

Life in the Rhythm of the Ati Drums

Our Life Story as *Manugbombo* (Drummers)

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ABSTRACT

The Valencia twin-siblings situate their narrative within their lived experience as Ati boys growing up in an Ati village. The *bombo* drums are central in sustaining the fluctuating rhythms of life retold in sketches of their early childhood days, their life when they acquired formal education, and their aspiration for the Ati community in general.

Keywords Ati, *bombo*, life story

OUR LIFE STORY

Social-Cultural Life of the Ati

According to our father, when the Second World War broke out in the island of Panay, our Ati (also, Ata) elders went to different directions and places of Panay. Some went to Tigbauan, Iloilo, and others to Sibalom, Antique; others went to Guimaras. They scattered in different places and directions in search of hiding places. Some hid in caves and in such inaccessible places. Others went to forests in the mountains also in search of food.

When they realized that World War II had ended, our Ati elders who had gone to different places out of fear of the Japanese soldiers, gradually gathered in Brgy. Pitogo, Anilao, in the Province of Iloilo. It was there that my parents stayed for many years as the food there was abundant. *Banayan* (wild root crop) was abundant, and so with *halo* (big wild, edible lizards), turtles, monkeys, squirrels, pythons, and smaller snakes.

Our parents later moved to Nagpana, Barotac Viejo, also in the Province of Iloilo because of the more abundant food that could be found there. We would catch wild lizards, turtles, squirrels and other animals in the forest, and we would share with the others the meat taken from hunting and the root crops, from digging. Our parents would also invite the other Ati to go to other places in search of wild animals. They would group themselves because after hunting, they would gather together for merrymaking. They would make musical sounds by striking bamboo nodes with sticks, while others sing la-la-la. There would be a melody although there were no lyrics. They would dance the *pandang-pandang* (movement of the butterfly), as well as other dances imitating the movements of wild animals.

The Ati dance that way and we do this very often, almost every month. Our elders would take time to go out hunting by groups. As soon as they had a good catch, the women would gather together chewing betel nut. The children would play *aswang-aswang* which means pretending to be witches. They would run after each other and catch one another.

Some men would secure *tuba* (half-fermented coconut wine) from gatherers while others would prepare the butchered animal by burning its skin to clean it. Then, they would prepare a good dinner, and a big merrymaking takes place. There would be so much revelry especially when the moon was bright!

The Entry of the 'White' Visitor

After many years, the Ati villagers in Pitogo got acquainted with a man who had a wide fish pond. He was friendly to the Ati and hired them to work in his *punong* (fish pond). He paid them according to the contracted wages. Twenty Ati villagers started working in that fish pond located outside the Ati

Note from the Editor:

Pre-colonial data found in the ten epics of Panay shows that the Ata (also, Ati) and the Bisaya (brown-skinned lowlanders and uplanders) had closely associated with each other as rowers of the Datu (also known as Buyong), or as members of the family assigned to look after the guarded or loved daughter. There was no racial discrimination, and they were trusted by their host family. There were intermarriages between the Bisaya and the Ati which continue even up to the present day. As to why they were left far behind in educational attainment and socio-economic life needs a closer look. We gain insight from this life story of the twin brothers who are *manugpanambol* or *manugbombo* (drummers).

village. They gathered mud from the fields and made dikes. The Ati workers at that time used to wear *bahag* (G-string). While working, they would be wet and covered with sticky mud all over, looking like carabaos wallowing in the mud. Only their eyes and teeth could be seen!

It was in one of those times, while they were covered with mud working and making dikes in the fish ponds when they heard a vehicle coming towards them. They all ran towards the mountain to hide, except my uncle Severo Elosendo (whom we call Tiyo Biro), my father's brother-in-law. He did not leave his place of work. The Negritos said, "Oh Biro, they might run after us and cut our necks. Why are they coming over to our place?" Another one said, "You just be the one to meet that Kano (American) because I will hide in the forest." The rest were afraid, and the others were in doubt about the real intention of the visitor. The man, they said, might just be pretending to be a missionary.

A few days afterward, the American missionary came again to our village. As the visitor was approaching from afar, the Ati talked among themselves under the mango tree. The other children were playing. When the visitor came near the Ati hut, the dogs started to bark. Suddenly, the Negritos scampered away. They all disappeared! The children playing nearby ran to hide. They were terribly frightened! But my uncle Severo Elosendo remained and faced the American missionary and the Filipino Pastor who was with him.

