

The tsunami, solidarity and the social construction of knowledge in nursing

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This year, on March eleventh, the world stood astonished to the most devastating natural disasters ever heard of: the high-scale earthquake followed by a devastating tsunami that destroyed entire cities in Northwest Japan. What followed was reason for much concern, because the nuclear plants of the region had also been damaged, increasing even further the suffering of the people who had just lost loved ones along with most of their belongings.

What shocked the international community the most, besides the extent of the catastrophe and how small humans became next to Nature's power was the solidarity amongst the survivors.

Monja Coen, who graduated in nursing in Japan, wrote first hand about this and her message was read in one of the events promoted in São Paulo by Brazilian nikkeis, hoping to offer some support to the victims. Among other things mentioned in her message, she said When there is humility and respect, we consider others' feelings and needs. When we care for life as a whole, we are cared for and respected. The inverse is not true: if one only looks out for him or herself in first place, one loses. Each of us is the expression of the whole.

The solidarity, respect, sociality, fraternity, compassion, and patience that surmounted the suffering, sadness, uncertainty and adversity touched me deeply and made me think about how these human attributes could also be appreciated and held in other life situations, such as those we nursing researchers face in the vicissitudes of a highly competitive unequal world of scientific production. Today, with the ranking of scientific journals, there is a high demand for results, regardless of the processes; quantity is more valued than the density and depth that comprise the quality of publications; leaderships that emerge at crises are more valued than those working continuously and incessantly with their peers. In this setting, less value is given to those who follow paths that are not always fast and easy ones, but still do so because they truly choose to understand the nature and reason of producing knowledge in nursing, which is wrongly restricted to nursing research.

I have no doubt about these two aspects: nature and reason. The former refers to the incessant search to understand and make it possible to improve the object of study under the light of theories, develop new working process instruments, be it clinical, managerial or educational, and its major purpose to seek answers to problems that are real, and could improve the quality of life and health of people from different regions, which are so unequally distributed in terms of objective conditions for reproduction and social production. We can (and should) also take a closer look and ponder the deep inequalities between nursing workers and the professional categories. The second – reason – refers to the intrinsic needs for theoretical improvement and advancement, which in nursing sciences – yes, plural, as there are many ways of doing science, with important epistemological and paradigmatic and immiscible differences – regarding other forms of obtaining knowledge and, in this case, perhaps in nursing, sciences could operate in consonance with art, a subject that is infrequently approached by researchers and philosophers of Brazilian nursing.

In Brazil, as in many parts of the world, nursing is feminine and, for that reason, carries a unique episteme, besides having unique practices in the working processes and in the ethical-political dimensions that allow human beings to mobilize the other dimensions of professional competencies: the knowledge-knowledge and knowledge-doing.

Hence, knowledge production is a political act, as was that of the tsunami survivors: offers a chance to expose their desires and wishes, channeled towards the construction of solidary and dignified citizenship. There is no citizenship and dignity in knowledge production, or any other area I would say, but I focus on nursing, without the corresponding value of solidarity, autonomy, emancipation and freedom: not of the individual being, but of the beings that form collectivities and socially produces life, work, health and research, among the many living humanity.

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