


## HISTORICAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Historical professionalization movements: the relationship between social disasters and modern nursing

*Movimentos de profissionalização histórica: a relação entre as catástrofes sociais e a enfermagem moderna*

*Movimientos de profesionalización histórica: la relación entre las catástrofes sociales y la enfermería moderna*

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### Abstract

**Background:** Nurses' socio-professional affirmation becomes a reference in contexts of social disasters.

**Objective:** To analyze the relationship between social disasters and the importance of the contribution of some nurses to designing/developing nursing as a profession at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Methodology:** Although the methodological choices in the validation of the scientific nature of this historical study are based on historiography, the facts narrated and interpreted in this study were contextualized according to the historical period, which allowed the development of new meanings that define unities, totalities, series, and innovative relations within the documentary material itself.

**Results:** Several nurses contributed to the development of nursing as a science. They practiced their profession in contexts with a common denominator: armed conflicts that translated into a scenario of social disaster, where the need to care for others was paramount.

**Conclusion:** Contexts of social disasters unquestionably provided modern nursing with a field of action that brought it visibility and allowed its development as a discipline.

**Keywords:** history of nursing; nursing; nurses; science; armed conflicts; disasters

### Resumo

**Contexto:** É em contexto de catástrofes sociais que a afirmação socioprofissional do enfermeiro se constitui uma referência.

**Objetivo:** Dimensionar a relação entre as catástrofes sociais e a relevância do trabalho realizado por determinadas enfermeiras, no final do século XIX, com contributo para a construção/evolução da enfermagem enquanto profissão.

**Metodologia:** Embora as opções metodológicas na validação do carácter científico deste estudo histórico assentem na historiografia, os factos narrados e interpretados foram contextualizados em função da época histórica, permitindo o emergir de novos significados que possibilitem definir no próprio tecido documental, unidades, conjuntos, séries, relações inovadoras.

**Resultados:** Foram várias as enfermeiras que contribuíram para a evolução da enfermagem enquanto ciência. Experienciaram a sua profissão em contextos com um denominador comum: os conflitos armados que se traduziram num cenário de catástrofe social, onde imperava a necessidade de cuidar do Outro.

**Conclusão:** É inegável que os contextos de catástrofes sociais permitiram um campo de atuação que conferiu visibilidade à enfermagem moderna e possibilitou um caminho, traçado no sentido de construir a enfermagem enquanto disciplina.

**Palavras-chave:** história da enfermagem; enfermagem; enfermeiros; ciência; conflitos armados; catástrofes

### Resumen

**Contexto:** En el contexto de las catástrofes sociales es donde la afirmación socioprofessional del enfermero constituye un referente.

**Objetivo:** Dimensionar la relación entre las catástrofes sociales y la relevancia del trabajo realizado por determinadas enfermeras a finales del siglo XIX, que contribuyeron a la construcción/evolución de la enfermería como profesión.

**Metodología:** Aunque las opciones metodológicas para validar el carácter científico de este estudio histórico se basan en la historiografía, los hechos narrados e interpretados se contextualizaron según el período histórico, lo que permite que surjan nuevos significados que hacen posible definir, en el propio tejido documental, unidades, conjuntos, series, relaciones innovadoras.

**Resultados:** Varias enfermeras contribuyeron a la evolución de la enfermería como ciencia. Vivieron su profesión en contextos con un denominador común, conflictos armados que derivaron en un escenario de catástrofe social, donde primaba la necesidad de cuidar al Otro.

**Conclusión:** Es innegable que los contextos de las catástrofes sociales propiciaron un campo de acción que dio visibilidad a la enfermería moderna y habilitó un camino hacia la construcción de la enfermería como disciplina.

