The *Telenovela* and the Representation of Black Women: A Study From the *Controlling Images* Analytical Category

La telenovela y la representación de las mujeres negras: un estudio a partir de la categoría analítica *imágenes de control*

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ABSTRACT

In Brazil, the telenovela has established itself as one of the most important products of television. Thus, it addresses the differences between social groups and disputes between them. The visibility for these groups that is built from this dynamic becomes a chance to promote their representation, when they see themselves as part of the nation. This study aims to understand the representation of Black women in the scenario of contemporary Brazilian telenovelas, focusing on *Amor de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019–2021). The research consisted of analyzing the protagonists of the first part of this narrative, Camila (Jéssica Ellen) and Vitória (Taís Araújo), based on the analytical category of *controlling images* (Collins, 1990/2019), which unravels the logic that tries to justify the oppression experienced by these women. The results show that these images can be identified isolated and/or combined in the construction of these characters. At times, the telenovela plot questions these images; at others, it reinforces them.

RESUMEN

En Brasil, la telenovela se ha establecido como uno de los productos más importantes de la televisión. Por lo tanto, aborda las diferencias entre los grupos sociales y las disputas entre ellos. La visibilidad para estos grupos que se construye a partir de esta dinámica se convierte en una oportunidad para promover su representación, cuando se ven a sí mismos como parte de la nación. Este estudio tiene como objetivo comprender la representa-

ción de las mujeres negras en el escenario de las telenovelas brasileñas contemporáneas, específicamente, en *Amor de mãe* (Dias y Villamarim, 2019-2021). La investigación consistió en analizar a los protagonistas de la primera parte de esta narrativa, Camila (Jéssica Ellen) y Vitória (Taís Araújo), a partir de la categoría analítica *imágenes de control* (Collins, 1990/2019), que desentraña la lógica que trata de justificar la opresión experimentada por estas mujeres. Los resultados muestran que estas imágenes pueden ser identificadas aisladas o combinadas en la construcción de estos personajes. A veces, la trama de la telenovela cuestiona estas imágenes; en otras, las refuerza.

KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE

Telenovela, representation, Black woman, *Amor de Mãe* / telenovela, representación, mujer negra, *Amor de mãe*

Most Brazilian telenovela plots refer to actual social events. However, narratives require a cutout of a subject and the universe of possibilities and angles to be explored therein. Thus, some themes may become more or less evident depending on what is addressed in each narrative.

Telenovelas have plenty of room in the programming schedule of Brazilian television broadcasters, which sets the recurrent exclusion of a given subject or group as an issue, as it interferes with the audience's possibility of identifying themselves with what is shown in fiction. Historically, the portrayal of Black characters in telenovelas has been disconnected from the Brazilian reality numerically or qualitatively. This understanding is ratified by the sparse number of Black actors and actresses among the casts and by the stereotypes underlying the characterization of these figures (Araújo, 2000/2004).

In this scenario, this study aims to analyze the Black female characters featured in contemporary telenovelas to understand how their construction reflects the current representation of this group. To this end, we will explore the first part of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019–2021), aired by the TV Globo television network between November 25, 2019, and March 21, 2020, created by Manuela Dias and under the artistic direction of José Luiz Villamarim. This extract is justified by the fact that *Amor de Mãe* was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020, preventing the analysis of the whole material at that time.

The research focuses on two characters based on the hypothesis that their leading roles in the telenovela—which are rather unusual for Black characters in the field—provide a more robust analysis, thus highlighting the degree of representation produced in the plot. The characters are Camila, played by Jéssica Ellen, and Vitória, played by Taís Araú-

jo. Such positioning requires analytical procedures that enable the identification of possible advances or reminiscences of the conventional means by which Black women have been portrayed.

Considering this information, the analytical categories will be organized around the concept of *controlling images*, coined by Patricia Hill Collins (1990/2019), which explains the ideological mechanisms trying to sustain oppression against Black women. Although termed differently, similar concepts are presented by the Brazilian thinkers Winnie Bueno (2020) and Lélia Gonzalez (1983/2019).

By understanding that the plot, the construction of characters, and meanings in telenovelas occur chiefly on the narrative sphere (Candido et al., 2009), this analysis is centered on the dialogues and the visual aspects established therein. All the scenes featuring or referencing these characters were included in the analysis.

