

Nurses' public image: documentary research (1910-1920)

Imagem pública da enfermeira: pesquisa documental (1910-1920)

Imagen pública de la enfermera: investigación documental (1910-1920)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to examine studies of Brazilian nurses' public image published in illustrated magazines in the 1910s and 1920s in Brazil's Federal District. **Method:** documentary research was conducted by historiographic analysis, with emphasis on early 20th century publications. **Results:** the studies ratified the presence of competition in the enunciation of nursing's public image in the circumstances of World War I, the Spanish Flu and also the Sanitary Reform led by Carlos Chagas, through the symbolic effects of institutional markers represented by the use of the veil, nurse's cap and mob-cap. The leadership that prevailed in enunciating nurses' public image was the one invested in by the Brazilian Red Cross Nurses' Practical School. **Conclusion:** pointing beyond competition among educational institutions, this indicates traces of disputes in another field, international relations.

Descriptors: Nursing, history of nursing; historiography, schools nursing.

RESUMO

Objetivo: examinar os estudos desenvolvidos sobre a imagem pública da enfermeira brasileira veiculada em revistas ilustradas das décadas de 1910 e 1920, no Distrito Federal brasileiro. **Método:** realizada pesquisa documental, mediante análise historiográfica, com ênfase em publicações do início do século XX. **Resultados:** ratificaram a concorrência da enunciação da imagem pública da enfermeira nas circunstâncias da I Guerra Mundial, da Gripe Espanhola e também da Reforma Sanitária, liderada por Carlos Chagas, por meio dos efeitos simbólicos dos marcadores institucionais representados pelo uso do véu, gorro e touca. A liderança que prevaleceu na enunciação da imagem pública da enfermeira foi a investida pela Escola Prática de Enfermeiras da Cruz Vermelha Brasileira. **Conclusão:** direciona-se para além da concorrência entre as instituições de ensino, apontando vestígios para disputas em outro campo, o das relações internacionais.

Descritores: Enfermagem; história da enfermagem; historiografia; escolas de enfermagem.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: examinar los estudios desarrollados sobre la imagen pública de la enfermera brasileña vehiculada en revistas ilustradas de las décadas de 1910 y 1920, en el Distrito Federal brasileño. **Método**: se realizó una investigación documental, mediante análisis historiográfico, con énfasis en publicaciones de principios del siglo XX. **Resultados**: ratificaron la competencia de la enunciación de la imagen pública de la enfermera en las circunstancias de la 1ª Guerra Mundial, de la Gripe Española y también de la Reforma Sanitaria, encabezada por Carlos Chagas, por medio de los efectos simbólicos de los marcadores institucionales representados por el uso del velo y gorro. El liderazgo que prevaleció en la enunciación de la imagen pública de la enfermera fue el de la Escuela Práctica de Enfermeras de la Cruz Roja Brasileña. **Conclusión:** se dirige más allá de la competencia entre las instituciones de enseñanza, señalando vestigios para disputas en otro campo, el de las relaciones internacionales.

Descriptores: Enfermería; história de la enfermeira; historiografia; facultades de enfermería.

INTRODUCTION

The pictorial publications of the Week Magazine and of the Fon-Fon Magazine were two competitors of the widest read in times past. The first was launched in 1900, which emphasized photographic images with proposal of reading of type *light*, for women¹. The second, founded in 1907, was a question of costumes and news about daily, with a focus on commercial advertisements and advertising ². Therefore, which was the public nurse's image in the beginning of the twentieth century released in the magazines?

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It was possible to identify the representations characteristics of the marking of the identity attributes of the nurses at the time, such as: the veil and the cross's symbol, in red color, from the School and Courses of the Brazilian Red Cross; the veil and the cross symbol, without color identification, of the Course of Botafogo Policlinic; the gown, with the cross's symbol in blue color, of the Professional School of Nurses and of the Nursing School Alfredo Pinto and; the cap of the School of Nurses of the National Department of Public Health³.

