



Promise and Unrest



Press Kit

PromiseandUnrest

FOMACS presents

A film by and Alan Grossman and Áine O'Brien

An intimate portrayal of a migrant woman performing global care work and long-distance motherhood in her role as sole provider for an extended family back in the Philippines.

Completion date

2010

Duration

79 mins

Languages

English, Waray and Tagalog with English subtitles

Festival Screenings

Capital Irish Film Festival, Solas Nua, Washington, USA, December, 2011.

Jean Rouch International Film Festival, Paris, November, 2011.

Athens Ethnographic Film Festival, Panorama Section, November, 2011.

Taiwan Ethnographic Film Festival, Tapei, October, 2011.

Days of Ethnographic Cinema, Russian Research Institute of the Cultural and National Heritage, Moscow, September, 2011.

31st International Nordic Anthropological Film Association (NAFA) Film Festival, University of St Andrews, Scotland, August, 2011.

Art-Kino Croatia, Rijeka, June, 2011.

Women Make Waves, Migration Film Festival, Tapei, Taiwan, May 2011.

ETNOFILM3, Festival Etnografskog Filma, Rovinj, Croatia, April, 2011.

*Best Film Award

'Days of Ethnographic Film' Festival, Audio-Visual Laboratory, Institute of Ethnology, Scientific Research Centre of Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia, March, 2011.

Waterford Film Festival, Ireland, November, 2010.

San Diego Asian Film Festival, Jury Competition, USA, October, 2010.

16th International Film Festival ETNOFILM ČADCA, Slovakia, Main Section, October, 2010.

'People on the Move: Migration Cinema in Israel and Europe', Cinemateque, Tel Aviv, Israel, September, 2010.

Cambridge Film Festival, September, 2010.

DMZ Korean Documentary International Film Festival, Paju City, Korea, International Competition, September, 2010.

11th European Association of Social Anthropology (EASA), University of Maynooth, Ireland – 'Visual Representation of Crisis Through Ethnographic Film' (in collaboration with CAFFE (Coordination of Anthropological Film Festivals in Europe), August, 2010.

Premiere, Jameson Dublin International Film Festival, Official Selection, Reel to Real Section, February, 2010.

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http://www.fomacsretrospective.org/?page_id=2#film

Synopsis

Through struggle and sacrifice migrant women often stand as sole breadwinners in the transnational family. Separated from her daughter Gracelle at 7 months, Noemi Barredo left the Philippines for work in Malaysia before arriving in Ireland in 2000. Filmed over a five-year period, 'Promise and Unrest' is an intimate portrayal of a migrant woman performing caregiving and long-distance motherhood, while assuming the responsibility of providing for her extended family in the Philippines. Through the camera lens, the film observes the everyday contours of Noemi and Gracelle's relationship, their subsequent reunion in Ireland through the 'right to family reunification', and the beginnings of a domestic life together in the same country for the first time. The film's narrative arc is shaped by the mother-daughter voiceover scripted by Noemi and Gracelle themselves, deliberately staged in two languages: the mother tongue Waray dialect spoken by Noemi in dialogue with an emerging adolescent and accented English – a new and acquired idiom that Gracelle is forced to learn in a new country.

Directors' Statement

'It is often migrant women who stand alone as sole breadwinners in the family through struggle, sacrifice and patience'. Noemi Barredo's comment, delivered in reaction to seeing herself on screen, served as a powerful reminder of why in 2005 we set out to make a film portraying the migratory journey, of a single Filipino mother and caregiver, away from her two young children in search of work, initially in Malaysia and then Ireland, that would 'lift the family out of poverty'.

We wanted to portray the transnational dynamics of long-distance motherhood and the emotional effects of separation from a daughter aged 7 months, together with the burden of responsibility of labouring to provide food, healthcare and education for an extended family in the town of Babatgnon, Philippines. In the act of migration much like translation, as Salman Rushdie reminds us, something is always lost, yet critically, something is also gained.

The value of *Promise and Unrest* lies for us most effectively in this in-between space of loss and gain; the negotiation of the 'here' and 'there' for extraordinary migrant women like Noemi, whose agency in the film is openly expressed less through speaking to camera and more through purposeful actions and long-term planning, strategically designed to culminate in transforming the quality of life for individual family members back home.

