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MATERNAL LOVE, TOO MUCH LOVE, EVIL LOVE: images of the Brazilian telenovela Amor de mãe

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Abstract

This study examines the second part of the Brazilian telenovela *Amor de Mãe* (Manuela Dias; 2019/2021, Rede Globo de Televisão), resumed almost a year after its broadcasting interruption on March 21, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses on the maternal ties established by the main characters and on the aesthetic arrangements of domestic interactions installed in shell-houses/dungeon-houses, whose configurations can be transformed by sensitive appropriations that re-signify architectural (and affective) spaces, that is: 'homes' can become 'prisons' and vice versa. Acting as a symptom field, the framings and consequent television images under analysis depict reenactments alluding to social partitioning in multiple contexts of power relations.

Keywords

Brazilian telenovela; *Amor de mãe*; Family ties; Shell-house/dungeon-house; Symptom field.

Introduction

Amor de mãe (A Mother's Love), written by Manuela Dias and with artistic direction by José Luiz Villamarim, was a Brazilian telenovela whose plot revolved around the ambiguities, distortions, and pathologies that make up the dynamics of family relations. Produced and broadcasted by *TV Globo* — premiered on November 25, 2019, at 9:00 p.m.—, it featured among the network's fictional products which had its broadcast and production affected by the new coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19): on March 21, 2020, production was shut down due to COVID-19 proliferation in Brazil. After five months of studies and planning to create safety protocols, work resumed in August and the broadcast of the so-called 'second part' of *Amor de Mãe* began on March 15, 2021, almost a year after its interruption.

From the beginning, the telenovela under study sought to build critical relations with the physical and social space recognized and/or experienced by the viewer, creating characters linked to environmental causes, struggles for education and health, and the respective corrupt and militia antagonists¹. The fraying and consequent installation of ruptures in the fabric of social relations, particularly as they relate to the family, which drove *Amor de Mãe's* narrative since its inception, were to some extent intensified and emphasized in the second part—not least due to plot abbreviation, which deepened conflicts and resolutions aiming to quickly reach climaxes and conclusion plateaus².

Our analysis provides a closer look at the narrative, whose focus is directed at the course of routine life, the characters' particular stories—which continued in the foreground of the second part: Lurdes (Regina Casé), for example, persists in the search for her missing son, Domênico (Chay Suede); Thelma (Adriana Esteves), in turn, remains committed to hiding the secrets on how she became Danilo's mother (Chay Suede). In this perspective, this study, part of a research project³ on the reiteration of depictions of physical and affective imprisonment in Brazilian telenovelas broadcast by TV Globo, seeks to examine how the characters Lurdes and Thelma, who give life to the main maternal figures in the plot, build affective bonds that at times result in possibilities of acceptance and sharing and union, at other times become immobilizing constraints and separating dissensions (Amado and Dominguez, 2004). Familial bonds, thus, reveal themselves as a motivating power of meanings and re-significations, of ways of life and nonlinear forms of coexistence, providing links and fissures; knots and cuts; identifications and differences.

Through aesthetic arrangements, the different modes of cohabitation observable in the analyzed episodes of *Amor de Mãe – Part 2* show family ties that are constituted 1) by shackle ties, depicting voluntary cohabitation (usually established in places traditionally recognized as 'home'); 2) by imposition (which can be physical or affective), or 3) interrupted (where the subject is removed from 'home' to create—or not—new networks of affections), figurative either by the image of the shell-house (Bachelard, 1989) or in the image of the dungeon-house (Autor 1, 2006), resulting in domestic spaces that become enclosures and enclosures that are transformed into homes.

1 Maria Immacolata Vassalo de Lopes (2009) emphasizes the character of "narrative of the nation" inherent to Brazilian telenovela: discussing culture in Brazil would require examining the telenovela, an aesthetic and cultural product that becomes a national identity expression. "This status achieved by the telenovela is responsible for its, if not unique, at least peculiar, character of being a 'national narrative' that has become a 'communicative resource' capable of communicating cultural representations that advocate, or at least tends to advocate, for social inclusion, environmental responsibility, respect for difference, building citizenship" (p. 22). Not gratuitously recurrent in telenovelas are "the identification between fictional characters and real public figures, between the plots and real issues, and the tendency towards greater verisimilitude in the stories told, a strong demand from the audience itself" (p. 26).

2 This second part broadcasted 23 episodes (against 102 in the first part). Due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, about 30 planned episodes were suppressed, child actors were little used, parallel plots were abandoned or quickly resolved.

3 We highlight other works published on the telenovela *Amor de mãe*, including analyses related to its first part, to build dialogues between studies.

Considering fiction as a document of its time, the telenovela under analysis enables a “documentary reading” (Odin, 1985), and “one of the ways to activate this type of reading are the stylistic resources used in audiovisual texts (...)” (Lopes, 2009, p. 37). Looked into by an interested, scrutinizing eye attentive to aesthetic solutions and diegetic directions, not always direct at televisual dramaturgy, the image depicted on screen allows to critically weave considerations about sociological, topological, architectural, etc. instances that define and reassert pre-established standards—which, once conveniently unveiled and “unmasked,” can be subverted. In this perspective, telenovela is understood here as a symptom field, interpreting audiovisual communication products as socio-historical phenomena, media processes that, according to José Luiz Braga (2011), enable society to perceive itself in dialogue.

