

# STUDY GUIDE



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## NEITHER HERO NOR TRAITOR (NI HÉROE NI TRAIADOR)

A film by ANICOLÁS SAVIGNONE

ARGENTINA / 2019 / 75 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. Find two reliable sources on the history of Falklands war focusing specifically on the war's prelude and the Argentinian dictatorship in the early 1980's. If you can, try to find a source addressing the draft in Argentina, otherwise known as *la colimba*.

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### 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 *Neither Hero, Nor Traitor*:

Buenos Aires, 1982. Matías (19) has recently finished his military service and dreams of going to Spain to study music far from a dictatorship. His problems come down to convincing his girlfriend to meet him there at a later date and to get around his father's opposition. But the playing board changes completely when the Falklands War breaks out and he is drafted along with his friends.



- 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)?



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## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

### CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- Analyze the film's opening shot: Matías playing bass in his room. How does this scene introduce you to the story's protagonist? Analyze the scene's **mise-en-scène**.<sup>1</sup>
- How does the film's set design set you in the time and place of Argentina in 1982? Think specifically about the props and the costumes.
- Diegetic and non-diegetic music play a major role in the film.<sup>2</sup> How is non-diegetic music used to build tension and suspense? What is the purpose of the film's diegetic music? Remember that Matías is a musician.
- Think about the scene of the radio announcement. How does this scene build tension and suspense in the audience?
- What is the film's cinematography like?
- How would you describe the color palette of the film? Are the colors dull, bright, vibrant? How might the colors reflect the film's themes?
- Do the filmmakers use artificial light or natural light for the majority of the scenes? Explain how this decision might inform the film's themes. How does the lighting reflect the film's time and place?
- When does the filmmaker use a handheld camera and when does he use a steady shot mounted on a tripod? Think of one scene where the camera is handheld and one scene where the camera is on a tripod. How do these decisions inform the overall tone and emotion of those scenes?
- Analyze the last scene's mise-en-scène -- Matías getting on the boat and saying goodbye to his father. What cinematic techniques does the filmmaker use to give the film an emotional ending?



<sup>1</sup> Mise-en-scène...is used in film to refer to everything that goes into the composition of a shot--framing, movement of the camera and characters, lighting, set design and the visual environment, and sound." "Term Index." The Columbia Film Language Glossary. <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

<sup>2</sup> "Non-diegetic sound is sound whose origin is from outside the story world. Voice-overs are typically non-diegetic, since the narration does not appear in the film's story world. Usually, the music soundtrack of a film is non-diegetic." "Term Index." The Columbia Film Language Glossary. <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

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## NARRATIVE

- ❑ Do you empathize or identify with Matías? Do you agree with him throughout the course of the film? Why or why not?
- ❑ How would you characterize Matías' relationship to his father? What about his mother, his friends, and his girlfriend? Does his relationship to these characters change over the course of the film?
- ❑ Think about Matías' friends and how they react to the government's announcement of war. Who is excited to enlist in the army and who is not? What does this say about them as characters? Do you think they are patriotic? Do you think they are brave? Why or why not?
- ❑ What happens to Matías' friend, Diego, when he attempts to avoid the draft? What might this say about the consequences of political opposition during Argentina's dictatorship?
- ❑ Do you think Diego is a coward for trying to avoid the draft? What about Matías? On the other hand, do you think Pablo is a hero for adamantly supporting the draft and the war? Explain your answers.
- ❑ Think about the scene where Matías has to shoot his friend in the foot. Do you think you would do that for your friend? Why or why not?
- ❑ Matías' family and his friends' families are part of the petit bourgeois in Argentina. How might this influence their support for the dictatorship? How might this story have been different if it was told from the perspective of someone from a different socioeconomic status?
- ❑ Why do you think Matías' father plays the violin? What might this say about the generational similarities (and disconnects) between him and Matías?
- ❑ How does Matías' decision to enlist in the army change throughout the film? How does he land at his final conclusion?
- ❑ Consider the character of Matías' grandfather. What does he represent? Why do you think Matías looks up to him? As a veteran of the Spanish Civil War, why do you think he says to Matías, "War sucks"?
- ❑ Why do you think Matías' grandfather is a pacifist despite having gone to war? What might this say about the process of aging?
- ❑ Why do you think Matías' grandfather says, "No matter how just the cause is, at some point you're going to think: what the fuck am I doing here?" Do you agree with his statement? Why or why not?
- ❑ How does Matías' grandfather influence Matías' final decision?
- ❑ Why do you think Matías' dad tells him, "Fight it and prove me wrong" before saying goodbye to him?
- ❑ Do you think the film has a happy ending? Why or why not?
- ❑ What do you think will happen to Matías once the film ends? Do you think he will be caught? Do you think he escapes safely? Do you think he will be happy?

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## THEMES

- ❑ How is this story, aside from a film about war and the draft, also a father-and-son story? How is it also a coming-of-age story?
- ❑ What do you think about Matías' decision to leave Argentina and chase his dreams as a musician? Do you think you would have done the same? Why or why not?
- ❑ What do you think about the draft? Is there a time in the United States where there was a draft? What do you think that must have been like?
- ❑ What do you think the film is trying to say about the draft? Do you think the draft is justified? Why or why not?
- ❑ Do you think it's fair for someone to deliberately avoid the draft? Do you think it's cowardly? Why or why not?
- ❑ Do you think war ever has a just cause? If so, what cause would you go to war for? If not, explain why.
- ❑ Think about the research you found on the Falklands Wars. Do you think you would have supported the Argentine government? Why or why not?
- ❑ Think about the film's title, "Neither Hero, Nor Traitor." What might it mean? How does it describe Matías?

