

Contextualization of Taring Padi's works in documenta fifteen

The collective Taring Padi has existed since 1998. Taring Padi work with visual materials to highlight specific aspects such as political struggles, resistance, and solidarity in Indonesian society. Their pictorial narratives on canvas and cardboard include protest signs and divide characters into the oppressed and the oppressor. The works, with their recurring motifs, address themes such as the critique of capitalism, imperialism, poverty, environmental injustice, and a better situation for (particularly) peasants, workers, and urban poor communities.

In documenta fifteen, Taring Padi presents materials that have been produced by the collective and used in various political settings over the past 23 years. These banners, posters, and life-sized cardboard puppets have been used in street actions and solidarity actions with many communities, including workers, peasants, and local communities who are endangered due to government projects undertaken in collusion with large corporations and the military.

Many of Taring Padi's works utilize zoomorphic figures, particularly pigs, boars, rats, and dogs. These animal figures are morphed half-human, half-animal, to represent oppressors: greedy capitalists, corrupt bureaucrats, and merciless police and military personnel. These hybrid figures are drawn from multiple and conflicting references: western art traditions (e.g. Hieronymus Bosch, George Grosz and the Dada movement), god-animal figures from Hinduism (e.g. Ganesh, Nandi, Hanuman), local animal folklores (e.g. *babi ngepet* [stinging pig], *buaya putih* [white crocodile]),

and antagonistic figures from the two important epics in Hindu literature, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, in the shadow puppet tradition who are depicted with fangs, sharp teeth, and bloody eyes. A more contemporary reference comes from Indonesian artist-activist Semsar Siahaan (1952-2005) and his visualization of the *manubilis* (*manusia setengah iblis* [half-human, half-demon]) concept. In the work *Tanah untuk Rakyat* (*Land for the People*), as an example, two zomorphic figures are depicted in a mating activity that illustrates the intimate relationship between a greedy industrialist and a merciless soldier who extract capital from the land at a cost to the people and the environment. The mating activity here does not necessarily refer to any particular (human) sexual activity. However, Taring Padi agrees with the assessment of the Indonesian partner of the German Lesbian and Gay Association (LSVD) regarding the depicted sexual activity: The depiction might associate anal sex with violence. Taring Padi is therefore thankful for the constructive criticism and takes it as part of their learning process.

Over 1,000 cardboard puppets were installed in three locations in Kassel: in Friedrichsplatz, as part of the installation of the 8-by-12-meter *People's Justice* banner, in the front yard of Hallenbad Ost, and inside Hallenbad Ost as part of the collective's archival display.

Taring Padi uses cardboard puppets as a pragmatic and interactive medium to support activist groups in their struggles for social justice in their communities. In effect, they deconstruct the highbrow art form of the Indonesian shadow puppet (*wayang*) tradition into a grassroots level of political and artistic expression and bring *wayang's* communicative and entertaining qualities to street

and political action. In street protests, for example, cardboard puppets are used to voice protest and demands, 'double up' the number of participants, add color and animation, protect participants from the weather, and act as a buffer against physical aggression.

The retrospective presented at Hallenbad Ost features a variety of diverse works by Taring Padi, which were produced collaboratively in open workshops with communities and within specific cultural and political contexts.

The large-scale banner *Sekarang Mereka, Besok Kita* (2022) encapsulates Taring Padi's overall theme in documenta fifteen. With its reference to Martin Niemöller's 1946 confessional prose "First they came for us..." the work is a call for action demanding an end to silence. This banner is a reminder of the unrelenting greed and violence of capitalism. It highlights the power of collective resistance, of agitating, educating, and organising ourselves and local communities to fight back. The banner *Sekarang Mereka, Besok Kita* is a call for solidarity, urging that to achieve significant change we must organize and support each other at a planetary level. Taring Padi strives to nurture local and global networks of resistance through the exchange of ideas and the sharing of skills and strategies.

