

# The Second Mother: bioethical analysis on gender and class

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## Abstract

Movie screenings followed by debate can be used as a pedagogical resource for narrative bioethics, aiming to share perceptions and collectively expand the capacity to reflect and dialogue. In this article, we sought to deepen the analysis of ethical and political issues raised in a debate on the movie *The Second Mother* with students from a public university. The film makes a socio-historical rescue of the Brazilian formation, exposing ancestral antagonisms and a viscerally racist, sexist, and authoritarian culture. Collectively, the main key scenes of the movie were addressed and discussed in the light of social bioethics, based on previously recommended reading. The process led the students to problematize relations of gender, class, work, power, and symbolic violence in contemporary Brazil – necessary reflections in the context of higher education in health.

**Keywords:** Bioethics. Ethics. Motion pictures. Education, higher. Gender identity.

## Resumo

### Que horas ela volta? Análise bioética sobre gênero e classe

A exibição de filmes seguida de debate pode ser empregada como recurso pedagógico da bioética narrativa, visando compartilhar percepções e ampliar coletivamente a capacidade de refletir e dialogar. Neste artigo buscou-se aprofundar a análise de questões ético-políticas suscitadas em debate sobre o filme *Que horas ela volta?* com estudantes de uma universidade pública. O filme faz um resgate sócio-histórico da formação brasileira, expondo antagonismos ancestrais e uma cultura visceralmente racista, sexista e autoritária. Foram levantadas coletivamente as principais cenas-chave do filme, debatidas à luz da bioética social com base em leitura previamente recomendada. O processo levou os alunos a problematizar relações de gênero, classe, trabalho, poder e violência simbólica no Brasil contemporâneo – reflexões necessárias no contexto da educação superior em saúde.

**Palavras-chave:** Bioética. Ética. Filmes cinematográficos. Educação superior. Identidade de gênero.

## Resumen

### Una segunda madre: análisis bioético sobre género y clase

La exhibición de películas seguida de debate se puede emplear como un recurso pedagógico de la bioética narrativa para compartir percepciones y ampliar colectivamente la capacidad de reflexionar y dialogar. En este artículo, se trató de profundizar el análisis de cuestiones ético-políticas suscitadas en un debate con estudiantes de una universidad pública acerca de la película brasileña *Una segunda madre*. Al realizar un rescate sociohistórico de la formación brasileña, la película expone antagonismos ancestrales y una cultura visceralmente racista, sexista y autoritaria. Colectivamente, se identificaron las escenas clave de la película y se discutieron a la luz de la bioética social, con base una lectura previamente recomendada. Este proceso condujo a los alumnos a problematizar relaciones de género, clase, trabajo, poder y violencia simbólica en el Brasil contemporáneo, reflexiones necesarias en el contexto de educación superior en salud.

**Palabras clave:** Bioethics. Ethics. Películas cinematográficas. Educación superior. Identidad de género.

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The film *The Second Mother*<sup>1</sup> was selected for a pedagogical activity with undergraduate students from a public university. It was chosen for its intelligent and committed socio-historical rescue of Brazilian culture, exposing ancestral antagonisms, as well as the authoritarianism, racism, and sexism still so visible in contemporary Brazil. As they evoke reflections on different dimensions of reality, films are important vehicles for communication, expression, and perception of the world.

The use of cinema in the education of health professionals is not new. However, in the past 20 years, this non-traditional pedagogical strategy has been increasingly applied. Cinema as an active methodology aimed at education generates discussions on relevant topics, with critical, reflective, and transformative power, thus stimulating the critical positioning of students. The film debate experience, focused through the lens of social bioethics, emphasizes the plurality of perceptions and perspectives on reality, awakening the imagination, and expanding the possibilities for dialogue, mediation, and ethical reflection<sup>2</sup>.

The selected movie brings together in the daily scenario of a Brazilian middle class family the question of two teenagers who live in different realities: "What time does she come back?" The query is addressed to two women connected by complex work and life relationships, being a sign of the female emancipation that both bring to the scene when occupying wage work spaces in 21st century Brazil, in dichotomous social places. On the one hand, we have the woman who plays the role of "boss," symbolizing the emancipation of domestic work; on the other, we have the maid who experiences her emancipation from a place that reproduces dated interrelationships of submission and substitution.

