



Political manipulation and political competence in nursing

Manipulación política y competencia política enfermera

Manipulação política e competência política de enfermeiros

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to reflect on current political debate, which is impoverished and dichotomized, and on its relation to nursing as profession and practice. **Content:** the debate presented goes beyond politics and transcends everyday social life, into which it feeds constantly. Factors such as simplism, individualism, the corrosion of citizenship, and one-track thinking are commented on as forming part of processes of political manipulation. Nursing, as a profession and social practice anchored in ethical, political, and humanistic principles, has been marginal to political debate, and its activities tend to be abducted by deceitful political discourse. **Conclusion:** it is an ethical imperative for nurses, in order to provide decent care, to develop their political skills in order to become indispensable, active participants in societies characterized by a pluralism of ideas and multiculturalism. By developing political competence, nurses can contribute to social change on the basis of care and through nursing care.

Descriptors: Professional competences; nursing; nurses; politics; public policies.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: desarrollar una reflexión acerca del debate político en la actualidad, el cual se encuentra empobrecido y dicotomizado, y la relación con la profesión y la práctica enfermera. **Contenido:** el debate presentado sobrepasa la política y trasciende a la vida social cotidiana, a la que permanentemente alimenta. Aspectos como el simplismo, el individualismo, la corrosión de la ciudadanía y el pensamiento único son comentados como parte de procesos de manipulación política. La enfermería, como profesión y práctica social que se ancla en principios ético-políticos y humanísticos, ha quedado al margen del debate político y tiende a tener su actuación abducida por el discurso político engañoso. **Conclusión:** Es un imperativo ético que enfermeras desarrollen su competencia política a fin de participar de modo activo e imprescindible en sociedades marcadas por el pluralismo de ideas y el multiculturalismo, para la prestación de cuidados dignos. Al asumir la competencia política, se puede contribuir a los cambios sociales, a partir de los cuidados, y a través de los cuidados enfermeros.

Descriptores: Competencia profesional; enfermería; enfermeras; política; políticas públicas.

RESUMO

Objetivo: desenvolver reflexão sobre o debate político atual, empobrecido e dicotomizado, e a relação com a profissão e a prática de enfermagem. **Conteúdo:** o debate apresentado ultrapassa a política e transcende a vida social cotidiana, à qual permanentemente alimenta. Aspectos como o simplismo, o individualismo, a corrosão da cidadania e o pensamento único são comentados como parte de processos de manipulação política. A enfermagem, como profissão e prática social que se ancora em princípios ético-políticos e humanísticos, tem ficado à margem do debate político e tende a ter sua atuação abduzida pelo discurso político enganoso. **Conclusão:** É um imperativo ético que os enfermeiros desenvolvam sua competência política a fim de participar de modo ativo e imprescindível em sociedades marcadas pelo pluralismo de ideias e pelo multiculturalismo, para a prestação de cuidados dignos. Ao assumir a competência política, se pode contribuir para as mudanças sociais, a partir dos cuidados, e por meio dos cuidados de enfermagem.

Descritores: Competência profissional; enfermagem; enfermeiros; política; políticas públicas.

INTRODUCTION

The democratic and humanistic principle of dialog, as the ability to listen respectfully and to build consensus is, apart from a civilized conquest of the occidental world, one of the ethical and political basis of the nursing profession. But in the present time, we are starting to naturalize that anything is valid in the political debate. Especially in the partisan politics and during election periods, insults, defamatory assertions, self-interested lies, reproaches, insinuations, intrigues, suspicions, ungrounded accusations... In short, anything is valid to get ahead of the enemy, if not adversary.

The problem is that this situation of extreme tension, harassment, manipulation and deceit, observed as co-substantial to the political debate, is not circumscribed to the realm of politics, but it transcends to the social everyday life it permanently feeds.

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The self-interested use of subject matters that should be reserved for institutional respect, quiet analysis, deep reflection and serene debate, such as terrorism, feminism, gender violence, education, and health, are converted into mere weapons of their political intrigues with the sole purpose of acquiring a bigger quota of power, representation or influence.

The ribbons, the banners, the minutes of silence, the manifestos, the statements, the tweets; they all become elements of the props with which they adapt their stages according to the theatrical play they are about to interpret each and every time in order to reach their goals, without having the minimal interest in transmitting anything that benefits their audience, which is but the citizens waiting for their results and not for their disputes. Plays which they only put on stage and interpret as a media, demagogic, false and sporadic game, in which they are not even capable of generating credibility, only to be followed and celebrated by an audience alienated by the social and communication media, with no critical judgment and, let alone, action capability to put an end to a staging they keep feeding with their passivity, either because they are fed up or for simple indifference. They use symbols and feelings to confront instead of to unite and they arrogate themselves as their exclusive owners, ownership it does not even correspond to them or have any right to manipulate as they do solely for their own benefit. Finally, anything is valid to win and to defeat the other, or better: to humiliate the enemy, who uses identical weapons.