While they were talking, the missionary asked who the leader of the community was whom everyone respected and followed. My

uncle answered, "It's me." The visitor then said, "Then, call your followers." Uncle Severo whistled with his two fingers in his mouth. It was a signal for them to come back. After that, the Ati who were hiding in the forests came out - women, men, and children. He said "Let us gather because our visitor is a good man and wants to befriend us. Don't be afraid because he is not going to harm us."

The American spoke in English and introduced himself as a missionary, and told the villagers that they should not be fearful because he was going to help them. He said that he could do a lot to help the elders and even the children. He told them he was coming back the next day. As they were conversing, the missionary assured them not to be afraid because he was going to help them in many ways, and he would come to visit every day.

American Missionary, Merry Making, and the Beating of Drums

After the American left, the Ati were very happy, and the others were no longer afraid. My Uncle Severo said, "Tomorrow he is coming back, so let us prepare food for him. Let us go and hunt. The rest will dig *banayan* (wild root crop), and we will have merrymaking. Nong Posoy will sing, Osting will dance together with the women, and the others will make sounds out of sticks and beat drums. Let us make this a happy event." They went home and started preparations for the food to be served the following day. Early the following morning, the Ati men went out to hunt and some women dug *banayan*. "Let us prepare for the return of our visitor," my uncle Biro said.

The following day, the white missionary came with his wife, and two children, an Ati boy, and a little girl. They brought with them boxes containing oatmeal, powdered milk, cans of oil and boxes of rice. Each family was given a box of food and ready-made clothes. There were also yards of cloth given away to be made into clothing. They also gave many farm tools like hoes, spading forks, rakes, plows from Germany and the USA. The women were taught how to cook oatmeal so they could taste it. It was lunchtime, and the family of the white missionary ate the loaf bread they brought.

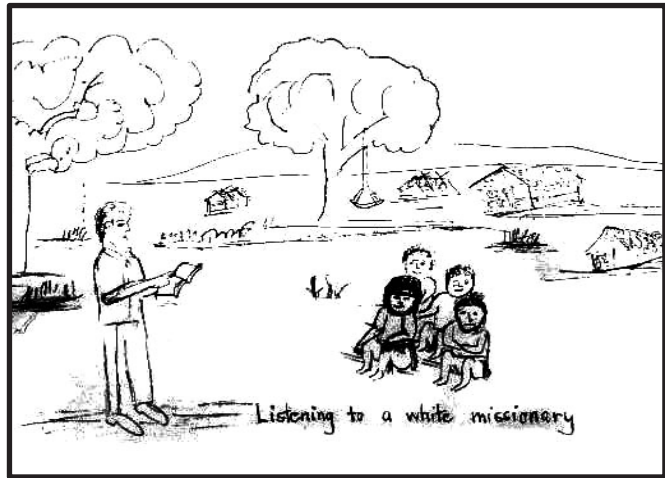


Figure 1. Visit from a 'White' missionary. From *Sketches of Life Story* by the authors.

At about 3:00 in the afternoon, the men who went hunting arrived and brought in ten big *itok* (lizards). As they were cleaning the lizard skin by burning it on fire, the children were pointing to the tail of the wild *halo* which meant that they would like to have it. The women chopped the flesh of the *halo* and boiled until soft. They also placed sour *batwan* leaves over it to enhance the flavor. At about six in the evening, they prepared *salong* sap for lighting. While waiting for the *halo* to be cooked, they started dancing. Because, the white missionary did not partake of the boiled *halo*, they had it barbecued.



Figure 2. Food preparation and merrymaking. From *Sketches of Life Story* by the authors.

The Transfer to Nagpana, Birth of the Twins, and Adoptive Parents

During the long stay of the Ati in Pitogo, Anilao, the wild lizards had become rare, so the Ati had to walk long distances to hunt in the mountains of Barotac Viejo, Iloilo. There they saw in Nagpana, big trees in the forest abundant with wild lizards, deer, wild boars, monkeys, pythons, and wild cats. There were many kinds of birds, and the gentle cool breeze came from the clear waterfalls running down the river. They saw that Nagpana was like a paradise because of the abundance of trees bearing edible fruit. When the hunters returned to Pitogo, they told their fellow Ati that they have reached Nagpana and that it was an ideal place to stay because there they would have sufficient sources of food.

