DIALOGUE

TRAUMA, MEMORY AND REPARATION FROM A TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Conversation with

CECILIA KANG

INTRODUCTION

LUCÍA RUD

From 1931 until the end of the Second World War in 1945, the Imperial Japanese Army recruited women and girls from different countries into a system of military sexual slavery, referring to them by the euphemistic term "comfort women" (*wianbu* in Korean). This issue remained largely silenced in South Korea until the 1990s. From that point onwards, survivors' testimonies, historical research, and the work of human rights organisations began to reveal both the scale and the systematic nature of the system. It is estimated that, during the Japanese occupation, between 200,000 and 400,000 women, primarily from the Korean Peninsula, China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, and other parts of Asia, were subjected to forced recruitment, deceptive labour promises, abduction, or economic coercion that ultimately led to their sexual exploitation in so-called "comfort stations" for soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army. Many of these women died because of abuse, malnutrition, or while being transported to combat zones. After the war ended, the survivors remained silent for decades due to social stigma and the absence of institutional support.

In this context of mnemonic contestation, cinema has played a crucial role as a vehicle for testimony, the transmission of transgenerational memory, and symbolic reparation. Alongside Byun Young-joo's foundational documentary trilogy—*The Murmuring* (1995), *Habitual Sadness* (1997), and *My Own Breathing* (1999)—several fiction films have also addressed the issue, including *Spirits' Homecoming* (Cho Jung-rae, 2016) and *I Can Speak* (Kim Hyun-seok, 2017), among others.

However, this body of films has often been examined through the lens of Korean national cinema, limiting our understanding of how traumatic memory travels, is reconfigured, and becomes mobilised across borders, particularly given that the so-called "comfort women" were predominantly—but by no means exclusively—Korean.

Today, approximately seven million Koreans, including both migrants and their descendants, live outside the Korean Peninsula, dispersed across countries around the world. The largest communities are found in China, the United States, Japan, Canada, and the former Soviet republics. The traumas experienced by the Korean population during the twentieth century continue to resonate within these diasporic communities, where they have also inspired forms of remembrance and activism. Audiovisual works such as *The Voices of the Silenced* (Park Soo-nam and Park Maeui, 2024), which focuses on the *Zainichi* (ethnic Koreans in Japan), and the television series *Pachinko* (Soo Hugh, Apple TV+, 2022), adapted from the 2017 novel of the same name by Korean American author Min Jin Lee, recover the history of Koreans under Japanese imperialism and explore its enduring consequences.

Cecilia Kang (Buenos Aires, 1985) is an Argentine filmmaker of Korean descent. In Argentina, she studied film directing at the National School of Film Experimentation and Production (ENERC) and furthered her training at the Film Laboratory of Torcuato Di Tella University (UTDT). Her body of work includes several short films, among them *Videojuegos* (2014), *Que viva el agua* (2011), and *Bicicletas* (2018). Her debut feature, *My Last Failure* (2017), is a documentary that explores identity, displacement, and the experiences of women within the Korean community in Argentina. In 2025, she premiered her first fiction feature, *Firstborn Son*, a co-production between Argentina (Tarea Fina) and France (Invivo Films) that examines the Korean Argentine diasporic experience through the perspective of a young woman. For this film, Kang received the Best Emerging Director award in the Cineasti del Presente section at the Locarno International Film Festival in 2025.

Partió de mí un barco llevándome (Cecilia Kang, 2023) was produced with the support of Argentina's National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA), in collaboration with Korean institutions such as the Seoul Film Commission, as well as private funding. The film stars Melanie Chong, an Argentine actress of Korean descent (born in Argentina to Korean parents). This geographical positioning offers a distinctive perspective on the issue of the "comfort women," challenging narratives that have been framed exclusively within national boundaries.

The film forms part of a broader series of initiatives on the issue of the "comfort women" in Argentina, demonstrating how movements for historical justice and memory can take root in geographically and culturally distant contexts through academic institutions, artistic practices, and human rights activism. In this regard, the work of the scholar María del Pilar Álvarez has been particularly significant. A leading figure in the dissemination and analysis of this issue in Argentina, she has published numerous articles in Spanish and, more recently, the book *Halmoni: The Revolution of the Korean Grandmothers* (2025).

