

Title: Gikan sa Kabukiran / From the mountains

Logline (30 words)

“Gikan sa Kabukiran” gives us a deep insight into the world of indigenous children refugees through the exchange of video messages with their loved ones at home.

Synopsis (250 words)

“Gikan sa Kabukiran” gives us a deep insight into the world of indigenous children refugees through the exchange of video messages with their loved ones at home.

Because of international interest in the mineral-rich ancestral land of the indigenous tribe of the Lumad in Mindanao, Philippines, attacks of those who protect their land from big mining firms is increasing at an alarming level. As thousands leave their home, about a hundred children have come to Manila, to a camp where they are not only safer but can also continue their education and draw attention to their current situation to the government and public.

The children haven’t seen their parents and family for several years and as the internet and telephone connection are absent in their homes in Mindanao, the organised video-exchange poses the first opportunity for them to really talk to their parents. The intimate messages, which provide their personal account of the struggles, challenges and joys that they experience day by day, shortens the physical distance between them and their families.

As the film portrays this big split between the different realities of the giant metropolis Manila and their home-villages, family and tradition in the mountains, it also gives a great tribute to the commitment, deep conviction and team spirit of the children to help their fellow Lumad out of oppression by investing all their energy to inform the public about their tragic situation and actively take the future into their own hands.

Project Description (1000 words)

The word “Lumad” is a Visayan term meaning “born of the earth”. Out of the 17 million indigenous people in the Philippines 61% are Lumad which makes up about 18% of the whole population.

Operations of large-scale mining by local and transnational corporations are the biggest threat to the right to ancestral land and self-determination of indigenous peoples. The Mining Act of 1995 institutionalised and legalised mining plunder by allowing 100% foreign ownership of mineral lands. Compounding the violation of indigenous peoples’ rights to land is the use of military, paramilitary, police force, and other state-sanctioned armed groups to quell resistance to these projects.

The refugees camp, more specifically the “Lumad Evacuation School” consists of volunteer teachers from nearby universities and developed due to the military attacks and closures of lumad schools in Mindanao. The camp in Manila hosts 100 indigenous Lumad children students from different places, tribes and with different languages.

The film consists of two different elements. One of which is the video-message exchange between indigenous children living in the refugee camp in Manila and their parents in their home-village in Mindanao. The other element of the film is the documentation of the children’s everyday life in the camp with focus on their initiative in the resistance fight of the ongoing problem of land-grabbing in Mindanao. In keeping with the film’s goal of the story coming from the perspective of the children, the Lumad children will also be filming / documenting themselves. We will provide them with shooting equipment and teach them how to use these equipment.

The main characters are five young teenagers from the camp; JENKY (16), BEBANG (17), ANGEL (18), JULIUS (19) and SITUI (16). All of them had to leave their homes because of military attacks and the closure of their schools.

Angel arranges her hair, only then she takes a quick glance at the camera, she moves her chair a little bit to the left. “I’m ready,” she says. “Dear Mom and Dad, I hope you’re okay.” She describes that she misses playing with her friends in the forest, bathing in the river and singing songs at night. “I miss you so much but I cannot come back right now. You did a lot for me, now it is my time to give back.”

Angel’s parents sit on their bed both looking into my computer. Their house is tiny and there’s only one window in the very back through which the sun casts a strong light beam on the floor. “Thank you for your message, Angel,” Jona, Angel's father continues to talk about how they cope with the harassment by the military day by day.

Situi wakes up at 3:30 in the morning. Some of his classmates and tribe members are still asleep, some slowly wake up, feet and arms appear from under their blankets as they stretch and roll over from one side to another. Little by little the children assemble in the small yard of the camp to stay in.

As everybody sits down in a circle Situi keeps standing and opens the session. “We want to honour our ancestors.” Liza, a 14 year old girl stands up and starts to sing. “The following dance is a tribute to the end of our oppression,” she finishes her contribution. Rhythmic pounding noises coming from the three drummer kids on their self-made plank-instrument fill the small yard. The movements of the children’s feet follow the beat. Just a few steps nearby the cooking team is preparing breakfast and stirs rice inside a huge pot.