During different stages in the film's production, whether in her cramped Dublin bedsit where she lives with Elvi, a fellow caregiver, or in the Barredo family home, we encountered reluctance on the part of Noemi to divulge her thoughts and feelings. This at times questioned our directorial judgement of Noemi as a vocally 'strong enough' character implicated in the 'global care chain' – a series of 'personal links across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring'. As documentary filmmakers we were therefore challenged to relinquish our investment in the power of words as testimony to Noemi's inner world, yielding instead to an observational cinematic appreciation of how her deeds and gestures powerfully translated into expanding financial outcomes and deepening emotional attachments, in particular to her daughter Gracelle with whom she was reunited in Ireland in 2007, resulting in the beginnings of a domestic life together in the same country for the first time.

The richness of the film's narrative arc is enhanced by the mother-daughter voice-over narration, scripted by Noemi and Gracelle themselves, deliberately staged in two languages: the mother tongue Waray dialect spoken by Noemi, which assumes an epistolary form, in dialogue with an emerging adolescent and accented English – a new and acquired idiom that Gracelle is forced to learn in a new country, yet which is significantly inflected with traces of her own cultural background. Neither had read each other's script in advance and it was only when they viewed the film together, did they learn what the other thought and experienced in both the distant past and immediate present. However difficult the film process was at times, especially since we did not have access to the intimate grammar spoken between mother and daughter, we believe that the making of the film – covering a five-year period during which time we lived with the Barredo family in 2005 and 2007 – has contributed in its own way to the flowering of Noemi and Gracelle's relationship.

Alan Grossman and Áine O'Brien

About the Filmmakers

ÁINE O'BRIEN (Co-Director/Researcher)

Áine O'Brien is an Irish documentary filmmaker, academic and Director of the Forum on Migration and Communications (FOMACS, www.fomacs.org). She co-directed a performative documentary film (*Silent Song*, UK, 2000) on Kurdish lyrical protest in Europe and an observational film on the subject of economic migration into Ireland (*Here to Stay*, Ireland, 72 mins, 2006), funded by the Irish Film Board. She is executive producer of *Abbi's Circle* (2010), a 3-part animation series funded by the Irish Film Board.

ALAN GROSSMAN (Co-Director/Researcher/DOP)

Alan is a South African-born academic and filmmaker with a longstanding documentary involvement with questions of migration, human rights and cultural identity across different transnational contexts. He co-directed *Silent Song* (2000, UK) about an exiled Kurdish musician in Scotland who, in 1976, refused to perform at a Ba'athist Party convention in Baghdad, together with *Here To Stay* (2006, Ireland), an observational film capturing the expression of migrant political agency and transgender in multiracial Ireland. He is co-editor with Áine O'Brien of a combined book/DVD-ROM titled *Projecting Migration: Transcultural Documentary Practice* (Wallflower Press, 2007).

ARIADNA FATJO-VILAS (Co-Editor)

Ariadna has worked as a freelance editor since 2002. In 2004 she left her native city of Barcelona to do an MA in editing at the National Film and Television School in London. Ariadna cuts fiction, documentary and animation. Highlights of her work include *City of Cranes*, a documentary series broadcast on Channel 4 television (UK) and PBS (US) and winner of prizes at Thessaloniki and Full Frame film festivals. *Animations*, *Glow and Glover*, have both been shortlisted for the Best British Animation Awards and the short drama, *The Memory of Elephants* was shown at Palm Springs Film Festival. She currently lives in London and Spain.

SIMON HIPKINS (Co-Editor/Additional Camera)

Born in Lancashire, United Kingdom in 1979, Simon first studied drawing and painting before moving into photography and film. He graduated from Napier University, Edinburgh in 2002. Simon first discovered his passion for storytelling when he filmed a friend's return to the Ukraine, *The Spring Dream* (2001). Since then, Simon has worked as a director, producer, cameraman and editor across a wide range of documentary and fiction projects. Between 2003-2006 Simon co-ran a production company, Corruption Films in Glasgow, making creative documentaries for BBC Television and ITV. In more recent years, Simon has specialised as an editor for documentary features, whilst pursuing his own interest in making work that blurs actuality with fiction. His last film *The Last Regal Kingsize* (2008) was nominated for a BAFTA and won the best fiction prize at the Tehran International Short Film Festival, 2009. Simon lives in Brixton, London but works wherever the project takes him.

