

Stella Barros' contributions to nursing in Brazil: life story and political activism

As contribuições de Stella Barros para a enfermagem brasileira: trajetória de vida e militância política

Las contribuciones de Stella Barros para la enfermería brasileña: trayectoria de vida y militancia política

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to examine the life story of Stella Barros and her contributions to Brazilian nursing. **Method:** this historical, biographical life-history type study, framed by the philosophy of Foucault, used the semi-structured interview technique. The oral history was organized and tabulated using NVivo 10 software. Data were treated by content analysis, from which five categories emerged. **Results:** first, the teacher in question was considered an icon nationally and internationally, and her trajectory bears the imprint of the political activism present at several stages of her life. **Conclusion:** studies that address contributions by militant nurses are important in prompting discussion of the problems of alienation and lack of identity, which are essential to the endeavor to gain recognition for the profession and its value.

Descriptors: Nursing; politics; nurse; leadership.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar a trajetória de vida de Stella Barros e suas contribuições para a enfermagem brasileira. **Método:** pesquisa histórica, do tipo história de vida com enfoque biográfico. O referencial filosófico que respaldou a análise foi o foucaultiano; aplicada técnica de entrevista semiestruturada. Para organização e tabulação da história oral foi utilizado o *software* Nvivo 10. Para o trabalho de dados optou-se pelo método de análise de conteúdo e emergiram cinco categorias dos discursos. **Resultados:** desdobram-se, primeiramente, no fato de a professora mencionada ser considerada um ícone no cenário nacional e internacional, seu percurso é marcado pelo ativismo político, presente em diversas fases da vida. **Conclusão:** são relevantes estudos que abordem a contribuição de enfermeiras militantes, de forma a favorecer a discussão de problemas expressos pela alienação e ausência de identidade - aspectos imprescindíveis para valorização e reconhecimento profissional.

Descritores: Enfermagem; política; enfermeira; liderança.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar la trayectoria de vida de Stella Barros y sus vínculos para la enfermería brasileña. **Método:** investigación histórica, del tipo historia de vida con enfoque biográfico. El referencial filosófico que respaldó el análisis fue el de Foucault; se aplicó la técnica de entrevista semiestructurada. Para la organización y tabulación de la historia oral se utilizó el *software* Nvivo 10. El análisis de datos fue realizado a través del método de análisis de contenido y de ahí surgieron cinco categorías de los discursos. **Resultados:** se desdoblaron, primero, en el hecho de que la profesora es considerada un ícono en el escenario nacional e internacional, su recorrido está marcado por el activismo político, presente en varias fases de la vida. **Conclusión:** son relevantes los estudios que aborden la contribución de enfermeras militantes, para favorecer una discusión de problemas expresos por la alienación y la ausencia de identidad - aspectos imprescindibles para la valorización y el reconocimiento profesional.

Descriptor: Enfermería; la política; enfermera; liderazgo.

INTRODUCTION

The militancy arises in the life of the people as a possible way to exercise as an individual, to be what you are. Stories of people who have developed a political militancy show that the great motivation of this exercise is the feeling of social injustice, seeking in the social movement and militancy a territory where change is possible¹.

The term militancy derives from the latin *militare*, a verb that begins to be used in theological language, used to name one who militates in a party or trade union organization, the one who exercises political, material and intellectual tasks, necessary for the conquest of the State and/or for the transformation of society².

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In this aspect, in a denotative sense, militancy represents the exercise and/or work of those who militate, being the action, performance or practice, exercised by those who participate actively in favor of a political and social ideal.

There has been a decline in political militancy in recent years, especially in the forms of political representation in trade unions and parties, as a result of the individualization of society, fragility in the formation of individuals in their political dimension and strengthening of neoliberalism³.

Regarding nursing, in particular, it is worth noting that it took time to identify itself and to organize itself as a category of workers. Until the mid-1980s, it was a moment of consolidation of the social technical division of its work and maintenance of differences; only afterwards, a project of revision of this posture was discussed and started, assuming, at least in the discourse, the unit of the category through associations, councils and unions⁴.

