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1st Edit

IMAGERIES IN MOTION
(*GAMBAR-GAMBAR YANG BERGERAK DI WAYANG*)

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Last night I played again Giuseppe Tornatore's movie, *Cinema Paradiso* – seeing Toto and Alfredo in a unique relationship. A piece of memory of an adult that wanted a world he couldn't afford to have during his childhood. Every person had that memory. Me too. I surely had that kind of memory. There was a child who wanted a world he couldn't afford to have. But like Toto, I also didn't know what I longed for and what did I miss from that longing. It was a piece of memory that always made every pain a reason, even though it was never been a reason before. Just like Toto, again, frustration in love was made as a reason to get out from the village – and surely leaving Alfredo. But in truth, it was not the real reason. There was a disturbing sentiment in Toto's heart to take him away – away from himself in truth, truly.

I too was borne in a small village, far from any conveniences of a modern world. A village that became sprightly with the opening of rubber estates owned by the British. Henceforth, the villagers mainly worked at the British-owned estates on daily salary basis. I had a grandma who brought me up. My grandma, as far as I knew, didn't work like the rest of the villages. She only worked whenever she felt like it. If not, she would stay at home, or go fishing at the river or spend time gardening in the backyard. Might be because my late grandpa left her sufficient wealth, house and land, to live off that my grandma didn't feel the desperate needs to earn a living like others.

I lived in loneliness worse than Toto. But just like Toto, I also had my Alfredo. Yes, step brother of my grandma. My step grandpa, if one wanted to relate his relationship to me. I called him Pak Da. I didn't know why I called him that way, might be because of his name or his status in the family. But one thing for sure, I couldn't recall his real name anymore. What was so special about him? Nothing, he was not like Alfredo who rotated movies and edited sexual scenes censured by the priests. Pak Da was only a person that rotated the images of village lives, liberalized due to the arrival of capitalist economics to my country.

“I don't want a village story anymore. Too Malay. We should relay a story that could bring an ideology of a new community. A story that portrays various faces of the community. The face of a modern world that wouldn't state that a country is merely a Malay village, which...which...full of nostalgias...dead romanticism.” The young producer, who would determine a film output by the biggest film-producing studio in this country, opposed his film.

“The village life is basic, a point to the formation of a country. We look at the primate orders.” I protested.

“You should look at market demography. We can’t live with unrealistic ideals...today is the world of consumerism.” The young producer, a film graduate from overseas, surely saw his intelligence as too grandiose.

“A film is a statement. A verisimilitude.” I didn’t want to test anyone’s knowledge.

“I am a film graduate from overseas. You don’t have to teach me the meaning of film that you understand from the street.” The producer, as if was mocking his credentials.

“I didn’t learn film, I entered film.” I repeated what Tarantino, that mad man from Hollywood, said.

That producer looked at him vacantly. Didn’t comprehend anything. His head was full with pride and misplaced arrogance; his head was truly empty. Or he might be confused.

Pak Da seldom talked; even when he talked his sentences were poorly structured and difficult to understand. His voice as if coming from the throat. But he was very nice to me. I was among the few that could easily understand what he was saying. His world of speech only consisted of several experienced-boxes of village surrounding, jungle and river in my village. So it wasn’t difficult for me to find meaning from the representative of sounds coming from his throat. Understanding of language, in truth, was the understanding of the surroundings in the head of one who did the talking.

Pak Da liked to keep many strange things in his home. From plants like black turmeric, white ginger, *larak salah*, *tas* wood, king of wood; to animal parts like horn of mountain goat, tiger’s eye-tooth, crocodile’s penile, ape’s canine, elephant’s toe, and feather of bird of paradise, *cenderawasih*; and no exception to strange stones like red ruby and *geliga buaya*, *geliga ular*, *geliga embun*, and *batu serai*, in addition to many others that I had already forgotten the names. Pak Da also kept various supposedly magical ointments like oil from a mountain goat, *cennuai*’s oil, and the scariest one was the murdered-man’s potion, which was the oil dripped from the scorched chin of a murdered person, dug from the grave on Thursday night.

Pak Da had many stories from each of the weird stuff that he owned. And each one of Pak Da’s stories was a movie whirling in my mind. Yes, Pak Da was an Alfredo who was spinning stories in the movies. The difference between a roll of film and Pak Da’s screen was only the strange stuff and the weird surrounding that shaped his world of speech. But for me, Pak Da’s story was the greatest and most enjoyable world of stories. Pak Da had an amazing experience in mystical matters. Difficult for me to say that he lied because Pak Da truly didn’t know how to lie. Pak Da was a simple villager and straight as an arrow, as the village folks said. And he never lied.

Pak Da told a story that he used to ride a truck at midnight together with Usin. Pak Da’s eyes, as sharp as tiger’s at night, saw them hitting a mountain goat. Usin paled and refused to go down. Pak Da went down with a machete to slaughter that stricken goat. Pak Da saw the goat was truly hit by Usin, felt the tires rode up and down over the goat – front and back tires. When Pak Da neared, that rolled over mountain goat suddenly stood with gleaming red eyes. Pak Da didn’t run. Finally the mountain goat was the one to walk away. The road that Pak Da rode on wasn’t commonly used by

people except for loggers' lorries. It was far into the jungles, tens of miles away. Over there Pak Da had seen boars, tigers, elephants and also bears. Pak Da worked with the logging company. But Pak Da said he was never afraid, even when he stayed alone in the jungle to taking care of logging equipment.

Pak Da had many stories; a shrilling vampire on tree-top, a python as big as coconut trunk, a dark being following *wak-wak* birds hitting a net, a child crying in the middle of the jungle, a mountain goat with gleaming red eyes, a tiger roaring around the shack, an elephant running amuck turning over the logging machine in the middle of night, a python swallowing a boar, a boar chasing him, a tiger fighting a crocodile while clawing to a tree trunk to avoid being pulled to the water till only its claws remained stuck to the trunk, a jungle wraith passing in front of him. I was the one facing the screen that played Pak Da's stories.

