

**Transnationalism in Korean-Argentine cinema:  
international co-productions and cinematic representation**  
한국- 아르헨티나 영화의 초국가주의: 국제공동제작 및 영화속에 묘사

Lucía Rud  
University of Buenos Aires  
[luciarud@gmail.com](mailto:luciarud@gmail.com)

**Abstract<sup>1</sup>**

This paper intends to generate new insights on Film Transnationalism and Cross-cultural film representation taking into account a very significant and yet overlooked film connection: the flows between Korea and Argentina, both in an industrial/economic (international co-productions) as in a cultural (cinematic representation) sense.

On the one hand, the paper brings into focus the production modes of Korean-Argentine co-ventures: the Jeonju International Film Festival has made three films with Argentina throughout its Jeonju Cinema Program, while Korean producer Suh Young-joo has produced two films directed by Argentine filmmaker Pablo Trapero.

On the other hand, this paper analyses the cinematic representation of the Korean community in Argentina (*50 Chuseok*, Tamae Garateguy, 2018; *My last failure*, Cecilia Kang, 2016; *La salada*, Juan Martín Hsu, 2015; *Una canción coreana*, Gustavo Tarrío and Yael Tujsnaider, 2014), and also the role of Korean and Korean-Argentine actors, technicians and directors taking part in the Argentine film industry.

This example of a productive film relation calls upon us to reflect on the possibilities of transnational cinema as a way to resist Hollywood's worldwide dominance and to support cultural diversity on films at the global marketplace. It also shows the possible uses of the film industry as a strategic tool for intercultural dialogue and international collaboration beyond regional cultural borders.

**Keywords**

CO-PRODUCTION; TRANSNATIONALITY; CINEMATIC REPRESENTATION; MIGRATION CINEMA.

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<sup>1</sup> The Korean Collections Consortium of North America (KCCNA) Research Travel Grant has provided crucial funding for this work. Joy Kim, Lee Sun-yoon and Rachel Hwang from USC East Asian Library, Yunah Sung from the University of Michigan and Cho Sang-hun from the Richard C. Rudolph East Asian Library, UCLA provided invaluable assistance with their materials.

## Introduction

Cinema constitutes one of the main cultural changes and one of the most commercialized economic products of the 20th century. At the same time, it has been a significant vehicle of the representation of a Nation's cultural identity and national values (hegemonic and counterhegemonic). Since the beginning of film history there were imbrications between national cinemas: international distribution, international co-production —beginning in 1920s—, and international film festivals —since 1932. 'National' cinema has been and still is the main way of categorizing films, even if:

It is practically impossible to discover films which are completely "pure" in terms of their national origin: even if all the crew share the same nationality, what about the nationality of the equipment, the film stock, the aesthetics of editing, the style of the clothes? (Eleftheriotis, 2001, p. 32).

Cross-border cinematic connections were part of the film industry since the beginning of cinema. But it wasn't until 1990s that the global circulation of cinema changed: the conditions of financing, production, distribution and reception of cinema (Ezra & Rowden, 2006) are not the same in an increasingly interconnected, multicultural and polycentric world (Higbee & Lim, 2010). Countries from outside the West are now making and exhibiting films not only in their own countries but also increasingly across national boundaries, finding receptive audiences in film festivals and commercial theaters and tv all around the world (Naficy, 2001) and international co-production became a very usual way of producing, connecting regional or distant countries.

This flexibility of the former national boundaries of the film industries started to be known by film studies academics as 'transnationalism'. The transnational comprises both globalization —Hollywood's domination of world film markets, that changed and grew stronger from the 1980s— and the counterhegemonic responses of filmmakers from former colonial and Global South countries (Ezra & Rowden, 2006).

Mette Hjort (2010) refers as 'weaks forms of transnational filmmaking' the ones relates to economic implications, such as co-producing, international distribution and international sales. In opposition, the 'marked transnationality' are the transnational themes in films. This type of transnational cinema focus on exilic, diasporic or postcolonial films, meaning the cinematic representation of cultural identity. The transnational ties between Korea and Argentina includes international co-productions and cinematic representation of the Korean diaspora in Argentina, although there is no film produced yet that includes both types of transnationalism.<sup>2</sup>

On the one hand, Korean-Argentine co-productions do not reach transnational themes (nor even refer to Korean characters). The production modes of Korean-Argentine co-ventures are related to international film festivals: the Jeonju International Film Festival has made three films with Argentina throughout its Jeonju Cinema Program, while Korean producer and international sales agent Suh Young-joo has produced two films directed by Argentine filmmaker Pablo Trapero. In these cases, Korean partners finance Argentine filmmakers with no direct artistic involvement in the project. Nevertheless, their participation is essential for producing and distributing the films.

