

Care work and social horror in *The Babadook* (2014) and *Relic* (2020)

Economia do cuidado e horror social em *O Babadook* (2014) e *Relíquia Macabra* (2020)

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ABSTRACT: This article examines representations of motherhood and grandmotherhood in the Australian films *The Babadook* (2014) and *Relic* (2020) through the lenses of the care economy and social horror. The central hypothesis is that monstrosity in these works emerges from labor exhaustion and the privatization of social reproduction. Through a comparative analysis, the article discusses how domestic isolation, bodily abjection, and affective ambivalence are represented as material expressions of the crisis of invisible care work in neoliberal society. It concludes that these contemporary horror films expose the unsustainability of a system that demands unlimited commitment from women without collective support, transforming the home into a space of confinement and trauma.

Keywords: *Motherhood; grandmotherhood; care work; social horror; Australian female gothic*

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RESUMO: Este artigo investiga as representações da maternidade e da avosidade nos filmes australianos *O Babadook* (2014) e *Relíquia Macabra* (2020), sob a ótica da economia do cuidado e do horror social. A hipótese central é de que a monstruosidade nessas obras emerge da exaustão laboral e da privatização da reprodução social. Por meio de uma análise comparada, discute-se como são representados o isolamento doméstico, a abjeção corporal e a ambivalência afetiva que materializam a crise do trabalho do cuidado invisível na sociedade neoliberal. Conclui-se que esses filmes de horror contemporâneos denunciam a insustentabilidade de um sistema que exige das mulheres um compromisso infinito sem suporte coletivo, transformando o lar em um espaço de encarceramento e trauma.

Palavras-chave: *maternidade; avosidade; trabalho do cuidado; horror social; gótico feminino australiano.*

Introduction

In the 21st century, horror cinema has experienced some discursive reconfigurations, often contested by two terminologies that, despite overlapping, reveal distinct intentions. On one side, critics popularized terms like *post-horror* and *elevated horror* to describe a supposed new wave of films that privilege dark dramas and sinister atmospheres over easy scares (ROSE, 2017; CHURCH, 2021), allowing for more serious or deeper reflections than the genre usually delivers to the public. On the other side, researchers and filmmakers consolidated the notion of *social horror* (LOWENSTEIN, 2005; CÁNEPA, 2016; PHILLIPS, 2017; CARREIRO *et al.*, 2025), referring to works that radicalize the critical vocation of the genre, giving visibility to historical conflicts, structural inequalities, and contemporary forms of oppression.

It is within this context of debate that this article is inserted. The phenomenon consists of the politicization of the domestic space through horror stories. We are interested in observing how cinema dramatizes the unsustainability of gender roles, focusing on female figures responsible for the maintenance of life. The objective is to analyze the representations of motherhood and grandmotherhood in contemporary horror cinema, based on the hypothesis that monstrosity, in these films, frequently emerges from the tensions resulting from the care economy (QUIROGA DIAZ; WOSNIAK, 2022). To support this discussion, we have chosen as objects of analysis two works produced in Oceania that achieved global resonance: *The Babadook* (Jennifer Kent, Australia, 2014) and *Relic* (Natalie Erika James, Japan/USA/Australia, 2020).

The Babadook and *Relic* were chosen for addressing everyday situations of domestic life that do not involve male presence. While the first dissects the exhaustion involved in being the single mother of a neuroatypical child and the unprocessed grief of losing a partner, the second addresses the terror of aging and the burden of the so-called “sandwich generation” (MILLER, 1981), that is, a broad group of people who need to care, at the same time, for elderly parents and young or adolescent

children. The choice is justified by the complementarity of the works: together, they cover the vital arc of care, from birth to death, sharing a visual grammar that privileges the domestic space as a psychological labyrinth. Both works are part of what Donna McRae (2021) defines as Australian Female Gothic. This category constitutes a regional variation of *female response horror*, a term coined by filmmaker Briony Kidd (MCRAE, 2021). In these productions, genre cinema serves as a tool to externalize affects under repression and process, in a critical way, clashes that mark both the individual and collective spheres (MCRAE, 2021, p. 151).

