

THE NURSES OF THE BRAZILIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE AND THE DISSEMINATION OF THEIR RETURN HOME

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This historical-social study aimed to examine the symbolic elements that express the hierarchizing division between the male and female, contained in newspaper reports published about the return home of the nurses who worked in the Brazilian Expeditionary Force's Health Service, and to discuss the symbolic effects these reports produced. The historical sources of the study, consisting of photographic, written and oral documents, were classified and analyzed in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's Social Theory and Michelle Perrot's studies on Women's History. The research revealed that the way the news reports about the arrival of these nurses to Brazil were disseminated represented the reproduction of a symbolic strategy to enforce political and social interests in force, and that contained the ideas about the hierarchizing division of the social world into male and female.

DESCRIPTORS: history of nursing; military nursing; world war II

LAS ENFERMERAS DE LA FUERZA EXPEDICIONARIA BRASILEÑA Y LA DIVULGACIÓN DE SU RETORNO AL HOGAR

Este es un estudio histórico social, cuyo objetivo fue analizar los elementos simbólicos que expresan la división jerárquica entre lo masculino y lo femenino, contenidos en reportajes periodísticos, publicados sobre el retorno al hogar de enfermeras que actuaron junto al Servicio de Salud de la Fuerza Expedicionaria Brasileña, y discutir los efectos simbólicos provenientes de esos reportajes. Las fuentes históricas del estudio, constituidas por documentos fotográficos, documentos y relatos orales, fueron clasificadas y analizadas bajo el marco de la Teoría del Mundo Social de Pierre Bourdieu y de los estudios de Michelle Perrot sobre la Historia de las Mujeres. La investigación reveló que el modo en que fueron publicados los reportajes periodísticos, sobre la llegada de esas enfermeras a Brasil, representó la reproducción de una estrategia simbólica en el sentido de hacer valer los intereses político-sociales de la época, y que contenían en su esencia las ideas sobre la división jerárquica del mundo social entre lo masculino y lo femenino.

DESCRIPTORES: historia de la enfermería; enfermería militar; segunda guerra mundial

AS ENFERMEIRAS DA FORÇA EXPEDICIONÁRIA BRASILEIRA E A DIVULGAÇÃO DE SEU RETORNO AO LAR

Este é um estudo histórico-social, cujo objetivo foi analisar os elementos simbólicos que expressam a divisão hierarquizante entre o masculino e o feminino, contidos em reportagens jornalísticas, publicadas sobre o retorno ao lar de enfermeiras que atuaram junto ao Serviço de Saúde da Força Expedicionária Brasileira, e discutir os efeitos simbólicos advindos dessas reportagens. As fontes históricas do estudo, constituídas por documentos fotográficos, escritos e orais, foram classificadas e analisadas à luz da Teoria do Mundo Social de Pierre Bourdieu e dos estudos de Michelle Perrot sobre a História das Mulheres. A pesquisa revelou que o modo em que foram veiculadas as reportagens jornalísticas, sobre a chegada dessas enfermeiras ao Brasil, representou a reprodução de estratégia simbólica no sentido de fazer valer os interesses político-sociais da época, e que trazia em seu bojo as ideias sobre a divisão hierarquizante do mundo social em masculino e feminino.

DESCRITORES: história da enfermagem; enfermagem militar; II guerra mundial

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INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research looked at the symbolic effects of the news reports announcing the return home of the nurses who worked in the Health Service of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB), during the Second World War. 1945 was selected as that was the year the war ended and this group of nurses was demobilized through a ministerial announcement⁽¹⁾.

These women represent the first female nursing group that was officially and historically incorporated into the ranks of the Brazilian Army. To maintain their position, this group struggled countless fights to gain visibility and credibility as "military nurses", since their mobilization, which started in 1943, until their demobilization in 1945. A large part of these attacks resulted from the male dominance they experienced in the military, political and social fields. Moreover, when the war ended, the effects of this domination loomed as, after having participated in the 'manpower' of Brazilian Army officials, working in field hospitals in Italy, they were excluded without any further explanation⁽²⁻³⁾.

