



Silvana Discussion Guide

Directors: Mika Gustafson, Olivia Kastebring & Christina Tsiobanelis
Year: 2017
Time: 90 min

You might know these directors from:
This is the debut feature film from this directorial team.

FILM SUMMARY

Welcome to the world of Swedish hip-hopper Silvana Imam. With a Lithuanian mother, Syrian father, and an upbringing mainly played out in the Swedish capital of Stockholm, Silvana Imam is a true Third Culture Kid, exposed to a variety of cultural influences that she moves between and beyond to create her own. She is also on a mission to overthrow the patriarchy, banish racism, and serve as a role model for LGBT youth—something she wished she had growing up. Unafraid to raise her voice, Silvana declares her truths and rewrites the rules one rap at a time, empowering others at the same time as she empowers herself through her art and craft.

SILVANA spans from Imam's initial breakthrough on the scene in 2014 through to her immense domination of Swedish cultural life in 2016. With incredible access to this refreshingly open character, the female filmmaking trio of Gustafson, Kastebring, and Tsiobanelis delivers a pulse-raising, heart-melting tale of fame, love, and artistry. When Imam's going gets rough, SILVANA slows, decelerates and allows the human to expand, as she acknowledges that none of us are superheroes. When Imam is on top of her game, however, the film goes all in, turning up the volume and pace.

With such a potent protagonist, a self-declared "power pussy" on center stage, SILVANA has the crystal-clear capacity to reach millions. A contemporary mix of Swedish, Arabic, Lithuanian, and English serves as a true reflection of these changing times.

FILM THEMES

Lithuanian, Syrian, Swedish. A Third Culture Kid who is 100% anti-racist lesbian power pussy. Not one to mince words, Silvana Imam is devoted to her burning heart-felt mission. Success follows her as she goes, and an intimacy she has never before known captures her along the way.

LIVING FEMINISM

"I don't have to justify anything," Silvana states. A punk take on the age-old adage: live and let live. If you classify yourself as anything other than heterosexual in this world, however, this simple truth is not something to be taken for granted. Yet in a world where Silvana is queen, homophobia is a thing of the past. The fact that she goes to bed with a woman is no more interesting than the next woman going to bed with a man, or even with no one at all. Silvana lives feminism, rewriting the rules by living her truth out completely.

HIP-HOP AND RAP MUSIC AS SOCIAL ACTIVISM

Although there are many battles she could choose to wage, Silvana declares the war against racism her central fight. As a third-culture kid and an upbringing where she often felt misunderstood and culturally askew, Silvana has personally felt the harsh winds of racism blow against her. Standing up tall and decrying neo-Nazism and bigotry in any format, she uses the powerful instrument of music to carry her message far and loud. A true freedom fighter and social activist, Silvana "continue[s] to take space everywhere [she] shouldn't take space in order to cause change," with hip-hop as the empowering weapon.

FAME

Although Silvana has cultivated her character and held her beliefs over the course of her lifetime, her rise to fame was lightening quick. Scooping up prestigious prizes awarded to her as an artist and lesbian, Silvana found herself dizzied by the bright spotlights. With the media hounding her to both represent lesbians and be the voice of anti-racists, there was no way for a single human being to deliver. "I'm no superhero. I don't want to be a superhero. There are no superheroes," Silvana plainly states. Finding a balance between the doors that success opens and the pressure fame creates is easier said than done.

ROLE MODEL

Silvana's music has a message. But message aside, her way and her method have turned her into a true role model for many. Along with her girlfriend Beatrice Eli, the two are a powerhouse couple, giving the thumbs up to LGBT youth. Her actions avow that it's OK to go your own way, to trust your inner voice. It's OK to dress how you dress, to look how you look, to love who you love. By living, loving, and working the way she does, she provides a generation something she never knew: "I've never had a role model in that way. Not someone who was like me. That's why I get so happy and full of joy. It's huge knowing that I can give some people that."

"There's no time for dreamy phrases, low frequencies and poetry. They tell us leaning out will lead to death, but that is what we will do now."

Silvana Imam

"I want to give what I myself needed when I was younger."

Silvana Imam

"This isn't about me. This is much larger than me."

Silvana Imam

FILM FACTS:

- SILVANA had its global premiere at the Swedish Way Out West festival in August 2017. It had its Stockholm premiere a few weeks later, when City Hall was transformed into a cinema. Silvana's family saw the film for the first time there.
- Silvana Imam was born on September 19, 1986 in Klaipeda, Lithuania. Her mother is a linguist; her father a lawyer and journalist. At the age of four, her family moved to Kiruna in northern Sweden, where they spent one year, before moving to Stockholm, where she spent the rest of her childhood. Silvana received a Master's Degree in Psychology and English from Stockholm University. As a child, she spent her summers visiting family in both Lithuania and Syria.
- Silvana released her debut album *Rekviem* in 2013. She met her manager Babak Azarmi, the head of hip-hop collective RMH (Respect My Hustle), soon after, and released EP *När Du Ser Mig—Se Dig* in 2014, followed by EP *Jag Dör För Dig* in 2015. Her second full-length album *Naturkraft* was released in 2016.
- Always one to go her own way, Imam refuses to be labeled a political artist and does things some of her fans don't always agree with, such as contributing music to a Volvo commercial and appearing in an Ikea advertisement for bedding.
- In Arabic, Imam means "the one who stands in front," often a religious leader or expert in Islam.
- Silvana played basketball as a kid, and was referred to by her coaches as "the pen warrior," as she wrote poems in the locker room.
- While Silvana's paternal family is Muslim, her father Talal is an atheist. Silvana's mother Lilia is Christian, and Silvana herself is agnostic.
- Hip-hop music has its roots in New York City, particularly amongst African-American youth living in the Bronx, in the 1970s, a time when block parties were popular and both sampling and drum machines were more affordable and widely available. Political hip-hop, which is arguably the type of music Silvana Imam creates, first emerged in the 1980s as a way of turning rap into social activism, and can be used to express any cause.
- The three female filmmakers behind SILVANA met at community college (2010–2012). They believe in educating the masses and female collectivity. They want to inspire others, especially women, to make films and believe in their own abilities, even if they haven't had any female role models.
- Sweden is one of the world's more progressive nations in terms of LGBT rights. Same-sex sexual activity was legalized in 1944, with same-sex marriage legalized in 2009. The Netherlands, however, became the first country to legalize same-sex marriage, passing the law in 2000.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** SILVANA with your community. Not only is the film inspiring on an artistic level, it raises issues in a raw and human manner, making it a truly influential piece of work.
2. **Be inspired** by the work of organizations such as [Hip-Hop Sisters Network](#), which supports and promotes positive images of ethnic diversity by bringing together women in the entertainment and corporate worlds.
3. **Learn** about the organizations supporting LGBTI rights at [ILGA](#), the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association. With over 1,200 organizations, there is support for most regions in the world.
4. **Fight** racism at a fundamental level. [ThoughtCo](#) provides practical tips on "How to Fight Racism" in your daily life. Not everyone can carry a megaphone as Silvana does, but each of us can make an impact.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.