



The Stronach Prize offered what was a wholly new experience in my short career as a scholar. From high school to the start of college and onward, I felt the need for a year of independent work. By independent work I had in mind a year during which I could work at the margins of institutions and yet not in the research mode—a year of work where the stakes were not my success as an individual academic, but the problems, at times intangible problems, of a community. The Stronach Prize exceeded my expectations and I was able to accomplish a project that, it is my impression, was important for the community I worked with, as well as for myself as a person and a scholar.

The project I undertook in 2014-2015 was the longest and most ambitious project I have undertaken not only in my career but in my life. It is also the only project for which I kept a close, constant record of my progress. It is an uncanny experience to re-read my monthly letters home and witness how my project morphed. The premise of the project that despite all changes remained solid was to develop a mode of ethnography whereby the product of the ethnography is made by those represented and not by me as researcher/ scholar/ activist. The intention, following the foundational debates in anthropology in the late 80s, was to develop a fully dialectical anthropology in a world where anthropologists cannot longer speak *for* the communities they study but can certainly speak *from* them. My experience conducting ethnography in Easter Island for my thesis during 2013 and 2014 left me with a bittersweet aftertaste. On the one hand, I knew I had discovered a wonderful world harboring important truths to share with the public, but on the other, I felt that my thesis, although well received by my mentors at Berkeley, was not relatable

to the Rapanui people I worked with and to the nonacademic public. Before receiving the Stronach Prize, I had promised many of my Rapanui friends—which, for the lack of a better word, I would often call my informants—that I would come back after finishing my thesis work to do collaborative work that they would fully understand and care about. The Stronach Prize provided me with the precise balance between structure and flexibility to give me the discipline and space I needed to find the best way of developing such a dialectical anthropology.

The initial plan, the plan I proposed at the start of my project, involved making what I called a performance space, by which I meant building an actual cultural center, what I thought of at the time as a live museum. The image of a live museum was meant to challenge that of Museum Island, what the Rapanui's memoryscape had been transformed into after cultural tourism made it a commodity in the cultural tourism industry. My intention was to work with local artist Te Pou Huke and, based on a lifelong dream of his, build a microcosm of the ritual memoryscape that existed before colonization in Easter Island on his property. The place was meant to provide a space where cultural experts of various sorts could share their knowledge with the community.

And then came what to me was the big break of 2014, both personally and professionally. My father suddenly passed away and as a result of personal obligations I had to re-structure my project in Easter Island in order to allow for the possibility of working on my project from outside Easter Island. The experience of loss I underwent at the time allowed me to empathize like I had never before with the experience of a different kind of loss—a historical loss, where what is lost is not

an individual, but a collective body, and what remains are not the ghosts of an individual, but those of a collective body—that my informants at Easter Island had shared with me. I found solace from the grief that assailed me reading novels and engaging in creative writing during my free time while I thought of ways to amend my project plan. It struck me that fiction may be, generally, a powerful therapeutic tool for people and communities dealing with loss. This realization brought it all together: for my revised proposal I wrote of a performance space that was that of fiction, not only in the sense of the figurative space of fiction, but in the literal sense of a collective story made about loss by Rapanui people for Rapanui people.

I began developing the idea of making an illustrated book based on narratives I would make with Rapanui oral historians in the places where the stories to which the narratives would refer took place. One of my lifelong dreams was to work with my lifetime friend and accomplished illustrator Antonia Lara, and so I proposed to her the idea of illustrating these narratives as the historians narrated them to me. The final product I had in mind was an illustrated book, which like the live museum which was my original plan would become an actual place where people could come once and again and experience that which has been lost. I went as far as proposing the idea of the book to the only publisher who exclusively publishes books about Rapa Nui culture. However, in conversation with Rapanui friends over social media before beginning my project in Easter Island, I was told that the medium of text is not appropriate if my goal was to make something to which the community could relate: we use oral history, they told me, we function on the basis of real sounds and images, not of words and the imagination.