Part of this idea can be confirmed by the contents of some news reports about Brazilian nurses' return from the war to their homes, reports that strategic and hiddenly showed a certain need to reoccupy the spaces they had left in the post-war period. Hence, *a priori*, the arrival to the motherland of these "heroines" was symbolically consecrated as the return of mothers, housewives, devoted wives, who should now return to their functions in the female universe.

Other reports ambiguously defended the need for these nurses to continue using their uniforms even after the end of the war, and strategically roused the readers' opinion that it was the duty of the State to remain in the quarters on a regular base.

In view of the above, the following objectives were elaborated: to analyze the symbolic elements that express the hierarchizing division between the male and the female, as contained in news reports published about the return home of nurses who worked in the Health Service of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, and to discuss the symbolic effects these reports produced.

The contribution of this article to publications on the theme is evidenced by the in-depth discussion about the hierarchization of social spaces and practices, implicit in the social division of work, through

the valuation of female attributes, which reaffirmed the division of sexual rules in the daily reality of women and nurses, through maternal, silent, affectionate and self-sacrificing care.

METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL ASPECTS

This is a historical-social study, more specifically directed at the History of Brazilian Military Nursing, developed from the perspective of micro-history, with a dialectical approach. The preferential primary sources were two reports taken from the newspapers *A Noite* and *Tribuna Popular*, which reported on some FEB nurses' arrival to Brazil. Particularly noteworthy is a photograph that illustrated the article published in the first newspaper. Both reports were initial and partially found in the personal diary of Nurse Virgínia Maria de Niemeyer Portocarrero, and later reviewed in the microfilm collection of the Coordination Office of Serial Publication at the National Library Foundation (Rio de Janeiro).

Besides the abovementioned primary sources, some written documents were used, as well as interviews with two former FEB nurses, held in September-October 2006 in Rio de Janeiro. Those nurses signed the free and informed consent term, transferred copyright to their interviews in writing and authorized their filing at the Documentation Center of Anny Nery School of Nursing (UFRJ) to remain useful for future research.

Secondary sources addressed Brazilian History, the History of Brazilian Military Nursing and the History of Women, particularly the studies by Michelle Perrot.

For the methodological treatment, the sources that were most related to the theme were selected, ordered and classified. Selection criteria were: sources published in 1945, the year the Second World War ended, which reported on the return home of Brazilian nurses and grouped dialectical elements for the development of the research. Other procedures were the triangulation of primary and secondary sources with the historical-social context they were produced in, besides the use of photographic and documentary analysis and thematic oral history techniques and methods. The latter aimed to pay careful attention to the contents obtained from the interviews, in terms of its use and the preservation of the interviewees' image.

To support the analysis and discussion, the concepts of field, *habitus*, symbolic capital, symbolic power, symbolic violence and male domination were elected, taken from Pierre Bourdieu's Social Theory. As a form of additional support, the authors attempted to strengthen their views and interpretations with the ideas of Michelle Perrot. Through this "combination", they managed to involve the distinct gender analysis developed by Bourdieu and Perrot, despite the theoretical-methodological differences between their researches. This exercise, however, aimed for the complementarity of their arguments in the attempt to better clarify the nuances of power and domination that marked the news reports published about FEB nurses' return to Brazil after the end of the Second World War.

It should be highlighted that this research followed the recommendations of the National Health Council, according to Resolution 196/9. All ethical-legal aspects were carefully considered, and approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at Anna Nery School of Nursing and São Francisco de Assis Teaching Hospital, Protocol No. 077/06, on September 26th 2006.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The post-war and the return home of FEB nurses

During the Second World War (1939-1945), the Vargas Government created and organized the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, which involved 25,334 Brazilian citizens to take part in the military support of Brazil to the United States, in its war efforts against the nazifascist power.