To connect socioeconomic reality with the debate on horror cinema, we turn to the classic works of Noël Carroll (1990) and Barbara Creed (1993; 2022). From Carroll (1990, p. 25), we adopt the definition of art-horror as a combination of fear, repulsion, and fascination, provoked by monsters capable of violating structuring conceptual categories for society. From Creed (1993; 2022), we turn to the concept of the monstrous-feminine developed by the author to analyze horror cinema from a psychoanalytic perspective, emphasizing female figures associated with sexuality, reproduction, and motherhood as focuses of fear and repulsion in narratives, in the vast majority, directed by men.

This work adopts a qualitative methodological approach, combining a bibliographic review with comparative film analysis. The article is organized into four sections. The first offers a conceptual review, crossing theories of the care economy with reflections promoted by social horror. The second presents an overview of the representations of mothers and grandmothers (and their social roles) in the tradition of the horror genre. The third section is dedicated to a comparative analysis of the films. Finally, it is concluded that, by refusing the traditional cathartic resolution, *The Babadook* and *Relic* show that, in the absence of a collectivized care ethic, the home inhabited by the nuclear family becomes a *locus horribilis* for social horror.

Care work and social horror

To understand the nature of the analysis of the two horror stories that compose our corpus, it is necessary to shift from psychoanalysis, a recurring approach in works on female horror in cinema, to the materialities of political economy. The premise that guides our discussion is that the horror experienced by the protagonists of *The Babadook* and *Relic* is the product of a social organization that privatizes the reproduction of life, isolates individual subjects from support networks, and abandons women who dedicate themselves to care work (ADDATI *et al.*, 2018) to exhaustion. Understanding this process involves discussing the care economy, a concept that emerged in the 1990s as an epistemological and political response of feminist theories to the fact that classical economics historically ignored the work performed inside the home for not generating direct monetary exchange value.

Chagas *et al.* (2025, p. 2) define the care economy as the set of material and immaterial activities necessary to meet the physical, psychological, and emotional needs of people, especially those in a situation of dependence (such as children, the elderly, and the sick). However, the central characteristic of this system, under capitalism, is structural invisibility. The productive system depends on care work to replenish the daily labor force, but refuses to pay for it, delegating it almost exclusively to women, under the rubric of love or instinct, in an operation that Silvia Federici (2019, p. 41) synthesized in a well-known formulation: “They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work”.

In this scenario, Helena Hirata (2002, p. 54) conceptualizes care work as a set of material and psychological practices aimed at responding to others’ needs, evidencing that caring involves both practical tasks and affective and relational components. As Danièle Kergoat (2009, p. 67) points out, the sexual division of labor operates as an organizing principle that naturalizes female aptitude for this service, creating a perfect trap: if the woman cares, she does nothing more than a natural obligation; if she fails, she becomes a social aberration.

Deepening the critique with the aid of a decolonial perspective, Quiroga Diaz and Wosniak (2022, p. 332) argue for the necessity of public policies that promote the socialization of care. The researchers suggest that many neoliberal reforms, especially in Global South countries, entrusted women with responsibilities formerly declared as social rights, generating a paradox that Jon Greenaway (2020, p. 1) identifies as the gothic essence of Marxism: capitalism as a kind of horror story itself, a system that, like a type of “boogeyman,” drains the vitality of workers to feed the mechanisms of the system. The act of caring, in this perspective, becomes an instance that prevents social collapse, but which must be performed at the cost of the depletion of the vital energy of women, creating a scenario of hopelessness that evokes the notion of “capitalist realism” (FISHER, 2009): the sense that there is no viable alternative to escape the system. The caregivers in *The Babadook* and *Relic* inhabit this reality, in which exhaustion is not a passing state, but an ontological condition of those who live to serve the very same mechanism that consumes them.

