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Raimunda Medeiros Germano: biographical aspects and contributions to Brazilian nursing

Raimunda Medeiros Germano: aspectos biográficos e contribuições para a enfermagem brasileira

Raimunda Medeiros Germano: aspectos biográficos y contribuciones a la enfermería brasileña

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze biographical aspects of nurse and professor Raimunda Medeiros Germano's professional trajectory. **Methods:** a biographical study based on documentary research for the master's dissertation entitled "A ousadia como horizonte: religando vida e ideias na formação em enfermagem". Moreover, the books "Ousadia Individual, Apostas Coletivas: A Formação em Enfermagem" and "Educação e Ideologia da Enfermagem no Brasil" were used. **Results:** this research's biographical aspects were organized into three thematic axes: personal and professional trajectory; political activism; and education and ideology of nursing in Brazil: deconstructing myths and truths in nursing. The first axis highlighted her school and academic life and her work at the university hospital and as a professor at the *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte*. Then, her political engagement in nursing associations was emphasized. The third axis highlights her book, which is a reference work in the history of nursing. **Final considerations:** this manuscript constitutes a summary of Raimunda Germano's professional career as well as her legacy for the understanding of nursing as a social practice. **Descriptors:** Biography; Nursing; History of Nursing; Education, Nursing; Politics.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar aspectos biográficos da trajetória profissional da enfermeira e professora universitária Raimunda Medeiros Germano. **Métodos:** estudo biográfico fundamentado em pesquisa documental da dissertação de mestrado denominada "A ousadia como horizonte: religando vida e ideias na formação em enfermagem". Além disso, foram utilizados os livros "Ousadia Individual, Apostas Coletivas: A Formação em Enfermagem" e "Educação e Ideologia da Enfermagem no Brasil". **Resultados:** os aspectos biográficos desta pesquisa foram organizados em três eixos temáticos: trajetória pessoal e profissional; militância política; e educação e ideologia da enfermagem no Brasil: desconstrução de mitos e verdades na profissão. No primeiro eixo, foi destacada a vida escolar, acadêmica e sua atuação no hospital universitário e na docência da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte. Em seguida, foi enfatizado seu engajamento político nas entidades de classe da enfermagem. No terceiro eixo, é evidenciado o livro, que é uma obra de referência na história da enfermagem. Considerações finais: este manuscrito constitui uma síntese da trajetória profissional de Raimunda Germano, bem como do seu legado para a compreensão da enfermagem como prática social. **Descritores:** Biografia; Enfermagem; História da Enfermagem; Educação em Enfermagem; Política.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar aspectos biográficos de la trayectoria profesional de la enfermera y profesora universitaria Raimunda Medeiros Germano. **Métodos:** estudio biográfico basado en investigación documental para la tesis de maestría titulada "A ousadia como horizonte: religando vida e ideias na formação em enfermagem". Además se utilizaron libros "Ousadia Individual, Apostas Coletivas: A Formação em Enfermagem" y "Educação e Ideologia da Enfermagem no Brasil". **Resultados:** los aspectos biográficos de esta investigación se organizaron en tres ejes temáticos: trayectoria personal y profesional; activismo político; y la educación y la ideología de enfermería en Brasil: deconstruyendo mitos y verdades en la profesión. El primer eje destacó la vida escolar y académica, así como su trabajo en el hospital universitario y la docencia en la *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte*. Luego se enfatizó su compromiso político en asociaciones profesionales de enfermería. En el tercer eje se destaca el libro, obra de referencia en la historia de la enfermería. **Consideraciones finales:** este manuscrito constituye una síntesis de la trayectoria profesional de Raimunda Germano, así como su legado para la comprensión de la enfermería como práctica social. **Descriptores:** Biografía; Enfermería; Historia de la Enfermería; Educación en Enfermería; Política.

INTRODUCTION

Biography is a type of study whose essence is time. Biographical writing is linked to the concept that the narrative about life and lived events is not characterized by a linear process of linking real facts. It addresses parts of subjects' history that we remember in a permanent process of recreation. In this way, we do not return to the past, but rather evoke it, thus opening up the possibility of self-reflection and reinvention of oneself. Thus, we interpret the present and project a future based on a story or narration of a life, articulated around individual and collective events, social phenomena, their contexts and intersections⁽¹⁻³⁾.

Furthermore, biography presents itself as a textual modality resulting from the art of telling life stories and from what can be extracted from history. This movement recaptures memories and singularities, since it evokes memories, shares facts about oneself and others. This act is intrinsically connected to the understanding of memory as a particular product, a creation or references shared socially⁽⁴⁾.