This work is part of a master's research developed in the Postgraduate Program in Communication and Territorialities of Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo.

Representation: A Journey Ahead

Media products, especially mass products, are valuable spaces for power maintenance and knowledge construction. The dynamics driving these processes are based on the reproduction of dominant logics, consequently emptying the representativeness of dominated groups by either avoiding or associating their representation to distorted, subaltern images (Hooks, 1992/2019). Such logic turns into an experience of discomfort and non-recognition for Black people, especially women, as stated by Hooks (1992/2019).

According to Bueno (2020), in reinforcing this logic, the media plays a fundamental role in maintaining this domination system. For the author, these images solidify certain ideologies while alleviating white guilt as to the historical exploitation of the Black population, ascribing their subordinate position to nature rather than to the long social violence process through which these individuals were denied and deprived of their rights.

In Brazil, some historical aspects may help understand these issues. The country went through a long-lasting enslavement period, an event that still shapes the experience of its Black population. Once it was over, Black people had to overturn the assumptions about their submissive nature while encouraged to adopt white customs to ascend socially (Souza, 1983). Considering this, the dynamics aiming to maintain their subordination were not depleted with the abolition; social mobility represented a challenge for these people. The society soon developed new means to keep them within limited social spaces and encourage them to move away (Souza, 1983).

Dialoguing with psychoanalysis, Gonzalez (1983/2019) states that, despite having hijacked elements from Africa—where most enslaved people were brought from—the Brazilian culture tends to erase these references. A notable example of the imaginary about Black women can be found in the Brazilian carnival *mulata*, name given to the women who perform in the parades of samba schools. These women symbolize Brazilian culture as they parade, especially when considering the extent of the carnival; however, their daily lives are marked by different acts of aggression. This denotes that festive events are but a chance to alleviate the guilt of the dominant groups for the violence perpetrated against these women.

For Gonzalez (1983/2019), this double dimension originates in *mucamas*, enslaved Black women who cared for the homes and children of white families. Such a mechanism seeks to eliminate them from certain spaces, so that the domestic setting would be their ideal sphere even when they reached the middle class.

Bueno (2020) argues that, despite Black women's reactions against these stereotypes, their elimination is not yet a reality, being updated and reinforced in a symbolic way. According to the author, this would be one of the explanations for the insignificant variation in the characterization of Black figures in Brazilian telenovelas, as suggested by Joel Araújo (2000/2004).

To materialize this issue, Campos and Feres Júnior (2015) computed the participation of actresses and actors in Brazilian telenovelas from 1984 to 2014 according to race and gender. The authors found that Black professionals accounted for less than 10% of these casts, and the number fell even further when considering Black women: 3.8%.

Brazilian telenovelas were established as a kind of ideal territory for the construction of an *imagined community*—a term discussed by Vassallo de Lopes (2003). For the author, a major characteristic of these media products is precisely their inclination for dealing with themes inherent to the country's social sphere. By seeing themselves represented on the screen, the different identity groups would recognize themselves as part of this nation.

Couceiro de Lima (2001) highlights the contradictions of this type of statement, as the presence of Black characters does not benefit from the existence of Black people in the reality that is intended to be portrayed (p. 98). In other words, this alleged representation of the Brazilian reality reveals that the national project disseminated in telenovelas instances deals with a limited, excluding portion of the population.

If this oppression is intended to limit the possibilities of identification and identity construction of Black people, then a more forceful reaction to this form of violence

is always possible. According to Hooks (1992/2019), Black women felt impelled to organize a resistance process through their spectatorial status based on the discomfort arising from the erasure of Black figures in media products: even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it opens the possibility of agency (Hooks, 1992/2019, p. 216).

Nevertheless, the reaction to this scenario does not always occur from a self-defined perspective. The telenovela analyzed in this study, *Amor de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019–2021), is a good example of these dynamics. Although this research assumes an update on the representation of Black women in telenovelas through their narrative, creators and directors are non-Black people. In fact, this is only one example of the predominance of non-Black directors in the field of Brazilian telenovelas, as stated by Campos and Feres Júnior (2015).

