

Expressing Basque Identity through Documentary Film: *Ama Lur* and *Pelotari* as Agents for Social Change and Cultural Responsibility

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As a part of the LARC program, I intend to research 1960s Basque documentary and its role in preserving the identity of a nation without a state. During this era, the Basque people suffered under the oppressive dictatorship of Franco, whose regime undermined Basque identity as he outlawed cultural festivals, religious practices, and the use of Basque language. I am particularly interested in analyzing the works of Fernando Larruquert and Néstor Basterretxea, namely *Ama Lur* (1968) and *Pelotari* (1964), to discover the extent to which documentary not only reflects a threatened identity but also creates a sense of collective selfhood.

Specifically, I intend to conduct a close reading of the films, exploring the techniques of visibility vs. concealment, reappropriation of art as evidence, and the representations of gender and language. Furthermore, as the learning community for this LARC seeks to comprehend the “the social and cultural role of ... media in the creation of new publics and counterpublics,” I intend to examine the role of the aforementioned documentaries in archiving identity, as the filmmakers summon a collective consciousness to preserve the Basque past in the nation’s future.

This project serves as an ideal counterpart to both coursework and experience. This semester I have been enrolled in a course called “Visible Evidence” that explores the nature of documentary film. As a class, we pay special attention to documentary’s capability to influence history and identity. This knowledge would inform my participation with LARC as I have considered how reproducing information and art in documentary through editing and recontextualization reveals a new “truth.” Also, next semester I will take a course titled “Life and Culture in a Totalitarian Regime” that explores how the Czechs preserved their independent culture throughout a period of Communism. In examining the power of Czech film in shaping and preserving identity, I will develop a pattern of critical thinking imperative to discerning how Larruquert and Basterretxea reappropriated Basque art within the medium of film to contribute to the resurgence of the nation’s identity.

Moreover, this past summer I served as an intern for a program that allows Basque students to experience cultural immersion in the United States. My interactions with these students provided me with a foundational understanding of the Basque culture. In May, I will even spend a couple of weeks in San Sebastian with a family who experienced firsthand the ramifications of Franco’s oppression. With Professor Cox’s written authorization, I will have access to museums and archives that can provide valuable insight for my project beyond my personal contacts. Also, I have been in communication with a leading scholar on Basque cinema, Robert Stone, who has published a variety of works concerning cultural coding within Basque film. An invaluable resource to this project, he has offered to aid my exploration in the Basque Country.

This LARC would be invaluable in terms of my academic and vocational goals. Academically, I am interested in synthesizing my interests in History, Sociology, Rhetoric, and Film to explore how identities are created through semiotics of film and other texts. Upon completion of my interdisciplinary research, I will write a 15- to 20-page research paper arguing for my conclusions. I intend to extend this research to the academic community through presentations for LARC, SSRD, and regional conferences such as the Visual Culture Colloquium. Vocationally, I aspire to become a professor, and so researching alongside faculty will be indispensable in establishing a narrative for my future.