Finally, after much deliberation, I decided to assume the formidable challenge of working with audiovisual media, with which I had little experience. Although, with the extraordinary help of Antonia Lara, I ended up making a film, the transition from making an illustrated book to making an illustrated film was slow. Initially, after my conversations with Rapanui friends, I thought of making an illustrated book that would have a DVD with film footage lodged in its front flap, something that the editor I was working with found both interesting and feasible. In order to disabuse myself of the ambitious idea of making a book with a DVD, I had to go to the field, where the reality of making one long or several short solid films seemed daunting enough, let alone a book *and* a film. In short, the flexibility given to me by the Stronach Prize to amend my ideas as my project progressed allowed me to hone into a project that was extremely challenging yet ultimately feasible.

When I arrived to Easter Island in October 2014, I realized that the first big step of my project—arranging trips with oral historians around the island—was easier said than done (of course!) Not that I had naively assumed that people would not only have the willingness but also the time to partake in my project; what I had underestimated was the power of cultural conventions I had learned but not fully processed during my thesis work. I intended my *modus operandi* to be respectful of the timeframes that Rapanui people traditionally demand in joint ventures. I started rekindling relations by dropping in on my collaborators at meal hours. We ate, talked, and I slowly began talking to them about the project I had in mind, how each of them could participate, what the goals were. Some days were more productive than others, depending on whether the short timeframes I reluctantly proposed to

my collaborators as I weighed Rapanui cultural norms against the weekly goals I had set myself and the waning budget I had in hand were met with either patience or reticence. Partly because of limited access to the Internet and partly because I was determined to accommodate my project plans to these cultural norms and not vice versa, I sought mentorship from Rapanui friends rather than my mentor at UC Berkeley. At this point of my project, my problems were far too specific to the field to have someone who had never been there help me.

A pivotal moment in this dilemma at the start of my project in Easter Island came when artist Te Pou Huke gave me another perspective on my enterprise. I have been spending my entire life collecting and transcribing the knowledge of the *koro* and *nua* [old respectable men and women], going to their homes, sharing with them, patiently waiting for them to reveal, puzzle by puzzle, their knowledge of our past, Te Pou told me. Traditionally, here, knowledge is something very valuable: you must earn it. And once the *koro* or *nua* in question has decided to share his or her knowledge with you, he or she will say things once and once only, he continued. It is not that they do not want to share their knowledge, but they also do not want to debase it. If you rush them, they will not cut their relationship with you, but they will not be generous with what they share with you and your project will have nothing new to say. The following day, after sleeping on Te Pou's words, everything came together. I decided that my *modus operandi* would be like that of the bricoleur. I would let moments with my collaborators flow. I would let questions and answers arise. And I would film everything. After this first, production stage of my project, I would revisit all the material I gathered and only then start to build

scripts for what at the time I thought would be various short films rather than one, feature-length film. After all, what I had set myself to was an artistic, collaborative project, not a research project. The goal of the project was not to reveal new truths, but to arrange existing truths in a novel form, a form that would reveal instead a deeper truth, a truth that had always been there but that was not accessible to most people.

Upon returning to Chile in December, I found myself overwhelmed with approximately 40 hours of dense footage, containing an infinite amount of possibilities for entertaining short, illustrated films to make and share with the Rapanui community. After taking a much-needed short break from my project for Christmas, I began the slow and arduous process of carefully revising the footage I had and organizing each around designated themes using an Excel spreadsheet. Meanwhile, Antonia worked on making tentative illustrations with which to mix the footage. Before I was done reviewing all of the material, there was not much we could do as far as the final film product went. January and February were therefore quiet, solitary months during which, I can say retrospectively, I struggled to convince myself that the project was on track. It seemed at the time that I had completed an overwhelming amount of communal work to no avail. At times when the postproduction process of summarizing the footage required breaks, I would frantically search for references on the Internet or at local libraries and contact filmmaker and creative writer friends asking them for feedback on ideas I had.

At one point of this frustrating part of my project, I decided that it was best for me to return to Easter Island now rather than later, as originally planned, so that

I could fill the gaps which I realized now existed in the whole archive of footage I had gathered and also so that I could work directly with the community on how to structure the post-production stage of my project before fully embarking on it. I spent a full month in Easter Island (for a total of three months in Easter Island at that point of my project) in February-March. During this time, I heard back from the Ph.D. programs I had applied to. The results were positive. This was a huge weight off my shoulders. The ideas that had been fruitlessly brewing in my mind for months suddenly came to fruition. I had toyed with the ideas of using children's illustrations about the stories which oral historians shared with me to mix with the video footage; of making a documentary film out of the material I had with a Rapanui narrator; and of making a fictional script with the help of Rapanui collaborators with which to frame the material I gathered. I arranged multiple meetings with cultural activists, artists, municipal authorities, schoolteachers, and other Rapanui people highly involved in the community. Eventually, I decided to mix all of the above-mentioned ideas into what I consider to be a new genre at the intersection of creative writing, filmmaking, art, and ethnography. I like to think of this new genre, of which I believe there are many other examples, as "arthopology," a compound word between art and anthropology.