This indicates that media representation—or the lack of it—is not only about numbers, but also the way diversity is inscribed and disseminated through narratives and discourses that circulate in its products, and rather society. We should also question the extent to which such hypothetical update in terms of representation proposed in *Amor de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019–2021) implies a commercial interest. Although few, the first

steps towards racial diversity in telenovelas were exclusively enabled by the Black movement and Black professionals working in the field (Araújo, 2000/2004).

The arrival of these people in institutions such as the media would instigate the confrontation of narratives promoting segregation and holding dominated groups in subaltern positions. However, as argued by Almeida (2019), racism is not only fought by including Black people in institutions, even in prominent functions, for such movement often mitigates the demands for diversity but maintains the power structures that ensure inequalities.

One of the central topics of this research is related to this aspect. As we assumed that the characters studied in *Amor de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019–2021) could show a break with conventional representations of Black women in the media, the question is to what extent such an update manages to dismantle stereotypes or whether, on the contrary, it relies on a symbolic, less perceptible representation of these same stereotypes, as stated by Bueno (2020).

Having an academic background, the character of Taís Araújo, Vitória, is a good example of these dynamics. Although Camila, played by Jéssica Ellen, also relies on an academic experience, Vitória enjoys a comfortable financial situation enabled by her successful professional

career. This success provides her with a series of privileges, especially monetary, which would make her less likely to hold positions considered subaltern. However, the plot shows that this assumption is not largely confirmed, which will be further discussed in the analysis.

This research also seeks to understand the roles played by Black women in other telenovelas broadcasted at the same time range as *Amor de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019–2021). To this end, these characters will be categorized according to a racial heteroclassification inspired by the method used by the Group for Multidisciplinary Studies of Affirmative Action (GEMAA) (Campos & Feres Júnior, 2015). This will enable a qualitative view of these characters, establishing a diagnosis of the patterns of narrative construction and representation in these plots.

The persistence of racism ensures the continuity of distorted representations of Black women in products such as telenovelas. The issue is aggravated by the potential of these representations to encourage the denial of rights and violence in real life. This is due to racism feedback that prevents self-criticism from the media in fighting the problem while showing the power of market interests in motivating its permanence. This is since challenging an oppressive system so entrenched in the national culture necessarily involves the risk of displeasing the groups benefiting from its continuation.

Controlling Images: Black Female Subjugation Strategies

The analytical process of *Amor de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019–2021) will be guided by some concepts introduced by Lélia Gonzalez (1983/2019) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990/2019), namely what Collins termed *controlling images*. These images refer to stereotyped representations, marked by a hegemonic view, which try to justify and continue the oppression against Black women due to their race, class, and gender.

An important aspect about *controlling images* as a mechanism of domination lies in the fact that they are not constructed by Black women, thus precluding a self-determined perception of their experiences (Bueno, 2020). Such notion is fundamental for understanding the persistence of problematic representation in telenovelas, as noted through the predominance of non-Black directors in the field (Campos & Feres Júnior, 2015). This also occurs in *Amor de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019–2021). These *controlling images* will be further discussed below.

The first *controlling image* presented by Collins (1990/2019) is that of the *mammy*, created to justify the economic exploitation of domestic workers and to tie Black women to this type of service, as if it were their natural duty. The *mammy* is expected to demonstrate a respectful behavior towards her employing families, as well as boundless dedication to work.

According to Collins (1990/2019), such behavior expected from the *mammy* would have a clear pedagogical function among Black communities. Besides caring for the children of the families for which they worked, these women also educated and cared for their own children—in compliance with the dominant logic, which assigns women tasks related to care. Under this logic, Black women should teach such ideal behavior to their children.

To ensure their employment, these women expressed little opposition to these mechanisms—a resistance strategy aimed at guaranteeing their income, but that could convey the false impression that they would passively accept domination without offering any resistance, which is not always true (Collins, 1990/2019).

To date, this image is still associated with Black women in the labor market, even with those outside domestic functions. As a result, these women are constantly pressed to present results, receive lower wages, and are expected to be affectionate, being punished if they do not meet this expectation.

Vitória, one of the characters, can be imagined as the modern form of a *mammy*. She is a lawyer with a successful career. As she holds this position, her clients often request more results from her, even if it involves breaking the law. This situation becomes a conflict when the lawyer wants to devote more time to her personal life (Figure 1).

