

CUIDADO É FUNDAMENTAL

Escola de Enfermagem Alfredo Pinto – UNIRIO

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

DOI:10.9789/2175-5361.rpcfo.v17.13767

NURSE EVA MARIA COSTA – THE “DAMA DA LÂMPADA” FROM 1980: AN IMAGE ANALYSIS

*Enfermeira Eva Maria Costa - a dama da lâmpada de 1980: uma análise imagética**Enfermera Eva María Costa - la dama de la lámpara de 1980: una análisis de las imágenes*Andréa de Sant’Ana Oliveira¹ Onã Silva² 

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar a produção imagética à história da Enfermagem cuja fonte foi um fac-símile, no qual consta a imagem de Eva Maria Costa, na formatura de 1980, da Escola de Enfermagem Alfredo Pinto. **Metodologia:** estudo do tipo histórico-exploratório de aproximação com a semiótica, que utiliza o conceito de Martine Joly visando familiaridade com a temática. **Resultado:** a análise do fac-símile evidenciou a representatividade de Eva Maria Costa como Dama da Lâmpada. **Conclusão:** alunas pertencentes à população negra podem alcançar destaque, pela obtenção de distinções durante o curso. Ademais, o estudo deixou inequívoco que a História da Enfermagem deve ser explorada, com novas e diferentes fontes, como a fotografia. Desta forma, será contributo para pesquisas sobre a temática das enfermeiras negras e suas contribuições representativas para a profissão. Para tal, são necessários investimentos e propostas para que a pesquisa histórica possa extinguir a dicotomia racial em espaços acadêmicos.

DESCRITORES: Enfermagem; História da enfermagem; Rito; Prêmio; Racismo

ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the image production related to the history of Nursing, based on a facsimile featuring the image of Eva Maria Costa at her 1980 graduation from the Alfredo Pinto School of Nursing. **Methodology:** a historical-exploratory study with a semiotic approach, using the concept of Martine Joly to promote familiarity with the theme.

¹Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro Enfermeira, Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil.

²Editora Cuidarte, Brasília, Distrito Federal, Brasil.

Received: 2025/01/31. **Accepted:** 2025/04/17

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: Andréa de Sant’Ana Oliveira

E-mail: andreasantoli@gmail.com

How to cite this article: Oliveira AS, Silva O. Nurse Eva Maria Costa – the “Dama da Lâmpada” from 1980: an image analysis. R Pesq Cuid Fundam (Online). [Internet]. 2025 [cited year month day];17:e13767. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.9789/2175-5361.rpcfo.v17.13767>.



Result: the analysis of the facsimile highlighted the representativeness of Eva Maria Costa as the Lady with the Lamp. **Conclusion:** students from the Black population can attain distinction through achievements during the course. Furthermore, the study made it unequivocal that the History of Nursing should be explored through new and different sources, such as photography. In this way, it contributes to research on the theme of Black nurses and their representative contributions to the profession. To this end, investments and proposals are necessary so that historical research can eliminate the racial dichotomy in academic spaces.

DESCRIPTORS: Nursing; History of nursing; Rite; Award; Racism.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar la producción de imágenes relacionada con la historia de la Enfermería cuya fuente fue un facsímil, en el que aparece la imagen de Eva Maria Costa, en su graduación de 1980, de la Escuela de Enfermería Alfredo Pinto. **Metodología:** estudio de tipo histórico-exploratorio con un enfoque semiótico, utilizando el concepto de Martine Joly con el objetivo de familiarizarse con la temática. **Resultado:** el análisis del facsímil evidenció la representatividad de Eva Maria Costa como Dama de la Lámpara. **Conclusión:** las alumnas pertenecientes a la población negra pueden alcanzar protagonismo mediante distinciones obtenidas durante el curso. Además, el estudio dejó en claro que la Historia de la Enfermería debe ser explorada con nuevas y diferentes fuentes, como la fotografía. De esta manera, se contribuye a investigaciones sobre el tema de las enfermeras negras y sus aportaciones representativas a la profesión. Para ello, son necesarias inversiones y propue

DESCRIPTORES: Enfermería; Historia de la enfermería; Rito; Premio; Racismo.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to publicize the representativeness of graduate Eva Maria Costa, a black woman who played a leading role in the passing-of-the-lamp ritual. The historical timeframe is 1980, when she, then an undergraduate, received the Florence Nightingale Award at the Alfredo Pinto Nursing School (EEAP).