**Palabras clave:** historia de la enfermería; enfermería; enfermeras; ciencia; conflictos armados; catástrofes



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## Introduction

If we take a quick historical look back at the personalities who were part of the history of nursing and its affirmation as a profession, we immediately think of Florence Nightingale and her work during the Crimean War. Nevertheless, other women committed to revolutionizing health care played an equally decisive role in the visibility and affirmation of nursing as a profession in scenarios of social disaster. Considering that the knowledge in this area is scattered, this article aims to highlight the contribution of several leading figures to the socio-professional affirmation of nursing. As this is a historical study, the references were included due to their relevance, and a more extended timeframe was adopted. Social disasters according to Rahman (2019) definition, is any collective event resulting from human

group activities, which can be either accidental, that is, the triggering factor is extrinsic to the will of the individual, or human-caused (intrinsic), including terrorist attacks and armed conflicts. These events are a common characteristic of the relationship between different civilizations (Bowden, 2019). However, in the past, armed conflicts, due to their physical characteristics, which forced severely malnourished soldiers to remain in muddy trenches, combined with the lack of antibiotics, exponentially increased the mortality rate among wounded soldiers (Figures 1 and 2). Moreover, the lack of hygiene education, the decadence of health care due to the lack of resources, the poor conditions of hygiene, comfort, and maintenance of the environment, the lack of discipline of care providers, and male prejudice about women's presence in these scenarios further aggravated the situation.

**Figure 1**

*Hospital in Scutari, Crimean War*



*Note.* Adapted from “History’s Badasses: Florence Nightingale”, by Lundin, E. 2021 (<https://historythings.com/historys-badasses-florence-nightingale/>). In public domain.

**Figure 2**

*American Civil War, Encampments*



*Note.* Adapted from “Winter Encampments - The Long and Frozen Road” (<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/winter-encampments>). In public domain.

Modern nursing emerges within this context, based on the need and desire to keep people healthy and provide comfort, care, and protection to patients. In scenarios of social disaster, women such as Florence Nightingale, Mary Grant Seacole, Sally Louisa Tompkins, and Clarissa Harlowe Barton provided visibility to nursing in key moments for the autonomy and development of the profession. These nurses' strong personalities, vision, and practical organizational skills were crucial in adopting the technical and educational principles and the high ethical standards that have fostered the nursing profession (Geovanini et al., 2019). Thus, this is a narrative/descriptive study in line with the New History Movement and based on documentary research and analysis of several data sources. The starting point of this study was the research question on the association between social disasters and the work performed by some nurses towards the development of nursing as a profession and discipline. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the relationship between social disasters and the importance of the contribution of some nurses at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the development of nursing as a profession and discipline.

## Methodology

Some historiographical movements in literature have greatly influenced Europe from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, such as the New History movement. This movement was initiated in the 1980s by followers of the Annales School (École des Annales) and led by Jacques Le Goff. Its name comes from the change in the objects of study and the shift from the history of great men and great syntheses to the history of peoples and mentalities. This movement is difficult to define because of its high diversity of content. Assuming that all human activity is history, Le Goff introduced new ways of thinking about and conceiving history by working on new objects, new approaches, new dimensions, and new documents. Therefore, this study incorporates a wide range of information sources that include written documents available in the literature, museum collections, such as photographs and documents in nursing history (Pimenta, 2018). History as science is permanently under construction and demands an analysis that extends beyond the mere interpretation of the meaning of texts or historical events. Its interpretation should allow for a circular relationship between part and whole. Only then will it be possible to achieve an interpretation of the analyzed data as close to reality as possible, which is crucial to the conceptual framework of history and, consequently, the history of nursing (Costa, 2017). Facts must be interpreted and contextualized based on the historical period in which they occurred. Interpreting is to go beyond that which is narrated and connect common points experienced in different historical moments. Historical research should allow new meanings to emerge that "define, in the documentary material itself, unities, totalities, series, and [innovative] relations" (Foucault, 2008, p. 7). In this study, history allowed identifying common elements of the evolution of nursing: power

is an etiological factor of the armed conflicts that have resulted in social disasters with large numbers of victims, where the need to care for these victims allowed for the socio-professional affirmation of nursing as a discipline and an identity. The documents were carefully integrated based on their contribution to this study.

The historical method, also called the historical-critical method or historical criticism, was used in this study. It is a three-step methodology that analyzes past events relevant to human societies using primary sources and other evidence. Its first step - the heuristic step - consists of selecting primary sources composed of original documents (minutes, legislation, diaries, news, photographs) on the topic available at online document repositories of several international museums. However, due to difficulties in accessing some of these documents, secondary sources were also used, bearing in mind that these sources have "limited value due to the distortions in information as it passes through several authors, while already containing the interpretation of the person who wrote it" (Ferreira et al., 2013, p. 156).

