

STUDY GUIDE



MY NAME IS GENNET (MI NOMBRE ES GENNET)

A film by MIGUEL ÁNGEL TOBÍAS
SPAIN / 2019 / 90 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.

“Representing between 0.2% to 2% of the population, persons with deafblindness are a very diverse yet hidden group and are, overall, more likely to be poor and unemployed, and with lower educational outcomes. Because deafblindness is less well-known and often misunderstood, people struggle to obtain the right support, and are often excluded from both development and disability programs.

For many young people, the transition from school to working life is impeded by two essential challenges. Firstly, there is a lack of deafblind adult role models. As the majority of young persons with deafblindness grow up in hearing families, they typically struggle to overcome barriers in a hearing and visually orientated environment. Secondly, young persons with deafblindness may have to cope with emotional challenges and identity issues, which are often inadequately tackled by the formal support programs offered by organizations.”¹

- Reading this, how do you think the film will deal with these issues? What are the benefits in addressing these inequalities and challenges through one very personal story?

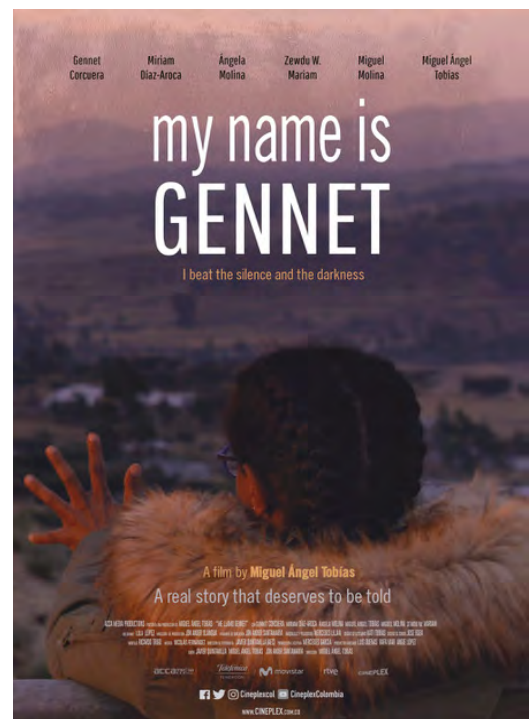
INTRODUCING THE FILM

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 *My Name is Gennet*:

Based on a true story, this poignant and inspirational film follows the life of Gennet Corcuera, from her childhood in extreme poverty in Ethiopia to her achievement as the first Deaf-blind woman to obtain a university degree in Europe.

Carmen Corcuera traveled to Ethiopia often, where her daughter worked as a diplomat and her son-in-law was the Spanish ambassador. During her visits, Carmen spent most of her time in the Madre Teresa de Calcutta orphanage in Addis Ababa. There, she met Gennet, a 7-year-old girl who became deaf-blind due to an infection. They formed a strong bond and Carmen decided to adopt Gennet and take her to Madrid. Corcuera helped Gennet to fight for her autonomy and succeed in her studies. In the university entrance exams, Gennet obtained a score high enough to continue with her university studies in Special Education. Upon graduating, she became the first deaf-blind woman from birth to achieve a university degree in Europe. The film gathers her special memories, marked by her difficult process of integration and learning in a world where there was no place for people like her.

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¹ World Federation of the Deafblind At risk of exclusion from CRPD and SDGs implementation: Inequality and Persons with Deafblindness, September 2018 https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/wfdb_complete_initial_global_report_september_2018.pdf

INTRODUCING THE FILM *(continued)*

Gennet is currently 37 years old and works in the only residence in Spain specialized in the care and education of deaf-blind people in Seville. She has become a point of reference for deaf-blind people from birth all over the world, such as the American Helen Keller and the French Marie Heurtin.

- ❑ 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)?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ Why do you think the filmmaker decided to tell the story in the form of a fiction narrative? How might this film be different if it were just a documentary?
- ❑ The film's main character, adult Gennet, is played by herself and at the request of the director "all four of the actors playing her younger self are orphans and Ethiopians"². Why do you think the filmmaker wanted to use non-actors for the film and Gennet to play out her own story? How does this change the film's tone and feeling?
- ❑ 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?
- ❑ What is the significance behind the woman's voice-over in numerous parts throughout the film? How does it work to introduce the narrative's plot and theme(s)?
- ❑ Think about the specificities of the non-diegetic sound and imagery throughout the film. How does the non-diegetic sound and visual choices made play a role in the telling of Gennet's story? What is the effect on the viewer?
- ❑ 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 narrative?
- ❑ The common communication methods that deaf-blind people use are very sensorial. For example, the use tactile sign language, tracking, tactile fingerspelling, print on palm and Braille. What cinematic techniques are used to depict the sensorial to the viewer?