The connection between the historical memories of Argentina and Korea also became explicit with the inauguration of the photographic exhibition *Comfort Women: Korean Women in the Diaspora* (2023), by Japanese photographer Yajima Tsukasa. Featuring portraits of the survivors in their everyday lives, the exhibition was held at the House of Identity within the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos (former ESMA) as part of the Month of Women and Memory. It was organised by the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo and the Korean Association in Argentina, with María del Pilar Álvarez serving as curator. This collaboration between the Grandmothers' Association—an internationally recognised symbol of the struggle

for memory and identity—and the Korean diaspora reinforced the transnational understanding of the "comfort women" system as a systematic violation of the human rights of women from Korea, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Yajima's photographs, taken in 2004, played a crucial role in making the faces of these elderly survivors visible.

Partió de mí un barco llevándome explores the transmission of memory and identity when one lives between two countries. Seeking to connect the experiences of the "comfort women" with those of contemporary young women, Kang selected a testimony from Ustinia Dolgopol and Snehal Paranjape's research report *Comfort Women: An Unfinished Ordeal. Report of a Mission* (1994) and invited several young Argentine women of Korean descent to study and recite it.

The film opens by foregrounding the documentary's own process of construction. Kang interviews several young Korean Argentines, asking them about their life experiences, employment, and whether they are familiar with the history of the "comfort women." Among them, she chooses to work with actress Melanie Chong (Buenos Aires, 1993), whom she describes as "her mirror" because of their shared interest in the performing arts—an uncommon career path within the Korean Argentine community. Chong studied at the Metropolitan School of Dramatic Arts (EMAD, 2012–2015), where she trained with Julio Chávez and Lisandro Rodríguez. Throughout her career, she has appeared in television series such as *Sr. y Sra. Camas* (TV Pública Canal 7, 2011) and *Niní* (Telefé, 2009–2010), as well as in stage productions including *La persona que esperábamos viene a la cena* (presented at the First Urgent Theatre Festival, 2016) and *Estoy perdido* (staged as part of the *Politically Incorrect: Francophone Theatre in Residence* programme, directed by Agustín Toscano and Ezequiel Radusky, 2024) (Alternativa Teatral, n.d.).

Melanie memorises and rehearses the testimony of Hwang Geum-ju, a former "comfort woman." When she first encounters the text, however, the testimony does not recount the atrocities committed under Japanese imperialism. Instead, it focuses on the survivor's later relationship with her mother and with post-war Korean society. The audience hears excerpts from Melanie's rehearsals in different settings: before her mother, with her Argentine friend Mora, in front of a mirror, and with actor and acting coach Julio Chávez, each rehearsal seeking a different emotional response from its interlocutor. Yet the complete testimony, performed during an open-microphone event at *La Pulpería*, remains off-screen.

Throughout the film, Melanie undergoes a profound shift in her understanding of its pur-

Image 1





pose. After performing Hwang's testimony at *La Pulpería*, she expresses her reservations and confronts the director: "You think… what's the point of reopening another wound? Or the same wound, over and over again… like those women. Why keep talking? It's over, it's over. The past can't be changed, you know?"

In the film's second section, Melanie travels to Seoul. There, she encounters Hwang's face in archival documents and personal objects displayed at the War & Women's Human Rights Museum. She later visits the House of Sharing (*Nanum ŭi Chip*) together with photographer Yajima Tsukasa. Yajima tells her that Hwang had been an active and passionate participant in the campaigns demanding justice from the Japanese government. Finally, Melanie takes part in the 1,551st Wednesday Demonstration, the weekly protest held every Wednesday since 1992 in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, calling for justice and reparations. There, she delivers in English a speech on domestic violence that directly echoes the experiences of her own mother, Hae Kyung-jeon. Earlier in the film, her mother recounts a testimony that is, in many ways, analogous to Hwang's: she describes the physical abuse inflicted by her husband, the lack of protection from her own mother ("How could they not hit you with that awful temper of yours?"), the silence surrounding the abuse and the absence of any formal complaint, as well as her own inability at the time to recognise it as violence ("But I didn't know that any of that was violence. I thought it was normal.")

