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ARTICLE

Between apparatuses and captivities: representations of single motherhood in contemporary cinema

Entre dispositivos e cativeiros: representações da maternidade solo no cinema contemporâneo

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ABSTRACT: *This study analyzes the representation of single motherhood in contemporary film productions available on streaming platforms, using the films* Straw *and* Earth Mama *as its corpus. Anchored in Cultural Studies in Education and Feminist Studies, the research mobilizes cultural analysis to examine discourses and representations of motherhood. The results show that the films foreground the burdens of single motherhood, mainly the concentration of caregiving responsibilities on mothers, aggravated by contexts of socioeconomic vulnerability. Forms of symbolic imprisonment associated with the captivity and apparatus of motherhood are also identified. The study concludes that the media participate in the production of meanings that (re)configure the limits and possibilities of the exercise of motherhood in contemporary society.*

Keywords: *single motherhood; apparatus of motherhood; contemporary cinema; cultural studies.*

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RESUMO: *Este estudo analisa a representação da maternidade solo em produções cinematográficas contemporâneas disponíveis em plataformas de streaming, tomando como corpus os filmes* Até a Última Gota e Mãe Terra. *Ancorada nos Estudos Culturais em Educação e nos Estudos Feministas, a pesquisa mobiliza a análise cultural para examinar discursos e representações sobre o maternar. Os resultados evidenciam que as narrativas denunciam as marcas da maternidade solo, principalmente a sobrecarga de responsabilidades concentradas na figura materna, agravadas por contextos de vulnerabilidade socioeconômica. Identificam-se, ainda, formas de aprisionamento simbólico associadas ao cativeiro e ao dispositivo da maternidade. Conclui-se que a mídia atua na produção de sentidos que (re)configuram limites e possibilidades do exercício da maternidade na contemporaneidade.*

Palavras-chave: maternidade solo; dispositivo da maternidade; cinema contemporâneo; estudos culturais.

Take 1: the research gestation enters the scene

The concept of motherhood has acquired new understandings, especially through Feminist Studies. Meyer (2005) points out that it was with the so-called "second wave" of feminism that motherhood began to be demystified as a natural instinct of women and, consequently, as their destiny. Tomaz (2015) understands that motherhood occupies a place in the sexual organization/division of labor, as a social role — mainly one of care — attributed to women. Due to this character of care, combined with the fact that it occurs in the domestic sphere, the sexual division of labor, which segregates the public from the private, associates motherhood with the sphere of private issues. On the subject, Biroli (2018, p. 61) points out that "domestic and care work, performed free of charge by women, constitute the circuits of vulnerability that keep them at a disadvantage in the different dimensions of life..."[1]

We highlight here the contributions of some feminist authors, such as Badinter (1985) and Scavone (2001), who denaturalize motherhood, approaching it as a plural experience. The authors problematize the subject of the "mother" and understand both the social construction involved in motherhood and the processes of regulation of the woman's/mother's body. Thus, we consider the existence of multiple "maternities," with their intersectionalities and interlocutions. This makes the experience of mothering a plural social construction and, at the same time, unique for each mother, whether they are cisgender, transgender, atypical, solo, adoptive, with or without support networks.

Based on Foucault's (2004) concept of apparatus, Marcello (2005) appropriates the term "apparatus of motherhood" to examine how women-mothers are regulated, monitored, and compelled to conform to an idealized model of motherhood. From this perspective, women-mothers are subject to constant surveillance, under the label of perfect motherhood, and to the behaviors idealized as to what a mother can or cannot

1 All translations of works for which no published English version is available were made by the authors.

do and what would be a good motherhood accepted by the disciplinary institutions that forge it: church, state, family, society, and media.

