

IMAGES OF CONTROL OVER BLACK WOMEN IN THE TV SOAP OPERA VALE TUDO (2025)

IMAGENS DE CONTROLE SOBRE AS MULHERES NEGRAS NA TELENOVELA “VALE TUDO” 2025

IMÁGENES DE CONTROL SOBRE LAS MUJERES NEGRAS EN LA TELENOVELA VALE TUDO (2025)



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the representations of the characters Raquel Acioli and Maria de Fátima from the soap opera Vale Tudo (2025), considering the dialogue with Black feminist discussions on images of control (COLLINS, 1990). The discussion established a relationship between the ways these Black women are represented in the soap opera and the stereotypes associated with this social group. The intention is to promote debate about the relevance of soap operas in addressing social issues and about the social imaginary that has been constructed around Black women.

Keywords: Soap Opera. Black Feminism. Images of Control.

RESUMO

O presente trabalho visa analisar as representações das personagens Raquel Acioli e Maria de Fátima, da telenovela “Vale Tudo” (2025), tendo em vista o diálogo com as discussões do feminismo negro sobre as imagens de controle (COLLINS, 1990). Na discussão, foi estabelecida a relação entre as formas de representar essas mulheres negras na novela, com os estereótipos relacionados a esse grupo. A intenção é levantar o debate sobre a relevância da telenovela na abordagem de questões sociais, e sobre o imaginário que tem sido construído socialmente sobre as mulheres negras.

Palavras-chave: Telenovela. Feminismo Negro. Imagens de Controle.

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar las representaciones de los personajes Raquel Acioli y Maria de Fátima de la telenovela Vale Tudo (2025), considerando el diálogo con las discusiones del feminismo negro sobre las imágenes de control (COLLINS, 1990). En la discusión, se estableció la relación entre las formas de representar a estas mujeres negras en la telenovela y los estereotipos asociados a este grupo social. La intención es

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promover el debate sobre la relevancia de la telenovela en el abordaje de cuestiones sociales y sobre el imaginario que se ha construido socialmente acerca de las mujeres negras.

Palabras clave: Telenovela. Feminismo Negro. Imágenes de Control.

1 INTRODUCTION

The *remake* of the telenovela "Vale Tudo", from 2025, brought as one of the proposals for the plot a more diverse cast, which made the plot adopt more black characters, including in the central core. In this way, the characters of the axis of protagonists, Raquel Acioli and Maria de Fátima Acioli, were played by black actresses, Taís Araújo and Bella Campos, respectively.

However, despite the difference in the approach, the *remake* generated discussion, since the representativeness proposed by the inclusion of black characters did not materialize as it should. In addition to the erasure of the characters in the plot, mischaracterizing their importance compared to the original version of the 1988 telenovela, the representation of the characters was built on stereotyped bases.

According to Collins (1990), in a thought about the stereotypes that are addressed to black American women (which can extend to black women of other cultures), the images of the *mammy*, the matriarch, the mother dependent on the State and the Jezebel/"hot" are common. Such stereotypes reveal images of control over this group, that is, the attribution of negative standards on black women regarding the ways of being, acting and being in the world. Understanding this phenomenon is of great interest to black feminist thought today, with a view to breaking with the perpetuation of reductionist and harmful images of black people. In this line, transposing this concern to the analysis of communicational products, as is the case of the soap opera, it is intended to verify if, and which control images may be involved in the representations of the characters Raquel and Maria de Fátima, from "Vale Tudo" (2025).

Given the presence of black women in leading roles, and in a prominent soap opera, it is pertinent to analyze how the representation of these characters took place. Thus, the present work proposes, from the perspective of control images, to trace initial reflections on which meanings were attributed to the characters Raquel and Maria de Fátima, with the intention of understanding how the socially constructed images about black women have currently been worked on by the media, specifically in soap operas.

2 CONTROL IMAGES

The historical process of oppression in various spheres (family, institutional, etc.) of black women, and the consequent subordination of the female role in society, is pointed out by Collins (1990). According to the author, it is these dominations that affect the construction of a social conscience, and policies aimed at black women. Consequently, this process derives the reinforcement of white supremacy and the construction of stereotyped images about black

women, aiming to control issues of gender, race, sexual orientation, beauty standards and behavior.

Collins (1990) draws attention to the discussions about the attribution of the condition of "other" to black women, that is, as the opposite and negative part of a binary relationship. The objectification and domination, arising from this unequal relationship, lead to the creation of images of control over black women, which are perpetuated in society.