Importantly, the present analysis is not mere dilettantism, or an exercise in applying concepts and precepts pertaining to, for example, plastic semiotics: albeit a televisual⁴ entertainment product highly popular in Brazil, telenovelas can go beyond themselves, that is, just as speech and writing can say more (or less) of what the genre allows and what the addresser (the artist, the creator) consciously sets out to say.

Homes that store maternal love

Familial ties, according to Ana Amado and Nora Domínguez (2004), are those that can strengthen affective bonds or tighten/stretch interactions in exercises of power, until fraying them. Aesthetically, such bonds are established in *Amor de mãe* in the three domestic settings: i) the house Lurdes shares with her three children and granddaughter; ii) the house in which Thelma lives with her son, daughter-in-law, and grandson; and iii) the enclosure in which Lurdes is imprisoned and kept under Thelma’s surveillance.

These dwelling spaces can configure what Gaston Bachelard (1989, p. 197) called “shell-house,” a welcoming place in which “to curl up belongs to the phenomenology of the verb to inhabit, and only those who have learned to do so can inhabit with intensity.” As such, one would seek one’s corner in the world: curled up, the subject would feel at home, finding there a place that is coincidentally outside and inside; conveniently sheltered, they would understand the world in their roundness. To focus on oneself is to embody a universe and appropriate it aesthetically and “*esthetically*”.

If, for Bachelard, inhabiting means curling up, for Milton Santos it would be associated with the interactive movement of the *landscape*, understood as everything that is within our field of vision, as when one is on top of a building or walking down the street. In this case, the landscape is re-signified into a space determined by an articulated set of things and beings related to *seeing*, *perceiving*, and *inhabiting* sensitive experiences: “Space must be considered as an inseparable whole in which participate, on the one hand, a certain arrangement of geographical objects, natural objects and social objects, and, on the other, the life that fills and animates them, that is, society in motion” (Santos, 1988, p. 26). Santos argues that “society would be the being, and space would be existence” (1988, p. 27), which recalls Martin Heidegger’s (1979) concept of inhabiting as *being-in-the-world* and *being* this world, knowing and possessing the place that is revealed between the sensitive mediations of affective and communicative relations.

Thus, the image of the family home may take root in the anesthetic landscape of a home environment delimited by the partitioning (Foucault, 2014) and compressed by the rarefaction of physical and affective appropriations; or in the aesthetic space made up by the fluid and undulating relational movement inherent to the vicissitudes of cohabitation that allows, according to its environmental characteristics, appropriating and understanding a *being-in-the-world* (Autor 2, 2021). In this vein, the

4 Our use of the expression ‘albeit’ points to the persistent notion, not only in common sense, but also in certain intellectual and academic groups, that television productions, due to their supporting medium and the characteristics of their target audience, hardly find space and conditions for elaborate aesthetic arrangements or major artistic experimentations. We do not share this understanding.

aesthetic space would be figurative by the image of the shell-house (Bachelard, 1989) and the anesthetic landscape by the image of the dungeon-house (Autor 1, 2006, p. 120), which insidiously imprisons more than benevolently embraces. In *Amor de Mãe*, the houses on screen are run by (Lurdes' and Thelma's) matriarchal power, like a large womb that gestates and shelters (or imprisons) its children.

Built little by little, the walls show marks and patches, revealing an architecture that has been assembled and reassembled, incorporating a myriad of lean-to additions, which even results in windows—elements that conventionally create cracks between inside and outside limits—opening into interior rooms. Lurdes and their children are repeatedly framed in these peculiar framings, which ensure interaction between family members: even when they occupy different rooms, those windows create communicating gaps and deconstruct the traditional architectural borders which demarcate hierarchies and cause isolation (Figure 01).

Figure 01 – frames of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*



Source: Globoplay

In the house Lurdes shares with her children, the architectural organization—whose usual partitionings determine, in Foucauldian terms, hierarchies of domination by means of divisions in which bodies are imprisoned within strict powers, which impose constraints, prohibitions, obligations (Foucault, 2014, p. 134), thus projecting the *docility* of the bodies—overcomes boundaries: the rooms are split, ensuring little to no restricted accessibility to its inhabitants. Due to windows atypically located indoors, the walls allow for crossings, so that the eventual (and so frequent) family ‘secrets’ can be easily shared, in an intersecting dynamic that tends to foster and consolidate bonds of trust among family members. We see the children take care of their mother, just as she watches over them. Occasionally, we witness role reversals: at times Lurdes lectures her children, at times they set rules in the house.