Both opposing to and complementing the image of the *mammy*, the second *controlling image* is that of the *matriarch*. This image emerged from the moment when Black women, freed from slavery, had to perform degrading work in the homes of white families to maintain their own. As the time spent working would prevent them from devoting due time to educating their children, this image was widely used to explain the violence and poverty rates among the Black population in the United States. In this case, care and education were responsibilities also attributed to women. Unlike the *mammy*, a positive image due to her respectful posture, the matriarch is considered a "bad mother" who would not devote due time to her family and would castrate the masculinity of her significant other by assuming the role of provider and head of the household. According to Collins (1990/2019), the imaginary of the matriarch interferes in the relationship between Black women and men, who tend to despise them due their excessive firmness. This image evokes the notion that matriarch-like behaviors are unwanted for entailing negative consequences for the lives of these women, who should aim for the "inverse" image: the *mammy*.

The characters of *Amor de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019–2021) show non-submissive behaviors in different contexts of the telenovela. Sometimes this characteristic help them be understood as assertive women. In the story, this is not shown as

61

Figure 1

Vitória Discusses With Her Client, Álvaro

Note. Screenshot retrieved from ''Chapter 51'' [Telenovela episode], by M. Dias et al., 2020c, January 22, *Amor de Mãe*, Estúdios Globo.

a determining factor for affective relationships; however, most of the partners of both characters are not black. None of the men with whom Vitória relates is Black, except her first husband, Fabio (Fabrício Boliveira). This reinforces the separation between Black women and Black men. Camila is just in one relationship during the telenovela, also with a white man.

The next image emerges in the context of social policy expansion in the United States as a result of social mobilization: the *welfare mother*. With this image, Black women are seen as single, accommodated people who receive financial aid from the State, and thus as individuals that do not properly value work. To explain the interest in controlling the fecundity of these women, the spectrum of such image suggests a fertile, "procreative" woman.

This construct emerges from the development of social welfare policies aimed at the Black population in a moment of shrinking job opportunities due to factors such as the use of illegal immigrant workforce, causing much of this population to remain idle. Such situation was deemed as a risk to the country's economic security, so that interfering with the reproduction of Black women meant to impose limits on spending on these social welfare policies.

From the 1980s onwards, this image is termed as the *welfare queen*, adding the characteristics of consumerists and materialists to the aforementioned ones, thus blaming Black women for the economic fragility of the United States at the time. It is not by chance that the image emerges at the same time as authorities were trying to reduce social spending in the country.

Collins (1990/2019) then addresses the image of the *Black lady*, a young woman capable of ascending socially by studying and working. For the author, the *Black lady* can be read as a modern version of the *mammy*, as her professional success would depend on her commitment, which would consequently reduce the time spent with her family and the possibilities of establishing relationships.

The matriarch likewise helps to understand the *Black lady*, for both are considered harsh or too assertive in the spaces they occupy. The *Black lady* also resembles the *welfare mother/queen*, as these hardworking women achieved greater access to spaces such as the academia and certain positions in the labor market by means of affirmative actions. As a result, these women were considered impostors, serving as yet another justification for reducing social welfare policies and affirmative actions aimed at the Black population.

There is a difference between Camila and Vitória's classes. At the beginning of the story, Vitória is a rich woman, not dependent of social welfare policies. Camila, on

other hand, is a poor woman. Even if it is not stated, she may have needed to access higher education through these social welfare policies. The commitment toward work and studies, shown in both cases, recalls the behavior of *Black ladies*, especially when their firmness makes other people uncomfortable (Figure 2).

The last *controlling image* discussed by the author is that of *jezebel*, originated from slavery under the idea that Black women would naturally have an excessive sexual appetite and increased fertility, justifying the constant sexual assaults against them. Such imagery also legitimizes the economic exploitation of Black women in slavery, for they were deemed as reproductive beings and alienated from their families, thus hampering the strengthening of these resistance networks.

This image was later turned into the *hoochie*, a term used to categorize Black women as sexually available, but with certain variations. The first derivation is that of the *plain hoochie,* a naturally assertive woman who very much resembles the matriarch. *Club hoochies* were Black women who would wear provocative clothing to clubs and dance to attract men for sexual purposes. In turn, the *gold-digging hoochies* sought relationships with highly paid men, often using pregnancy to achieve their goal. Finally, the image of the *hoochie mamma* represents Black women who would

provide sexual favors and, as *mammies*, they would find in this practice a means to provide for the economic maintenance of their children.