In the other hand, the films representing Korean diaspora in Argentina (transnational themes) are made "within a purely national framework of production and oriented in the first instance towards an audience defined in national terms" (Hjort, 2010, p. 14), meaning, they are produced by Argentine companies and with support of Argentine public art institutions such as the Instituto Nacional de Cine

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<sup>2</sup> The film in production *Older son / Hijo mayor* (Cecilia Kang), about a vicissitudes of a family of Korean immigrants in Argentina, obtained the Seoul Screenplay Development Support Program granted by the Seoul Film Commission for the development. Kang's first film, *Mi último fracaso*, had support from Korean Women's International Network (KOWIN) Argentina.

y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA, National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts). The cinematic representation of the Korean community in Argentina is expressed in films such as *Halmoni*, Daniel Kim, 2018; *50 Chuseok*, Tamae Garateguy, 2018; *My last failure*, Cecilia Kang, 2016; *La salada*, Juan Martín Hsu, 2015; *Una canción coreana*, Gustavo Tarrío & Yael Tujsnaider, 2014; *Do U Cry 4 Me Argentina?* Bae Youn-suk, 2005.

From a transnational perspective, in parallel with a political economy approach, postcolonial theories and diaspora and migration studies, this paper presents the ties between Argentine and Korean cinema, and brings into focus this strong but yet overlooked connection between an Asian and a Latin American country through international co-productions emerged in the context of film festivals and cinematic representation of the Korean diaspora.

### **International co-production**

Both the Korean Film Council (KOFIC) and the INCAA in Argentina develop measures to support film production and to protect film exhibition, as well as to co-produce with other countries through international co-production treaties, which usually consist of a regulatory text between two countries, more specifically between the agencies that handle the cinema in each country, mediated by their Foreign Offices. They set rights and obligations requiring the films to represent the nationality of both countries—in most cases, the premiere of the film in both markets is mandatory. They also establish the minimum and maximum percentages of the total budget which each producer should provide, and determine the distribution of technicians, actors and laboratories that will work on the film. The advantages deriving from these treaties include tax incentives, funding mechanisms and opportunities for film distribution. However, in practice, few films are made within the framework of these formal agreements because:

For some producers, ICPT (International Co-production Treaties) are unproductive and impractical for four reasons: 1) they are too complex—there two sets of rules, two sets of bureaucracies and two sets of crews, often speaking different languages; 2) they remain out of sync with other incentives available in one's own country; 3) they can cost more because of complex legal agreements; and finally 4) on a smaller note, vastly different time zones can make communication difficult (Yecies, 2009: 88).

Currently, there are no formal international co-production treaties between Argentina and Korea. However, the lack of official agreements has not been an obstacle for co-productions: since 2008, six Argentine-Korean films have been shot: Pablo Trapero's films *Lion's den / Leonera* (2008) and *Carancho* (2010) were co-produced by Korean companies Cineclick Asia and Finecut respectively (and both of them by the Korean producer and sales agent Suh Young-joo). Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF) co-produced the Argentine films *The movement / El movimiento* (Benjamín Naishtat, 2015), *A decent woman / Los decentes* (Lukas Valenta Rinner, 2016) and the medium-length film *Rosalinda* (Matías Piñeiro, 2011). *The theater of disappearance / El teatro de la desaparición* (Adrián Villar Rojas, 2017) which is the latest Argentine-Korean film until now, was co-produced by Korean Real DMZ Project. Also, two independent short films (*Sunset*, 2011 and *Going places*, 2013) were filmed in Korea by Argentine director Sebastián Elsinger.

