

(Yes)

mag·ic re·al·ism

a literary or artistic genre in which realistic narrative and naturalistic technique are combined with surreal elements of dream or fantasy.

What would you do when you give up?

We rephrase - this question is not so simple, not one to ask a defeated man. Because one thing we have learned - karmic retribution is a folly; your defeat is not imminent. We simply ask: what would you do when all this is over, when there is nothing left for you here?

We have no answers, so we gather around, sit before the campfire of our laptops and smartphones, and tell each other tales.

We create mythologies. Ran through with young protesters' knives like Muammar Gaddafi (No). Lying in a jungle hut dying slowly of a thousand tropical diseases, like Pol Pot (No). Brought before an international tribunal of people reciting your many crimes, wishing for a quick death, like Slobodan Milosevic (No). Denied access to basic human rights as your family waits to disconnect your life support machines, like Idi Amin (No).

We seek magic realism. We build the grandest Dream - despite everything we have been told about karma, about fate. You, having secured your riches and your safety, departing your residence to perhaps another country - And like Pablo Escobar - building your fortress, basking in your paradise and rewarding those close to you, sipping black coffee as you continue building an empire. Perhaps you'd rear hippos.

Like Escobar, we too imagine your fall, as a nation more powerful tears your fortress down and hunts you in the barrios

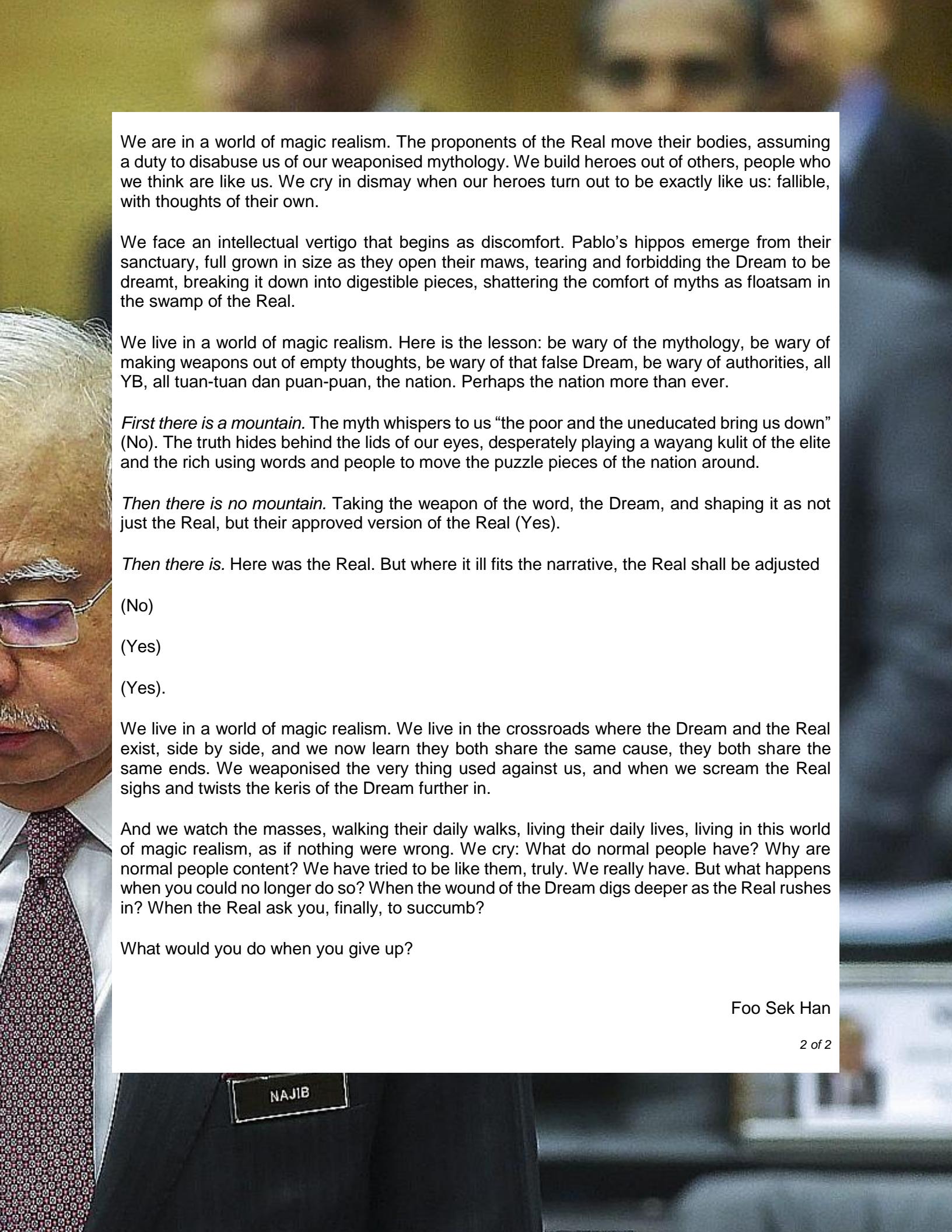
(No)

(Yes)

(No).

We live in a world of magic realism. That was the power we sought when we create this Dream as a weapon - not to run through flesh or reduce people to things, but to take the imaginary and render the Real asunder.

But like Pablo building a sanctuary for himself, a lake for his hippos, this search for myth was doomed. The many versions of the Dream we told ourselves could no longer match the violence of the Real.



We are in a world of magic realism. The proponents of the Real move their bodies, assuming a duty to disabuse us of our weaponised mythology. We build heroes out of others, people who we think are like us. We cry in dismay when our heroes turn out to be exactly like us: fallible, with thoughts of their own.

We face an intellectual vertigo that begins as discomfort. Pablo's hippos emerge from their sanctuary, full grown in size as they open their maws, tearing and forbidding the Dream to be dreamt, breaking it down into digestible pieces, shattering the comfort of myths as floatsam in the swamp of the Real.

We live in a world of magic realism. Here is the lesson: be wary of the mythology, be wary of making weapons out of empty thoughts, be wary of that false Dream, be wary of authorities, all YB, all tuan-tuan dan puan-puan, the nation. Perhaps the nation more than ever.

First there is a mountain. The myth whispers to us "the poor and the uneducated bring us down" (No). The truth hides behind the lids of our eyes, desperately playing a wayang kulit of the elite and the rich using words and people to move the puzzle pieces of the nation around.

Then there is no mountain. Taking the weapon of the word, the Dream, and shaping it as not just the Real, but their approved version of the Real (Yes).

Then there is. Here was the Real. But where it ill fits the narrative, the Real shall be adjusted

(No)

(Yes)

(Yes).

We live in a world of magic realism. We live in the crossroads where the Dream and the Real exist, side by side, and we now learn they both share the same cause, they both share the same ends. We weaponised the very thing used against us, and when we scream the Real sighs and twists the keris of the Dream further in.

And we watch the masses, walking their daily walks, living their daily lives, living in this world of magic realism, as if nothing were wrong. We cry: What do normal people have? Why are normal people content? We have tried to be like them, truly. We really have. But what happens when you could no longer do so? When the wound of the Dream digs deeper as the Real rushes in? When the Real ask you, finally, to succumb?

What would you do when you give up?

Foo Sek Han

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