When we think about the apparatus of motherhood, we understand that women are, in a way, trapped by these forms of judgment, in a kind of captivity. Lagarde (2005) understands that this captivity in which women live regulates their behaviors, in a space of oppression by the patriarchal system through the regulation of their conduct and decisions. Based on this concept of captivity, Chacel (2024) conceptualizes "captivity of motherhood" as the spaces in which women-mothers experience this oppression directly in their experiences of motherhood.

Discussing the role of the media, Tomaz (2015, p. 155) argues that it is "an undeniable site of meaning-making; communication has become a unique space for research across a wide range of fields interested in the social construction of motherhood."

The author reinforces that "communication practices are increasingly constitutive of the ideals of motherhood" (TOMAZ, 2015, p. 159). The readings of Fischer (2002), who discusses the disciplinary character of the media, and Freire (2022), who states that the media supports or reinforces our understanding of ways of being mothers, invite us to analyze the media as a space for capturing subjectivity. This debate contributes to our understanding of the representation of motherhood in the media.

Thus, considering single motherhood and its complexities, and understanding the role of the media as a relevant object of investigation in the field of communication, we ask: How is single motherhood represented in contemporary cinematic productions? In what ways do such representations reveal the operation of the *apparatus* of motherhood and its captivities? We seek to understand how films contribute to the symbolic production of motherhood through the operation of the forms of capture and resistance associated with the captivity and the apparatus of motherhood.

Our object of study is the films available on streaming platforms, as these platforms, even if paid, are increasingly popular. A Google Scholar search based on the terms "representations of motherhood in the media"

identified research focused on magazines and social networks. This gap contributed to the choice to privilege film analysis in the execution of the research. Based on the question raised, we carried out a search for productions from the last five years, depicting women raising children without a partner. The choice of the selected films resulted from the experiences represented of single motherhood in a context of socioeconomic vulnerability.

Thus, this article aimed to analyze how single motherhood is represented in contemporary film productions, based on the concepts of captivity of motherhood and the apparatus of motherhood, taking as the corpus the films *Earth Mama* (2023) and *Straw* (2025). This study seeks to contribute to the debates on gender in the audiovisual media and to expand understanding of the social construction of motherhood. In the next section, we present the study's theoretical foundations, based on the chosen theoretical frameworks.

Take 2: the public and the private enter the scene

Resuming studies in the field of motherhood, we seek to reflect on the social construction to which it is linked. Meyer (2005) states that gender, in addition to differentiating us sexually, distinguishes the way men and women are constituted and educated. This premise is necessary to understand that:

> The sexual division of labor between the sexes has been fundamental to this dichotomy since its theoretical principles. Men are seen as, above all, linked to the occupations of the sphere of economic and political life and responsible for them, while women would be responsible for the occupations of the private sphere of domesticity and reproduction. Women have been seen as "naturally" inadequate to the public sphere, dependent on men and subordinate to the family (OKIN, 2008, p. 307-308).

The sexual division of labor segregates the public and the private. This division affects, in particular, women's lives. Antoniazzi (2021) adds that, even though they are engaged in the labor market, women

are overwhelmed with "their" working hours. That is, it is necessary to manage what is considered private and public at the same time, in order to mitigate women's disadvantages.

> The separation between public and private is presented in liberal theory as if it applied to all individuals in the same way. Clearly, this still applies to much of contemporary theory. The liberal idea of non-intervention of the State in the domestic sphere, instead of maintaining neutrality, actually reinforces the inequalities existing in this sphere (OKIN, 2008, p. 320).

Biroli (2018) states that the sexual division of labor compromises women's citizenship, for example, creating obstacles to their political participation. This participation affects both the occupation of positions and decision-making. For motherhood to be politically challenged, it is necessary to take steps toward denaturalizing roles, by recognizing the hours dedicated to care, which still fall on women. Costa (2024) states that motherhood is associated with several stereotypes, and as a result, it is commonly monitored and placed within expected patterns of behavior for women as mothers.

