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Toronto International
Film Festival 2022



AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A Film By **MAKBUL MUBARAK**

KAWANKAWAN MEDIA PRESENTS "AUTOBIOGRAPHY"
IN COLLABORATION WITH IN VIVO FILMS, PÖTOCOL, STARON FILM, CINEMATOGRAFICA, NiKo FILM, FOCUSED equipment, PARTISIPASI INDONESIA FEATURING KEVIN ARDILOVA, ARSWENDY BENING SWARA, YUSUF MAHARDIKA,
LUKMAN SARDI, YUDI AHMAD TAJUDIN, RUKMAN ROSADI, HARU SANDRA DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY WOJCIECH STARON PSC PRODUCTION DESIGNER SIGIT D. PRATAMA EDITOR CARLO FRANCISCO MANATAD MUSIC BY BANI HAYKAL COSTUME DESIGNER L.H. AIM ADINEGARA,
WALDIR XAVIER, RÉMI CROUZET, JEAN-GUY VERAN CO-PRODUCERS LOUISE BELICAUD, CLAIRE CHARLES-GERVAIS, JEREMY CHUA, MALGORZATA STARON, ARMI RAE CACANINDIN, NICOLE GERHARDS, AMERTA KUSUMA,
ROBIN MORAN, PINKAN VERONIQUE, ARYA SWETA, GANESYA PRODUCER YULIA EVINA BHARA WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY MAKBUL MUBARAK SELLER ALPHA VIOLET



RUNTIME

115 minutes

LANGUAGE

Indonesian with English subtitles

GENRE

Drama, Thriller

FORMAT

DCP | 2.35:1 | Colour | 5.1 | 24 FPS

YEAR

2022

COUNTRIES

Indonesia, France, Singapore, Poland,
The Philippines, Germany, Qatar

LOGLINE

A young man torn between loyalty and justice confronts the truth of his father figure that may destroy them both.

SYNOPSIS

With his father in prison and his brother abroad for work, young Rakib works as the lone housekeeper in an empty mansion belonging to Purna, a retired general whose family Rakib's clan have served for centuries in a rural Indonesian town.

After Purna returns home to start his mayoral election campaign, Rakib bonds with the older man, who becomes a close mentor and father figure, and finds his calling as Purna's assistant in work and life. When Purna's election poster is found vandalised one day, Rakib doesn't hesitate to track down the culprit, kicking off an escalating chain of violence...



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Throughout the three decades of Indonesia's military dictatorship from the mid-Sixties to the late-Nineties, my father worked as a civil servant under the regime. I grew up observing him performing his loyalty to the state as something that seemed inherent to my family's life. I learnt, by observing him, that loyalty is what makes a person honourable: a principle that I considered to be very true, and at that point in time, satisfyingly rewarding.

However, as I grew up, a question began to haunt me: is loyalty still honourable if and when it is pledged to something monstrous? If we annul our loyalty to them, would this be considered a betrayal? Or a fight for justice? And therefore, would this make us a good or bad person?

Autobiography is an emotional inquiry into my adolescence, my country, and to the values that I was raised with—which are still being taught everywhere even to this day, twenty-four years after the collapse of the dictatorship. In a society with such a repressed history, what does it take to be able to call oneself 'a good person'?

INTERVIEW:

BY JAMES MOTTRAM



MAKBUL MUBARAK

How did your father's work in the civil service feed into the project?

My family are all civil servants, including my uncle and my aunts. We are a big family of people working for the government. It all started back around 1974... it was the heyday of the military dictatorship in Indonesia. I was born in 1990 into that kind of family. So everything seemed normal to me in my childhood... the ruling value of the state also became the ruling value in our family, because our family worked for the state. I couldn't tell the difference. So that happened until 1998, when the dictatorship dissolved.

So your teenage years were very different after the dictatorship ended?

Exactly. So this is where the confusion started. This is the moment where I started to go, 'Okay, so we have to question this dictatorship', but I was raised from within this environment. So how should I approach this? Teenagers... we're all searching for things. And the immediate answer at the time was religion. So when politics fails, I think in many places in the world, religion takes over and gives you the answer. I was sent by my family to an Islamic Boarding school to learn the Islamic religion. But it didn't solve the question for me. Later, I went and studied politics, and learned that... the people who work for the dictator are still ruling nowadays. We are governed by the same people, by the same value almost. So the value doesn't change. And that's why I wrote the film. Because I always feel that we're still living in the shadow. It's a big shadow. It's not actually past, it's present. This is the spirit of the country.

You call the film 'Autobiography'. Why?

The autobiography in the film is not my autobiography. It's the autobiography of the country. Between these two characters, this endless vicious circle of people coming to power and people being ousted by power. You can see the autobiography of the country from the interaction between these two characters, and they're mirroring each other. They're basically the same person, I would say, on a lot of layers. The title is very abstract. And I like it that way. There is no autobiographical element in this story, but only in this layer, that these characters actually mirror each other. And my generation and my father's generation also like mirroring each other in terms of what we are doing nowadays. So this is where the title works.

The theme of loyalty is huge in the story. Was that a starting point, as something you wanted to explore?