In nursing, biographies are consolidated as a tool for teaching the history of nursing, valuing professional identity and the legacy of nurses who have become inspirations over time. These studies resume the understanding of identities and legacies as a historical product of interaction of aspects of their care, educational,

scientific, social and political role, and the way in which they have influenced and continue to influence care, research and education in nursing^(5,6).

In this way, biographies can support reflections on both the history of nursing and the identity construction of new professionals as well as the meaning of nursing, its possibilities, crossroads and curves. Likewise, as one learns about the history of nursing, one understands the relationships that nursing has in all aspects that permeate life, whether social or political, from what they think, are and feel^(7,8).

Thus, this study is justified by the need to know and preserve the memory of a nurse from Rio Grande do Norte, Raimunda Medeiros Germano, whose trajectory reflects the dedication to the consolidation of democratic movements in nursing and to the teaching of nursing in the state of Rio Grande do Norte and, also, in Brazil. To this end, this manuscript emphasizes her contributions to nursing education, highlighting her struggle for training nurses for the Sistema Único de Saúde, as well as her boldness in revealing the knowledge and practices that underpin nursing as a social practice.

OBJECTIVE

To analyze biographical aspects of nurse and professor Raimunda Medeiros Germano's professional career, highlighting her legacy for Brazilian nursing.

METHODS

This is a biographical study about Raimunda Medeiros Germano, a nurse and professor from Rio Grande do Norte, with national repercussions for nursing. For its implementation, documentary research was carried out in the master's dissertation entitled "*A ousadia como horizonte: religando vida e ideias na formação em enfermagem*"⁽⁹⁾ and in the book "*Ousadia Individual, Apostas Coletivas: A Formação em Enfermagem*"⁽¹⁰⁾. In addition to these cited bibliographic materials, the book "*Educação e Ideologia da Enfermagem no Brasil*"⁽¹¹⁾, by Raimunda Germano, was used, which is considered a scientific work of reference in the history of Brazilian nursing.

The analytical reading of these materials made it possible to systematize three thematic axes: personal and professional trajectory, which reveals information about school and academic life and her work at the university hospital, the Nursing Assistants School of Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, and teaching at the *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte* (UFRN); political activism, in which her engagement in professional associations and in the struggles of nursing for democracy and the right to health is emphasized; and in the last axis, the repercussions of the book "*Educação e Ideologia da Enfermagem no Brasil*" are discussed, which is considered a reference work in the history of nursing.

RESULTS

Personal and professional trajectory

Raimunda Medeiros Germano was born in Caicó, countryside of Rio Grande do Norte. She began her studies at the *Grupo Escolar Senador Guerra*, then attended high school as a scholarship student at the Educandário Santa Teresinha and completed a course in accounting. Her desire to pursue higher education took her to Fortaleza, Ceará, where she enrolled in a nursing degree course in José de Alencar's capital^(9,10).

In the turbulent political context of the 1964 military coup, she moved to Recife, Pernambuco, due to her sister's job change, and completed her degree in nursing at the *Universidade Federal de Pernambuco* (UFPE) in 1965. As a nurse, she began her professional career in 1966 at the UFRN University Hospital in Natal. In the same year, she began working as a professor at the Nursing Assistants School of Natal, and in 1973, with the creation of the School of Nursing, she became a nursing professor at UFRN^(9,10).

At this school, she was the first coordinator of the undergraduate nursing course. Moreover, in 1969, she completed her undergraduate course in pedagogy at UFRN. She holds a master's and doctoral degrees in education from the *Universidade Estadual de Campinas* (UNICAMP) and was the author of important works on nursing, such as "*Educação e Ideologia da Enfermagem no Brasil*" and "*A ética e o ensino de ética na enfermagem do Brasil*"^(9,10).

Due to her ties to the hospital, she was forced to collaborate with the Nursing Assistants School of Natal, either by accompanying internships, practical classes or teaching some subjects. This helped to awaken her passion for teaching, and she began to work with two contracts: one as a professor and the other as a nurse. After the creation of the undergraduate nursing course at UFRN, in 1973, she became a full-time higher education professor^(9,10).

In the 1980s, during the pedagogical changes in health education, professor Raimunda Germano used in her classes the didactics applied to nursing, texts by Paulo Freire, and was at the forefront of discussions regarding the UFRN School of Education itself, even being criticized by institution staff. She reports that a certain professor once said, "Why don't you put a cover on this book?", referring to the pedagogy of the oppressed and education as a practice of freedom^(9,10).