Co-productions between Korea and Argentina have its singularities. Due to the absence of a formal international co-production treaty between the INCAA and the KOFIC, Argentine-Korean co-productions are usually generated by influential personal networks rather than by macro-institutions. Limited to financial exchanges most of them are not released theatrically in Korea because they are not anticipated to meet the screen quota. Moreover, by lacking the benefits of official agreements, these co-productions do not benefit from cultural diversity and cultural exchange, that accompany the transfer of human capital, technology and knowledge. In that sense, film ties between

Korea and Argentina are more of financial support in its nature rather than of cultural exchange, with Korea providing funding without the engagement of Korean actors or themes.

Launched in 2000, the Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF) is the second largest film festival in Korea after the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF). It is held at Jeonju, a city known as the cultural capital of the province of Jeollabuk-do. The festival is carried out over ten days during spring (April-May). This event focuses on independent cinema and experimental films, regardless of genre. Within its sections, 'In Competition', 'In Frontline' and 'World Cinemascope', they concentrate on the exhibition of foreign cinema.

The festival has a competitive nature and several prizes are awarded. For the International Competition, the prizes are: Grand Prize (KRW 20 million, approximately USD 18,000), Best Picture Prize Woosuk Award (USD 10,000) and Special Jury Prize (KRW 7 million, approximately USD 6,000). Various Argentine films have been exhibited at the JIFF, including two winners of the Grand Prize: *The stolen man / El hombre robado* (Matías Piñeiro, 2007) in 2008 and *History of fear / Historia del miedo* (Benjamín Naishtat, 2014) in 2014. Argentine winners of the Special Jury Prize were *Parabellum* (Lukas Valenta Rinner, 2015) in 2015 and *The human surge / El auge del humano* (Eduardo Williams, 2016) in 2017.

In addition to the exhibition of experimental films from the globe, the JIFF also promotes film production. The Jeonju Digital Project (JDP), carried out from 2000 to 2013, offered an annual fund of around KRW 50 million (approximately USD 45,000) for three filmmakers chosen by the JIFF committee to make a 30-minute length film, with the only requirement of making a digital 'unconventional' video product, with experimental features. In 2014, when the JDP was replaced by the Jeonju Cinema Project (JCP), the fund was increased to KRW 100 million (approximately USD 90,000) per filmmaker, and the bases were modified, moving towards the production of feature films. Between 2000 and 2017, more than 50 projects were supported through the JCP and the JDP.

Directors are selected heterogeneously. While some supported filmmakers, such as Harun Farocki, Hong Sang-soo or Bong Joon-ho, who all own great track records and recognition, others had just premiered their debut feature at the festival a year earlier. In that sense, there is a legitimacy balance: the consecrated filmmakers legitimize the festival which, in turn, contributes to the legitimization of new directors, supporting the idea of an event that embraces new and experimental filmmakers and sustaining its notion of 'Young Art' or avant-garde. The transnationality of these co-productions, in turn, serves to place Korea as a reference for cinema worldwide, as well as to the development of the 'made in Jeonju' brand. The Jeonju Cinema Projects 2018 has been expanded to include five titles: three Korean directors (Jang Woo-jin, Lim Tae-gue and Lee Hark-joon) and two Chilean filmmakers (Alejandro Fernández Almendras and Camila José Donoso).

Until 2018, the only filmmakers selected from Latin American were Argentine. This was on three occasions: 2010, 2015 and 2016 (although the 2016 director is Austrian, he is partially based in Buenos Aires, where the film takes place). Three Argentine-Korean films were produced: the medium-length film *Rosalinda* (Matías Piñeiro, 2010) and the feature films, *The movement* (Benjamín Naishtat, 2015) and *A decent woman* (Lukas Valenta Rinner, 2016). Even if the Argentine presence in the JIFF is remarkable, it is not the only presence from the Global South in the festival. For instance, in 2008, the JIFF had some African filmmakers as beneficiaries of its JDP (*Return*, 2008), giving a funding to Idrissa Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso), Mahamat-Saleh Haroun (Chad) and Nacer Khemir (Tunisia). The JCP finances filmmakers from all nationalities, without differentiating between developed or developing world beneficiaries.