I think loyalty is important. Because it's in Indonesian context, it's an outcome of ignorance. I would say. The young people, they're ignorant of the past. It's not being taught in school. So it's a history that is being repressed. In school, this 32 year period... they don't teach you that. So it's no wonder that the young generation grows more and more ignorant of the past. A lot of young people are very conservative in Indonesia. It's like Make Indonesia Great Again! They want to go back there because it was much more stable in the past. And today, it's very uncertain. So this loyalty I think is dangerous because it's a result of ignorance. So that's why in the film, loyalty is always being questioned. It's not being praised. It's always being questioned because loyalty sounds honourable. But where does it come from? And what is the outcome that you can get out of this loyalty? So it's slowly become the thematic ground zero in the film.



With his own father in prison, Rakib sees the General as a surrogate father. Can you also speak about the notion of father figures in the film?

You know, the Indonesian dictatorship works in a very Freudian way. It centres on the dictator as the father figure of the country. We even have a term in Indonesia as 'Bapakisme', which literally translated to English as 'fatherism'. So this becomes an ideology; things gravitated towards this father figure. We used to call the dictator Soeharto the father of the development. We call him that. It was written on one of the bank notes in that time - 'Soeharto, the father of the development.' So he always presented himself as a father, and we have to be loyal to the father. I mean, as I'm telling you, it feels like North Korea! It's not that extreme. But there is this aura of the President as the father figure. So everybody was looking either to praise this father figure or to rebel against him by looking out for other father figures. So there's always this constant search for it. If you don't like the father figure that the state is giving you, look for your own father figure. And hopefully it can help you grow as a person. And this is what Rakib is actually looking [for], because he already feels that his real father is failing, being in the prison, for whatever he did.

There's an atmosphere of violence pervades the film. What was your approach to showing it on screen?

Violence has different forms. It's not just physical violence. But in the film, I want to present violence as a mood. There are layers of violence. We introduce the violence through coffee! The General says: 'Who says I drink coffee? Sit down!' This is the first form of violence in the film... it's very violent to me. And it involves no physical contact whatsoever. It's just a conversation. So this is what I strive to do in the film; to show as many layers of violence as possible that are present to the audience. And of course, it culminates in the actual violence that breaks out in the climax of the film. For example, I intentionally did not show the General beating the high school kid. For me, the effect on Rakib is much more important.



What sort of conversations did you have with your cinematographer, Wojciech Staroń, about visually expressing the film's themes?

The first thing we talked about - this is a film about mirrors. It's two characters mirroring each other. And in the film, we use a lot of glass and mirrors and light is refracted through these many mirrors. We use a lot of mirrors to create this refraction. And also space is very important because space in the film is always about power. So there's always this game of who is controlling and who's being controlled and through what form of violence. So I always talked to the actors - now you're being the predator, now you're being the prey, play that role. So we are role-playing - you're the tiger and the other one is the sheep. So there is always that dynamic. And my cinematographer would always go first and foremost, to shoot the head of Rakib, to see things from his mind. And then from that we create the mood.



How did you set about finding an actor to play Rakib?

For Rakib, I didn't do open casting because I wanted to know the actor's life story. Because I also want to borrow from his life. I'm looking for an interesting person, not just an actor who can portray the character as accurately as possible. So for Kevin [Ardilova]... I talked to him not about the script but his situation. He's a breadwinner for his family. His Mum and Dad are divorced and he's now taking care of two siblings and the mother. So he knows the burden. At only 21 years of age, he has to think about a lot of stuff: apartments, school fees, everything. So I said, 'I think I can borrow from that.' So a lot of things that actually I learned from Kevin were actually put in the script later. I changed the script, based on his life story also. So it's a meeting point for the three of us - me, Rakib the character and also Kevin.

Was it a very different experience stepping up from making shorts to doing a feature?

Yes, and a more enjoyable one. I wrote *Autobiography* first as a short film. I wanted to make it a short. Back then I thought 'Features film is so far, I'm still starting.' But then when I reached scene number 70, I was like, 'This is not a short film anymore!' And since then, I'm not saying that I'm not interested in shorts, but I love long-form much more. Maybe because I'm also more of a writer. I started as a writer, I started as a film critic, and writing for other directors. So I love structure. I love character development. And in short films, sometimes you don't really have time for developing your character in many ways, because you only have fifteen minutes. But doing features, I think it's much more enjoyable for me creatively.





DIRECTOR'S BIO

Makbul MUBARAK is an Indonesian film critic-turned-filmmaker. A Berlinale Talents and Asian Film Academy alumni, his short films have been shown and awarded widely at festivals such as the Thai Short Film & Video Festival, Singapore International Film Festival, and Festival Film Indonesia, the Academy Awards of Indonesia. *Autobiography* is his debut feature.

CAST

Kevin Ardilova
Arswendy Bening Swara
Yusuf Mahardika
Lukman Sardi
Yudi Ahmad Tajudin
Rukman Rosadi
Haru Sandra

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Wojciech Staroń PSC

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Sigit D. Pratama

EDITOR

Carlo Francisco Manatad

MUSIC COMPOSER

Bani Haykal

SOUND

L.H. Aim Adinegara
Waldir Xavier
Rémi Crouzet
Jean-Guy Veran

CO-PRODUCERS

Louise Bellicaud
Claire Charles-Gervais
Jeremy Chua
Małgorzata Staroń
Armi Rae Cacanindin
Nicole Gerhards
Amerta Kusuma
Robin Moran
Pinkan Veronique
Arya Sweta
Ganesya

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Makbul Mubarak

PRODUCER

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