

# ***Mga Dili Angay Hikalimtan/ Necessary Memories***

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## ***Habilin***

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*Alang kang Geronima Nacionales, bayani sa Balangiga*

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kalag nga wa namo tawaga, ngano kang motangka  
sa talad kan-anan, Apoy, nga kaniadto pa, amo nang  
gitugyan sa kalangitan? Mokalit lag tugnaw ang sabaw,  
ang bahaw mangaging sa among plato, ug manuhotsuhot  
sa among ilong ang nipis nga baho sa dugo.  
Mamaliktad among tiyan, unsa pa may sud-an sa panaksan,  
amo na lang talikdan ang kan-anan nga gutom.

Lubos baya ang pangaliya sa imong pagpanaw—  
ang siyam ka adlaw nga nobena, ang kwarenta diyas  
nga pagsaulog sa imong pagkayab, ang hubkas,  
tanang amo gyung giayo pagsaulog.  
Ang imong escapularyo sa Madre Dolorosa,  
mga balaan nga medalya, rosaryohan,  
mga nobenahan, bendita sa lukay, among  
gisulod sa imong lungon isip pabalon, basin  
sa imong paghimata sa tiilan sa Ginoo,  
Iyang mapamatud-an nga ikaw buotan

ug matitud-anong anak. Saksi baya ang tanan  
dihang gibenditahan ang imong lubong  
sa paring piangon, ang kataposang buhi  
nga among nailhan sa mga nahilambigit  
niadtong dakong sangka nga nahitabo  
kaniadto sa lungsod sa Balangiga.

ii

Apoy, nganong gihisol nimo akong katulogon?  
Akong mga damgo napuno na lang gyud  
sa imong hunghong. Moukiok sa akong dalunggan  
ang imong hagawhaw, pulos mga pangutana  
nga lisod sabton ug tubagon. Nahibalo kaha ka  
nga nanglipang ang katalagman ning among panahon?  
Morag mga apan nga mikutkot sa kataposang udlot  
sa among mga paninguha. Apoy, kinahanglan mig  
pahuway, katulog, aron inigkaugma duna mi kusog  
ibugwal sa napan-as nga mga bukiran, iaswat  
sa mga kargamento sa pantalan, ilatas sa lain-laing  
mga dalanon sa among paningkamot. Tingali kahag  
wa ka makapamilinbilin og tim-os, Apoy, mao nang  
magbalikbalik ka karon. Intawon kubti na lang  
nang imong mga habilin, dad-a ngadto sa Ginoo,  
asa man gani Siya karon, ay' na lag kabalaka namo,  
ay' na lang mig samoka. Kanang kaalam o kusog  
nga buot nimong isangon kanamo, palihog,  
ayaw na lag hasola imong kaugalingon,  
sa imong pagpahuway padayon na intawon.

Dugay na ming wa katanda sa imong lubnganan,  
nagsapaw-sapaw na kaha didto ang gatos ka tuig  
nga mga bukog, sukad nahitabo kadtong dugoong  
panagsanka sa Balangiga. Adlaw-adlaw  
tibuok nimong kinabuhi sayod ming giludhan mo  
kadtong ngilngig nga panghitabo, magalakaw ka  
sa imong tuhod gikan sa pultahan sa simbahan  
ngadto sa altar, busa gikublan kunog baga  
ang imong mga tuhod. Unsay imong giampo, Apoy?  
Ang mga gipangmatay, o kadtong mga nangharos  
ug kinabuhi? Ang tanan sad-an man, ang tanan, Apoy.  
Way mapili. Usahay among ihapon ang nangawala,  
hinganlan ang nangapildi, apan wa miy siguro—  
sibo kaha ni sa panghitabo, takdo kaha sa matuod?  
Nangalagiw baya ang tanan, human sa sangka,  
iyahay'g panago, panagka sa bukid, panglayaw.  
Pag-ugdaw sa kalayo nga maoy naglinis sa lungsod,  
kinsa pa may moukay sa abo pag-ila sa nangatodas?  
Gikakha ug gikahig na lang to sa mga manok ang abo,  
ang kabukogan, nahisagol sa yuta  
ug gianod sa ulan ngadto sa Himanglos.