In this sense, the construction of the image of black women serves to maintain the power of hegemonic groups, and is manifested by stereotypes that are maintained, albeit with some updates. Collins (1990) explains that the main images of control studied by black feminism are: *mammy*, the matriarch, the mother who is dependent on the State and Jezebel.

In the control image of the *Mammy*, the idea is of an obedient and faithful servant, a kind of mother of the white family. That is, a black woman who serves a white family, and who despite any space she has in this circle, is subordinate. This influences the permanence of oppression, with the attribution of the role of care and deference to white groups as a value and a duty. In addition, black women have their preferences, subjectivities and sexual issues annulled, as they live according to those they serve (COLLINS, 1990).

The image of the matriarch refers to the mother of the black family, a woman characterized as alone, abandoned by her partner, and without qualities, such as femininity. Her existential conditions are often passed on to her children, perpetuating poverty and other negative issues, making her a failure. Such a simplistic perspective blames women, maintaining the ideal of patriarchy, and ignores the social, historical, economic and political conditions that involve black existence (COLLINS, 1990).

According to Collins (1990), regarding the image of women dependent on the State, the notion is that by requesting the right to help from social programs, black women are accommodated with the situation of vulnerability, leaving their children also lazy, without cultivating the value of work. In this way, the black women of this group are failures to the extent that they are alone, because in general they are not in a family in the patriarchal mold, and only burden the State, since they do not work.

Finally, the Jezebel control image, or *Hoochie* (related to the promiscuous woman), portrays the black woman as sexually aggressive, or with deviant sexuality, when she escapes heteronormative standards. From this stereotype, derives the idea of the woman who relates for financial interest, who seduces and deceives (COLLINS, 1990).

Thus, as Collins (1990) points out, such images of control act to perpetuate the power of heterosexual white men, and in the same way, to maintain oppressions of race, gender, class,

sexual orientation, etc. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to recognize these images and act in the construction of other imaginaries. As the media acts in this process of creation and/or reaffirmation of values on various social issues, and the soap opera is an important cultural product for this objective, the communicative potential it can have in society will be studied below.

3 THE TELENOVELA "VALE TUDO": 2025 REMAKE

The first version of the telenovela "Vale Tudo" aired on TV Globo in 1988 and was written by Gilberto Braga, Aguinaldo Silva and Leonor Bassères. Due to the great success of the plot, the network produced the *remake* of the soap opera in 2025, which was adapted by author Manuela Dias. The main plot discusses the limits of honesty and greed, bringing social, moral and ethical reflections from the opposition between the heroine Raquel Acioli (Taís Araújo) with her own daughter, the unscrupulous Maria de Fátima (Bella Campos), and also with the villain Odete Roitman (Débora Bloch).

The soap opera, as a rich media product for the debate on Brazilian culture and identity (LOPES, 2014), when updated, as "Vale Tudo" in *remake*, expands the possibilities of discussion, covering another historical context. Thus, in the 2025 version, the soap opera drew attention for adopting the *Merchandising* social (a way of approaching different current themes in a pedagogical way in the plot) when dealing with topics such as alimony, homosexual relationships, adoption, ageism and sexual orientation.

In addition, it was proposed to include black actors/actresses to occupy the roles that in the original version of the soap opera were white people. Some of the updates were: Raquel Acioli (Taís Araújo); Maria de Fátima (Bella Campos); Sardinha (Lucas Leto); Luciano (Licínio Januário); Jarbas (Leandro Firmino); Consuelo (Belize Pombal); Daniela (Jessica Marques); André (Breno Ferreira); Fernanda (Ramille) and Eunice (Edvana Carvalho). In this way, the current version of "Vale Tudo" included black characters for the main and supporting cast, unlike the original version, which brought only two black characters throughout the plot: Gildo (Fernando Almeida), who was a street kid, later welcomed by Raquel, and Zezé (Zeni Pereira), the maid of Ivan's family.

In the case of Raquel and Maria de Fátima, the casting of black actresses for the roles proved to be an opportunity to bring black protagonism to the plot, however, in addition to the presence of black people in the soap opera, it is interesting to verify to what extent the representativeness was materialized, and how the construction of the characters took place.

Thus: what meanings were attributed to Raquel and Maria de Fátima, and in what way do they reinforce or innovate in the images that are socially constructed about black women?

Therefore, the choice is to analyze the representations of the characters Raquel Acioli and Maria de Fátima. The characters were chosen because they are part of the core of protagonists, in the current version played by black actresses, and because they contain, in the narrative arc, events that give rise to the intended analyses. Reflecting on the ways of constructing meaning about such prominent characters in the soap opera can help to understand which images are (still) constructed about black women, and which are passed on to the soap opera audience.