The critical study of rites and symbols in nursing shows how these elements reflect social, cultural and historical issues and have been institutionalized for decades. According to Porto and Neto's research, each teaching institution had its own imagery signature and aspiring nurses were institutional messengers. One of these rites, the Florence Nightingale Award - also called the Lady of the Lamp Award, was institutionalized at the Alfredo Pinto Nursing School (EEAP) in 1946.¹

The analysis of the facsimile recording of the black student Eva Maria Costa as the Lady of the Lamp at the graduation ceremony is intended to break with the reproduction of eliminatory paradigms; in other words, it aims to recognize the importance of the black population in the training of nursing students, their rites and signs.

This study is justified by the historical and social relevance of recognizing a black student in an academic context which, for decades, was mostly accessed by the white population. The Florence Nightingale Prize was sequentially awarded to white students. Eva Maria Costa's receipt of the award is a significant

milestone in the history of nursing, reflecting changes in the form of inclusion and representation in the educational and professional fields.

Furthermore, this study enriches the historiography of nursing, offering a critical perspective on the social and educational transformations that have impacted the field over time. Analyzing this historical achievement allows us not only to understand the progress made, but also to identify the challenges still faced in promoting racial equality in the academic and professional spheres.

It is a historic milestone for interrupting the sequence of non-black students, usually chosen as the Ladies of the Lamp, in the Florence Nightingale Prize. Therefore, by receiving the distinction of Lady of the Lamp, Eva Maria Costa draws attention to the existence of empowered black women, who subvert the invisibility imposed on black nursing students in the past. On the other hand, in the present day, this study proposes a reflection on the representativeness built up in the collective imagination, forming a professional identity in academic society.

METHOD

With regard to the methodological basis, the typology of historical-semiotic study was used, with the biographer's personal and professional information and her iconographic image as the data source; the data analysis was mediated by

the Photographic Analysis Matrix (MAF), and the references of Martine Joly. The image analyzed comes from the personal archive of the biographer, nurse Eva Maria Costa.²⁻³

In this historical-exploratory study, the approach to the semiotic theme was worked on, using Martine Joly's concept, which advocates reading the image, enriched by analysis, in order to stimulate creative iconographic interpretation.³

The theoretical framework shows that semiotic analysis aims to uncover the multiple levels of meaning in an image, respecting the complexity and plurality of meanings it can offer. According to Joly, the image is made up of significant elements to unveil the multiple levels of meaning of an image, respecting the complexity and plurality of meanings it can offer.³

Regarding the typology of studies, with image analysis, the use of photography as an analysis document, in the field of nursing history, the semiotic studies guided by Prof. Dr. Fernando Porto, leading researcher of the Laboratory of History of Care and Image in Nursing (LACUIDEN), are recognized.⁴

In addition, the Photographic Analysis Matrix was chosen because it can help organize the data considerably. Considering the methodological issues for iconographic analysis - in this case, photographs - we can see that the area of nursing history has come closer to semiotic studies.

The Photographic Analysis Matrix is made up of three main items. The first item contains the image's identification data, the second relates to the level of expression, and the third and final item is the level of content. These three items are subdivided into complementary data.

It should be noted that the image of nurse Eva Maria Costa analyzed in this study was classified, described and analyzed in terms of identification, expression and content.