I was very fortunate during this second trip to Easter Island to meet two Rapanui people in particular: Evelyn Huke and Christian Madariaga Paoa. By helping me translate important interviews I had made in Rapanui, Evelyn was able to grow intimate with the material and, given her extensive knowledge of Rapanui history as well as of the current political and social situation of the island, she was able to

advise me on how the community would best benefit from the material in question. Christian, on the other hand, helped me write a script and later made the voice-over for the film. Together, Evelyn and Christian, who are both the precise age in order to understand the concerns of both the younger and older generations, told me that what is truly needed in the island today is a method, a format, a medium by which the knowledge of the older people is made entertaining for the younger generations. The younger generations, they argued, are overstimulated by social media and television to such a degree that they find the repetitive and slow rhythm and the predictable tropes that their grandfathers and grandmothers use to tell them about their past boring.

After I returned from Easter Island to Santiago and while I visited Ph.D. programs in the U.S., things came together for the post-production stage of my project, which took place during two months from April to June in Santiago. I appreciate this stage of my project for the opportunity it gave me to meet personal and professional goals. Personally, I was able to express my passion for creative writing that in my life has amounted only to unpublished short stories, but which has always informed my academic writing. One way of making the message that oral historians shared with me adequate to the younger generations was by framing it with a fictional story, rather than using the dry academic language of books, articles, and documentaries which outsiders interested in Rapanui culture bombard it with. What I ended up doing was to basically translate the large amount of historical and cultural information I gathered at the local library and on the field with oral historians in Easter Island into a story, which although fictional, is historically

plausible. As you can see in the final film I made, the story is that of a young man who inherits a manuscript from his grandfather—an allusion to the many manuscripts written in the early 20th century by the few Rapanui people who survived the late 19th century. This manuscript is in fact a drawing—Antonia’s drawing—which summarizes the Rapanui’s colonial history, which in turn is narrated in the film by Christian’s voice. Christian’s voice corresponds to the voice of the young man unconsciously speaking to himself, re-discovering his biographical past that at the same time is the past of his culture.

This way of mixing the material I collected also met my professional goal of developing a fully dialectical anthropology. One of the major challenges I met early on my project was the language barrier. All the discourse about working from the local outward that went into my project seemed compromised by the fact that the oral historians I was working with were choosing to speak to me in Spanish, in order to allow for a fluent conversation. Using what is not only a foreign but more importantly the colonizing language was a foundational drawback to my project. I evaluated the possibility of working with a real-time translator, but the costs I foresaw were too high. After realizing the significance of the language barrier issue, I began asking the oral historians who by then I knew would appear in the final version of the film to speak in Rapanui, arguing that the fact that I would not be able to understand what they were saying in that moment would allow the conversation to unravel in a more natural manner in any case. Although by asking oral historians to narrate stories in Rapanui, I lost the opportunity to delve deeper into certain themes, the risk of the film reflecting what I wanted to hear and not what the oral

historians wanted to say was curtailed. I am glad to say that more than half of the film turned out to be in Rapanui. Although it would have been ideal for the entire film to be in Rapanui, reality is that many Rapanui of the younger generations do not know how to speak Rapanui. So, the film as it is does a good job of reflecting the island's current language situation.

The most difficult part of my project was the final stage, when I had to present the product of the work I had done with the community to the community itself. Although my work stemmed out of close work with local actors, before traveling to Easter Island for the third and final part of my project I was worried that many of my oral historians and many of the people with whom I had not worked but who would be seeing the film would find the style of the film or the techniques I used to mix it ineffective. Fortunately, the film was very well received, with large audiences, much praise, and many requests for extra copies.