In this scenario of political and educational effervescence, Raimunda Germano worked with other professors from the Department of Nursing at UFRN, especially with professors Abigail Moura and Francisca Valda. This collaboration materialized in the pedagogical practice that problematized reality, making it possible to rethink knowledge, attitudes and understanding of nursing and health education from a critical and emancipatory perspective. These professors suffered repression, even from the Department of Nursing at UFRN itself, for being classified as political, since they questioned the hegemonic models of traditional health and education^(9,10).

As coordinator of the undergraduate nursing course at UFRN, she was instrumental in emphasizing discussions about nursing training in relation to public health, as well as creating a research coordination with the aim of fostering scientific production in undergraduate nursing. While still in this position, she was concerned about the profile of nurses being trained by the university, since in addition to technical skills, political, ethical and social skills were also required. This and other struggles contributed to advancing nursing as a social practice^(9,10).

Due to her career, Raimunda Medeiros Germano, a symbol of transcendence and boldness, received an honor in 2020 from the *Conselho Regional de Enfermagem do Rio Grande do Norte* (COREn/RN, Regional Nursing Council of Rio Grande do Norte) as an inspiring woman in nursing in Rio Grande do Norte. In this honor, COREn/RN highlights her importance in the founding of COREn/RN and extols her contributions to nursing education⁽¹²⁾.

In 2023, after approval by the Conselho Universitário da UFRN (CONSUNI), Raimunda Medeiros Germano was awarded the title of Professor Emeritus, in recognition and appreciation of the memory and legacy built by her, for her struggles and for the defense of higher education with quality and social responsibility⁽¹³⁾.

Political activism

Raimunda Medeiros Germano actively participated in the student movement from a very early age, while still in Caicó. At that time, she was part of the Juventude Estudantil Católica (JEC, Catholic Student Youth) of the Educandário Santa Teresinha. JEC was a Catholic youth movement with a social character that held debates on the country's political and economic problems at its meetings. At university, she was president and vice-president of the Academic Center of Nursing in Fortaleza and also participated in the Academic Directory in Recife. While still at university, and influenced by her participation in JEC, she became part of the Juventude Universitária Católica (JUC, Catholic University Youth). This movement debated the problems of society, aligning itself with liberation theology from the perspective of the political formation of young Christians^(9,10,14).

In the early 1960s, before the military coup, she witnessed a period of effervescence in the student movement in response to the problems facing the population, especially in the fields of education and health. During the military coup, in Recife, she experienced moments of tension and suffering due to the influence of the regime's repression, mainly due to the characteristic of the questioning nature of teaching at UFPE, different from the technical approach of nursing training in Ceará^(9,10).

Therefore, it is important to emphasize that her participation in social movements such as JEC, Academic Center, Central Student Directory and JUC provided contributions for Raimunda Medeiros Germano to become a person who questions social inequities. These experiences broadened her horizons beyond a technical view of the problems experienced in nursing^(9,10).

As a nurse and professor, she played a leadership role in the category, being president of the Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem, seção Rio Grande do Norte (ABEn/RN, Brazilian Nursing Association, Rio Grande do Norte section), for two terms: 1970 to 1973; and 1973 to 1976. As director of ABEn/RN, Raimunda Germano contributed to the fight, amid the dictatorship, for professional qualifications for nursing assistants. Another important contribution of her management at ABEn/RN was the implementation of COREn in the state of Rio Grande do Norte (COREn/RN) in 1975^(9,10).

Furthermore, even during the dictatorship, she actively participated in the trade union movement and the Brazilian Health Reform movement. In Natal, she participated in meetings to consider proposals and activities based on the population's right to health. These meetings took place in a building opposite the Brazilian army barracks^(9,10).

Thus, as these discussions took place in Brazil, the undergraduate nursing course at UFRN, with the contributions of professor Raimunda Germano, already incorporated the idea of a new health model in line with the Health Reform. This combative stance was translated into the adoption of counter-hegemonic theoretical frameworks, such as the study of professor Paulo Freire's works, whose books were covered with wood-based paper because they could not be used during the military dictatorship. Having experienced the student movement in Recife, she maintained contact with other nurses, such as Isabel dos Santos, who had been her professor at UFPE, and also Stella Barros, her college colleague, strengthening important connections and dialogues for the necessary changes in nursing^(9,10).