For the analysis, excerpts from the soap opera were chosen that demarcate the rupture between Raquel and Fátima, which appears in the initial chapters of the soap opera. The passage covers the initial position of the characters (both living in Foz do Iguaçu), a fact that impels them to act (the sale of the house), and their arrival in Rio de Janeiro. With this excerpt from the soap opera, the process of presentation and at the same time reconstruction of the characters is evidenced, and the framing of the character of both, with values and attitudes that will accompany their entire narrative arc until the end of the plot. From such events, which highlight the contrast between the characters, the intention is to verify how the representation of the black woman took place, considering the discussions about the images of control.

4 IMAGES OF CONTROL ON STAGE: THE CHARACTERS RAQUEL ACIOLI AND MARIA DE FÁTIMA

Raquel Acioli is represented in "Vale Tudo" as a strong, hardworking woman who cultivates values such as honesty and nurtures unwavering hope for a better life. The plot begins with Raquel living in Foz do Iguaçu with her father and daughter Maria de Fátima. While Raquel works as a local tour guide, Fátima wants to get out of the city and try her luck in Rio de Janeiro, investing in a career in *Influencer* digital, or trying to win a partner rich enough that you don't have to work.

In the first chapter of the novel, on Fátima's twenty-third birthday, Raquel is excited, while her daughter, pessimistic about life in Foz do Iguaçu, regrets having been born poor and wants to leave the city. During the party, Fatima goes to the gate of the house and begins to remember facts that make her dislike her condition. In the memory, the origins of her family are rescued, when Raquel was still married to Rubinho, and faced difficulties due to the irresponsible condition of her partner. On a day when Rubinho comes home drunk in the morning, Raquel

confronts him to take responsibility, work and help with the bills; he becomes enraged and slaps Raquel in the face, who quickly retaliates and says she will leave.

Figure 1

After being assaulted by her husband, Raquel decides to leave with her daughter



Source: Frame from the soap opera Vale Tudo. (Chapter 1, Scene 05' 02").

Raquel cries, lamenting the difficulties suffered in terms of finances and her relationship with Rubinho. However, because he acted immediately to the aggression, retaliating physically and verbally, he imposes his firm position in the face of adversity and assumes an active posture.

Figure 2

Raquel and Fatima talk



Source: Frame from the soap opera Vale Tudo. (Chapter 1, Scene 06' 25").

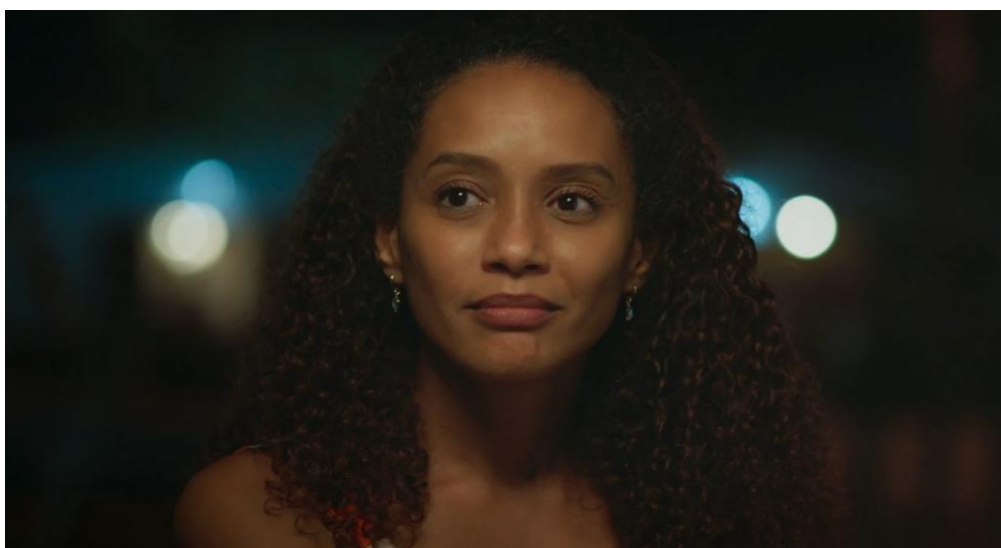
After the memory, Fátima is even more resigned to changing her life, while browsing the social networks of rich people who display a life of luxury. Raquel approaches, and the panoramic image shows the two talking in front of a humble house, on a street that is also

simple, demonstrating the socioeconomic conditions of the family, which contrast with what Fatima dreams of. The mother tries to cheer up her daughter, but the young woman directs the conversation to the case of a rich tourist, but married and already elderly, who tried to get closer to Raquel. She encourages her mother to have an affair with the man so that the two can ascend socially.