As its main focus is experimental cinema, is characterized by thematic and aesthetic freedom, and is only inflexible about the accomplishment of the cinematographic product on time. According to the directors interviewed for this research, there is no meddling with the film content in the JIFF

sponsorship, making this one of the main differences with the European funds. Besides, the amount of KRW 50 (JDP) and 100 (JCP) million granted for the production of films is much higher than to the ones granted in other festivals: Hubert Bals (Rotterdam International Film Festival) grants EUR 10,000-20,000 and a maximum of EUR 50,000 for feature films; Films in Progress (San Sebastian Film Festival), between EUR 10,000 and 30,000 for post-production or distribution; World Cinema Fund (Berlin International Film Festival), grants a maximum of USD 80,000 for production (which is often much less) and 10,000 for distribution. In addition, most of these funds require the direct intervention of a European producer, which the JIFF does not demand.

Although the selected filmmakers are aesthetically and thematically very diverse in their production, they do share a certain profile in common. Beyond thematic or stylistic coincidences, Benjamin Naishtat, Matías Piñeiro and Lukas Valenta Rinner have also studied at the same university, the Argentine Film University (Fundación Universidad del Cine, FUC) —which has ties to Cannes. In addition, all three have been supported not only by JIFF, but also by the INCAA and/or Argentine production companies. But most importantly, they all had had presence in the most important European film festivals and/or had been prior recipients of European funds before being commissioned by the JIFF.

In a more commercial level, the director Pablo Trapero filmed two Argentine-Korean co-productions. Trapero is one of the greatest exponents of the New Argentine Cinema trend that emerged in the mid-nineties. After winning the Short Film Award for *Business / Negocios* (1995) at the Mar del Plata IFF 1997, he produced his first feature film, *Crane world / Mundo grúa* (1999) with a HBF script development grant. The film premiered in Venice IFF 1999 where he received the Critic's Award and won the Best Director at the first BAFICI in 1999.<sup>3</sup> His trajectory went from winning a Hubert Bals production grant for *El bonaerense* (2002) to later, being invited to CineMart<sup>4</sup>, IFFR's co-production film trade exhibition, in order to find fundings for his film *Born and bred / Nacido y criado* (2006).

*Lion's den / Leonera* (2008) was produced by Matanza Cine (Argentina), Cineclick Asia (Korea), and Patagonik<sup>5</sup> (Argentina) in co-production with Walter Salles' Videofilmes (Brazil), engagement for which it received funding from Ibermedia. *Lion's den* premiered in Cannes 2008 ('In Competition', the main section of the festival). *Carancho* (2010) is a co-production between Matanza Cine and Patagonik, Finecut (Korea), Ad Vitam Production (France) and L90 Productions (Chile), also funded with an Ibermedia grant. Starring Ricardo Darín, both a darling of the industrial auteur cinema and one of the biggest stars of the Argentine quality commercial cinema, the film sold 614,000 tickets in Argentina, positioning as the second most watched Argentine film that year.

Unlike other more experimental or 'festival films' (Falicov, 2016), Trapero's movies appeal to conventions and strategies typical of genre films. In the case of *Carancho*, classic black thrillers; in the case of *Lion's den*, prison films. These genre characteristics also imply a very different theatrical performance from the 'art house festival films'. *The clan / El clan* (2015), with which Trapero won the best director award (Leone d'Argento) at Venice IFF 2015, was the most watched national film that year in Argentina, reaching more than 2,5 million viewers in the country —and one of the most popular national films in Argentina in the last twenty years. In Korea, *The clan* was released by

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<sup>3</sup> The 1999 BAFICI jury included U.S. independent film director Whit Stillman and the former BIFF director Kim Dong-ho.

<sup>4</sup> CineMart is intended for film projects that are more developed than the ones funded by the Hubert Bals Fund (Falicov, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Patagonik, partially owned by Buena Vista International (Disney), is one of the largest film companies in Argentina and Latin America. It is associated with Buena Vista International for the distribution of its films. In the above mentioned films, Buena Vista International only acted locally (in Argentina and Brazil) as Finecut was in charge of international sales.

Double & Joy and attracted almost 30,000 spectators. Trapero's previous films were not released theatrically in Korea, despite having been co-produced by a Korean company specialized in sales.