Like most working women, these two must face triple working hours: in addition to working to maintain the family, they are also responsible for educating their children and caring for the home. This journey is camouflaged by her hiring a the maid, another woman, to replace her in "domestic" and even maternal duties, given the emotional-affective involvement of her son with the maid, analogous to the wet nurses in colonial Brazil.

By focusing on the structural antagonism of Brazilian society, the film opens cultural and fundamental wounds perpetuated by values and stigmas arising from paternalism, sexism, authoritarianism, slavery, and the exploitation of

work. Social roles are based on gender and work identities that lead to the sharing of affections, positions, and status, which dispute the domain of family relationships. Domestic intimacy is overcome by a tension that threatens the game of affectivity, sexuality, and education.

The "maid," formerly "*mucama*," refers to colonial-slaveholding relationships, as a subjugated female figure disqualified for productive work. This social difference maintains, in the urban and modern environment of Brazilian society, the country's oldest and most profound contradiction: the "master's house" and the "slave quarters"<sup>3</sup>. The analogies between slavery and precarious wage labor relations mark a social ambiguity highlighted in the movie: domestic employment as a natural predestination of women and greatest expression of class and gender inequality.

In symbolic exchanges between those who can give and those who need to receive, the dominant position is naturalized, both in objective and intersubjective aspects<sup>4</sup>. Hegemonic social groups exercise and ensure their social and cohesive positions by coercing those dominated, through ideological, physical, and economic processes. In the history of modern Brazil, the beginning of industrialization and economic development, which should reduce racial inequality, especially with the end of the massive foreigner immigration in the 1930s, contradictorily kept former slaves as a mass of dispossessed, incorporated in a "non-productive" or peripheral way to the economy.

When black workers are displaced from urban centers by the process of forced "whitening", based on the occupation of jobs by "European whites," an important economic disadvantage is perpetrated. In the context of incipient proletarianization, the black population continues to lead a precarious existence in urban outskirts and rural centers historically marked by export monoculture. In such context, the provision of domestic services becomes an important work front for black women or migrants.

Without drastic changes, Brazilian society continues to be structured on master's dependence, clientelism, and the hierarchy between whites and non-whites or between rich and poor<sup>5</sup>. *The Second Mother*<sup>1</sup> portrays this reality in a common, but unevenly shared, domestic space, shedding light on the interrelations that reveal hierarchical roles, with the domestic aspect reflecting the feminine,

the subaltern, the subcitizenship. In this article, we sought to deepen the analysis of the ethical-political problems raised by the movie in a bioethics pedagogical activity with undergraduate health students at a public university.

## Method

From the perspective of narrative bioethics, the film *The Second Mother*<sup>1</sup> was used as a pedagogical resource to share perceptions and discuss problems, collectively expanding the capacity for analysis, ethical reflection, and mediation of a group of university students from the south of Brazil, undergoing work-internship. Narrative bioethics aims to exercise moral judgment, that is, to make decisions not only based on facts, but also on values and duties. Cinema is used to bare human existence itself as a narrative, going beyond the narrow margins within which reason has been thought. By relating with what is experienced in the movie and what is collectively thought, a pedagogical teaching-learning space is built<sup>6</sup>.

In the activity reported here, we applied the procedures recommended by Flick<sup>7</sup>. According to the first one, “watch and feel,” the movie was considered as a whole, and impressions, questions, and patterns of visible meaning were noted. Next, the most essential questions were identified, selecting, from the descriptions of segments of reality contained in the film, key scenes on which questions to be answered were formulated.

Then, structured micro-analyses of individual scenes and sequences were carried out, describing fragments to arrive at detailed patterns of the exhibition. Finally, we sought to answer the central question of the analysis from realistic and subversive readings, contrasting the patterns to arrive at a final interpretation. Realistic reading seeks to understand film as a true description of the phenomenon, with an accurate analysis of the contents and formal aspects of the images to validate the truth claims that the work reproduces about a given reality. Subversive reading, in turn, highlights the author’s ideas that may have influenced the film, as well as the interpreters’ ideas, which may have influenced the interpretation.

