

tiff
toronto
international
film festival
OFFICIAL SELECTION 2012

BAFICI 2012
BUENOS AIRES
AUDIENCE
AWARD

임수경

THE GIRL FROM THE SOUTH

A FILM BY JOSÉ LUIS GARCÍA

TASKOVSKI
FILMS LTD.

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film festival
OFFICIAL SELECTION 2012

INTERNATIONAL
PREMIERE

임수경

THE GIRL FROM THE SOUTH

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CAST

Lim Sukyung
Alejandro Kim

Won Dong-Yeon
Kim Jung-Eun
Lim Pan-Ho
Woo Sung-Ran
Yoon Won-Il
Park Jong-Kun
Jong-Hyun
Jang Liu
Kim Bo-Hyeop

CREW

DIRECTOR
José Luis García

PRODUCER
José Luis García

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Gabriel Kameniecki

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS
Roberto Bonomo - FOLK
Geo Orellana
Luciano Quilici

SCREENPLAY
José Luis García
Jorge Goldenberg

EDITORS
Alejandra Almirón
Alejandro Carrillo Penovi
José Luis García

COMPOSER
Axel Krygier

**SOUND DESIGNER AND
POSTPRODUCTION**
Martín Grignaschi - La Burbuja
Sonido

DIRECT SOUND
(in South Korea)
Kim Yul-Su

CAMERA
José Luis García

ADDITIONAL CAMERA
(in South Korea)
Kim Tae-Jung
Park Jae-In
Gabriela Cristina Chirife