Suh Young-joo was a key figure for Trapero's Argentine-Korean co-productions. While running Cineclick Asia<sup>6</sup> (2000-2007) and Finecut (from 2008 on), she has worked as international sales agent representative for Korean directors such as Lee Chang-dong, Park Chan-wook, Kim Ki-duk and Bong Joon-ho. The first non-Korean film represented by the company, Chinese *Tuya's Marriage* (Wang Quan'an, 2006) won the Golden Bear at the Berlinale 2007. Besides Argentine-Korean films, Finecut co-produced the Korean-French joint production *A Brand New Life / 여행자* (Ounie Lecomte, 2009); *Opium war* (Siddiq Barmak, 2008), a joint venture with Afghanistan and Japan; and the UK-Indian-Korean *The Profane* (Sidharth Srinivasan, 2012). Finecut has managed to position its films in numerous international film festivals, and in Cannes in particular. Suh Young-joo at Cineclick Asia first, and then Finecut, has represented a variety of Korean films at the Argentine film festivals BAFICI and Mar del Plata IFF.

Although Trapero's Argentine-Korean joint productions were not financed directly by a film festival fund, the importance of film festivals is evident: European festivals were decisive for his recognition as director, from which he could establish the network that led him to Korean sales agent and producer Suh Young-joo.

According to the usual assumptions, co-productions are market driven as they could expand and open potential markets, leading to better sales. However, in the case of Argentine-Korean co-productions, there is no great monetary gain. Nevertheless, the benefits of these co-production practices exist as the art films have a smaller, niche market-based potential.

Argentine-Korean co-production films have gained great recognition in international festivals by obtaining funds and prizes, and being programmed in the most important sections of the Big Three (Cannes, Berlin and Venice). In that sense, both Korea and Argentina have benefited from it. On the one hand, young Argentine filmmakers with experimental and personal bets—who usually act as well as script writers and producers—get to publicize their films and make international sales. On the other hand, Korea attracts a global reputation and gets to be known to filmmakers and producers who interact with the international film festival circuit. As international festivals compete against one another to premiere the best films and vie for international recognition, the JIFF thus finances not only films, but its own distinctive image. Although these co-productions are obviously beneficial for Argentine (and Latin American) cinema, it should be noted that the imperative need for foreign funds—which allow the production of films but do not correct the basic problems of Latin American industries, which are infrastructure and distribution—also constitutes a form of dependency. This opens the debate about whether the film funds help or hinder professional development efforts in the Global South (Falicov, 2016).

The cinematographic links between Korea and Argentina are built from the bottom-up, by the interest and drive of a few non-state actors. Despite having a compelling number of co-productions, the most enriching side of it—artistic exchanges, cultural diversity—has not yet been accomplished.

Although it is refreshing to think of the Asian-Latin American link as innovative, the importance of European festivals should not be overlooked. The Western prestige lent by the European International Film Festivals to novel Latin American directors is still a leading entry point for their films. As a matter of fact, it is only after its exhibition in major European festivals that Argentine films are able to reach Korean public institutions and private companies. Perhaps in the future it would be possible to

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<sup>6</sup> Suh founded Cineclick Asia in 2000, which was one of Korea's most successful independent sellers. In 2007, Cineclick Asia merged with Fantom Entertainment Group, a company more focused on the domestic Korean market. Suh then founded Finecut, in order to handle a more diverse slate of international projects.

achieve film ties between Asia and Latin America that does not involve Europe or Hollywood as a key pivot of their relationship.

### **Cinematic representation**

The cinema has the ability to convey and promote cultural diversity. Nafici (2001) calls ‘accent cinemas’ those of exile and diaspora, as opposed to the non-accented ‘universal’ dominant cinema. Nafici states that the accent emanates not so much from the accented speech of the diegetic characters as from the displacement of the filmmakers and their artisanal production modes.

Currently around seven million Koreans live outside Korea, in more than 170 countries around the world, although most of them are in China, United States and Japan. The Koreans abroad are represented in films from a variety of countries: Korean-Cuban in *Jeronimo* (Joseph Juhn, in production); Korean-Danish in *The return* (Malene Choi Jensen, 2018); Korean-French in *A Brand New Life / 여행자* (Ounie Lecomte, 2009); Korean-Belgian in *Couleur de peau: miel* (Laurent Boileau, Jung Boileau, France/Belgium, 2012); Korean-American in *Spa night* (Andrew Ahn, 2016); Korean-Kazakh in *The Unreliable People* (Y. David Chung and Matt Dibble, 2007), among many others.