In 1950, they transferred to Nagpana where they created an Ati community. The Ati usually held a merry-making after they had caught wild lizards and gathered other foods during hunting. The American missionary continued to teach them regarding good health and cleanliness and about God. The Ati learned to love the missionary and his wife. Later, the missionary helped Tatay Biro how to read and write and then sent him to a seminary in Iloilo to study theology.

November 2, 1959 was the day we were born – I, (Enoch) and my twin brother Elias. Our father's name was Sergio Pauden Valencia and our mother's, Leonarda Elosendo Valencia. They were pure Ati. We lived in a small hut made of cogon, with walls and floor of woven bamboo. We, the twins, are the third among eight siblings of five boys and three girls. My twin, Elias and I have the same facial features. We were born with many deprivations and difficulties in life. Even during breastfeeding, our mother would hold us both: I, on the right breast, and my twin, on the left. While we were toddlers, we were always sick, one after the other. When I recover, my twin brother would follow getting sick too. When my uncle, Tatay Biro saw this, he told my parents that he and his wife would adopt me. And so I lived with my adoptive parents to lessen my family's burden.

Growing Up with Ati Boys and Going Places

As we grew older, we became capable of tending carabaos. We would go along with the other children who were also grazing their carabaos. One afternoon, when we were on our way home, we saw that our fellow Ati were gathering around Lolo or Ibo Posoy who was dancing. We thought there was a visitor. As we got closer to them, I saw that they had butchered a wild boar. Some of our fellow Ati were dancing and beating bamboo nodes while others were singing "Manamit naman kay yamin darapli kito ini gab-i" which means, "Our viand tonight is delicious again." The meat of the wild boar was divided and distributed to every household in the community. This is a practice among the Ati that they share with one another what they catch. Even the dog has a share because the dog is our hunting partner.

As the years passed, we observed that our grandparents and uncle went hunting every day so we would have viand. Meanwhile, my uncle and my older brothers would help dig *banayan* (a wild thorny yam considered as a favorite Ati rootcrop) so we could have something to eat every day.

One day, a group of us, children, planned to go hunting. We trekked Mt. Asisig, a part of San Enrique, Iloilo, a town adjacent to Barotac Viejo. The mountain is more than 10 kilometers and away from Nagpana. Because I was still small and barely nine years old, and the rest of my companions were already 15-16 years old, I couldn't catch up with them. I couldn't walk for long. It was already late in the afternoon when we were able to catch six *halo* (big wild lizards). It was twilight when we started for home, my companions running along the way. And because I could not run fast and was already exhausted, I was left behind. I went to find a brook to get a drink. I already felt so hungry and could hardly walk. So I stopped and lay down to rest. I fell asleep. It was very dark, around 9:30 in the evening when I heard someone calling my name. I woke up and saw my mother and father holding up a Petromax (gas lamp) and a *duyan* (rattan hammock) to carry me. We reached home at around 11 that night. They gave me soup, and I was revived, but I still felt shaky.

In 1972, which was the year Martial Law was declared, we were almost 13 years old. A group of military men came to our place in Nagpana to confiscate the weapons of the Ati because this was the order of President Ferdinand E. Marcos. But because we didn't have guns, we brought out our bows and arrows which we use for hunting wild animals. When they saw that we didn't have guns, they laughed and returned the bows and arrows saying, "Indi pana kag bangkaw ang amon ginapangita kundi pusil" (We are not looking for bows and arrows, we are looking for guns). They told us that we could keep our weapons for hunting because they didn't know how to use them.

Bamboo Stick Beating, Tending Carabaos, and Schooling Experience

Two years passed and we were still tending our carabaos in the mountains together with my five cousins. Because I had nothing else to do, I would beat the bamboo node to amuse myself, one of us would dance until the other children would arrive. We would have lots of fun beating bamboo nodes while the others dance to the rhythm.

In 1974, we were 14 to 15 years old, when we finished Grade III in Nagpana Primary School. We continued our Grade IV and VI at Lipata Elementary School which was about 2.5 kilometers from home. I would walk barefooted to school and during lunch time, my twin, Eli and I would climb a mango tree and eat our lunch there. Our non-Ati classmates would call us "moy-moy-moy", which means "monkey, monkey." I think I lost interest in schooling because my classmates always made fun of us and would fight us.

