

Who Is the Mother Who Can Speak? — Decolonial Perspectives and the Universalization of Motherhood in “*Unconditional — The Myth of Motherhood*”

Quem é a mãe que pode falar? — Perspectivas decoloniais e a universalização da maternidade em “*Incondicional — O Mito da Maternidade*”

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ABSTRACT: *This article analyzes the documentary “Unconditional — The Myth of Motherhood” (2024), by Patrícia Fróes, from a decolonial feminist perspective. To observe the film’s feminist political proposal, the article draws on feminist studies of motherhood. The assumptions of decolonial feminism are also articulated in order to expose the effects of the coloniality of gender on the feminist struggle itself. The analysis of the film reveals a discourse that evokes a predominantly white and middle-class motherhood, but also points to fissures of resistance in the interviewees’ statements, such as the rejection of the label of “warrior” and the defense of care as a collective responsibility. It emphasizes the importance of plural audiovisual representations, sensitive to differences in race, class, and territory.*

Keywords: *motherhood; hegemonic feminism; decolonial feminism; documentary.*

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RESUMO: *Este artigo analisa o documentário Incondicional — O Mito da Maternidade (2024), de Patrícia Fróes, de uma perspectiva feminista decolonial. Para a observação da proposta política feminista do filme, são expostos estudos feministas sobre a maternidade. Também são articulados os pressupostos do feminismo decolonial, a fim de expor os efeitos da colonialidade do gênero na própria luta feminista. A análise do filme revela um discurso que evoca uma maternidade preferencialmente branca e de classe média, mas também aponta fissuras de resistência nas falas das entrevistadas, como a recusa do rótulo de “guerreira” e a defesa do cuidado como responsabilidade coletiva. Ressalta, dessa forma, a importância de representações audiovisuais plurais, sensíveis às diferenças de raça, classe e território.*

Palavras-chave: *maternidade; feminismo hegemônico; feminismo decolonial; documentário.*

Introduction

Is motherhood truly instinctive or just a social construct? The documentary *Unconditional — The Myth of Motherhood*, directed by Patrícia Fróes, offers a reflection on maternal instinct, guilt, loneliness, and the emotional challenges of mothering through accounts from different mother-women. The film uses and values the testimonies of these mothers as a tool for both breaking the silence and the myth of idealized motherhood, shining a light through the contradictions of the maternal experience. Despite the film's stated aim of interviewing women from different backgrounds, the narrative follows an interview structure consistently guided by the same questions, all related to motherhood. According to the feature's own director, in an interview with one of the authors of this article¹, the idea was to “*portray mothers who had the right of, or even the duty of, idealizing motherhood. Due to this, they [the film's interviewees] needed to follow a certain pattern.*” Patrícia explains that she had no interest in the more singular, unique experiences or even in the “minoritarian” ones, because the main goal was to represent the frustration of motherhood as a pattern that all women go through, regardless of the situation.

Indeed, although the film includes the participation of older women (a grandmother and the director's mother), three Black women, and one woman of Chinese descent, it is possible to observe that there is no explicit attention to race, class, or territorial specificities in the interviews. We can affirm that, in this regard, the narrative editing sustains the idea of motherhood as a homogeneous and universal experience, erasing the structural differences inherent in being a mother in Brazil. This narrative choice reveals one of the central questions of this work: is it possible to consider as plural a form of listening that silences such fundamental and determining characteristics? Which motherhood are we talking about when the documentary claims to break those idealizations? And, if such,

1 Interview granted by director Patrícia Fróes to the author of this article, conducted by email on July 8, 2025.

who are the mothers who have the legitimacy to speak — and be truly heard — within audiovisual narratives?

Based on these questions, we sought to comprehend how the movie reinforces or challenges the idea of a “universal motherhood”, and who truly are the “authorized mothers” who are allowed to take space in contemporary Brazilian films. From a decolonial feminist perspective, we propose a perspective that advocates for plural representations of the maternal experience and points toward more inclusive listening of motherhood, one that takes into account, within documentary productions, the intersectionalities of race, class, gender and territory.