After the screening, a debate was carried out to reflect on the highlighted issues in the light of social bioethics, based on previously recommended

readings<sup>8</sup>. When watching the movie, students were instructed to look for aspects relevant to the bioethical debate and to the Brazilian context, in view of the experience with health professionals, patient-users, community and families in this phase of teaching-work integration, in which students get closer to the Brazilian Unified Health System. In the debate, students discussed issues of gender, class, work, socioeconomic and cultural inequality, autonomy, power relations and symbolic violence, drawing relations with the previous reading.

This article aimed to deepen the analysis of the issues discussed in this pedagogical activity, from three key scenes, analyzing the Brazilian socioeconomic and historical context. We sought to complement the realistic reading with subversive reading, following the proposed method. We hope that, based on the path described in this work, other film debate activities will be developed in educational institutions to promote the training of future health professionals.

## Results and discussion

### *One's place in the world: dehumanization through work*

The first key scene selected is that of a conversation between Val (the maid) and Jéssica (her daughter). In the dialogue, Val expresses her place in the world (*one is born knowing already*<sup>1</sup>), indicating a naturalized view of class and gender that reaffirms the figure of the maid as a productive object, adjectivated by submission, obedience, and subservience in its incorporation into the bosses’ “master’s house.” Historically defined for the working body, marked by a different accent and culture and by class antagonism, this place reveals the concentration of power interspersed with affection and civilizing contradictions.

Bárbara, the mistress, suggests an affective approach – *you are like family*<sup>1</sup> –, while being bothered by the fact that the maid’s daughter “does not know her place,” preventing her from crossing the limits of the kitchen (*do not let her pass through that door over here*<sup>1</sup>). These scenes and lines reflect the dehumanization through work, as well as the generational clash between a woman, mother, worker and self-provider, with her daughter, teenager and student, with prospects for a freer future, despite being deprived from maternal company since the mother’s migration to the Southeast in search for work.

When writing *Casa-grande e senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves*) in 1933, Gilberto Freyre<sup>3</sup> probably did not imagine that what he described would remain in the daily lives of 21st century Brazilian families. When he stated that the strongest mark of colonization in Brazil was the use of native people – mainly indigenous women and later black women, *caboclas*, or orphaned and “idle” girls sent from Portugal –, Freyre enters the heart of the patriarchal and aristocratic Brazilian family, formed together with the sugar plantations. The “masters” (initially adventurers, soldiers seeking fortune, exiled, new Christians fleeing persecution, castaways; slave, parrot, and wooden traffickers) started to live comfortably in houses (the master's house) that supported their particular initiative and effort, constituting their families in the mixture of races with land-based agriculture.

Slave labor, the basis of the economy, sterilized everything around it and accommodated an oligarchic-nepotist political organization, symbol of the alliance between State, market, and Church. Thus, the “master” grew accustomed to command, to a rude, violent, and even perverse authoritarianism, also exercised in the administration of politics and the State. Women were denied the right to the street, establishing a strong cultural oppression of gender. Without social life and deprived of education, they were submitted to a type of “white sadism” of the European.

The wife (*sinhá*) supervised the maids (*mucamas*), nurses, and foster brothers (“kids” of the young master), who came up from the slave quarters for domestic service and were considered “people of the house.” The “good” black nurse raised the young master (*sinhô-moço*), breastfeeding him, rocking him, teaching him the first words in Portuguese, satisfying all his wishes, and often replacing father and mother. For this position, the most aesthetically and morally adapted female slaves were chosen, docilized by religious doctrine and morals, subjected, submissive, and inferior.

The division of society between despotic masters and forcibly dominated slaves was the main cause of the abuse of black men and women by whites, in their sadistic and hypocritical forms of “love.” The famous painting – attributed to Debret – of D. Pedro II in the lap of his nurse, holding one of her breasts, represents the first promiscuity allowed to the owners of power; it symbolizes, above all, the appropriation of black women's body by the white man and the construction of Brazilian society at the expense

of the work of this population<sup>9</sup>. The idle life of the plantation master, cradled in the hammock by black hands and then moved by the body of a “fresh” maid, reproduces the manorial relationship of sadistic taste for command, characteristic of the Brazilian man raised in a master's house and internalized into popular imaginary: a manly and courageously autocratic government, less willing to reform or correct political-economic vices and more fond of victimizing<sup>3</sup>.