**POST PRODUCTION
MANAGER**
Luciana Sternberg

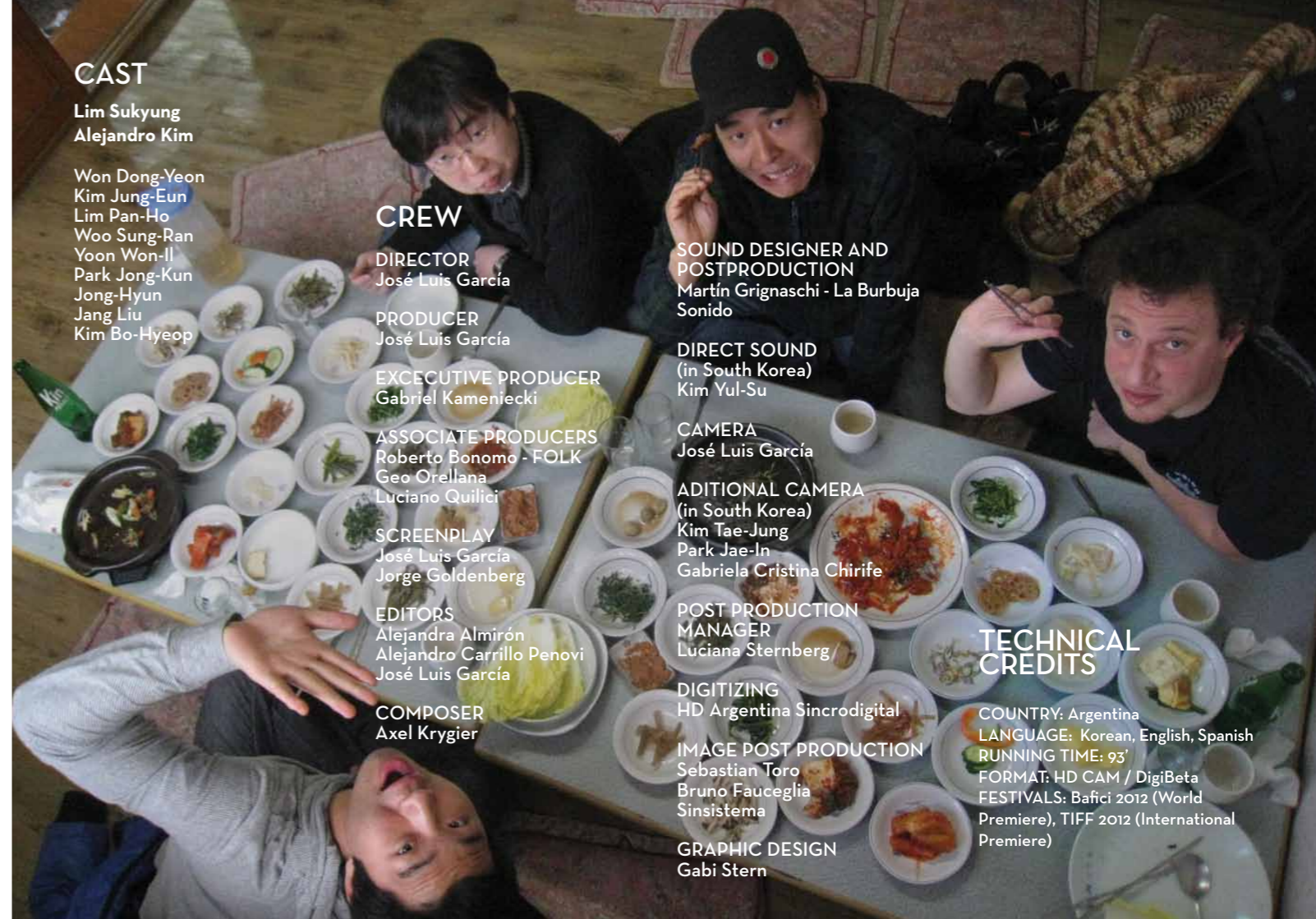
DIGITIZING
HD Argentina Sincrodigital

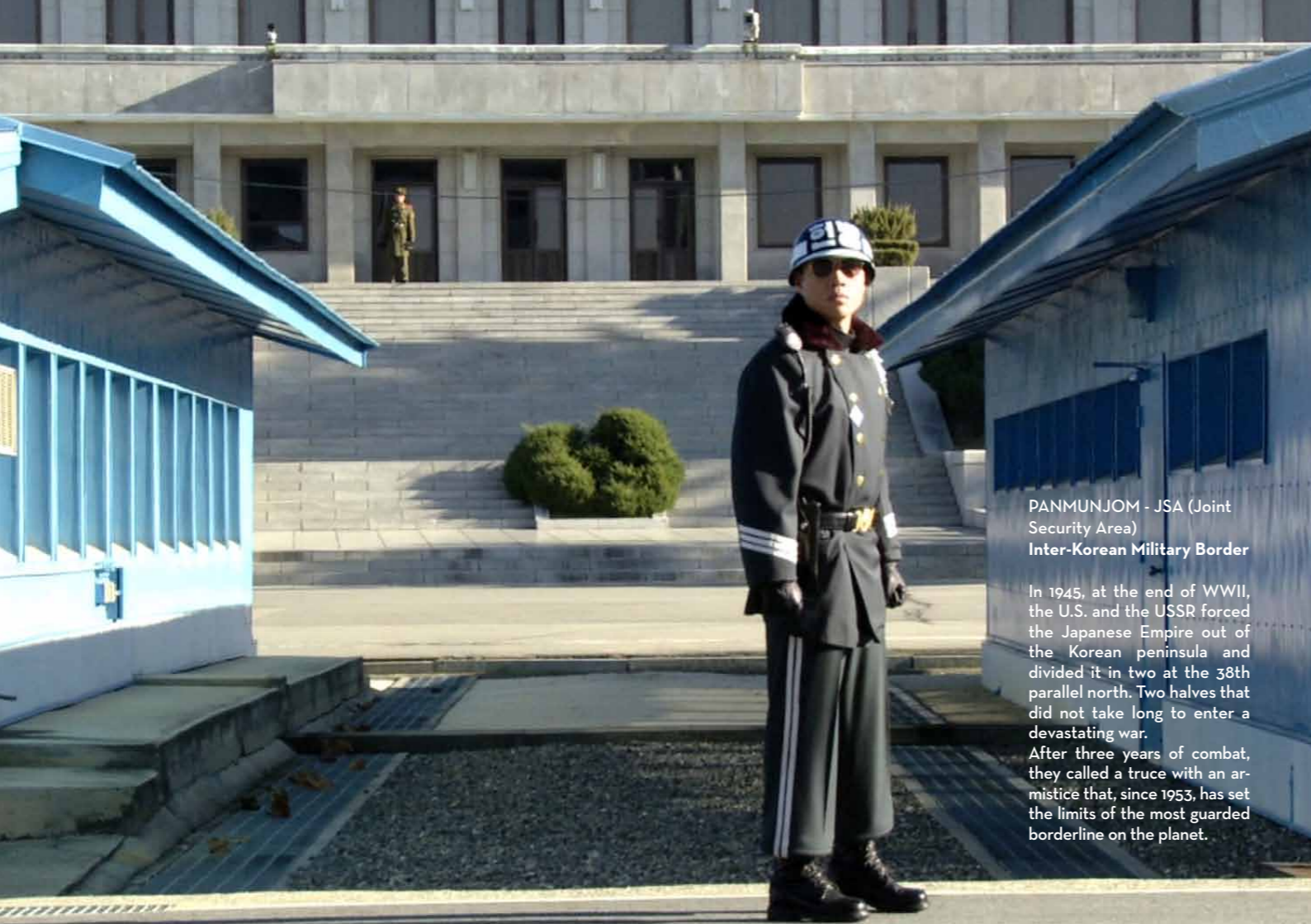
IMAGE POST PRODUCTION
Sebastian Toro
Bruno Fauceglia
Sinsistema

