

20,000 SPECIES OF BEES

A FILM BY ESTIBALIZ URRESOLA SOLAGUREN

Berlinale
 **73rd** Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Competition

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SYNOPSIS



An eight-year-old child struggles with the fact that people keep addressing her in confusing ways.

During a summer in the Basque Country among the beehives, she explores her identity alongside the women of her family, who at the same time reflect on their own lives and desires.

CAST



COCÓ Sofía Otero
ANE Patricia López Arnaiz
LOURDES Ane Gabarain
LITA Itziar Lazkano
GORKA Martxelo Rubio
LEIRE Sara Cózar
ENEKO Unax Hayden
NEREA Andere Garabieta
JON Miguel Garcés

CREW

SCRIPTWRITER Estibaliz Urresola Solaguren
DIRECTOR Estibaliz Urresola Solaguren
DOP Gina Ferrer García
ART DIRECTOR Izaskun Urkijo
EDITOR Raúl Barreras
COSTUME Nerea Torrijos
SOUND Eva Valiño
SOUND DESIGN Koldo Corella
HAIR AND MAKE UP Ainhoa Eskisabel
Jone Gabarain
CASTING NOMA Acting

PRODUCED BY Gariza Films and Inicia Films
IN ASSOCIATION WITH Sirimiri Films
PRODUCTION Lara Izagirre Garizurieta
Valérie Delpierre



2023 | 129' | Spain | Color | 1:1,85 | 5.1. | Spanish, Basque and French



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

ESTIBALIZ URRESOLA SOLAGUREN

Graduated in Audiovisual Communication (UPV-Bilbao), Editing Theory (EICTV Cuba), Master in Film Direction and Master in Film Business (ESCAC). She has directed the short films **Adri** and **Ashes and Dust** and the feature-length documentary **Paper Voices** premiered at San Sebastián. Her latest short film **Chords** has premiered at the Semaine de la Critique Cannes and has won several national and international prizes, among which Best Short Film in the Forqué Awards. In 2023 her first feature film **20.000 species of bees** will premiere in the Official Selection at the Berlinale.



FILMOGRAPHY

- 2012** - **ADRI**
short fiction film.
- 2016** - **Voces de Papel** (Paper voices)
documentary feature film.
- 2018** - **Nor nori nork** (The Declensions)
short film - hybrid documentary- fiction.
- 2020** - **Polvo somos** (Ashes and dust)
short fiction film.
- 2022** - **Cuerdas** (Chords)
short fiction film.
- 2023** - **20,000 species of bees**
feature film.



IN CONVERSATION WITH ESTIBALIZ URRESOLA



Where does this story about a trans girl come from? Was it a story you had in mind for a long time?

I've always been reflecting on identity, body and gender, as well as family relationships, and expressing it through my work. In my previous work, I've been asking recurring questions such as : since when do we know who we are? What is the relationship between our notion of identity and our body? Is self-identity only an intimate and personal experience or is it affected by external gaze?

Why did you want to talk about trans identity? Are you related to this subject in some way or was it an external matter for you until now?

I've always been concerned by gender identity. I am the fifth of six children, and most of them are girls. I always felt a fracture between the roles I was assigned at home and the behavior I was supposed to have outside. I practiced swimming from the age of 6 to 13. I trained daily, competed in the girls' category and changed in gender-segregated locker rooms. The sexual and symbolic difference of my body has marked my passage

from childhood to adolescence. Because I enjoyed sports, I spent most of my childhood surrounded by boys. I was more suited for action, competition, playing games... And, at the same time, I never really felt included in that group. This difference became even bigger when I entered teenagehood and when my body changed.

This story comes from the need to question the limits of the rigid sex-gender system. It denies and socially punishes the in-between zones that exist between two extremes. Such denial has generated, and keeps generating much suffering. It is an uncomfortable legacy that is represented in the film by the figure of the father and his work, and by how he perceives masculine and feminine ideals .It can also be seen in the legacy of his workshop, a legacy that Ane, despite being the most progressive character in the film, does not want to get rid of.

How were you advised on the subject ? Did you work with trans children and their families?

I got in touch with an association that set me up with about twenty families who had children that were between 3 and 9





years old. They were extraordinarily generous in sharing their intimacy with me. It was a very enriching process that nurtured my script. One of the things that impacted me the most was when some families told me it had been a positive experience for them and that it had allowed them to identify themselves as families in a new way. They did not see it as a problem, but rather as a process that shed light on the rules governing their families. It allowed them to challenge these rules. It questioned their relationship with their sons and daughters and their role as mothers and fathers, as well as their experiences around the question of their own identity. Another thing that I found beautiful is that these families never used the words “transit” or “transition” to define the process that their transgender sons and daughters were going through. On the contrary, it was their own perception and the perception of the people around them that was transitioning. The children never stopped being who they were; in fact, it was the others who were forced to change and to evolve. I think you can find that in my film.

The film is not solely about trans childhood, since it also talks about many other issues. In particular, it deals with the weight of family, social and cultural traditions which we spend our whole lives dealing with, in order to become free individuals.

That is a fundamental issue in the movie. This is why there is a double point of view in the

film, despite the fact that many writing labs advised me not to do it, as screenwriting dogmas usually force you to choose only one. There is the daughter’s point of view, but also her mother’s, who is the character with whom I identify the most, because of my personal experience and the generation I belong to. The film is the common journey of these two protagonists. To me, trans childhood is just one more aspect of human diversity, and of the different ways of being and living that exist in the world. In the context of the film, it is the issue of trans childhood that set the family in motion, transforming bonds and bringing hidden things to the surface, but I never intended to make a film that would only talk about that subject, partly because I am not a trans person myself and because I didn’t want to speak in the name of that community. I was interested in addressing the question of identity in a broader way, and to study how family relationships can affect us on our journey to selfdetermination.