For Collins (1990/2019), such an image also carries a well-defined symbolic function regarding the division of roles according to genders. If heterosexuality is based on a binary notion that assigns active roles for men and passive roles for women, the *hoochies* would attest the existence of deviant sexual practices among Black women. Such a deviation is considered in relation to women who would have sex in exchange for money, and even those who would practice lesbian, anal, or oral sex.

As discussed by Gonzalez (1983/2019), the concept of *mulata* also relates to this image, for the provision of sexual services to white men was the other key role of Black women enslaved in Brazil. Many of them based on sexual abuse, relations between white men and Black women posed a risk to the prevailing economic order. Although samba school parades would highlight the sensuality inherent to Black women, these are spaces to which their access would always be restricted as a way to ensure their permanence within places that were thought for them.

Perhaps the sexual image is not so explored in *Amor de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019–2021). Although sexuality is

Figure 2
Camila Speaks During Her Graduation

Note. Screenshot retrieved from "Chapter 1" [Telenovela episode], by M. Dias et al., 2019a, November 25, *Amor de Mãe*, Estúdios Globo.

at the center of the construction of *controlling images* and the very theme of the telenovela, the exploration of this subject through Vitória and Camila does not seek to typify their sexual behaviors, just like the image of a *hoochie*.

Controlling images differ from stereotypes and representations because they arise from the power of dominant groups in naming certain social elements (Bueno, 2020). Thus, as stated by Gonzalez (1983/2019), they work as the basis for the continuity of racist behaviors and for denying social justice to these women. These images are symbols that avoid the autonomy and self-affirmation of Black women (Bueno, 2020), so that, at the same time as they are established as logic, they equip themselves with mechanisms to avoid any type of action contesting their permanence.

The dynamism of *controlling images* would be one of these mechanisms. These images are adjusted according to the resistance movements among the people they seek to oppress (Bueno, 2020), enabled by their dialectical dimension. With that, dominated groups can attribute positive meanings to *controlling images* thought as negative, just as they might appropriate positive conceptions to make them negative (Bueno, 2020).

This is a truly relevant reflection to this study because it evinces that the dynamics of oppression do not stagnate but imply multiple dimensions containing the different reactions that may threaten its continuity. If the media is one of the main means of disseminating these images (Bueno, 2020), then it is increasingly important for us to observe to what extent the latest appearances of Black women in telenovelas reflect this complex relationship between domination and common resistance.

Who Are the Black Protagonists of *Amor de Mãe*?

The debut of Manuela Dias as a telenovela creator occurred during prime time. The author had previously worked on texts for TV series such as *Above Justice* (Gabriela, 2016), which revolves around stories that interconnect through four crimes that occurred on the same night in Recife. Although short, her career as main author shows her tendency towards social criticism, constructing plots with a strong interlace of the characters' paths.

From its beginning, *Amor de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019–2021) ratifies such a trend. The first scene of the telenovela portrays Lurdes (Regina Casé), the mother of Camila dos Santos Silva, being interviewed by Vitória Amorim for a job position as a nanny. Lurdes adopted Camila after finding her when she was still a newborn, on a road in Malaquitas, a fictional city in the state of Rio Grande do Norte. She grew up in the city of Rio de Janeiro, where her mother moved to along with

her other children: Magno (Juliano Ca-zarré), Ryan (Thiago Martins), and Erica (Nanda Costa).

Being the first of the family to graduate from a university, Camila is presented during her commencement ceremony in the history course. As the student speaker, she recounts the difficulties faced by her mother in caring for the whole family and ensuring her education.

Once graduated, Camila starts teaching at a public school in Rio de Janeiro; in fact, several of the character's actions are driven by education, resembling the image of the *Black lady* discussed by Collins (1990/2019), for Camila constantly recalls her hard work to access higher education.

However, Camila's career calls into question the oppression underlying this and other images. If Black women occupy limited social positions determined by a ruling class, Camila contests such assertion through her profession and, particularly, through the relationship built with her students. Her classes deal with social exclusion, defending education as an essential tool for facing this reality, reliving her path through the experiences of her students. Therefore, she seeks to promote critical awareness among them.

