
Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

July 2011

Telling Stories Through Documentaries

By Poonam Dhavan and Lisa Kircher Lumbao



Green “Monster” Jimenez and Mario Cornejo entertained those of us at the June 20 Manila Women’s Forum meeting by describing their experiences making documentary films and answering our many questions. Several women present had seen their most recent film, called “Kano: an American and his Harem,” and the rest are looking forward to seeing it at a future screening or when it becomes available on DVD. “Kano” won a major award in the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam in 2010.

Mario’s passion is independent filmmaking and he has been able to follow this by working in collaboration with Monster since they met at La Salle University. To support himself, he directs local TV, mainstream films and commercials.

Monster is Managing Director of Arkeofilms, which is a commercial and movie production company she started in 2000 with the dream of making indie movies. To support the latter, they do commercial work like commercials, corporate videos, wedding videos, and videos for the Asian Development
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Monster (left) and Mario (right)

JULY MWF Meeting ■ **When:** Monday, 2011 July 18, 6:30 p.m. ■ **Where:** Poonam Dhavan’s home, Unit 9-C, Pacific Plaza Condominium, Ayala Avenue, Makati (across from Rustans). ■ **What:** Francisco Liboro, President of PCCI Securities Brokers Corporation and Asian Securities Analysis Federation, will speak about personal finance and investing in the Philippine stock market. ■ **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. ■ **August Meeting:** Monday, 2011 August 15.

“The character of the woman becomes irrelevant when it comes to rape. No woman wants to be raped.”



15 JULY 2011

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Selected and edited by
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Harems, Slaves, Consensual Sex, Human Trafficking

Tales from the Expat Harem: Foreign Women in Modern Turkey

As a neo-cultural entertainment author/producer, global networker, identity adventuress and mentor, Anastasia Ashman believes in the need to find one's "global niche" to truly be at home in the world.

... A turning point in her journey occurred ... when she co-created with Jennifer Gökmen the anthology "Tales from the Expat Harem: Foreign Women in Modern Turkey." Inspired by their "historical peers in the Ottoman harem," they recognized that even though expats and foreigners often live in limbo, they can find strength and solace in each other and learn ways to thrive by combining the local culture with their own backgrounds and inclinations.

(Source: Article by Brooks Emerson in *Today's Zaman*, www.todayszaman.com/news)

Harem: A group of women sexual partners for one man. The wives, concubines, female relatives, and servants occupying such a place.

Kody Brown and his 'wives' *A polygamist asks to be left alone*

When it comes to sexual relationships and cohabitation among consenting adults, Utah takes a permissive approach. ... [A man] can father children by different roommates, with no fear of the law.

But if he marries one woman and represents three others as his "spiritual wives," like Kody Brown? Then he's committed a felony. Not because of the stuff that goes on behind closed doors. It's the public act of claiming to be part of a lifelong "plural marriage" that raises the specter of jail.

(Source: Article by Steve Chapman, *Chicago Tribune*, www.chicagotribune.com)

8 Years for Rapists

2011 July 15 - Two farmers were each jailed for eight years by the High Court in Labasa, Fiji, for the rape of a mother.

The victim was a married mother who invited the first accused, with whom she was having an extra-marital affair, into her home and had consensual sex with him when her husband was away and her children were asleep.

After the first accused was done with the woman, he pushed her back and pressed a pillow against her face while the second accused then had sexual intercourse with her as well. Because of the woman's secret extra-marital affair, the two men figured that she would be less inclined to report rape for fear of her affair being exposed to her husband and children.

However, according to Justice Daniel Goundar, the court had a duty to denounce any form of sexual attack on a woman. The character of the woman becomes irrelevant when it comes to rape, he said, and no woman wants to be raped because "rape is not just an attack on her body but an attack on her soul."

(Source: Article by Maika Rabaleilekutu in *Fiji Times Online*)

Awareness In Human Trafficking

Human trafficking awareness became a reality Saturday July 2 as the Women's Ministry Conference at Tabernacle Baptist Church in New Bern, North Carolina, looked at it head on.