If the indoor windows are the main architectural structure in Lurdes and her children’s house, in Thelma’s, which despite a tragic past fire is still standing, we have an abyss perspective, through which a long corridor leads to the bathroom. In one of the scenes, aired on the March 15 episode, Thelma walks down this corridor, emerging from the back of the house; initially her image is blurred, until her face—whose clouded features betray concern or discomfort—takes over the screen, framed in the foreground:

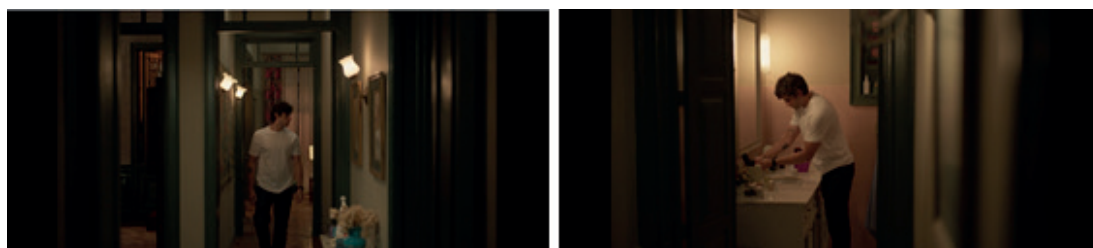
Figure 02 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de mãe*



Source: Globoplay

In another scene, her son Danilo, arriving from the street, is shown walking along the same corridor in a similar abyss perspective, but this time inverted; reaching the bathroom, whose background framing does not hide its small dimensions (a room that is purposely located at the end of the corridor, as if abruptly obstructing its path), the character seems to us, despite the open door, somewhat cornered:

Figure 03 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de mãe*



Source: Globoplay

Supposedly the room that most protects the subject's body privacy (once the door is closed, in deference to the moment of intimacy protected there, no one, except some unsuspecting person, will try to open it), the bathroom—like the corridor—acquires important contours in the scene following the crime committed by Thelma: returning home after faking her friend Jane's suicide, Danilo's godmother, the killer crosses the corridor and heads directly to this room (Figure 04), immediately closing the door behind her and taking shelter in the shower (a symbolic attempt to cleanse herself?). By faking Jane's suicide (who had just discovered her secrets), leaving her unconscious and locked inside the car to die suffocating, Thelma also forges her friend's handwriting in a farewell note. In the shower, trapped in the cramped stall space, she remembers—in voice off—words she had uttered:

I'm stuck, completely alone, so alone that there is no one around that I can blame. I could have opened up to someone, I could have told the truth, yeah, but who would understand me. I just hope my son will forgive me someday, that everyone will forgive me. I hope I can even one day forgive myself. I did what I could. (*Amor de Mãe*, Ep. 15/03/21, 01h05m27s-01h06m14s.)

Obviously, the content of the message that Thelma would have us believe is from Jane talking about herself, locked in that bathroom, trying uselessly to rid herself of all the filth she created. Thelma knows she is alone and stuck, imprisoned in (family and social) relations established based on an intricate web of secrets and lies, culminating in images that configure a kind of labyrinthine funnel at the end of which excrement is deposited and obscene actions are hidden.

Figure 04 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de mãe*



Source: Globoplay

The domestic imprisonments on screen, which unveil to the audience the inside and outside of Thelma's home, are emphatically figurative by the labyrinthine corridor, by the framings of closed or insurmountable doors, by the isotopic reiterations of bars alluding to a prison architecture:

Figure 05 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de mãe*



Source: Globoplay

Note that Camila, Lurdes' daughter who leaves her mother's house to live with Thelma alongside her husband Danilo and their son, is at no point shown walking down this corridor. Aware that she is seen by her mother-in-law as an intruder who must be cast out or exterminated at any cost, she joins her partner in his efforts to escape from there, but the repeated attempts to find another place to live are always hindered, frustrated by one problem or another. The breakup only takes place when Camila, after receiving a call from the mother she thought dead, finally leaves the house taking the baby with her—although without the child's father: at that moment, in a scene that is interspersed with that of the young woman's escape, Danilo discovers he is Domênico, Lurdes' missing son.

In analyzing the images revealing the architectural construction of Lurdes' and Thelma's family

houses, especially the parallelisms between the plane of expression and the plane of content⁵, we observe that such scenography produces meanings and creates contrasting or even radically opposed effects.

Lurdes and her offspring live in a cozy home, a shell-house where the residents, sheltered, share experiences through physical and affective presence. The precarious building, built with difficulty and in stages, without the guidance of a previously defined architectural project, refers to the reality of many migrants who, lacking financial and family planning, lose and acquire children along the way⁶ and still resist, keeping themselves afloat due to joint efforts.

The house in which Thelma lives with her son, in turn, does not facilitate or even allow for unobstructed transpositions: the corridor, in theory a space of active and shared circulation, abruptly ends into the excluding space of the bathroom. Throughout the plot, the characters are often shown static, standing at the thresholds of doors that seem to function not as openings but as delimiting interactions. Boundaries, rarely crossed, are overcome with difficulty. It is a divided dwelling, in which disciplinary apparatuses work on the principle of elementary location, implying in a *partitioning* in which “each individual has his own place; and each place its individual,” and whose logic avoids “distributions in groups,” the breakup of “collective dispositions,” and the analysis of “confused, massive or transient pluralities” (Foucault, 2014, p. 140). A home that limits and hides, whose patroness forges kinships (she buys Domênico, Lurdes’ youngest son, to raise him as Danilo, thus replacing the baby she lost in the fire), subtracts people (murders her friend, tries to kill her daughter-in-law, keeps Lurdes in captivity to annihilate her), offers herself as a surrogate to gestate Camila and Danilo/Domênico’s child to further her own interests (an attempt to extend her power over the couple or already foreseeing the possibility of later kidnapping their baby?), prepares decoys and traps. In Thelma’s domains—constituted by a dungeon-house that allows no escape routes—, the son remains a stifled figure, suffocated under the weight of a hypertrophied and castrating mother, always committed to manipulating and preserving a hierarchical network of restrictions and control.