They place us in a permanent dichotomy, so absurd as it is useless, of rights and lefts, reds and blues, fascists and communists, conservatives and progressives, good and bad... a dichotomy which generates sides and bands dedicated to wait at the street corners to lynch each other and to mark the territory in which they will be the boss. They null and void dialog, commitment, debate, serene discourse, argumentation... and so, consensus.

It already suffices now that the Caesar's wife looks honest, she does not need to be so any longer. What matters is the effect, the image, the wrapping, the appearance, although there is nothing afterwards or actually corruption, lies and personal interests. They work on the aesthetics but they forget about ethics, and they corner it.

Curricula are groped, adapted, manipulated or simply bought, as if knowledge were but another marketable good that can be bought with money or influence, for the simple appearance which earns the admiration of their audience. Among nurses, the search for a permanent professional qualification is frequent. Frequently, though, the demand for qualification is to attend to a work market that searches professionals with a high technical level and that meets the demands of polyvalence and flexibility. Then, this qualification process does not always articulate with the health needs of the population, and becomes of an instrumental character and of reproduction of a health model that prioritizes illness, technique, and procedures, not care¹.

From Machiavelli² to Orwell³, that is, from *The Prince* to 1984. From "the end justifies the means" to *Big Brother's* control for the sake of the boss, or leader, in office. And we position ourselves in what Bauman⁴ calls liquid modernism which imposes on the individuals a new burden of responsibility, where the traditional standards are replaced by other self-chosen ones. The expression "liquid modernity" pretends to define a social model which implies the end of the mutual commitment era, where the public space retreats and an individualism which leads to the corrosion and slow disintegration of the concept of citizenship imposes itself. We basically feed on liquid information, in allusion to Zygmunt Bauman's proposals, that is to say, on such information not verified, sustained or confirmed; unlike the solid information, understood as documented, reasoned and enriched information which proves its own veracity and situates us in the *post-truth* era and is fed by social processes but, especially by politicians, in which manipulation is easier. We must signal that this access to reliable information, in the health area, goes through various filters based on political and media interests, especially in contexts of collective threats, as in the case of epidemics⁵.

The purpose of this text is to develop reflection on the present political debate, which is impoverished and dichotomized, and on the relation with the profession and the practice of nursing. To such end, we consider some current aspects of the political life, of the health policies and of the population's health, especially of the most vulnerable groups, and we highlight the importance for nursing to develop the political competence in its practice.

CONTENT

It is clear that society, which is permeable, absorbs without any filtering, contrast of ideas or critical thought what is staged day after day, generating an amorphous, simplistic and apathetic social mass... which gets the sickening schizophrenia in which they keep us submitted and which they develop in the quagmire they turn society into⁶. The Roman Circus show is reproduced, although they are not lions or tigers now but more fearful and dangerous beasts that the politicians, erected as Caesars, make them who they consider enemies of their homeland, flag, economy, ideology fight against... as if they were gladiators, whereas the people enthusiastically cheers the unequal fight against these new beasts like hopelessness, poverty, exclusion... or among these new gladiators in a struggle to survive. In either case, if



this does not sate the people, there is always soccer or the television trash in which they also usually participate. The objective is clear: anesthetizing thought or forming a unique, lineal and directed thought. We are confronted with a new reality that tries to tell us that we do not know what we know. They are attempts to manipulate people into thinking they do not know what they know⁷, since the present society does not promote thinking⁸.

But, what does this have to do with nurses and nursing? Well, everything and nothing at the same time.

Everything because we are not left aside from this big theater of political lies, since we participate either actively or passively in its maintenance, or even in its promotion and development. And nothing because we do nothing to try to change this situation, when we think that it is not up to us, that it is what has fallen into our lot in life, and because we do not do much more than incorporating ourselves into the permanent complaint.

Poverty, migration, gender violence, inequality, pollution, individualism, harassment, and the violation of rights live with us as part of the furniture and props in which these big lies are staged, without us doing anything, or very little, to eradicate them or, at least, mitigate them. We have fallen into the trap of indifference, of naturalization, of "this is not my business".

The work overload of nurses is a fact, the work precariousness they many times suffer or the lack of valuation of their work lead to a high emotional, cognitive and technical demand. Under these circumstances, it is most usual to hear that "as a nurse I can't do anything: my patients, my diabetics, my disabled, my ulcers and my little time are enough for me, let alone the people, the families and the community"⁹. It is to that that we have reduced our perspectives, if not observations, our assistance, if not attention, our hearing, if not listening, our attitude, if not emotion, our activity, if not care. We mechanize, automatize, standardize and simplify. Our thoughts and actions are abducted by the hypnosis of a political discourse, so deceitful and despicable as void, but that reaches its objective, even in detriment of health¹⁰.