It was emphasized the competition among the teaching institutions, for the enunciation of the Brazilian nurse's public image, by the imagetical signature related to the attributes displayed as a composition of the institutional identity¹.

Based on the above considerations, the aim of this study was to examine the studies developed about the Brazilian nurse's public image, through illustrated magazines of the 1910s and 1920s, in the Brazilian Federal District. That way, it was sought to exercise a critical look over the knowledge, then produced, about the history of nursing, having as a focus of analysis the divulgation of the nurse's image in the first decades of the twentieth century.

THEORETICAL - METHODOLOGICAL REFERENTIAL

It's a documentary research of historiographical analysis, with emphasis on publications of the twentieth century, aiming to build the nurse's public image for the history of nursing.

The historiography⁴ term was used to discuss what was produced about the nurse's image⁴. Therewith, it was saw the possibility to carry out the debate from the knowledge produced in re-examining the building of the sociocultural scheme.

Other theoretical element applied to the study was the term *image*. This covers two domains – mental and material – considering that one does not exist without the other. This implied the building process of the nurse's public image, for her (mental) idealization, materialized to result the production of meaning, which led to the representation of this professional⁵.

The documental mass was composed of the Week Magazine and the Fon-Fon Magazine of 1918s and 1929s.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the midst of the context of the I World War and of the circumstances of the Spanish flu epidemics, the imagetical discourse was announced by the Brazilian Red Cross. At the time, the institution took into itself the discourse of first learning institution on the training of nurses in Brazil, disregarding the creation of the Professional School of Nurses, created in 1890.

In the 1920s, the defense of the nurse's public image remained on behalf of the Brazilian Red Cross. Thus, she counted on the alliance of the School of Nurses of the National Department of Public Health (1923), in spite of the latter has reservations beyond the exclusion of the male that is, struggled to take it for itself the pioneering of the training. Therefore, what became to be at stake was the right to announce the public health nurse's image as an agent of implementation of the modern nursing in the Federal District.

In the integration process of Brazil into the I World War, the mobilization of nurses strengthened their presence in the illustrated magazines pages. Their public dissemination described scenes of training and actuation, with emphasis on the war wounded.

Several authors addressed the documentation at the time and highlighted the Brazilian Red Cross, central organ in the Federal District, in the training of nurses for acting in the war. In 1914, the Committee of Ladies of the Brazilian Red Cross demanded the creation of the Volunteer Nurses Course, justified by the need for care provision in times of conflict and in public calamities^{2,3,6-13}.

In this context, the Red Cross conveyed the nurses's images with the attribute of the veil, resulting from the plastic representation called *The Greatest Mother in the World* (1918)¹⁴, which refers to a re-reading of the Pietá, of Michelangelo (1498)^{1,15}, as shown in the Figure 1.

In a work entitled *The book of the male nurse and the female nurse – for the use of those who are intended to the nursing profession and of the persons who take care of ill persons,* of the authorship of Getúlio dos Santos, Secretary-General of the Brazilian Red Cross and Director of the teaching institution of nurses, the physician criticized the advent of a teaching institution created, in the dawn of the Republic, for both sexes, which would not have had the expected effect¹⁶.

Based on the discourse of Getúlio dos Santos about the *expected effect*, a study relied in his assertive and interpreted it, maybe ingenuously, as if he would have, indeed, ignored the creation of the teaching institution, inaugurated in 1890, using the argumentation that it was intended to the nurses's training¹³.





FIGURE 1: Plastic representation of the Red Cross. Rio de Janeiro, 1918.

When examining the argumentations of the referred study¹³, some weaknesses were identified¹³. One of them was that the teaching institution did not train only female nurses, but professionals of both sexes, as shown in the list of graduates of 1906 of the first class¹⁷. The other refers to the interpretation of Getúlio dos Santos about having ignored the creation of the institution prior to the Practical School of the Brazilian Red Cross. About this, it's understood as strategical discourse, since, indeed, the only class formed until 1921 was the one of 1906. Soon, the discourse of Getúlio dos Santos, partly, depicted what could have occurred at the time about the *expected effect*, what led the researcher, due to lack of access to certain documentations, to be wrong in the building of his assertive¹³.

