

Medication advertisements in the illustrated press and the image of brazilian nurses (1920-1925)

PROPAGANDAS DE REMÉDIO NA IMPRENSA ILUSTRADA E A IMAGEM DA ENFERMEIRA BRASILEIRA (1920-1925)

PROPAGANDAS DE REMEDIOS EN LA PRENSA ILUSTRADA Y LA IMAGEN DE LA ENFERMERA BRASILEÑA (1920-1925)

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ABSTRACT

This is a historical and social study about the symbolic effect of medication advertisements presented by women using object representations used by nurses, featured on Fon-Fon Magazine, which describes the medication advertisements featured on Fon-Fon Magazine; analyzes the object representations of the nurse image present in the referred advertisements and discusses on the symbolic effect of those representations on the consumption of medication by the Brazilian society. The document sources were in print, iconographic and literature referring to the History of Brazil, the Press, Advertising and of Nursing. The medication advertisements, analyzed using an analysis matrix based on concepts of semiotics, were obtained from the Fon-Fon Magazine. The study showed that the analyzed advertisements invested in object representations used by nurses to gain reliability regarding the medication being announced.

KEY WORDS

Nurses.
Nursing.
History of nursing.
Propaganda.

RESUMO

Estudo histórico-social sobre efeito simbólico das propagandas de remédios protagonizadas por mulheres com representações objetivas utilizadas por enfermeiras, veiculadas na Revista Fon-Fon, que descreve as propagandas de remédios veiculadas neste meio de comunicação; analisa as representações objetivas da imagem da enfermeira presente nessas propagandas e discute o efeito simbólico dessas representações para o consumo do remédio pela sociedade brasileira. As fontes documentais foram escritas, iconográficas e literatura referentes à História do Brasil, da Imprensa, da Propaganda e da Enfermagem. As propagandas de remédios analisadas, mediante uma matriz de análise baseada em conceitos da semiótica, derivam da Revista Fon-Fon. O estudo evidenciou que as propagandas analisadas investiram em representações objetivas utilizadas pelas enfermeiras, de modo a obterem credibilidade em relação ao medicamento anunciado.

DESCRIPTORIOS

Enfermeiras.
Enfermagem.
História da enfermagem.
Propaganda.

RESUMEN

Estudio histórico-social sobre el efecto simbólico de las propagandas de remedios protagonizadas por mujeres con representaciones objetivas utilizadas por enfermeras, publicadas en la Revista Fon-Fon, que describe las propagandas de remedios exhibidas en tal publicación, analiza las representaciones objetivas de la imagen de la enfermera presente en tales propagandas y discute el efecto simbólico de tales representaciones para el consumo del medicamento por parte de la sociedad brasileña. Las fuentes documentales fueron escritas, iconográficas y bibliografía referente a la historia de Brasil, de la prensa, de la publicidad y de la enfermería. Las propagandas de remedios examinadas a través de una matriz de análisis basada en conceptos de semiótica, corresponden a la citada revista Fon-Fon. El estudio evidenció que las propagandas estudiadas se orientaron a utilizar a la enfermera como representación objetiva con el fin de que el medicamento anunciado goce de una mayor credibilidad.

DESCRIPTORIOS

Enfermeras.
Enfermería.
Historia de la enfermería.
Propaganda.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of the nurse's image presented by the Weekly Magazine, in the period from 1919 to 1925, on the occasion of the elaboration of a doctor's degree thesis titled "The institutional rites and the public image of Brazilian nurses in the illustrated press: the symbolic power in the photographic *click* (1919-1925)", evidenced the competitive fight among the three nursing schools located in Rio de Janeiro, the Federal Capital at the time, which were: Practical Nursing School of the Brazilian Red Cross (Escola Prática de Enfermeiras da Cruz Vermelha Brasileira - 1916), Professional Nursing School of Care to Alienated People (Escola Profissional de Enfermeiros e Enfermeiras da Assistência a Alienados - 1890), current Alfredo Pinto Nursing School, and the Nursing School of the National Department of Public Health (1922), current Anna Nery Nursing School.