Melanie's participation in the Wednesday Demonstration in Seoul and her rehearsal of Hwang Geum-ju's testimony at *La Pulpería* in Argentina can be understood as rituals of cultural trauma repair. These performances are not intended merely to inform but to generate an emotional resonance that fosters the audience's identification with the victims' suffering. The film never shows Melanie's performance at *La Pulpería*, and Lee (2025) notes that she ultimately failed to deliver the testimony. By contrast, during the Wednesday Demonstration, Melanie not only succeeds in speaking publicly about the "comfort women"—and does so in English, a language that is not her own—but also reflects on her mother and on her own personal history.

Together with her Korean Argentine friend Eunice, her brother Álex, and her non-Korean Argentine friend Mora, Melanie reflects on the differences between Argentina and Korea: how people sit, whether they remove their shoes indoors, whether they use umbrellas, when they apply sunscreen, and their different relationships with the ground and the sky. These conversations seek to articulate cultural difference while revealing how Korean Argentines never fully belong to either place, experiencing shifting positions between "us" and "them." Language also becomes a site of negotiation. In Seoul, Melanie chooses to speak English as a mediating language because she feels that her Korean is not sufficiently fluent.

The relationship with men constitutes another recurring source of tension throughout the film. It is present both in Hwang's testimony, where she explains that she never married because of her aversion to men and to sex, and in Hae Kyung-jeon's account. On the one hand, Hae recalls the violence of her former partner; on the other, she advises Melanie that, in order to "save" them both—herself and her daughter—she should try to marry a Korean man ("a millionaire," she adds). From the perspective of these older women, there appears to be no complete escape from structures of oppression.

The film's title is drawn from a line in Alejandra Pizarnik's poem *To Explain with the Words of This World*, included in her collection *The Tree of Diana* (1962). In interviews, Kang has explained that this verse conveys the difficulty of expressing traumatic and ineffable experiences through language, an idea she sought to communicate through the protagonist's journey. Kang had previously engaged with Pizarnik's work in a poetry

workshop led by Andi Nachón, where participants reflected on the inadequacy of words to articulate pain and on the need to explore visual and sonic forms of expression. This reflection is materialised throughout the film in a series of visual motifs: the sculptures displayed in the museum, the paintings created by former "comfort women" as vehicles for transmitting memory, and the tattoo Melanie chooses to have—a little she-devil—which, as she explains in hesitant Korean, carries a meaning: "a bad girl, but a pretty one."

The documentary had its world premiere on 7 November 2023 in the International Competition of the Mar del Plata International Film Festival, where it received the Astor Piazzolla Special Jury Award and the Audience Award. It was first screened in Buenos Aires as part of the Argentine Women Directors programme, organised by Género DAC and GPS Audiovisual. The film later won the 2025 Sur Award for Best Documentary, presented by the Argentine Academy of Cinema. Despite these accolades, presidential spokesperson Manuel Adorni defended budget cuts to Argentina's National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA) by arguing that it subsidised films with very low attendance, citing this documentary while providing inaccurate—and false—figures regarding its audience (Página/12, 2024).

Ninety-three years after the establishment of the first "comfort station" in Asia, very few former "comfort women" remain alive (Álvarez, 2025), making the transmission of their memories and the pursuit of at least symbolic forms of reparation an urgent task. Such remembrance should not be confined to a nationalist framework but should also acknowledge the ways in which sexual violence against women has recurred across different wartime contexts, from Bosnia to Rwanda. This broader perspective has increasingly been embraced by Korean institutions. The War & Women's Human Rights Museum in Seoul has dedicated a permanent gallery to violence against women worldwide; the Women at War Film Festival, inaugurated in Seoul in 2023, situates the issue within a transnational framework; and, in 2024, the Research Institute on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery (RIMSS) organised a symposium in Seoul in which Cecilia Kang participated.

With regard to the "comfort women," it is important to recall that, despite the broad historical consensus on the issue, the Japanese government has never issued an official apology acknowledging legal responsibility that has been ratified by its parliament. In 2015, under the administrations of Park Geun-hye and Shinzo Abe, South Korea and Japan reached an agreement establishing a compensation fund for some surviving victims. However, the agreement was never enacted into law, and many survivors and advocacy organisations criticised it as little more than humanitarian assistance rather than an act of state reparation accompanied by an acknowledgment of responsibility. The continued prominence of the issue in cinema reflects the fact that the wound remains open so long as Japan does not offer a formal, comprehensive, and legally recognised apology (Nam, 2022).

