

STUDY GUIDE



TREMORS (TEMBLORES)

A film by JAYRO BUSTAMANTE
FRANCE, GUATEMALA / 2019 / 107 MIN
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 where that film comes from. Take some time to explore the status of LGBTQ+ rights in Guatemala.

In March 2021, Human Rights Watch published the report “It’s What Happens When You Look Like This: Violence and Discrimination Against LGBT People in Guatemala” after at least five gay and transgender people were reportedly killed in Guatemala during the first four weeks of the year.¹

Guatemala also has a large and growing Evangelical (Protestant) population, and some influential Evangelical churches have been at the center of efforts to promote and enact anti-LGBT public policies.² The Human Rights Watch report states that “In 2018, Evangelical leaders drafted and introduced the Life and Family Protection bill in Congress as a popular initiative. The bill defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman. The bill describes “sexual diversity” as “incompatible with the biological and genetic aspects of human beings.” It establishes that “freedom of conscience and expression” protects people from being “obliged to accept non-heterosexual conduct or practices as normal,” a provision that could be used to justify discriminatory denial of services. The Evangelical leader behind the Life and Family Protection Bill told media that the bill also aimed at “preventing Guatemala from engaging on any [international] convention on gender diversity.” Incoming President Giammattei stated during the election campaign that he supported the bill. At time of the writing of the report, the bill still needed further legislative approvals.

Social stigma starts early and often at home. In some cases, family rejection takes the form of forcing or pushing LGBT family members to undergo conversion therapy, offered by both mental health professionals and religious leaders, sometimes in the form of exorcism of purported demons.³

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 marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for *Tremors*:

In this deeply personal follow-up to his landmark debut *Ixcánul*, Jayro Bustamante shifts his focus from rural Guatemala to the denizens of Guatemala City, but once again sets his sights on an individual caught between two seemingly irreconcilable worlds.

When handsome and charismatic Pablo arrives at his affluent family’s house everyone is eagerly awaiting the return of their beloved son, devoted father, and caring husband. A seemingly exemplary pillar of Guatemala City’s Evangelical Christian community, Pablo’s announcement that he intends to leave his wife for another man sends shock waves through the family.

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¹ Human Rights Watch, 2021. “It’s What Happens When You Look Like This: Violence and Discrimination Against LGBT People in Guatemala” <https://tinyurl.com/4hnhhze5>

² Cariboni, Diana. “Evangelicals in Guatemala on Verge of ‘Legalizing Homophobia.’” openDemocracy. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/evangelicals-guatemala-legalising-homophobia>.

³ Flores, Pia. “Being Gay: They Wanted to ‘Cure’ Me Through Exorcism and Placement in a Children’s Home” (“Ser gay: Quisieron ‘curarme’ con un exorcismo y con el Hogar Seguro”), Nómada, February 7, 2018, <https://nomada.gt/identidades/ser-gay-quisieron-curarme-con-un-exorcismo-y-con-el-hogar-seguro>.

INTRODUCING THE FILM *(continued)*

As Pablo tries to acclimate to his new life in the city's gay subculture with the liberated Francisco, his ultra-religious family does everything in its power to get their prodigal son back on track, no matter the cost.

As he is further blacklisted from social circles, fired from his job for breaching his firm's "flawless moral code," and increasingly desperate to see his two children, Pablo quietly submits to a brutal conversion-therapy regimen, leading to a moral and emotional tipping point against the reality of life within a deeply religious culture. In a deeply repressive society, God loves the sinner, but not the sin itself.

- ❑ From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main elements from the film's plot and the socio-political background to the film.
- ❑ 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)?
- ❑ What does the promotional materials' color palette tell you?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ☐ Why do you think the filmmaker decided to start the film with rain and a shot of the back of the main character's head? What effect do these shots have on the audience?
- ☐ The film has a very particular color scheme. What do you think these colors represent? What effect do they have on the audience?
- ☐ Do you think the feel of the film changes during different sequences? Think about the scenes taking place at Pablo's new apartment, the church, the family house, and the conversion therapy site.
- ☐ Try to think about two or three shots of the film that really spoke to you -- what about them is significant? Why do they stick out in your mind?
- ☐ Think about close-up shots throughout the film. How often do they appear, what is the main subject of them (think hands, face)? What purpose do these shots have?
- ☐ Is the editing slow or fast paced? Why do you think the director chose this pace for the film?



NARRATIVE

- ❑ Think about the film's opening scene: Why do you think the film opens like that? How does this gain importance and meaning as the film progresses?
- ❑ What is the meaning of earthquakes throughout the film? Think about when they appear and their reported intensity. What would have happened if the director had placed the earthquake scenes at different times?
- ❑ We never find out when or how the affair between Pablo and Francisco started or how they got caught. Based on what occurs in the movie, why do you think Bustamante decided to avoid this information?
- ❑ Many films about homosexuality involve the "coming out" plot. How is Pablo's coming out different than most of the stories you've seen before?
- ❑ Pablo and Francisco have a different attitude toward their sexual orientation. What are those differences? How are they depicted on the screen?
- ❑ Think about the scenes where Francisco appears at his work and the time spent at the bars vs. the spaces Pablo must navigate when he is with his family. How do the spaces the two men inhabit differ?
- ❑ Pablo's wife and family are greatly influenced by religious doctrines, even the young kids. Think about scenes where this is manifested by Lucía and Juampi's reaction to the situation.
- ❑ Pablo is forced to undergo radical gay conversion therapy. There is so much emotional brutality that occurs in the movie. How did these scenes make you feel? Where you able to empathize with Pablo's situation?
- ❑ An older man at the church says the following, "God loves sinners. God loves you. What he doesn't love is sin." What do you think of this statement?
- ❑ The filmmaker dedicates as much focus and time in the story to Pablo, as to the people affected by his actions. What do you think about this narrative decision? How would the film be different if it were told completely from Pablo's point of view?
- ❑ What do you think about the final scene of the film? Why do you think the director decided to conclude the film the way he did? Do you think it was a suitable ending to the film?
- ❑ The film's narrative is highly affected by its cultural context and the country it takes place in. How do you think a similar storyline taking place in the US would develop?



THEMES

- ❑ What is the symbolism behind the title of the film, *Tremors*? How do you relate this with earthquakes? Think about the background context of the country of Guatemala.
- ❑ Family structure is greatly challenged in this film. Think about one or two scenes where family life was abrupted or compared to what a traditional family should look like.
- ❑ Think about the various themes that were emphasized in the film. Gay rights and evangelical Christian ethos are a huge component. Who do you think the intended audience for this film is?
- ❑ Pablo's siblings, parents, and friends care way too much about the family name and reputation. What message is the director trying to convey regarding gay rights and religion?
- ❑ Do you think that Pablo ever truly liberated himself from the shadow of heteronormative oppression? Why or why not?
- ❑ Leaving aside the family and the church, how do you think the outside world would react to Pablo's sexuality?
- ❑ Issues of race and class are present in the film. Can you explore a few scenes in which they are evident? How does the director approach these themes?
- ❑ The film establishes early that Pablo has the right to be with the man he loves but puts into question whether that happiness is worth the sacrifice. What do you think? Why or why not?
- ❑ Think about your own community, how is its attitude towards LGBTQ+ rights different or similar than that depicted in the film? Why do you think are the reasons for these differences and similarities?
- ❑ Drawing from your own familiarity with LGBTQ+ rights and attitudes in the US, how do they differ with what you learned about Guatemala's approach to LGBTQ+?