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Gabi Stern

TECHNICAL CREDITS

COUNTRY: Argentina
LANGUAGE: Korean, English, Spanish
RUNNING TIME: 93'
FORMAT: HD CAM / DigiBeta
FESTIVALS: Bafici 2012 (World
Premiere), TIFF 2012 (International
Premiere)





PANMUNJOM - JSA (Joint Security Area)
Inter-Korean Military Border

In 1945, at the end of WWII, the U.S. and the USSR forced the Japanese Empire out of the Korean peninsula and divided it in two at the 38th parallel north. Two halves that did not take long to enter a devastating war. After three years of combat, they called a truce with an armistice that, since 1953, has set the limits of the most guarded borderline on the planet.

SINOPSIS

THE COLLAPSE OF YOUTHFUL ILLUSIONS GUIDE THE QUEST OF A FILMMAKER, FASCINATED BY THE MEMORY OF A YOUNG KOREAN ACTIVIST, THE “FLOWER OF REUNIFICATION”.

In 1989, José Luis García participates in the World Youth and Students Festival taking place in Pyongyang, North Korea. A political event sponsored by the USSR just three weeks after the massacre at Tiananmen Square and four months before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

García records with a borrowed VHS camera the surrealistic landscape of that summer when thousands of young people from all over the world, hold a great party in the distant “Hermit Kingdom”. But the focus of his gaze changes when Lim Sukyung, a young activist, arrives clandestinely from Seoul representing the students of South Korea, demanding the peaceful reunification of her nation.

When the festival ends, she crosses the most guarded border on the planet, on foot, concentrating in this truly revolutionary gesture all of her willingness to sacrifice for an ideal.

Twenty years later, the collapse of youthful illusions guide the quest of the filmmaker, fascinated by the memory of the “Flower of Reunification”, whom he meets for the first time in Seoul.

Always beset by the onslaught of a society still at war, she ends up revealing the unexpected and profound link that bonds her to a complete stranger who has arrived from the far ends of the earth.



ABOUT...

José Luis García
(Director / Scriptwriter / Producer)
Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina,
06/25/1965

Student of TERCINE (Workshop of Studies and Cinematographic Direction) set up by professionals of the argentine cinematography industry, between 1982 and 1984, then continued his studies as a disciple of cinematographer Felix Monti until 1988. He has an extensive career as a director of photography on several feature films including highlights as “L’Isola alla deriva”

(dir. Tomaso Mottola - Italy/ 1989), “**Rapado**” (dir. Martin Rejtman - Argentina /1991), “**Just Friends**” (dir. Alejandro Agresti - Holland / 1993), “**Sotto Vocce**” (dir. Mario Levin - Argentina / 1996), “ **The Sleepwalker**” (dir. Fernando Spiner - Argentina / 1998 - selected for “ Camerimage Festival 1999”) and “**The Magic Gloves**” (dir. Martin Rejtman - Argentina / 2001) among others and as director of photography and director in music promos (CJ, **Los Condenaditos** y **La Vida** -MTV Award 2000 and Carlos Gardel Prize 2000 -, all from Los Fabulosos Cadillacs).

“When I was a teenager, at the end of the 70’s in Argentina during the military dictatorship, I was taught that revolutionary and subversive were bad words. They taught me this at school and bombarded me with it on TV. They even taught this to me at home, out of fear. These two words were always maliciously linked to a third: Marxist.

The concept of International Marxism was something dreadful to be protected against.