Partió de mí un barco llevándome stands out within this landscape because it reveals the continuity of violence against women beyond the specific historical episode of the "comfort women," while underscoring the importance of narration and testimony as pathways toward healing. Equally significant is its diasporic perspective, which is at once both insider and outsider, endowing the film with a distinctive critical vantage point. From this dual position, the narrative ceases to belong exclusively to the history of Korean—or even Asian—women and instead opens onto a broader understanding: this violence is not merely a national or regional trauma but part of a global pattern that has affected women across different geographical contexts and armed conflicts. ■

INTERVIEW

MARCELA CANIZO

Thank you very much for speaking with us, Cecilia. To begin, could you introduce yourself and tell us about your career as a filmmaker in Argentina, as well as your relationship with Korea and its history?

Thank you very much for the invitation and for this conversation. I am a filmmaker, and I have directed two documentary features. The first is *My Last Failure*, and the second is *Partió de mí un barco llevándome*. Both explore the position of women within the Korean community in Argentina. In each case, I am essentially trying to answer the question of who I am, having been born in Buenos Aires in 1985 to Korean parents. I have always been interested in these issues—questions of identity formation and of how we construct our representation as women. More recently, I premiered my first fiction feature, which also incorporates documentary elements. In many ways, I would say it is the result of the exploration I have been undertaking in my previous films. This latest work follows the emotional journey of a man from South Korea who decides to travel to the southernmost part of the world. The film explores the consequences of making such a decision—of seeking a kind of freedom that is profoundly different from the one that has been given to you.

As your body of work has evolved, your exploration of the representation of Asian diasporas in Buenos Aires has become increasingly nuanced and profound. Even in your early short films, such as *Videojuegos* (2014), Asian characters already occupy a central place. Before returning to your filmmaking, however, we would like to ask about your parents' migration and how the narratives surrounding war were transmitted within your family, shaping your own understanding of Korean history.

It is an interesting question. I think my parents' story is, to a certain extent, a fairly typical one. They both came from humble working-class families, and neither had the opportunity to pursue education beyond secondary school. Although they both aspired to continue their studies, neither was able to fulfil that ambition. My father was the eldest son in his family and was expected to provide for everyone. His father would not allow him to continue his education because he needed to work the land alongside him. In a way, his act of rebellion was to leave for the big city. He came from a small coastal town in southern Korea called Taean. My mother's story was different. She was an exceptionally diligent and intelligent young woman, yet she too was denied access to higher education,

simply because she was a woman. Her family consisted of my grandmother and her seven children. My grandfather died when my mother was fourteen years old, and my grandmother had to prioritise the education of her sons in Seoul. It was a Korea devastated by war, marked by widespread poverty and military dictatorship.

How did these stories reach you? How were they told within your family?

My parents' view of that historical period—and of the political regimes that shaped it—is quite polarised. They experienced the war firsthand as children, so their political understanding is deeply rooted in lived experience rather than in historical analysis. My father, for example, lost a brother during the Vietnam War. At the same time, the main reason he ultimately left Korea was simply that there were no employment opportunities for someone of his age and ability to work. The poverty people experienced was a direct consequence of the harsh policies that were being implemented at the time. I will never forget one trip I made with my family to the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea. My father pointed towards the mountains on the northern side and said: "Those are red mountains. You can clearly see the lack of vegetation. That is the difference between the North and the South. They have no resources because they have exhausted them all. In South Korea, by contrast, people's sacrifices made it possible to rebuild society." It is a deeply complex and contradictory narrative, because my parents themselves were never really part of that story of economic progress. They were forced to leave the country.

In fact, that is precisely what my most recent film is about, as it is based on my own family's history. After settling in Argentina, my parents got married. My sister was born in 1976, and the following year my father found work at a gas extraction plant and moved to the Middle East. He was originally supposed to return after a year, but he did not come back until the 1980s.

