

STUDY GUIDE



TEMPEST (TEMPESTAD)

a Film by TATIANA HUEZO

MEXICO / 2016 / 105 MIN
Spanish with English subtitles



www.pragda.com

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Corruption: Corruption in Mexico is wide-scale and extends through the entire country's governmental institutions. Moreover, corruption within Mexico's law enforcement sector has received more attention as horror stories have found their way into the media worldwide. As Paul Imison, for *Vice*, states:

“The issue of police working directly with local drug cartels is not new in Mexico, but the pressure to do more about it rose after municipal agents in the city of Iguala, Guerrero, attacked and then abducted 43 students in September 2014. The wave of national and international outrage that followed prompted President Enrique Peña Nieto to promise major reform.”¹

The public still reports high levels of distrust towards the State and its police forces² due to the human rights abuses and corruption that seemingly continues without an effective end in sight. Although the government keeps pushing out reform to better this dire situation, little progress has been made.

Race and class: The start of colonization in Mexico (and elsewhere in Latin America) also brought along with it the start of a racial hierarchy, which in turn created deep social class divisions. The whiter and more European one appears, the more likely he or she is to be positioned in a higher socio-economic class. Those who have more African or Indigenous physical features are systematically kept at the bottom of society.

¹ Imison, Paul. "Mexico's Efforts to Tackle Police Corruption Keep Failing." *Vice News*, March 21, 2016.

² *Ibid.*

INTRODUCING THE FILM

A film **synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarise the film's narrative, genre, style and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for **TEMPEST**:

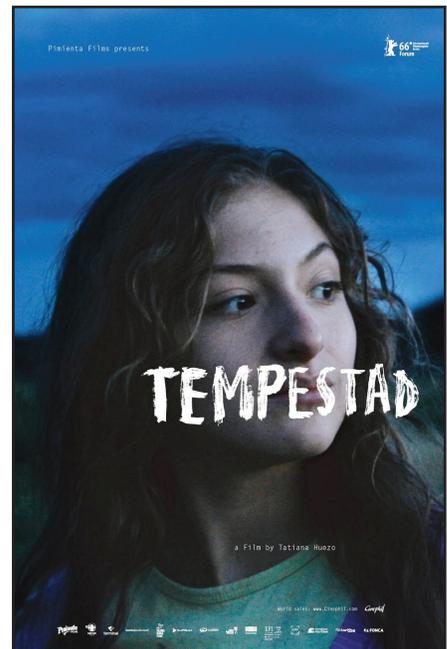
MEXICO'S OFFICIAL ENTRY TO THE ACADEMY AWARDS®

A poignant doc by celebrated filmmaker Tatiana Huezo, *Tempest* narrates the parallel journey of two women. Mirror-like, it reflects the impact of the violence and impunity that afflict Mexico. Through their voices, we are drawn into the heart of their feelings, steeped in loss and pain, but also love, dignity, and resistance.

On a normal day on her way to work, Miriam is arrested on suspicion of human trafficking. While the government reports that a criminal gang has been rounded up, in reality a group of innocent Mexicans has fallen victim to the vagaries of a corrupt system. After her detention, she is handed over to a private prison controlled by the Organized Crime, where she is forced to pay a monthly fee to remain alive.

Adela works as a clown in a traveling circus. Ten years ago, her life was irreversibly transformed; every night during the show, she evokes her missing daughter, Monica.

Tempest has screened at more than 80 film festivals worldwide, collecting awards in Berlin, Lima, Havana, Madrid, Cork, and many others.



- From the text, identify the key plot and main characters, as well as the historical background to the film.
- How do the trailer, poster, and image stills encourage you to watch the film in the cinema?
- Can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about just from the marketing (i.e. trailer, poster, and image stills)?

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- Keeping in mind dialogue, clothing, and any behaviors, how are the characters introduced to us at the start of their story lines? What are the differences in how they are introduced?
- In the first scene (00:45-2:09), the audience is forced to listen, without seeing anything but a black screen. How is this connected to both Miriam and Adela's situations?
- How would you describe the narrator's (Miriam) tone? How did it make you feel? Did your feelings change when her story progressed?
- Alissa Simon, for *Variety*, writes that, "The oral (and aural, thanks to Lena Esquenazi's tense sound design) takes primacy over the visual in Carbajal's story."³ Do you agree?
- Why do you believe the director chose to never reveal the face of her narrator?
- What was the point of showing the people using the bus to travel through Mexico? Why do we go through the motions of watching them get questioned? Why do we watch their journey to their destinations?
- Why do you believe the director chose to film clips of different women and men throughout the narration of the woman who was accused (Miriam)? What do you think these people represent?
- Do you feel you needed a preamble to Adela's story? Do you think the cuts between Miriam and Adela's stories were confusing?
- Think about the rhythmic movements of the random people shown during Miriam's narration. What do you think the significance of these rhythmic motions is in relation to the way corruption is viewed in Mexico?
- Notice the clothing and scenery that are shown in this film. What conclusions can you draw? Why do you think it is important that the director focus on this?
- How does fear play a role in the lives we saw? Think about dialogue, tone, facial expressions, and body language.
- At the end of this film, what were your reactions to the stories that were told? Do you think your emotions were manipulated through cinematic techniques like non-diegetic sound (music played at minutes 27:34-29:53) or long takes of different people's despairing expressions (for example, 1:18:41-1:19:30)?
- In the last scene (1:39:12-1:40:46), we see Miriam for the first time, even if it is just the outline of her body floating in the water. What do you believe the significance of this is? Think about the dialogue within this scene (what she realizes and the impact of this realization); "There was a point when I realized what I was doing to my son. I realized that I couldn't let the damage spread to him."

³ Simon, Alissa. "Film Review: 'Tempestad'." *Variety*, March 28, 2016

LANGUAGE

- Does the language difference present a barrier to your viewing experience? What about the subtitles?
- If you have knowledge of the Spanish language, do you think the characters spoke clearly and slowly enough to where you could understand parts of the dialogue without the help of the subtitles?
- Do you notice a difference in Miriam and Adela's way of expressing themselves? What is that difference?



NARRATIVE

- Describe the contrasts you see in this film. Think about the contrasts in the two storylines, the contrasts within each storyline, and also the contrasts of the beautiful shots to the disturbing stories. What is the connection between the contrasts represented in this film and the narrative overall?
- What are the differences and similarities between the two stories? Think about the characters' life situations and the perspectives from which they tell their stories, what time means to each of them, and the significance of family to each of them.
- Why do you think the audience was given an in-depth look into Adela's family and life situation first, before receiving information of her missing daughter?
- How did you find the ending minutes of the film? Did the film give a clear resolution to the narrative, or was the narrative suspended?
- What do you believe the significance of the last line is? What tone does it leave the audience with?
- What do you think is the point of the narrative? What is the overall message being relayed?



THEMES

- How does the first scene highlight the tensions that are ongoing in Mexico?
- In English *Tempestad* translates into Storm, what do you think the significance of the title is? How is it represented (literally and metaphorically) throughout the film?
- Innocence is an important theme in both the stories that are told in this film. Explain the theme of innocence.
- After watching this film, what were your reactions to the injustices? What did you think about how each of the two women (Miriam and Adela) handled their injustices?
- Do you think the director is critiquing Mexican governmental institutions in this film, or simply portraying an unfortunate situation without giving away any political thesis? Use examples from the film to explain your answer.
- How does this film depict the complex relationship between civilians and the government?
- This film delves into the topic of human rights on various levels. The right to a fair trial, the right to freedom from extortion, etc. How did this film open your eyes to the violation of human rights that goes on in Mexico?