The analyzed data evidenced that, in quantitative terms, there was a prevalence of images of nurses from the Nursing School of the National Department of Public Health. Nevertheless, it was evidenced that most of these images had codes that reminded the nurses of the Brazilian Red Cross, since the cross and the veil were the codes used by the journalists at the time to represent the nurse's image. These codes did not symbolize the nurses of the Nursing School of the National Department of Public Health, whose symbolic feature was a cap.

In this perspective, through another type of source, the present study will examine closely the competition among the three images built by the nursing schools of Rio de Janeiro, in order to detail the results presented by the doctor's degree thesis previously mentioned.

The object in analysis refers to the symbolic effect of the medication advertisements presented by women with object representations used by nurses, featured on Fon-Fon Magazine. The period limited for the study is between 1920 and 1925. The initial mark refers to the medication lodeal presented in 1920 whereas the last refers to the Linimento de Sloan in 1925.

The relevance of this study consists on the possibility of using the advertisement as a historical source, seeing its comprehension as a possibility to work with languages that are not only in the verbal or written scope⁽¹⁾, since images represent the social life in terms of being fragments of the real, when contextualized to the time, as they reproduce certain realities⁽²⁾. Besides, this proposal also allows to (de)consolidate the way the construction process of the Brazilian nurse's image took place, with other study data.

It is important to highlight that, the advertisement was introduced to the press due to the fact that it represent a desire for changes. These changes were one of the ways of showing the readers certain ways to achieve the idea of

happiness, because having the advertisement images in hand, the readers took a look at each page of the magazine, admiring the images and dreaming with the power of choosing a product they needed⁽¹⁾.

In face of the facts exposed, this study has the objective to describe the medication advertisements featured on Fon-Fon Magazine; to analyze the object representations of the nurse's image present in these advertisements and to discuss the symbolic effect of these representations for the consumption of medication by the Brazilian society.

METHOD

This is a historical social study whose data were analyzed through the conceptions of habitus, object representation and symbolic power of the French sociologist Bourdieu.

In a general way, the conception of habitus was applied to the documents regarding the most insignificant aspects of the things, situations or practices of the human existence⁽³⁾, understood in the study as the attitude of the nurse's professional practice.

The object representations (uniform, cap, cross) evoked images of nurses used by the pharmaceutical industry targeting the production of object representations consonant with the reliability of the products in the themes approached in the reading of documental corpus⁽³⁾.

The symbolic power was understood as the suggestion exerted by things and people and the condition of efficacy of all types of symbolic power capable of exerting something over the habitus of the other⁽³⁾.

The study sources were located in Rio de Janeiro: National Library; Library of the Nursing School Anna Nery; Documentation Center of the Nursing School Anna Nery; Sectorial Archive Nurse Maria de Castro Pamphiro, of the Nursing School Alfredo Pinto. These sources consisted on written and iconographic documents, as well as the literature referring to the History of Brazil, the Press, Advertising and the History of Nursing, which are characteristic of historical social studies.

The images presented in medication advertisements were analyzed through an analysis matrix based on two concepts of semiotics: the plan of expression, as the manifestation of the content as a system of verbal, non-verbal or syncretic meaning and the plan of content, considered as the meaning of the text, what the text says and the way it says so⁽⁴⁾.

The magazine Fon-Fon was chosen for the study due to the importance given to advertisements, which did not happen randomly, since the editorialists suggested businessmen, at the time, to make their regular and systematic advertisements at the best magazine of the illustrated press in Brazil. Besides, they claimed to be the most popular and circulated magazine in that society⁽⁵⁾.

RESULTS

Data collection had the support of a study instrument, consisting on five items: the name of the medication, year of publication, magazine number, page and date, which resulted in ninety medication advertisements on Fon-Fon Magazine. These advertisements were later grouped into four types, according to the name of the medication, being: *Iodeal* (1920), *Vinho Iodo Phosphatado de Werneck* (1921, 1922 and 1923), *Lavaolho* (1922) and *Linimento de Sloan* (1925).

In this grouping, the medication *Vinho Iodo Phosphatado de Werneck* presented the frequency of seventy-five, *Iodeal* twelve, *Lavaolho* two and *Linimento de Sloan* one, and their image contents were analyzed as it follows.