As for the ethical aspects of the research, the nurse portrayed was informed about the scientific objectives, risks and benefits of this study, giving her full consent and authorization to carry it out and publish it.

Therefore, this research complies with Resolution 738/24 of the National Health Council (CNS) and is in accordance with the standards and guidelines established by the Human Research Ethics Committee (CEPSH).

It should be noted that Resolution 738/24 of the National Health Council allows the prior submission of the research project to the Research Ethics Committee (CEPE) to be waived, according to article 2, item IX, which deals with "Sensitive Personal Data: personal data on racial or ethnic origin". In other words, this study is documentary in nature, using image documents from her personal collection and information provided and authorized by the woman portrayed.

RESULTS

It should be reiterated that for iconographic analysis, the Photographic Analysis Matrix was used as a research tool, previously validated in studies led by researcher Dr. Fernando Porto.^{2,4} For the present study, adaptations were made in line with the established objectives.

As established in the methodology, the Image Analysis Matrix resulted in the creation of a Demonstrative Table, which contains the analytical information of the photograph: identification plan, expression and content.

First of all, the nurse portrayed in the study is contextualized. Eva Maria Costa joined the Undergraduate Nursing Course in 1976 and graduated in 1980. She completed the undergraduate course in 8 periods, according to the curriculum established at the time and adopted by the Alfredo Pinto Nursing School (EEAP).

Regarding the Graduation Ceremony, in which Eva Maria Costa appeared as Dama da Lâmpada (Lady of the Lamp), when I interviewed her, she explained that the fact that she only had one photograph to study was because she didn't have a camera at the time, so she didn't record all the moments when she was at the graduation ceremony.

Later in this study, the only image that will be analyzed is presented, in which the student Eva Maria Costa is identified, wearing the clothes of the graduation ceremony. She was photographed on her way to the center stage of the ceremony to hand over the lamp to the student chosen to be her successor. According to her account, Eva was wearing white clothes, which is also a characteristic of those who receive the lamp during the rite, as she takes on the role of representative for the next semester, until she graduates the following semester.

I was passing it on to the girl who was in her seventh period. I did receive the white cape from the student in the term before mine (when she received the lamp from her predecessor) but I don't have that record. I remember that on the day I received the white cape, I don't remember the place of the graduation, I went with the white cape and I wore a white dress that was "kind of" embroidered on the front, but I don't have any photos, I even remember going with my dad, but at the time we didn't have a camera or dad didn't take a camera to photograph or something, so I have no record of the day I put on the white cape and received the lamp. (Eva Maria Costa)

The data reported by Professor Dr. Eva Maria Costa was collected via the instant messaging application WhatsApp in 2020, and then transcribed, keeping the interviewee's information.

Figure 1 - Eva Maria Costa representing the Lady of the Lamp, at the Nursing Graduation Ceremony, Florence Nightingale Award, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, 1980



Source: Illustrator's personal collection

Chart 1 - Photographic Analysis Matrix built with the facsimile data

1. Identification data	
Location of collection	Illustrator's personal collection
Image date	1980
2. Data for the Expression Plan	
Author of the image	Unknown
Type of image	Portrait
Geometric format	Rectangular
Plane	Diagonal
3. Data for the Content Plan	
Image setting	Auditorium of the UFRJ School of Music
People represented (how many; sex; individual or group)	A black woman appears in the foreground, wearing a graduation gown. There is also a group of people occupying all the seats in the auditorium.
Image backdrop	In the spotlight is a black student, on graduation night, carrying a Greco-Roman lamp in her hands, symbolizing nursing. The audience, predominantly male and adult, is sitting on chairs in an auditorium. Many are attentive to the ceremony, although some show expressions of distraction. The presence of a large audience emphasizes the social and institutional relevance of the graduation ceremony.