More than 100,000 Koreans have settled in various countries in Latin America. According to a 2011 report from the migration department of South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT, 외교통상부)<sup>7</sup> 50,773 live in Brazil; 22,354 in Argentina; 11,800 in Mexico; 5,205 in Paraguay; 12,918 in Guatemala; and 4,000 in Chile, Peru and Ecuador (this counts only first generation Koreans).

Although geographically distant, Argentina has an important Korean community (the second in Latin America, and the sixteenth worldwide). In the case of Argentina, the official emigration began in October 1965 with 93 people from about 18 families. They arrived in Argentina to participate in an agricultural immigration project and they settled in lands acquired by the Korean Overseas Development Corporation (KODCO). Most of the people didn't have any previous experience in agricultural labor which, over time, forced them to try to leave these settlements to either enter in Brazil or simply look for work in metropolitan areas, mainly Buenos Aires, Argentina's capital city. The Korean immigrants in Buenos Aires ended up settling in the Baek-ku, a neighborhood in Flores (near Barrio Rivadavia) that owes its name to the bus line 109. The signing of the ‘Acta de Procedimiento para el ingreso de inmigrantes coreanos a la Argentina’ (Certificate of proceedings for the Entry of Korean Immigrants to Argentina) in 1985 allowed 11,000 Korean families to take residence in Argentina. This new migration wave differed from the previous one because they now came from an industrialized country and had capital to invest, and they did in the garment industry. Around 70% of the Korean diaspora in Argentina works in the garment industry, and around 60% of the clothes produced in Argentina is linked to Korean in its production or distribution (Yoon, 2015).

Several Argentine films convey cinematic representations of the Korean diaspora in the country: *Corea* (Melina Serber, 2013); *La salada*; *My last failure*; *Una canción coreana*; *Do U Cry 4 Me Argentina?*; *50 Chuseok*, among others. All of them Argentine productions without any Korean financing or support.

The Argentine cinema did not ventured into the representation of its cultural identities but after the

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<sup>7</sup> In 2013 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) reverted to its earlier name of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

Argentine financial and economic crisis of 2001.<sup>8</sup> Joanna Page (2009) notes that after the crisis, its cinema helped to consolidate a new image of the nation. In that sense, the economic crisis of 2001 profoundly affected how Argentines see themselves (Ko, 2013). It was then when the mestizo, black, Arab and Jewish<sup>9</sup> population of Argentina began to be visible in films such as *Bolivia* (Adrián Caetano, 2002) or *El abrazo partido* (Daniel Burman, 2004). This added to a global process of multiculturalism and pursuit of diversity as a desirable value, which implied both the recognition of differences as well as their segmentation and magnification. Simultaneous to this phenomenon, the Korean population in Argentina began to descend. From the year 2000 on there were multiple departures that included families re-emigrating to Mexico, Australia, the United States or Korea and young members of the 1.5 generation heading for Korea and the United States (Mera, 2009).

Until the beginning of the 21st century, and throughout the 20th century, Argentina perceived itself as an homogeneously white nation closer to Europe than to Latin America (while the ‘others’ were assimilated or invisibilized). In the cinematic representation, this meant that only white characters were represented, and if other ethnic groups appeared, it was in a caricatured and stereotypical way. Although this changed in the latest years, in media (television, publicity) is still usual for multicultural subjects to appear performing as a racialized other so as to be easily recognized by the normative subject, disseminating stereotypes (Ko, 2013; Kim, 2017).

Although audiovisual productions in television and publicity have had in general very stereotyped, erroneous and even racist representations of Korean migrants during the 1990s, with orientalist biases, in films they have been portrayed in less hostile ways. In the last five years, some Argentine films have even begun to present Asian characters as protagonists. This is partly due to the nature of the film industry (different from the TV industry), but mostly to the presence of directors of Asian origin: Veronica Chen (daughter of a Chinese father), Juan Martin Hsu (Argentine son of a Taiwanese mother and a Chinese father), Cecilia Kang (daughter of Korean migrants), Tamae Garateguy (granddaughter of a Japanese grandfather), among others. Loshitzky (2010) considers that this type of films, made within ‘minority discourses’, are usually based on ethnic autobiographies and autobiographical fictions:

They are experimental diasporic films using basically Western film forms to speak from non-Western culture to a mixed audience. As hybrid films they perform disjunction typical of ethnicities in a state of cultural transition and reveal the process of exclusion by which nations and identities are formed. Moreover, as ethnic films they are also diasporic films, a form of otherness that poses cultural and political challenges to the hegemony and homogeneity claimed by the nation-state (Loshitzky, 2010, p. 9).

