

Shedding light on misconceptions

Documentary gathers testimonies from all parties involved in adoption

By Julio Nakamurakare
Herald staff

It goes without saying that adoption (whether the temporary foster care of a minor or the “full” incorporation of a child into a new family) is not a decision to be made lightly, and it’s an issue that the State must monitor carefully, on a thorough case-by-case basis.

Adoption is still the subject of social debate, both in general and as and a hub of painful, intense, highly controversial stories. These stories, strong as they may be, are made even stronger by the gaze of others. This is one of the reasons why a documentary like *Alumbrando en la oscuridad* (literally, Giving birth in the dark), codirected by Mónica Gazpio and Fermín Rivera, is worthy of attention, for it amply fulfills its stated premise of shedding light on the issue from little-seen perspectives.

Alumbrando en la oscuridad is not all-encompassing, for this is an unattainable aim, but it does make an intelligent choice: the testimonies are voiced by people who stand not for or against adoption, but rather from different standpoints converging on the same or very similar view.

We thus get to see and hear the testimony of a teenage girl explaining why, in the face of her unwanted pregnancy, she made the difficult decision to give the baby up for adoption. In formal cinematic narrative terms, this is shot and reverse shot. Next, we hear the opinion of people who ought to know: a couple who, unable to have children of their own, decide to go for adoption. The process is as difficult for the potential foster parents as it must be for the biological mother.

These testimonies have the praiseworthy intention of shedding light on a subject often plagued by bureaucratic obstacles and social misunderstanding. As is the case with all good argumentation, we get to hear different voices, different aspects of the same issue. *Alumbrando en la oscuridad*, appropriately running at 62 minutes instead of stretching it to the standard (almost mandatory) 90-minute average length, is a neat compendium of the points of view of those directly involved in the matter.

There are several instances in which viewers, rather than watching and hearing in contemplative attitude, forcibly pay close attention to the interviewees: a middle-aged man who grew as an adopted child, and an elderly man whose testimony is the most searing of all. Sitting quietly in his home’s frontyard, the latter succinctly explains that it was not love but monetary interest behind his adoption. Instead of being given shelter and protection, he went the fate of minors subjected to child labour.

But, given the right circumstances, even for a painful case like his there is always the possibility of closure. Life comes full circle when his daughter, unable to conceive, decides to adopt a baby girl. Just as there are adopted children and foster parents, there are also foster grandparents.

His testimony — like most seen in *Alumbrando en la oscuridad* — helps us understand that, above any other consideration such as prejudice vs. acceptance, love always comes first. All in all, *Alumbrando en la oscuridad* is a much needed, enlightening documentary.