



CULTURAL HEGEMONY AND IDEOLOGY IN THE THOUGHT OF ANTONIO GRAMSCI: IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING ENTITIES

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the implications of Antonio Gramsci's social theory for the political-ideological organization of civil entities of the Nursing class in Brazil. **Method:** study of reflection on the thought of Antonio Gramsci, discussing the notion of cultural hegemony, ideology and expanded state and its implications for the organization of nursing entities. The study was developed in the second half of 2021 and waived appreciation by ethics committee. **Results:** the ideological preparation of the nursing practitioners was identified as an essential element to give meaning and revolutionary sense to the political and economic struggle of the class, supporting the formation of identity and sense of fellowship among category members and formulation of action guidelines for entities. **Final considerations:** it is concluded by the importance of trade unions and professional associations for the organization of the category and the need for (re)connection between students and nursing workers with civil entities, committed to social change and the real demands of the working class.

Keywords: Nursing. History of nursing. Societies. nursing. State. Social theory.

INTRODUCTION

This study deals with the political organization of civil nursing entities in Brazil, as institutions of representation and claim of nursing workers and students. In the perspective of reflecting on the performance of such entities in the midst of a regulated society, the thought of the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci was triggered as a theoretical arsenal, due to its potential to organize the forces and the workers' intellect in an associative and syndicalist action of counter-hegemonic character. Therefore, it was necessary to reflect on nursing and its social function, examining together the contemporary crisis and the role of civil entities for the profession and society in general.

Defining the Nursing phenomenon is a difficult task. Without the pretension of closing the subject or absolute assertiveness, in this study, modern nursing is defined as a field of scientific knowledge, historically and socially constituted by skilled workers who dedicate themselves to the conditions and methods necessary for the production, reproduction and operation of this knowledge, which supports the practices of promotion, protection and recovery of the health of people and communities, in its

various stages of growth and development, in the context of their actual living conditions and circumstances. Nursing knowledge and practice are based on ethical, aesthetic and humanistic principles and on the indelible respect for life and human dignity. The workers of the category deal with human needs, so that they are able to support people to identify, understand and satisfy their real needs in the field of health, in articulation with the other districts of human existence. For all this, nursing care is a process of criticism, of (self) knowledge and emancipation of man, on a personal and collective level.

These lines explain a worldview for Nursing, in which nursing care exceeds the notion of a technical execution of therapeutic procedures under the disarrangements of organic systems and reaches the status of an emancipatory intervention of the human race in the field of health, humanistic perspective and overcoming capitalist alienation.

In fact, it is a huge challenge to exercise the nursing profession in the midst of a regulated society, where workers and students need to resist the oppression and harassment of political and economic systems⁽¹⁾. Despite its social relevance, the class faces a serious problem in

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the establishment of standards of education and exercise of the profession, in the struggle for decent working conditions and to ensure and increase the security and resolution of the assistance provided^(1,2). Therefore, it is imperative that the members of the category maintain a level of collective organization that allows them to direct their office in a genuine way, that is, in the light of the ethical principles with which they have historically committed themselves and the operational and intellectual requirements indispensable to the development of this work.

Therefore, civil entities are necessary for the class as a space of power and coordination of efforts in achieving common professional goals⁽²⁾. However, it is necessary to recognize that the entities perform their function in the context of a society strained by the class struggle, so that their study requires an attentive analysis of the current political, economic and social dynamics.

Regarding the national situation, it is worth explaining that Brazil participates in the global economy in a peripheral manner, dependent on other nations and maintaining a financial structure along the lines of neoliberal capitalism⁽³⁾. Despite the large extractive and service sector, the country still maintains a strong dependence on foreign technologies and investments, with a trade quite vulnerable to international fluctuations⁽³⁾. In recent years it has undergone a process of destructuring its industrial park, which negatively impacts the productive sector and job generation and deepens the problem of internal debt. The sum of this problem is that the actions of dynamization of the economy and social development become increasingly difficult.