The second step - source criticism - consists of an analysis process that includes external and internal criticism. 22 documents were analyzed to confirm the authenticity of the historical data and ascertain their genuine nature (external criticism), as the subjective nature of certain sources of information can compromise the rigor of scientific research. It is worth noting that "the greater the time gap between the event and the collection of information, the greater the risk of error, confirming the saying that a tale never loses in the telling" (Ferreira et al., 2013, p. 157). Concerning internal criticism, the credibility or reliability of the sources was evaluated, which allowed determining if the content of the data transmitted by the source was accurate and whether there were contradictory versions. The final step consisted of the conceptualization of the hermeneutic phase, associated with data interpretation, a process through which the reference of a sign is established, "whose significations are . . . shared . . . and act as a conducting line between the individuals' minds and the world around them", leading to new approaches and knowledge about the topics studied (Miguel & Popadiuk, 2019, p. 461).

The triangulation of all data sources described above was carried out when presenting the results, to increase the credibility of the research. In addition, this study also associated each historical figure with their public history and context, which are not always documented in the picture.

## Results and discussion

The various pioneers of modern nursing are presented below in chronological order, following Michel Foucault's proposal for historical analysis.

### Florence Nightingale

Born on May 12, 1820, in Florence, Italy, into a traditional and aristocratic 19<sup>th</sup>-century English family, Florence Nightingale gave up a life of comfort to become one of the



most remarkable personalities of her century. Determined to pursue her vocation in nursing, she revealed from an early age an interest in social causes. However, her family did not see nursing as a respectable profession or worthy of her social status. Their opposition led her to travel through Europe and North Africa in 1850. In Germany, she trained with the deaconesses in Kaiserswerth, a suburb of Dusseldorf (HISTORY Channel, n.d.).

Between 1851 and 1854, she complemented her training at the Dublin Hospital under the administration of the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, acquiring and consolidating knowledge and publishing a few works in the field of public health. Due to her experience and acquired knowledge, she was appointed Superintendent of the Establishment for Gentlewomen During Temporary Illness in London until the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854.

From a humanitarian perspective, this war was a social disaster due to the extremely high death toll (largely due to the high incidence of infectious diseases resulting from poor sanitary conditions and the disorganization of field hospitals), for which reason the British medical services in charge of caring for the hospitalized war-wounded were severely criticized in the newspapers (HISTORY Channel, n.d.).

In this context, the Secretary of State for War, Sidney

Herbert, requested Florence's presence in the Turkish military hospitals in Scutari to organize and coordinate the nursing services. Florence accepted the request and headed off to Scutari with 38 volunteers, including religious and laywomen. She managed to reduce the mortality rate from 40% to 2% in only six months (Figure 3) due to her knowledge and concern about the quality of care delivery, the environment, and the well-being of the wounded and sick soldiers, which earned her the recognition and respect of politicians, Queen Victoria, and the British people. However, this achievement was not an easy task. Besides the lack of resources and sanitary conditions, Florence had to face the hostility of doctors and other military officers, male prejudice, and her nurses' indiscipline and lack of preparation. Nevertheless, her dedication made her the guardian angel of the wounded and sick soldiers. They immortalized her as "The Lady with the Lamp" because Florence would walk around the wards during the night with a lamp in her hand to attend to the needs of the sick or wounded soldiers (HISTORY Channel, n.d.).

It was from this experience in Scutari, in the hostile context of war, that Florence acquired the practical knowledge to establish the basis for the reorganization of nursing services and the hospital reform in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, providing nursing with the socio-professional status that it lacked as a new social representation.

**Figure 3**

*Florence Nightingale*



*Note.* Adapted from "How Florence Nightingale Revolutionized Modern Nursing", 2020 (<https://interestingengineering.com/how-florence-nightingale-revolutionized-modern-nursing>). In public domain.

When Florence Nightingale returned from the Crimean War, she established the Nightingale Training School for Nurses at St Thomas' Hospital in London on July 9, 1860, which is recognized worldwide as the first nursing school and a historical milestone in the affirmation of nursing as a profession. Thus, Florence Nightingale became the symbol of the profession by promoting literacy and learning and influencing decision-making on health care policies and practices at various levels (The National Archives Education Service, n.d.). Florence dedicated her life to the nursing profession, being impossible to fit the account of

her work within the limits of this article. She died on August 13, 1910, in London.

