

 PRAGDA | SPANISH FILM CLUB

DISCUSSION GUIDE



THIS STOLEN COUNTRY OF MINE

A film by MARC WIESE

Germany / 2022 / 93 min
Spanish with English subtitles

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BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country that film comes from. Learning about the filmmaker is also a relevant way to gain insight on the context in which the film was produced. You can learn more about Marc Wiese at <https://pragda.com/film/this-stolen-country-of-mine/>.

INTRODUCING THE FILM

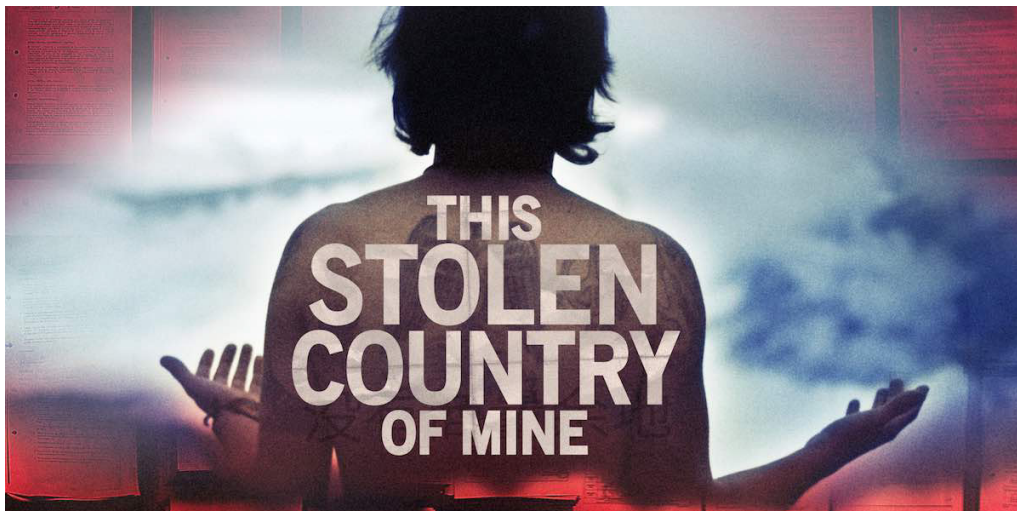
A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style, and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film's marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this synopsis for *This Stolen Country of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

Chinese mining in Ecuador's mountains sets the stage for an epic battle between eco-guerrillas and a corrupt government in an intensely dramatic documentary.

This Stolen Country of Mine follows Paúl Jarrín Mosquera, who leads the indigenous resistance against the exploitation of their land. Meanwhile, China uses the Ecuadorian government to turn the country into one of its new colonies, having made the country dependent on credit through a series of corrupt and greedy treaties. When journalist Fernando Villavicencio exposes these plots and gets access to the contracts between China and Ecuador, the government wants him silenced too. Both men are fighting for freedom in this battle against a superpower.

Directed by award-winning filmmaker Marc Wiese, the film exposes China's massive hunger for natural resources and how during the last decade it has been aggressively operating to obtain access to these resources in Ecuador. The country is now stuck with the most Chinese debts in Latin America

- From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film?
From this same text, try to identify the main events of the film's plot and the socio-political context of the film.
- Do you think that the film will have a political message?
Cite specific language from the synopsis to support your answer.
- How do the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- Viewing the marketing materials alone (i.e., trailer, poster, and still images available at <https://pragda.com/film/this-stolen-country-of-mine/>) without the aid of the synopsis, can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