The intention of sharing the film with the community varied according to the pocket of the community to whom I showed the film. I first showed the film to eleventh- and twelfth-grade students in the only high school in Easter Island that is manifestly dedicated to preserving Rapanui culture. I hoped not only that the modern format that the film uses to transmit the ancestral message would draw the attention of students amid the hyper-stimulation they receive from smartphones and TV screens, but also that the students would see the film with the eyes of potential filmmakers. The power of film to capture experiences, cultural information, events, and other phenomena that interest anthropologists and the people they study alike has become all the more relevant nowadays with the

pervasion of smartphones in the margins/ peripheries of the world. After showing the film to the students, Antonia and I proceeded to make a short film of the same genre in class with them. We asked students to divide themselves in three groups—music/dance, illustration, and narration. The first group filmed itself singing and dancing; the second, made a large collective illustration; and the third, invented a script in Rapanui and then wrote and narrated it. The final stage of the work we did at the high school involved mixing the material in class using Adobe Premiere Pro. Students were able to see both how simple the process is of mixing audio, video, and illustrations and how far-reaching the results are. Although hoping that all of the students will now start making ethnographic film on their own would be too ambitious, judging by their reactions, I think that we achieved the goal of sparking interest in ethnographic film, eliciting conversations between students and their grandfathers about the themes touched in the film and perhaps fueling the career of one or more students interested in making similar kinds of work in the future. (I have included the video made by students and us in the supplementary material to this final reflection.)

The other two pockets of the community I shared the film with represent two main factions of the community when it comes to cultural leadership: one faction that works toward preserving the culture by collaborating with Western institutions and programs of cultural preservation and attempting not to cut cultural tourism but manage it in ways that are culturally responsible; and another faction that works using Polynesian forms of government and which rejects tourism and advocates instead for the return to an autonomous economic system. I showed the

film to the first faction in the local museum, a Chilean institution. I anticipated some harsh criticism in this event, given that the film mainly portrayed the views of people in the other faction. This criticism did come and I value the half-an-hour or so during which leaders in the local community with important roles in defining the community's future—like Alfonso Rapu and Alfredo Tuki—laid out their positions. Many of these positions are so political that, I was told, it is difficult to create a situation where people feel comfortable to share them. I filmed the entire discussion following the showing and will upload it to the webpage once it is ready.

For the second faction, I planned a Rapanui event, which is to say that in collaboration with a local corporation for cultural preservation—Kahu Kahu O'Hera—I made a ritual *umu hatu* or earth-oven feast. I used the occasion to officially close my work in Easter Island and a cultural leader blessed the project. After showing the film during this event, I received very positive feedback as well as multiple requests for copies. In particular, I was moved by people requesting a copy for the film to be showed during the weekly meetings held by the Rapanui Parliament, a powerful local institution currently in possession of Easter Island's National Park (that was formally run by the Chilean government). I was also moved by an elderly man's petition for a copy to share with his grandchildren. It is these kinds of dissemination of the film within the local community that was my goal at this final stage of the project.

I am now in the stage of the project when I will be sharing the film with the global online community. My plan is to create a website that will contain as home page a video with the film imbedded in it. The video will be above the entire

illustration, which will contain links to footage that was not included in the film imbedded in different parts of the illustration. Other than the homepage, the website will include pages such as one that briefly summarizes Rapanui history and another with links to my letters home and final reflection. The target audiences of the website are three: 1) Chileans, most of whom are generally unknowledgeable about Easter Island's history and the Rapanui's current demands, despite considering Easter Island as part of their nation; 2) foreign tourists and other Easter Island aficionados, most of whom go to Easter Island only interested in its ancestral past without knowing even of the existence of the Rapanui people; and 3) the academic and artistic global community. I am currently working on the subtitles of the English version of the film, as well as on the actual website with a website developer. You will be able to access the website, including the English version of the film, using the following URL: <www.arthopology.org>, once it is ready by September.