When we were in grade five, we only had one pair of shorts and a shirt to wear for the whole year. Our *baon* (packed lunch) would be a piece of boiled corn with *halo* for viand. This was practically our lunch for the whole year until I finished grade VI. In 1976, I lost all interest in going to high school because we were very poor, and we were much older than the other students because we quit school a few years back to help our parents farm and find food to eat.

I remember an important event on June 30, 1976. It was fiesta time in Barotac Viejo. We presented our *Ati-atihan* and *pandang-pandang*, a dance which imitates the actions of wild animals.

We danced to the beat of the bamboo sticks, the movements of our bodies in rhythm with the sounds. This caught the attention of our town mayor, and Assemblyman Niel Tupas, Sr. invited us to display our talent in Iloilo City. For months, we practiced performing our dance in the Dinagyang Festival in Iloilo City. We were excited because we would be able to display our talent and skill. We really enjoyed beating drums and bamboo nodes and dancing to the rhythm.

When the Dinagyang Festival came, we went to Iloilo City. The day before our scheduled performance, our Tiyo Biro prayed for us, as he always did, that God would give us the strength to display our Ati music and dance culture. We were so nervous because there were so many people. But my uncle told us not to be afraid and ashamed to show our talents. It made us feel more confident and happier

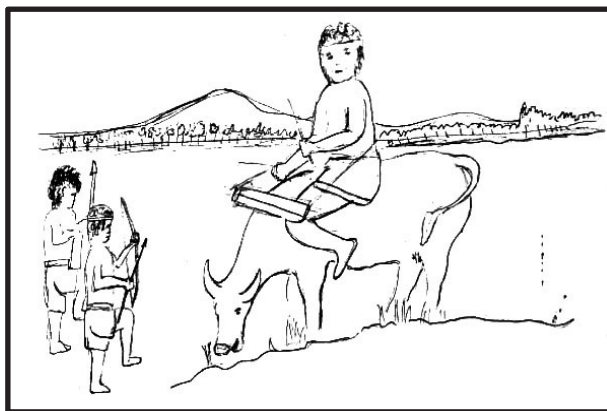


Figure 3. Beating drums while tending carabaos. From *Sketches of Life Story* by the authors.

in every presentation in each of the performance areas. The experience spurred the desire to continue honing the skills which we learned from my grandfather Lolo Posoy.

A Rare Opportunity to Study, Tiyo Biro's Encouragement, Bamboo Beating, and Friends

In 1978, I stayed in our mountain farm to plow the field and to prepare our uncle's land for seed planting. Usually, I would take a midday rest. I would then recall the merrymaking we had in Nagpana. I would recall the times when we went hunting and when I was left behind. I would also remember the times when my companions and I would beat the drums during the Dinagyang Festival in Iloilo City.

Sometime that same year, my adoptive father, Tiyo Biro visited me on the mountain farm and asked if I would like to go to high school. But I answered that, maybe, it would be good not to go back to school because no one would help him on the farm. He told me about an opportunity offered by a well-to-do family in Liningwan, Jordan, Guimaras. I was quite hard-headed regarding schooling because of the lingering thought that people did not give us attention anyway because we were Ati.

The month of May 1978 came. I left the mountain farm and went home to Nagpana. When my twin brother Eli learned about this, he came to see me and stayed with us overnight. My Uncle Biro asked me again if I would want to study. I wasn't interested for the same reason that we were Ati and that we had grown too big for high school. But my twin Eli told me that he liked the idea of us going to high school together. "Please tell Tatay Biro that the two of us will go and study," he said.

The following morning while Tiyo Biro was boiling *tsa* (tea) he asked me again if I would like to go to school. I answered him "yes" but I would like that the two of us, Eli and I, would go. He answered, "Only one is needed, but I will just bring Eli with us, just in case. . . ." So, on May 25, 1978, we went to Liningwan, Jordan, Guimaras. Upon arriving there, Tiyo Biro told the wealthy man, "You only needed one boy as a helper, but I brought with me two because the other one will feel lonely without his twin brother. The two are always together." The young Attorney Juanito Elechicon and his wife Paulina answered, "It's better that you brought the two of them." And so, my twin brother Eli and I were so happy to hear the answer. We would be together, for both of us had this rare opportunity to study.