NARRATIVE

- > The film begins by introducing the audience to Paúl Jarrín at the top of a mountain. What was your initial impression of the activist? Describe him as a person.
- > How does Paúl's mother react to his dangerous activism? In what ways do they think differently?
- > When the audience is first introduced to Fernando Villavicencio, he briefly explains the economic situation between Ecuador and China. Summarize what he says. Why is Ecuador in so much debt to China?
- > The documentary primarily revolves around the journeys of Paúl Jarrín and Fernando Villavicencio. Although they are fighting for the same cause, their experiences are completely different. What are the differences between their styles of activism?
- > After having his house raided and all his belongings confiscated by the government, Fernando is offered a job and political asylum in the United States. Nonetheless, he chooses to fly back to Ecuador to continue his activism. Why did he make this choice? How do his tactics change upon his arrival in Ecuador?
- > Describe the community of Sarayaku. How are they impacted by the contracts signed with China? Why do they fight against the government? Why do they welcome Fernando into their community?
- > In 2017, Rafael Correa was succeeded by his former vice president, Lenin Moreno. Were any changes made during this administration? What stayed the same?
- > Throughout the documentary, the conflict between the indigenous communities and government gradually intensifies. How does this form of conflict evolve? Does it become violent?
- > On April 7, 2020, Rafael Correa was sentenced to prison for eight years, and was banned from politics for the next twenty-five years. What were the reasons for this sentencing? What was he convicted of?
- > As the film concludes, Paúl Jarrín clarifies that although some Chinese companies have been expelled from indigenous land, their fight against corporate invasion must continue. What are the next steps for Paúl Jarrín and Fernando Villavicencio?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- > Instead of directly entering into the topic of the film, *This Stolen Country of Mine* begins by showing a vast mountainous range as Paúl Jarrín performs a prayer ritual. Why did Marc Wiese choose to begin the documentary in this manner?
- > On various occasions, *This Stolen Country of Mine* utilizes archival footage when speaking about certain figures, especially Correa and Moreno. Besides visualizing the topics at hand, does this archival footage carry any other effects that formally compliment the documentary?
- > Analyze the scenes that take place in indigenous communities. How do the filmmakers capture physical space in order to demonstrate a level of intimacy within these villages?
- > *This Stolen Country of Mine* employs a very desaturated color palette. How is this color palette used to evoke emotions and portray mood?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES *continued*

- What differences lie between the way Paúl Jarrín's journey is filmed in comparison to that of Fernando Villavicencio? Consider specific aesthetic details.
- Throughout the film, various moments of narration and dialogue are complimented with shots that display the vastness of Ecuadorian nature. What is the purpose of these shots? What meaning do they carry outside of the accompanying dialogue?
- During a public protest, the point of view switches to a smartphone camera as the police begin to open fire on the civilians. Why did they choose to use a smartphone camera? How does it engage with the audience's viewing experience?
- During a scene in which the police bombard a village with tear gas, the film crew struggles to escape the impacted area while in the process revealing itself to the camera. Speak on the involvement of Marc Wiese in the film. Are the filmmakers passively or actively involved in the subject matter? Is there a certain degree of self-reflexivity within this documentary?

THEMES

- Explain the significance of the title, "*This Stolen Country of Mine*". Whose country is being stolen? Who is stealing the country?
- As the film begins, a caption states that in 2007 when Rafael Correa was elected, western leaders refused to further lend money to Ecuador causing Correa to approach China as the nation became insolvent. Do you believe that developed nations have a duty to support those in need during periods of instability and political change? Could anything have been done to prevent Ecuador's economic dependency on China?
- As foreign companies continue to exploit the resources in Ecuador, what issues related to land ownership, land rights, and struggles for sovereignty among indigenous communities arise? How can you help to combat these issues?
- Since the signing of countless contracts, Ecuador's natural resources have been harvested from Chinese enterprises. Examine the environmental impact of modern development on indigenous lands and ecosystems. How do mines and the harvesting of fossil fuels affect the environment?
- Through the many papers published by Fernando Villavicencio, the corruption of Rafael Correa and his government was revealed to the public. Speak on the importance of the press. How did Fernando's work invoke change within his nation?
- Why were Indigenous lands chosen to be given to the Chinese? Are the rights of the citizens being ignored because they are indigenous? Would the same have happened if the land belonged to somebody else?
- In one of the interviews with Fernando Villavicencio, he states that Ecuador is being colonized for a second time. In what ways are foreign companies using their capital to colonize Ecuador? What elements define neocolonialism?
- Throughout the documentary, many instances of the government neglecting the rights of its citizens can be seen. This includes Fernando's property being seized by the police and the forced displacement of the indigenous communities in Azuya. In what ways can any member of society stand up for themselves and combat oppression from their government? How can those not directly affected by this oppression support those who are?
- As the film concludes, Paúl Jarrín stands in an abandoned mine praising the accomplishment of a local community that overtook a mine located in Macizo del Cajas. Speak on the importance of uniting as a community in order to fight for a greater cause.