A society formed by the most profound of all social antagonisms, “the master and the slave,” is formed, from which the historical bases of the submission of Brazilian workers derive. These are the bases: 1) violence associated with power of command; 2) the alleged – socially constructed – intellectual inferiority of blacks and manual workers; and 3) Christian morality associated with the right to property, with obedience and servility<sup>3</sup>.

In modern societies, where market interests are hegemonic, the instrumental value of the body takes on different and new ways, but corroborating the idea that sustained and sustains slavery, despite the growing rejection of this type of trade. The purchase and sale of the body is naturalized, confusing freedom and availability with property and commercialization. Control over labor strength and capacity gains more value; physical and mental capacities based on the exploitation of material and immaterial work are hired<sup>10</sup>. Women face the additional sexist fetish, which imbues the female body with other properties besides productive work, always being kept at a disadvantageous social place: as domestic or sexual labor, sensual and maternal, subsumed to male use and power.

The symbolic violence against women and dehumanization through work as co-participants of Brazilian socioeconomic and cultural inequality<sup>11</sup>, portrayed in the film by the relationship of command and submission between mistress and maid, bring to light the bioethical topics of autonomy, violation, and liberation. Critical theories of bioethics articulate the principles of freedom and autonomy with the guarantee of equality, equity, and protection. According to Berlinguer<sup>12</sup>, the utilitarian perspective – which considers better the action that brings greater happiness to the greatest number of people – and the justice perspective – which considers economic and social inequalities and seeks the greatest benefit to the socially disadvantaged – question the vicious circle that leads the weakest, albeit unconsciously, to endure the greatest damage.

Autonomous individuals are free to manifest their will without internal or external constraints that prevent or limit their choices and decisions. They rationally decide what is “good” for them, choosing between the existing alternatives and understanding the consequences of their choices, according to their values, expectations, needs, priorities, and beliefs. However, the ideal of autonomy is utopian when considering social vulnerability<sup>13</sup> and negative discrimination<sup>14</sup> of individuals and groups in contexts of profound socioeconomic and cultural inequality, in which autonomy can be masked by coercion of will, exposing the essential aspect of the vulnerability.

In unequal power relations, there are instances in which ethical reflection does not apply, and absolutized principles are insufficient. Principlist bioethics, aimed at individuals able to consider the effectiveness of their assumptions and to defend their interests through them, presents no way out for those socially vulnerable and discriminated against. Social bioethics, on the other hand, discusses actions of protection and intervention by the State before inequity and oppression, turning to the effectiveness of public policies with positive discrimination of people and groups<sup>15</sup>.

Changing precarious relationships and implementing laws (such as the Constitutional Amendment that established equality of labor rights between domestic workers and other urban and rural workers<sup>16</sup>) can mean a shift in the conscience of workers from mere vendors of workforce to another, of producers: informed, reflective, conscious, and transforming individuals<sup>12</sup>. In this sense, the first key scene selected shows a change in the daughter’s consciousness, beyond a mere generational clash. Instead of the expected subservient behavior that naturalizes the submission historically required from the maid, Jessica’s question – *Where did you learn what you can and cannot do? Did you read it in a book?*<sup>1</sup> – expresses another position, learned in contact with a libertarian education.

On the one hand, in Val’s view, domestic employment is seen as the only way of productive life, with no alternatives for herself or her offspring<sup>3</sup>. On the other, education as a practice of freedom, unlike education for domination, implies recognizing human beings in their relationships with the world and their conscience, since the conscience and the world happen at the same time, awakening reflection. The search for disalienation and for the affirmation of the human being as

a being for oneself is an achievement before dehumanization, considering that oppression is not a given fate, but the result of an unfair historical order that generates violence. The oppressors’ power, when seeking to alleviate the weakness of the oppressed, is nothing but false generosity. Thus, who better than the oppressed to free themselves from oppression<sup>17</sup>?

### **Symbolic violence against women**

The second key scene selected focuses on the marriage proposal that the boss makes to the maid’s daughter, after visiting some of his properties, unequivocally showing his income power, which maintains the family and social structure. This scene, followed by that of the boss “lying in the hammock” and the jealous mistress, symbolizes the permissiveness of violence against women, in a routine of material ostentation devoid of social meaning.