Since the school year had not yet started, the two of us worked on their farm in the afternoon, tending the carabaos at the foot of the mountain. And we would sit on a big rock and recall our life in Nagpana. We would talk about bamboo beating for music. We missed the sound of the bamboo node and the drums, so I said, "Let's make a drum, and I'll beat it while you beat with bamboo sticks." While doing this, the Bisaya children who were also tending carabaos would gather around us and observe. They liked to watch us and listen to the rhythm of the drum, the sound of the *tulali* (bamboo flute) and the beat of the bamboo sticks. The sounds beautifully blended. The Bisaya boys loved it and befriended us.

The day came for school opening. We had mixed emotions of fear and shyness. I could feel and see the difference between our classmates and us. We are black-skinned with curly hair. Inside the classroom, many were surprised about our presence. Some of our classmates started laughing at us, but others were friendly. As the days and the weeks went by, we became less shy because we already had friends. After classes, we would hurry home because we still had to graze the carabaos. Some children would always come and observe how we would beat our sticks and drums with rhythm. There were those who wanted to learn beating sticks with rhythm, and we would teach them. We would tell them about the instruments that the Ati use during merrymaking which were similar to their fiestas.

Every December, we would have two-week vacations. We would go home to Nagpana. Our parents who missed us would usually prepare *bao* (turtle) and *halo* for food, and our other siblings would go hunting for us. If we didn't partake of what they had prepared, they would feel bad and get hurt. While in Nagpana, I would then recall the happy times we had. I realized that while the children sat on the backs of their carabaos, they had bamboo sticks in their hands to make music, and that made them happy.

It was not only drums that I learned to play. I also learned how to play the *tulali* (flute), the guitar and the accordion. I have learned to play these instruments by merely listening and observing the fingers of musicians. They called the skill *naga-oido* and I learned much later in life that correctly, it is "oido" or learning music by ear. I thank God for giving me this rare gift of music.

Kind Benefactors, College Opportunities, and Brothers Beating Drums

We stayed in Guimaras for four years until we finished high school. The young Atty. Elechicon, and his parents Atty. Juanito and Paulina Elechicon, who were then in their mid 60's were kind to us. We showed our diligence and industry in looking after their farm animals and in caring for their mahogany and coconut trees. We regarded them as our foster parents for they looked after us and attended PTA (Parents Teachers Association) Meetings. Elias became the Corp Commander at the CAT (Citizens Army Training). He showed leadership skills and stamina after passing the initiation test and the one-week training where we were tested to take 30 native *sili* (chili peppers), and to roll down the hillside, in addition to dismantling and assembling the ArmaLite. It was so easy for us to pass the test of stamina. After four years, we were quite sad to leave Guimaras, but God allowed another opportunity for schooling in college again.

In Iloilo, Tiyo Biro recommended Eli to study at the Doane Bible School as a working student for one year. The following year, God gave another opportunity for us to study at the Iloilo School of Arts and Trade (ISAT), now Iloilo Science and Technology University. Both of us became working students until we finished college. Eli finished the degree of Bachelor of Science in Industrial Education (BSIE). He taught for two years as a substitute teacher in Nagpana. Later he went to Mindanao to teach, and after a few years, he came back to our place and married a Bisaya. Now, he is active as a minister of God in Dumarao, Capiz, and was recently elected as a Barangay Kagawad. At one time, he is IP Representative (Cluster Head) to the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) for the Municipality of Dumarao, Capiz, and Consultative Advisory Board (CAB) for the Province of Capiz. He is also an IP Representative to the Department for Agrarian Reform (DAR) Program.

I, (Enoch), finished a two-year technical course in Building Construction and Architectural Drafting. I graduated in 1986 and worked at the Passi Sugar Central for one year as a sugarcane plantation worker. In 1987, I applied at OSCC (Office for Southern Cultural Communities) now the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) as Artist Illustrator. Today my work takes me to many communities to help the indigenous people.

I still use my talent as *manugbombo* in making drums and teaching children to play them. One project in Aklan enabled me to make 24 drums of various sizes (small, medium, and big) for the Ati of Boracay which I finished in April 2016. All in all, as a *manugpanambol*, I have made over a hundred drums for festival purposes. Last April 2017, I went to Boracay and taught the children how to play drums using three kinds of beating: *malaka* (slow-paced beating) for large drums; *malakalaka* (quite slower beating) for medium drums, and *repike* (fast beating) for small drums.