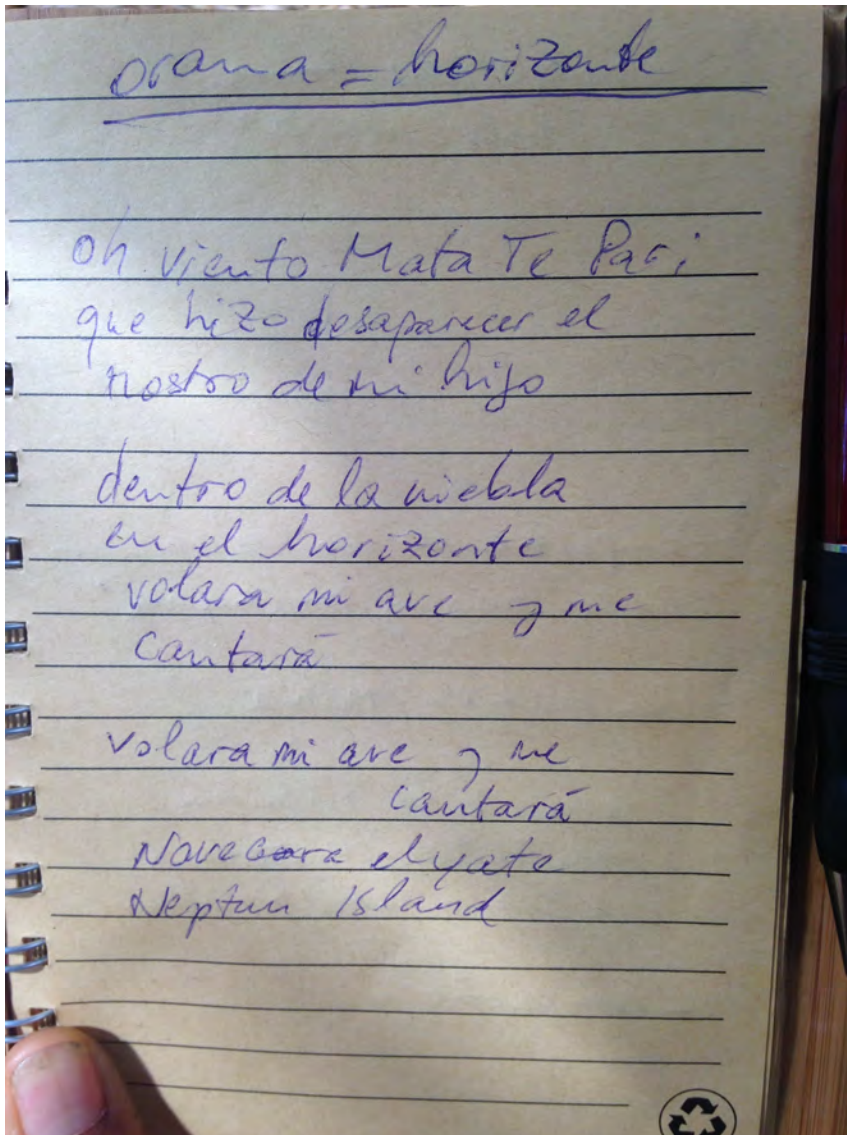
I would like to conclude this long reflection on this wonderful experience that occupied what was probably the most difficult year of my life—certainly personally, perhaps not professionally—by giving a deep thank you to all the people who made the project possible. I would like to thank first of all the Rapanui community for opening their doors and for their willingness to trust me with valuable information and experiences and to delve deep into topics that ultimately are not my own. I also would like to thank Mary Crabb, who was a wonderful coordinator for the Stronach Prize, constantly in contact with me. I would like to thank Leah Carroll, whose excellent management of the Office of Undergraduate

Research at UC Berkeley allowed me to develop the academic trajectory for which I was awarded the Prize. And of course, I would like to thank the Stronach committee for choosing my project over so many other wonderful projects to invest the valuable Stronach funds in. Once again, thank you for all your support!

P.S. As you may have noticed, I changed the title of my project from “Umanga Tupuna” or “Sharing with the Ancestors,” to “Ta i te Mana’u ki te Matamu’a,” or “Drawing the Thought of the Forefathers.” I did so upon the suggestion of the Rapanui people I worked with, whom thought that “umanga” and “tupuna” are both words that are in some kind of a fad today with the ancestral politics that are in fashion. They all thought that the title I ended up using was more original. It also reflects the concept of the film which I developed throughout the project.



A panoramic photo I took while doing a trip with an oral historian to the leper colony's cemetery. The photo shows the complex place-based history of Easter Island, with modern ruins indexing a history of colonization along the ancestral Rapanui landscape.



A photo of the sketchbook used by Evelyn Huke when helping me make translations from Rapanui to Spanish for interviews made in Rapanui.