While the country is going through a serious economic crisis, an important portion of the population struggles to maintain precarious jobs, while many others suffer from the terror of unemployment and labor informality⁽⁴⁾. In addition, reforms in the structure of the state deepened social inequities, pulling the standard of living of Brazilians down by extinguishing labor and social security rights, and legalizing the de-financing of public policies in the health and education sector. Added to this is the human damage caused by the very serious pandemic of

COVID-19, which changed the way of living and demanded from health systems a resolution difficult to be achieved with the resources available, accumulating an increasing number of sick and dead and an incalculable suffering⁽⁴⁾.

Moreover, reactionary and authoritarian ideologies fill the constellation of ideas of various social groups and immerse them in an unfruitful and inhumane moral crisis⁽⁵⁾, leading to a serious threat to the democratic and republican principles of Brazilian society and to the civil and political rights conquered over generations.

In the midst of this situation, composing a large class of health workers, also affected by these same problems, are nursing professionals, who have made a commitment to produce actions and services contributing to the health of people, families and communities. When considering this problem, it seems reasonable to argue that working in the area of Nursing, from the perspective of that worldview, is, in fact, a huge challenge, so that overcoming this crisis requires a profound reform in the structuring bases of society and this is only possible with the collective struggle of the workers. In this sense, the role of civil nursing entities is to coordinate the efforts of the category in favor of the full exercise of a profession that can collaborate with the confrontation of this morbid state of social organization⁽²⁾.

Thus, this study addresses the issue of civil entities of Nursing, including as a way to contribute to its function from the research and collective scrutiny. In search of theories that explain the complex social network and offer subsidies for the category find routes of intervention, the political-philosophical thought of Antonio Gramsci was chosen to guide the reflections here, as it embodies the historical experience of the working class in criticizing the status quo and engendering forms of resistance in favor of a universal, socialist human demand. Given the above, the objective was to analyze the implications of the social theory of Antonio Gramsci for the political-ideological organization of civil entities of the nursing class in Brazil.

METHOD

This is a reflective study, whose arguments are based on the work of the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci and scholars of his political thought. The civil entities object of this reflection were the Brazilian Nursing Association (ABEn – *Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem*) and the Nursing Unions, due to its nature as a private legal entity.

The organization and presentation of the results of the reflections included in this work followed a line of reasoning divided into two moments: first a revisional discussion about the Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony, expanded state and ideology, highlighting criticism as an element of resistance and emancipation; then a reflection on the implications of Antonio Gramsci's thinking for the organization of nursing entities. The study was developed in the second half of 2021 and, considering that it is a reflection article, dispenses with the appreciation by an ethics committee in research with human beings.

RESULTS

Antonio Gramsci: Extended State, Ideology and Cultural Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci was a communist politician and philosopher, born on January 22, 1891 in Alghero, Cagliari Province, on the Island of Sardinia, Italy⁽⁶⁾. In 1911 he applied for and won a scholarship to study literature at the University of Turin⁽⁶⁾. Years later he joined the Italian Socialist Party and in 1917 he was elected secretary of the regional section of the party⁽⁶⁾.

In 1921, Gramsci constituted the Italian Communist Party, being chosen its first General Secretary, three years later he was elected deputy and in parliament denounced the fascist strategies of Benito Mussolini⁽⁶⁾. When the fascist dictatorship was established in Italy, Gramsci was arrested and taken to the prison of Regina Coeli in 1926⁽⁶⁾. In 1928 he was sentenced to twenty years in prison, being taken to Turin, being imprisoned for almost eleven years⁽⁶⁾. In 1934 his health was seriously shaken and the fascist leaders did not want the prisoner to die as a martyr in prison, so Gramsci was released on parole, and died three days later in a private clinic in Rome on April 27, 1937⁽⁶⁾.