By bringing these topics to school, the character confronts oppression, especially the one arising from the social class sphere. Her position in the school envi-ronment indicates her longing for making students perceive the forms of social exclusion acting upon them (Figure 3).

Other interesting issues arise from the relationship between Camila and her mother-in-law, Thelma (Adriana Esteves), who get closer after Camila starts a romantic relationship with Thelma's son, Danilo (Chay Suede), a relationship that was induced by both of their mothers. Although at first annoyed by the situation, Camila and Danilo end up falling in love after getting to know each other without any interference from their mothers. When they start dating, Thelma is thrilled by the possibility of having a grandchild and, given the opposition of the couple, pricks their condoms to induce pregnancy.

However, Camila suffers a miscarriage and needs to have her uterus removed due to some complications. Frustrated, Thelma offers herself to be a surrogate mother for Camila and Danilo, who accept. This situation provokes some conflicts between Thelma and Camila, who feels that her mother-in-law interferes too much in childcare, excluding her from her own motherhood.

A striking characteristic of Thelma is her fixation on exercising control over her son, which extends to her daughter-in-law. Nevertheless, other issues revolve around her relationship with Camila. As argued by Collins (1990/2019), sexuality is a key element in thinking about *con-*

Figure 3

Top: Camila Vents on Her Mother at the Hospital
Bottom: The Teacher Tries to Protect the School Where She Works During a Shooting

trolling images. In forging a pregnancy desired only by herself, Thelma nullifies Camila's reproductive rights. After the birth of her grandson, Thelma does not prioritize Camila's decisions about the child, even after being warned of her excessive intervention. Such alienation from the care of her own children resembles the image of the matriarch, who is considered guilty of the "bad education" of Black children.

Thus, whereas images such as the *mammy* foster a dehumanization rooted on its explicit association with childcare and household chores, a contrary movement may be observed in Camila. Thelma's actions—and Danilo's little reaction to them—help nullify Camila's subjectivity in her experience as a mother. That creates the feeling that Camila is but a distant family member, or even less, for her opinions on raising her own child are at times ignored.

We should mention that Camila is assertive in her positioning whenever she feels uncomfortable, which is mostly expressed by using her voice. Her speeches are straightforward when addressing oppression related to race, gender, and class crossing her story, as in the excerpt from the chapter aired on January 13, 2020, below:

> É, mãe, mas o problema é esse. Eu sempre vou ter que ser forte? Sempre? Eu tenho que ser forte porque a gente é pobre e eu quero estudar. Aí eu tenho que passar de primeira porque eu não posso perder nenhuma chance, nenhuma! Eu tenho que ser forte porque eu sou mulher e para mulher tudo é mais difícil. Eu tenho que aguentar sempre um babaca olhando para o meu peito ao invés de prestar atenção no que eu tenho a dizer. Eu tenho que ser forte porque eu sou preta e a gente vive num país racista. Eu tenho que ser forte porque eu sou professora; porque eu tentei ajudar os meus alunos, eu tomei tiro. Eu tenho que ser forte. Eu tô cansada, mãe, eu tô cansada! Eu tô cansada de ser forte. Eu não vou poder ser fraca nenhum dia, nenhuma vez na minha vida? [Yeah, mom, but that's the problem. Will I always have to be strong? Always? I have to be strong because we are poor, and I want to study. Then, I have to get into university at the first try because I can't miss a chance! I have to be strong because I'm a woman, and everything is harder when you are a woman. I always have to put up with an asshole looking at my chest instead of paying attention to what I have to say. I have to be strong because I'm Black, and we live in a racist country. I have to be strong because I'm a teacher; trying to help my students, I got shot. I have to be strong. I'm tired, mom, I'm tired! I'm tired of being strong. Will I ever be able to be weak, once in my life?] (Dias et al., 2020b, 15:25).

69

Camila's position suggests this linearity in the character's values. Her characterization reinforces this idea since it is almost not changed during the plot. Her hair is natural, and her clothes show many African references. Even if it is unknown if Camila follows any religion, the elements of her clothing indicate, at least, a relationship with the Afro-Brazilian religions. This aspect reveals the character's recognition of the importance of the Black people's culture that preceded her historically (Figure 4).