Motherhood as a social construct: instinct, idealization, and erasure

The theme of motherhood was approached in many different ways during the first waves of Anglo-European feminism; however, it was in the 1980s that the idealization of motherhood gained prominence, especially in the French philosopher Elizabeth Badinter’s work (1985). In the book *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct*, Badinter (1985) investigates different historical eras and social contexts to denaturalize the mother instinct and to reveal how maternal love is shaped by cultural, economic, and political demands. We highlight the author’s work here due to its reverberations across countless studies and debates in the field of gender studies, including in the context of Latin American feminism. Regarding the movie, it is important to note that the film’s director interviewed Badinter (1985) for *Unconditional — The Myth of Motherhood*, and, according to the director, she was the one that told her all about motherhood with her book.

Badinter’s arguments (1985), in opposing the naturalization of maternal love, focus primarily on the historical roots of its construction. According to the author, during the 17th and 18th centuries², there was a

2 It is important to observe that the author dedicates herself mainly to the European context, more specifically French. There are footnotes observing the differences when it comes to German and British mothers, but basically nothing is said about the Americans.

long period of time in which maternal behavior was marked by indifference and rejection. In the last third of the 18th century, a shift occurred with the development of demographic studies and the valorization of children's lives. However, this had to do with a mercantile relation that maintained the French population active, made possible by making the family responsible and valuing the maternal role, under the tutelage of patriarchy. Between the 19th and 20th centuries, the modern nuclear family gained strength, and with it, the concept of intimacy (BADINTER, 1985). The philosopher observes that the nuclear family model was better accepted among the bourgeoisie, due to the status bestowed upon the role of mother, followed by the aristocracy, and then by the lower classes. When she argues about this acceptance, however, it becomes clear in her terminology that there is a colonialist gaze that disregards other realities: "Close to what we now call the inhabitants of fourth world countries, the most deprived populations of the 19th century should know that their children, many of whom died prematurely, were their only guarantee for the unproductive period of old age" (BADINTER, 1985, p. 225, our translation).

Badinter's (1985) research emphasizes that the 19th and 20th centuries encompass the period of time in which many discourses and institutions are mobilized in a way as to construct motherly love as something inherent or even sacred:

Motherhood becomes a rewarding role, as it is now imbued with an ideal. The way this "noble function" is discussed — through a vocabulary drawn from religion (frequent references are made to maternal "vocation" or "sacrifice") — indicates that a new mystical dimension is associated with the maternal role. The mother is now commonly compared to a saint, and the habit emerges of thinking that every good mother is a "holy woman." The natural patron of this new mother is the Virgin Mary, whose entire life bears witness to her devotion to her child. (BADINTER, 1985, p. 223, our translation).

Such was the strength of those discourses that to this day, this association is frequently suggested by advertising, television, and many popular

cultural products, overestimating motherly love. Badinter (1985) also observes that, even though most scientists and scholars in the 20th century abandoned the term “instinct” as outdated, the idea that motherhood is something inherent and universal persists. According to the author, there was a change in vocabulary, but the illusions were kept and frequently associated with the female nature.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Andrea O'Reilly (2019), a professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University, initiated a new chapter in motherhood studies when she coined a new bias or feminist branch, “Matricentric Feminism”. The researcher proposed considering motherhood as a task that traditional feminism has yet to complete, and highlights the category *mother*, as opposed to the category *woman*, arguing that mothers need their own organization, structured around work and the specific identifications that come from motherhood. “Mothers, incontestably more than women in general, remain powerless, even after forty years of feminism” (O'REILLY, 2019, p. 13, our translation).

Mendonça (2021), in an article about the absence of the theme of maternity and mothering in feminist studies, labels it “the elephant in the room of academic feminism”. This argument is also grounded in O'Reilly's (2016) words, when observing the discomfort with the theme and its possible associations with essentialism: “because gender difference is seen as a structuring factor in the maintenance of male dominance, many feminists minimize or disregard any marker of this difference: motherhood is — obviously — the primary one” (O'Reilly, 2016, p. 203 *apud* Mendonça, 2021, p. 66, our translation). Nestled between the demand for rights and the excesses caused by neoliberal discourses that overvalue the role of the mother in society, motherhood becomes, in fact, a delicate and complex subject. When we think about the images that are widely disseminated by advertising, television, film, and other cultural products, we face an even more worrying dimension: the universalization of feelings and demands, which further affects the different realities of countries in the Global South.