MEDICATION ADVERTISEMENTS AND THE IMAGE OF THE NURSE

The advertisement of the medication *Iodeal* covered an entire page, and consisted on image and text. The medication aimed at the prevention of infections and was used in lesions, such as: *abscesses, thrush, heat irritation, rash, itching, eczema, impetigo, pimples, wounds, chilblain, fistula, skin spots and stinking sweat*, for sale at pharmacies, drugstores, perfumeries, markets, as well as at the general local store, for 4\$000 (four thousand *contos de réis*), or by mail for 7\$000 (seven thousand *contos de réis*).



Figure 1 - Advertisement of the medication *Iodeal*

Flask price 4\$000 – by mail 7\$000 – For sale at all Pharmacies, Drugstores, Perfumeries, Market and at the Local Store J. DE CARVALHO – 225 General Camara Street – Sobrado – Telephone: NORTE 6479 – ZIP CODE N. 1724 – RIO DE JANEIRO⁽⁶⁾.

It is important to highlight that, at the time, the city of Rio de Janeiro had 512 pharmacies, 143 drugstores, 100 laboratories and stores and 47 herb shops⁽⁷⁾ which allowed producers to distribute the products to be sold and consumers to find these products.

The price of the product varied from 4\$000 to 7\$000 (four to seven thousand *contos de réis*), which at the time corresponded to the purchase of ten magazines of the illustrated press – two and half months.

The advertisement text also instructed the consumer on how to use it for the skin defense:

IMPORTANT – the daily use of a spoonful of IODEAL, in a bowl of water to wash the face, being careful to aspire in order to quickly wash the nasal cavities, absolutely prevents from constipations, influenza and other illnesses, which manifest due to bacillus that are inhaled during the day⁽⁶⁾.

The above extract presents linguistic terms such as *constipations, influenza and bacillus* which being words from the scientific medical field, produced a meaning of credibility of the product. In this perspective, the speech aimed at producing the effect of truth⁽³⁾, and this truth produced by the advertisement aimed to convince the consumer regarding the medication efficacy.

Another argument used in the advertisement speech referred to the legal aspect, presented by the statement *Approved by the General Director of the Public Health of Brazil, on July 5, 1919. License no. 928*. The speech about the legal aspect allowed the advertiser to express his juridical capital as a subtle way of work division through the symbolic domination⁽⁸⁾. This statement consisted on another way to convince the consumer about the product efficacy used by the advertiser.

Besides, the text mentioned the Red Cross as a way of appealing to the consumption of the product, as the following extract shows:

Having a flask of IODEAL at your house for your urgent needs is a measure of precaution. It represents the Red Cross, civilizes the IMMEDIATE AID⁽⁶⁾.

By using the expression *Red Cross*, the advertisement reproduced the symbolic belief of the institution⁽⁴⁾, also by articulating other expression in the speech *Immediate Aid*. These expressions worked as a mind trigger for the reader, reminding the Red Cross, which aimed to assist victims in times of war and disasters. It is implied here that the advertiser targeted the reliability of the product.

The image of the woman, which covered a quarter of the magazine page, reminds the object representations used by nurses from the Nursing School of Care to Alienated People, female section from Engenho de Dentro⁽⁹⁾, whose uniform's symbolic mark was a blue cap with a cross. However, it is worth mentioning that the personal attributes used by the nurses at that school, analyzed by another study, did not present images of nurses with their hair out of the cap⁽⁴⁾.

In this context, by articulating the symbolic belief produced by the Red Cross to the image of the woman on the advertisement, with the object representations used by nurses from the Nursing School of Care to Alienated People, female section, it is possible to identify that the advertiser

made a crossing message between the written and the image speech. It is, thus, inferred that, the advertiser, though a hybrid speech, once again used strategies to convince the consumer to purchase the product and to have it at home for daily use.

The advertisement of the medication *vinho Iodo Phosphatado de Werneck* was indicated to treat *anemia, lymphatism and debility*. The composition of its name, with the foreign word Werneck, probably resulted from the name of the Laboratory Werneck. The technical director of this laboratory, in the period from 1919 to 1931, was Fábio Leoni Werneck – who graduated at the School of Pharmacy and Dentistry of Rio de Janeiro (1920)⁽¹⁰⁾.

The advertisement of the product on the magazine pages had the image of a woman with the following personal attributes: veil, light-colored and long-sleeved clothes, with the cross symbol on the top of her head and on her chest, giving the reader the idea that she carried a glass on a tray (Figure 2)⁽¹¹⁾.