The conceptual basis of Gramsci's thought is cultural hegemony, being the means through which the ruling caste maintains its hegemony, whose notion harbors two meanings⁽⁶⁻⁹⁾. In the first, hegemony is related to domination by coercion and force, in the second, to the idea of consent through an intellectual and moral direction⁽⁶⁻⁹⁾. This means that the ruling caste maintains its hegemony through legal and police force, but mainly through ideological cooptation, spreading its ideology in a constellation of ideas in which its values and particular interests represent common sense⁽⁶⁻⁹⁾.

This strategy is operationalized through the state apparatus, so that the hegemony takes place at the time of the superstructure, that is, the state in its enlarged sense, in which two essential spheres are distinguished: the political society, the state in *stricto sensu* or dictatorship, formed by the set of state mechanisms through which the ruling class holds the legal and police monopoly of repression, and civil society, which brings together all the so-called bodies deprived of exercising hegemony, organizations responsible for the elaboration and dissemination of ideologies, such as schools, churches, trade unions, media, political parties, among others^(6,7).

However, this differentiation is only didactic or methodological, but not organic, since force is a constitutive element of consensus, insofar as any rupture of the latter triggers the mechanisms of coercion intrinsic to all spheres of social life, but that remain latent while consensus maintains social control⁽⁶⁻¹⁰⁾.

The break with this situation occurs through a war of position to occupy the state apparatus and reshape the social forces^(6,8). To this end, it is necessary to criticize the hegemonic conception of the world, abandoning an alienating common sense in order to reach a critical sense in the light of history and real needs of the working class^(6,8). It is from the critique of the hegemonic conception that the subordinate classes can assume a leading function, because they would engender the new world conceptions that contemplate no more the interests of the bourgeoisie, but the universal interests of the oppressed class, promoting intellectual, moral, political and economic reform throughout the generations^(6,8).

There is, then, an ideological unity, a

conception of the world that houses the interests of the various layers of society and is therefore widely accepted^(6,11). Therefore, intellectuals play an extremely important role, since they are the ones who operate the hegemonic apparatus and unite the interests of the members of the class they represent, translating them into ideologies that keep them cohesive in an ideological block^(6,11). This ideological unity is the amalgamation that organizes the efforts of the working class in a strategy of counter-hegemony, demanding an ideological preparation to raise the intellectual level of the working-class movement, so that each of its members is a critical and active political subject^(6,11).

Implications of Antonio Gramsci's thought for Nursing civil entities

The trajectory of the political organization of Nursing in Brazil has its initial milestone in the creation of the National Association of Graduate Nurses, currently ABEn, since its foundation anticipated the entire structure of class representation⁽²⁾. ABEn was created by the first nurses trained at the School of Nurses of the National Department of Public Health, on August 12, 1926⁽²⁾. The idea of the creation of the Association arose from the realization that it would be very difficult for the graduates to individually conquer the proper space of nursing in the health sector and fair social recognition, however, ABEn was created on the basis of an elitist view of the profession⁽²⁾.

ABEn's legacy for nursing is incalculable and focuses on all areas of professional activity: the creation of political and scientific itinerant events; participating in the formulation of devices for regulating the profession, such as Law n. 5,905/73 and Law n. 7,498/86; in the regulation of nursing teaching; in the development of terminologies proper to the profession, among the many other achievements over so many years of struggle⁽²⁾.

Currently, ABEn is present in all states of the Federation and welcomes the association of all categories of nursing professionals and students of high and high level. However, it is worth analyzing that the Association has been undertaking a great effort to expand its

membership, as well as its participation in the spaces of discussion and deliberation within the health system, especially in health councils, in addition to maintaining dialogue with other entities, councils and institutions from inside and outside Nursing and sustain their influence in front of other actors of power in the social scenario.