"I don't want just all these superstitious stories..." That young producer gave his final words.

"No. This is not a superstitious story." I looked at him directly.

"I meant we need a horror story like *Exorcist*, *Nang Nak*, *Ju-on*, or at least *Jangan Pandang Belakang*..." That young producer taught me how to make money through movie.

"I don't see a ghost but I see a culture... a magical surrounding created by cultural atmosphere."

"Do you want to do a documentary film?" The young producer continued, "...you need to look for other producer."

"Not a documentary but film...fiction film. It is a film about humanity. Is it not the film is also humanity itself?" I leaned back and spinned the chair in front of me.

"Listen here. I don't want to be rude or uncouth with you. You are older than me. But I don't want to waste time with your film. You look for other producer." That young producer as if was giving me an ultimatum. I didn't feel bad, I knew he was nice and truly the easiest producer to work with. The problem was just that...he was in confusion. Confused on how to complete this film entasked to him. Confused on how to turn this film into a box-office. Confused on how to ensure this film wouldn't be a losing wrecked. Confused with the whims of his actors and crews. Confused by his married life newly navigated. Confused by his bank loans that were snaring him. Confused with the world that kept saying he was confused.

"I have the script approval already..."

That young confused producer was stupefied. Confused evermore.

People said that Pak Da's house was guarded by *anak nyir*, a term the village folks used for a changeling tiger. It was a guardian wraith in the form of a tiger. Mak Da, whom had a son with Pak Da, said that Pak Da had seven *anak nyir*. Mak Da was a coward with ghosts and phantoms, but Pak Da would always follow her dictates. Their only son, Zu, who was much older than me, was also very kind to me. Mak Da said, sometimes Pak Da's *anak nyir* would show themselves, slipping their tails through the floor of their home. That meant Pak Da forgot to feed them. What did they eat? I asked. Burnt rice, said Mak Da. Mak Da wasn't scared? I asked again. Mak Da already asked to get rid of them, but Pak Da refused, hardheaded. Mak Da wasn't

seriously angry. There were seven changeling cubs and their mother, a large but lame changeling tigress.

That was Pak Da's story. In truth, I had never met any ghosts, specters or any of the strange animals in Pak Da's and Mak Da's stories. It was true that I saw all the weird things kept by Pak Da, but I only saw them as not more than cultural artifacts kept in Pak Da's cultural atmosphere, or my village folks'. Yes, a sphere of hallucination that kept unconscious awareness cumulatively for so long. Ghosts, wraiths and phantoms were holograms that existed in Pak Da's sphere of hallucination due to condition of the environment surrounding him. The village surrounding, jungle, hill, mountain, and river, was a nature in motion communicating with Pak Da; bringing into existence the hologram as language and his world of speech. It finally formed a value system in Pak Da, Mak Da and the village folks that were surrounded by it. A value system that was formed by nature; for them to respect the nature; to be aware of the mystical strength of the nature; to feel the presence of natural influence; and to form a life that forbade them from committing evil or damaging their surrounding environment, in their community, and within their own selves – because the nature had its own power in responding to their evil conducts.

It was a unique cultural atmosphere. A value system developed internally and naturally through close relationship of man and nature. This value system existed for a long time, since the ancient time or might be since pre-historic time. Nevertheless, when the foreign elements like the modern power of British arrived, which brought a new wave of capitalistic value system through rubber estates, train, currency system, salaried labor, and way of life that started to damage relationship with nature. Nature was used for the selfish interest of man to gain wealth through conquering and damaging it – relationship between man and nature began to disconnect. The unique relationship that formed the society's value system for so long started to be threatened. Pak Da was among the last stakes to that unique value system of the Malay society. After that, in the hand of Zu, Pak Da's son who was more interested in soccer and Levis jeans, who ran to work in Singapore for an Adidas shoe, the stake that held this value system was uprooted.

"I just watched your film; we can show a totally different horror film. Even though I am not sure audience can accept this experiment. But I feel like trying it." That young producer came to see him, half confident and half perplex.

"No. It is not a horror movie." I tried to straighten his confusion.

"I am not so sure, but the film about a village, a weird old man and a kid looking for mystery behind every lives around him. What film is this?" That producer was still in his massive confusion.

"It is an atmosphere of hallucination."

"You think it can attract many movie-goers? Can be a box-office hit?" The young producer asked me politely.

"Does film require audience?" I asked him in return.
He was perplexed.

“Film doesn’t need audience. It is a hallucination sphere, a hologram that exists due to modern value system, just like nature creates ghosts in agrarian society. Thus a modern society is a man entering this atmosphere of hallucination. Not the audience but the participants spreading out in this atmosphere of hallucination.”

That young producer was dumbfounded and confused.

“This film, currently, is part of our lives’ value system. It will bring profit because it is its attribute to generate profit. Because our current value system is material, not nature anymore. We will not accept magical stone, eye-tooth of a tiger or a changeling as payment for this film. We will accept money, because that is our value system.”

The audience saw man X, possibly a director, was arguing with man M, a producer that didn’t want to produce his outdated films. Man X went home and that night performed a spirit-calling ritual combined with a blood offering. In the bedroom of man M, suddenly the window opened slowly, something was creeping in, crawling up the bed of man M. Man M woke up, shocked, his eyes wide opened. No screamed was heard. Man M lay still on his bed. The wind blew softly through the open window...

Translated from original works:

***Gambar-gambar Yang Bergerak Di Wayang.* S.M. Zakir**

(Total word-counts: 2,091 words)

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