Is your film critical of the family institution?

We are social animals that evolve within a group. The first group is always our family. That background chisels and shapes us as if we were the sculptures that Ane is working on. I don’t know if it is possible to be absolutely free. We cannot avoid being conditioned by the perception of others. These other people are our parents, our local community, our friendships, society and its institutions and the traditions we inherit. In the film, they are the local neighbors, the municipal swimming pool which works as a

micro-society, and its access card that represents our possibility to act upon our own existence, which may or may not be granted to us.

Where does the metaphor of beekeeping come from and what does it symbolize in the film?

In the hive, each of the bees has a distinct role that is necessary to the functioning of the group. However, the hive is more than the sum of its individuals. It is a living organism in itself, and I thought it was appropriate in regards to the theme of the film, because of the tension between the individual and the community. The hive is governed by interdependent individuals and, at the same time, each bee plays a specific part in it. To me, it was a suitable image to talk about family relationships as they are portrayed in the film. In addition, bees and beehives play an important social and spiritual role in the traditional Basque life, whose culture I also wanted to portray. In Basque culture, the bee is considered a sacred animal. In Basque, the word "zu" (t.n. : "you") or "usted" is used to refer to them with respect.

Your film is fully bilingual, and uses both the Spanish and Basque idioms. You naturally go from one language to another, which is not so usual in modern cinema.

To make a monolingual film in that kind of environment would not

have made sense, because in the reality I describe, people naturally switch from one language to another, even within the same family. Moreover, the Basque Country is divided by a border that splits the territory in two. Not only does this border represent a geographical separation, it also works as a mental barrier or a limit the protagonists will have to cross. Ecological studies say that the greatest biodiversity and the greatest abundance of flora and fauna is to be found around geographical borders. Many languages also coexist around those places, and they are part of the diversity of identities and cultures that I wanted to show. There is a sort of binarity here as well : one hegemonic language represents the norm while the Basque language represents alterity.

To me, using Basque was fundamental because it is a language whose grammar is not gendered, and it made sense for my character, as it offers her the possibility to break free.

The film oscillates between different rhythms. Why?

The story starts at a fast pace because I wanted to personify the routine of a family with three children. It reflects upon our hasty daily lives that prevent us from looking carefully at the situation in front of us. This energy disappears when we get to the village. I wanted to set a slower temporality which would allow me to follow each of the characters more closely. This central part of





the film works as a game of mirrors ; every step a character takes impacts the other characters' paths.

Aesthetically, you have opted for naturalism.

I wanted to show reality in the most natural way as possible, so that the viewer would not have the feeling of witnessing something artificial, but rather an almost normal life. This led to other aesthetic decisions. For example, there is no extradiegetic music in the film. The music comes from the characters themselves, who play it at a given moment, which also allows me to characterize them.

I played with natural light a lot. I tried to use the natural light of the places that Cocó goes through as much as possible. And when it came to the camera, I wanted to be close to the characters and to work with close-ups combined with wider frames in order to show the impact of the environment on them, and to allow the viewers to put themselves in each character's place.

To achieve this naturalist aesthetic, the most important thing was the rehearsals. For several months, we rehearsed scenes that were not in the script in order to develop the relationships between the characters: between the siblings, between the daughter and her mother, between the mother and the grandmother... Since I was working with children that were not

trained actors, I went for realness and a fresh tone, even though they had to follow the script. To get them and the professional actors to the same level was one of the biggest challenges of the film.

How did you cast the actors ? Did you write the role of Ane thinking of Patricia López Arnaiz, who is one of the up-and-coming actresses in Spanish cinema?

Not really. I was determined to find an unknown actress, in order to offer the viewer a realistic experience, so they would not recognize the actress but rather follow an "anonymous" person. I looked for several Basque actresses who had not made their breakthrough yet, which is something Patricia had already achieved when I started working on the film. But I ended up auditioning her eventually. From the deep understanding she had of the script and the dialogue we established right from the start, it was obvious that we would work very well together. We were able to communicate, and that was the most important thing to me.

How did you find the actress who plays Cocó?

I saw about 500 girls. I met Sofía at the beginning of the auditions and I immediately saw one of the characters in her, one of the pool girls. She was great at improvising, but at first, she didn't

match my idea of Cocó's character. It wasn't until the end of the process that I realized I had never really given her a shot at playing Cocó and I thought I'd auditioned her one last time. Her audition was overwhelming. She was Cocó.

The film arrives after an exceptional year for Spanish cinema. Especially for a whole bunch of new female directors, such as Carla Simón (Alcarràs), Pilar Palomero ("Las niñas", "La maternal"), Elena López Riera (El agua) or Alauda Ruiz de Azúa (Cinco lobitos). Do you feel like you belong to that generation of female filmmakers?

I feel very close to the aesthetic concerns of all these women directors and the themes they're interested in, since we're pretty much the same age. What we're experiencing now is the result of a long process that has to do with greater institutional support and correctional measures. It tried to compensate for a historical asymmetry that existed for a long time.. And still exists. To have historical role models is very important, because it enables you to visualize yourself doing the same and to feel legitimate as a filmmaker. Either way, I am very aware that we are not starting from scratch: there have always been women directors in Spanish cinema, although we have not always advocated for them the way they deserved.

On a personal level, I do question the label "female filmmaker" because it seems to me that it is used in a somewhat limiting or reductive way. It often works as a synonym for a more sensitive cinema, for intimate gaze, for a type of film that is perhaps less pretentious and also often less ambitious in terms of budget. Right now is a very valuable and happy time for Spanish cinema, and it is without a doubt a reason to celebrate, but let's not settle for this kind of headlines. It's not the ideal scenario yet. There is still a lot of work to be done.



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