Regarding the trade union movement, the approval of Ordinance n. 3.311 of the Ministry of Labor of Brazil in 1974 made it possible to create nurses' unions in the national territory, but it was only from 1980 that it was possible to see a more active trade union activity in the category, when several unions were founded, such as the one in Bahia (1980), the Federal District (1981), Ceará (1983), Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Paraná, Alagoas and Goiás (1985) of Pernambuco (1986), Rio Grande do Norte and Niterói/RJ (1987) and Pará (1989).

It was in the effervescence of the period of redemocratization of Brazil that the identity or union activity of Nursing was formed, so that in 1983 the existing unions joined the Central Unified Workers (CUT - *Central Única dos Trabalhadores*), as soon as it was created, and in 1987 they formed the National Federation of Nurses (FNE - *Federação Nacional dos Enfermeiros*)⁽²⁾. Other events were equally significant, such as the holding of the National Meeting of Trade Unions and Pre-trade Unions of Nurses (ENESPSE), from 1982, and which followed throughout the 1980s, the formation of the National Coordination of Trade Unions and Pre-Unions of Nurses (CONESPE - *Coordenação Nacional das Entidades Sindicais e Pré-sindicais de Enfermeiros*) in 1982, in addition to the creation of the National Forum of Nursing Entities (FNEEn - *Fórum Nacional de Entidades de Enfermagem*) in 1988, which integrates ABEn, FNE, Nursing Councils and representatives of students and technicians and auxiliaries⁽²⁾.

These events point to an articulated action of Nursing entities at the time, which may mean the strengthening of professional representation, but also denote that the political organization of the class is permeated with advances and setbacks and that can still be considered incipient in view of the relevance of the profession in the health system.

In addition, it is necessary to analyze that the technical and social division of health work and nursing is also found in the organization of institutions and entities of the category, and it is reasonable to argue that this may represent an identity conflict between technicians and nurses, which weakens the collective feeling of belonging to the class. This, in fact, constitutes a problem for the nursing entities, since the notion of companionship in the labor struggle is an important element for the quantitative and qualitative mobilization of the exercisers of the profession and that the entities need to have political, financial and human resources to counter the employer power.

Currently, the leaders of nursing entities have devoted much attention to the issues that make up the itinerary of the working cause for years, especially in the struggle for more dignified teaching and professional practice standards for workers and safer for the population served, since from the confrontation with the COVID-19 pandemic, the labor situation of nurses and nursing technicians has worsened significantly⁽¹²⁾.

Since the last labor and social security reforms and from the pandemic of COVID-19, the nursing class in Brazil has been living more intensely with the weakening of employment relationships, unemployment and underemployment, inadequate working conditions, low salaries, reduction in the number of professionals in health services, multiple working hours, physical and mental illness and the death of professionals due to contamination by the virus^(1,12). The presence of racism and health inequalities aggravate this problem^(9,12).

These conditions have become arguments for civil nursing entities before the state and private sector authorities in favor of workers' demands, which include reducing the working day to 30 hours per week, without reducing wages, the payment of the salary floor of Nursing, the establishment of face-to-face education for training in Nursing and the consolidation of the Unified Health System and its public policies for health protection and social assistance.

From the point of view of the legislative framework of Brazil, civil entities can be defined as a legal entity of private law, non-profit, formed from the meeting of citizens who

exercise the same professional activity, or activities nearby, with a view to achieving common professional goals⁽¹³⁾. However, despite being regulated by state legal provisions, civil entities constitute an element of civil society, as they are founded and spontaneously directed by workers and students and are not part of the state structure.

However, the Gramscian theory defined trade unions and associations as 'commonly private organisms', since they may correspond to the hegemonic function of the dominant group⁽⁶⁾. In order to distance themselves from this function, entities need to be impregnated with revolutionary predicates, rather than representation or vindication, otherwise they will be innocuous or serve as a belt of transmission of bourgeois interests⁽⁶⁾.