Defending the nursing on behalf of the feminine was, at the same time, defending the woman's qualities, which, in a way, was a target of the Brazilian Red Cross¹⁶. Therefore, Getúlio dos Santos was one of the spokesperson of this discourse, considering the visibility and the symbolic power of the institution that drove. His discourse about the preference for women, in this activity, was based on their sincerity, as well as due to be more moderate than the men, emphasizing that they needed for training to become nurses.

When following by this aspect of the discourse, Latin-American medical congresses occurred during the 1904-1907 period come up. In them, one of the discussions has fallen on the training of the nurse (male) and the nurse (female), with preference to them (female), endorsed by the feminine qualities ¹⁸. On the other hand, there is report that, since the twentieth century, in France, there was a predominance of nurses in the French hospitals, being understood that the feminization of profession could put at risk the prestige won up to that time ¹⁹, as well as in the United States^{20,21}, Netherlands and England hospitals²², which was unavoidable with the development of the nursing in this latter country.

It is worth highlighting that the results pointed to the exclusion of the nurse (male) occurred due to the systematic investment in the image of the feminine in the profession. However, it did not mean their absence in the practice of the care, as pointed in some researches^{23,24}.

The representation of the nurse's public image in the end of the First World War⁶ counted for the reproduction of the symbolic belief in the Brazilian Red Cross, as shown in the Figure 2.

It was possible to identify that it is a reproduced copy, in Brazil, coming from the May edition of the *Motion Picture Magazine*, North-American periodical that circulated between 1911 and 1977¹⁹. This data becomes relevant, since the reader of yesterday and of today, when seeing the image of the Week Magazine cover²⁵, could think that it was about Brazilian nurse. The image conveyed leads to think about the appropriation of an international model to reinforce what had in Brazil.

The circumstance of the publication refers to the assertive that the nursing needed to (re) know itself in that context according to the needs of health that pointed, be on military ones, as in the Crimean War, which showed the figure of Florence Nightingale, or in the Paraguay War, which revealed the actuation of the Brazilian Anna Justina



Ferreira Nery in the requirements of that time directed towards the public health. In this game, the magazines covers conferred visibility in the social field, which contributed to the development of the profession²⁶.



FIGURE 2: Cover of the Week Magazine. Rio de Janeiro, 1918.

Amidst the celebrations of the end of the First World War, the Spanish Flu emerged as one of the most deadly pandemic than the own military conflict. In this circumstance, nurse's the public image was reinforced with the actuation of the teaching institutions, with emphasis on the Practical School of Nurses of the Brazilian Red Cross and on the Course for Nurses at the Policlínica de Botafogo (1917-1920), in the development of actions directed towards the public health, which has contributed to the generation of conditions for the creation of the National Department of Public Health (1920), headed by Carlos Chagas and, in tow, of the School of Nurses of the National Department of Public Health, subsidized from the *Rockefeller* Foundation two years later^{3,5,6,23}, which would lead to the School of Nurses Dona Anna Nery, in 1923.

The North-American nurses, headed by Ethel Parsons came on the scene, to promote the training of those who would work in the public health field. With this, the creation of this school also included it in a field of disputes where, by illustrated press, it searched for taking for itself the pioneering of the teaching of the Brazilian nursing and the enunciation of the nurse's public image in the country. Such situation was, apparently, sustained by the effects of the victory of the United States in the First World War, as well as was strengthened by the subsidizing from the Rockefeller Foundation for the creation of another school for the training of nurses in the Federal District.

Some studies, when basing on the assertive of lack of institutions of nurses's training in the country, adopted as starting point for the professionalization the creation of the School of the National Department of Public Health, in 1922^{27,28}. This data, associated with the record found in the Parson's report of that there was no teaching institution to train nurses in Brazil, was the problematizing argument of the research²³, which focused on the documental mass of the Policlínica de Botafogo to refute the absence of schools of nurses at the time. This institution led the researches to build the assertive that the Ethel Parson's argument was not only due to the competition about the pioneering among the schools, as well as to avoid the risk of enunciation of the nurse's image by another teaching institution.

