

Three Poems from *Notes From the Field*

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Marawi is Trending

Listen – I want to be done
with poems about bygone
bullets and the aftermath. The truth is,

what happened in Marawi has happened
before. The news is loud until after the anniversary

passes. They said they'd keep a backward countdown
for every day that went without a trial – they forgot.

A catalog of buried things: the revelatory lead
of a damning news report; the torn genealogy
of a royal family, discarded at the bottom of a lake;
a woman's account of escape
with a hole in it.

A list of evidence: the absence of land titles
and numbers sprawled on the skeletons
of houses; the bones of a family under the rubble
of a government airstrike; a backhoe
with the mayor's name on it.

In Mindanao, every violence is different.
In Mindanao, every violence is the same.
Is this land cursed or unlucky –
or are the people upstairs just greedy?

We are always spoken about and never spoken to:
Today, it was the Maranao yesterday
the Sama Dilaut the Tausug the farmers
the fishermen the indigenous
the journalists the businessmen your neighbors
your shops your boats
your harvest your rivers your language

Surely martial law is meant to be a security precaution,
not some Stanford prison experiment, one party armed,
beating the balls out of the other
because they could because the subjects signed consent forms
because power has a way of making a man *high*

These are true stories: after the siege,
a soldier was found in the Nikes of a man
whose house was looted; my schoolmate's missing bicycle
was found on the lawn of a Western Mindanao Command residence;
and the mosque on Simariki Island rings
with silence, another Ramadan without an imam.
He is wrapped in a thin malong in a cold cell
in Manila. His wife has slept next to a picture
since the day they took him without a warrant.

At least once a year a city from here rules
the front pages because there is a court hearing
for terrorism rebellion murder
people are dying or fighting or both
people have lived on the cursed floor
of a covered basketball court for years
and for a day

Marawi is trending
Zamboanga is trending
Kidapawan is trending
Maguindanao is trending

Rido

The women weep for the river. The river weeps for the women. The women weep a river. The river sings to the women. The women wash and dry their plates and laundry. The river divides those on either side of it. The river unites those who come to fish in it. The children cannot cross the river. The river runs, clear and cold. When blood was first spilled here, it was thick and hot. Blood is thicker than politics, than principle, than religion, than the waters that run between us. Revenge is a dish best served warm. Nobody likes a cold body – everybody cries over what is fresh. This is what men tell us. *We do not expect you to understand this.* But we do. There is a woman across the stream, and she looks like me. We have bled a river, cried a river, and washed a body. It is said that the river was once a woman, her sons killed in a feud. She has not stopped weeping since. Their bodies have hardened to stone.

Interview with a Churchgoer at the Jolo Cathedral

January 27, 2019

I missed mass on the morning of the bomb.
My mother-in-law, at the front pew of the cathedral, hung on to God.
When we rushed to its ruins, it was overrun by dogs
and policemen. We were told to search elsewhere. A drum

pounded in my chest as we combed the hospitals and morgues,
expecting the worst. We learned there was only one ambulance
in all of Jolo, my lost mother-in-law in it. She would never dance
again, but she was alive. We were told she was taken aboard

an airlift to Zamboanga. We were at the pier for hours.
The last fastcraft docked to the song of crickets.
Dozens of injured died during the wait; we got their tickets.
When we returned, I thought, I would offer them flowers.

We arrived at dawn, and I unburdened my cross.
A week later, terrorists bombed the mosque.

NOTES

“Marawi is Trending” is after “Jerusalem is Trending” by Sam Sax.

“Rido” references the 2016 film *Women of the Weeping River*, directed by Sheron Dayoc.

REGINE CABATO is a journalist based in Manila. She has received the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Award and Loyola Schools Award for the Arts for poetry. Her work has been published in *Kritika Kultura*, *Cha Literary Journal*, and *Rambutan Literary* among others. She hails from Zamboanga City.