Figure 2 - Advertisement of the medication *Vinho Iodo Phosphatado de Werneck*

The personal attributes were: the veil and the cross symbol. These object representations remind the image of nurses from the Practical School of the Brazilian Red Cross (RJ) due to the similarities shown by the social agents of that institution. The veil associated to the cross symbol was one of the symbolic marks of the Red Cross, which considered the nurse as the messenger agent of the institutional principles of that school⁽⁴⁾.

These symbolic marks worked for the Red Cross as visual communication, which according to Bourdieu represents the instrument of social integration. In this context, these object representations (veil and cross) made the readers trust the consensus of the symbolic belief preconized by the institutions and, probably, the reliability of the product.

As of 1921, the same product started to be advertised with another image. The advertisement presented the product's package with an enlarged image of the woman previously described. Besides, it provided the reader with

more information about the medication *Vinho Iodo Phosphatado de Werneck* (Figure 3)⁽¹²⁾.



Figure 3 - Advertisement of the medication *Vinho Iodo Phosphatado*

The information was [...] in the recovery from all illnesses that require a restorative of energetic and immediate effect, and it also presented the address for the acquisition of the product *Rua dos Ourives, 5 e 7 – Rio de Janeiro*⁽¹²⁾.

The product on the advertisement had a different package, like a bottle, covered with a fine patterned paper, which could not be identified, and a refined label.

On this new advertisement, the image was enlarged and, it was also possible to see the tray with the full glass, probably to give the idea it was the medication.

By articulating the object representation shown by the woman on the advertisement and the corporal *hexis* of the arm, carrying a tray with a glass, the imagery message of the text lets it show that it is the representation of a nurse. In this context, the advertisement used the professional technical competence of the nurse's image, through the *habitus*, as carrier of an authorized imagery speech. This authorized speech, articulated to the imaginary collective, through the symbolic belief produced by the Red Cross, produced a sense of credibility of the medication, due to the imagery signature of the nurse, understood as the applicable knowledge of the profession oriented to the consumer.

Other pharmacological product presented by the press was *Lavolho*, which was indicated to wash the eyes of children. The advertisement presented the image of a woman wearing an armband with a cross symbol, giving the medication to a child⁽¹³⁾ (Figure 4).



Figure 4 - Advertisement of the medication *Lavolho*

The advertisement contained the following information:

The eyes of children – beautiful, washing them daily with LAVOLHO. It's magnificent, [...] effective and pleasant. Women from the [...] saved the expensive treatment with [...] washing the eyes of sick people with [...] this discovery.

It heals the eyes quickly and safely [...] swollen eyelids get firm. Weak eyes get healthy like magic. Long eyelashes and [...]⁽¹³⁾.

Below this information, the reader would read that the product was available for sale [...] with an eyedropper at pharmacies, drugstores and markets [...]⁽¹³⁾.

Among the object representations, it is worth highlighting the armband with a cross. This personal attribute reminds the graduation rite of nurses from the Brazilian Red Cross. In this ritual, the graduates receive an armband, which was regulated by the institution through the article 75⁽⁴⁾.

This object representation was one of the ways the Red Cross had to show their symbolic power, because as Bourdieu says *there is no symbolic power without a symbolism of the power*⁽³⁾. Therefore, by using the armband as object representation, the advertisement sent the message to the reader, and possible consumer, that the product was worth their trust.

The articulation of the armband to the corporal *hexis* of the woman, with the attributes used by the nurse, probably gave the reader the sensation of the way the product should be used. In other words, the woman in a gently inclined position, holding the eyedropper with one of her hands and a child on the other arm, also showed how to give the medication, as well as sensitized the future consumer. The sensitiveness touches the person, in the strong meaning of the term, interiorizing the sensation that has its own nature over the specific competence⁽¹⁴⁾. Therefore, the armband with the cross symbol associated to the corporal *hexis* of the woman and the figure of the child, aimed at sensitizing and instructing the reader regarding the use of the medication, were strategies of communication to sell the medication.

The last medication, named *Linimento* [unctuous medication] *de Sloan*, was indicated for:

RHEUMATISM sciatic, neurosis, bronchitis and other common illnesses of the season, are healed and prevented with the application of LINIMENTO DE SLOAN (Figure 5)⁽¹⁵⁾.