Even though they try to deny it, we live in a plural and global society in which the end has come to the practice of imposing a unique culture, despite their discourses clinging to the contrary and although they want to keep a racial, ideological, religious and values supremacy, so dangerous as sad and harmful. We are in a world interconnected by communication and, thus, an inter-cultural world. Therefore, it is necessary to progress without denying the evidence, with our commitment as citizens but also as nurses in this project to unite efforts and cultures, to be able to integrate the joint cultural elements to offer a service that better fits the social needs, uniting care measures and values from the perspective of freedom and respect, because none of this can be done by imposition. It is thus necessary to establish certain minimum standards that sustain and give meaning to the care and, from there, work is to be done to materialize coexistence with values promoted and assumed by everyone so that we can understand each other and so that we do not fall prey of the political discourse of reactive confrontation¹¹.

This presupposes the construction of the political competence in nursing and it is necessary to highlight now, before any argumentation, that by "political" we do not mean the republican expression of the representative democracy, or of the electoral process, organized by means of collectives of representatives organized in political parties. The understanding of the term "political" must exceed the oversimplification which generally links it to the electoral periods, without excluding that dimension of public life.

It is necessary to resignify the concept of politics, as in the words of Alberdi Castell from her civic perspective, like *that set of personal and social interactions that lead to actions which allow to establish the rights and circumstances in which those rights may be demanded, and to guarantee the resources that allow for these rights to be respected*^{10:26}.

As nurses, and from our different legitimate and necessary political perspectives and approaches, we must be aware that our contribution of care measures places us now at the center of the promotion, preservation and rehabilitation of health where sciences and technology do not suffice, since they are neutral in relation to human values, values in which our paradigm is centered. The nucleus of our practices is integrated, integral and integrating care measures¹². Therefore, we are willing to be referents for a society that suffers the indifference, if not the attack, from a great part of the political class, preoccupied with their egocentricity and survival¹³.

Caring is always related to helping a person or a group of people to satisfy certain needs; it is probably for that reason that it is so difficult to understand for those who see it as something simple, valueless, feminine and domestic. And caring has no room from that perspective, or time, or science, or wisdom and, therefore, has no suitable stage in which to be provided. So this leads to the nurse falling into the trap set up by those who reduce everything to a simple contract, a technique, a protocol, diluting her professional capacity, which must be focused in caring to provide well-being, comfort, safety, technical advice, apart from the specific, suitable and agreed upon care measures.



Only if as nurses we can abstract ourselves from the contagious bad politics and we focus in keeping and strengthening the fundamental element, which is care, as a crucial link among people, families and community in order to be autonomous, responsible, active and participative, we will be able to be absolutely indispensable in a society that is dynamic, changes and sets out new scenarios and new demographic, social and political realities that predict a future reserved for the nursing care, care through which we have the opportunity to improve situations, contribute to generating equality, identify and fight against violence, empower the community, and favor resilience to poverty. Because all that is possible from the care actions of nurses, and in the framework of the universal health systems^{8,14}.

The idea of political competence in nursing has been considered as the ability to participate in the formulation, development and management of public policies to confront inequality conditions. Therefore, constructing political competence from the nursing professional training is not an option since, as in the words of Alberdi Castell, there are consequences when denying the fact that this is an indispensable competence and when not putting it into practice, having the training to do so. The questions of responsibility and professional ethical commitment are therein implied¹⁰.

If, on the contrary, we fall into the spider web woven by some public and political current figures where the fights for power, the personal ambitions, the intrigues, the lies and the deceits prevent any perspective for dialog, for respect of the differences, for the appraisal of the ideas, we shall get entangled in that web and we will find it more and more difficult to escape.

CONCLUSION

We are living in a society in which the political-economical models and the concept of development are deeply jeopardized. Instead of generating the redistribution of the wealth of a world that gets richer every day, money concentrates in fewer and fewer hands, while the environmental threats and those of the social well-being policies augment. Social recognition of Nursing, therefore, will constantly oscillate between what we expect as nurses, and what society identifies from our contribution and the value it attributes to it. The nursing profession is based on care, and all conceptions of nursing care insert themselves into a system of beliefs and values, influenced by a set of social, cultural, economic and political factors which, as already stated, are devalued and are permanently questioned¹⁵.

What we want is up to us. To incorporate ourselves into the dynamics imposed by the politicians or to assume political competence to change the politicians and their values. Impossible? No, it is merely a question of believing it can be done and of setting out to it. Because, as nurses, we can help change society from and through care, with political competence.

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