Nursing education and ideology in Brazil: deconstructing truths and myths in nursing

In the late 1970s, Raimunda Medeiros Germano enrolled in a master's degree in education at UNICAMP, but she did not distance herself from nursing. In her dissertation, she studied the *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem* (REBEn, Brazilian Journal of Nursing) from 1955 to 1980, highlighting the historical context and nursing education in Brazil⁽¹¹⁾. This research supported the critical and reflective perspective on nursing ideology, making explicit the militaristic and religious bias of nursing^(9,10), in particular ABEn.

As a result of her master's dissertation, the book "Educação e Ideologia da Enfermagem no Brasil" was published, promoting great dissemination and capillarity of the ideas discussed by Raimunda Germano. The first edition was launched by Cortez publishers in 1984, and is currently in its 5th edition, revised and updated, published in 2011 by Yendis publishers, constituting a classic of Brazilian nursing.

"Educação e Ideologia da Enfermagem no Brasil" was seminal and provocative, as it made explicit, as early as 1984, the hegemony of religious and vocational conceptions in Brazilian nursing, including knowledge and practice at the Brazilian State's service. Her work was a disturbing noise that questioned truths and myths in nursing and in professional associations, contributing with the theoretical-methodological bases for understanding nursing as a social practice.

It is worth noting that these productions are inserted and articulated in the context of effervescence and democratization in Brazil and, particularly, in Brazilian nursing with the participation movement. This movement was permeated by tensions and reflections, constituting a division of the category, since it recognized and defended that democracy within nursing practice passes through democracy in Brazilian society. Therefore, nursing's and ABEn's commitment was to defend the right to health, freedom and a dignified life⁽¹⁵⁾.

In this movement lie the historical roots of the understanding of nursing as work, i.e., as a social practice. Nursing ceased to be an idealized nursing isolated from others and became part of collective health work, inserted in the organization of healthcare services in a capitalist society⁽¹⁶⁾.

It is no coincidence that the launch of Raimunda Germano's book was a cause of outrage among some nurses, because they believed she was defaming the category. However, this work critically revealed the concept of selfless and obedient nursing, reinforced even by the ABEn *Nacional* board at that historical moment. In particular, it critically revealed the legitimizing role of ABEn in the face of government policies, thus assuming a position of acceptability, obscuring, therefore, the contradictions of capitalist society and the dictatorial State⁽¹¹⁾.

Professor Stella Barros, in the preface to the aforementioned book, reflects that the work clearly shows how the process of the history of nursing is not an abstract space, but rather one with economic, political and ideological determinants, whose relations are established between nursing, civil society and the State at different moments in history⁽¹⁰⁾.

Nursing, according to the thinking expressed in the texts of REBEn of ABEn at the time, was a neutral instance at the service of an abstract society, whose practice is based on love and kindness, concealing the exploitation of labor and class inequality in capitalist society, with nursing education being an instance of reproduction of obedience, technicality and the Christian spirit⁽¹¹⁾.

Therefore, this book⁽¹¹⁾ enabled innovative contributions to nursing education such as: the unveiling of a hegemonic technicist model, present for decades in nursing training in health practices; the denunciation of the alliance between a conservative State and nursing entities; the questioning of idealized and romanticized myths in nursing; and the promotion of a critical analysis of the historical path of nursing education in Brazil, highlighting the need to understand nursing as a social practice.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The biographical aspects mentioned in this manuscript constitute a summary of nurse and professor Raimunda Medeiros Germano's personal and professional trajectory, currently a retired professor at UFRN. Her life trajectory raises reflections on discourses of conformism, negativity and apathy that are strongly present in contemporary society, being an example of a life of daring that contributed to disturbing, changing, persisting and transforming standards in health, nursing and nursing training.

She was a woman, a nurse and a citizen who was able to dare and be a voice denouncing and announcing myths and ideologies in nursing. Far from being a deified model, her life experiences signal human contradiction as well as the possibility of resisting and transgressing patterns of normativity. Her activism and, mainly, her academic work in Brazilian health and nursing leave a legacy of deconstruction of selfless, technical and selfless conceptions of nursing. This criticism is current and necessary when the working class in nursing faces new and old challenges, such as precarious employment relationships, distortions in the implementation of the minimum wage, the need to implement the 30-hour law and exhausting workdays. Therefore, nursing and nursing education are not abstract and idealized, but represent concrete social practices. This understanding is supported by nurse and professor Raimunda Medeiros Germano's thinking and work.

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