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Let no man speak for all

Anushka Anastasia Solomon | Apr 13, 09 2:17pm

"Every reform was once a private opinion, and when it shall be a private opinion again it will solve the problem of the age."

- from Emerson's essay 'History'

Being Malaysian-American can be likened to that Osmond classic - a little bit country and a little bit rock and roll.

The macabre aspects to that analogy, however, are the experiences of the PKR's state representative Elizabeth Wong who recently fled Malaysia, the Mongolian Altantuya, and Kugan Ananthan whose death is still under investigation.

In my opinion, Malaysia today, although beautiful is still not a safe place for women, children and minorities. I, myself, do not feel safe enough to return.

As a Malaysian poet, unless I sing odes to the Malay-Muslim government, or adopt its' dominant culture as my own, my tongue is fettered.

Loving both my country of birth and my country of adoption I experience life on either end of the spectrum as well all the middle ground.

On a bad day, I am burning a candle on both ends. On a good one, it's a beautiful world, "charged," as the poet Gerald Manley Hopkins wrote, "with the grandeur of God."

As the personal and political intersect in life, I choose. Some choices I write about. Others, made in the silence of the heart, are laid to rest with God.

One lesson learned however is that in personal life, naïveté is endearing, in political life, costly.

As a young American educated 26-year-old Malaysian, I held a baby and gestured to my husband as he pulled out the driveway. He drove back in, and as I stood there, wilting in the morning heat, outside our little terrace house, he sat in the air-conditioned car, and looked at me quizzically.

"Is this it?" I asked.

"What?" he inquired, indulgently.

"The house, the car, the baby...2.1 children.... The American Dream, only in Malaysia."

"Yes, isn't this great?" he quipped, beaming, the proud husband and father.

Looking at him, I could only love his boyish exuberance and let him get to work on time. He waved cheerily and drove off. I looked down our street and back at our house.

A road paved with martyrs

There is somewhat more hope, I imagined. I was sure that the American dream was possible for Malaysia, for all countries and people but certainly sooner for us.

Time, commitment, education, hard work, intelligence, integrity, transparency and trust; that's all, I thought, rather naively.

I failed to appreciate the full extent of a need in government for a police force that is not corrupt and for the checks and balances of civil society such as exist in the United States.

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The United States is not utopia, President Barrack Obama - a good man - is not the messiah but both embody the hope that our human spirit yearns for in God, government, state and civil society.

Malaysia, on the other hand, is a nation that imposes a narrow and rigid interpretation of Islamic doctrine on her people.

The current Malaysian government leaning heavily on its' archaic religious and racial politics has exchanged her moral compass for the highly subjective interests of a few.

Turning away that morning, in Malaysia, I didn't realize that dreams take out the best years of our lives. That time is all we have. That there is pain, sacrifice, loss, humiliation and the broken road to endure before dreams come true and turn to destiny.

As my husband commented recently upon hearing of Lasantha Wikramatunga's assassination, "The road to freedom is paved with martyrs."

I didn't realize until almost twenty years after that morning, that a university degree could not unlock opportunities that are withheld in a stronghold of racial and religious politics.

That tradition would have to be overcome by the spirit of the martyrs, willing to die, face prison or exile for their beliefs.

Malaysia has her martyrs; men and women, laying the foundation for a better tomorrow by evincing a sacrificial love of country.

Now Chief Minister of Penang Lim Guan Eng who went to prison for the human rights of a Malay Muslim family, Hindraf and their families, Raja Petra Kamaruddin, Irene Fernandez, Karpal Singh, Elizabeth Wong, Ambiga Sreenivasan and others, create change by actively, and through peaceable means resisting an evil government.

The battles they choose to fight and the ones that they are prepared to compromise on create the foundation for a great nation.

Great nations find their inspiration in the lives of great people every where, some like Mahatma Gandhi achieve acclaim being thrust into public political life, others, like President Obama's late mother, and grandmother influence through their personal lives from behind the scenes.

Poverty of spirit

Slumdog Millionaire generated profit and buzz at a time when the West had failed to observe her own core values.

Success stories, East and West, underreported in major newspapers, have foundational dreams that are based on those core values. What will it take to return to those core values?

The answer has come from the United States - the people. Despite, religious and political jockeying for power, the God who answered from the heavens answered on the side of the people.

Slums are everywhere. We need only to look. When Jesus walked this earth, he called it 'poverty of spirit.'

Here in America, volunteering with the homeless, I watched a young American child raised in a motel right next to a place where there is nude dancing.

For this child as well, the American Dream would be inaccessible unless something happens. That something is happening. That's the good news.

In his inaugural benediction, the American Reverend Lowery invoked the 'God of our weary years and silent tears'.

What gives me great hope for the Malaysian Dream is this 'kepercayaan kepada Tuhan'.

More and more men and women are refusing to nod assent to evil and believing in a God of justice.

The Malaysian people are rising up just like Americans and asking more of their governments and religious institutions.

Where once I posited, "The Malaysian Dream, is there one?" the multiracial, multi-religious Malaysian people are answering resolutely, yes.

The time has come for Malaysia with the help of the international community and the United Nations to throw off the yoke and bondage of racial and religious politics.

The question of whether Malaysia will turn republic and return power back to the people is best answered by the people and their God. Let no man speak for all, I say, having fled Malaysia in search of that proverbial homeland.

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