> In motherhood, the association with the Virgin Mary, the need for altruistic and compulsory love, as well as the responsibility of caring for the child justified by the biologizing view of the sexual division of labor and the maternal instinct, triggers patterns of behavior required for the woman-mother in order to have her motherhood legitimized (COSTA, 2024, p. 50).

In this sense, to understand Marcello's (2005) studies based on her reading of Michel Foucault, we draw on the concept of apparatus for a better understanding.

> A decidedly heterogeneous set that encompasses discourses, institutions, architectural organizations, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, philanthropic propositions [...] the said and the unsaid are elements of the apparatus. The apparatus is the network that can be established between these elements (FOUCAULT, 2004, p. 244).

Based on this reading, Marcello (2005) conceptualizes the "apparatus of motherhood" as comprising all institutions that somehow control, monitor, and determine models and behaviors of women as mothers. They are the family, church, media, school, as well as the State itself. The author states that the apparatus creates idealized models of motherhood, producing practices of maternalization by "giving visibility and enunciability to these specific ways of being a mother-subject" (MARCELLO, 2005, p. 141).

The apparatus also operates through mechanisms of control and self-control, regulating even women's thoughts as mothers, as reflected in recommendations to avoid negative thoughts during pregnancy or to be mindful of the words they use. Another way that the apparatus operates is through the organization of daily life, which prioritizes childcare over self-care, leading many women to (re)organize their routines or leave their jobs. Finally, enunciation stands out, that is, the way the women as mothers narrate their experience, often emphasizing how much motherhood has transformed their lives.

Alongside the apparatus of motherhood, we draw on the concept of captivity, in which the *madresposas* (mothers-wives) live, presented by anthropologist Marcela Lagarde (2005). For the author, captivity is a "phenomenon of expropriation, inferiorization, discrimination, dependence and subordination" (LAGARDE, 2005, p. 17). Chacel (2024, p. 176) adds that "thus, captivity is directly linked to the other's decision about women, in an oppressive logic of the dominant male subject, as well as the patriarchal and capitalist system, functioning as a sentence for every woman." We can say that the apparatus of motherhood identifies the network of mechanisms that produce subjectivities, at the same time as captivity interprets and captures these forms of oppression.

Even women who consider themselves fulfilled in their experience of motherhood remain under surveillance, both reproducing and being captured by the structures of captivity. Costa (2024, p. 51) considers that "Captive mothers also become institutions of discipline, exercising the very oppression of which they are themselves victims." When we

judge a woman's motherhood as good, bad, right, wrong, or in other ways, we also imprison this mother in captivity.

Take 3: the power of the media in the apparatus of motherhood enters the scene

The media has broadcast various forms of content produced by women as mothers about their experiences of motherhood, pain, and silencing. Social media has become the primary space where mothers express their struggles and share what they describe as "real-life" experiences, distancing themselves from romanticized notions of motherhood. Likewise, women with profiles who consider themselves "experts" use social networks as guides for mothers (FREIRE, 2022).

> As an institution of control, and as a mechanism employed to discipline mothers themselves, the media determines, naturalizes, legitimizes, reinforces, and challenges social paradigms. In doing so, it acts as a mediator of knowledge by establishing a process through which motherhood and mothering are taught and learned (CHACEL, 2024, p. 185).

Perhaps the paradox of the media lies in its ability to provide space for more women to speak openly about their "captivity," freeing the speaker while allowing for a new imprisonment of the listener. At this point, we consider the teaching-learning process that the media facilitates.

> The media, therefore, is not constituted as a mere space in which mothers can give visibility and enunciability to knowledge and normativity, but as a space that also produces, through its lines of subjectivation, ways in which they recognize themselves in this knowledge, recognize themselves in this normativity and can effectively enunciate themselves (and be enunciated) as subjects of this "apparatus" (MARCELLO, 2005, p. 148).

Fischer (2002) also draws on Michel Foucault's concept of the apparatus to develop the concept of the "pedagogical apparatus of the media." The author, when studying the media, especially television, understands that the media constitutes subjects and their subjectivity

through the production of content, producing a discursive and non-discursive apparatus.