The beginning of nurses' work was characterized in a position of subordination, reflected in the history of nursing, distinct from the power between men and women, in which men were assigned the management of services, this being a hindrance to the development of a strong political militancy⁵.

Still for nursing, political militancy is understood as essential to walk the path of change, with an integral committed vision, ethically, politically and socially with the human being and Brazilian society, avoiding accommodation and exaggerated acceptance without questioning, avoiding accommodation and exaggerated acceptance without question, which makes the profession, often, a repetitive practice and without creativity⁶.

The political militancy favors personal and professional growth, learning and knowledge acquisition. Several studies show that when experiencing militancy, the individual can learn about himself, personal relationships, broaden the view of the world and increase knowledge about society. This posture benefits changes in behavior and opens perspectives of personal fulfillment⁷⁻¹⁰.

In continuity to the discussion of political militancy in nursing, it is observed that this issue gains a greater prominence when it is identified that the professional categories in nursing are composed mainly by women, coming from the middle and working class of this country, and that studies in the area, reinforce the nursing training centered on the biomedical model, technical and with weaknesses in the political dimension of the formation and in its understanding¹¹⁻¹⁴.

On the other hand, considering the implications of knowledge production on the life history of nursing personalities that contribute to the reconfiguration of the profession, we have the study carried out on the Brazilian nurse Maria Rosa Sousa Pinheiro. Her life course consolidated a new representation of the feminine in the social and labor sphere¹⁵.

Another aspect related to the justification of the study is related to the novelty of the study, the political expression of Professor Stella Barros in Brazilian nursing, her contributions to the Brazilian Nursing Association (ABEn), therefore to the Brazilian nursing.

Initially, based on the Foucauldian techniques of constitution of individuals, some questions stand out: What are the Stella Barros' contributions to Brazilian nursing? Are these contributions materialized in the institutions and practice of nurse? Why are there no studies about this icon of Nursing? In what fields of the profession were there contributions? Thus, the objective was to analyze the life trajectory of Stella Barros and her contributions to nursing.

THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

It is a historical research, of the kind of life history with biographical focus that is characterized by its creative movement, which makes sense when outlined as a source of new knowledge.

It is important to emphasize that the philosophical frame of reference that supported the analysis of Stella Barros' life trajectory was the Foucauldian. As regards the theoretical aspects of self-techniques, they are divided into four main groups: production techniques, which allow to produce, transform or manipulate things; techniques of sign systems, which allow the use of signs, senses, symbols or meaning; techniques of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and subject them to certain ends or domination, objectifying the individual and techniques of the self, which allow individuals to perform a certain number of operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct and way of life¹⁶.

Stella Maria Pereira Fernandes de Barros has a degree in Nursing from the Federal University of Bahia (1965) and a Master's degree in Collective Health from the Federal University of Bahia (1978). She was vice president of National ABEn (1986-1989) and president of National ABEn (1990 - 1992). She worked in the Participation Movement, whose main objective was to carry out the political role of the association, the democratization of the institution and the construction of the Political Ethical Project for the profession.

She has developed research on the political dimension of the profession, in particular: the forms of organization of work in health and the nursing worker, preliminary subsidies to discuss the specificity of nursing practice in collective health, the Brazilian Nursing Policy Project, research to evolve and human resources of health: a strategic challenge for quality of the assistance.

The themes of the Brazilian Congresses of Nursing (CBEn) in her management were: Construction of a new practice (42º CBEn - 1990); Assistance in Nursing (43º CBEn - 1990); Nursing: struggle for life (44º CBEn - 1992).

The research, funded by the Coordination of Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), was conducted with Professor Stella Maria Pereira Fernandes de Barros, object of this study, in Salvador-Bahia, at the time of data collection for doctoral thesis. Data were collected in August 2015, and the semi-structured interview technique was applied. The interview was recorded, after authorization of the interviewee and signing of the Term of Free and Informed Consent and the letter authorizing the use of the interview.