Since colonial times, the acceptance of relationships of violence and domestic submission in which women are victims of moral, emotional, and sexual abuse has been continually constructed in Brazil. Man has always been allowed to “catch” a maid for his delight, before the wife’s chaste and naturally resigned eyes – an individual who married early and was sexually and socially repressed by her father and later by her husband, destined to breed and take care of the home<sup>3</sup>. This mistress, when jealous, invariably inflicted cruelty on the “house” female slaves, ordering their eyes, teeth, breasts, or nails to be ripped out, burning their faces, or selling them on the market.

This tradition of submission and violence remains in the symbolic imaginary, reworked in the new cultural contexts in which it is inserted: man, strong and centralizing, at the same time romantic and sacred<sup>9</sup>, in the exercise of his patriarchal role, has the power to determine the conduct of subordinate social categories, authorized – or at least tolerated – by society to punish what he sees as a deviation<sup>18</sup>. Male strength can be measured by the fact that it does not need to be justified; the androcentric view imposes itself as neutral and has no need to be enunciated. While it is legitimized, the victims are held responsible for the losses suffered, in a pattern of symbolic violence that ensures the maintenance of this order<sup>19</sup>. On this basis, modern Brazilian society still remains grotesquely patriarchal and unequal, reaffirming profound structural violence towards girls and women.

Within fields or social segments, these dynamics structured by values or forms of capital can be called “*habitus*.” In this conception of dynamic structure, a set of historical relationships is a product and producer of conditioned and conditioning actions and correlations of power. Thus, the agent is inserted in the structure at the same time that he acts as a structuring force of a field, in double overlap between mental and objective structures. The reciprocity of the relationship establishes a self-conditioned generative movement, which constantly seeks to rebalance itself, tending to regenerate and reproduce itself.

Agents cannot conduct themselves, improvise, or create freely, as they are subject to the structure of the field, its codes, and its precepts. Still, within limits, within internalized and accepted restrictions, conduct, improvisation, and creation can be free. The *habitus* is then considered a system of dispositions, ways of perceiving, feeling, doing, and thinking that lead to acting in a certain way, in a given circumstance, not with mechanical or deterministic, but plastic and flexible dispositions, acquired in the correlations of social structures. Bearers of individual and collective history, internalized in such a way that their existence is ignored, such dispositions appear as unconscious body and mental routines, which allow us to act without thinking. They are the product of learning, a process of which we are no longer aware and that is expressed by a “natural” attitude of conducting ourselves in a certain environment.

The *habitus* generates a logic, a practical rationality, irreducible to theoretical reason. It denotes the system of durable and transferable dispositions that works as a generating and organizer principle of practices and representations, associated with a particular class of conditions of existence. The *habitus* designates not only a conditioning, but also a principle of action. These are structures (durable internalized dispositions) that are structuring (generators of practices and representations), and that therefore have an autonomous dynamics, that is, they do not suppose a conscious direction in their transformations. They engender and are engendered by the logic of the social field. Thus, we are vectors of a structured structure that becomes a structuring structure<sup>4,20</sup>.

This concept supports the idea that hegemonic social groups use different mechanisms

established to exercise power and ensure the reproduction of their social position<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, dominated groups are coerced through ideological, physical, and economic processes that constitute an entire economy of symbolic exchanges and social positions, as can be seen in the film. Such processes occur to the extent that groups present socially learned responses throughout history by the notions of “right” and “wrong,” which act as a gear that reproduces social beliefs by incorporating each agent and their social and gender position<sup>21</sup>.

In this case, a class and gender *habitus* is perpetually put into operation as a mechanism of symbolic violence, exercised with tacit complicity between those who suffer it and those who exercise it, based on the assumption that they exercise or suffer them unconsciously<sup>4</sup>. In other words, these are deeply violent mechanisms of subjection and domination, naturalization of representations and standardization of dominant ideas among individuals within a social network. This violence is manifested by the institutions and agents that exercise authority – as evidenced by the film – over the female body.