Raquel is upset with Fatima's speech, and later, in conversation with a friend, reveals that her hope is in work, and that all prosperity can only come from individual effort. She comments that she wants to open her own business, since this is a current trend, and believes that it will be a good investment. Asked about love relationships, Raquel recalls what she went through with her ex-husband, emphasizing that she managed to be strong and overcome the troubles of the relationship, and points out that to be interested in another man again, she wouldn't even be able to say what kind of man it would be.

Figure 3

Raquel is dreamy with expectations of the future



Source: Frame from the soap opera Vale Tudo. (Chapter 1, Scene 09' 05").

In this way, the representation made of mother and daughter highlights the contrast between the two. Dreams for the future and the notion of values are discrepant. Raquel is the good-hearted girl, with positive thoughts and full of good intentions, and Fatima is the self-interested villain, unscrupulous, and whose values are individualism and materialism.

The distance between mother and daughter continues, as the daily life of the characters is developed. Raquel works as a tour guide, always being very communicative, with a cheerful face, and showing that she likes what she does; meanwhile, Fatima tries to take advantage of her mother's condition to attend a club with tourists.

Figure 4

Fatima sees César for the first time at the club



Source: Frame from the soap opera Vale Tudo. (Chapter 1, Scene 13' 41")

In one of the incursions through the club, pretending to have a high social status, Fatima sees César, a model who was working at the place, and becomes interested in him. In the scene, Fatima performs a typically masculine gesture of briefly removing a crack in her glasses to better see the one who interested her physically.

After pretending a coincidence at the bar, and inventing lies about her socioeconomic condition, Fatima manages to attract César's attention, and soon after seduces him, spending the night with him.

Figure 5

Fatima and César spend the night together



Source: Frame from the soap opera Vale Tudo. (Chapter 1, Scene 30' 32")

Later, Raquel receives the news of her father's sudden death. With another load of suffering, she tries to get back on her feet, now that the only male figure she had to support no

longer exists. Raquel is sad and shaken, being comforted by a friend, while Fatima seems only a little dejected, but without suffering.

Figure 6

Raquel suffers in farewell to her father



Source: Frame from the soap opera Vale Tudo. (Chapter 1, Scene 40' 30")

After her grandfather's death, Fátima takes advantage of the fact that the house was in her name and sells the property, using the money to go live in Rio de Janeiro. When she discovers that her father's house has been sold, Raquel is desperate, but she does not believe her daughter's bad nature.

Figure 7

Raquel is shaken when she discovers that Fatima sold the house

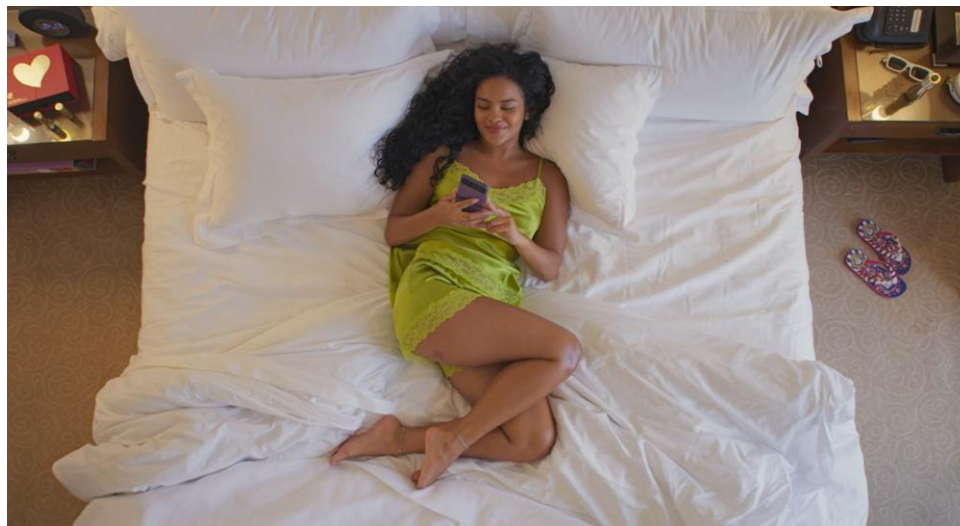


Source: Frame from the soap opera Vale Tudo. (Chapter 1, Scene 48' 54").

While Raquel tries to go to Rio de Janeiro, buying a bus ticket to the city and quitting her job, Fatima stays at the Copacabana Palace and keeps the lies about her financial condition to César.