Contemporary studies in Latin America, in dialogue with O'Reilly's work, coined the concept of "captivity" (LAGARDE, 2005) to question the position imposed upon women-mothers. According to the author, this constitutes the political-cultural expression of women's condition within the patriarchal world. Lagarde (2005, p. 36) develops a critique of how this condition shapes female experiences and identities. The captivity of the women-wife-mother³ (LAGARDE, 2005, p. 38-39) is presented as the most common paradigm, in which the women only become personally fulfilled by procreation and codependency from motherhood, filiation, and marriage. "The condition of womanhood is a historical creation, whose content is the set of circumstances, qualities and essential characteristics that define woman as a social and cultural generic being, a being of and for others" (LAGARDE, 2005, p. 33, our translation). Likewise, motherhood is seen as a "sexual and maternal instinct", something "natural" and "that cannot be renounced" for all of women (LAGARDE, 2005, p. 17, p. 202, our translation). The naturalization of the role of women reinforces the erasure of care work in general, unseen in society, and, rather than being a choice, becomes an inherent duty of the female sex⁴. The patriarchal society described by Lagarde (2005) imposes, through the experience of childbirth, the only legitimate way of being a woman: becoming a mother. The configuration of social status is considered successful if women feel fulfilled only in this condition. Therefore, biological reproduction is highlighted as fundamental for "female identity" (LAGARDE, 2005, our translation).

The author reinforces that the naturalization of motherhood and the devaluation of care work, also present in Badinter (1985) and O'Reilly (2016; 2019), affect the continent in which we live through its local experiences. Still, the question that drives this work emerges precisely from this critical point: how can we account for what constitutes our own

3 From the original: "*madresposa*".

4 Notice that I use "sex" instead of gender, because the main analysis which the author draws upon also expands to the biological meaning that was naturalized in the beginning of the 2000s.

“local experiences”? How can we address the many intersections involving mothering in our context, such as class, race, gender identity, and others? We propose, therefore, that in approaches such as the one in the documentary, when it comes to motherhood in the Brazilian context, the impacts must be taken into account, both in a Eurocentric perspective of the mother figure, and in the indiscriminate use of ideas originating from White feminist studies.

Decolonial motherhood: race, colonialities and the limits of the mother-subject

Decolonial epistemological reflections, produced from the 1990s onward by a group of scholars from the Global South dedicated to critiquing the effects of colonialism, pioneer a perspective more attuned to the racial and social constructs established by European colonies on our continent. Gender oppressions, however, even though observed by authors such as Aníbal Quijano (2005), only gained visibility through the efforts of women who dedicated themselves to political activism and to researching the effects of the coloniality of gender in the Latin American context. Among them, it is important to highlight Argentinian philosopher María Lugones (2020) and her contributions to decolonial feminism. It is also important to point out that, beyond the term’s theoretical dimension, the revindications, the struggle, and the foundations of the decolonial feminist ideology predate the group’s creation. Lugones (2020) states that she draws inspiration from and grounds her work in the thought of activists, Indigenous and peripheral women’s groups, Black feminist thinkers, among others, who were already operating in a “decolonial” manner long before the term was coined. Such inputs are used by the author to examine how modern/colonial concepts of sex and gender, when imposed on the existence and being of the colonized, conditioned them to a diachronic interpretation, limited to Eurocentric patterns and incapable of accounting for the complexity pervading the social relations and subjectivities of these people.

For Lugones (2020), the modern-colonial gender system is characterized by two “sides” of operation: a visible/luminous one and an invisible/obscured one. When it comes to the visible, that of privileged White women, purity and sexual subjugation are imposed. Thereby, their reproductive function is valued even as these women are excluded from the power structure. On the other side — the invisible one —, any and all traces of prior gender attributions are erased, and colonized women (Black, Indigenous, peripheral, etc.) are violently subjected to forced sexual relations with colonizers and to immeasurable exploitation of their labor. The category “woman,” however, is conditioned by the visible side, and the term, within these parameters, becomes universal.

Lugones (2020) expands the analysis conducted by Aníbal Quijano (2005) on the coloniality of power and focuses more specifically on the use of the modern-colonial gender system in the subjugation of racialized women. It constitutes a mechanism through which the colonial system imposed a binary and hierarchical gender regime, relegating non-White women to a state of total invisibility throughout history.