In the mid-80’s, democracy returned to Argentina and I began to study cinema and make short films in Super 8. I traveled with one of them to an amateur film festival in Cipolletti, a small city in Patagonia in the south of Argentina. There I met a girl who, like me, had just finished high school, and was studying journalism. We fell in love. In the months that followed, I traveled a number of times to see her until one of my trips ended up being very short: ‘Hello... Goodbye.’ I believe it was the first time I felt that the world had ended.

FILMOGRAPHY

Short Films:
PROHIBIDO FIJAR CARTELES (1984)
VATROPVITE (1987)
HOUSE IN MOTION (1992)

Feature Films:
CÁNDIDO LÓPEZ, THE BATTLE FIELDS (Argentina/Paraguay 2005)
BAFICI 2005: Audience Award
Clarín Prizes 2006: Best Documentary
Cóndor Prizes 2006: Best Documentary

A couple of weeks later, I didn’t hesitate to make a deal with my older brother - who was immersed in local political activities - to take his place on a journey to the far side of the planet, which was the closest place I wanted to travel to.

When we arrived to North Korea, the fear of Marxist revolutionaries vanished quickly. There was nothing to fear about the thousands of young people who had arrived there from all over the world. They weren’t “diabolical,” and I also sympathized with their slogans, no matter how utopian they were. The majority of them not only openly criticized U.S. imperialism, but also they spoke in low voices



or through explicit silences to criticize the Soviet imperialism that financed the festival and the North Korean totalitarianism which sheltered them. Or the Chinese government that had just murdered hundreds of students who protested in Tiananmen Square against the bureaucracy in power to the shouts of The Internationale. Almost everyone had a repressed intention of subverting some order that they considered unjust.

It was just four months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and a couple of years later the dissolution of the USSR ended up making it clear that the sense of something revolutionary had to be searched for beyond the stagnant and extinct structures of the actual socialism that, sadly, had also dragged off in its ruins the best utopias.

“ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR, ALL THAT IS HOLY IS PROFANED, AND MAN AT LAST COMPELLED TO FACE WITH SOBER SENSES, HIS REAL CONDITIONS OF LIFE AND HIS RELATIONS WITH HIS KIND.”
(K. Marx y F. Engels - Communist Manifest)

There was one person, the girl from the south, who transformed forever, with a truly subversive and revolutionary gesture, my memory of that summer of '89.

From an age at which political passions can become powerfully mixed with the love that one believes will last forever. To a time, as the noted English historian Eric Hobsbawm reflects, in which not only do we not know where we are heading, but we don’t even know where we should be heading.

INTERVIEW WITH JOSE LUIS GARCIA

- What was it that most struck you about Lim Sukyung that led you to thinking about documenting her journey twenty years later?

- I think that all of us who saw her in 1989 in Pyongyang, men and women, were struck by the same things: a woman, so young, so beautiful, so brave who was determined to cross all political, military, and cultural barriers that were placed before her. A kind of Joan of Arc, determined to sacrifice her life in the name of a whole generation, for the legitimate desire for the pacific reunification of all her people, the reunification of Korea. At that moment, I felt that she, in and of herself, was the incarnation of all the utopias that one could imagine. Especially in the middle of a meeting in which thousands of us young people came from all over the world and did not do much more than revolutionary tourism.

When I returned from the trip I was conscious that I had uniquely important material that I had recorded with a VHS camera without planning beforehand.



But now I know that I was lacking maturity as a person to be able to articulate it, in the middle of the debacle of that world that had “melted into air” dizzily.

There is a moment, after you enter your forties, when you begin to see “the other side of the river” and stop believing in utopias. Even though you want to keep believing... And that was more or less the moment when I decided to go back to looking for her. A search that was as senseless as it was inevitable you could say.

- There is a notion behind the film that is about enlarging the ideas of dedication and sacrifice, without making them epic but rather extremely human. Were you trying to do something like that?

- I met Lim Sukyung when she was an ordinary girl, the girl from the south, with whom I could have fallen in love – or perhaps I did fall in love with... – at the age of twenty-four. She could have been like one of my high school classmates. A bright person who laughed and made jokes. Capable in her youth of undertaking the adventure of going around the world to reach a forbidden place. And at the same time she had all the mystery that someone from the East could provoke in someone from the West.