The rhythm stops and the kids sit down in the circle again. The further proceeding in the Lumad activities against land-grabbing is being discussed. After the gathering of new ideas for the educational theatre play planned for an upcoming event, Situi closes the session with the sacrifice of an egg that gets placed in a small container on the top of a two-meter bamboo stick.

With the concept and structure of the film, the interplay between the video-exchange episodes of the children to their parents and the coverage of the children's everyday life in the camp in Metro Manila, we intend to reveal the innermost feelings of the children set amid their new environment and as young advocates fighting for their ancestral lands.

I met the indigenous people of Lumad in 2015-16 during the street protests in Manila. Initially out of interest and gradually through more intense acquaintances and the urgency of their concerns, I built a close relationship with a group of kids and decided to follow them with the camera. Their great courage to stand up for their rights, their unique culture and strong bond with nature fascinated me.

With this film project, I want to portray the children, the youngest of the protest movement, how they grow up so fast through the serious matters they deal with and remain playful and sensible children at the same time. I want to show how they adapt to a new environment and how they maintain their culture, how they struggle at times and how they are so determined again that they will regain their right to peacefully reside in their respective ancestral homes.

Lina's Bio (6000 Characters)

Lina Zacher is a German filmmaker and visual artist. The focus of her work is on dealing with different cultures and the confrontation of socio-political subjects with a participatory approach. Her installation media-works and participatory works with children have been exhibited internationally. Her debut documentary film „Fonja“, which tells the story of the everyday life inside a youth prison in Madagascar of ten young detainees, had its premiere at the biggest creative documentary festival in Europe, the Ji.hlava international documentary festival and won best documentary and a special mention and the Up&Coming Award in Vienna.

Cha's Bio (6000 characters)

Cha Escala is a documentary film producer, director, videographer, and editor. One of her most recent works is “Dreaming of My Homeland,” a documentary that presents the struggles and challenges that indigenous children face after they were displaced by the armed conflicts in their region. It was aired on NHK World's program Inside Lens.

Her full-length film Nick and Chai (2014) which follows a couple who lost all their four kids to the Typhoon Haiyan competed in festivals such as the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam and Busan International Film Festival and received Audience Choice Award at New Caledonia, Best Film at the QCinema International Film Festival, and Best First Feature from the Young Critics Circle.

Project Status

99 words

The film has completed 50 percent of the material shot. We were able to capture intimate messages from the children with corresponding footage. We have documented the everyday life of our five main characters in the camp. The answer-messages from the parents from Mindanao still need to be shot and the follow-up answer-messages from the children. We plan to have three to four sets of video exchanges from children to parents and vice-versa. We also want to shoot aspects of the parent's life which forms part of the children's past as well.

The film should be finished by 2021.

Access Secured

87 words

We have direct access to our main subjects. We are welcome to join the Lumad camp and communities any time. In order to deliver the children's video messages to the parents and get answers in return we intend to do two simultaneous setups for three weeks: one in the Manila camp for the Lumad children and the second in the Lumad communities in Mindanao for the parents of the Lumad children. In this way, we can facilitate a direct video exchange between the children and their parents.

Artistic approach

105 words

The five Lumad children are the leading characters of the film. The video messages to their parents allow us to catch a glimpse of their lives in a raw and authentic manner. The video messages replace the usual "talking heads" seen on documentary films. The parents' answer-messages serve as a counterpoint but the main focus remains on the children. These recorded video messages capture the humanity of the characters, which is the measure of our artistic approach.

We see great potential in the footage the kids created themselves in between the shootings. The opening scene of the shaky hand-held shot into the sky in the 'preview video' reflects the kids' curiosity and mindfulness in the way they perceive their environment. Those obviously personal „contributions“ fit to the intimacy of their recorded messages to their loved ones and add to the „human side“ of the film which is the main measure of our artistic approach.