*50 chuseok* (Tamae Garateguy, 2018), is a documentary on Korean-Argentine actor Chang Sung Kim, who returns to Korea for the first time in 48 years; *Una canción coreana* (Gustavo Tarrío, Yael Tujsnaider, 2014), is a documentary on Chung An-ra (Anna), a Korean immigrant who lives in Baek-ku, works at a store and is a lyrical singer; *Mi último fracaso* (Cecilia Kang, 2016), a documentary on different ways of femininity through different generations of a Korean family in

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<sup>8</sup> In the beginning of December 2001, the Minister of Economy Domingo Cavallo announced the freezing on bank deposits (‘Corralito’). On December 19, 2001, the Argentine government declared state of siege to stop the looting and riots sparked by austerity measures and poverty. In December 21, president De la Rúa resigned after thousands protest (more than 20 civilians were killed). The following days were of political instability, with four presidents in a week. The country announced the default of its external debt. It was the biggest debt default in history. There has been analysis of this crisis and the financial crisis in South Korea (1997), comparing the role of neoliberal policies and the International Monetary Fund’s adverse role during the crises (Kim, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Although Jews had had an important role as actors, directors and entrepreneurs (Max Glücksmann, Leon Klimovsky, David José Kohon, Juan José Jusid), they did not enjoy the same place in the cinematic representation (some films of the twentieth century are: *Pelota de trapo*, Leopoldo Torres Ríos, 1948; *Los gauchos judíos*, Juan José Jusid, 1974).

Argentina. *La salada* (Juan Martín Hsu, 2015) is the only feature film, about different migrants working in a clothing market named 'La salada'. These films are not entirely autobiographical, but they do have an autobiographical base. They present questions on the cultural identity that they not intend to reply, not at least entirely.

Thematically, these films presents similarities: territorialities —the presence of Buenos Aires as opposed and similar to Seoul— and journeys; work environments —the tensions with other migrants at the textile industry, and the possibility to work outside the garment industry—; family relationships —difficulty of love relations outside the community—; the language barrier and/or multilinguality (Rud, 2018a). Unlike other audiovisual media which sustains representations with a high level of ignorance of the world they are projecting (television<sup>10</sup>, advertising and even in literature<sup>11</sup>), these films were execute by directors and actors tightly linked to the world to be portrayed.

Accented filmmakers are not just textual structures or fictions within their films; they also are empirical subjects, situated in the interstices of cultures and film practices, who exist outside and prior to their films (Naficy, 2001, p.4).

As Cecilia Kang is both director and character of her documentary, she can enter that world —her family's world— with ease; Yael Tujsnaider has a relationship, prior to his film, with Víctor and Anna from *Una canción coreana*, and the importance of the film of its protagonists led to the establishment of the restaurant that bears that name; Juan Martín Hsu is familiar to the work environment of La salada; *50 chuseok* was proposed by Chang Sung Kim and financed by the Korean community of Argentina. This knowledge allows a more intimate cinematic representation that reflects specific issues of the community, even though they do not necessarily escape stereotypes. These films were developed with interest and specific knowledge from their creators, the Korean characters and their experiences are central in the narration.

In addition to the interest of specific people, these films were made with support from INCAA and other Argentine institutions. *Una canción coreana* had funding from the Metropolitan Culture Fund of the City of Buenos Aires and INCAA; *La salada* was funded by INCAA and had support from INADI (Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism); *Mi último fracaso* did its postproduction at the ENERC (National School of Experimental Film Direction). This funding reflects the intention of some national organizations to accompany the discourses of minorities.