If the plot of *Amor de mãe* depicts Lurdes’ house as a shell and Thelma’s as a dungeon, it also provides a third topological instance that, from the same architectural structure, will become both a prison (an enclosure-house) and a gap for reconfigurations (a house-enclosure). A particularly subversive location, which transforms the subjected into subjects by re-signifying roles and places—thus configuring an atypical space, which within the telenovela, aggregates characters and functions from unusual liabilities and appropriations, such as a shell and a dungeon.

Maternal love: enclosures and escape routes

The moment Lurdes discovers that Danilo is her son Domênico, Thelma devises a plan to remove the biological mother from the picture: she leads her friend to a remote location, lying that she had bought a house so that both families could live together. As in her house, the corridor stands out as the main feature in the architectonic structure of the location; as do the windows, reminiscent of Lourdes’ daily life. The viewers are soon presented with the shackles that await the prisoner, figurative in the plane

5 For Jean-Marie Floch (2001), the meanings given by the plane of expression and the plane of content, when juxtaposed, constitute semi-symbolic systems. The plane of expression is “the plane where the sensible qualities that a language has to manifest itself are selected and articulated among themselves by differential variations.” The plane of content is “the plane where meaning arises from the differential variations thanks to which each culture, in order to think the world, orders and chains ideas and discourse” (p. 09). There is a distinction between the levels of form and substance of each plane: “the form is the organization, invariant and purely relational, that articulates the sensible matter or the conceptual matter of a plane, thus producing meaning”; and “the substance is the matter, the variable support that form articulates. Substance is therefore the materialization, at a given moment, of the form” (p. 11).

6 Note that the character Lurdes, as she leaves the small town of Malaquitas, in the northeastern backlands, in search of her son Domênico, sold by his father, to Rio de Janeiro, finds and adopts an abandoned baby on the road, thus becoming Camila’s mother.

composition of Thelma's feet framed next to chains:

Figure 06 – frames of the telenovela Amor de Mãe

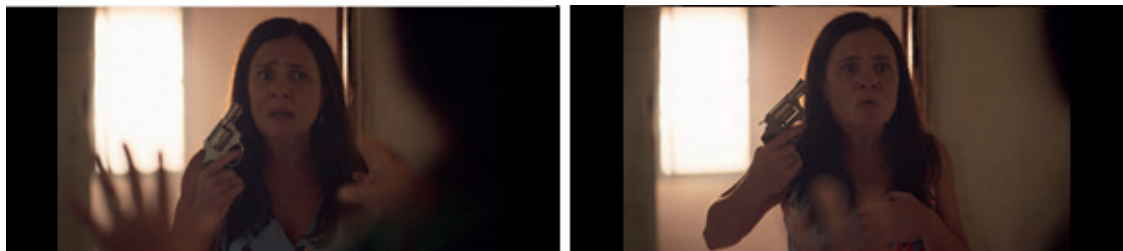


Source: Globoplay

There, when Thelma is revealed to be carrying a revolver, it is to her own head that she points the gun, before intimidating Lurdes with a shot (Figure 07). Despite her defiant haughtiness, the character, who at the beginning of the plot discovers she has an aneurysm, repeatedly reveals herself to be in a state of intense turmoil (she suffers, for example, nocturnal breathing disorders, alluding to the fire of which she was a victim). By agencying a network of physical and symbolic prisons, Thelma seems to feel the claustrophobia inherent to the asphyxiating and paranoid mother-son relationship she developed with Danilo:

I haven't been feeling well, Lurdes. I am not well at all. I have tachycardia, I'm short of breath every night, I have this pressure inside my head all day long—sometimes I think the aneurysm has already burst. And I get nervous, I have a feeling that [sic] something wrong is about to happen. But it is also at this time that a strength comes from within us, from who knows where [sic], and I never imagined... I never imagined that I would be able to do so much, that I would be able to do all of this for my son. (Amor de Mãe, Ep. 25/03/21, 50m40s-52m30s.)

Figure 07 – frames of the telenovela Amor de Mãe



Source: Globoplay

Lurdes, in turn, left in captivity, later tries to free herself from the chains restricting her movements: with the help of a spoon, sharpened by scraping it against the cement, she manages to break the chain-link keeping her tied to the wall. She manages to escape through one of the windows, but still bound as if wearing an electronic anklet (Figure 08), she is soon recaptured and put back in confinement.