However, symbolic violence has no substance. It takes place not so much through the action of the dominant subject, but through the voluntary and automatic adhesion of the dominated, constituting itself as a tacit social mechanism with implicit but concrete rules, to the point of preventing other forms than the dominant relationship. Such violence implies a whole ideation about the moral rules accepted by the dominated, sanctions for transgressions and operations based on fear.

Symbolic violence requires submissions that are not even perceived as such, due to collective expectations and socially instilled beliefs. In the topic of gender, symbolic violence relies on unequal veiled social relations between the sexes, in which individuals submit to rules that define what the body, attitudes, and presentation should be<sup>4</sup>. The awareness of oneself in the daughter’s world transforms the boss’ intentions into strangeness and symbolic violence, in a gesture of affirmation.

#### **Social status, merit, and positive discrimination in access to education**

The conversation at the table about Jéssica’s project to take an entrance exam in a top-ranked Brazilian university was chosen as a third key

scene. After speeches interrupted by silences, the phrase *you know it is very difficult to pass, don't you?*<sup>1</sup> emerges, confirming the elitist prejudice that the university and the chosen course were not for “people like her.” Later, there is another disdainful line from the mistress about Jessica’s success in the exam (the same one that her son failed), which maintains the class bias: *She studied, passed... Of course, that's all she does*<sup>1</sup> – as if it were morally unforgivable that a maid’s daughter could focus solely on her studies, taking the place that would be destined, by “merit,” to her son.

Following the status pattern unveiled in the film, the exploitation of child labor, including domestic work, is still quite common in Brazil, although the legislation only allows hiring teenagers between 14 and 16 years of age as apprentices. According to national estimates, almost half of the population starts to work before the age of 14, in a type of sale and use of the body considered “natural” and morally acceptable to poor families who need the help of all members to ensure their livelihood<sup>10</sup>.

Access to the university, especially to the public ones, of greater excellence, is seen as the right of the children of the elites and middle classes, awarded by the “merit” of social lottery. In practice, this access is limited to those who attend private schools and pre-university courses, share perspectives on the future and a cosmopolitan culture – subtly represented in the movie by the T-shirts worn by the maid, coming from trips she obviously did not take. Thus, the invisible but natural estate class right, exclusive to “first class” citizens, is confirmed.

A subversive reading of the movie is revealed in the scenes in which Jessica is caught studying, confirming the contemporary ideology of meritocracy, which keeps a positive discrimination movement invisible by affirmative public policies, such as quotas for black, *quilombola*, and indigenous people and public school students. In meritocracy, based on the Fordist production organization, in which rationality acquires its own logic and establishes effective means to achieve goals, life is organized under the advent of technoscience, which participates directly in the production process.

In this knowledge society, ideas emanate directly and naturally from corporations and market laws, without tangible producers. The competence discourse is incorporated, invalidating individuals and social classes as

subjects of action, making them private atoms that learn to be competent specialists. Society is divided between those who have power because they have knowledge and those who do not have power because they lack knowledge. Happiness is achieved through competition and the success of those who win. The university ends up feeding this ideology of competence or merit, sold daily by the educational apparatus and the media. Hyperspecialists are graduated, but they remain socially and politically incompetent, for they think in a fragmented and limited way<sup>22</sup>.

However, this meritocratic ideology collides against social reality. Personal and family investment to develop interest in a successful future and prospective thinking – based on effort, concentration, discipline, self-control, and time available to assimilate knowledge – is the privilege of those who can buy free time and social prestige. The impoverished classes are denied not only economic but also cultural capital. In the dominant classes, the stimuli, since childhood, to the intellectual capacity and self-esteem prepare the individual for success (or failure) in school and career<sup>11</sup>. That is why public policies of positive discrimination are essential. They allow the “dispossessed” to have access not only to consumer goods, but to cultural goods, such as schooling.

In the past few decades, affirmative and social inclusion policies – while falling short of historical needs – have been challenged by a middle class allegedly raised to the national elite. Quotas in universities, in addition to the introduction of the National High School Exam (Enem), are perceived by this “elite” as an attack on inherited rights, such as access to public universities. But “social selection,” naturalized as merit, can be easily contradicted by data. Just consider the high percentages of the poorest young people who cannot graduate from primary or secondary education, while in the highest income quintile are young people who have access to higher education. Universities have been the privilege of the wealthiest part of society, a self-declared “white” population<sup>23</sup>.