It is at this point, where the sustainability of life clashes with the scarcity of resources, that social horror finds its most fertile ground. The concept, here appropriated from a set of works that address this problem under different denominations, refers to a film corpus that mobilizes horror conventions to make visible collective anxieties and structural traumas. It should be noted that reflection on social horror found special resonance in Brazilian academia, whose researchers have, for more than a decade, been identifying a branch of national horror aimed at the thematization of the country’s social ills (CÁNEPA, 2016; SOUTO, 2019). More recently, studies have associated this Brazilian social horror with international cinema trends (CÁNEPA; DENNISON, 2025), revealing a globalized phenomenon.

By its own nature, horror produces a pairing of sensations between characters and spectators, as observed by Rodrigo Carreiro (2020, p. 3). In the case of social horror, this contagion can exceed the sensory sphere, assuming a character of sensitization to structural

conflicts and ills — of class, race, and gender —, which begin to be experienced as legitimate sources of fear, repulsion, and anguish (CARREIRO; CÁNEPA, 2025, p. 313). Care work produces a specific sensoriality marked by repetition, physical wear, and emotional overload, lived mostly inside the domestic space, which can become a confinement zone in which the sexual division of labor transforms solitude into a rule of the female experience. The fear that emerges from this scenario has little or nothing, in principle, of the supernatural or mysterious; it is born from the perception that care knows no limits and that life is organized around an infinite obligation.

Referring to social-natured horror films that thematize the monstrous-feminine as a material, affective, and temporal experience of cycles of domination and violence, Barbara Creed (2022, p. 3) observed that:

Horror as an emotional force and an artistic aesthetic has strongly influenced this new movement but it cannot be confined to, or defined by, the conventions of the horror film — it both embraces and exceeds them. The horrific is complex and varied; it draws on physical, psychological, and psychic horror. These films focus on the horrific as it occurs in the family, relationships, political systems, the law, religion, race relations, and environmental destruction.

Creed (1993, p. 17) argues that the woman, in horror films, is monstrous because she constitutes an archetype she calls the “archaic mother”: a symbolic figure that gathers generative power with the threatening aspect of motherhood, representing the fear of the feminine not domesticated by the patriarchy. In the context of the care economy, the archaic mother is not a monster because she desires to devour the child, as in more traditional psychoanalysis, but because society demands that she be omnipresent and omnipotent. Female monstrosity in *The Babadook*, as we will discuss ahead, constitutes a visual manifestation of the repressed anger of this mother who, frustrated and exhausted, without autonomy and prevented from exercising sexuality, becomes a devouring force.

Many recent horror films have dramatized this condition, associating domestic exhaustion and women's isolation with atmospheres of sensory suffocation and bodily degradation. The archaic mother (CREED, 2024) appears in the archetypal tropes of the exhausted caregiver, the besieged mother, or the woman imprisoned in routines of surveillance and self-containment that run through emblematic characters, such as the unbalanced nurse of *Saint Maud* (Rose Glass, United Kingdom, 2019), the reluctant mother of a newborn in *Huesera* (Michelle Garza Cervera, Mexico, 2022), and the mother obsessed with resurrecting her daughter in *Bring Her Back* (Danny and Michael Philippou, Australia, 2025).

In a way, it is possible to affirm that the monstrosity of these women emerges from a structural failure of the care economy. When Nancy Fraser (2016) discusses the contradictions of capital and care, she suggests that the system cannibalizes the social bases that allow its own existence. In cinema, this cannibalization becomes literal and advances over physiology. The monster in *The Babadook*, as we will see soon, grows proportionally to the isolation of the exhausted mother, fed by sleep deprivation. In this aspect, horror dialogues with Jonathan Crary's (2014) thesis on 24/7 capitalism. For Crary (2014, p. 19), sleep consists of the last physiological barrier that prevents the complete domination of the market over human life (and body), an unproductive time that the system tries to colonize. In *The Babadook* and *Relic*, the barrier ends up broken in the gothic of the home: the demand for care is uninterrupted, invading early mornings and nights, and making wakefulness a state of torture.