Thinking specifically about *Partió de mí un barco llevándome*, how did you first come across the history of the *wianbu*?

Until 2014, I knew nothing about that chapter of history. I had never even heard the euphemism "comfort women." Realising how little I knew filled me with a sense of shame. That year, I travelled to Korea to film several scenes for my first documentary. I was accompanying one of the film's protagonists, Kim Ran, a Korean artist who had lived in Argentina for many years and was travelling to Korea to attend a women's conference. I wanted to document her experience there. It was at that conference that I first attended a talk on the subject. Kim Ran presented the testimony of a survivor named Kim Bok-dong, who could easily have been my grandmother. She looked like her—we shared the same facial features. She began by describing how she had been abducted at the age of fourteen, how she was raped by more than thirty soldiers a day, and how she witnessed other women dying beside her. She spoke of the guilt she carried for having survived while so many of her friends did not. She did not speak only about the atrocities she endured during the war, but also about the stigma she faced afterwards upon returning to Korea—having to live in silence, as though she were an outcast, a source of shame for her own nation. At the end of her testimony, she said: "All I want is for the Japanese government to acknowledge these crimes. I do not need financial compensation. What I want is for children to learn this history, so that it never happens again. I hope it will one day be included in school textbooks." That is how her talk concluded. It was profoundly moving and utterly unforgettable.

That experience truly shattered me. It affected me in an extraordinarily deep way. This was in 2014, more than ten years ago. I returned from that trip preoccupied with the idea that there was not even a widely used equivalent of the word feminism in Korean. I was trying to understand the position of women within that Asian context,

which, despite my heritage, also felt strangely unfamiliar to me. I remember coming back to Argentina and asking my mother, "Did you know about this?" She replied, "Of course. We all know." And I asked her, "Then why did you never tell me?" My parents belong to a generation for whom certain things simply were not discussed—you don't talk about that, you never mention the war. And I understand why. Speaking about it meant reliving the pain. At the same time, it was deeply rewarding when the film premiered and my mother attended the screening with her friends, seeing their own community represented on screen. For me, it was important to help people of her generation understand that these wounds needed to be spoken about, however painful that might be. Sharing the past is essential if we are to avoid repeating it.

The way you work with testimonial speech in the film is particularly compelling. It is not only the protagonist who gives voice to the testimony; her body also becomes a medium through which testimony and memory are re-enacted and made present. How did you conceive the relationship between this testimonial text, the film itself, and Melanie's personal story?

The central question was how to make a film about a subject like this. After attending that conference in 2014, I returned to Argentina and made my first documentary. Yet this story continued to haunt me. At the time, it felt impossible to approach—to make a film about something so vast, so overwhelming, and so horrific. Years passed, and... in truth, I do not think we choose our films. Films choose us. There comes a moment when you no longer have any other option—or at least that is how it happened for me. I then began working with Virginia Roffo, the film's screenwriter, and together we started thinking about how this story could be told. We read extensively, but we also felt it was essential to consult specialists. We contacted María del Pilar Álvarez,

Image 2





Image 3

an Argentine sociologist whose research on the "comfort women" has been fundamental, as well as Lucía Rud, who generously shared a great deal of material and guidance with us. We were fully aware that this was already a thoroughly documented historical subject, and yet, amid that immense body of scholarship, we still felt there was a need to make this film. At the same time, I am not a historian or a sociologist. I make films—that is what I do. We discussed this very openly with Melanie, the protagonist. I told her, "We have to tell this story through you."

That conflict became the film's primary driving force—the first clue as to how we might begin thinking about it. How could we tell the story of such immense pain, of such an unspeakable atrocity, from where we ourselves stood at that moment, on the other side of the world? Later, we came across a collection of first-person testimonies by surviving "comfort women," compiled by a group of Swiss jurists in The Hague. They were extraordinarily harrowing accounts. It was there that we found the testimony of Hwang Geum-ju, which ultimately became the text used in the film. Those authentic testimonies, together with our initial question, provided the foundation for the film's first possible structure. The question was essentially this: What would happen if young women from the Korean community—women like me—were confronted with these testimonies?