Missionaries and experts spoke about parents who sell children into sex slavery for drugs, rent and food. Among the data provided on human trafficking:

* There are at least 30 million slaves worldwide, more than any other time in history, and 80% of the victims are exploited for sex.

* Over 50% of child pornography websites originated in the US.

* More than 200,000 youth are the victim of commercial sexual exploitation within the US.

* A trafficking victim is brought into the US every 10 minutes.

(Source: *ENC Today*, "Eastern North Carolina's Source for News and Information")

Political Storm Over Slave Comment

In a pledge circulated among GOP presidential candidates, a controversial passage originally stated that, "sadly," a black child born into slavery in 1860 was more likely to be raised by a mother and a father in a two-parent household than one born now, after the election of the nation's first African-American president.

Critics on both sides of the aisle argued that the pledge implied that black families were better off during slavery than under the Obama administration, an accusation the Sioux City Republican on Tuesday called "absurd."

(Source: Item by Robynn Tysver in *Omaha World-Herald*, www.omaha.com)

Consensual: Involving the willing participation of both or all parties, especially in an illegal transaction or practice (consensual crimes of prostitution, drug abuse, and illegal gambling).

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Bank. Although both Mario and Monster do commercial projects to raise funds, they also enjoy doing this type of work.

Being very curious and not at all shy, many of the women at the MWF meeting pressed Monster to tell us how she got such an unusual nickname. She said when she was young, she and her *barkada* (group of friends) took photos of themselves in an automatic photo booth. They all agreed to make scary faces and when the photo came out everyone was smiling sweetly except Monster, who was making a scary monster face. And this of course led her friends to start calling her “Monster.”

Monster and Mario’s first movie, a crime comedy called “Big Time,” was made in 2004-05. Mario was the director and Monster was the producer. It received good reviews. For the movie “Kano” their roles as director and producer were reversed with Monster as director.

They spoke about the many challenges in making documentaries – raising the funds, getting the actors together, making the film, and then

getting people to watch it.

They explained to the group that there are two types of documentaries – the creative type is an art form that contains the personal vision of the filmmaker. “Kano” is in this category. This is not journalism. The second type is the genre documentary, where there is a set format – the filmmaker is the reporter. This is what is common on Discovery Channel, National Geographic, etc. Monster recently wrote a genre documentary about Cory Aquino for the History channel.

The idea to make the film “Kano” came about when Monster was assigned to write an article about him by Summit publishing and Mario went along to take pictures. This was to be for a new magazine that was never launched. Since they had all the materials and were ‘obsessed’ with the story, they decided to turn it into a documentary.

The main character in the film is an American man named Victor Pearson, from a small town in Oregon, who had a traumatic childhood filled with physical and sexual abuse, poverty, neglect, and alcoholism in the family. During the Vietnam War, he was among

the soldiers tasked to “clean villages” of all the inhabitants, and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result. He came to the Philippines for rest and relaxation (R&R) and married a Filipina almost immediately. They moved to her hometown, a very remote, poor area of Negros in the Visayas. Victor receives from \$3,000-\$6,000 per month from military, disability, and company pensions, so he was able to build a house within a large compound. He and his wife had a daughter and then he had a vasectomy.

Over time, he started having sexual relationships with their maids, and then started throwing big parties that attracted many women and girls – some as young as seven years old. He videotaped the parties and many sexual acts. The women and girls would come and go and he built small huts for many of them in the compound. It is estimated that over 100 women and girls passed through his compound and had sex with Victor. He supported many of them in going to school and buying them food, clothing and other necessities.

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“KANO” seems to raise more questions than provide answers.

One question foremost in our minds was: How could local officials have tolerated the goings-on in Pearson’s compound for so long? . . . But another angle is the willingness of the women not just to join the arrangement, but to stay in it and indeed maintain it . . .

In feminist discourse, it is customary to portray the female victim as an unwilling prey to a man’s power and oppression. Even when no physical or emotional force is employed, we explain away the complicity by citing poverty and how it could delude and confuse a woman into playing the part of victim. One uncomfortable sensation while watching “Kano” is the feeling that many of Pearson’s women don’t see themselves as victims, and are clear about their motives and loyalties.