Attributes of person representation (detailed costumes of people)	A dark-skinned woman with short black hair, wearing a black graduation gown with long sleeves, a collar in the shape of a “priest’s collar”, without buttons, with a white Jabor positioned just below her neck on the front and over a dark fabric cap. She is holding a Greek metal lamp in both hands. In the background, it appears that there was a group of people watching the ceremony.
Gestural representation of the person	He holds the Greco-Roman lamp with both hands, projecting it forward, at the level of the mediastinum, highlighting the object, appearing to be walking towards the center of the ceremony.
Attributes of landscape representation	A black woman at an academic ceremony, with an auditorium full of people in the background, who appear to be the guests of the graduates. The yellowish light of the photograph and the style of the audience’s clothes indicate the historical period, placing the scene clearly in the late 1970s or early 1980s.

Source: Author

DISCUSSION

The 1980s brought achievements demanded by the unified black movement (MNU) and included in the Federal Constitution such as “the prohibition of racial discrimination and the creation of Caó Law No. 7.716/89, which typifies the crime of racism in the penal code.”

For this reason, a ritualistic award given to a black student who played a leading role in the graduation ceremony in the 1980s transcends the personal sphere, becoming a political and socio-historical milestone. In this way, it is a concrete example of how black women challenged the racist structures of their time in order to gain recognition from a society that was still trying to deal with its inequalities in the face of the myth of racial democracy.

With regard to the object of study - the facsimile - it has great value for analytical purposes. According to Joly, the image itself is not a universal language that allows us to recognize the visual elements and their message, even if it seems an obvious and natural message.³ “Several reasons explain this impression of natural reading of the image, at least of the figurative image. In particular, the speed of visual perception, as well as the apparent simultaneity of recognizing its content and interpreting it.”³

There are references that argue that we learn to read images even before we learn to read writing. Some codes may seem natural, but they are part of the cultural, social and historical learning process. The idea is that some images that we think are easy to grasp may not be so natural. The analysis of an image can take on a pedagogical character, according to the needs of a community, assuming the function of teaching, allowing visual messages to be read or constructed more effectively. Therefore, the image is a specific and heterogeneous language, with its own signs.

For the purposes of this discussion, we refer to the description and analysis of the image of Eva Maria Costa’s graduation ceremony representing the Lady with the Lamp. Undoubtedly, to discuss the rite of the ceremony of the Lady of the Lamp, based on the image of the study, it is necessary to understand dogmas and paradigms that are still inherent in the social and professional construction and representativeness of nursing.

In this discussion, it is necessary to return to the time and historical facts of 1943, when, after five male and medical administrations, Maria de Castro Pamphiro, the first woman nurse to graduate from the Anna Nery School of Nursing, took over as head of the EEAP; seconded by the National Public Health Department (DNSP), to which the EEAP was subordinate at the time - and was under the command of Adatauto Botelho, appointed by Health Minister Aramis Taborda de Ataíde.

When she took over as head of the school, Maria de Castro Pamphiro instituted some significant rites for nursing, including the rite of the Lady with the Lamp. According to Kaminitz, at the time, Principal Pamphiro recorded in her report that: “the institution of the lamp is the milestone of greatest responsibility for its future in the cause of the nursing profession in Brazil”.⁵

Historically, in the context of the EEAP, the rite has existed since 1946 and was institutionalized by the EEAP’s first nurse director, Maria de Castro Pamphiro, during her time at the head of the school (1946-1956). According to Porto, the purpose of the rite is to reaffirm the image of Florence Nightingale with the aim of “keeping alive the memory of Florence Nightingale as the forerunner of modern nursing”.^{4,5}

It’s important to clarify that the Lady of the Lamp rite is a distinction linked to the Florence Nightingale Award,

which honors the graduating student who was in her final term and stands out for the best academic performance in terms of average grades, after evaluation of the average coefficient of return (CR) and identification with the ideals of the profession.⁶ When the award is given to a woman, the student is codenamed Lady of the Lamp, and if given to a man, he is called Keeper of the Lamp.