The film was originally conceived as an ensemble piece, much like the opening sequence that appears in the final cut. In fact, we held exactly that audition: it was a real casting call in which we invited young women from the Korean community to participate. We were looking for women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who were interested in taking part in a documentary about this subject. From the outset, the idea was to create a space in which different conversations and reflections could emerge. As is often the case with documentary filmmaking,

the filming process inevitably rewrote the project. You begin with a series of hypotheses and ideas that seem convincing in your mind, but once they encounter reality, many of them no longer fit. I conducted a short interview with each participant to learn about her background, her family, and her relationships. I was particularly interested in how they navigated their dual cultural identity. What I was looking for was a response similar to the one I had experienced when I first listened to Kim Bok-dong's testimony: the sudden awareness of an invisible yet inescapable connection to Korea, despite living on the other side of the world. After each interview, I asked the participants to read aloud an excerpt from one of the survivors' testimonies. Once they had finished, I asked them how they felt and what they thought about what they had just read. Most of them had heard of the issue before, but only in very general terms. Those conversations helped me realise that what ultimately mattered was not only the historical past but the forms of violence that continue to exist in the present—violence that is often normalised or rendered invisible in everyday life. It is something that affects all women, in different ways and across different experiences. That initial casting process gradually transformed the structure of the film. It was also where I first met Melanie. She was the very first young woman I interviewed. Within the Korean community, very few people choose to pursue careers in the arts, so I was deeply moved to meet a young Korean Argentine woman who had decided to become an actress. That was our first point of connection. As our conversation unfolded, she revealed that she carried a very specific and deeply personal pain related to the domestic violence she had experienced. That became especially evident when she read the survivor's testimony for the first time. Her response to the text fundamentally reshaped the project. It allowed me to understand where the film needed to go and gave it the direction it had been searching for.

It is worth noting that the casting took place in December 2019, and just two months later the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. We were forced to put the entire project on hold for a full year. That pause ultimately became the moment when we had to make a crucial decision: should we continue with the idea of an ensemble film, or should we focus on a single protagonist? How could we delve much more deeply into the subject? At the beginning of the following year, my producer, Martín Rodríguez Redondo, suggested that we use that period of stillness to revisit the footage and decide who the film's central character should be. By then, I had already chosen Melanie. At the time, I probably could not even articulate why it had to be her, but there was an undeniable emotional connection. Throughout that year, we stayed in touch through phone calls and video chats. It became a year of getting to know one another, of building trust, and ultimately of becoming friends.

And regarding Melanie's journey, was the trip to Korea—and in particular to the House of Sharing museum—part of the project from the very beginning?

In an early version of the project proposal, which we submitted to the Argentine National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA) for funding, the trip to Korea was already part of the plan. Virginia and I had discovered the existence of the House of Sharing, which functions both as a museum and as a residence for some of the surviving "comfort women"—there were four women living there at the time. From the very beginning, we were certain that we did not want the survivors themselves to appear in the film or to interview them, because we did not want to contribute to their revictimisation. As we continued rewriting the script, the idea of Melanie's reunion with her brother emerged. The pandemic also gave us the time to rethink the project and shift its focus toward Melanie and her everyday life with her family. Eventually, we received the grant—unfor-

tunately, that funding programme no longer exists—and were able to begin filming. However, the budget was not sufficient to cover a trip to Korea. We filmed for two weeks within the limits of the resources we had and rewrote the ending to exclude the journey altogether. We were also working against a deadline because I had to travel to Singapore for work. Unfortunately, rain forced us to cancel the final day of shooting, which had to be postponed until my return nearly six months later. At that point I was geographically very close to Korea, but without either the crew or the protagonist. In the end, we discovered an open funding call from the Korean Film Commission and decided to apply. We were awarded the grant, and the Korean community in Argentina also helped us raise additional support. Thanks to that combination of funding, we were finally able to organise the trip to Korea with Melanie, Martín—our producer—and Victoria Pereda, the film's cinematographer.

And were those funds institutional grants, or did they come from private contributions?

Yes. The Korean funding came from the Korean Film Commission, while the rest consisted of private contributions raised through the Korean Business Association in Argentina. I remain deeply grateful for the support we received—and, to be honest, I was also genuinely surprised by it. I was fully aware that we were dealing with a highly sensitive subject. What surprised me most was that we were able to secure that level of support, especially considering that we had not received any backing from the official Korean institutions operating in Argentina.