Mothers and grandmothers in the tradition of horror cinema

Motherhood is a frequent theme in horror stories, mainly in those told by cinema in the last 65 years. David Greven (2011), for example, highlights that *woman's films*, largely dedicated to the experience of motherhood until the 1950s, were successfully incorporated by modern horror cinema from the following decade onwards:

The seemingly defunct genre of the woman's film takes a significant new form in the modern horror film, which repurposes female melodrama as it expands upon the precedent of Hitchcock's 1960 *Psycho*. Modern horror can be roughly divided into two categories: *oedipal horror*, focusing on problems between fathers and children (*It's Alive*, *The Stepfather*) and *persephonal horror*, focusing on problems between mothers and children, most often daughters (*The Exorcist*, *Carrie*, the *Alien* films) but sometimes also sons, and usually then a queer-themed film (*Psycho*, the first two films of the *Friday the 13th* series, *The Silence of the Lambs*) (GREVEN, 2011, p. 83).

Greven (2011) establishes in *Psycho* the origin of the popularity of this type of story, assuming the periodization made by several historians, who point to this film as the birth of modern cinematic horror. Robin Wood (1979, p. 30) showed that Alfred Hitchcock, in *Psycho*, overcame the European origin tradition, moving horror away from medieval castles, adapting gothic models for a type of petty-bourgeois and family environment. In this model, the maternal figures took on redoubled importance, since fear is not distributed in these representations in an egalitarian way. If paternal figures were, for a long time, assigned absence or aggressiveness, maternal figures competed for a more complex and structural role.

The model inaugurated by *Psycho* turned family relations into the gravitational center of horror cinema, which contributes to the consolidation of the genre as a privileged object of psychoanalytic readings. Modern horror began to articulate, in a recurring way, three central elements for this theoretical field: anxiety toward events that escape the norm; the production of a visual pleasure linked to unconscious processes; and exposure of the nuclear family to rupture situations. From the 1970s, this debate has intensified with the advent of feminist studies, which transform horror into a field of theoretical dispute. Authors such as Ann Kaplan (1983), Linda Williams (1991), and Carol Clover (1992), dialoguing with Laura Mulvey (1975), interpreted recurring violence against women in horror films as an expression of a patriarchal logic

that sought to reaffirm male control over sexual difference and female sexuality.

In counterpoint, Barbara Creed (1993; 2022; 2024) proposed a displacement by articulating horror not only to the woman as victim, but to femininity as a monstrous principle. Motherhood emerged, thus, as a privileged focus of anxiety, linked to gestation, childbirth, breast-feeding, and body fluids, recurring elements in horror narratives. This displacement was deepened by Sarah Arnold (2013), by evidencing the intersection between horror and melodrama as a key to understanding the centrality of motherhood in the genre. For Arnold (2013, p. 5), both psychoanalysis and melodrama operate with a normative narrative of maternal sacrifice, in which the woman can only exercise power within rigid limits. Maternal horror emerges when these limits are tensioned: the mother may appear as a selfless figure or as a selfish and controlling presence, but, in both cases, she tends to concentrate the affective and narrative load of the film, becoming the focus of fascination and repulsion (ARNOLD, 2013, p. 27).