> with regard to the production and circulation of a series of values, conceptions, and representations related to the everyday learning of who we are, what we should do with our bodies, how we should raise our children, what our daily diet should be, and how we should view Black people, women, members of the working classes, people with disabilities, religious groups, political parties, and so on (Fischer, 2002, p. 153).

Risk and Santos (2021, p. 2) state that "... the media constitute an intricate set of meanings, conveyed by image, sound, text, creative use of camera, among other resources that disseminate discourses and practices and, therefore, model subjectivity..." Freire (2022), when discussing representations of motherhood consumed and produced by women, understands that the media transmits forms of "almost disciplinary knowledge." It is from this recognition of the media as an apparatus, which operates by (re)producing meanings, that we conduct this analysis.

Take 4: the methodological path enters the scene

Cultural Studies brings together an interdisciplinary approach in the field of the humanities and social sciences. Risk and Santos (2021, p. 2) point out that Cultural Studies are constituted through the articulation of "textual, visual and verbal analysis, through art history, literary criticism, gender studies, even language theories... in addition to research on cinema, media, communication and popular culture." From this perspective, Paraíso (2014) proposes understanding methodology not as a rigid set of techniques, but rather as a way of asking questions, formulating problems, and producing coherent information. In short, this implies analyzing how the discourses present in cultural artifacts favor the formation of subjectivities and the legitimation of certain truths, often associated with dominant groups.

Grounded in Cultural Studies, this research adopts cultural analysis as its methodological approach. Its central practice consists of investigating

the social and cultural dimensions present in media artifacts. According to Steffen, Henriques and Lisboa Filho (2020), the adoption of this methodological approach makes it possible to identify and understand the interrelationships of meanings present in social practices. In this perspective, cultural analysis guides the investigation of the articulations between media artifacts and their sociocultural contexts. As Lisbôa Filho and Machado (2015, p. 3) point out, "cultural analysis is dedicated to thinking about human relations in the context of interrelationship where the media occupy an important place in the conception and cultural action of the subjects." In short, Cultural Studies and cultural analysis are crucial approaches for a critical understanding of the subjects and practices that shape meanings and spaces.

In the search for works that could contribute to this analysis, the authors were already familiar with the film *Straw*. Thus, we sought to select at least one additional film to include in this analysis. We carried out an exploratory search, using the generative artificial intelligence tool ChatGPT (OPENAI, 2026), with a prompt to search for "films released in the last five years about single motherhood, focusing on women in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability, facing challenges such as poverty, precariousness of work, lack of support network, institutional violence, racial inequalities and overload of care."

The search identified eight audiovisual productions: five feature films, two documentaries, and one television series. As this study focuses exclusively on feature films, the two documentaries and the television series were excluded from the sample, leaving five films for evaluation. Of these, *Straw* and *Earth Mama* were selected because they present narratives centered on single motherhood and provide particularly relevant representations of the issues examined in this study. The selection of *Earth Mama*, in particular, was also based on the realism and empathy that permeate its narrative. As drama films, both productions evoke strong emotional responses by portraying conflicts that resonate with audiences. Another selection criterion was that both films address the privatization of care, exploring both the expectations socially assigned to the maternal role and the imperatives that

sustain a particular ideal of motherhood. The absence of a father figure in both narratives is another relevant aspect, as it places primary responsibility for caregiving on the protagonists. To contextualize the works examined, the authors prepared Chart 1, with information about the cultural artifacts analyzed, including the original title and Portuguese title, direction, year of release, streaming platform, film genre, and a brief synopsis.

Chart 1 – Films selected for analysis.