To conclude, we would like to return to your approach to documentary filmmaking. In this film, you made the deliberate decision not to work directly with the testimonies of the survivors themselves, but instead to give voice to another woman who takes on that role and, in a sense, becomes their witness. Looking back now, with some distance from the project, how do you reflect on the experience of making *Partió de mí un barco llevándome*?

I hope we can eventually move beyond the point where that distinction matters, because, in a way, everything is fiction. At the same time, documentary filmmaking offers extraordinary possibilities. For me, making documentaries is actually far more exciting than making fiction films. Fiction tends to be much more linear. There is usually a fixed script, with very little room for improvisation. Documentary, by contrast, opens up as many paths as there are possible worlds. That is what I find most extraordinary about it. It represents cinema at its fullest potential.

When you make films, you become obsessed with finding those moments of truth. I am not referring to objective truth or to documenting historical events in an objective way. Absolute objectivity does not exist in cinema, because there is always a point of view. There is always a camera framing one part of reality while leaving another outside the image. Yet there are certain combinations of images and sounds that reach such profound emotional depths that they feel like pure truth. That is what interests me most: working with the malleability of reality, with people inhabiting their own spaces and inviting you into them. That, for me, is where the true power of documentary cinema lies.

Documentary filmmaking also entails an enormous sense of responsibility. In fiction, the world is largely shaped in a single direction by the filmmaker. In documentary, however, you have to understand the responsibility that comes with engaging with—and interpreting—the realities of other people. For me, making documentaries has always been an exercise in humility and a process of learning. Every film teaches you something, but the experience of making this film in particular was such a profound and transformative learning process that I remain deeply grateful for it. I am certain that Melanie, Victoria, Martín, and

everyone involved in *Partió de mí un barco llevándome* would say the same. These are genuinely transformative experiences. There is nothing more beautiful than being able to live through and share something like that.

Making a film always changes you. To me, that is the true power of cinema, and of documentary in particular. The journey from what you write to what you eventually film—and then to what you edit—is one of constant reading, rereading, and rewriting, not only of the material itself but also of what you believed you had said or wanted to say. You keep listening to yourself anew. In the end, the process inevitably teaches you to broaden the way you see the world. To me, that is something truly wonderful. Beautiful. ■

REFERENCES

Alternativa Teatral. (n.d.). *Melanie Chong*. Retrieved July 18, 2026, from https://www.alternativateatral.com/persona346816-melanie-chong

Álvarez, M. D. P. (2025). *Halmoni: La revolución de las abuelas coreanas*. Debate.

Kang, C. (2024, October 21). *How a Diaspora Director Talks About the "Comfort Women" Issue Through a Documentary*. *KYEOL: Research Institute on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery (RIMSS)*. https://kyeol.kr/en/boards/bd_en_look_cult/417

Lee, S. (2025). Workings of postmemory in twenty-first century Argentina: Cecilia Kang's *Partió de mí un barco llevándome* (2023) and *Hijo mayor* (2025). *Research in Film and History, 8*. https://film-history.org/index.php/issues/text/workings-postmemory-twenty-first-century-argentina

Nam, S. (2022). Court decisions in the Republic of Korea on Japan's accountability for sexual slavery of the "comfort women." *Journal of International Criminal Justice, 20*(2), 459–482. https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqac007

Página/12. (2024, November 7). *Para Adorni, no hay diferencia entre ochenta y siete mil personas*. https://www.pagina12.com.ar/781137-para-adorni-no-hay-diferencia-entre-ochenta-y-siete-mil-pers/

TRAUMA, MEMORY AND REPARATION FROM A TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE. A CONVERSATION WITH CECILIA KANG

Abstract

This conversation with filmmaker Cecilia Kang explores the intersections of trauma, memory, and reparation through her documentary *Partió de mí un barco llevándome* (2023). The Argentine-Korean director focuses on the memory of the so-called "comfort women" of the Japanese Imperial Army from a transnational and diasporic perspective. The interview examines documentary strategies for representing the intergenerational transmission of trauma and considers the potential of documentary cinema as a form of symbolic reparation. Kang reflects on how her own personal experience informs both the creative process and the construction of the film through its protagonist, Melanie. *Partió de mí un barco llevándome* establishes connections between wartime sexual violence and the forms of gender-based violence that continue to affect women today. Through Kang's voice and documentary practice, the conversation offers a reflection on cinema as a space of mediation between past and present, capable of fostering processes of memory, recognition, and reparation that transcend national boundaries.