It was after her spectacular gesture of crossing the military border between the two Koreas on foot, before anyone else ever had, that she ended up becoming an epic character. But it wasn't anything she did for her own personal gain in any way whatsoever. Quite the opposite. For that rebellious act she had to stoically suffer the condemnation of an eminently conservative society for the rest of her life. When I went back to Seoul to see her, twenty years later, I met a character who was terribly human, especially after the death of her son in an accident and the need to survive in a society still at war, balancing on a thin grey line that separates the black and white that prevail all around her.

Perhaps the establishments of one side or the other would like to see her enclosed in a bronze statue, immobile. But she fights each and every day to continue be a human of flesh and bone.

- The film speaks of the Korean conflict but it is much more universal than this conflict in terms of politics..

- The Korean peninsula, surrounded by great powers that have subjugated it and divided it for their own interests, has been branded by the Cold War, and has transformed itself, without a doubt, into the stage for the most dramatic contrast of regimens that exist in the world today.

But the Korean conflict is much more complex than that and I don't have the understanding necessary to analyze it, nor is it my place. Nonetheless, I believe its character, being so extreme, allows us to see sharply more universal questions in relationship to the ideas of “good” and “evil” that often aim to impose themselves on politics. Personally, I think that the extremes tend to cover agreements between political bureaucracies that seem to be in conflict but in reality need each other to perpetuate the status quo that keeps them in power.

- There is a place that returns repeatedly in the film, from different angles, different times and that is the line at Panmujom, the military border between the two Koreas. How did you approach this idea as a structuring device for the film?

- The border between the two Koreas is like the eye of a hurricane in which everything is incredibly calm while the world seems to revolve around it. Like the set of a Western in which a calm tension reigns before the sudden outburst of a ferocious gunfight. It is a completely theatrical space in which different meanings are represented.

The first time it appears in the film, when I visited it from the northern





side in 1989, there is a political gaze upon this space in which two ideologies have a conflict that belongs to a still bipolar world. Visiting it again, from the south many years later, the border of Panmunjom seems to be transformed into a tourist site, a theme park, emptied of meaning. Guided by a U.S. soldier, guardian of the dominant ideology, concerned about warning us of the need for South Korean soldiers to use dark lenses to avoid the intimidating gazes of the North Korean soldiers...

At the end, as an epilogue, I recover the idea of the border from a more psychological or spiritual point of view. Because even if this border disappears tomorrow morning, as a physical landmark, it will always exist as a threshold to the possibilities that each individual holds for passing over to the other, the unknown, the forbidden. This ability is what I definitely admire and I was interested in exploring in the character of Lim Sukyung, the girl from the south, who in some way seems, despite having crossed that line, to continue living in that limbo between the two Koreas.



- Unlike other materials that we see of North Korea, that seem to be extremely controlled by the authorities, here you present a fresh look, that doesn't seem in anyway censored or limited ... How were you able to film life in the streets of Pyongyang like this?

- It was the first time that North Korea would open its doors to the outside world. When I traveled there I only had a VHS camera that a friend had lent me in order to make a touristic travel log. I was very naïve in terms of politics, but I had already worked as a cinematographer, so my gaze through the camera wasn't so naïve. I was fascinated by everything that was going on around me. I think I didn't sleep during the ten days I was there. The advantage of being 24 years old!!

Paradoxically, despite what we might suppose, I felt almost complete freedom to move around with the camera. We were a flood of 20,000 young people from all over the world that arrived all at once and perhaps not even the organizers calculated the impact. In the same way that they didn't calculate the tremendous impact that a South

Korean girl would make in the society of North Korea. The material in the north has a freshness that perhaps was lost more and more as the crisis grew and more strict controls were put on journalism and even on personal cameras. Today it would be impossible for a political act condemning the massacre at Tiananmen to take place in downtown Pyongyang, as well as for someone to film it with a video camera.

-The first part of the film, in the north, takes place like a travel log which is suddenly interrupted by this extraordinary character, Lim Sukyung, who becomes difficult for you to connect with when you try to find her twenty years later. In what way did this difficulty affect the structure of the film in the second part, in South Korea? How did you organize the shoot there, which seems more complex and logistically more difficult?

-The film in the south, many years later, continues as a travel log narrated by me. But the shoot was planned in a completely different way. This time I was going to find what was missing to finish the story. This was only made possible by the efforts of my two partners: Gabriel Kameniecki, the producer, and Alejandro Kim, the translator. Gabriel, as well as being a great friend, was an indispensable partner when it came time to make important decisions, whether production or editorial. Alejandro was much more than a translator; he was a bridge between two cultures that were at the far ends of the Earth from each other. Two days after arriving, he wanted to go back. He was scared. Sukyung was like a caged lioness. But for some reason, which is revealed later in the film, she scared us but didn't devour us. She had accepted that we would travel to meet her.