If we take the canonical films of Christian/Satanic horror (*Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*, and *The Omen*), horror centrally explores gestation and child-rearing as experiences of invasion, parasitism, and loss of autonomy. In *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, USA, 1968), motherhood is lived as conspiracy and violation. Rosemary is progressively isolated, discredited, and instrumentalized, while the husband acts as an active accomplice of violence, negotiating his wife's body and future. In *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, USA, 1973), the mother faces her daughter's possession as a radical form of the collapse of domestic order: overloaded, blamed, and impotent, she sees herself forced to turn to external male authorities (medical and religious), while the paternal figure is absent. Finally, in *The Omen* (Richard Donner, USA, 1976), motherhood is marked by substitution and grief made invisible: the adoptive mother intuitively feels the threat represented by the son, but has her perception systematically invalidated, while the father occupies an ambiguous position, oscillating between rational denial, protection of family order, and,

finally, the violent assumption of the role of punitive agent. Altogether, these model films reveal a recurring pattern: mothers are left with the direct experience of horror, lived in the body, in care, and in the domestic sphere, while fathers emerge as absent figures, as accomplices, or violent figures, reaffirming gender asymmetry.

In horror films of the 21st century, however, we can observe a certain displacement of this role: the focus slowly leaves the monster-son, moving to what motherhood does to a woman's psyche. In *mother!* (Darren Aronofsky, 2017), biblical and environmental allegory serves to expose the care economy in its most extractivist form: the protagonist is a universal donor of resources (food, comfort, body) for a husband who is a creator and an artist. Similarly, in *Shelley* (Ali Abbasi, 2016), the issue of surrogacy introduces a class and immigration perspective in the care economy, showing how the woman's body is also colonized, resulting in physical deterioration that evokes abjection.

In the Brazilian context, *Good Manners* (As Boas Maneiras, Juliana Rojas and Marco Dutra, Brazil, 2017) articulates motherhood, domestic work, and racialization, while at the same time reinscribing the monster-son as a product of unequal class and affective relations. In some films, the monster simply disappears. *Die, My Love* (Lynne Ramsay, USA/France, 2025) shifts horror to affective daily life, exploring postpartum depression, unassimilable sexual desire, and marital isolation as disintegrating forces of female subjectivity. In *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* (Mary Bronstein, USA, 2025), maternal experience is marked by dissociation, transforming the care overload into a formal and narrative collapse.

If motherhood enjoys ubiquity in modern horror since the 1960s, in different versions, grandmotherhood remains a less explored territory, sometimes relegated to the stereotypes of the witch or the senile elderly woman. In the Western cultural imaginary, the elderly woman is doubly object: she has lost her reproductive function and her role as an object of sexual desire. Horror films usually portray her as a decrepit or even vengeful figure.

A paradigmatic example of this tension is *The Visit* (M. Night Shyamalan, 2015). The film uses the found footage format to confront grandchildren (and the public) with the raw physicality of old age: urinary incontinence, mental confusion, flabby nudity. The horror in *The Visit* is born from generational repulsion, since the grandmother is not the safe harbor of cookies and stories, but an erratic body that terrifies because she fails to perform the expected sweetness. In *Paranormal Activity 3* (Henry Joost and Ariel Schuman, USA, 2011), the emulation of domestic records reveals that the grandmother, presented initially as a domestic guardian, is indeed an accomplice to a demonic entity. The same occurs in *The Taking of Deborah Logan* (Adam Robitel, 2014), a mockumentary in which a television team documents the physical degeneration of an elderly woman (Jill Larson) who seems to suffer from Alzheimer's, but is actually a victim of possession by an evil spirit.

In *The Grandmother* (*La Abuela*, Paco Plaza, 2021), a granddaughter who works as a model needs to interrupt her career to care for her grandmother. The film cruelly depicts the conflict between the two, culminating in the idea that grandmotherhood is a vampiric trap: the previous generation literally desires to occupy the body of the new one to perpetuate its existence. This logic reappears in *X* (Ti West, USA, 2022), in which Mia Goth, in the double role of Maxine and the elderly Pearl, embodies a resentful female old age by transforming the young body into an object of desire, envy, and punishment. In *Weapons* (Zach Cregger, USA, 2025), this figure is radicalized in the character of a great-aunt who arrives as a fragile and sick woman, but gradually reveals herself as a witch whose presence contaminates the house and reorganizes family relations around fear and exploitation.