This ritual is of the utmost importance to the profession, as the lighting and carrying of the lamp - the symbol of nursing - at all the School's solemnities or at external events where the School is represented, by means of the Lady with the Lamp, is done in respect for the memory of Florence Nightingale, symbolizing the maintenance of the light of professional knowledge.⁶

Continuing the discussion on the issue of race in the educational context, we go back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the inclusion of blacks in the educational system was still limited, due to the legacy of slavery and the social marginalization to which this population was subjected.

However, the work of black professionals in nursing - especially black women - was significant in hospital and home environments, even though they were not properly valued.⁷

In the historical context, the Alfredo Pinto Nursing School (EEAP) was the first nursing school in Brazil, founded in 1890, and was a pioneer in accepting black students, marking a milestone in the transformation of the profession.⁸⁻⁹

It is worth noting that the trajectory of the EEAP not only reflects the inclusion of the black population in Brazil's education system, but also the inclusion of the black population in the nursing professionalization process.⁷

Considering the aforementioned history, there is no doubt that the analysis of the facsimile with the image of student Eva Maria Costa, in this study, aims to break with the reproduction of paradigms, recognizing the importance of the black population for the training of nursing students.

Another necessary discussion is the consequence of the lack of black references, a fact that prevents black students from seeing or knowing that, in history, there was once a black Lady of the Lamp. She argues that this historical fact is a parameter for black students who can also aim to achieve this distinction. Therefore, the study of the imagery will contribute to building an anti-racist education and, in favor of a new paradigm among the rites of nursing.

It is important to emphasize that it is complex to look at the history of the black population - and its surroundings - and show that the presence of black students is still a minority in the spaces of academic training in higher education; and to visualize a positive and inclusive sense for professional construction. Therefore, it is important to confront all the

exclusionary factors in the university environment, in order to influence other black students to also achieve their places, thus legitimately belonging to the academic processes.

To talk about black representativeness, it is necessary to analyze this important title achieved by Eva Maria Costa in 1980. That's why this study, by publicizing the facsimile image and the story of the nurse portrayed, is certainly of great importance for the everyday image of the black Lady of the Lamp - a record for empowering black female students. Along with this historical issue, it should be pointed out that the majority of our country's population is black or brown. On the other hand, when it comes to nursing, a mostly black and female profession, however, black students hardly recognize themselves as legitimate participants in similar spaces and rites, the minority is highlighted in academic spaces that are considered elitist places. It is a historical fact that black students still occupy subordinate roles.

In fact, through historical analysis, it is possible to discuss the fact that it was only in 2020 that the EEAP once again awarded the Dama da Lâmpada distinction to the student Eloíza Domingos Jordão, a self-declared black woman. In other words, there was a historical gap of 40 years before the EEAP awarded the distinction of Dame of the Lamp to another black student.

There is no doubt that Eva Maria Costa is important in the history of nursing, as a representative of the anti-racist struggle in the educational context. Eva Maria Costa continues to represent and contribute to the history of nursing, beyond the domains of the EEAP and Rio de Janeiro. Her story, together with the image of a black nurse, is on display at the MuNEAN - Museu Nacional da Enfermagem Anna Nery in Salvador - BA, undoubtedly a fitting tribute to her professional career. Nurse Eva Maria Costa and the other honorees in the exhibition were nominated by the Nursing Councils of their respective states for their contributions to the profession.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study has shown that the Lady of the Lamp rite reflects both the legacy of nursing and the challenges of racial inclusion in the academic environment. Eva Maria Costa's achievement as Dama da Lâmpada (Lady of the Lamp) in 1980 is a historic milestone that contributes to the construction of anti-racist education, re-signifying the rites of nursing ceremonies and events.

Furthermore, the development of similar studies expands the possibilities for more black representation in the academic context, strengthening the anti-racist struggle

in the lives of black students. In other words, the inclusion of the black population as users of the education system has always been difficult, both bureaucratically and as a prominent element in positive actions for history and the educational process.