Gramsci explained that the struggle of the proletariat against capital takes place in three moments: economic, political and ideological⁽⁶⁾. The economic struggle also unfolds in three phases: the first of resistance against capitalism or the trade union phase; a second of offensive against capitalism, by workers' control of production, and a third of elimination of capitalism through socialization⁽⁶⁾. The political struggle can be summarized by the concept of war of position, in which the working class seeks to occupy the institutional trenches, especially the parliamentary ones, in order to maintain or create a democratic situation in which the popular forces can organize and develop⁽⁶⁾. On the other hand, the ideological struggle gives meaning to the economic and political struggle, since it constitutes the diffusion of ideology, of the universal socialist culture of the working class by its organic intellectuals⁽⁶⁾.

This creates a demand for the political-ideological organization of nursing entities: the necessary operationalization of the economic and political struggle of the class, including trade union struggle in employers' institutions and the occupation of seats in decision-making and power spaces in the health sector and in state structures and social control, including the party-parliamentary stage. Added to this is the ideological struggle, so that the actions of the entities acquire revolutionary predicate from the awareness that one fights for a social reorganization of emancipation of man from

exploitation and capitalist alienation.

It is the duty of the entities to direct and operate an ideological and cultural reform so that workers and students understand the real reason for the economic and political struggle of the class and collectively find union and associative organization guidelines consistent with their needs historical^(6,8,11,14,15). Therefore, the elevation of the standard of teaching and exercise of nursing is so important, so that one can have an education that surpasses the superficiality of employment training, eclecticism and fad typical of modernity, so that category members reach such a sophisticated intellectual level that even in the complete dysfunction of their entities, each student and each worker will be able to criticize the reality in which it is inserted and extract from it the necessary elements for a revolutionary decision-making^(6,8,11,14,15).

This will only be possible if the programmatic content of this intellectual reform adheres to the real needs of the working class. This ideological unity is achieved by the organicity of the intellectuals of the class, that is, such intellectuals are not constituted only by operating the but because they are born and raised in their own class and know empirically the problems and interests of the group they represent^(6,8,11,14).

Therefore, the expansion of the cadres of associated and affiliated workers and students and the stimulus to the emergence of new leaderships are necessary for the renewal of the forces of the revolutionary movement, but without losing sight of the heritage accumulated by the vanguard and the orthodoxy of the purposes and ideals of this movement.

This process of ideological formation constitutes a challenge for nursing, especially when considering the group of emerging professionals, who, by an illusion of capital, can be considered a set detached from the larger collective of workers, have reached a higher level in the social and technical division of labor⁽⁶⁾. This emerging group constitutes an element contrary to the working struggle, reproducing within the class the bourgeois ideology and resisting any change so that they remain isolated at the apex of the pyramid of work⁽⁶⁾. The remedy for this situation is at a time

when the prestige and power of these professionals are placed in favor of the interests of the class, feeling of companionship and understanding that the profession has accumulated achievements by the efforts of men and women of all times.

From the perspective of Gramscian thought, civil entities play an important role in shaping the feeling of companionship, class consciousness and in raising the intellectual and ideological level of practitioners of the profession, both to make them feel part of the job of caring for people and communities, and to understand that the problems and harassment they face are not individualized, but rather are structural and affect a collective of workers who share the same working and living conditions. This unity of thought and action is not achieved spontaneously, it is necessary an educational work of generations, that nursing practitioners become capable of occupying strategic power spaces for the full exercise of the profession and for the health of populations^(6,8,14,15).

This work requires a material basis that supports and makes progress, that is, it is important to analyze that the Italian mark does not forget to explain that subordination takes place in the political and cultural sphere, but is also economic, because hegemony can only be maintained by a class that occupies a prominent place in the system of production and consumption⁽⁶⁾. This reinforces the need for expansion and mobilization of the cadres of associates and affiliates, the formation of new leaderships, the strategic use of the hegemonic apparatus, the influence and prestige of intellectuals, in a genuine movement of criticism and collective understanding. The challenge for the achievement of this guise of providences for the entities of Nursing is the (re)establishment of the connection between the workers and their entities, transforming the quantitative force in achievements until the present and the relevance of nursing work to society.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Nursing entities play an important role for the category, since they are spaces of political organization, both because they are legitimate bodies of representation and because political

activity requires a centrality of direction and command. Ideological preparation, companionship and class-consciousness are indispensable elements in the revolutionary struggle, acting as articulators of the combative potentials of the class, since the accumulation of science and the experience of the proletariat teaches that isolated, disjointed or unconscious labor conquests are not capable of emancipating man from capitalist exploitation.