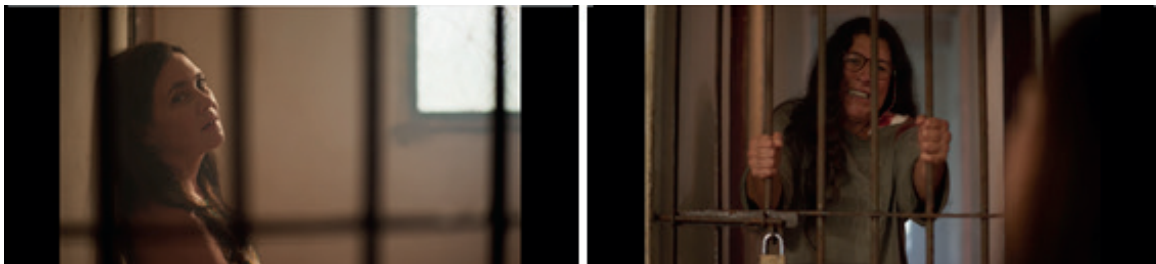
Figure 08 – frames of the telenovela Amor de mãe



Source: Globoplay

Once re-imprisoned, the shackles are removed from her feet, but bars—like those seen in detention houses—are installed, separating the prison space from the large front windows of the house. The image on screen denotes the ambiguity of an aesthetic composition that imprisons both Lurdes and Thelma, since both are framed behind bars (Figure 09). From this moment on, Lurdes stars in a narrative permeated by an appeal to the sensitive, while the hardened figure of Thelma seems to be increasingly cornered.

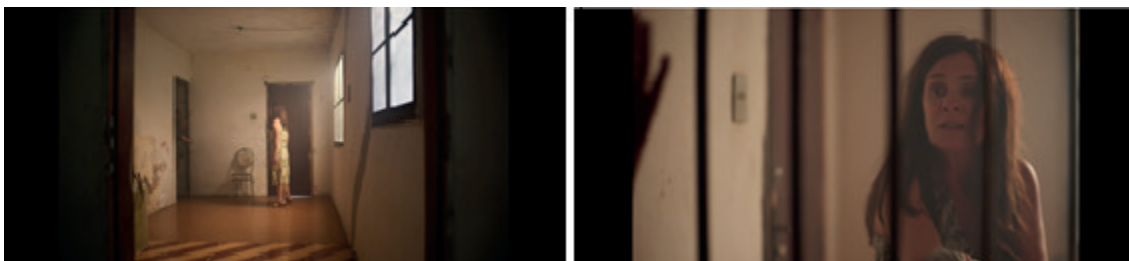
Figure 09 – frames of the telenovela Amor de Mãe



Source: Globoplay

Aesthetically, the above and below images suggest two sides of the same prison: by how she is shown on screen—framed between vertical and horizontal bars in the small partitioning of the house-enclosure whose environment is dominated by a misty darkness—Thelma becomes hostage to her own crimes. She curls up; not in the restorative/invigorating roundness that precedes being cast into the world, as discussed by Bachelard, but rather condemned to be her own tormentor. The meanings manifested in the nebulous partitioning of image compositions permeated by bars and architectural arrangements that restrict mobility (Figures 9, 10, and 11) affirms, in the plane of expression, the labyrinth of secrets and lies diegetically construed by the character in the plane of content.

Figure 10 – frames of the telenovela Amor de Mãe



Source: Globoplay

Figure 11 – frames of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*



Source: Globoplay

Imprisoned by her friend, Lurdes finds gaps in the windows: she first escapes through one of them, only to be recaptured; she is then repeatedly framed looking at the outside environment (and being looked at by the camera) through the gaps of the windows, having her face framed by the torn lace curtain in one instance:

Figure 12 – frames of the telenovela *Amor de mãe*



Source: Globoplay

Figure 13 – frames of the telenovela *Amor de mãe*

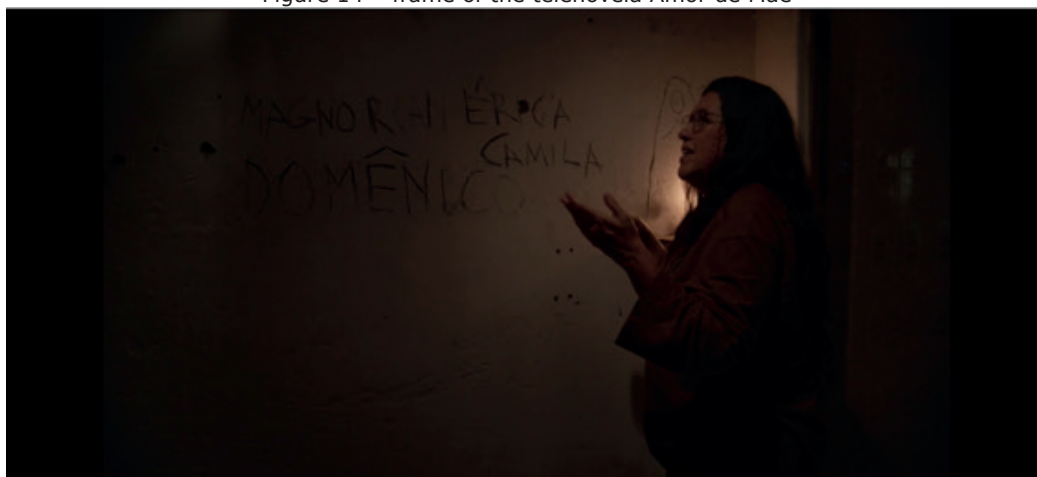


Source: Globoplay

The ratty fabric, by creating the opening that allows communication between the inside and outside environments, re-signifies her appropriation of the dwelling: as a captive, the prisoner elaborates