It is clear from this study that a black student winning the Florence Nightingale Award - or the Lady of the Lamp Award, as it is popularly known among EEAP faculty and students - is not simply a story of a black student standing out in front of a local academic group. It's a milestone! It's also a message to other black students - from EEAP and other academic institutions - making them aware and empowering them to occupy a similar place, or any other place of prominence.

The history of nursing is built with the participation of everyone, without distinction of any kind, which is why the image of the black Lady of the Lamp encourages the black nursing community to seek out every opportunity for representation. It is possible to take prominent paths in what you set out to do, if you so wish.

We reiterate that this semiotic study, with analysis of the facsimile of the student as the black Lady of the Lamp, aimed to break with the reproduction of paradigms, recognizing the black population as important in the history of nursing students' training.

Undoubtedly, the lack of black references in history has several consequences, such as preventing black students from seeing or knowing that there was a black Lady of the Lamp, and leaving them with no parameters for achieving this distinction.

Thus, this study is a historical contribution to nursing and its social conceptions, by breaking the hegemony of receiving this distinction, which should also include black students.

It concludes with the historical representation of a black woman - Eva Maria Costa - who was the Lady of the Lamp for the Florence Nightingale Award. The existence of such a story of a black Lady of the Lamp in the graduation rite among the students of the EEAP institution is evidence of the achievements and historical resilience of the black population; showing that it needs to integrate the cultural and social dimensions in nursing teaching and practice, making the profession more inclusive and committed to the anti-racist struggle.

REFERENCES

1. Porto F, Mercedes N. Enfermeira na Imprensa Ilustrada Brasileira (1890-1925): assinatura imagética. Patrimônio e memória. [internet]. 2014 jun [acesso em 13 de dezembro 2024]; 10(1). Disponível em: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/5703282.pdf>
2. Silva Onã. CERIMÔNIA DE POSSE DE MEMBROS DA ACADEMIA IPÊ: rito e simbolismos. [Programa de Pós-graduação Doutorado em Enfermagem e Biociências]. Rio de Janeiro (Brasil): Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro; 2016.
3. Martine Joly. Introdução a análise da imagem. Lisboa: Ed. 70; 2007.
4. Porto F. Os ritos institucionais e a imagem pública da enfermeira brasileira na Imprensa Ilustrada: O poder simbólico no *Click* Fotográfico (1919-1925). [Doutorado em Enfermagem]. Rio de Janeiro (Brasil): Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Escola de Enfermagem Anna Nery; 2007.
5. Kaminitz S.H.C Elementos simbólicos nos rituais de formatura da escola de enfermagem Alfredo Pinto (1943-1956). [Programa de Pós-graduação Doutorado em Enfermagem e Biociências]. Rio de Janeiro (Brasil): Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro; 2017.
6. Escola de enfermagem Alfredo Pinto [homepage na internet]. Ritos da EEAP [acesso em 11 dez 2024]. Disponível em: <http://www.unirio.br/ccbs/eeap/direcao/ritos-da-eeap>.
7. Moreira A; Oguisso T. Profissionalização de enfermagem brasileira: o pioneirismo da Escola de Enfermagem Alfredo Pinto (1890-1920). [Tese] São Paulo (Brasil): Universidade de São Paulo;2003.
8. Moreira A. Escola de Enfermagem Alfredo Pinto - 100 anos de História. [Dissertação de Mestrado em Enfermagem]. Rio de Janeiro (Brasil): Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Escola de Enfermagem Alfredo Pinto; 1990.
9. Moreira A, Porto F, Oguisso T. Registros noticiosos sobre a escola profissional de enfermeiros e enfermeiras na revista "O Brazil-Médico", 1890-1922. Ver esc enferm USP. [Internet]. 2002 [acesso em 13 de dezembro 2024];36(4). Disponível em: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0080-62342002000400015>.