Apoy, ay' na intawog hasola akong mga daman  
sa imong mga bagutbot nga lugos nako masabtan.  
A, sayod kong buot nimong ang tanan  
mahinumdoman namo, buot nimong masaysay,  
makulit sa panumdoman ang mga hinungdan  
sa panghitabo, masabtan sa kalibotan og ngano,  
ngano, ngano, nga sukwahi sa balaanong sugo,  
ug sugo sa tawohanong tanlag ug garbo,  
ang usa ka balangay kinahanglang mopatay  
ug magpakamatay, aron sila magpakabuhi  
nga tawohanon. Imong hagonghong kanamo,  
Hinumdomi kining mga pangutana.

Dayong buga sa imong tugnawng gininhawa  
sa akong tangkugo, manindog ra ba ang buhok  
sa akong tingkoy. O na, hala, di man gyud ko nimo  
pakatulgon, sige na, sige na, Apoy, ayaw na dihag  
langas, nia na ning papel, nia nay lapis, hala kapti,  
tultoli akong kamot. Magsugod ta....

*Agusto 15, 2012*

## ***Last Words***

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For Geronima Nacionales, heroine of Balangiga

i

Unwanted ghost, why do you sit  
at the table with us, old mother whom  
we had resigned long ago to heaven?  
The soup turns suddenly cold, the left-over rice  
hardens on our plates, and in our nostrils rises  
the faint smell of blood. Our stomach turns,  
whatever meat there is on the platter,  
we turn away from the board, hungry.

Didn't we give you full honors in death?  
The nine-day prayer, forty days of mourning,  
the feast of your ascension, the formal rite to end  
our mourning, all of these we duly performed.  
Everyone witnessed the lame priest,  
sprinkling holy water on your coffin,  
he, the last survivor after you of that long-ago  
bloody fray in the town of Balangiga.

The Mater Dolorosa scapular,  
your hoard of sacred medals, rosary beads,  
novenaries, the Lenten palms, all these  
we had carefully placed inside your coffin,  
your going away provender, so to speak, so that  
when you awaken in the next life at God's feet,  
He will quickly recognize His true daughter.

Old mother, please stop troubling my sleep.  
You fill my dreams with noises of your whispers.  
Your mumblings pierce my ears, full of questions  
I can neither answer nor understand.  
The times we live now are rife with perils  
as in your times, do you know that?  
Fear like locusts gnawing endlessly  
at the buds of our endeavors. Old mother,  
we too need rest, we need sleep, that we may  
regain power to till our arid lands, lift cargo  
in our seaports, walk our separate roads  
to find the means to thrive. Did you die  
before you could say what needed  
to be said, old mother, is that why you keep  
haunting us today? Please, I beg you,  
keep those words to yourself, or take them to God,  
wherever He bides these days, don't worry  
about us, don't add to the burdens we bear.  
That wisdom or strength you want to lay  
upon our shoulders, I beg you, lay them away  
from yourself, instead, go, go away to your rest.

True, we had been neglecting your grave.  
The bones of a hundred years must be  
piling up there now, since that bloody day  
in Balangiga. This we know, that every day  
of your life you had prayed for that fatal day,  
walking from church door to altar on your knees  
until they grew callused. For whom were you  
praying, old mother, was it for those who were killed,  
or for the killers? You must know as we do,  
old mother, no one is blameless, everyone sinned.  
Sometimes we stop to count the dead, or call  
the names of the vanquished, but never sure  
whom we had missed. After the fray,  
everyone fled, went into hiding,  
took to the hills, or left the island.  
When the fire which cleansed the town  
subsided, who were left to stir the ashes  
to recover all that we had lost?

Only the chickens came back to scabble  
among the ashes, the bones mingled  
with the earth, they drained with the rain  
to the flood of Himanglos.

Old mother, I beg you, quit troubling me  
with the nightmares of your grumbling  
that I can barely understand. Ah, I know it,  
you want everything to be remembered,  
you want the whole story to be told,  
etched in everyone's memory—how things  
happened as they did—so the world may know  
why contrary to holy writ, and driven  
by will and conscience, a whole village  
must kill, or be killed, that they may live  
as humans. Why, why, why?  
Please keep these questions in your mind,  
and you breathe your cold breath  
making every hair on my head rise.