DAVID MCAULAY (Music/Sound Design)

David was born in 1980 and started out in music as a guitarist in Glasgow-based rock band, 'Terra Diablo'. His songwriting for the band led to deals with labels and publishers on both sides of the Atlantic (Sony Records, Big Life Publishing, Nocturnal Records). Since then, David's natural talent for production, arranging and composing has seen him move into the fields of production and engineering, being regularly booked for sessions at Chem19, a highly respected recording studio in Glasgow with a reputation for quality independent music. More recently, he has been turning his attention to sound for picture and has had his compositions licensed by Nintendo, Playstation and also a European advertising campaign for Seat Altea XL cars. Along with this he has worked on short films and documentaries as composer, sound designer and mixer. David composed the score for *The Last Regal Kingsize*, which was nominated for a BAFTA and won the best fiction prize at Tehran's International Short Film Festival.

Reviews and Quotes

There is something quite special about the mother-daughter relationship at the emotional core of this visually impressive film ... you see people grow up, grow old, a character dies ... there's a poetry to it.' **(Luke McManus, RTÉ Radio 1 review of Jameson Dublin International Film Festival, Arena Arts and Culture programme, February 2010).**

A gut-wrenchingly powerful film. **(Cambridge Film Festival, 2010)**

Promise and Unrest is a thought-provoking film with strong and striking images ... the filmmakers have captured the human complexities of migration and I can understand why many migrants would say 'that's my story.' **(John McMahon, Educational Programmes RTE, March 2010).**

Listen [here](#) to review of film on Arena Arts programme, RTÉ Radio One, 17 February 2010.

Promise and Unrest documents five years in the life of Noemi Barredo, a *Pilipina* migrant who works as an elderly caregiver in Dublin, Ireland. Remaining at home are her two children, Noy-Noy and Gracelle (fondly called Chinggay by her family), who are taken care of by her sister, Neriza.

This growing phenomenon of transnational women has alarmed many scholars and activists; about half of the total population of migrant workers are women. In 2004, sociologists Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild's *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* argue that because First World women are entering the workforce in increasing numbers but are still expected to take up the bulk of the household's domestic duties, Third World women are being hired as nannies, maids, and elderly caregivers to pick up the slack. But what of these domestic workers' own homes? Ehrenreich and Hochschild point out that these workers often do not return home for years and that their own children are often cared for by aging parents or by other relatives. Some nannies admitted to feeling closer to their clients' children than their own.

Sociologist Rhacel Parrenas' *Servants of Globalization* details the devaluation of domestic work, women, and *Pilipina/o* labor as seen in their low wage, despite how physically and emotionally grueling migrant labor is.

The film brings attention to these issues, albeit subtly. It includes multiple moments where the viewer can see (and feel) the emotional disconnect and heartbreak that this family often faces. Noemi leaves to work abroad for the first time when Chinggay is only 9 months old. When Chinngay is 6, her mother returns home for a visit, only to find that Chinggay doesn't recognize her.

The dialogue between Noemi and her roommate, another elderly caregiver named Elvie, reveals the physical and emotional toll that their thankless work takes on them. Unlike in a nursing home where several nurses attend to a group of patients, Noemi and Elvie often work 24 hours a day as the sole caregiver of a patient.

Despite this, their work is devalued and often taken for granted. At one point, the Irish government proposes changes to work permits that would put many migrant laborers out of work. I congratulate *Promise and Unrest* for not victimizing Noemi and her family, but rather showing their agency. Noemi joins other *Pilipina/o* workers in protests against these work permit changes and attends meetings, speaking out against these changes.

Promise and Unrest is not a dry documentary but an emotional rendering of the phenomenon of transnational women. As a *Pinay*, this documentary really hits home and may even bring a tear to your eye. As I watched this film, I thought of my great-uncle who worked for 20 years as a truck driver in Saudi Arabia and never had a chance to visit to the Philippines to see his family before passing away. I thought of my auntie who works as a domestic helper in Hong Kong, leaving behind a one-year-old son in the Philippines. I thought of my mother's *Pilipina* friends in Okinawa who were conned by Japanese employers who claimed they were hiring them to work as cultural dancers in Japan, only to be forced to work as strippers and prostitutes. I thought about the time I studied abroad in Rome and met *Pilipinas/os* living there, who always asked me upon meeting me, "Are you a D.H.?" Being a domestic helper has become so commonplace that it was abbreviated, and it assumed that I knew what the abbreviation stood for.