In turn, being a successful lawyer who owns a law firm in Rio de Janeiro, Vitória experiences quite a different reality. From the beginning of the story, motherhood is a central topic in her plot due to a child she had lost in an advanced stage of pregnancy. Concerned about her age, Vitória believes that the priority of her marriage to Paulo (Fabrício Boliveira) should be a child. Therefore, besides trying to get pregnant, she also waits for the conclusion of the adoption process. However, their marriage goes into crisis after Vitória discovers that Paulo betrays her, believing her insistence on becoming a mother to be one of the reasons. After the divorce, Vitória realizes that her project of being a mother did not necessarily require the presence of Paulo—the only Black man with whom she relates throughout the plot.

The story does not provide us with much detail about her life. We do not know whether the adoption process was initiated by the couple or only by Vitória; in fact, after leaving the house he shared with Vitória, Paulo is no longer portrayed in the narrative. Although explored in few scenes, Vitória's relationship with her husband reinforces the supposed Black men's rejection of Black women. *Controlling images* such as the *matriarch* and the *Black lady* incorporate this conception to portray the emotional loneliness of Black women as a punishment for their conquests or for failing in suppressing their longings in their positioning.

The construction of this character already shows an association with the matriarch in the first week. If this *controlling image* suggests that Black women would tend not to provide due care for their children, this character shows the opposite: Vitória is portrayed as controlling precisely in her desire for becoming a mother. In planning to get on with a frayed marriage to satisfy a desire of her own, her obstinacy is confused with this rigid image (excerpt from the chapter aired on November 26, 2019):

> VITÓRIA — Eu não vou me separar, Paulo. Se você se envolveu e tá tendo um casinho fora do casamento, a gente conversa e se acerta.
>
> PAULO — Não é um casinho. Eu tô apaixonado.
>
> VITÓRIA — Não inventa, Paulo! Não inventa. Não inventa. Paulo... o pro-

Figure 4

Camila Talks to Her Students During One of Her Classes

Note. Screenshot retrieved from ¨Chapter 4¨ [Telenovela episode], by M. Dias et al., 2019c, November 28,
Amor de Mãe, Estúdios Globo.

cesso de engravidar ele tá chato. Eu sei disso. Só que a gente tem um objetivo aqui que é botar um neném na minha barriga.

PAULO — Esse é o seu objetivo, Vitória. O meu, agora, é me separar.

VITÓRIA — Não, se é para falar sobre isso, é melhor a gente dormir.

PAULO — Será que você consegue uma vez respeitar o desejo do outro? Por isso que o nosso casamento acabou: você quer mandar em tudo!

VITÓRIA — O nosso casamento não acabou, Paulo.

PAULO — O nosso casamento está acabando agora!

[VITÓRIA. I'm not going to divorce, Paulo. If you got involved and you're having a little affair, we'll talk and get it right.

PAULO. It's not a little affair. I'm in love.

VITÓRIA. Bullshit, Paulo! Bullshit. Bullshit. Paulo... the process of getting pregnant is boring. I know that. But our goal here is to put a baby in my belly.

PAULO. This is your goal, Vitória. My goal, now, is to get a divorce.

VITÓRIA. No, if we're going to talk about it, we'd better get some sleep.

PAULO. Can you at least once respect another person's wishes? That's why our marriage is over: you want to rule everything!

VITÓRIA. Our marriage isn't over, Paulo.

PAULO. Our marriage is ending now!] (Dias et al., 2019b, 48:13).

The adoption process is completed soon after the divorce and, with the arrival of her first child, Vitória realizes that motherhood will demand changes in her routine, for the time spent with work could interfere with childcare. This issue is highlighted through her relationship with one of her main clients, Álvaro (Irandhir Santos), president and shareholder of a plastic factory.

Vitória knows, condones, and even benefits from Álvaro's illegal actions as a considerable amount of the money she receives for her services is not declared. The turning point of such endorsement is the very moment when Vitória's eldest son is detained by the police for allegedly participating in a looting on the beach. He and other children are taken to a forest under the orders of Belizário (Tuca Andrada), a police officer and some sort of henchman for Álvaro who had even been defended by Vitória (Figure 5).