### **Mary Jane Seacole – The Black Nightingale**

Mary Jane Seacole was a nurse, born in 1805 in Kingston, Jamaica, to a Jamaican black mother and a Scottish white father, a British army officer, who distinguished herself for her dedication, determination, and perseverance. However, her name and commitment to the nursing profession remained almost unknown for several decades until a British nurse by the name of Elsie Gordon found, by mere chance, a copy of her autobiography in a sec-

ond-hand bookshop.

According to her autobiography *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857), it was during the epidemics of yellow fever and cholera that ravaged her country (Jamaica) that Mary Seacole acquired the skills to provide nursing care (Nittle, 2019).

After the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853, she decided to travel to England and volunteer to join the medical teams to treat sick and wounded soldiers. However, her request was rejected due to the prejudice against women's right to practice medicine. Later in 1854, Mary signed up as a volunteer to join the group of nurses to be sent to

the Barrack Hospital in Scutari, administered by Florence Nightingale. Despite the recommendation letters issued by the Jamaican and Panamanian governments, Mary Seacole was rejected once again due to the racial prejudice of the time. Unwilling to accept it and determined to care for the sick and wounded of the Crimean War, she funded her passage to Scutari. There, she founded the British Hotel near Balaclava (Figure 4), whose purpose was to provide the necessary health care to the soldiers who were wounded or sick due to malnourishment and infectious diseases (Nittle, 2019).

**Figure 4**

*Mary Seacole*



*Note.* Adapted from “Colourful Characters – Mary Seacole”, by Howard, V., 2021 (<https://thecrownchronicles.co.uk/history/history-posts/colourful-characters-who-was-mary-seacole/>). In public domain.

Mary Seacole's bravery, charity, dedication, and skill captured the attention of Sir William Howard Russell, a British journalist, and correspondent for the *Times* newspaper. In one of his publications in 1857, Russell wrote, “a more tender or skillful hand about a wound or broken limb could not be found among our best surgeons” (Anionwu, 2012, p. 248).

Although she received some recognition towards the end of her life, Mary Seacole quickly faded from public memory. Nevertheless, due to her hard work and determination during the Crimean War, she is considered today as one of the leading figures in the affirmation of nursing as a profession, as well as a symbol of anti-racial attitudes and social injustice in the United Kingdom during the Victorian period (Nittle, 2019).

Mary Seacole died on May 14, 1881 and was buried in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery in Kensal Green. She was awarded the Crimean War Medal and the French Legion of Honor, among other decorations.

### **Sally Louisa Tompkins – Angel of the Confederacy**

The American Civil War, also known as the War of Secession (1860 to 1865), caused the highest number of military casualties in the history of the United States. According to historical records, over 600,000 people died, and part of the country was destroyed, a situation that boosted the affirmation of nursing as a profession in the United States (Hassler & Weber, n.d.).

Sally Louisa Tompkins, the youngest daughter of Colonel Christopher Tompkins and Maria Booth Patterson, was born in the Tidewater area of Virginia in 1833. Born into a deeply religious family, Sally studied at the Norfolk Female Institute, an Episcopal school, between 1849 and 1850 (Backus, 2019).

Due to the shortage of human resources during the American Civil War, the Confederate Government in Richmond, Virginia, asked the civilian community to help care for the high number of wounded and sick soldiers (Figure 5). Sally Tompkins accepted the request and founded in 1861, together with Judge Robertson, a field hospital known as the Robertson Hospital (Soodalter, 2019).

**Figure 5***Capitan Sally Louisa Tompkins*

*Note.* Adapted from “Sally Louisa Tompkins,” by Changemakers, V. (<https://edu.lva.virginia.gov/changemakers/items/show/222>). In public domain.

Her demanding nature and high organizational and management skills, together with her aptitude for leadership, recognized at all levels, provided her with the fundamental basis for designing and implementing hospital reforms. According to historical records, Sally Tompkins revolutionized nursing practice in health care and prevention in the United States. As a nurse, she cared for 1,331 wounded and sick soldiers who fought under poor sanitary conditions, achieving the lowest mortality rate in hospitals at the time (a result of her uncompromising advocacy for the quality of care delivery, the patients’ well-being, and the environment; Soodalter, 2019).