Figure 5 - Advertisement of the medication *Linimento de SLOAN*

In the foreground, the advertisement presented a man wearing a bathrobe with a checked collar, sitting on an armchair with his legs straight and covered and a facial expression indicating pain. In the background, in a discrete way, there was the image of a woman wearing a cap and a coat, suggesting the reader, according to her corporal *hexis*, that either she was going to get the medication or that she had already used the liniment in the patient to relieve his pain.

The medication advertisement used the figure of a woman with the symbolic elements used by nurses and invested in the professional distinction of this figure-type in the advertising game of the pharmacological product.

The figure-type may be understood by Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as one of the ways to have, use and acquire, indicating time, effort and assumed learning⁽¹⁶⁾. In this context, the figure of the woman in the advertisement evidenced in its representation some of the *habitus* of the nurse, as strategy to advertise the product. On the other hand, the advertisement tried to show the quality of the product through the facial expression of pain of the male figure.

It is important to highlight that, some advertisements of this type, from the decade of 1920, were based on the principle of not hiding the pain, through an imagery witness, since it should be fought⁽¹⁾.

The analysis is clear in the idea that, *what is in question in the game of advertising and distinction is how human excellence is perceived, that which every society recognizes in the cultured man*⁽¹⁷⁾. Here, the cultured man has the meaning of the cultural capital, which the advertisement reader possesses to understand the imagery message articulated towards the efficacy of the medication.

THE SYMBOLIC EFFECT OF RELIABILITY FOR THE USE OF MEDICATION

The object representations analyzed in the medication advertisements converged to the game of advertising and

distinction of the commercial product perceived by the man, which according to Bourdieu is explained by the *effect of figures*⁽¹⁶⁾. This game is the implementation of the nurse's image, which induced the consumer to believe in the reliability of the product to be consumed. Nevertheless, through the use of the woman's image, the attributes of the professional distinction of the figure-type worked as a mind trigger for the reader to associate that woman as a nurse.

A study⁽¹⁷⁾ clarifies that

[...] the distinction is organized according to socially defined rules, and *distinct* behaviors are in the system of expressive procedures as well as speeches are in a language.

The reliability through object representations used by nurses did not happen at random. It is understood that the message uses solutions that were already decoded, because instead of creating a code, it adapts to solutions of public property, considering that its objective is not informative, but to confirm an existing ideology.

Furthermore, in a general way, the press advertisements seduced the consumers and contributed to the success of the commercial product. The press logic towards the advertisement is to impose, dominating especially the unlucky, since it directly favors the products and their producers. Besides, the advertisement seduced the public opinion, as a fighting field that uses a martial image, which you shall not desert⁽¹⁴⁾.

The advertisements have two main operations of intervention. The first one is to remove the ugliness, weakness and illness, whereas the second is to add to the reader what he lacks: aesthetic, strength and health. Removing or adding leads to a certain code, keeping bodies in a social norm⁽¹⁾.

In this context, the function of the advertisement refers to the impact of the given product not fixed for eternity⁽¹⁴⁾, that is, the speech authorized by the nurse's image and the presentation in the press, whenever associated, have a double function. This double action opens possibilities, according to the words of the same author *what you do shows what others do not and could do*⁽¹⁴⁾.

It is implied here that, the commercial agents advertised their products using female figures, by showing symbolic elements of the nurse, and reminding the readers of the image of the nurse from that time. Thus, those personal attributes indicated the authorized imagery speech regarding the administration of the medication to those who needed specific care.

This authorized imagery speech was also emphasized by the corporal hexis of the female images in the advertisements, which evidenced the habitus of the nurse. The latter, in this context, transmitted to the reader the symbolic efficacy and reliability of the product as a symbolic effect.

The symbolic effect, on the other hand, acted as some sort of magic for the solution of health problems associated to the figure of a woman's body. The body was then understood as a substrate of the habitus, which holds the relations of power that reproduce the domination system that rules society⁽¹⁸⁾.

The female image in the advertisements of medication prevailed as a support to the message of the announced product. In the decade of 1920, advertising posters used the image of a woman as an image support, aimed to build the model to be followed by those who could buy products in an operation to add values and promote a beautiful, agile and healthy body⁽¹⁾.