But later she ended up adopting Alejandro as a younger brother. This made me very happy because this kind of Platonic love that I had for her became something very terrestrial and human between two beings

with a particular similarity. Lim Sukyung belongs to Korea, but to neither Korea at the same time. This is difficult for the South Koreans to perceive, but Alejandro could understand it because something similar happens to him between Korea and Argentina. He became a decisive figure for being able to reach her in emotional terms. For her to finally trust me.

The shoot in the south was very tense, very rough. We used various kinds of cameras, smaller and smaller ones each time, so that Sukyung would feel more comfortable and not to be noticed in public places. A few days into it, after dropping a camera assistant and a sound person with whom we had started the shoot, and taking on these roles ourselves, everything began to happen in a much more intimate way that favored getting closer to her.



In the six weeks that we were in South Korea, I explored the actual spaces where she spent her time: the university, the radio station, and a thousand and one bars.

She is such an emotionally fluctuating character that she would reel off her story from different points; some so surprisingly dramatic that I decided to put them in the film in the same chronological order in which they rolled out during the shoot.

- Beyond the assistance of the translator, who becomes an important character in the story, how did you manage in a place that is so inaccessible language-wise for a Westerner?

- I think if you really go fully into a subject and try to get to know a character as much as possible to the point of, as she says in the film, “you knew so much about me that if I didn’t help you I would go to hell...”, a kind of intuition appears that suddenly, although you don’t understand the language they are speaking and at times you are missing the translation, allows you to “push” the camera closer to where the action is developing. A gesture that can seem risky but has a prior reason that triggers it.

- How did you finance a film like this, that is in some ways as “without a country” as some of its characters?

- The film had important support from the Argentina Film Institute (INCAA), that didn’t judge it based on the fact that almost all of the film would take place in Korea but rather based on the universality of the subject matter. Also, we received a very important grant from the Jan Vrijman Fund of Holland and support that was more than symbolic from some producer friends in Argentina.

My family bank account also came dangerously close to being in the red until I was able to sell the Cable TV rights for Latin America to Turner, when the film was almost completely finished,

and with this we were able to finish covering our budget. At one point I tried to produce the documentary with a very important Argentine producer who I respect a lot, Lita Stantic. But after she saw the material from ’89, and intuited the kind of character that we would be dealing with and learning of the kinds of funds we had obtained, she advised us to continue alone, keeping a low profile, to not add unnecessary costs. In Korea I didn’t try to search for any kind of funding or economic help in order not to put any limits or conditions on the work we were doing around a character that is very controversial there. Paradoxically, I think this ended up awakening more suspicions. It ended up seeming like an alibi in the middle of a nation that continues at war. They contacted us from a government organization in Seoul to ask if we were making North Korean propaganda, to which Gabriel, the executive producer, responded by asking them, with irony: how would that even be possible ? I think that Lim Sukyung also suspected almost to the very end that we were spies.

- After the experience of making the film, how do you see the character of Lim Sukyung today? What do you think the film says about political ideals with the passing of time?

- I think she continues to have the same ideals, though perhaps she is no longer a person that is so naively idealistic like we all were at the age of 21, when you believe you can touch the sky with your hands from one day to the next and not think, still not know, how to build a ladder to at least be able to reach it. I think she is a person that learned how to enrich everything with all of the experiences that she has lived and suffered. Through them she has been able attain a deep feeling of what is freedom. Respect and compassion for human beings are values that she holds above any conflict, before mutual contempt and mistrust would open a

breach that would not be mended. And that is what I am interested in upholding in the film as well.