Film	Director	Year of release	Streaming platform	Genre	Synopsis
Earth Mama	Savanah Leaf	2023	Available for rent/purchase on platforms such as Amazon Video, Apple TV, Google Play, Claro Video, and Vivo Play	Drama	The story follows Gia, a single mother who is pregnant again and struggles to regain custody of her children, who have been placed in foster care, while striving to secure a better future for her family amid the hardships and challenges of everyday life.
Straw	Tyler Perry	2025	Netflix	Psychological crime drama	Janiyah Wiltkinson, a single mother, faces a cataclysmic day in which a sequence of desperate events pushes her to an extreme limit, leading to dramatic decisions that completely change her life.

Source: prepared by the authors.

In the film *Earth Mama*, we highlight Black motherhood, the dynamics of institutional foster care, and the practice of controlling bodies. The story is set in California, United States. Amid various forms of "waiting" — whether for pregnancy or for the regaining of child custody — the film's protagonist is surrounded by other women who are likewise waiting to regain custody of their children. The periods of "waiting" portrayed in the film contribute to its slower pace, with many scenes focusing on the protagonist as she caresses her belly.

The film *Straw*, also a U.S. production, explores not only Black motherhood but also a range of socioeconomic inequalities by portraying a single day in the protagonist's life. Precarious living conditions, precarious working conditions, racial prejudice, and institutional violence are some of the issues highlighted, among many others observed in the film. The director's decision to concentrate all the events of the protagonist's life in a single day makes the production more fast-paced, unlike the other film. If *Earth Mama* is marked by the slower space of waiting, *Straw* causes anguish, because throughout the film we wonder what else can happen to the protagonist.

Risk and Santos (2021, p. 4) point out that "the media are composed of written material (script/text), audiovisual, in addition to art direction effects, which makes their organization and analysis complex." Based on the authors' discussion, we understand that, for the collection of the research data, it was necessary to organize the audiovisual components that most contributed to our research objective. To carry out the analysis, the films were watched repeatedly in order to select the scenes most relevant to the research question and most conducive to problematizing single motherhood.

The scenes were organized into analytical axes, related to the experiences of care, overload, vulnerability, lack of institutional support, and forms of resistance. The dialogues, the construction of the characters, the settings, costumes, and narrative situations that evidence control and surveillance over women as mothers were also considered.

Data interpretation was guided by attention to the representations constructed, the power relations that permeate the narratives, and the ways in which the films reiterate or challenge norms associated with the apparatus of motherhood and the forms of captivity historically imposed on women. This process resulted in an interpretive reading grounded in the perspective of Cultural Studies.

Take 5: the analysis of the films enters the scene – childbirth

Care emerges as a central analytical axis in both films. Beyond the narratives they present, the films find in the discussion of care a means of

problematizing the absence of care networks, support systems, and the role of the State. Therefore, these artifacts are not merely fictional stories; they are a means of conveying a message through the operation of the media pedagogical apparatus described by Fischer (2002). The exhaustion of Janiyah and the surveillance of Gia are structural problems, within which captivity and the apparatus of motherhood operate in different and cruel ways.

We understand that the director of *Straw*, when making motherhood the central focus of the protagonist's life, builds a character "protected" by the shield of motherhood, as if the responsibilities attributed to her were greater than the mistakes and crimes she committed. Chacel (2024, p. 186) mentions the fact that, in the films, the narratives "revolve around... sometimes the woman who is capable of everything for her son, including criminal attitudes, being justified by maternal love."

In our view, the film seeks to evoke the audience's empathy for the protagonist's distressing circumstances. It can be observed that the impulse to defend or absolve the protagonist, despite the crime she commits over the course of the narrative, reveals the difficulty of associating the maternal figure with violent behavior, given the social expectation that mothers should be gentle, caring, and loving. In this sense, the character, who is pushed to the limits of mental exhaustion, embodies multiple expressions of the captivity of motherhood. This is evident in the visual elements that shape her representation, such as her plain clothing, disheveled hair, and dark circles under her eyes. These forms of captivity are also reflected in the conditions of social vulnerability to which she is subjected throughout the narrative.