In response to the discourse that there would be no lack of health support during combat for those who joined the FEB, the Government, among other measures, created the Nurse Force in the Army Reserve, in December 1943⁽⁴⁾. Soon after the creation of this Force, volunteers from all over the country, single, widowed and married, with a wide range of Nursing degrees, were called upon to take the Emergency Course for Nurses from the Army Reserve⁽⁵⁾, practically training them in a hurry. Among the countless volunteers who took the course, 67 were selected to go to the front. It should be highlighted that, during the research process, the researchers did not get access to sources that defined the exact number of women who ended up participating in that course.

In a way, the activities of this first group of military nurses in the national and international public context, at that time, reupdated the positions women occupied in war scenarios in the ideological, esthetical and definitely cutting sense, also because the idea persisted that, as a rule, men should go to the front, while women generally stayed at home to take care of the children and, hence, to work so as to guarantee the adequate functioning of civil society. Thus, the creation of the Nurse Force in the Army Reserve, in the context of the Second World War, entailed an apparent review of women's possible position in the male universe, as it permitted their inclusion into public spaces outside the common pattern of femininity.

After working in North American field hospitals set up in Italy, the FEB nurses were demobilized soon after the end of the conflict. In this interval, some newspapers started to report on their return home. About the circumstances involving this situation, one of the interviewees said:

[...] When we arrived here in Brazil, we had already been demobilized. We came from Italy demobilized... We only handed over the material we had to and bye, bye! Go home! We went to the Health Directory and they released us.

As for this act they suffered, the concept of symbolic power can be applied to the action the Government performed through the Brazilian army, as symbolic violence against the group of nurses was embedded in the legitimate use of this power, by having almost abruptly abstracted their feeling of belonging to that corporation. In this sense, according to the statement, demobilization strongly defined a loss for the group, in terms of the privation of positions they had legitimately occupied, which ended up entailing social, financial, moral and symbolic losses for these women.

Soon after their arrival to Brazil, the FEB nurses had to appear at the Health Directory, located at the Palácio Duque de Caxias in Rio de Janeiro, so that some administrative measures could be taken related to their discharge. On the occasion of this presentation, one of the nurses said:

[...] I appeared before the Health Directory in Rio de Janeiro. It was general Souza Ferreira, the director of Health in Rio de Janeiro. He did not pay any attention to me! He was writing in his cabinet. He did not even look up, hardly said hello and said like: "Go to the 3rd Section! You will be discharged!". At that time I even felt like crying! I didn't expect a speech. But I expected a handshake and a thank you hug... It was over, it was over... They did not justify themselves in any way!

This entailed the idea that the demobilization of FEB nurses embedded the consolidation of these

women's exclusion process from Brazilian Army fieldwork as, ideologically, mobilized war nurses would no longer be needed in a peaceful world.

Some reflexes of this process of exclusion and, consequently, of forgetting (*de-historicization*), can also be observed in the way the press reported on those nurses' return⁽³⁾. In that respect, the fragment below stands out, which records one of these nurses' perception on the news the media disseminated about the nurses' arrival in Brazil.

They ignored it! They did not highlight it... Some small report was published. Very few interviews! There wasn't any movement... One interview here and there, a small report...

Considering that the Brazilian media were a direct and important participant in the reproduction of these nurses' activities in the war, since their appearance until their departure to the front, the authors take the risk of affirming that the written press at that time expressively reported on the FEB nurses' return. Not so much in quantitative terms, as the extract below indicates, but in qualitative and, hence, symbolic terms.

For the sake of an example, among different reports, one published a picture on the front page of the newspaper *A Noite*, published on June 11th 1945⁽⁶⁾, to illustrate an article about the recent arrival of two nurses to Brazil, entitled: "They saw the war in its most cruel sense". This photograph, printed on the first page of that newspaper, crystallized and mystified a scene from the domestic daily reality of Nurse Virgínia Maria de Niemeyer Portocarrero, soon after her return from the front. The legend said: "Miss Virgínia Portocarrero in the (supposed) act, when she served lunch to her nephew Carlos Alberto Portocarrero".