All right, okay, you won't let me sleep,  
go on, go on. Old mother, lay off now,  
I have paper, here's a pen, now then  
guide my hand. Let us begin...

*August 15, 2012*



## *Ihaw*

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Sa dili pa mosidlit ang adlaw guyoron na nila ang karabaw dapit sa pangpang sa Himanglos, sa may kahoy o puno sa lubi nga nagbarog diin ila kining ihigot. Usa-usa nga mangabot ang silinganan, mamungko, manikungkong sa kabatoan, maghuwat sa matansero. Isig dagkot sa ilang upos, manabako, magbalyoanay og tilad, “Diay apog, pare, diay bunga, buyo, maskada.” Magkandaiyag hikyad og istorya, damgo, kahiubos, lansis, yaga-yaga, pakatawa.

Bugnaw ang adlaw sa sayong kabuntagon ug may yamog pa ang sagbot nga gihangrab sa mananap. Wa siyay kahadlok, way kabalaka. Manabsab siya, maghulat sama sa iyang naandan, sa isangon niyang buluhaton nianang adlawa—magdaro ba, magpakaras, maghakot ug kopras, magsaog og troso. Tingali aboton siyag katingala sa kadugayan nganong gigaoran man nila ang iyang duha ka sungay og usa ka putol nga kahoy, tuyokan og pisi ug itagkos siyag hugot sa punoang lubi. Sama sa gikaandan, di siya motutol, ug matuman ang tanang pangandam. Unya

moabot ang matansero, magabitbit og bunal ug sundang talinis. Moduol sa mananap nga karon mobati nag kahangawa. Kining mga nahitabo sukwahi sa iyang naandan. Apan tungod kay wala man siyay pagduda, wa man lang gani kini moaksyon og likay pagduol sa matansero. Kalit siyang gibalbag niini, gibunalan sa alimpulo, mobuto ang iyang kalibotan, magkadurog-durog. Magpatid-patid iyang pangulhing tiil, hangtod siya malup-og.

Inigkatumba na niya, duslakon sa sundang talinis ang dapit sa tutunlan. Mosirit ang init nga dugo. Mag-aningal ang hayop gikan sa kinaunhang hagtos sa bunal hangtod kini magbuy-od sa yuta. Ang tiyabaw sa hayop madungog ngadto sa ikapitong tuktok sa Amandewing, ang iyang kasakit, kon imo gyung pamation, moguba sa pito ka tuig nimong katulogon, kay mora kinig nangutana sa mga nag-alirong, “Unsay akong sala nga inyo man kining nahimo?” Ang iyang unga magkahinay nga magkahinay. Padayon nga magbanaw ang init ug lunsayng dugo. Mangdasok ang mga tawo, mag-iyahayg salod sa nagbuhagay nga kinabuhi. Ang matigom nga dugo ila kining isagol kuno sa bag-ong hiwat nga lina, unya imnon para pabaskog. Sumala sa naandan, ang gisagol nga dugo ug tam-is nga tuba idalit sad sa mga babaying masus-an ug sa mga bata.

Moundang nag tiyabaw ang hayop.

Mao na lay madungog karon ang hagarong sa iyang hingutas nga gininhawa, hangtod mohilom na gayud. Hiwaon ang tiyan, habwaon ang gininhawaan ug dad-on sa tubig aron limpyohan. Putlon ang ulo, ang duha ka sungay. Buk-on ang bagol-bagol aron maabot ang utok nga kinaham. Anitan ang karabaw. Pikason ang lawas, ang mga pinikas tagod-tagoron aron mabahin-bahin sa mga panimalay nga mingdugok, morag mga ulmigas, pag-ambit sa karne. Ganiha ra may naghaling—sa di madugay mangalimyon ang sinugba nga atay ug tungol. Ganiha pa ming-abot ang damahan. Tagay ang tanan, pati na ang kabataan nga malipayong nagdagan-dagan, dakop-dakop, manikoy og karne nga manglasik, pira-piraso sa bukog, aron ilang iuli ug isud-an. Ang Himanglos nga maoy testigos aning tanan wa gyuy ikatug-an, padayon lang sa iyang pagdailos ngadto sa kadagatan.