This inequality is accompanied by xenophobia, represented in *The Second Mother*<sup>1</sup> by the spatial and social segregation inflicted on migrant northeastern workers. Disguised as competitive exchanges between formally free and equal partners in the labor market, meritocracy renders invisible the inequalities and hierarchies formed by class positions, passed down from

generation to generation. Religion, the family, and the school system, among other social apparatuses, work as ideological standardizers of “opportunities” that actually prevent social mobility. Capitalist ideological relations are based on the always available examples of men who “made themselves” from nothing, maintaining the view of opportunities open to all<sup>5</sup>. However, society is considered democratic when it institutes and expands real social rights of equitable inclusion.

Citizenship, defined in liberal democracy as a guarantee of civil rights, takes a broadened sense in participatory democracy, which opens up the field of popular struggles for economic and social rights, opposing the interests and privileges of the ruling class, thus providing a new culture of citizenship, which includes, not divides. Brazilian colonial history, however, with its authoritarian and separatist character, insists on maintaining negative discrimination against blacks and the poor, creating a scenario of total lack of perspectives, which leads to religious and media fundamentalism as the only form of identity, knowledge, and power<sup>22,24</sup>.

The culture of poverty, marked by symbolic violence, builds a subcitizenship that denies equal access to knowledge and full employment. Then, certain values of financial aspiration and consumption emerge as a possibility of inclusion for poor young people, external signs of wealth associated with the hegemony of the market and neoliberal policies. The lack of job skills, however, remains, throwing these young people into a disadvantageous type of competition, with a racist bias.

To naturalize violence and social exclusionary positions, certain mechanisms hide the ideology of domination. The transformation of individuals into human capital – that is, in investment to produce profit – frees the State from fulfilling its protective and inclusive role, expanding private market spaces and shrinking public democratic spaces, which prevents the construction of identity as something positive<sup>24</sup>. As Florestan Fernandes<sup>25</sup> points out, the bourgeois revolution in Brazil, amalgamated with reactionary social forces, could not implement liberal democracy, condemning the country to internal underdevelopment and subservience to foreign capital, which allows “white” national elites to keep their varnished shoes away from the slave quarters, hypocritically unaware of it, despite sleeping and waking up with it.

## Final considerations

The movie *The Second Mother*<sup>1</sup> proved to be the right choice to stimulate the critical thinking of undergraduate students undergoing work-internship, given the engagement observed during the debate and the relevant bioethical themes raised. Therefore, activities like this are recommended to achieve similar goals.

The film allows us to address socioeconomic and cultural antagonisms of Brazilian society, constituting social prejudices, symbolic violence, sexism, racism, and authoritarianism, so noticeable in contemporary Brazil. The debate that unveils these resistant social pathologies in our daily lives may expand the ethical reflection of future professionals and their understanding of society and their social participation as professionals and ethical-political beings committed to work in the Brazilian health system.

Domestic employment, a central element of the film, represents the maintenance of the exploitation of socially disqualified female labor, in submissive relationships that constitute Brazil today but refer to the slavery period. The collective analysis of the students showed the importance of overcoming subordination, the despotic power of the patriarchal command, and the authoritarian and exploratory social treatment, especially of working women, so as to constitute a new citizenship. The discussion brought the need to change the perspective on the very division of roles at work and in the Brazilian family, challenging the use of domestic work and family care as symbolic violence.

In the film, as her reality contrasts with her daughter’s way of life, Val starts to question her subservience. Becoming aware of her condition as an absent mother and, at the same time, a substitute mother for the mistress’ son, with irreparable personal losses, she suggests new life possibilities to herself. Self-awareness in the world becomes a constituent element of the search to reduce historically constructed inequalities and prejudices. In this sense, the expansion of rights in the scope of work, health, and culture, that is, the advancement of civilization, gives ethics a leading role. Despite temporary setbacks, these processes increasingly assert the place of the slave quarters in Brazilian history, especially in the drive for affirmative public policies. Thus, the bioethical debate about a necessary minimum ethics, a historically outdated public ethics, and a still incipient ethics of justice remains central.




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## Participation of the authors

Doris Gomes conceived the article. All authors wrote the manuscript. Mirelle Finkler critically reviewed the text.


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