Location: Collection of Fundação Biblioteca Nacional (Rio de Janeiro) – Newspaper *A Noite* June 11th 1945 (facsimile).

Figure 1 – Fragment of a nurse's daily housework after the end of the war

The articulation between the photograph and the article, as well as the legend, leads to the identification of a symbolic strategy in the sense of calling upon those women to return to their activities in the female universe.

In the symbolic sphere, the act registered in the picture, of serving a child lunch, evoked characteristics and activities intrinsic to the female nature, which evidence the hierarchizing division of the social world into male and female. Thus, it is considered that male domination demands no further explanation here, as social order ratifies it in nature and in the distribution of activities, as well as in the occupation of spaces. Hence, this order attempted to reserve home for women and public spaces for men.

Moreover, male domination is part of the routines of work division or private rituals by means of marginalization conducts imposed on women, through their exclusion from public places and, consequently, their exclusion from nobler tasks⁽⁷⁾. This physical and social regularization establishes man as "lord of the private and the family they govern and represent, delegating management of daily reality to women"⁽⁸⁾.

This statement reveals the knowledge and practical acknowledgement of the border between domineering and dominated, unleashed by the magic of symbolic power, and according to which the dominated contribute, often taking the form of bodily emotions or passion and feelings. In that sense, the photograph exposes the expression of the socialized and tamed body, which the logic of women's social duty is embedded in.

Despite the cooling of censorship in Brazil as from February 1945, when the Press and Propaganda Department stopped intervening as it used to, everything led to the belief that the newspaper *A Noite*, where this particular report was published, was still part of the New State's doctrinarian tactics which, at the hear, aimed for the people's cultural homogeneity⁽⁹⁻¹⁰⁾.

The analysis of this source reveals possible remnants of the State's ideological position towards gender division, as it attempted to ratify and reinforce the private patriarchy's prescriptions and proscriptions as if they came from a public patriarchy, inscribed in all institutions that were in charge of managing and regulating the daily existence of the domestic unit.

The return home of those "heroines", who cast themselves into a front as impacting as the Second

World War, was symbolically consecrated by the return of mothers, housewives, devoted wives, who at that moment were expected to return to their functions originated in the female universe. In this perspective, there is the symbolism involving the activities of Ana Ferreira Justina Néri in the Paraguayan War (1864-1870). After the end of the conflict, she was called "mother of the Brazilians" by the Historical and Geographic Institute⁽¹¹⁾. Hence, wars reinforce the most traditional and symbolic representations of gender differences.

In the same report that accompanied the selected photograph, the following extract stands out: "At the end of the war in Europe, many of the nurses who registered to accompany the FEB to the Italian front start to return to our country. It does not matter what is said about them, about their silent and priceless action inside the field hospitals, always ready to take care of the wounded".

The tone of the above extract, published in a newspaper article that informed the readers about the nurses' arrival from the front, praises, even if discretely, their care activities for wounded soldiers. At the end of the extract, however, a certain bias is revealed, orienting the readers to give "little importance" to comments that would be made about the nurses, which leads to the understanding that this statement reflected the need for the author of the report to, at first sight, preserve the image of the "war nurses". Nevertheless, in the context of the text, the expression "does not matter" becomes almost hidden, as it can be interpreted in a double and even negative sense. In this respect, as one of the war correspondents supposed who covered the FEB's activities in Europe, "in times of war not lying means a lot, but saying any truth is unthinkable!"⁽¹²⁾.

The other article selected for this research was published on the front page of *Tribuna Popular*, a newspaper issued in the Federal District, on July 12th 1945, with the following subtitle "The people want to see the nurses in uniform!"⁽¹³⁾. That report ratifies some of the elements addressed above and, at the same time, reveals new foci, which evidenced the worthy activities of FEB nurses at the front more clearly, as shown in the partial transcription of the article.