The protagonist's mental health, as well as her daughter's physical health, reflects the naturalization of female sacrifice, a process through which the apparatus of motherhood operates. At the beginning of the film, the daughter is shown returning home from the hospital in her mother's lap. However, at the end of the narrative, it is revealed that the child had already died at the beginning of the film. The protagonist experiences the events of that day while suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, unable to come to terms with her daughter's death.

As the film's plot twist is revealed, inviting us to reinterpret the narrative, we observe the effects of the moralization of motherhood, the absence of paternal co-responsibility, the social judgment of mothers' decisions, the lack of support networks, feelings of guilt, and the absence of the State from the protection system. *Straw* offers us a wide range of expressions of captivity and the apparatus of motherhood, portraying the challenges of single motherhood.

In *Earth Mama*, the apparatus of motherhood also becomes evident from the very beginning of the narrative. In the opening scene, even before the film's title appears, one of the members of the group to which the protagonist belongs states that the journey is her own and that no one else could take her place or truly understand what she is going through. In the same conversation, she adds, "When everyone has an opinion, judging me from their high horse... let them" (EARTH MAMA, 2023, 00:01:44). Her statement reveals the social judgments and expectations that permeate the experience of motherhood, pointing to the mechanisms of surveillance and evaluation to which these women are subjected.

In the film, the protagonist lives with her sister after her children are removed from her care by the U.S. child protection system. The circumstances that led to this separation are not explained. The protagonist seeks to meet a series of institutional requirements to demonstrate her "maternal fitness," completing courses and undergoing assessments in order to regain custody of her children. In this process, the character, who is pregnant, is constantly required to prove that she is a "good mother," once again revealing the mechanisms of control and judgment that govern the exercise of motherhood.

At the same time that the group Gia attends has the function of assisting mothers in the process of regaining custody of their children, it also serves as a space for sharing and support, in which women exchange experiences about their life trajectories, family relationships, childhoods marked by vulnerabilities, and drug use. The participants' testimonies are imbued with meaning and emotion. They reveal the suffering caused by separation from their children, and the burden of social and familial

judgments imposed on them. This group operates in the cycle of capture and imprisonment associated with the captivity of motherhood.

In another scene in which this same group appears, the person responsible for the activity distributes condoms to the women and advises them to limit the size of their families, stating that the group's objective is to enable the regaining of child custody, but without increasing the number of children. This is the manifestation of the role of regulatory mechanisms in regulating the bodies and behaviors of these women, of discourses on maternal accountability, and, especially, of discourses on moralization. It is a system that, while offering support, also monitors, regulates, and disciplines practices considered appropriate to the exercise of motherhood.

As Antoniazzi (2021, p. 102) points out, "women, the more excluded and marginalized they are, the more they are subject to oppressive relationships." This dynamic becomes even more evident in a scene of intense stress, when Gia consumes crack, which accelerates her labor. At the hospital, the professional responsible for accompanying Gia through the process of placing her baby for adoption states that she abused her child by using drugs during pregnancy. At the same time, the hospital notifies the social worker about the use of the substance. This situation has a direct impact on decisions related to the custody of her children.

> If during pregnancy, what the mother does with the body is important for the good development of the fetus or for its subsistence, in the case of mothers who have already given birth to their children, what they do with their bodies may be related to the healthy development of their children's childhood (MARCELLO, 2005, p. 143).

Take 6: the captivity and apparatus enter the scene

We highlight below some scenes in which the expressions of the captivity of motherhood and the apparatus of motherhood are evident. Marked by precarious working conditions in their struggle for survival, the

protagonists of the films work as a supermarket cashier and a photography studio assistant, respectively. In *Straw*, the character mentions having two jobs to support her daughter, although the second is not specified in the narrative.