In recognition of her services and dedication to the cause of the Confederate States Army, on September 9, 1861, by order of President Jefferson Davis, she was appointed Captain of the Cavalry and responsible for the management and coordination of all field hospitals under the Confederate States Army.

Known as Captain Sally or “Our Florence Nightingale of the Confederacy,” she kept Robertson Hospital running until the end of the American Civil War, minimizing the suffering of wounded and sick soldiers. However, the war and the demands of her charitable work and generosity completely depleted her family’s fortune. In 1905, she moved into the Confederate Women’s Home in Richmond, Virginia, where she lived until she died in 1916. Sally Louisa Tompkins was buried with full military honors, and her name is inscribed on the United Daughters of the Confederacy Memorial Building (Soodalter, 2019).

#### **Clarissa Harlowe Barton - Angel of the Battlefield**

Clarissa Harlowe Barton was an American teacher, nurse, and philanthropist. She is remembered for devotedly

and skillfully organizing humanitarian assistance and providing health care to American Civil War soldiers, and founding the American Red Cross (American Battlefield Trust, 2018).

Clarissa was born in 1821 in Oxford, Massachusetts, to Sarah Stone Barton and Captain Stephen Barton, a member of the local militia and a well-respected politician. From an early age, she expressed her desire to devote herself to nursing. However, due to her parents’ opposition, she gained her teaching certificate in 1838. On April 19, 1861, riots in Baltimore against Abraham Lincoln’s anti-slavery policies triggered the first bloodbath of the American Civil War. Wanting to serve those in need, Clarissa volunteered as a nurse to care for wounded soldiers (Figure 6). She demonstrated her management skills and desire to strive for quality in every step she took. However, like Florence Nightingale or Sally Tompkins, Clarissa was constantly hindered by military authorities, who resisted every change she suggested. They appeared to resent the fact that she was a civilian woman whose authority was independent of the military services.

Nevertheless, rising above these obstacles, Clarissa did not give up. In August 1862, Superintendent Daniel Rucker authorized her to care for the wounded on the front lines of the war. She worked tirelessly to distribute essential resources and ensure the sanitary conditions of field hospitals (Chantilly, Harpers Ferry, South Mountain, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Charleston, Petersburg, and Cold Harbor), guarantee the delivery of health care, and improve the soldiers’ physical, psychological, and social well-being (Figure 6), gaining the trust and admiration of the population and senior military officers (American Battlefield Trust, 2018).



**Figure 6***Clarissa Barton*

*Nota.* Adaptado from “changed how wounded and missing troops are treated” by Cope, C., 2019. (<https://www.wearethemighty.com/history/the-angel-of-the-battlefield-changed-how-wounded-and-missing-troops-are-treated>). In public domain.

In 1864, in recognition of her service, Clarissa was appointed by Union General Benjamin Franklin Butler as head of the Union Army field hospitals. As an expression of their gratitude, soldiers referred to her as the Angel of the Battlefield.

After the war, in 1868, she decided to travel to Europe, and in 1869, in Geneva, Switzerland, she joined the International Red Cross. During her years in Europe, with the knowledge acquired during the American Civil War, she helped Louise of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Grand Duchess of Baden, Prussia, and the Red Cross (1870) to organize military hospitals during the Franco-Prussian War. Later in 1871, at the request of the German government, she was responsible for distributing basic food supplies to the poor in Strasbourg (HISTORY Channel, n.d.). Due to her dedication to the cause, Dr. Appia, Director of the Red Cross in Switzerland, invited Clarissa to establish the American Red Cross (n.d.).

In 1881, Clarissa became the first President of the American Red Cross. She attended and organized several humanitarian relief missions and served as a Red Cross emissary at various international events during her term. In 1907, she published an autobiography entitled *The Story of My Childhood* and died at her home on April 12, 1912, at the age of 90.

### **The “Lady-Nurses” of the Portuguese Red Cross (*Das Enfermeiras da Cruz Vermelha Portuguesa*) - Maria Antónia Ferreira Pinto Basto**

In Portugal, long before the outbreak of World War I, the training of professional nurses was already being advocated, particularly by feminists who argued that the Catholic Church should be removed from the responsibility it held

in this area for hundreds of years, through the several religious orders of the Sisters of Charity.

