

# STUDY GUIDE



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## GUIE'DANI'S NAVEL (Xquipi' Guie'Dani)

A film by XAVI SALA  
MEXICO / 2019 / 119 MIN  
Zapotec and Spanish with English subtitles

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## BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a foreign film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country that film comes from.

Research Mexico's racial classification system that dates back to the early 16th century; this designated the racial makeup and social status of the people the Spanish conquistadores ruled over, for the purpose of the control of persons in the "new-world" <sup>1</sup>. The basis of this system continues to exist today, seen in the marginalization of indigenous peoples in Mexico and across the region who continue to lack autonomy and face violence and human rights violations at the hands of those within the country's hegemonic social hierarchy. Also, investigate inequality in Mexico: despite rapid economic growth in the past few decades, Mexico remains a deeply unequal society, with huge disparity between the living conditions of the well-off and the working-class population. Find out how this affects social cohesion in Mexico.

### INTRODUCING THE FILM

A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize 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's marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this synopsis for *Guie'Dani's Navel*:

Guie'Dani, Zapotec teenager, and her mother, Lidia, move from their native Oaxaca to Mexico City to work as live-in housekeepers for an upper-middle-class family. Guie'Dani does not fit in and maintains her defiance and silence against the new family, who mock the Zapotec language and habits and inflict psychological and physical subjugation on the indigenous pair. However, Guie'Dani rejects the life of servitude and seeks out her own identity, through her friendship with another rebellious teen maid living on her street.

- From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main element from the film's plot and the socio-political background to the film.
- Do you think that the film will be politically charged? If so, why?
- How do the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- Can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about just from the marketing materials (i.e. trailer, poster, and still images)? In what ways does the marketing material differ from larger commercial productions?



<sup>1</sup> Native Heritage Project, 15/06/2013. <https://nativeheritageproject.com/2013/06/15/las-castas-spanish-racial-classifications/>

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## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

### CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ The director has chosen to make this film in the style of social realism <sup>2</sup>. Analyze the techniques used by the director that add to the film's realism. Consider aspects like music, lighting, location, casting, and costume.
- ❑ Thinking about the way lighting is used, what differences do you notice between the lighting in Guie'Dani's home village and in the city?
- ❑ When casting for the film, director Xavi Sala spent time in Oaxaca, meeting with women before casting Sótera Cruz as Guie'Dani. List the pros and cons of this casting method.
- ❑ Consider camera techniques and how they add to the realism of the film. Can you find any scenes that exemplify the documentary-style feel of the film?
- ❑ Why do filmmakers choose this technique, and how does it impact you as the viewer?
- ❑ Consider the sound in the film. In terms of the music, note that it is all diegetic and that there is no non-diegetic sound in the film <sup>3</sup>. Why do you think the director has taken this approach?
- ❑ When is music used in the film? What type of songs does the director choose to include and how do they affect the mood of the scenes in which they appear?
- ❑ Consider the use of the zombie film that Guie'Dani and Claudia watch when they are home alone. What do you think the zombies represent?
- ❑ There are multiple shots of Guie'Dani and Lidia, looking at themselves in the mirror. What do you think the director is trying to convey here?



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<sup>2</sup> Social realism in cinema aims to draw attention to socio-political conditions of the working class as a means to critique the power structures behind these conditions.

<sup>3</sup> Diegetic sound is any sound that emanates from the story (or narrative) world of a film. Non-diegetic sound is sound whose origin is from outside the story world.

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## NARRATIVE

- ❑ Consider the differences in Guie'Dani and Lidia's behavior and their relationship. What do both women represent? Do you think Lidia's anger towards her daughter is justified?
- ❑ Is Guie'Dani a likeable character? Think about her character development: does your perception of her change over the course of the film? If so, what makes it change?
- ❑ What is the trigger for the change in Guie'Dani's behavior? When does her spirit start to become more rebellious?
- ❑ What exactly is Guie'Dani rebelling against? Why is her defiance so shocking to Valentina and the rest of the family?
- ❑ What do you make of Lidia staying to help Valentina with her new baby? Do you think Guie'Dani's defiance will have forged some sort of mutual respect between her and the family, or do you think they will continue to treat her with hostility?



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## THEMES

- Think about Guie'Dani and Lidia's identity. How important do you think language is in relation to identity? Can you think of some examples you know?
- Why does the Mexican family try to take Guie'Dani's native language away from her?
- How does the director show the gradual assimilation into middle-class culture that Guie'Dani and Lidia experience? Think about the cultural differences the pair encounter in the new house.
- Consider the contrast between Guie'Dani's house in Zapotec and the house in Mexico City. What do you notice about the outside of the house when Guie'Dani and Lidia arrive? What does this tell you about their feelings towards outsiders? What do you make of Lidia and Guie'Dani's living conditions in the new house? Note the differences between their living area and the rest of the house.
- Consider Guie'Dani's position in the household, and in society as well. The term 'subaltern' can be used to describe Guie'Dani and her mother, as they are part of a social group which is excluded and displaced from the socio-economic institutions of society in order to deny their voices. Can you find any scenes or moments in the film that exemplify Guie'Dani's experience as part of the Subaltern <sup>4</sup>?
- Why do you think the director chose to use female protagonists in the film? Consider what would be different if the protagonists had been male.
- How are women portrayed in this film? And men? Analyze all the characters in the film and the roles they play.
- Think about the circumstances of many Mexican women, like Lidia and Guie'Dani, that may obligate them to accept work in unfamiliar and challenging environments. What are some of the conditions in Mexican society that force women into this type of work?
- An important part of Zapotec culture for women is that they are traditionally expected to take on childbearing and rearing duties. Think about the film's ending and consider how this cultural expectation ties into the responsibility Lidia feels to stay with the family.



<sup>4</sup> 'Subaltern' is a term coined by Antonio Gramsci, used in postcolonial studies to describe the colonial populations who are socially, politically, and geographically outside the hierarchy of power of a colony or mass population.