Figure 8

Fatima takes advantage of Rio de Janeiro and makes an appointment with César



Source: Frame from the soap opera Vale Tudo. (Chapter 3, Scene 01' 34").

In the representation of the characters, Raquel is always humble, kind and honest. In characterization, she is usually dressed in simple and colorful clothes (which shows both her personality and her financial condition), and has a general appearance that shows that she does not care about issues related to femininity. Endowed with values aimed at life dignified by work and individual effort, she is fervent in the ideas she defends, and fights to support herself and also take care of her daughter, since difficult circumstances have crossed her life, such as a marriage permeated by financial instability and disrespect. With the death of her father and the departure of her daughter, Raquel once again finds herself challenged by life to face problems and seek to overcome all evil.

The construction of the character Raquel, in the 2025 version of "Vale Tudo", now as a black woman, accentuates racial issues at an intersectional level, in view of the socioeconomic crossings of the life of this woman who needs to work and fight for the maintenance of family stability, even if the adversities are great. In dialogue with the images of control, Raquel could be the matriarch, or the mother of the black family, represented by the stereotypes of the woman with a suffering life, who needs to fight fervently to move on. Without a husband, without a home of her own, with a daughter who even in adulthood does not work

or study formally, and later without any other parental ties of support, Raquel maintains only her values of honesty and dignity and ode to work and meritocracy as her foundations.

On the other hand, Maria de Fátima is represented as the result of a generation deviated from traditional values, without sentimental attachment, and with the materialistic side developed to the detriment of honesty and valuing work. In addition to not wanting a job in formal standards, seeking apparently simpler solutions, such as a career on the internet, Fátima rescues the stereotype of the self-interested woman, who has no independence and needs to be based on the financial condition of a preferably heteronormative relationship, valuing patriarchy, male domination and the submission of women.

With this, the character is represented in the molds of Jezebel/*hoochie*'s control image, as a young, beautiful woman, who always shows herself attractive, whether by the use of makeup, or clothes that show physical attributes. In addition, Fátima's speeches and attitudes reveal the lack of scruples to achieve what she needs, which may include different strategies, especially sexual involvements as the best, if not the only way to seduce a man from the elite.

In the contrast of the representation of the characters Raquel Acioli and Maria de Fátima, there is, to a certain extent, a dialogue with traditional stereotypes of the construction of an imaginary about black women. Always strong and struggling because of the harshness of life, or driven to lust as a way to conquer what they want, or escape the reality in which they live, Raquel and Fátima, even in a soap opera produced with the intention of being more inclusive and representative of the black audience, represented images of control that still need to be deconstructed.

5 CONCLUSION

When the soap opera addresses a current topic, of interest to the public, or even controversial, it creates a link between fiction and reality, and generates debates in society. Considering that the soap opera can be watched on open TV and *streaming*, and even in excerpts on social networks, there is also an expansion of the reach of this object in terms of audience and forms of discussion. Thus, it is of interest to take the soap opera as an object of study.

When choosing the telenovela "Vale Tudo" for analysis, the relevance of the title to national teledramaturgy was considered, in view of all the social issues discussed, both by the original version, from 1988, and by the 2025 remake. In this sense, thinking about the representation of black women in the plot is of interest to reflect on possible advances or perpetuation of the treatment of the imaginary about this group in society.

Through the discussion, according to Collins (1990), about the images of control (*mammy*, matriarch, mother dependent on the State and Jezebel) about black women, it was possible to understand how stereotypes permeate the relationship that society has with this group. Thus, when choosing the telenovela "Vale Tudo", the relationship of the central characters of the plot, Raquel and Fátima with the images of control, was discussed.

In the verification of how the characters were constructed, analyzing the initial narrative event of the soap opera, from the beginning of the story, to the climax point in which Fátima sells the family house and goes to Rio de Janeiro, there is the contrast created between mother and daughter, as each one develops a typical side of the imaginary about the black woman. While Raquel incorporates traits of the matriarch's image of control, such as the lonely, honest woman who fights for a better life, always believing in work and dignity, Fátima highlights traits of Jezebel/*hoochie*, such as the young and self-interested woman who uses various resources to ascend socially, such as lies and sexuality to achieve what she wants.

In this line, considering that the soap opera has strength as a cultural product that disseminates knowledge, raises debates and can influence the public, causing changes in society, it is urgent to question the representations that are still made of certain social groups and latent issues of today, such as the images of control over black women. Thus, valuing and studying soap operas has all the legitimacy and emergence for the communicational field.

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