sensitive constructions that break with an automate daily life, escape routes (Greimas, 2002) that enable her to transform a house given to her as an enclosure into a house-enclosure. Other escape routes emerge in the paper boats Lurdes folds using old magazine sheets, on which the word ‘mother’ written in uppercase tries to make her absent children present through affection; on the wall where she writes their names and draws a picture of a central figure in Catholicism, the ‘mother of all’—the Virgin Mary, whose image is overlapped with that of Lurdes by the framing:

Figure 14 – frame of the telenovela Amor de Mãe



Source: Globoplay

Later in the plot, providentially, such inscriptions will provide the enabling clues for the meeting in which, in an ironic role inversion, the searching mother is found by the lost son: when Danilo/Domênico arrives at the house to rescue her, the place is empty of Lurdes’ physical presence (who had once again managed to escape captivity), but filled with the marks of her affection—figurativized by her children’s names drawn on the wall.

A. J. Greimas’ (2002) concept of fracture is based on the emergence of momentary “illuminations,” enabling aesthetic and esthesically experiences. Lurdes experiences such a moment when a bird flies over a hole in the ceiling:

Figure 15 – frame of the telenovela Amor de Mãe



Source: Globoplay

From there, the character plans her escape route—in the dictionary sense and in the sense of Greimas’ sensitive construction, as a beam of light that illuminates her and reaches the aesthetic order. Using pieces of a chair to cut an opening in the roof and the bars framing the windows to assist in her descent, the prisoner regains freedom:

Figure 16 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*



Source: Globoplay

Figure 17 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*



Source: Globoplay

In a new inversion, ironically, it is precisely the elements that ensure imprisonment—the bars—that make escape possible. Fractured confinement structures are re-signified by the construction of escape routes and by the subversive advent of sensitive experiences.

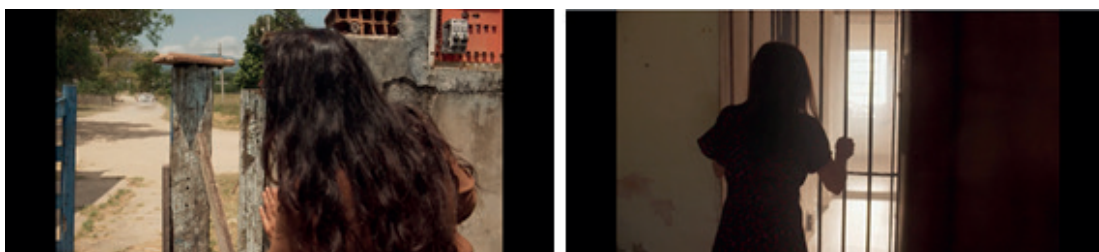
Upon arriving at the location and finding the place empty, Thelma will follow practically the same path as Lurdes' escape. The sequence of scenes again places the characters in similar situations: if previously framed between bars, static, both are now filmed following the same paths. In similar shots and framings, they also perform similar movements, as can be observed:

Figure 18 – frame of the telenovela Amor de Mãe



Source: Globoplay

Figure 19 – frame of the telenovela Amor de Mãe



Source: Globoplay

Figure 20 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*



Source: Globoplay

Figure 21 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*



Source: Globoplay

Figure 22 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*



Source: Globoplay

The outcome of this sequence, however, implies different meanings for each of the two ‘mothers’ involved: while Lurdes finally finds her lost son, Thelma realizes that hers is gone. In the scene, the view that the adoptive mother—and the viewer—has of her son hugging his biological mother, is mediated by a wooden and barbed wire fence. This, shall we say, “barred” gaze works as an impediment, denoting the observer’s (Thelma) inability to access the object being observed:

Figure 23 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*



Source: Globoplay

In contrast, the images of Lurdes in the company of her son are shot against the backdrop of a dirt road stretching towards the infinite horizon, which in later episodes will lead Lourdes to the welcoming domestic spaces that will shelter her and her newly restored large family group.

Figure 24 – frame of the telenovela Amor de Mãe



Source: Globoplay

Once home again, Lurdes is repeatedly shown standing in front of one of its several windows: a large, illuminated opening framed by a colorful curtain that sometimes blends in with the shades of her dress. Restoring and reaffirming physical and affective bonds⁷ (Figure 25), the matriarch is constantly cuddled and hugged by her offspring:

Figure 25 – frame of the telenovela Amor de Mãe



Source: Globoplay

Thelma, on the other hand, becomes a clandestine presence. Alienated both from her son, who begins to reject her, and from the other characters, her vision is now permanently obstructed, mediated by bars. In an attempt to plot a new kidnapping, she ends up stalking, unhappy and regretful, what is forbidden to her:

⁷ Bonds maintained and strengthened even with the character Sandro, who at a certain point in the narrative (in part 01 of the telenovela) was mistakenly assumed to be the missing son.