It is impossible, however, to dissociate the contemporary discussion of motherhood and grandmotherhood without mentioning *Hereditary* (Ari Aster, 2018), a work that passes through the two categories. Aster's film discusses the impossibility of escaping

genealogical debt. Grandmother Ellen (Kathleen Chalfant) is the architect of trauma; the mother, Annie (Toni Collette), her reluctant executor and crisis manager; and the granddaughter Charlie (Milly Shapiro) is the object of an elaborate and sinister sacrificial rite. Annie, overwhelmed in her role as a member of the sandwich generation (MILLER, 1981), caring for her children and mother, tries desperately to take care of the family, but discovers that her role had been scripted before she was born. The dollhouse she builds functions as a visual metaphor of social determinism: there is no possible agency when the structure (the cult, the family, the system) has already decided that your body serves only to serve.

A comparative analysis: *The Babadook* and *Relic*

The Babadook, Jennifer Kent's debut feature, obtained universal acclaim after screening at the 2014 Sundance Festival. The plot follows Amelia (Essie Davis), an exhausted widow who struggles to raise her son Samuel (Noah Wiseman) alone, while being haunted by an entity from a children's book. *Relic*, also revealed at Sundance, addresses the end point of the care cycle. The director narrates the return of Kay (Emily Mortimer) and her daughter Sam (Bella Heathcote) to the family home after the mysterious disappearance of the matriarch Edna (Robyn Nevin), building a horror in which dementia manifests as a kind of physical decomposition of the house and Edna's body. Together, the two films form an essential diptych about the collapse of the care infrastructure. Comparative analysis demonstrates how the *mise-en-scène* materializes horror stories about the continuous motion of reproductive work.

The first point of convergence between the narratives is isolation as a structuring condition of horror. In *The Babadook*, Amelia, a widowed nurse, lives reclusively with her son Samuel, whose aggressiveness and terrifying visions are linked to the father's death in an accident that occurred on the day of his birth. The routine, already

marked by exhaustion, social rejection, and grief, is destabilized by the emergence of a mysterious children's book that presents the figure of the Babadook, an entity that begins to embody both the boy's fears and the mother's emotional repression (CÁNEPA, 2015, p. 124). As the monster imposes itself, Amelia becomes progressively hostile and violent, putting the son at risk and converting the house into a prison. The final confrontation reveals the monster as a manifestation of maternal trauma, and the ambiguous resolution points toward the need to coexist with this presence, now contained in the basement.

In *Relic*, Edna, an elderly woman who lives alone in a remote house, disappears without explanation, leading her daughter Kay and granddaughter Sam to return to the location. After Edna's reappearance, her behavior reveals memory lapses and temporal confusion that gradually transform the house into an unstable environment, with physical alterations that accompany the advancement of mental deterioration. While Kay assumes the caregiver role, the supernatural is confused with the concrete experience of dementia. The outcome makes explicit that Edna's monstrous transformation is irreversible, leading mother and daughter to confront bodily and affective inheritance and to accept care and degradation as shared destinies.

In both films, female isolation is constructed in narrative situations, but also in the organization of bodies in space. Kent translates Amelia's loneliness through a desaturated palette, dominated by blacks, blues, and grays, which contrasts with the excessive luminosity of the suburban exterior, where successful motherhood functions as a symbolic capital. James, in turn, spatializes isolation through geography: Edna's house, situated in a rural zone surrounded by dense forest, appears suffocated by the surroundings, converting that space into a direct metaphor for the enclosure of dementia.