The comprehension is that, advertisements with female figures presented nexus, which Bourdieu mentions regarding the relations of domination and exploitation involved in the female gender⁽¹⁸⁾. Women are situated in the humid, low, curve side, with attributions of housekeeping jobs understood as those private and hidden, or even invisible of their nature, such as taking care of a child⁽¹⁸⁾.

It is in this sense that the woman image, associated with the object representations used by nurses, explored in medicine advertisements produces the meaning of care. The care, as a word in the ideological effect of the unification of opposites or the denial of divisions, is rejected by educated people. This rejection happens as the word may sound avaricious, middle-class and poor, despite of its polysemy in the language⁽³⁾.

Other strategy used by the advertisers as a symbolic effect was to make readers move their eyes to follow the course of the written text, using the resource of changing the letters by articulating the visualization of the female images with the symbolic elements used by the nurses. An author⁽¹⁾ clarifies the analysis by saying that, the objective of this articulation was to transform the image beyond the picture. It is once again understood that, the objective of advertisers who used female images was to make readers see and believe, with the object representations used by nurses, in the product's reliability and credibility through the authorized imagery speech.

Moreover, this articulation between the written and the imagery text suggested a certain change in the consumer's habit in terms of becoming healthier, for instance in the advertisement of Iodeal, which suggested the daily use of the product as a way of prevention against the bacillus aspired during the day.

The proposition of changing the readers' habits through the advertisement made people consume the product. Women were the main consumers and even considered, at the time, as overspending due to the organization of the family life, being theirs the decision on whether to buy products aimed at keeping the family health⁽¹⁾.

CONCLUSION

The advertisements invested in the object representations used by nurses and, at the same time, deposited in them the importance of credibility for the consumption of the advertised medications. Thus, it was the reader's responsibility to take care of his body in order to keep away from life illnesses and maybe from the oldness. Besides, trying to provide a healthy body through the impression caused by the message of what a sick body could provide, seen and read by part of the Brazilian society as readers of Fon-Fon Magazine.

The medication advertisements aimed at the health of the readers, and it is worth highlighting that the country was experiencing a context of Sanitary Reform, led by Carlos Chagas. The Sanitary Reform appeared in a health conception for a modern country after several epidemics, such as the yellow fever and the influenza, and at the time, fighting tuberculosis. Therefore, the advertisements implicitly pointed out to the readers the possibilities of taking better care of their bodies, having female figures as messenger social agents, with object representations used by nurses from that time.

On the other hand, the advertisements aimed at generating some fascination, but also needed to be understood as a market space. This market space was described by the symbolic belief of the products through the authorized imagery speech of the nurse.

The object representations articulated to the corporal hexis of the female images in the advertisements of the medications were aspects that made the advertisers meet the satisfaction of the readers. This satisfaction was seen and believed when the reader identified himself with the advertisements and, objectively, in the possible consumption of the product due to the content of the medication advertisement.

It is worth highlighting that, the category of gender as an articulating element of the social relations in the advertisements allowed to understand the way social agents are constituted in the daily life of that time by a set of meanings and permeated with symbols, which attribute different places to men and women. This difference is crossed by relations of power that historically give men a dominating position.

The symbolic effect based on the analysis evidenced that the advertisements, besides the authorized imagery speech of the nurse, presented the nurse as an ally and dealt with the disease in order to fight it.

In this context, the advertisements presented to the readers, with the articulation of the written and the imagery text, possibilities of a better life through the strategy of impact of suffering and, at the same time, the guarantee of relief, showing the reader a way to achieve welfare.

It is also important to mention that, the apparent unbalance between the theoretical and the historiographical part was, therefore, intentional. In the theoretical part, which aroused interest in the authors in this text, some concepts of Pierre Bourdieu that were considered fundamental were chosen, since they helped understand the construction process of the Brazilian nurse's image.

In this comprehension, the object representations in the medication advertisements featured on Fon-Fon Magazine, when articulated to the qualitative results of the doctor's degree thesis *The institutional rites and the public image of the Brazilian nurse in the illustrated press: the symbolic power of the photographic click (1919-1925)*, are emphasized and become expressive through the object representations from the Practical Nursing School, in the reproduction of the symbolic belief of the Red Cross to the Brazilian society.

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