However, it was after Portugal entered World War I (1916) that a group of nurses aimed at serving the Portuguese Women’s Crusade (CMP) was created by Sofia Quintino (doctor and founding member of the CMP) and Elzira Dantas Machado (wife of Bernardino Machado, President of the Portuguese Republic). Their goal was to join the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps (*Corpo Expedicionário Português*, CEP) at the Franco-Belgian border in Flanders (Monteiro, 2017). According to Maria Lúcia de Brito Moura, in her work *Nas trincheiras da Flandres: com Deus ou sem Deus, eis a questão* (2010), this goal was temporally hindered because the government feared the power and influence of the monarchic and Catholic movements. Nevertheless, in 1917, due to the CMP’s constant pressure, the Minister of the Interior authorized the nurses’ integration into the CEP in Ambleteuse, France, thus responding to the appeal to serve the country (Monteiro, 2017). Maria Antónia Ferreira Pinto Basto was appointed to head the task due to her family’s close ties with the Women’s Association (linked to monarchic aristocracy), which had been established to assist the Portuguese military staff.

Thus, in April 1917 under Maria Antónia’s leadership, a committee of 26 Lady-Nurses was sent to the Red Cross Hospital in Ambleteuse, Boulogne-sur-Mer. Their mission was to join the British troops fighting in France against the countries of the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy). However, the hospital was not yet running, so Maria Antónia Ferreira Pinto Basto and her committee of Lady-Nurses offered to serve at the CEP Base Hospital, near the battlefield (Figure 7).

**Figure 7***Maria Antónia Pinto Basto*

*Note.* Adapted from “Maria Antónia Ferreira Pinto, aristocrata e tenente do exército português na I Guerra Mundial” by Monteiro, N., 2017, *Faces de Eva. Estudos sobre a Mulher*, (38), p. 189-194. ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maria\\_Ant%C3%B3nia\\_Ferreira\\_Pinto\\_Basto.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maria_Ant%C3%B3nia_Ferreira_Pinto_Basto.png)). In public domain.

Maria Antónia was confronted with gassed, wounded, and amputated soldiers and dealt with death daily. However, despite the difficulties, deprivation, and hardship, Maria Antónia was exemplary in carrying out her profession and supervising her team of nurses (Monteiro, 2017). Due to her dedication, commitment, and expertise, Maria Antónia, who was also praised for her education and culture, comforted angered soldiers in pain due to the mutilation and carnage experienced at the trenches. According to Monteiro (2017, p. 193), the nurses under Maria Antónia’s leadership “were role models, earning the preference and praise of the soldiers and civilians treated there.”

Some of these nurses were decorated. For example, Maria Antónia Pinto Basto was awarded the Portuguese Red Cross Medal of Benefaction and the Victoria Cross by the Ministry of War (Monteiro, 2017). She died in 1930.

## Conclusion

Florence Nightingale was widely known socially and had an important role in the socio-professional affirmation of nursing. Although her contribution is remarkable, other nurses also dedicated their lives to caring for others and the professionalization of nursing. Despite having lived in a racist and discriminatory period, Mary Seacole was able to brave the frontiers of the unknown and challenge the normative assumption that caring was a minor activity reserved for religious women and people of lower

social status. During the American Civil War, Sally Louisa Tompkins and Clarissa Harlowe Barton were also crucial in the social valorization and recognition of the identity of the nursing profession.

These nurses are considered role models for modern nursing due to their honesty, sobriety, devotion, humanized care, abnegation, and perseverance in caring for others. They worked in scenarios of social disasters and were praised and admired for their courage. Moreover, it seems to be in moments of greater vulnerability and social chaos that the necessary conditions emerged for these nurses to reinvent themselves and evolve. As members of the largest professional group in the health field, nurses can have a significant impact on the resilience of healthcare services. The contexts of social disasters unquestionably created a field of action that gave visibility to modern nursing. The importance of caring beyond common sense has led to measurable results that contributed to the improvement of care delivery and health conditions worldwide and to a path of recognition, respect, and visibility aimed at developing nursing as a discipline and establishing it as a profession that builds its own history.

## Author contributions

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