Apan ikaw, ikaw karon nga ako nang gisuginlan aning akong hibatian, hinaot imo sang madungog ang tiyabaw sa gisakitan, ang agulo sa natumba ug samdan nga mananap, ang kasakit sa way dag-anan maglanog-lanog unta sa imong alimpatakan. Aron di na ko mag-inusara, duna na koy kauban, duha na ta, duha na tang magbangotan, bisan wa gud tay mahimo pagbakwi sa naandan...

## ***Butchery***

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Before the sun is up, the animal is led  
to the bank of the Himanglos River  
where a tree or a coconut palm stands,  
to which the animal is tied. The neighborhood  
arrive one by one, they sit around or squat  
among the rocks to wait for the butcher.  
They take out their smokes, each one  
lighting up his own roll, or they exchange chews,  
“Some lime paste here, *pare*,” “Some betel nut?”  
“Chewing tobacco, anyone?”  
They dredge up stories, tell their dreams,  
rehash their hurts, make jokes, make foolish talk,  
to raise some laughter while waiting.

The early morning sun is cool  
and the animal grazes on dew-fresh grass.  
He feels no worry, no fear.  
He grabs the sweet grass around him,  
waiting as he is wont to do, for the day’s  
work—plow the fields, harrow, pull a sled  
loaded with sacks of copra, or drag lumber  
down from the hills. He might have wondered  
why they tie a piece of wood now to his horn  
to harness him very close to the tree.  
Trained to obey, he does not resist, and thus  
the preparation is easily done. Then

the butcher comes, in one hand a piece of wood  
and in the other a sharp-pointed knife.  
He goes near the animal. Now he scents fear,  
for these things that are happening are all new  
and strange. Still he suspects nothing, makes no move  
to evade when the butcher approaches.  
Swiftly the man hits the beast one mighty blow  
at the top of his head, his world explodes,  
shatters into pieces. He kicks wildly with his hind legs  
until he falls.

Once the beast is down he jabs  
with the knife, wounding the throat. Blood spurts.  
The animal screams at the first blow, the second,  
the third, several blows more. The cry reaches  
the seventh peak of Amandewing. If you listen well,  
the cry of pain could wreck your sleep for seven years,  
for it seems to be asking those around him,  
“What have I done that you do this to me?”  
Soon the cries grow weaker. The warm pure blood  
gushes copiously. The people gather close, pushing  
to get their share of the life richly pouring out.  
They will mix it with fresh-tapped coconut wine  
and drink it for energy and strength.  
The broth will also be fed, as is customary,  
to nursing women and the children.

The animal has stopped crying.  
The only thing to be heard now is the growling  
of his ebbing breath. Then at last, silence.  
The belly is opened up, the innards are taken out  
and brought down to the river to be cleaned.  
The head is cut, the two horns. The skull is opened  
to get to the soft brains, the choicest part.  
The carabao is then skinned. The body is split,  
then cut into pieces so it can be divided among  
the families who had come for their share of the meat.  
Someone has started a fire—very soon, the fragrance  
of roasting liver and tripe will fill the air.  
A demijohn of tuba had earlier arrived.  
There is drink for everyone, even the children  
who are happily skipping about, chasing each other,  
stealing the meat flying from the butcher's knife,  
pieces of bone—they'll bring it home for dinner.  
The river Himanglos is witness to all these  
but it just keeps flowing to the sea, and has nothing to say .

And what about you, you to whom I now tell  
everything that I have heard, I pray you too,  
would hear the roar of pain, the cry of the fallen,  
wounded beast, I pray the agony of the oppressed  
will echo deep in the caverns of your brain—  
so I won't be alone, I will have you, the two of us now  
to share this grief—though it's quite true, both of us,  
we're powerless to change what's fixed...

*August 24, 2012*

## ***Bin Laden***

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Ten, eleven years they hunted him. Too long a time  
to keep a prize on a man's head without hunter or prey  
becoming careless, giving up on the game one way  
or the other. But felons have been hunted for lesser crimes—  
and his, by any means, exceeds the count:  
two commercial flights wrecked, their passengers killed,  
national monuments demolished, two proud cities shamed,  
a nation brought to mourning, the world in puzzled rage—  
all on one sunlit morning of 9-11 A.D. 2001.  
We sat agape all that day, not knowing what to think.  
Drumbeats of war vibrated from zone to zone.  
We've walked the razor's edge since then,  
stalked by terror, no one spared.

