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| *Vidas secas [Barren Lives] (1963)* |
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| One of the most important films of Brazil’s Cinema Nôvo movement, Vidas secas was directed by Nelson Pereira dos Santos, and based on the 1938 novel of the same name written by Graciliano Ramos. It tells the story of a poverty-stricken family in the sertão—the dry Brazilian northeast lands—in the 1940s. Shot in a modernist style reminiscent of Italian neorealist film, Vidas secas is characterized by telling compositions, subjective shots, atomized overexposed lighting, and sparse dialogue. Fabiano, the father, Sinhá (Mrs.) Vitória, the mother, their two sons, and their dog Baleia wander about the desolate land searching fo a better place to live, but the drought and misery destroy their dreams of a more human existence. Dos Santos shapes the family's struggle as blunt moments of survival pitted against the harsh landscape. For a while, Fabiano finds work as a cowhand, giving the family privileges to a tiny patch of land and a leather bed. However, a disagreement with a local policeman and merciless nature send the family back on the road. Made at a time of great political and social turmoil, just before the coup d'état of 1964 and the establishment of the military dictatorship in Brazil, it became one of the most representative films of Latin American cinema of the period. The film won the OCIC (International Catholic Organisation for Cinema) prize at Cannes Film Festival in 1964. |
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| Further reading:  (Bernardet)  (Johnson, Cinema Novo X 5: Masters of Contemporary Brazilian Film)  (Johnson and Stam, Brazilian Cinema)  (Laurier)  (Price)  (Ramos)  (Rocha, Revisão Crítica Do Cinema Brasileiro)  (Rocha, Revolução Do Cinema Novo)  (Salem) |