

I'm Still Here [15]

2024 Brazil/France 137mins

UK released **21 February 2025**

Director **Walter Salles**

Screenplay **Murilo Hauser; Heitor Lorega (book by Marcelo Rubens Paiva)**

Cinematography **Adrian Tejjido**

Music **Warren Ellis**

Cast **Fernanda Torres** (Eunice Paiva); **Selton Mello** (Rubens Paiva); **Fernanda Montenegro** (Eunice Paiva)

As they drag their sand-covered feet from Ipanema beach to their house across the road in 1970, the Paiva children can't imagine that, 50 years later, people would be marching down those same streets asking for the reestablishment of the military regime that violently killed their father. But history is cruel in its cycles, and the most willing to forget are often the easiest to convert.

Walter Salles' I'm Still Here is about memory as resistance. Based on the eponymous biographical book by Marcelo Rubens Paiva, Salles's first narrative film in over a decade – and his first made in his home country since 2008's *Linha de Passe* – tackles one of the most emblematic cases of Brazil's military regime: the forced disappearance of Marcelo's father, former congressman Rubens Paiva (played here by Selton Mello).

But instead of opting for a traditional biopic chronicling the congressman's life and career leading up to his arrest, the director turns his attention to the Paiva matriarch Eunice (Fernanda Torres). We first find her floating in the ocean, rocked by gentle waves as the harsh Brazilian sun turns glistening the water that envelops her.

Laughter is a permanent fixture in the Paiva household, home not only to the family and their adorable dog Pimpão, but to all those who wish them well. Salles paints the Paiva residence as the physical manifestation of the artistic freedom of the early 60s and a place where the kindhearted and open-minded will always find a home.

But this is 1970, and gone is the hopeful Age of Enlightenment that inspired cultural movements like the Tropicália and Cinema Novo. In its place is the dark opposite: an antidemocratic military regime funded by the United States and fuelled by post-Cold War nationalist idealism. In periods of legitimised oppression, there is no such thing as a safe haven, and this truth becomes painfully clear to the Paiva family on the morning that a group of unidentified officials drives Rubens away for questioning, not yet knowing that their father and husband will never return. Brazilian cinema is no stranger to films about the regime. Still, I'm Still Here triumphs in pairing Salles's intrinsic understanding of the emotional potential of realism with two brilliant performers in Mello and Torres. The latter is so arresting as to rival her mother Fernanda Montenegro's shattering turn in Salles's 1998 drama Central Station, imbuing her Eunice with a pained understanding of the heavy cross carried by the resilient.

Many of Brazil's great thinkers and artists lived in forced exile during the two decades of the regime, Emília Viotti da Costa amongst them. The historian would come to coin the seminal encapsulation of that era, one that in its grasp of both warning and lament, also elucidates Salles's moving elegy: "A people without memory is a people without history. And a people without history is doomed to make, in the present and the future, the same mistakes of the past".

Rafa Sales Ross, *Little White Lies*, 20 Feb 2025 (abridged)

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