The duration of the report was 3 hours and 34 minutes, later transcribed. The analysis was performed from October 28 to November 4, 2015. For the organization and tabulation of oral history, converted from oral to written, it was used the *software* Nvivo 10. This program enables the exploration of in-depth interviews, as well as organizes and analyzes the semi-structured interviews.

For the treatment of data, it was chosen for the content analysis method, for understanding a set of techniques of analysis of the communications in order to obtain indicators that allow the inference of knowledge regarding the conditions of production/reception of these messages¹⁷.

The analysis of data included the following steps: cutting of recording units, enumeration based on frequency, in the treatment of results and interpretations. The categorization of the data was based on the registration units and the manifest content, making it possible to identify, throughout the life of the interviewee, her contribution to Brazilian nursing, acts that are connected and interrelated.

Regarding the categories of analysis, these were identified from the *software*, which are called *nodes*, respectively. Scientific research respected the ethical precepts of research, proposed by Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council. The study was submitted to the Brazil Platform, having been approved by the Ethics and Research Committee (CAAE: 28775614.2.0000.5531), through the opinion number 663.359.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study converged to the answer of the central question of the research, aiming to analyze the contributions of the teacher Stella Barros to the Brazilian nursing, anchored in the Foucauldian theoretical-philosophical reference¹⁶ and in the *software* of qualitative analysis.

In the analysis plan of this study, from the *software* of research N-vivo, It was found the categories (called by the program as nodes) and subcategories of analysis (called by the program as sub-nodes), described below, as the contents of the reports.

Subnode: contribution to the Graduate Nursing

I was one of the creators of the Master [...]

I participated in several moments of the medical residency in community health as a teacher and supervisor [...] to develop some work at the Institute of Public Health (ISC).

Subnode: contribution with the democratization of the Brazilian Nursing Association

With the process of political opening [...] the history of ABEn [...] but there are researches that shows that she always adjusted to the policies of government [...] There was no counterpoint, when it comes to 1980, when there began to be a certain discussion about the so-called Diretas Já (Direct Elections Now) movement, [...] it began to bring the democratic discussion into the ABEn, of nursing [...]

We participated in two union meetings in Minas Gerais, [...] and another was in São Paulo, [...] we discussed the issue of nursing in a comprehensive way, understanding the importance of entities in these advances. This movement enabled the growth of militancy throughout Brazil and we made the first ticket against the ABEN national ticket.

[...] 2 years later another election happened [...] for the first time a black woman wins the presidency of ABEn and I was her vice.

Subnode: contributions in favor of licit practices in the management of the Federal Nursing Council (COFEN)

[...] we created the national forum of nursing entities, in which COFEN participated, already presenting several clashes between the nursing entities and the autarchy.

[...] we lived Since 1990 the same situation within the System COFEN/Regional Nursing Council (COREN) - murder, persecution, terror, dictatorship. People were afraid to speak, at that time some leaders backed down [...].

[...] in 1992, current president of ABEN and coordinator of the National Federation of Nursing Schools (FNEEN), we held a public act in the Federal Senate in defense of life, implementation of the Unified Health Systems (SUS) and approval of PL 4499/89 in Brasilia, [...]. At the moment of singing the national anthem I [unintentionally] took the hand of the president of the Constitutional Financing Fund of the Northeast (FNE) and I did not hold his hand him, but I was not going hold his hand or shake hands with him, so in front of everyone I exposed him. And after that, then, he started a war and the war you know. [...]

The congress we did in Santa Catarina, I believe it was in 1999, we had to have police security, we were only going to Congress with the police ahead [...]

Subnode: internationalization of Brazilian nursing

[...] I was a mentor of a project for the development of nursing in Latin America, [...] I participated in five meetings with other Latin American countries [...]