Social interaction scenes also make visually explicit the rupture of support networks. In *The Babadook*, the niece's birthday party functions as a key moment of exclusion: Amelia is framed in unstable angles, isolated from mothers who perform motherhood serenely,

while the dialogue is organized around veiled judgments. The explicit refusal of sister Claire (Hayley McElhinne) to coexist with Samuel seals the total privatization of care. In *Relic*, this rupture assumes an institutional form: after Edna's disappearance, the police act with bureaucratic indifference, the doctor reduces the crisis to clichés about aging, and Kay is left alone to manage a situation that exceeds her capabilities. In both films, the State appears only as an instance of control or threat, never as support, reinforcing the structural solitude of caregivers.

As this isolation consolidates, horror overflows from architectural space toward bodies, introducing the dimension of dirt and abjection. Both Kent and James articulate care as management of biological matter, dealing with fluids, waste, and bodies that fall sick and fail. This approach dialogues directly with Julia Kristeva's (1982) concept of abjection: that which must be expelled to preserve symbolic order, but insists on returning. Horror is not born from the supernatural in itself, but from the impossibility of maintaining the border between a clean, functional body, and a degraded body revealed by care.

In *The Babadook*, Amelia's collapse manifests in the failure of cleanliness and domestic control. Her work as a caregiver for the elderly contaminates private life, and the monster emerges, always associated with dirt: soot-covered hands, black stains, viscous vomit expelled in the car, in a scene that crystallizes abjection. In *Relic*, abjection assumes the explicit form of body horror: urine-soiled underwear hidden around the house, the disoriented mother's bath, physical proximity to degradation. In both films, the "dirty work" (HUGHES, 1962) falls on women, revealing the physically and morally stigmatized dimension of care.

Visual metaphors reinforce this convergence. In *The Babadook*, the dark substance emerging from Amelia's body symbolizes physical and emotional saturation, that which she is forced to swallow in silence. In *Relic*, the mold that spreads through walls and Edna's skin materializes negligence and progressive decomposition of the aged

body. If motherhood deals with the body in growth, old age deals with irreversible entropy; even so, both films show that the effort involved in cleaning and care is a lost battle against biology, a struggle that society prefers to make invisible.

This exhaustion culminates in the most disturbing axis shared by the films: the ambivalence of affect and the taboo of hatred. Both narratives break with the ideal of unconditional love, suggesting that exhaustive care produces genuine love, but also resentment and desire for annihilation. In *The Babadook*, the monster functions as a psychic permission for Amelia to vocalize the unspeakable — hatred for the son and the dark fantasy that he should have died in her husband's place. In *Relic*, ambivalence is expressed in Kay's anticipated grief, divided between filial love and the desire for liberation from the burden.

The outcomes radicalize this comparison. Amelia does not destroy Babadook. She confines it and feeds it in the basement, domesticating horror as a permanent part of the routine. Kay, in turn, does not eliminate the monster-mother; she welcomes her, helping to remove the human 'shell' and lying down at her side, in a gesture of resignation. Both endings flirt with the idea that there is no alternative, only management of suffering. Horror is not overcome, but integrated into daily life.

Final considerations

The association between social horror and care economy reveals that fear in *The Babadook* and *Relic* is born and feeds on politics. It is about the fear of death, but also the expropriation of the life span. The protagonists are pushed to the margins of citizenship and confined to a terrifying space. In summary, the hypothesis we propose is that these films expose a collective crisis, since the monster that lurks in the corridors can be understood as the shadow projected by a society that demands infinite care, but isolates caregivers and offers them no support. The care economy, in these narratives, is like a prison sentence.

By refusing the cathartic resolution, *The Babadook* and *Relic* also configure the nuclear family house as a *locus horribilis* (FRANÇA, 2017, p. 115), an ordinary space that, under determined historical and social conditions, becomes a producer of horror. The refusal of catharsis points toward the observation that, in a regime that vampirizes the vital force of reproductive work, the haunted home can no longer be abandoned nor exorcised, as in classic horror, but only inhabited with endless suffering.

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