As of December 2007, there are 8.7 million to 11 million overseas *Pilipinas/os* worldwide, equivalent of about 11% of the total population in the Philippines. Given these statistics, this film is sure to hit home for many in the *Pilipina/o* diaspora (**Film Spotlight, *Bakitwhy*, San Diego Asian Film Festival, 1 October, 2010**) (<http://www.bakitwhy.com/articles/film-spotlight-promise-and-unrest>).

I saw Aine O'Brien and Alan Grossman's film *Promise and Unrest*, the story of mother and daughter Noemi and Gracelle from the Philippines, and was reminded, yet again, of the hidden lives of thousands of migrant women care workers in post-Tiger Ireland.

Noemi came to Ireland when her daughter Gracelle was seven months to work as a care worker for an elderly person in Dublin. She is one of many domestic and care workers who have become a feature of Ireland once independent and enterprising Irish women returned to the workplace in their thousands, requiring enterprising and independent migrant women to take their place – the assumption being that this is 'women's work'. These women have to leave their children in their country of origin to be looked after by their families while they look after Irish families, sending money home for the upkeep of their families and their children's education.

It is an extraordinary film, which should be watched by all. Filmed over five years, it traces Gracelle's life in a small Philippine village and Noemi's life in Dublin, allowing them to tell their own stories – they have written their scripts independently of each other, enabling them to be honest about the pain of separation, the hardship of the work, and the anger of a young girl, left to the care of her aunt and grandparents, who also feature in the film. While working in Dublin and sending money home, Noemi keeps a tight watch over her family's life back home, paying for her father's medical care and her sister's education.

After several years working in Dublin, Noemi succeeds in her application for family reunification and brings Gracelle to live with her. For the young girl, Ireland is a dream place, but when she arrives, she has to share the confined living space with her mother and her flatmate. It is cold and not always hospitable as she struggles with her schoolwork. When Noemi loses her job and risks becoming undocumented, she joins the MRCI campaign to change the work permit regime – and is now reinstated in a job, complete with work permit.

The film is a story of care, and a story of women, but also a story of migrants who are obliged by economic pressures to seek work half way across the world so that their families can have necessary medical care, build a new home, get material goods they otherwise could not afford. Yet the Philippines – which encourages its citizens to work abroad, as remittances play a huge role in the

country's economy – is not portrayed as poverty stricken, but rather as a beautiful country, whose people smile as they struggle, struggle as they smile.

Most importantly, the film is a reminder that migrant workers – about whose plight we do not hear much these days as Irish people are, understandably perhaps, preoccupied with Ireland's crumbling economy – are here to stay. They work hard, they lead transnational lives between their home countries and Ireland. Their contribution cannot be ignored, yet their existence – particularly now – remains under the radar, hidden. And interestingly, although they demand, and deserve, equal rights with Irish workers, many of them, and their children, see Ireland as a transitory stop. Gracelle, who is studying for her Leaving Cert, says she would most probably not go back to the Philippines, nor stay in Ireland, but go elsewhere to search work. Yet she would probably continue to send money home, even though she does not have to **(Dr Ronit Lentin, Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland)**.

Credits

Directed by Áine O'Brien and Alan Grossman

Scripted and Narrated by Noemi and Gracelle Barredo

Editor Ariadna Fatjo-Vilas and Simon Hipkins

Camera Alan Grossman

Additional Camera in Dublin Simon Hipkins

Research Áine O'Brien and Alan Grossman

Sound Design David McAulay

Foley Graham McCormack

Studio Sound Recording Andy Byrne

Re-recording Mixer David McAulay

Home Video Footage Gracelle Barredo Neriza Barredo John Barredo
Noemi Barredo Pablo Adizas Arnel Barredo

Post Production Supervisor and Colourist Aodán Ó Coileáin

Post Production EGG, Dublin

Translation and Transcription Triballiance Language Solutions, Toronto
Gracelle Barredo Nilo Torres

Subtitles Aodán Ó Coileáin

Music written, performed and engineered by David McAulay

Produced by FOMACS in association with Ned Kelly Pictures

Associate Producer Barrie Dowdall, Ned Kelly Pictures

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