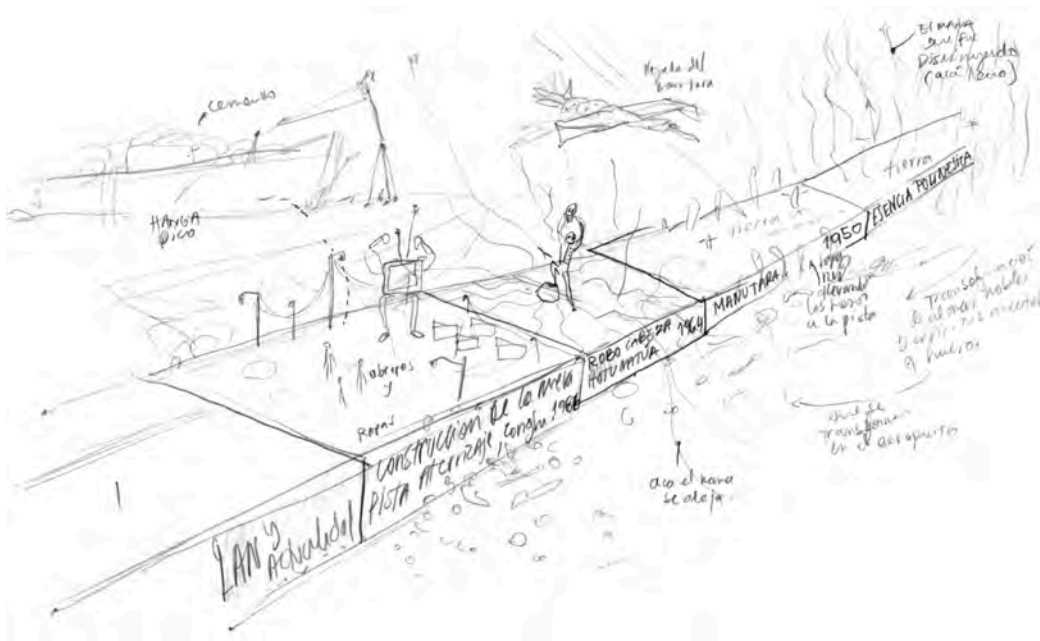


Photo of the first sketch made by Antonia of her drawing. At the time, we thought of the airstrip functioning as a timeline for the drawing, an idea which ended up not being quite so literal.



Photo of a more advance sketch made by Antonia. This is about halfway through the final sketch, before the illustration was made digital.



Photo showing the process of tracing the finished sketch, so as to have a clean copy to scan and digitalize.



Antonia and I presenting the film at the local museum library. I am holding a printed copy of the final drawing on my hand.

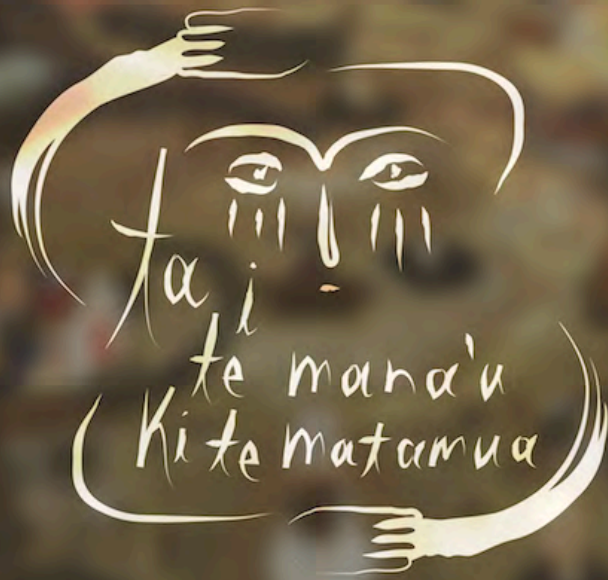


A Rapanui man preparing the ritual earth-over meal for the final event that closed my work in Easter Island.



A key oral historian with whom we worked (Petero Huke), who is pointing at a modern ruin of the leper colony.

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PRESENTACIÓN
CORTOMETRAJE
DOCUMENTAL
—



DIBUJANDO EL PENSAMIENTO DE LOS ANCESTROS

BIBLIOTECA WILLIAM MULLOY
MIÉRCOLES 1 DE JULIO A LAS 17:00 HRS.

Los esperamos con un vino de honor
y se regalarán copias del trabajo

Flyer for film presentation on Easter Island.