Hero of the sleepless, angry, disenchanted, Osama Bin Laden.  
Warrior, desert rat, bigot, fanatic, maniac, saint.  
Rebel against the universal tyrannies of our age, hegemonies  
of greed. Honor we begrudge him—this devotee  
whose causes crumble on the threshold of our facile pieties.  
Slurping our thinned teas and watery rice gruel,  
we simple folks blamed him for all our ills—sun and ice,  
drought and flood, surely, all these, we said, are wages  
of the Christian blood wasted at his command  
on that morning of 9/11. The fevers that kill our children,  
train wrecks, earthquakes, tsunamis, wars and famines  
—none will be assuaged until he falls, his deed avenged.

We prayed he would be found. Tracking dogs sniffed out his traces in real or virtual time. We never thought of him as mortal, and perhaps, like us, also afraid. He was proudly as a cougar, fierce, and always blood-hungry.

His fall when it came was swift and sure—only his wives, a son or two to witness. They took him out in Hyderabad, shot him down in his own room, bundled him up and flew his body to a waiting ship.

No grave on land  
for such as he, they had decreed, whose name could  
turn a mere rock to an altar or a monument and thus  
populate the earth with more believers to sow terror  
such as he had bred. The sea then, the sea for Bin Laden,  
commodious graveyard that gorged him in without a trace  
into its darkness and ponderous silence.

That's all that we can tell the future, all what we've been told.  
Dare we ask, Has Justice been served, with blood to even the score  
on both sides? Are the murders paid up at last? With him gone,  
will we, at last, lie easy at night, sipping our drink,  
dipping our fingers in sea salt to flavor a mess  
of cold rice and mountain greens? Eternally,  
the sea washes his bones. Listen:

ebb and flow  
ebb and flow  
ebb and flow—  
we'll never know.

*September 7, 2011*



## Stories

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Ormoc lay in muck for weeks after the flood.  
People rose from the muck, sorting out the debris  
for what to throw away, what they might re-use,  
took up shovel, hammer and nails, saw, drill, mattock,  
to rebuild the city they had lost to the water and the silt.  
After a while the sun came out, dried the muck  
which quickly turned to dust and rose in the air,  
and fell gently over all surfaces, even the trees  
wore on their leaves the color of clay.  
Then the stories began, many different stories.

Witness:

One day before the flood, a beggar came by,  
stopped to ask for a drink at a house in Isla Verde.  
A very little thing, did anyone pour him a drink,  
or did he turn away dry? Dry, everyone said,  
or else... such wages they paid for a good not done.  
Not so, not so. It was a woman, a woman came knocking,  
asking for a night's shelter, but ever suspicious  
of strangers, no householder dared to let her in.  
And still one more tale: No, no, not a beggar,  
not a woman. A child came by asking for food,  
but not a mouthful would anyone spare him  
from his meagre board—

Now then, with eight thousand dead, homes,  
neighborhoods, villages, perished in the Great Flood,  
who is to blame among the living or the dead  
for that fit of churliness or greed, a mild indifference,  
granted, a minor sin, doubtless a little guilt  
that brought down heaven's wrath to flood the city?

And still more stories come up. Witness:

When it is time to light the lamps, listen—  
cries for help, shouts of distress, mothers calling,  
children screaming, before the water surged.  
I heard those voices, said one. I too, said another.  
And I. And I. And I. Even those who merely came  
to help, even they would say, We too, we too,  
we heard them...

We may doubt these voices, heard  
as from a great distance, disembodied,  
mere echoes in the nerves' tympani, likely,  
heard more in the head than by the listening ear,  
where a village used to be, a neighborhood, homes.  
Walking the dark streets some nights, some swear,  
one may sense them rising from the sea,  
faint wailing hovering over the water  
as of angels lamenting. How the skin prickles  
as one sits down to eat, or at dawn, as one  
draws up the sheets against the chill—  
these stories, word by mouth passing,

as the living dug their lives out of the muck  
and washed off the dust abiding everywhere.

Ask me how they bore all that—the swift  
emptying wrought in one fell sweep of water?  
Tell stories, tell stories to one another,  
stories of one thing or the other,  
oh, but not to the sea, never tell the sea—  
the sea never remembers.