[...] take a position to put Brazil to Latin America, [...] then we opened ABEN to Latin America, and we took over the Federation of Nursing Professionals [...]

Subnode: contribution to the creation of the Institute of Collective Health

[...] to create the Institute of Collective Health, there was created a commission of which I was part, [...] aiming to create an interdisciplinary institute that offered collective health disciplines for all health professionals. [...] chaired the assembly of its creation. [...], I participated in seminars and the first national meeting of planning [...]

Rescuing the definition of individual, we can affirm the existence of three types of individuals: those of knowledge, marked by a historical ontology of ourselves in our relations with the truth; the political individuals: represented by individuals that act on others, individuals that establish relations of power, and finally, the ethical individuals: represented in our relations with the moral, which allows us to constitute ourselves as ethical agents^{16,18,19}.

Stella Barros, from the contributions with the Brazilian Nursing, is admittedly a political individual, having acts of life that demonstrate her implication with ABEN, collective health, nursing and health education and with the COFEN/COREN System.

Starting from another topic of discussion, the need arises to define a political individual, which is one whose practice refers to the sphere of freedom, thought and human action inherent in the encounter, expressed in the private and social life of the human being, allowing to adopt a critical, reflexive and conscious attitude of reality^{16,18}.

The highlights of the life of the woman and teacher Stella Barros, show freedom of thought and action. Even with pressures of hegemonic power, it remained with a critical, citizen and reflexive position on the management practices of ABEN and COFEN.

When you ask yourself, what made you this way? Considering that the sociopolitical knowledge pattern allows the adoption of a critical stance on the context of current practice for the future of health and the profession, one has as answer his experiences of childhood and adolescence of implication with a better world and that the Graduation in Nursing collaborated with this dimension, because it is a training space with traditional principles for contestation²⁰.

It was found that the crises pointed out in the representative and supervisory institutions of the profession are linked to the political fragility of the profession, being sometimes placed as a way of personal rigging of power and representation of specific groups of professionals.

By entering the determinants of context and the discussion of why nursing workers do not recognize political militancy as a possibility for change, issues related to gender, social class, symbolic domination, professional identity and alienation were found as parts of an analytical conjuncture.

The life trajectory of Stella Barros demonstrates the understanding of the importance of the understanding of the profession, its collectivity and the centrality of the political representation of the profession. At this point, some authors affirm that one of the issues favoring the underutilization of nursing in favor of capital accumulation is the low participation of the category in the class entities and in the fight for professional demands, besides the historical and social conjuncture that conditions it to play a subordinate role, limiting their decision-making power²⁰⁻²².

In a problematizing perspective, the depoliticization of professionals is related to the fact that nursing is composed mostly of low-middle-class and working-class women submitted to the wage-labor regime in private companies and public agencies, often simultaneously. The percentage that has the economic and social conditions to engage in the



demands and union activities is minimal, which contributes even more to placing this work force in a position of disadvantage in relation to the hegemonic groups of the health sector²⁰⁻²².

This perspective will have repercussions and already had repercussions on a mechanized, inhumane, technical-centered exercise, uncoordinated with the ethical political issues of the profession, becoming an auxiliary activity, devoid of critical and reflexive thinking, for example the proliferation of Graduation in Nursing, of low technical-scientific and political quality, in private institutions, all over Brazil.

In this context, another important topic for understanding the militancy, the professional identity and the social image of the nurse was perceived, the understanding of the latter passes through the social representations of nursing, which through a set of concepts, affirmations and explanations, reproduces and is reproduced by the ideologies originated in the daily life of social practices, internal/external to it²⁰.

It was observed that the image of Stella Barros in the Brazilian and Bahian Nursing is a possibility of reversal of these central questions, that the professional, depending on his life history and convictions, can be located in another place in the world, more involved ethical and politically with the world, with society and with the chosen profession.