Key words

Transnational memory; comfort women; Cecilia Kang; documentary cinema; Korean cinema.

Authors

Marcela Canizo is a Director of Photography who graduated from the National School of Cinematography of Argentina. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Arts from the University of Buenos Aires and a Master's degree in Communication and Semiotics from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo. She is a member of the CEO (Center for Oriental Studies) at PUC-SP. She currently teaches in the Intercultural Education Program at the Nichia Gakuin Institute. Her research focuses on Orientalist visual culture in the West and on representations of Asian diasporas in contemporary transnational cinema. Contact:

Lucía Rud (Buenos Aires, 1984) is a film researcher from the University of Buenos Aires/National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET). She received her Ph.D. from the University of Buenos Aires and holds an M.A. in cultural diversity from Tres de Febrero University. During the past nine years, she has been researching the transnational cultural ties between Argentina and South Korea.

TRAUMA, MEMORIA Y REPARACIÓN EN CLAVE TRANSNACIONAL. CONVERSACIÓN CON CECILIA KANG

Resumen

La conversación con la cineasta Cecilia Kang aborda los entretejidos entre trauma, memoria y reparación con el documental *Partió de mí un barco llevándome* (2023) como protagonista. La autora argentino-coreana pone el foco en la memoria de las denominadas «mujeres de confort» del Ejército Japonés y lo hace desde una perspectiva transnacional y diaspórica. La entrevista pone sobre la mesa procesos documentales para representar la transmisión intergeneracional sobre el trauma y las posibilidades del cine documental como forma de reparación simbólica. Cecilia Kang reflexiona sobre cómo su propia experiencia personal interviene en el proceso creativo y en la construcción de la pieza audiovisual a través de Melanie, la protagonista. *Partió de mí un barco llevándome* establece diálogos entre la violencia sexual ocurrida en la guerra y otras violencias que persisten contra las mujeres. La voz de Kang a través del documental propone una reflexión sobre el cine como espacio de mediación entre el pasado y el presente, capaz de activar procesos de memoria, reconocimiento y reparación más allá de los marcos nacionales.

Palabras clave

Memoria transnacional; mujeres del confort; Cecilia Kang; cine documental; cine coreano.

Autoras

Marcela Canizo es directora de fotografía egresada de la Escuela Nacional de Realización y Experimentación Cinematográfica (ENERC) de Argentina, licenciada en Artes por la Universidad de Buenos Aires y Magister en Comunicación y Semiótica por la Pontificia Universidad de São Paulo de Brasil. Actualmente, integra el Centro de Estudios Orientales (CEO) de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú y ejerce como docente en la Tecnicatura Superior en Cultura y Lengua Japonesa con orientación en Educación Intercultural del Instituto Nichia Gakuin de Buenos Aires. Su investigación aborda la cultura visual orientalista en Occidente y las representaciones de las diásporas asiáticas en el cine transnacional contemporáneo. Contacto:

Lucía Rud es doctora en Teoría e Historia de las Artes por la Universidad de Buenos Aires. Sus líneas de investigación se centran en las relaciones cinematográficas entre Corea del Sur y Argentina. Es autora de diversos artículos publicados en revistas científicas, como *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* e *Imagofagia*.

Article reference

Canizo, M., Rud, L. (2026). Trauma, Memory and Reparation from a Transnational Perspective. A Conversation with Cecilia Kang. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 26, 154-169. https://doi.org/10.63700/1414

Referencia de este artículo

Canizo, M., Rud, L. (2026). Trauma, memoria y reparación en clave transnacional. Conversación con Cecilia Kang. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 26, 154-169. https://doi.org/10.63700/1414

Edita / Published by

associació cineforum L'ATALANTE

EL CAMAROTE DE PERE JULES

Licencia / License

creative commons SOME RIGHTS RESERVED

ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com