As twin brothers, we have always been close to each other and try to be together as much as we could. We only parted ways when we got married. Nonetheless, we also consult with each other when we have problems and need some sound brotherly advice.

As a Manager of 'Tribu Miro'

In 2013, I became Manager of our talent showcase in the Dinagyang Festival in Iloilo. Our group was named 'Tribu Miro' (Tribe of the Civet Cat), sponsored by the Iloilo Dinagyang Foundation, Inc. and Mayor Bing Tupas, Mayor of Barotac Viejo, with Ma. Teresa "Matet" Debuque, Mayor of Anilao. I am still teaching some Ati children and my children to the rhythm with the drums and sticks so that, they, too, will also learn what my grandfather, Ibo Posoy had taught me. This talent I have I inherited from him, and I am very thankful to God for this unique talent that He gave to us.

Hopes and Aspirations for the Ati

My twin brother and I have shown in our life story how we almost gave up on getting an education because of poverty, prejudice, and isolation. The opportunities given to us by concerned individuals and the support of our elders enabled us to gain acceptance in the wider society, and recognition as creative and productive Ati. We endeavored to make a contribution to the lives of others through our sharing of dance and music from simple drums and sticks, and participation in the social, economic, and political functions of the wider society. We have gone a long way from our mountain abode to where we are now. We have acquired an education, though not without difficulties and hardships. We

¹The present mayor, Lee Ann Debuque is the daughter of Matet Debuque.

nurtured our talents, though not without the challenges. We have shared our culture with pride and courage, despite prejudice from others.

It is our earnest desire for our fellow Ati to break the walls of cultural isolation and exclusivity. We aspire for the time when the Ati will be recognized for their unique and beautiful cultural practices and creative talents. We want to nurture what is beautiful about our Ati heritage, and stand tall and be proud of it. The Ati needs to be strong and persistent in facing difficulties and challenges when they pursue the expression of their creativity and culture, and find their place in the world.

We hope that the readers would also feel our earnest desire for our people to be recognized. While we, Ati, are different in language, color and other physical features, we belong to this country and want our equal share of dignity and respect, and the right to pursue our dreams. We hope that the next generation of Ati will experience a wider acceptance from the non-Ati community, the way we did, and become part of the larger community and enjoy its benefits.

We dream for every Ati in the generations to come to be given opportunities to get an education, if not assistantships like we had, in the form of scholarship programs. The Ati has God-given talents and potentials that need to be developed. We, Ati, have hidden creative abilities that should be nurtured. Given the opportunity and support, the Ati can reach their highest potential just like anybody, and we can be proud as any Filipino could be.

We have experienced life in our mountain abode, enjoyed the fruits and game in the forests, the clear waters and the cool beauty of nature. Our Ati ancestors and forebears lived on this land, our parents have lived here as well, as we do. We hope that our children will continue to live here where we dwell now. It has been our fervent hope and longtime desire that we truly own our land. We believe that Ati rights to ancestral land which they own should be honored and granted. We are waiting for our Government to honor our claim and hear us who are being threatened and whose ancestral lands are being taken away. We are hoping for the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and the National Commission for Indigenous People (NCIP) to hasten facilitative intervention for the solution of problems which causes delays and threats.

We dream of healthy and happy Ati children, and productive Ati adults who can fulfill not only their basic needs for survival but are able to produce their own abundant supply of food and goods. My brother and I, and my whole family experienced the direst poverty and deprivation – the lack of food, clothing, and secure shelter. The American Missionary came to help us with food, clothes, tools and the Word of God. We have visions of how our government agencies and NGOs can help. For instance, the Department of Agriculture (DA) can help the Ati in the production of corn, and other agricultural goods; the Taytay sa Kauswagan, Inc. (TSKI) can conduct livelihood projects to Ati barangays. Other agencies and NGOs can help the Ati in their fight against poverty.

These are our hopes and aspirations for the Ati. With the initiatives and efforts of concerned agents of the government and non-government organizations, we will truly be grateful to them for giving hope that we will see the fulfillment of our aspirations for the Ati before the completion of our life story.

