

 **PRAGDA** | SPANISH FILM CLUB

DISCUSSION GUIDE



FINLANDIA

A film by Horacio Alcalá

Mexico, Spain / 2021 / 97 min
Spanish with English subtitles

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 Horacio Alcalá at <https://pragda.com/film/finlandia/>

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 *Finlandia*:

Belonging to a community of muxes fighting to reclaim their gender beyond the binary spectrum, Delirio, Amaranta, and Mariano go through their past, present, and future.

Marta, a designer, embarks on a journey to Oaxaca to document its rich traditions. As she navigates the fine line between admiration and cultural appropriation, her perception of reality—and herself—begins to shift. Living among the muxes, she is drawn to their struggles, passions, and unspoken traumas. Immersed in their world, Marta must confront her assumptions, desires, and a deeper meaning of belonging.

When a powerful earthquake shatters their world, they must confront not just the physical destruction, but also the deeper tremors of identity, resilience, and self-expression in a society that both reveres and resists them.

A visually stunning and deeply moving exploration of love, struggle, and the defiant beauty of being oneself, *Finlandia* is a cinematic ode to the strength of those who dare to live authentically.

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/finlandia/>) without the aid of the synopsis, can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

NARRATIVE

- How does the film's opening image, Delirio's luminous face emerging from the rubble, set the poetic and symbolic tone for the journey that follows? What does this contrast between devastation and beauty suggest about the muxes' inner strength and resilience?
- How does *Finlandia* portray the paradox of the muxes being both celebrated and marginalized within Mexican society? What emotional and political tensions arise from this dual status of visibility and rejection?
- By showing different muxes at various moments in their lives, how does the film construct a layered, collective portrait of identity? Can we interpret the three main characters as facets of a single muxe's journey?
- How does the film explore the duality between the vibrant, empowered nightlife of the muxes and the shame or scorn they may face during the day? What does this say about social hypocrisy and internalized fear?
- What do Amaranta's strained interactions with her father reveal about rejection, gender norms, and the longing for familial love? Similarly, how do Mariano's moments with her mother explore themes of care, loss, and complicated acceptance?
- How does the parallel storyline of Marta, the Spanish stylist, deepen the film's questions about cultural appropriation and authenticity? In what ways does her journey provoke reflection on Western fascination with Indigenous traditions?
- How does your perception of Marta evolve throughout the film: from an outsider on a fashion assignment to a conflicted woman torn between exploitation and empathy? What makes her change her mind, and is this transformation believable?
- In the restaurant scene in Spain, Marta's boss casually draws the line between "plagiarism" and "inspiration." What does this moment reveal about the colonial gaze and class-based contempt embedded in the fashion industry?
- What is the emotional impact of Marta's betrayal after Amaranta welcomes her into the intimate world of the muxes? How does this moment affect our trust in Marta, and what does it say about the vulnerability of cultural exchange?
- Delirio speaks out about colonial histories and exploitation, invoking the illusion of peaceful contact that masks domination. How does this moment shift the power dynamic between Marta and the muxes, and how does it echo through the film's narrative?
- The earthquake that frames the film is both literal and symbolic. In such a deeply spiritual and symbolic story, how do you interpret this natural event in relation to transformation, rupture, and rebirth?
- Film critic Víctor Delgado wrote: *"The film is, from beginning to end, a struggle of emotions and solemnity that reveals to the viewer the human life of the muxes. It portrays their discrimination in society and their family problems, but also great friendship, the search to be oneself, the joy of self-acceptance, and the fight for their desires. In other words, it shows both the light and the shadows of the lives of the muxes. It is a human and realistic film, adorned with magic, mysticism, and symbolism that captivates the viewer in every scene—a clear example of magical realism."* Do you agree with this review? Why or why not?
- How do elements of magical realism enhance, or complicate, your emotional experience of the film?



CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- Luis Alberto Jiménez, film critic at Cineparadisfrutar writes: "As for the cinematography, it is so essential that it immediately draws our attention with the colors, dresses, and designs worn by the muxes. A burst of color explodes before our eyes to paint a multicolored palette that, in a way, reminds me of the brilliant painter Frida Kahlo."
- What stands out to you about *Finlandia*'s color palette? In what way can you compare it to Frida Kahlo's art?
- The costumes and traditional garments of the muxes explode with color. How do they contribute to the emotional or symbolic weight of the story?
- What editing techniques does the film use to establish or modulate its tempo? Can you point to specific sequences where slow motion heightens the atmosphere or emotion?
- What is the effect of the cross-cutting at the beginning of the film between Spain and Mexico? How do the colors, styles, and energies of each location contrast or echo each other? What does this say about the two worlds the film is bridging?
- Does the film rely more on natural or artificial lighting? Can you think of a scene that particularly illustrates this choice, and how it affects the mood or authenticity?
- There is a visually rich and emotionally layered sequence that begins with the woman singing at the party and flows into a series of photographic portraits, and Marta's own transformation. Could this be considered the stylistic climax of the film? How does this sequence use parallel editing and musicality to elevate the narrative?
- What purpose do the snowy images of Finland serve, intercut with the rest of the story set in Mexico? What feeling or vision do they communicate? Are they a metaphor? A dream?
- Luis Alberto Jiménez writes: "The emotions, those of the muxes as well as of Marta, and feelings such as sadness, pain, or desire are portrayed in a sensitive and, at times, raw manner. The camera becomes a kind of 'Wailing Wall' (playing on a literal wall that appears in the film) to reveal the suffering that the muxes are going through, as even the people of their own town want to cast them aside."
Do you agree? Can you think of a moment when the camera seems to "listen" rather than simply record?
- How does the cinematography help us feel the emotional truth of the characters? Can you recall specific shots that linger in your memory because of their framing, movement, or symbolism?

THEMES

- What do you think is the central meaning of *Finlandia*? What ideas or emotions did the film leave you with? What messages does the film communicate about the muxes?
- How does it challenge or expand your understanding of gender identity?
- How is the world of the muxes portrayed in the film? What details: visual, cultural, emotional, stood out to you?
- Religion and spirituality are woven throughout the narrative. How do you see these elements interacting with or contrasting the experience of the muxes?
- The title *Finlandia* is unexpected. How did your understanding of the title change after watching the film? What does it mean to you?
- How do you feel the title reflects the film's deeper themes and emotional atmosphere?
- Beyond its visual richness and poetic language, the film carries deeper subjects. How does it challenge us to reconsider our assumptions about gender, cultural identity, and beauty?
- What do you think the film says about the commodification of identity in a globalized world? What are the emotional, spiritual, or political costs of such commodification?
- The film ends with an earthquake. How do you interpret this final event, particularly in relation to themes of identity, transformation, or resilience?