Documentary dated 1976, and re-edited in 2008, recognized the creation of the teaching institutions – School of Nursing Alfredo Pinto (1890) and of the Brazilian Red Cross — Central Organ (1914) —, but record that the Course for Visitors of the Brazilian Red Cross, dated 1920, would not have brought the expected effect due to the quality desired by the physicians of the National Department of Public Health²⁹. In the historiographic debate, such statement was problematized, which resulted in rebuttal³⁰.

This made possible the building of the assertive that it did not interest to the National Department of Public Health, in the Federal District to obscure the North-American nurses's image, by the credibility that the Red Cross institution had in Rio de Janeiro, including considered as of public utility, as well as by its international recognizing and representativeness.

Dis-crystallizing beliefs of this nature is not an easy task. Ethel Parsons was a powerful and full of prestige woman in the society of the Federal District. In this sense, pointing arguments and counter-arguments in the scope of a historiographic debate is also advance in the building of the History of nursing.



In 2011, a research presented to the academic community revealed the actuation of other teaching institution in the nurses training, with a designation of Course of Midwives-Nurses of the Pró-Matre, covering the period 1928-1931⁸. It was not possible to detect the right date of the beginning of the training, but it is inferred that it occurred at the final of the 1910 decade, having in mind the participation in the care to the persons affected by the Spanish Flu².

When being seen in the pages of the illustrated press, the images of the midwives-nurses trained by the Pró-Matre referred the readers to the nurses trained by the Brazilian Red Cross, given the appropriation of the veil and of the cross in their uniforms⁸. It is worth noting that the symbol of the cross was in green color, by virtue of a group of women of that institution be recognized as the Ladies of the Green Cross.

In the1920s, there were different events for the nursing, emphasizing the realization of the National Congress of the Practitioners (1922). In this, Ethel Parsons was present when participating in two debate arenas: nurses *versus* physicians and midwives *versus* physicians³¹. The last arena aimed to solve two types of problems found by the physicians. The first consisted of eliminating the lay midwives and the second aimed to combat the insubordination of the graduate midwives, who do not submit to the physicians and to the current legal determinations. Therefore, what was at stake was the exclusivity of the physicians in exercising the art of providing childbirths exclusively. For Parsons, this implied the defense in favor of the public health nurses and, soon, put into practice the objectives of their mission: to establish the modern nursing and announce the nurse's public image³².

In a study about the advertisements of the health institutions articulated to the public image of the nurse in the Federal District, in the period 1917-1931, it was possible to identify nurses with the attributes of identity markers of the profession: veil, cap and gown. The most highlighted institutions were the *Hospital Internacional of Brazil* (International Hospital of Brazil) and the House of Health Maternity Dr. Pedro Ernesto, each with 14%, and, with minor percentage (3%), The Guanabara Sanatorium, Evangelical Hospital and the House of Health Dr. Oliveira Motta. The images of the nurses depicted by these institutions were presented as such: 100 with veil, 60 with cap, four with gown and 111 articulated to the cross symbol without distinction of color².

The data showed the predominance of the use of the veil with the cross symbol, which represented institutional markers of nurses trained by the Brazilian Red Cross, as well as other institutions that followed its leadership. These two markers were not held by nurses trained by the School of Nurses of the National Department of Public Health.

Study indicated that the School of Nurses of the National Department of Public Health, since its creation until the training of the first class (1922-1925), made several investments in advertisements¹ emphasizing the image presented in the Figure 3. This was intended to the advertising for the training of the nurse, when the professional who edited the material illustrated it with the image of the nurse with a veil, which did not meet the attribute of the ruled institution (image on the left). The other image, piece of the same institution, in the year of training of its second class, presented the requirements for the young women applying to the profession with guarantee of employment after the training.