² Ferreiro, Emilio. "Gennet: the University Deafblind Woman at the Cinema." *Unusualverse*, Blogger, 30 July 2019, www.unusualverse.com/2019/02/gennet-deafblind-university-movie.html.

NARRATIVE

- ❑ Think about the film's opening scene: the initial title sequence imagery and the dream sequence. Why do you think the film opens with this? How does this gain importance and meaning as the film progresses?
- ❑ How does the film break up the different chapters in Gennet's life? Do you think the use of a nonlinear narrative works in regard to Gennet's story?
- ❑ How does Christianity play a role in the film's themes and in Gennet's life? How is it manifested throughout the film?
- ❑ How does the film successfully evoke empathy in the viewer and make you empathize with Gennet? Pick two scenes from the film where you felt profound empathy for Gennet.
- ❑ How does the young Gennet struggle with adapting to her new life in Spain? What are the different barriers she faces? Analyze two scenes that illustrate this.
- ❑ What do you make of the relationship between Gennet and Carmen? Think about the juxtaposition between the first scenes and the last ones: how does their relationship shift?
- ❑ Reaching the end of the film, Gennet, in light of her recent achievements and the death of her mother Carmen, decides to undertake a trip to her birth country, Ethiopia. In what way is this trip symbolic? Why do you think Gennet feels like it is a necessary step? Why do you think Carmen wrote that letter to be delivered once she passes?
- ❑ What is the significance of the last few scenes? Why do you think the director chose to end the film like this? Do you think it was a suitable ending to the film?



THEMES

- ❑ Inclusive Education is mentioned in numerous parts of the film, “an education that includes everyone, with non-disabled and Disabled people (including those with “special educational needs”) learning together in mainstream schools, colleges and universities”³. How does the film approach this subject? Think of two scenes that illustrate a negative and positive in adopting this educational method.
- ❑ There are many factors that have facilitated Gennet’s success and progress. Think of four people whose role have aided her get to where she is today that appear throughout the film.
- ❑ The social stratum of the family is important when dealing with disabilities. What kind of environment does Carmen belong to? Mention a few clues the movie gives. Do you think this story could have happened if the foster family was in a different situation? Explain why.
- ❑ Visibility and invisibility occupy a large part of the film. How does the film reflect this?
- ❑ How are language and communication barriers explored throughout the film? How are they overcome? What is the film trying to convey through the theme of communication?
- ❑ Disability and dependence: At one point in the story a government program is mentioned: The Dependency Act. This made it easier for Gennet to have an escort, Alessandra, who has accompanied her over the years and has been her link to the auditory and visual world. What do you think is the State’s responsibility to people with disabilities? What is the U.S. policy on this issue?
- ❑ Feminism and Racism: Gennet is in a particular position; as a black woman with a disability, she is faced with many obstacles. How does the director approach these themes surrounding gender and race in the film?
- ❑ There are several support networks in countries dealing with severe poverty: Institutional humanitarian organizations (Oxfam, UN, etc.), philanthropic (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), private (Save the Children, Amnesty International), or religious (through missions or foundations such as Vicente Ferrer):
 - What do you think is the responsibility of countries to nations suffering from severe poverty?
 - What is the role of religion in these countries?
 - There are many volunteer programs where volunteers go for a week or maybe months to help on specific missions. Carmen, in this context, contacted Father Juan to volunteer for religious foundations in Ethiopia. At one point in the film, the priest criticizes these projects, saying they only serve to cleanse visitors’ consciences. What do you think about this?
- ❑ Upon her arrival in Spain, at the beginning of the film, Gennet had to be hospitalized fighting for her life. How do you think malnutrition in the population affects a country’s overall progress, specifically in the economic sphere? With this in mind, what do you think are the additional challenges that undocumented immigrants have to face when they reach their destinations in search of a better quality of life?



³ “What Is Inclusive Education? ALLFIE (the Alliance for Inclusive Education).” *Allfie*, 7 Oct. 2019, www.allfie.org.uk/definitions/what-is-inclusive-education/.