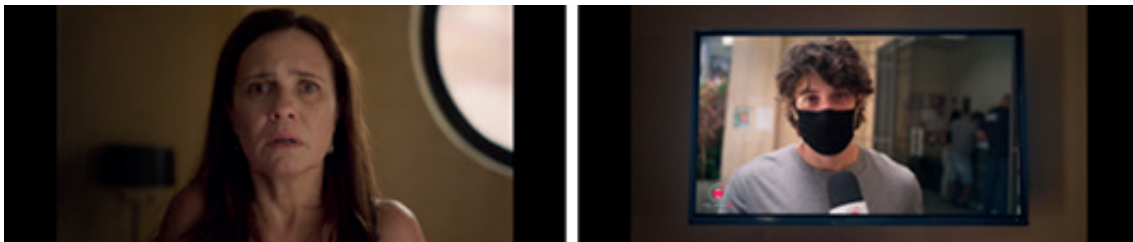
Figure 26 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*



Source: Globoplay

Deprived of her relationship with Danilo, who turns out to be Lurdes' son Domênico, Thelma tries to kidnap the grandson (Caio, whom she calls João Danilo) that she once carried in her womb. At this point the son, now a father, reports all his mother's crimes to the police. Approached by a reporter waiting for him outside the police district, he gives an interview stating that Thelma has no son. The television screen, then, is filled by another TV screen, in a metalanguage exercise that, if no longer a novelty, contributes to intensify the effect of verisimilitude:

Figure 27 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*



Source: Globoplay

Note that when Danilo/Domênico outs Thelma from the role of mother, she (who dedicated her life to him) ceases to 'be.' The character does not recognize herself in any other role than that of a mother; without the indispensable complementary figure of the son, her existence in the plot no longer makes sense. Her aneurysm, presented to the audience from the beginning of the telenovela's first part, erupts. Insistent, repeated close-ups emphasize a desperation that oscillates between the melodramatic, often characteristic of this kind of television product, and the tragic:

Imagem 28 – Frames da telenovela Amor de Mãe



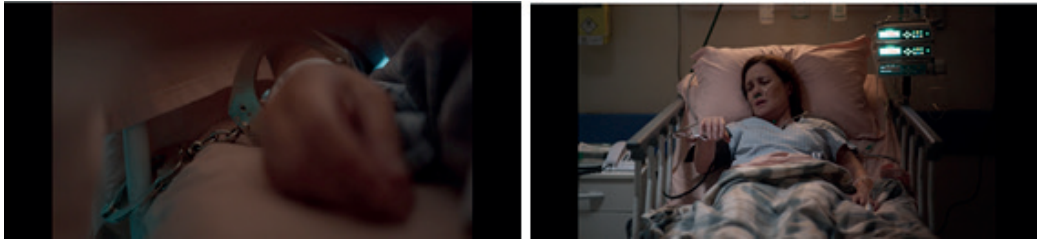
Fonte: Globoplay

Hyperbolic, the agony plastered on Thelma's features reaches a climax as one hears the growing, distorted echo of a baby's cry—allusion to her dead child, the bought child, the child stolen from the son she had traded for herself? In the cramped hotel room where she hides with the kidnapped child, the final scenes played by the character (villain?), without offspring and without a home, would synthesize, in the succession of dramatic frames on screen, all the unsuccessful births, stolen children, interrupted relations, imposed conviviality.

In the hospital, Thelma appears handcuffed: between the bars of the hospital bed, she is

immobilized both by her failing health and the steel chains emphasized by close-ups on her bound hand:

Figure 29 – frame of the telenovela Amor de mãe



Source: Globoplay

Begrudgingly, urged by Lurdes, Danilo/Domênico visits his mother on her deathbed. They hold hands, a gesture highlighted by a new close-up image, in a clear sign that the familial ties, which until then were more shackles than bonds, still endure:

Figure 30 – frame of the telenovela Amor de Mãe



Source: Globoplay

The son recognizes his love for the usurping mother, who then admits her mistakes:

(...) Danilo: Mom, why did you do all this?

Thelma: For you to love me.

Danilo: I love you. I've always loved you. I love you so much.

Thelma: Being a mother is a very strange force, my son. I wish I'd never wronged you like this. It's so sad that mothers aren't perfect.

Danilo: Mom! Mom!

Thelma: Mom? You came?

Danilo: Mom...

(Amor de Mãe, Ep. 09/04/21, 57m22s-58m18s.)