The significance of cardboard puppets in Taring Padi's artistic practices is reflected in the two puppets as the central figure in the *Sekarang Mereka, Besok Kita* banner, who become part of the people and puppet master themselves and "play" the two antagonistic military and bureaucrat figures. Typical in the collective's banners is the Manichean compositional structure, referring to an ancient religious belief that breaks everything down into good or

evil. But, distinctively, in this newest banner, the destructive power occupies less space. The color is brighter and carries a more optimistic tone that is less violent in character in comparison to older banners. Nonetheless, a warning of the urgency of climate injustice is manifested by the lying white skeleton that holds a growing tree.

As a collaborative project, the woodcut on fabric *All Mining is Dangerous* was created in 2010. The work is a collaboration between Taring Padi and the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative: a decentralized network of 41 artists from the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The work was developed in the context of a protest against the construction of a gas pipeline in Portland, US. The construction of the pipeline was intended to distribute gas imported from Indonesia, which would have dangerous ecological implications for the environment of American's Indigenous communities. *All Mining is Dangerous* addresses the impacts of the mining industry and references the relationship between Indonesia and the US in this segment. In the Indonesian context, this has typically involved a collusion among military, corporate, bureaucratic, and religious interest groups, who sometimes appointed themselves as a mediator between the mining industry's interests and the people. It is in this context that Indonesia's (Muslim) religious leadership is depicted in the upper left part of the work. A revised figure shows a classic and widely used Indonesian headdress: the *kopiah* or *peci* in Bahasa Indonesia.

Initially, that figure wore a *topi haji* (Hajj cap), a hat commonly worn by religious leaders in Indonesia. Taring Padi's decision in June 2022 to alter the original imagery of the *topi haji* into a *peci* was made after the banner *People's Justice* was taken down. The decision was based on

empathy with the larger public and as a preventative measure against its possible misinterpretation as a *kippah*.

The *peci* is carried by the recurring character *Petruk* in the popular Indonesian shadow puppet (*wayang*) theatre tradition. *Petruk* is one of the four *punokawan*, clown-like servants of the hero in a play. The four appear in every *wayang* puppet play and can be recognized and differentiated by their physical features. *Petruk* is typically depicted with lengthy limbs and a long nose; his nose is generally considered his most distinctive feature.

In the *wayang* tradition, the *punakawan* provide amusement; in addition, they also speak to the audience and convey the puppeteer's ideas. The *punakawan* are servants, followers, and dependents, but not rulers. If they nevertheless try to rule, it can have chaotic consequences, as the best-known play entitled *Petruk Dadi Ratu* (*Petruk Becomes King*) shows. In contemporary Indonesian political language, *Petruk Dadi Ratu* has become a metaphor describing social and political corruption, and social disorder. And this is the context of the figure of *Petruk* in the work *All Mining is Dangerous*: when *Petruk* becomes a ruler acting on behalf of the people and he makes a deal with the mining company's investors.

Storytelling through shadow puppetry (*wayang*) is a traditional element of Indonesian culture. The earliest evidence of this art form dates to the late 1st millennium CE in medieval texts and archaeological sites. In November 2003, UNESCO declared three forms of *wayang* shadow puppetries - the flat leather shadow puppet (*wayang kulit*), the flat wooden puppet (*wayang klitik*) and the three-dimensional wooden puppet (*wayang golek*) - as Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

In recent times, *wayang* as a form of storytelling is closely linked to the experience of political upheaval towards an authoritarian regime and utilized as a form of protest against the regime. After an unsuccessful coup attempt in 1965, the military led by General Suharto committed massacres of over 500,000 communists. These circumstances led to the ousting of the first president Soekarno, allowing Suharto into power and introduced radical political and economic changes under the slogan of "New Order". Under Suharto's "New Order", a 32-year-long military dictatorship and authoritarian regime began, with restrictions on freedom of the press and freedom of speech. In the general anti-communist climate of the Cold War, Suharto's totalitarian state policy (also in schools and universities) was strongly supported by the USA, Israel, Germany, Great Britain, and other states of the West. During this period - especially in universities - students formed collectives as a counter-voice to and struggle against the authoritarian state. Collectives such as Taring Padi, ruangrupa, and others emerged in this socio-political context.