Biological dimorphism, the man/woman dichotomy, heterosexuality, and patriarchy are inscribed — with capital letters and hegemonically — within the very meaning of gender. Aníbal Quijano did not perceive his own conformity with the hegemonic meaning of gender. By incorporating these elements into the analysis of the coloniality of power, I seek to expand and complicate his ideas, which I consider central to what I call the modern/colonial gender system (LUGONES, 2020, p. 56, our translation).

Within this logic, the categories man and woman began to be extended as homogeneous and universal. Still, there is a standard in which “woman” is used to refer to White, privileged, heterosexual women and “man” is used to refer to heterosexual, privileged men. Lugones (2020) notices that this separation twists and makes invisible the intersection between race and gender, and reinforces compulsive heterosexuality as a form of control over reproduction and the perpetuation of social roles.

To expose the artificiality and violence of the imposition of the modern patriarchal system, Lugones (2020) draws on research by the

indigenous-descendant scholar Paula Gunn Allen and the Nigerian author Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí.

Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí understands gender, as introduced by the West, as a tool of domination that produces two social categories that are opposed in a binary, hierarchical manner. “Women” (as gender) is not a term defined by biology, even though it is assigned to anafemales. The colonial association between anatomy and gender is part of this binary and hierarchical opposition, central to the domination of anafemales introduced by colonial rule. Women are defined in relation to men, the norm. Women are those who do not have a penis; do not have power; cannot participate in the public sphere. None of this characterized Yoruba anafemales prior to colonization (LUGONES, 2020, p. 66, our translation).

The studies made by Oyěwùmí and mentioned by Lugones (2020) expose the hierarchization of gender in the modern-capitalist standards as something enforced upon Yoruba systems that, before this interference, were not characterized by a dichotomous and oppositional differentiation, much less by the subjugation of females. However, as Oyěwùmí (2020) observes, even after years of imposition and domination, it is possible to identify forms of resistance within familiar cultural and religious dynamics among descendants of those cultures. In Brazil, the practices related to religions of African descent are an example when it comes to the flexibilization of gender roles and the hierarchies determined by these roles.

In another written piece dedicated to the challenges of African epistemologies in confronting the Eurocentric foundations of feminism, Oyěwùmí (2020) remarks on the limitations of the theme of motherhood as approached by White feminism. The main limitation concerns the conditioning — even as the subject of criticism — of the womanly role within the modern nuclear family structure. Thus, the category “mother” only truly make sense when comprehended as the wife of patriarchy. “This is the only explanation for the popularity of the following oxymoron: single mom” (OYĚWÙMÍ, 2020, p. 90, our translation). Thereby, while marriage and gender-based oppressions

are objects of critique within feminist studies of Euro-American origin, these same feminist frameworks are also grounded in the institution of the family, conditioning intelligible social arrangements and structures within specific societies and contexts.

When it comes to Latin American countries, the nuclear family was enforced as a role model. However, it is important to identify both the artificiality of this imposition and the experiences and existences that do not follow this rule. Any discourse that addresses motherhood and the category of “woman” as issues in our context must also examine the foundations on which those critiques are based, taking into account the different forms of submission and the confrontations in their daily lives. With this in mind, when we face discursive practices such as those shown in the film discussed here, one must wonder: who is this woman?

The decolonial feminist Françoise Vergès (2020, p. 45, our translation) proposes the concept of “civilizational feminism” to analyze the effects of years of gender studies that consider a “universal being of feminism”. The initiative is not only a critique of White feminism but also highlights the author’s position before a colonizing continent: Europe, a continent historically built on the colonization of external territories. According to Vergès (2020), the paths to avoid the traps of civilizational feminism, through a discourse underpinned by neoliberalism and individualist gender equality, are crucial for deconstructing the binds of colonialism. The hegemonic script manifests itself through the increased participation of women in the job market, access to consumer goods, and industrialization, connected to what the “civilizational” call a conciliatory and peaceful globalization for all of those involved. As a counterpoint, the epistemologies of the Global South must be emphasized specifically to avoid the universalization of women’s condition as pertaining to a White, middle-class, and European standard.

Love: unconditional or universal?