According to INADI statistics, the Korean community is among the five most present in acts of discrimination. On the other side of the same coin, Koreans are also hyper-exotized with positive characteristics, following the idea of a 'model minority'. These films propose a representation of the Korean migration and Korean-Argentines from a more intimate and, therefore, also improved point of view. There are no profound statements behind these films, but small characters with a certain charm.

This study stands as an introduction to reflect about the way in which Korean and Korean-Argentine migrants are represented in Argentine cinema. This topic is significant for two different fields of study. On the one hand, for Film Studies, it suggests the existence of a category that some theorists refer to as 'migrant' or 'diasporic' cinema (Ballesteros, 2015) within Argentine cinema as well as to reflect about the complexity of the 'national' cinema category. On the other hand, for Migration Studies, these films not only depicts what it means to be a migrant or second-generation in Argentina, but also what it means to be Argentine. Building on Yosefa Loshitzky's (2010, p. 8) ideas regarding migrant cinema in Europe, these cinematographic experiences of diaspora, exile, migration and

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<sup>10</sup> The Korean character in *Juana y sus hermanas*, the sketches and cinematic representation of Koreans in *Todo por dos pesos*, the presence of Miss Lee in *El periscopio*, Natalia Kim in *El Tao del sexo y del amor*. The most notably exception to this simplification is Walter Mao's character in *Graduados*, played by Chang Sung Kim.

<sup>11</sup> I refer here to the representation of Korean characters in "De cómo son hechos los arco iris y por qué se van" by Washington Cucurto and in *Equipo en peligro (Metegol)* by Eduardo Sacheri.

nomadism challenge traditional notions of what “Argentina” and “being Argentine” means.

## Conclusion

The Argentine-Korean film connection is the largest and more intense film connection between an Asian and a Latin American country. This is not only because of the Korean diaspora in Argentina, but mainly because their film industries boomed around the same time (in the late 1990s) product of film policies and the importance acquired at the same environment (European film festivals). The UNESCO Institute for Statistics states that Korea and Argentina have similar indicators regarding films produced by year and they are both in the top ten major exporters of audiovisual and related services according to the World Trade Organization. Their strength of the film industries in each region, the film policies and the recognition at European Film Festivals of the New Argentine Cinema (Nuevo Cine Argentino) and the Korean Wave are not the entire explanation of this relation. The cinematographic links between Korea and Argentina are built from the bottom-up, by the interest and drive of a few non-state actors.

The films that connect Korea and Argentina are very authorial in their representation (opposed to the dominant Hollywood/international/‘universal’ style films in their textual cultural specificity) and are produced through a limited budget, as they are placed on the margins of dominant film cultures or the peripheries of industrial practices (Higbee & Lim, 2010). In that sense, they intend to resist Hollywood’s worldwide dominance and support cultural diversity on films at the global marketplace. However, they have very limited impact, as they have a very reduced circulation on screen. They depend on international (mainly European) film festivals to credit any value. Transnationality in film must also take into account these imbalances in the power dynamics between the nations, and the West keeps being the most benefited stakeholder of the Global South films (Falicov, 2016; Rud, 2018b), as the circulation and international distribution of the Global South films depend on the recognition of Western film festivals (authorial films) or the major-distributors like Buena Vista International (for quality commercial films).

For instance, the cinematic representation of the Korean diaspora in Argentina is more exhibited in Western film festivals than in the East or the Global South. As independent and artistic films, these films are exhibited in Argentina with little to no-repercussion theatrically. In Korea, they have no circulation at all, as they were not made for a Korean public as target receptor and were not distributed or exhibited in Korea (the only exception is *Do U cry 4 me Argentina*, exhibited at the Busan International Film Festival in 2005). On the other hand, the Korean-Argentine co-productions were exhibited at Korean film festivals (although not theatrically), but the most enriching side of it —artistic exchanges, cultural diversity— has not yet been accomplished.

Even if the existence of films product of a Korean-Argentine relation already demonstrate an important link between the countries, the most significant part of cinema is still missing: the audiences. And this is not a task that solely the States, the national film institutes and the film producers should address. As transnational and interconnected across borders publics, we have the possibility to choose which type of films to consume, which film production and discourses to see and hear. This paper is an invitation, as academics, to think the Asian-Latin American as a method (Kim, 2017), and also, as film spectators, to search, watch, enjoy and reflect upon the several existing Argentine-Korean films.

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