The advertisements produce some meanings. On one hand, as one of the ways of making oneself see and believe, as a strategy of demarcation in the field of struggle, due to the competition with the Practical School of Nurses of the Brazilian Red Cross; and, on the other hand, to show the guarantee of employment of the public health nurse, establishing the belief for the professional training in the field of health.

Another study, with advertising pieces of medicines, evidenced the presence of representations of nurses by the same identity markers. With them, the study emphasized (1916-1931) several frequencies, with predominance of the veil and the cross symbol. This investigation made possible the assertive that the leadership of the enunciation of the image was, indeed, the Red Cross ³³. This is due to the reliability of the trained by the institution, since the divulgation



of the advertising of medicines, with their representation, reinforced symbolic features of the visual culture that there was about the reliability and distinction of the institution.

Study about the nurses of the National Department of Public Health, during the Health Reform, identified a crisis in the training of these nurses at the end of the 1920s⁹. At first sight, the assertive seems to be rebuttable, through a matter divulged in the Week Magazine entitled *The missionaires of Charity*, dated 1929³⁴. However, when being analyzed and discussed based on the circumstances and results of other study³⁵, the publication was, indeed, about the strategy to motivate candidates, considering the disinterest of the nurses of public health, unmotivated by the excess work and the rigid discipline attributed to the training.

Other study pointed to the weakness of the leadership by the School of Nurses of the National Department of Public Health, underlining that the commemorations of the Day of the Nurse, in the 1920s, were disputed in the pages of the magazines by the Brazilian Red Cross⁷. The examined documentation reveals the dispute of the two teaching institutions in the illustrated press, including in the formatting of some pages, in the mosaic modality, the ritualist carried out by both, when the Brazilian Red Cross headed, quantitatively, in the published images.

The current historiographic debate can even be rebutted, but, through the historical sources, it cannot be denied the leadership of the enunciation of the nurse's public image by the Practical School of Nurses of the Brazilian Red Cross at that time. Thinking in this perspective is to consider that the historical fact is clotted blood that back-flow driven by facts; wound that makes itself present by the discovery of other documents in the historiographic debate ³⁶. This implies the idea of that it makes itself necessary, considering that other versions and interpretations are possible.

To understand how did occur the building of the nurse's public image, by the historical thinking, is to invest and expand horizons by the knowledges acquired and reproduced when articulating positions and suppositions that resulted from it.

The training of nurses, through schools/curses, also occurred in the enunciation of the nurse's public image by the concurrence pointed by studies under debate in this article. In this regard, this can be understood by the expression *at high cost* ³⁷, meaning the sacrifice of the toil of the work, under rigid discipline and teaching to become professional. They struggled among them and excluded the men, as well as there are indications in other studies that, direct and/or indirectly, they ratify the said ^{38,39}. Thus, it can be right the explanation of the disinterest of the current School of Nursing Alfredo Pinto when in competition at the time, since its strategies in the training of professionals aimed at both sexes, what made her go through two centuries in the training of nurses (females).

CONCLUSION

The historiographic debate searched for elucidating the schemes based on the images divulged in pages of the two magazines that publicized the nurse's imagetical and studies of support on the subject. The veil associated with the symbol of the cross *versus* the cap disputed the leadership of the enunciation of the nurse's public image in the pages of the illustrated press. In this fight, to win did not mean necessarily to loose, and vice versa.

On the one hand, the Practical School of Nurses of the Brazilian Red Cross enounced the image in the two decades of the twentieth century. On the other hand, at the beginning of the 1930s, occurred the reaction, in a political-educational way, of the School of Nurses Donna Anna Nery, in the management of the President of the Republic Getúlio Vargas, having become the standard official institution for the teaching of the profession in Brazil.

Last of all, the historiographic debate of the enunciation of the nurse's public image pointed to the dispute of two international institutions — Rockefeller Foundation and International Red Cross —, what deserves intellectual investment in the field of the international relationships for the building of the trajectory of the nursing.

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