The documentary *Unconditional: The Myth of Motherhood* (2024) evokes, in its title, a reference to Elizabeth Badinter (1985), which is present throughout most of the film's 70-minutes, as will be mentioned later. This influence is evident in the moment when the book *Love Conquered: The Myth of Motherly Love* is mentioned, and in the intersection of an interview with the philosopher, conducted in another environment. The film constructs itself through studio interviews with nine women from different backgrounds, along with Patrícia's interventions. There are also scenes from Fróes' routine as a mother and archive images of the director's childhood, all narrated in first-person point of view (POV). According to the director, "It is a movie that I wished I had seen when I became a mother. I felt very alone and so deceived; it was nothing like they promised. [...] I made the movie in first-person POV, and these are motherhood experiences that, in certain ways, relate to mine" (INCONDICIONAL, 2024, our translation). However, when we observe the narrative and conceptual choices in the feature that relate to the director's personal allegory, we face the question posed in this article: which mothers are we talking about?

The opening sequence of the documentary distinguishes itself from the following by alluding to images widely circulated in the advertising of "perfect" and idealized motherhood. Before the first scene, however, the caption reads: "This film was recorded during work hours, with eight-hour workloads executed on commercial days". We see Patrícia Fróes playing with her child, Lino, on a field in a park on a sunny day, while the song "Sua majestade, o nenê" plays, a recording made in the 1960s by the trio Nagô. The images are in slow motion and have a "dreamy effect" of an idyllic scenario. Through narration, Fróes evokes a rupture in those patterns, questioning what was needed to obtain this type of image, such as assistants, makeup artists, equipment, etc. From then on, the movie shows the behind-the-scenes work, the team at work, Patrícia's makeover, and the space being prepared, breaking through to the "fantasy" that then becomes an image.

In the sequence, after the movie title, we are taken to a studio where most of the scenes are filmed. We see Patrícia's child on the floor, playing by himself for 20 seconds. Next, we cut to a frontal image of Patrícia's body sitting on a chair, with under-eye circles and a messy ponytail. These images, associated with the initial lettering about the eight-hour workload and the making of the images of the idyllic sequence, evoke the idea of a mother's routine when she has to take her son to work with her. The theme of coordination between work and motherhood recurs throughout the film, as discussed below. It is also important to note that the director's image in this sequence does not have a specific function among the interviews that begin in the following scene, with her mother, Luciana, occupying the same chair that Patrícia had been sitting in beforehand. These images bring up the discussion of the excesses involved in a "mother's job," which is revisited later, in a sequence in which Patrícia lists her chores as a mother.

Overall, we identified 13 questions/lines of questioning that the director asked the interviewees. We highlight here the sections that relate to the proposed discussion, in which the observed effects become more evident. Specifically, it is in our interest to highlight the moments in which possibilities of rupture are silenced. The first question, directed to Luciana Fróes, the director's mother, is about the desire to become a mother: "Did you always dream of being a mother?" "Always. It took me very long to become a mother". In this sequence, five women answer this question. The first three interviewees answer positively regarding their desire to be mothers. The fourth interviewee, Thainá, the only Black woman in the sequence dedicated to this question, answers completely differently from the others: "I never wanted to be a mother. I thought motherhood was something that nullified life. Something that paralyzed dreams and projects." Then we follow to Mariana's answer, the fifth interviewee: "Always. Ever since I was a child". We cut to archive images of Patrícia while pregnant, during an ultrasound, with the baby's heartbeat as the background. The camera pans to Patrícia and then to the ultrasound image. Cuts to a low-angle shot of a three-year-old, which we take to be

Patrícia, and the camera gets closer to her expression. Cuts to Patrícia, as an adult, apprehensive during childbirth. Such images prompt a dialogue about the desire to be a mother as something instilled in women since childhood. The insertion of archival images of the director in different contexts and moments of her life are used in many of the sequences, either illustrating or corroborating the answers. In this case specifically, it becomes evident that at no point were Thainá's words considered to conduct the film.

The next round of questions refers to immediate love after childbirth. Apparently, the idea was to demystify something that was built as a "magical" moment, but that actually creates a strange feeling of solitude, as the interviewees and the archive images seek to affirm. The last interview in this sequence includes Thaiane, another Black mother, whose testimony we will highlight as distinct from all the others, especially compared with Patrícia's childbirth images, used at many points in the film. This answer is also used as a hook for the following theme, about the baby blues:

I went through twenty-two and a half hours of labor. She (her daughter) was born on April 17th, 2020. During the pandemic, I had just been placed on leave from work [...] in a crowded maternity clinic in Madureira. With a bunch of mothers saying: 'Please, for the love of God, please help me, mother!' And I was like: what's happening? Is it really like this? [...] And after this, I could not smile, could not cry, I only felt exhausted.

