look into the issue, however, shows that women are still regarded as source of temptation and sin. This essentially continues to put restraints on women not only in their manner of dressing but also in their
actions during mass and other public activities. But other than this segregation, gross signs of male dominance are least visible. The Eskaya spirituality where the tende takes on a significant role serves them well. The tende remains to be the insurer of the safety of the souls of everyone in the community. In traditional and the contemporary ways, the tende is still regarded as the hiyas (gem) of the Eskaya world.

ENDNOTES

1 Eskaya is the earliest language and culture of the Boholanos as recorded in ancient records found in the caves at Biabas, Guindulman whose teachings were secretly followed by a group of locals whose last keeper and teacher was a certain Anoy Datahan. [Abregana, B, The Republic News]

2 Tamblot Rebellion – a religious revolt led by the Babaylan (native priest) Tamblot against the Spaniards in Bohol. For a discussion of the Tamblot Rebellion, see Apalisok 162-170.

3 Noko Tomao is an Eskaya piece of literature which discusses the origin of humans as either having been a product of evolution as in the Darwinian Theory or as having been sprung from the Lord Jehovah’s Dust. [WHO 1981].

4 Aspormos Meneme - from the body of man. According to Eskaya literature, all their symbols represent different positions of the body and its parts like head, hands, feet, etc. [Tirol, JES B. UB Update; ndp.

5 Mariano ‘Anoy’ Datahan - His real name was Mariano Sumatra, ‘Datahan’, meaning receiver of fees and dues. He was unschooled but people swore ‘he had the power of bilocation, telekinesis, clairvoyance. [WHO 1981].

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