Both works portray the characters as constantly mobilizing strategies to ensure the sustenance of their homes and their children. This is the organization of everyday life as operated by the apparatus. The films also show the characters' places of residence, suggesting the idea of housing projects with very similar or identical houses. In the opening scene of *Straw*, the protagonist's home is shown. The camera shows the sink full of dishes, leftover food, clothes scattered around the room, and the apartment's eviction notice. The idea underlying this scene seems to be to demonstrate to the viewer that the demands of motherhood are so overwhelming that there is not enough time to "do it all."

> The fact is that the organization of the women as mothers' time presupposes the distribution of activities, the choice to prioritize the child, and self-care without losing sight of the care for the other (Marcello, 2005). However, the apparatus of motherhood, by requiring a self-organization of the woman's time, defends a norm that motherhood, before any other function, needs to be fully performed. In this sense, I would add another technology of the self, linked to the pressure for self-organization and to the expectations imposed by the apparatus of motherhood regarding what it means to be a mother: blaming oneself (CHACEL, 2024, p. 183).

In another scene from *Straw*, Janiyah is evicted from her apartment due to nonpayment of rent. Even in the face of an adverse situation, where the guilt for the "disorganization" of life is exalted, in a dramatic scene in the rain, the mother imprisoned by captivity meets, once again, a maternal expectation. When faced with all her belongings thrown on the sidewalk, the character decides to collect only her daughter's science fair project from the ground, putting her daughter first. This gesture reinforces the maternization practices of the apparatus of motherhood, as described by Marcello (2005).

Straw is also about negligence. At one point in the narrative, the child is removed from her mother's care by the U.S. child protection system. The removal was reportedly prompted by the teacher's statement that the girl often arrived at school hungry and sometimes dirty. These scenes are not "confirmed" in the film. Once again, the apparatus operates by determining the ways in which care should be provided.

Finally, we highlight one of the dialogues in the film *Earth Mama* that could be used in both films, and which portrays how the mechanism of the cycle of socioeconomic inequalities operates. The scene takes place during a conversation between the protagonist and her best friend, after Gia's decision to place her son for adoption. This friend also lives under conditions very similar to Gia's, is pregnant as well, and is part of the support group for mothers seeking to regain custody of their children who are under state care. In this scene, Gia's friend judges her decision and invokes the Bible to argue that placing the child for adoption would go against God's plan. This attitude corroborates Chacel's (2024) argument that the apparatus operates through the surveillance of mothers themselves and of other mothers. We chose to end this research using this dialogue, as it summarizes our considerations. "There are a lot of people waiting for us to fail, my whole life I've had everything taken from me. They tried to take away our culture, they tried to take away our homes, they tried to take away our freedom. The same thing that is happening to us now, happened to our mothers" (EARTH MAMA, 2023, 00:37:21).

Final considerations

This research aimed to understand how single motherhood is represented in the films *Straw* and *Earth Mama*, based on the concepts of apparatus and captivity of motherhood. The analysis, guided by Cultural Studies, allowed us to identify these concepts in both works, revealing how cinematic narratives mobilize discourses that produce meanings and shape understandings of the exercise of motherhood.

The findings indicate that the analyzed productions do more than represent experiences of motherhood; they reveal the vulnerabilities that directly affect mothers' lives, particularly the overload of caregiving responsibilities. We consider that one of the limitations of this study was the lack of a deeper analysis of the fact that the protagonists are Black women. We understand that this discussion could broaden the understanding of the dynamics addressed here, opening space for further contributions.

In this context, the media is understood as a space in which the apparatus of motherhood operates, producing representations and meanings that shape how maternal experiences are socially perceived and evaluated. Thus, motherhood emerges as a site of discursive struggle, traversed by power relations that regulate contemporary ways of being a woman and a mother. Although this study focused on the analysis of two cultural products, its findings underscore the importance of further exploring how the apparatus of motherhood and the forms of captivity that regulate motherhood operate in other spaces within the field of communication. Final scene... cut!

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