"Brazilian nurses consider that the war had a meaning, that their efforts were not lost, and that they fought for freedom and that, therefore,

they contributed to the primary liberties of our people [...] They are coming back home [...] They can be proud that they fought for their Motherland against fascism, and the people want to see them in uniform. The uniform they conquered by helping the wounded, animating the soldiers in the Italian snow. The people want to see them protected by the State. The uniform distinguishes the heroes of the Motherland. It is the fighter's greatest medal. They are the dear nurses of the people who fought for the people and whose war uniform cannot be taken away. The FEB is an army from difficult times. Not only soldiers should use their glorious uniform on civic dates, but also the nurses. They are part of the army that defeated fascism".

In a way, the attention they received from the press at that time favored the establishment of social relations that granted the nurses, even if symbolically, the power to make believe they are included by the State, of showing themselves as accepted by the people and, therefore, acknowledged for the symbolic capital they gained from their activities in the war. Thus, the above text attempted to legitimize their participation in the conflict, at the same time as it supported the attempt to consecrate them in the Army by demanding their right to continue using their uniform.

It should be taken into account that this article came from a communist journal, with large daily circulation and that, at that time, communists strongly defended the end of the New State and demonstrated their opposition against the ways the Army acted. Hence, based on sources that helped to verify that the press increasingly got around censorship at that time, the authors believe that the report showed resistance against the form in which the activities of FEB nurses in the Second World War was socially scrutinized⁽¹⁴⁾.

Moreover, it should be taken into account that, in the context of the New State, the media imposed itself as an instrument to disseminate pre-molded convictions, which ended up (re)structuring new patterns of order in the social world. In some cases, the media functioned as a fundamental vector in the national integration process, so as to guide the people's thinking towards the "benevolences" the regime intended. On the opposite, contrary positions were taken in resistance to a dictatorship that, in mid-1945, had little support⁽¹⁵⁾.

The same report reveals the existence of traits that outline a certain political and ideological strategy by the journalist to conduct the readers' opinion which, apparently, went against the Government's position about women's possible actions in public spaces.

Hence, based on the analysis of distinct elements in the two selected reports, it is inferred here that some statements (political and socially) guided those women towards their maintenance in private spaces, and others towards their consecration in public spaces. Therefore, the authors agree with Perrot when she affirms that "[...] the borders between the private and the public tend to change over time, also because not all private spaces are female, and not all public spaces are male [...]"⁽¹⁶⁾.

Hence, between the public and the private and, consequently and respectively, between men and women, between the political and the personal, and between the battle fields and domestic scenarios, divisions tend to be broken so as to recompose a scenery that remodels the social spaces through the appearance of fights and resistance that move the (in)visible frontiers between men and women.

This perspective gains privileges, for example, in times of war, when discussions about gender relations gain special outlines, as the interfaces of male domination are projected in other contexts. By the way, wars, which entail a certain degree of disorganization in civil and military life, lead to the involvement of exceptional situations in which the borders between genders are mixed up and, on certain occasions, are even inverted.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The sources that were selected, ordered and classified according to theme guided the authors of this study towards an approach that is capable of apprehending the truly symbolic dimension of male domination and its distinctive properties in the public and private spheres.

Therefore, the involvement with French gender studies by Pierre Bourdieu and Michelle Perrot is justified, in order to prevent probable sexual dissymmetry of philosophical discourse⁽¹⁷⁾. The authors believe that they managed to reproduce the male and female views in the historical version analyzed here.

The problem of the private/public dichotomy found in this research constituted fertile ground to understand the sexual division of the spaces FEB nurses started to occupy in the immediate post-war. Hence, by applying the distinction between the private and the public to the representations involved in the discourse of news reports, the authors attempted to clarify some symbolic effects that were conjuncturally reproduced in the social world.

Finally, the authors consider that the symbolic effects of the news reports that disseminated the FEB nurses' return to Brazil partially resulted from the way those nurses' identity was represented in the social world. In this sense, those reports represented the reproduction of symbolic strategies in the sense of standing on political and social interests at that time. And, consequently, they entailed preconceived ideas about the hierarchizing division of the social world into male and female.

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