Indeed, “victims” and “villains” have complex stories to tell. . . . shadowed by doubts and uncomfortable truths.

(Rina Jimenez-David, Philippine Daily Inquirer, 03/08/2011)

Negrenses . . . for the first time saw the multi-awarded documentary about an American war hero who kept a harem in Negros Occidental and eventually was convicted of rape.

Negrense film director Peque Gallaga said “Kano” is a “devastating indictment of the system, and an eloquent argument for the passage of the reproductive health bill.”

“It’s an amazing film. In the beginning, it’s so easy to set up your parameters of what is right and wrong, and then you begin to see the humanity and you realize that there is something distorted about their worldview,” he said.

“It points all the way back to extreme poverty, in which case shame on the government, and shame on the Church that wants us to increase and multiply, when so many poor parents can’t even take care of their children,” he said.

He cited how parents in the documentary, because of extreme poverty were willing to sell their children to Pearson.

“I congratulate Monster for allowing these people to tell their story without editorializing. I was so glad she did not put any representatives of government, law enforcers or the Church to give their opinion,” Gallaga said.

“It was a dilemma faced by the filmmaker and the audience. . . it was a totally mature film that left us completely alone to face that experience,” he said.

(Excerpt from “Documentary on Pearson an amazing film – Peque” by Carla Gomez, The Visayan Daily Star)

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He started flaunting his women and lifestyle. He had a jeepney and was seen with about 15 women and girls going around the small town that was a two hour drive from his village. He also started drinking heavily and badly beat some of the women. The local government officials finally got fed up and decided to build a case against him for raping some of the women and girls. He was convicted in 2002 on two acts of rape, which gave him a sentence of 80 years. Some of the women who testified that he raped them are still with him, and several are married to him. Once he was put in jail he claimed to be a Muslim and married 5 of the women so he could have conjugal visits with them.

Monster and Mario talked about how complicated it was to deal with him – they knew he had done really evil things, but they also felt empathy towards him and recognized the positive things he had done for the women. He is also very intelligent, likeable, and persuasive. He is very well read and speaks many languages, including the local languages spoken in Negros.

They decided to make the film with a dysfunctional family focus. All the women shown on film are related to him or have had sex with him (except the mother of one of the rape victims). These women come from very poor backgrounds. One of them told Monster and Mario that they do not understand what it is like to be so poor that you are forced to eat soil – having sex with Victor gave her a home and

food so it was a better option for her.

Victor was in a provincial jail in Negros for many years and was transferred to the national prison in Muntinlupa when all of his appeals were denied. He has built a small hut in the prison yard and has several wives living nearby and visiting him daily. Victor has seen “Kano” and is reported to like the film.

The film has been shown in many international film festivals and won an award in the 1st/2nd time filmmaker category at the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam. Monster is planning to use the prize money to help the women and girls in Negros who are no longer being supported by Victor.

Monster said “Kano” cost about \$100,000 to make and was made over a 5-year time period. They got initial funding from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), which was very helpful to show international donors that they had national government support. Additional funds came from Sweden and the Asian Cinema Fund based in Korea. She did not want to get funds from any organizations that would influence their creative style.

They explained their approach to these films as – tell the story, and the viewer will draw their own conclusions and take away their own message. Monster said the challenge is that the story exists (unlike fictional films) and the question is how to articulate it.

Monster and Mario are currently working on several film ideas:

1. Public school education –

textbook scams and errors

2. Filipinos abroad – radio documentary

3. Faith and religion – Judiel Nieva, who claimed to have seen the Virgin Mary, had a sex change, became an actress, and got married to an Englishman.

Thank you to Monster and Mario for a very intriguing presentation and lively discussion. We hope to enjoy more of your films! ■

Manila Women’s Forum

Manila Women’s Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, talk to women of various cultures, and share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join.

The current officers are: **Amy Alexander**, Message Board. **Julia Holz**, Treasurer, Membership and Programs. **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair. **Junie Navarro**, Message Board. **Lisa Stuart**, Message Board Moderator. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P50 for non-members. For more information about MWF, please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com.

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