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Analysis

From the life story, we can infer some contributing factors as to why the Ati life lagged in terms of their socio-economic condition and educational level. When they were still in the elementary grades, because of their color and poorly appearance, Enoch and Elias suffered from prejudice, although, not explicitly stated. But it can be inferred since they were bullied by their classmates; they were prone to feelings of inferiority. They shied away from mingling with their Bisaya classmates. Economic impoverishment indicated by the lack of clothes and shoes or slippers made it difficult for them to feel accepted. Moreover, a lack of food in the family was evident. It was one of the main reasons why Enoch and his brother were not motivated to continue schooling. There was no food, no money, no adequate clothing, no acceptance, and no self-esteem. Their classmates looked down upon them. Enoch said that anyway, his classmates did not treat him well because of his dark skin. Loss of self-confidence resulted in very low self-esteem and motivation. How others regard or treat fellow human beings strongly contribute to their sense of confidence and self-esteem. With a lack of it, the person suffers. Despite the

reasons why Enoch didn't want to go to school, his uncle Severo Elosendo continued to motivate him. This was a significant factor in their considering to study in Guimaras.

The situation in Guimaras was entirely different. Note the contrast in the way the two brothers performed in their high school studies. Their host family treated them as foster children and looked after their school need, serving as parents for Enoch and Elias during the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) meetings. In addition, their classmates made friends with them. They were able to show their skills and endurance in the preliminary tests given, like eating chili pepper and rolling down the hill. In fact, Ely demonstrated his leadership skills and became the Corps Commander in the Citizen's Army Training (CAT) at the Liningwan-Jordan National High School. This is because acceptance boosted their confidence and self-esteem. They gained confidence in themselves and in their capacity to making good grades and showed good performance. This is because they knew and felt that they were accepted by their host family in Guimaras, and their classmates who were friendly.

In like manner, appreciation by their Bisaya friends strengthened their confidence and self-esteem. After school, their contentment and happiness was shown by their merrymaking even while sitting on the back of a carabao. The talent in bamboo beating and rhythmic skills they learned since they were children were highly appreciated by the fellow carabao herders who were Bisaya boys. Their ability in music as *manugbombo* or *manugpanambol* boys, which they inherited from their Lolo Posoy (grandfather) was discovered— a skill they continue to harness today and teach to their own children.

The qualities of hard work and diligence which they learned from their elders, plus the continued encouragement of their uncle Severo "Biro" Elosendo gave them the determination to finish studies. Their uncle Biro provided opportunities for schooling through his contacts, not only with the lawyer of Guimaras, but in his church. This gave them confidence in God. Coupled with hard work, they were able to take advantage of the opportunity to get a college education by being a working student. Thus many factors contribute to the change in their lives. Hard work, diligence, talent and desire to become better, by themselves are not enough. Support from elders and benefactors coupled with recognition of their potentials as human beings, regardless of color and status in life, made a difference in the lives of Enoch and Elias.

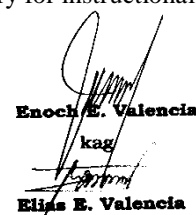
Conclusion

The Ati are known for not having a permanent settlement. Sadly, the nomadic way of life of the Ati bonded their group but contributed to the loss of their land. They go from one place to another to find their food, for this is their way to survive. Reports from the last few years indicated that the Ati lost their lands after they would leave for *panglagkaw* or *pangranso* (moving from place to place). Upon returning, they would find their place occupied by the Bisaya people who would threaten them if they insisted on occupying the area they had left. Today, Enoch and Elias who are recognized as leaders by the Ati are aware of the many problems encountered by their fellow Ati. They are being consulted regarding these problems. They take this seriously and are trying to find peaceful solutions.

Postscript

We consider it a rare opportunity, that through Dr. Alciia P. Magos, we were given the privilege to be invited by the University of the Philippines Visayas – Iloilo to perform as drummers and share our life story in two international conferences, *Pagtib-ong 1*, International Conference for Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) held in May 2017, and *Pagtib-ong 2*, International Conference for Intangible and Intangible Heritage in October 2018, both sponsored by the university held in Iloilo City.

We had narrated in those conferences the story of our lives since birth and how we were able to surmount difficulties. We would be grateful if many people, especially the Ati in this country, will find strength and inspiration in the example we have shown in our life story. We are thankful for the attention given to us by the University of the Philippines Visayas, as well as this rare opportunity to be heard. We, therefore, give the university the right to publish our life story for instructional purposes.



Enoch E. Valencia
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Elias E. Valencia