In their flaws and imperfections, the characters all reveal themselves to be condemned—one way or another—to predetermined places and roles. Danilo tries to be only Domênico, but he cannot undo past affective ties: to some extent, he will always be tied to the filial relationship established with the woman who raised him. This bond is aesthetically highlighted by the image composition on screen, which centers the bodies of Thelma and Danilo together, stretched out between the bars of the hospital bed, in which the son's head and torso reclines on the mother's belly and legs:

Figure 31 – frame of the telenovela *Amor de mãe*



Source: Globoplay

Familial ties are (in the telenovela and in life) consolidated in the relationships established in domestic environments, shell-houses and dungeon-houses that constitute themselves visually in the plot as signifiers of voluntary relations, imposed relations, and interrupted relations. We see, throughout the episodes, that the sensitive appropriation of the physical environment will be determinant for constructing these houses that, sometimes, simultaneously oppress and shelter. The captivity scenario explored here demonstrates how such appropriations can be transient and transversal (for the kidnapped character, the apparently sterile and hostile prison environment ends up becoming the cozy and fertile shell-house in which she curls up to then ‘cast herself into the world’ of her constructed/promised affections). The kidnapper, in turn, has her ruin sealed in the same environment: apparently free, able to come and go, she her appropriation of this space ends up turning it into a dungeon-house (since her actions there condemn the character to an irreversible anesthetic state).

Lurdes and Thelma, women who resemble and repel each other due to their role as progenitors of the same offspring, are diegetically complementary characters: the former, despite the adversities, transforms the several landscapes of the environments she moves through into aesthetic spaces by peculiar sensitive appropriations; the latter, on the other hand, cannot overcome the anesthetic landscapes proposed by the narrative and always remains trapped—either as oppressor or oppressed.

Thus, contrasting domestic and family relations are manifested on-screen: there are those in which bonds act as shackles and those in which shackles act as bonds. Hypertrophied mothers, who impose castrating power structures onto their children, and mothers who raise their offspring to watch them cast themselves into the world. Maternal love, always? Any resemblance to the non-fictional off-screen universe, say, was not mere coincidence.

Last thoughts: the telenovela that overflows with/in life

In the panorama of Brazilian television dramaturgy, the telenovela builds communicational links between private intimacy and social issues. As a product, its predominant character are “narratives quintessentially about the family. The telenovela champions certain issues, behaviors, products and not others; it defines a certain agenda that regulates intersections between public and private life” (Lopes, 2009). The present sought to identify and analyze the forms of appropriations of domestic spaces experienced by female characters, mothers who raised children alone and persevere in the incessant struggle for the exercise of motherhood. Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes (2009, p. 28) observes that it is perhaps in the female trajectory that telenovelas agglutinate and express public and private experiences,

addressing the character's professional life and financial independence, reproductive technologies, and the constitution of new family arrangements that contemplate interracial and same-gender marriages. Different love relationships (monogamous or not, simultaneous or not, sexualized or not so sexualized, etc.) also sometimes take place. Many of these themes are glimpsed in the course of *Amor de mãe's* plot.

The images of particular stories experienced by characters act, therefore, as a metonymy and metaphor of the society in which their telenovelas are inserted, as "(...) a multidimensional, kaleidoscopic narrative of the daily life lived by Brazilians" (Lopes, 2009, p. 24). Shell-houses and dungeon-houses are architectural, affective, and symbolic configurations of viewers' daily life. These dwelling places, which can become enclosures, are latent in the multiple daily lives of society. Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, already stressed the importance of observing the re-significations of hierarchical and repressive regimes within the family institution: "one day we should show how intra-familial relations, essentially in the parents-children cell, have become 'disciplined,' absorbing since the classical age external schemata, first educational and military, then medical, psychiatric [...]" (2014, p. 208).

By focusing on the shackle ties established by the family relations in *Amor de mãe*, we observed that the domestic dynamics on screen function as a magnifying glass for social interactions that can become increasingly tighter, intensifying the asphyxia of a constrained society, immobilized in physical and symbolic prison structures—but which are also, paradoxically, able of stimulating the escape from norms. When well scrutinized, the gaps between bars enable the daily escapes of deviant, resistant, and revolutionary bodies the ambiguous movement of flowing/gathering. Let go, let in. According to Lopes (2009, p. 26), the telenovela has a "sui generis capacity to synthesize the public and the private, the political and the domestic, the news and the fiction, the masculine and the feminine," moving between the "formal conventions of documentary and television melodrama." Such a movement would thus typify the Brazilian telenovela, creating "the quasi-paradox of 'seeing' Brazil more in this fictional narrative than in news broadcasting."

As the product on screen proves, telenovelas "absorb social changes and revitalize its expressions," is updated chronotopically: "the 'hybridization' of the genre asserts itself in the current historical time. Thus, there is a specific contamination between fiction and reality, between the telenovela and society" (Lopes, 2009, p. 34). When contemplating Lurdes and Thelma enclosed in house-enclosures, viewers have the opportunity to establish connections and analogies, to reflect on their daily life (and, who knows, perhaps even find themselves trapped, suffocated in physical and affective prisons?) and have also the chance to—through self-education and agencying of their particular aesthetic and aesthesic possibilities—, be cast into the world and have a restorative, invigorating, regenerative experience.

In the non-fictional world, building our homes as a corner in the world, in the domestic sense, but also in the broader sense that implies community, territory, nation, seems to be one of today's challenges—and not only in Brazil. Welcoming and inclusive love relations can ensure a good binder for, in the constructions to be erected around the world, joining bricks and freeing openings. Hopefully.

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