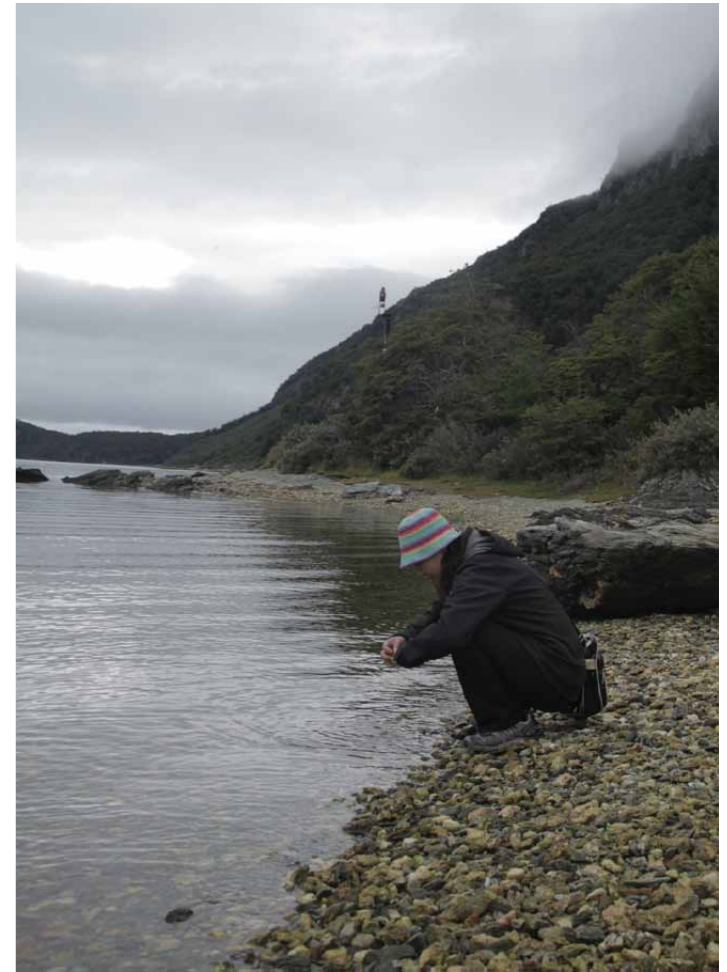
She is still a political animal. A very temperamental person who one day could just get fed up with try to resolve the dilemma that I mentioned of belonging to Korea but not to either Korea and go off to live in the mountains. Or perhaps, having just started a career as a legislator, become the president of a unified Korea...

- And today how do you see this 24 year old Young man who traveled to Pyongyang?

- Tall, skinny, with a ridiculous moustache. Excitable. Exploring a new world but with a camera in front of his eyes all the time. It was truly a journey of initiation for mi in many aspects. But I believe I ended up maturing much later, when I took off the camera and began to think a bit more. When I realized that the journey had still not ended. And that now I had a family and a son to whom I would want to tell the whole story.

I feel a deep gratefulness towards Lim Sukyung for the possibility that she gave me of being able to finish the journey in the form of a film.

In April 2012, Lim Sukyung was elected as the Member of 19th National Assembly as the Democratic United Party’s 21th proportional representative



PRESS QUOTES

"The girl from the south" is a moving real life story of a born idealist and her change and evolution over time.

Rodrigo Chavero
elespectadoravezado.com.ar



Lim Sukyung is strange and hates García, which doesn't make it easy for him to make the film. But in some way, Lim Sukyung and García are a pair of searchers for utopia who meet in a personal and intimate space of transformation.

Valentina Gonzalez
edicioncuyo.com



The girl from the south, Lim Su-kyung, also radiates a kind of star appeal, an attractive quality that the very director of the film shares, but it is a star quality that is linked to suffering and sacrifice like a personal lost that runs five levels deep.

It is the performative act of the documentary filmmaker who explores in that enigma-profundity, by giving it weight, by creating a space for the crushed idol in order to bring it back to life.

Gonzalo de Miceu
losdependientes.com.ar



"The girl from the south" is an intimate story of love and pain, an autobiographic film, a political document, a sociological gaze and an essay about the aim of utopias (ideologies) and the passing of time.

Diego Batlle
otroscines.com

In a very unconventional way, the film uses intrigue, conflict and emotions. Keeping us wanting to know what is going to happen, when the truth is that this is what matters least.

Lucuma
filmaffinity.com



A favorite among local critics and winner of (Bafici's) audience award, the film features surprising archive footage taken in late 1980s North Korea.

Agustín Mango
The Hollywood Reporter



The conflicts, differences and lack of understanding between the two Koreas would seem to be expressed by the tense relationship that is established between the director and his main character who avoids him and holds doubts about the aims of the documentary.

Julia Laurent
puestaenescena.com.ar

임수경

THE GIRL FROM THE SOUTH

Electronic Press Kit, Trailer and High Resolution Stills available at:
www.thegirlfromthesouth.com.ar
www.taskovskifilms.com