The contrast between these words and the other accounts relating to the theme is evident, but gets diluted in the theme shift to the baby blues — a phenomenon which, according to the director, 80 to 90% of pregnant women around the world fall victim to, but nobody talks about. Beyond emphasizing a real issue, these strategies also reveal an attempt to approach the theme as universal, ignoring the intersectional gender characteristics of experiences such as Thaiane's.

Following the theme of the baby blues, the interviews focus on maternal loneliness and exhaustion during the first months. We also highlight that, during this sequence, Patrícia's narration about her childbirth

experience contrasts very strongly with that of Thaiane, as previously described:

There's a quote that I really like. It is not about motherhood, but I think it says a lot about motherhood. It goes like this: 'all oppression implies a simulation.' These simulations are often done during childbirth, when the photographer chooses the best angle and removes your skin imperfections with the best filter. In the maternity clinic in which Lino [her child] was born, there was no psychologist, but there was a makeup artist (INCONDICIONAL, 2024, our translation).

This statement, apparently a form of criticism, reveals the class indicators that structure the director's experience, especially as the main narrator of the feature. After all, which maternity clinic is she talking about? In which realities do a photographer and a makeup artist accompany childbirth? This is a privilege inaccessible to most Brazilian mothers. At this moment, a similarity becomes evident in relation to the object of Miñoso's (2020, our translation) criticism, which establishes the concept of the feminist Eurocentric reasoning as a "series of practices [...] that were developed and agreed upon by feminists of any tendency and through which they contributed to the production of a universal 'woman/women' being." The analysis of *Unconditional* allows us to infer that, even when trying to deconstruct the "myth of mother instinct", the image of "woman" is presented regardless of any difference, space, or time. Motherhood is present as a Western-modern project, as Miñoso (2020) observes. Even though there was the precaution of using women from different contexts and backgrounds, consisting of three Black interviewees and one of Asian descent, in none of the sections are the particularities of the said mothers, of race, class, or otherwise, used or highlighted by the director in the film's progression.

Another aspect that needs to be highlighted is the choice to exhibit the interviews without any mention of race, class, territory, or gender identity. These identities are only revealed at the end, with the movie credits. Such a choice could be read as an attempt to avoid any prejudice

and create equity in the experiences. However, it could also reveal a strategy that seeks to universalize the experiences of motherhood, looking for similarities that create relatability across diverse mother profiles. This strategy reinforces the erasure of different motherhood experiences, particularly when narratives shaped by specific social conditions emerge. This contrast makes evident what Lugones (2020, p. 73-76, our translation) refers to as the “sides” of the modern/colonial gender system. On the one hand, there are White, bourgeois women, for whom motherhood is idealized as “natural”, that is, the position occupied by the director herself in her narration. On the other hand, there are racialized women, marked by overload, exhaustion, and precarity. By attempting to universalize these experiences and voices as if they were equivalent, the documentary, even in its intention to deconstruct, reinscribes colonial masks that silence structural differences. Grada Kilomba (2019) helps to illuminate this mechanism by naming the “mask of silencing” as the colonial device that suppresses speech and symbolizes an entire regime of domination. The question that echoes from the reflection “who can speak?” resonates in *Unconditional*.

Resistance: breaking the silence and refusing labels

Although the analyzed film draws on universalized ideas of struggle, reinforcing the invisible side of gender coloniality (LUGONES, 2020), it is possible to point out sections that reveal fissures that disrupt the modern/colonial standard, resulting in images of resistance. Fissure is not used here randomly, but to emphasize points of rupture or instability that emerge within an idealized or widespread representation. Those fissures are the moments when lived-through experience and the subordinate line of thought break through the logics forced by a “feminist reasoning” that considers itself universal and Eurocentric, and usually reproduces racism, elitism, and heterosexism (CURIÉL, 2020; MIÑOSO, 2020).

Such effects can be observed, for example, in the questions of the interviewee of Chinese descent, Lian Tai.