The use of progressive theories can serve as a theoretical arsenal in the formulation of organizational and operational guidelines for the labor movement, also in the necessary analysis of the so that the results of this reflection show

that the ideological struggle is the north of the political and economic struggle. The ideology of Brazilian nursing is based on commitment to health and human dignity and the historical needs of the working class. Fulfilling that worldview of nursing exercise represents the genuine moral and economic emancipation of man and requires from the entities an openness to discuss and understand the problems that affect the collective of the practitioners of the category. Thus, the entities may have in the nursing class the driving force for their performance. This is the key to the true (re)connection between entities and workers.

HEGEMONIA CULTURAL E IDEOLOGIA NO PENSAMENTO DE ANTONIO GRAMSCI: IMPLICAÇÕES PARA AS ENTIDADES DE ENFERMAGEM

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar as implicações da teoria social de Antonio Gramsci para a organização político-ideológica das entidades civis da classe de Enfermagem no Brasil. **Método:** estudo de reflexão sobre o pensamento de Antonio Gramsci, discutindo a noção de hegemonia cultural, ideologia e Estado ampliado e suas implicações para a organização das entidades de Enfermagem. O estudo foi desenvolvido no segundo semestre de 2021 e dispensa apreciação por comitê de ética. **Resultados:** a preparação ideológica dos exercentes da Enfermagem foi identificada como elemento essencial para dar significado e sentido revolucionário à luta política e econômica da classe, apoiando a formação da identidade e sentimento de companheirismo entre os membros da categoria e formulação de diretrizes de ação para as entidades. **Considerações finais:** conclui-se pela importância dos sindicatos e associações profissionais para a organização da categoria e pela necessidade de (re)conexão entre os estudantes e trabalhadores de Enfermagem com as entidades civis, a partir de uma atuação comprometida com a mudança social e com as reais demandas da classe trabalhadora.

Palavras-chave: Enfermagem. História da enfermagem. Sociedades de enfermagem. Estado. Teoria social.

HEGEMONÍA CULTURAL E IDEOLOGÍA EN EL PENSAMIENTO DE ANTONIO GRAMSCI: IMPLICACIONES PARA LAS ENTIDADES DE ENFERMERÍA

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar las implicaciones de la teoría social de Antonio Gramsci para la organización político-ideológica de las entidades civiles de la clase de Enfermería en Brasil. **Método:** estudio de reflexión sobre el pensamiento de Antonio Gramsci, discutiendo el concepto de hegemonía cultural, ideología y Estado ampliado y sus implicaciones para la organización de las entidades de Enfermería. El estudio fue desarrollado en el segundo semestre de 2021 y no necesita apreciación por comité de ética. **Resultados:** la preparación ideológica del personal de la Enfermería fue identificada como elemento esencial para dar significado y sentido revolucionario a la lucha política y económica de la clase, apoyando la formación de la identidad y el sentimiento de compañerismo entre los miembros de la categoría y formulación de directrices de acción para las entidades. **Consideraciones finales:** se concluye por la importancia de los sindicatos y asociaciones profesionales para la organización de la categoría y por la necesidad de (re)conexión entre los estudiantes y trabajadores de Enfermería con las entidades civiles, a partir de una actuación comprometida con el cambio social y con las reales reivindicaciones de la clase trabajadora.

Keywords: Enfermería. Historia de la enfermería. Sociedades de enfermería. Estado. Teoría social.

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