When it is considered that nursing is a significantly feminine profession, an area of knowledge, initially linked to medicine, with a strong religious and military influence, one can perceive that the icon analyzed is situated in another way of perceiving to understand and to do the nursing.

From this perspective, nursing, from the political point of view, has some limitations, highlighted below.

- The conflict between two perspectives in the training of nurses, one linked to the idea of preparing professionals who are submissive to the professional practice and the other to elaborate a new culture in the profession;
- The nursing working class was harshly expropriated of participatory, militant class consciousness, necessary for confronting the labor market;
- The collective nursing worker is a form found by capitalism to keep wages of the labor force at low levels;
- The female segregation in nursing is a historical fact very well used by capitalism to keep wages of the nursing workforce at low levels;
- In the education of women and, by extension, in the education of nursing workers, it permeates the ideology that the nurse must be someone who is disciplined, obedient, does not exercise social criticism, but console and help the victims of Society²¹.

This chaotic scenario shows that it is necessary to strengthen citizenship, directly related to social movements, reconstituting collective spaces, articulated to the need to rethink training and professional practice in order to overcome its mechanistic exercise, extrapolating the disease industry through a more caring, ethical and citizen care²².

On the other hand, it is recognized that the political dimension of the individuals is an immanent part of the individuals, and although handicapped by the traditional and hierarchical education, it produces resistances and breaks out the game of power and the correlation of forces of the game of life. And this dimension applies to the immediate daily life that categorizes the individual, marks his own individuality, binds him to his own identity, imposes on him a law of truth that we must recognize and that others must recognize in him.

And in this direction, for Foucault, it is important to understand the systems in which people become individuals, as a result of an intricate process of objectification within the networks of powers that capture, divide and classify¹⁶. In addition to this, it is necessary to seek the understanding of how political knowledge is produced and structured.

Finally, the contributions of the life trajectory of Stella Barros to the Brazilian and Bahia nursing are relevant. They are located in the field of democratization of representative institutions and inspection, in the implementation of the Nursing Post-Graduation, in the internationalization and visibility of the profession.

These contributions may have repercussions on organizational capacity and professional and collective awareness, which are so vulnerable in the nursing case. They imply the political dimension of the profession, its recognition and professional *status*.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the study was reached with the analysis of the life trajectory of Stella Barros and her contributions to nursing.



It was verified the political fragility of the profession, linked to the questions of gender and religion of the professional genesis, implying the existence of few studies in the scientific field concerning the personalities of the profession and its contributions. Noteworthy is professional identity crisis which is historical and that the profession has been going through for many years.

The contributions are materialized in the institutions, both in the inspection and in the association. However, there are two management models in the entities, antagonistic, on the one hand democratic management and on the other a Taylorist/Fordist management, centered on hierarchy and domination.

The life trajectory of the researched icon exemplifies the sense of co-responsibility of the path taken by nursing representative entities, especially the opportunities for change and reconfiguration of these institutions in favor of a more ethical, citizen and socially recognized profession.

The contributions of the nurse Stella Barros as a militant occurred because of the way of being, family education and political engagement in Catholic Youth, which had repercussions on a participatory trajectory for Brazilian nursing, expressed in the following achievements: political and financial autonomy of ABEn, internationalization and protagonism of the Brazilian nursing, strengthening of Nursing Postgraduate and in collective health and with the Brazilian Sanitary Reform.

Stella Barros's life trajectory is marked by acts of militancy, whether for the benefit of post-graduate training or in collective health, or in favor of a more representative ABEn and COFEN, with management practices that respect the workers who compose the collective, by the internationalization and visibility of the profession.

Finally, the spaces occupied in the entities were motivators of the exercise of militancy, although, often, it limited the expression and the political participation. But, in general, it was configured in a device that produces itself, often provoking a change in the historical path of things and people.

It is concluded as important, studies that address the remarkable contribution of militant nurses, in order to favor discussion and overcoming expressed problems by the alienation and absence of identity – indispensable aspects for the valorization and the professional recognition.

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