

 PRAGDA | SPANISH FILM CLUB

DISCUSSION GUIDE



ALEGRÍA

A film by VIOLETA SALAMA

Violeta Salama / Spain / 2021 / 119min
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 Violeta Salama at <https://pragda.com/film/alegría/>

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 *ALEGRÍA*:

Alegría's life takes a profound shift upon discovering that her orthodox Jewish brother insists on holding his daughter's wedding in Melilla. Guided by Dunia, her Arab housekeeper, and Marian, her Christian confidante, *Alegría* embarks on a journey to connect with her roots while assisting her niece, Yael, in navigating womanhood within a highly conservative male-dominated environment.

Renowned Mexican actress Cecilia Suárez (*The House of Flowers*, *3 Caminos*) takes the lead, infusing the film with her charisma and impeccable comedic timing, amidst a backdrop of familial tumult and conflicting traditions. The film sensitively depicts her coming to terms with her roots and the cultural past she has rejected. She may not want these traditions for herself, but she comes to understand the value they have in her community.

Alegría is also about Melilla, an autonomous, multicultural Spanish city on Africa's north coast, where Jews, Muslims, and Christians mix and mingle and come together to make the wedding happen. It is a gorgeous evocation of a fascinating and beautiful corner of the world not often seen on-screen.

Shaped entirely by women – from the director and screenwriters to the producer, director Violeta Salama follows in the footsteps of esteemed directors like Nadine Labaki in Lebanon (notably with *Caramel*), Mira Nadir in India, and Leila Marraki in Morocco.

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



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

NARRATIVE

- How would you describe Alegría's feelings about her visiting relatives? Why do you think she feels this way? How does she seem to view her Jewish heritage?
- What is Alegría's relationship to the rabbi officiating Yael's wedding? What do you think is the reason for their current estrangement?
- What is your first impression of Yael's fiancé Jacobo? What seems to be his role in the wedding planning?
- What lines can you draw between Alegría and Yael based off clues that have been provided thus far? What influence do you think Ale will have on Yael going forward, and vice versa?
- News of the recent bombings coincide with Dunia's pivotal interview and subsequently causes a rift between her and Alegría. How do the filmmakers use a real-world event as a catalyst for major plot points and character development?
- What's your impression of Sara's home community? What is Alegría's reaction upon first arriving? Why do you think this is?
- Compare and contrast our introduction to Alegría and Sara's relationship at the beginning of the film versus when we finally see them interact in person. How has their relationship changed? How has Alegría changed?
- Rather than rallying around a single character's perspective, the film shifts between three distinct POVs: Alegría, Yael, and Dunia. In what ways does this narrative structure serve the main theme of the film? How would it be different if there was only one main character?
- In the last scene, Yael, Dunia, and Marian give a joint song performance for Alegría as she watches virtually along with Sara and her home community. What is the significance of their performance, and how do you think this is a suitable ending for the film?

CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES

- How do the filmmakers employ various cinematic techniques to effectively establish the movie's setting from the first frames?
- How would you describe the nondiegetic music in the film? How does it inform the mood and themes of the film?
- Does the camerawork tend to be static or more mobile in the film? What effect does this have on our perception of the onscreen action? How does this stylistic choice tie into the themes?
- The scene in which the four women cross the Moroccan border is told by way of a minute-plus long take without switching frames. Describe the use of the long take in this scene, including staging and camera movement, and how it transforms viewer's experience.
- Analyze the editing in the scene where Yael and Dunia cook in the kitchen while Jacobo and the men watch TV. How do you think it serves the scene and its characters?
- At the dinner scene when Alegría learns of Sara's pregnancy, why do you think the filmmakers chose to fix the frame on Alegría even as various offscreen characters confront her? What does this imply about the nature of their interaction?
- Why do you think most scenes are filmed with a shallow focus that favors the foreground over a more blurred background? What do you think this lens seeks to emphasize?



THEMES

- The film was helmed by a female director and made by a mostly female crew. How do you think director Violeta Salama injects the film with a uniquely female perspective? How do you think the film would be different if it had been directed by a man?
- How does the setting of the film, the city of Melilla, act as a metaphor for the themes the film explores? What's unique about this setting?
- Tradition versus modernism seems to be a major theme in the film, especially at it relates to feminism. While a Jewish family is the focal point in this case, do you think this theme has a broader application to other religions? In what ways does the film tackle the challenges of being a Jewish woman in a contemporary society?
- How do the pressures and responsibilities of soon-to-be brides differ from their male counterparts? What does this imply about gender roles in this Jewish community and the expectations of women in general?
- Reflect on the complicated dynamic between Alegría and her Muslim housekeeper Dunia. How would you describe their relationship? How does it at times reflect or at least play on the modern Israel-Palestine conflict? How do you think it would be different, if at all, if their roles were reversed?
- Although it's only briefly visited in the film, the nation of Israel is a focal point of both the story and its lead character. Describe the significance of Israel and what it symbolizes to Alegría in terms of identity, history, family, etc.
- The theme of identity is explored by way of various characters, from Yael learning how to be a wife to a Jewish husband to Alegría grappling with what it means to be a mother. How do the circumstances surrounding the characters lead them to their own respective self-discovery?
- What is the significance of the "female experience" in the film, and what role does this theme play among its mostly female cast? What do you think is the filmmaker's intent by exploring this theme despite the diversity among the women?