Figure 5
Top: Vitória Tears Her Service Contract to Álvaro
Bottom: The Character Awaits Healthcare Services for Her Child

Note. Screenshots retrieved from [*top*] "Chapter 56" [Telenovela episode], by M. Dias et al., 2020d, January
28, *Amor de Mãe*, Estúdios Globo; and from [*bottom*] "Chapter 72" [Telenovela episode], by M. Dias et al.,
2020f, February 15, *Amor de Mãe*, Estúdios Globo.

73

The story of Vitória undergoes a turn-around when she ends the contract with the businessman, who submits a complaint against the lawyer, making her lose the right to practice her profession. Facing financial problems, Vitória moves into a much simpler house and starts working as a seamstress for a living. However, such a turnaround seems unreal as, even after breaking up with her main client and losing her license, we would expect her to have some financial reserve after being in charge of a well-known law firm for years. Somehow, this change seems oriented towards making the character live experiences explainable by *controlling images*, which forge an imaginary of Black women as poor, single mothers, who depend on public services. At this stage of her life, Vitória faces the precariousness of access to public healthcare when trying to treat her sick son, spends sleepless nights managing all the work, and even resorts to a loan shark.

Then, her story undergoes yet another turnaround when she nurtures a romantic relationship with Raul (Murilo Benício), a boyfriend from her teenage years. In an effort to help her, Raul pays her debt without her knowing, which makes her feel deeply offended. When Vitória confronts Raul about this action, he proposes marriage to her. Once married, Vitória reestablished her living standards at the beginning of the story, but most of the financial resources are provided by Raul. This moment of the plot reveals a certain

dependence of Vitória on Raul. Although she is resistant in complying with the situation at first, the unfolding of the narrative contributes to portraying her as a woman who does not depend on the State, but on a male provider, and thus as a *gold-digging hoochie.*

Unlike Camila's, Vitória's characterization is not so linear. This is because it accompanies these changes in her financial reality and in her values. At the beginning of the story, her look is more formal, more connected with the exercise of her profession. Then, the characterization became simpler when she was prevented from working as a lawyer. Finally, when she regains the right to practice her profession, she returns with more sophisticated clothing but with slightly lighter and less formal colors. Her hair is also natural. At the beginning, it was tied many times, but was later seen freed more often (Figure 6).

These constant turnarounds in the characters' stories, especially in Vitória's, provide plenty material for discussing representativeness. Perceiving their construction from multiple angles helps understanding the correlation between the experiences lived by real women and by those portrayed in the fiction.

Controlling images are not static; they are dynamic. They may be interconnected and, often, when escaping from one, women may fall into another (Bueno,

Figure 6
Vitória Takes Care of Her Home While She is Not Able to Work as a Lawyer

Note. Screenshot retrieved from "Chapter 64" [Telenovela episode], by M. Dias et al., 2020e, February 6,
Amor de Mãe, Estúdios Globo.

2020). The reading of these characters reveals that *controlling images* explain much of the construction and the events employed in the dramatic narrative. Yet, the influence of each of these images is not determined by clear cut borders; rather, they provide a profusion of possible references in Vitória and Camila.

Final Considerations

The leading roles of Vitória and Camila foster pertinent discussions about representativeness. The longer screen time provides more space for a rich construction of their story. The narrative style favors this approach, allowing the alternation among different plot segments. Likewise, the text provides a fertile ground for confronting certain historical and contemporary social issues.

Although the *controlling images* proposed by Collins (1990/2019) were inserted in a different context, the concept proved particularly useful for discussing this research object. Such applicability accounts for the similarities in the cultural formations of the two countries, especially regarding the legacy of the historical enslavement process and its imprint on the Black population. In applying these concepts, we reinforce Collins' (1990/2019) claim about the possibility of a shared perspective among Black women in different geographical and social contexts.

The results show that the construction of characters imply a flow between the *controlling images*, which are used as a resource in the narrative. On the other hand, the recurrence of these images throughout the plot reveals that breaking with them still falls into implicit limits. At times, these images are contested by the characters; at others, they are constantly evoked, thus reorganizing and reinforcing them.

This research is relevant for advancing knowledge on the specifications underlying the reproduction of racism and sexism in telenovelas. The prominence of these media products in Brazil highlights the need for continuous monitoring capable of identifying and challenging representations that contravene the experience of Black women.

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