

15 Filhos. Maria Oliveira and Marta Nehring,

Reviewed by Robert M. Levine

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The imposition of military dictatorship on Brazil in 1964 led to mass arrests, the eruption of pockets of resistance in large cities as well as in the countryside, and the complete abrogation of civil rights of Brazilian citizens. Brazil underwent a series of military presidencies, from the moderate but stern Castello Branco to the far harsher Costa e Silva, Figueiredo, and Garrastazu Medici. Under Ernesto Geisel, the final military president, the armed forces prepared to step back--however gradually--but the damage to the lives of thousands of Brazilians had been done. The repression increased significantly after 1968. Brazil was engulfed in urban bank robberies and terrorism (the curious and flawed film *Four Days in September* deal with this theme) and guerrilla insurgency in the interior. Although never as savage as in neighboring Argentina under its generals, or as in Chile under Pinochet, for left-wing Brazilian activists (as well as sympathetic intellectuals, students, and journalists), life during the 1970s was hell. Every branch of the military practiced counterinsurgency terrorism, routinely torturing its captives, some of whom simply "disappeared." The regime drove thousands into exile, including Brazil's current president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Some Brazilian leftists fled to Chile, where they found haven under the government of Salvador Allende--only to be captured again when Allende was overthrown. Brazilian military officials sent teams of agents to Santiago to "work with" their Chilean counterparts in inter-

rogating Brazilian prisoners. For some, this was not a bad period. Conservatives hailed the crushing of the Left, although moderates (including some heroic members of the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church) found peaceful ways to protest the abuses against human rights. The economic scene was different. Against the background of the repression, Brazil experienced its "economic miracle," a period of unprecedented growth aided to a large degree by the enforced stability that accompanied the crushing of labor unions, student groups, and a muzzled press. Brazil gradually won back civilian government and democratic practices, although the process took an entire generation to achieve. *15 Filhos* is the story of the children of victims of the repression: men, for the most part anti-military left-wing activists who fought the military regime and who paid with their lives. The film is simple, almost all of it in the form of close-ups of the young men and women--most in their 20s--who tell the story of fathers who they only knew in infancy before they disappeared into clandestinity and ultimately into death. As a documentary, the video is a moving reminder of the human costs of political conflict. Although it has won awards at festivals in Fortaleza, Rio de Janeiro, and Holland, and recently has been submitted to a film festival in Germany, it has limited classroom use because it was produced for Brazilian viewers presumably knowledgeable about the history of the events of the 1960s and 1970s that cost the fathers of the in-

interviewed subjects their lives. The documentary does not even provide the full names of the fallen fathers. This is too bad: the film would be much more suitable for non-Brazilian audiences if the directors were to add a five-minute preface to their video explaining the origins of the 1964 coup and its aftermath. Still, *15 Filhos* remains a moving testimony to the human side of ideological conflict and political warfare.

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