I think that the fact that the mother is considered solely responsible, because of this narrative that, for her, it is natural, instinctive that she is the one who must sacrifice everything, ends up turning it into an exclusively mother-child relationship. One of the two has to lose. For the child to be well, the mother must sacrifice everything. Or, for the mother to be well, it is the child who ends up being neglected. Other possibilities have not been considered. Where is society? Where is the community? Where is the extended family? Where are public policies to care for the child?

Lian's discomfort creates a fissure in attributions related to motherhood, as it challenges the idea that the upbringing of children is the sole responsibility of the mother, reinforcing care work as a social responsibility. The need to recognize other types of knowledge and practices that emerge from experiences and that propose other ways of living outside the liberal/colonial matrix that privatizes care is one of the most important arguments raised by decolonial feminism (CURIEL, 2020). Western modernity, as one of the faces of capitalism and the service of coloniality, imposed an individualist logic that oppressed women, making them bear alone the costs of motherhood, those which, in other contexts, were always a collective responsibility. Another point of rupture emerges at the moment in which the moms talk about the support groups formed by other women. This is mentioned again in Patrícia's final words: "I learned that feminism is the opposite of loneliness."

Another part of the film that relates to racial discourse is its criticism of the term "warrior" as it applies to mothers. This, though directed to all mothers, relates directly to the image of the strong Black woman (GONZÁLEZ, 2020) and creates space to question this stereotype, as in Gabi's speech:

Damn, I was in the building the other day. I had two tote bags and the child. But I was vibing. I was wearing headphones like this. Man, I was vibing so hard. The doorman said: 'I admire you a lot, you're such a 'warrior'. I said: 'Holy shit, you just ruined my vibe.' Because I thought like: 'Dude,

I am carrying two tote bags, the child, and my headphones, listening to *pagode*, you know? I had such a good vibe, and the guy turned to me to call me a warrior. And I was like: ‘Okay’. But do not call me a damn warrior.

The refusal to be called a “warrior” in this case specifically creates a fissure by breaking with the romanticization of heroic maternity, thereby criticizing the glorification of maternal strength that, in effect, only naturalizes the mother’s overload. Grada Kilomba (2019), discussing the figure of the “strong Black woman,” explains that although it might be a political strategy, it also traps women in an ideal that prevents them from expressing vulnerability and the real suffering that comes from oppression. The fissure here is the demand to be seen as a complex human being that has “the freedom to feel angry, and when weak, I would like the freedom to feel as such, not to be a ‘superhuman’” (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 194, our translation).

In conclusion, these fissures represent moments in which the voices and experiences of women in the documentary challenge the narratives imposed on them by motherhood, exposing their contradictions, violence, and the need for a more complex and decolonial approach that recognizes the heterogeneity of women’s lived experiences. They are an invitation to “unveil the hidden feminist struggles and their commitment to coloniality” (MIÑOSO, 2020, p. 98, our translation).

Concluding remarks

The analysis of the documentary *Unconditional — The Myth of Motherhood* showed that, at the same time that the feature presents itself as a form of criticism of the myth of motherly instinct, it also reinforces this ideal in the way it universalizes the experience of motherhood, inserting it in a type of reductionist feminist critique that is imbued with traces of coloniality. We conclude that, to break away from the standard image of the urban, middle-class White woman, more is needed than just inclusion and a diversity of characters. It is necessary to speak with, not merely about, and — through attentive listening — to decolonize the cinematic

discourse itself as well as an ostensibly contestatory political thought, by continually seeking to determine the points of view from which such contestations are constructed. This involves a process of deconstruction and constant questioning, and, above all, recognizing the privileges embedded in the social and historical context of the production of these contesting discourses.

Simultaneously, despite the elements analyzed in this work, it was possible to identify fissures amongst the discourses and gestures of the interviewees in certain moments, such as the refusal to be called “a warrior” and the discomfort with the exclusive attribution of responsibility to the mother. Those are moments that challenge the romanticization of motherhood and reconstruct care work as a collective responsibility, made possible by the dynamics arising from exchanges among women. Within these accounts, it is possible to identify traces of livelihoods and perspectives that directly contrast with the hegemonic standards, making it evident that motherhood cannot be understood as a common, homogeneous experience.

More than identifying the limits of an artwork, this reflection highlights the significance of recognizing the plurality of experiences of motherhood and the need to create listening spaces that do not erase these differences. To ponder who can talk about motherhood means ultimately to think about whose voices are considered worthy of recognition and listening, both on film and in social life.

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