

The Portuguese literacy campaigns after the Carnation Revolution (1974-1977)

This article presents a description of the major campaigns of adult literacy in the revolutionary period in Portugal, between the years 1974 and 1977. The campaigns aimed to address the problem of extremely low levels of formal education and high levels of adult illiteracy, and were organized by different movements, from the military to political youth organizations. In all cases, Paulo Freire's theory and methods were an important reference to these initiatives of popular education even if, in some cases, these were clearly top-down approaches, while others advocated a bottom-up perspective. We will start by an analysis of the rationale of these movements based on documents produced at the period and a literature review. Then, retrospective interviews with two women participating in these campaigns are used to illustrate these experiences and their perceived impact on themselves and the adults involved. Not surprisingly, the impact of these literacy campaigns is perceived as significant both for the population, particularly older women, but mainly for the young literacy mediators who seem to have experienced this as a life-changing event. Even though this is a preliminary stage of the research, results suggest the significance of gender inequality and poverty as markers in the lived experience of these campaigns, and the high levels of hope and political mobilization of the young people involved, even with various degrees of ideological commitment.

Cet article présente une description de grandes campagnes d'alphabétisation des adultes dans la période révolutionnaire au Portugal, entre les années 1974 et 1977. Les campagnes visaient à régler le problème des très faibles niveaux d'éducation formelle et des niveaux élevés d'analphabétisme des adultes et ont été organisées par différents mouvements, de l'armée à des organisations politiques de jeunesse. Dans tous les cas, la théorie et les méthodes de Paulo Freire ont été une référence importante pour ces initiatives d'éducation populaire même si, dans certains cas, ces approches ont été clairement de haut en bas, tandis que d'autres plaidé pour une perspective de bas en haut. Nous allons commencer par une analyse de la justification de ces mouvements fondés sur les documents produits à la période et une revue de la littérature. Ensuite, des entretiens rétrospectifs avec deux femmes participant à ces campagnes servent à illustrer ces expériences et leurs répercussions perçues sur eux-mêmes et les adultes impliqués. Sans surprise, l'impact de ces campagnes d'alphabétisation est perçue comme importante tant pour la population, les femmes âgées en particulier, mais surtout pour les jeunes médiateurs de l'alphabétisation qui semblent avoir fait de cette expérience comme un événement qui change la vie. Même s'il s'agit d'une étape préliminaire de la recherche, les résultats suggèrent l'importance des inégalités entre les sexes et la pauvreté comme marqueurs dans l'expérience vécue de ces campagnes et les niveaux élevés d'espoir et de mobilisation politique des jeunes impliqués, même avec divers degrés d'engagement idéologique.

Keywords:

Literacy campaigns, democracy, conscientization, Paulo Freire

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1 Introduction: The *Revolutionary Period in Progress* and the emergence of literacy campaigns in Portugal

The Portuguese Carnation Revolution (1974) paved the way for the flourishing of a creative, energetic, and cooperative climate that brought the Portuguese society to an intense participatory movement, with the development of a myriad of initiatives attempting to deal with the deep problems faced after the collapse of the longest dictatorship in Western Europe (1926-1974) – that was characterized by the lowest level of compulsory education in Europe, very high levels of adult illiteracy, and high rates of health problems including infant mortality. This social environment was particularly intense between the years 1974 and beginnings of 1977 – the so-called *Revolutionary Period in Progress* (PREC), when vigorous and diverse social movements emerged, concerning, among others, literacy, political socialization, sanitary education, cultural mobilization, and the rehabilitation and construction of infrastructure such as kindergartens, schools, houses and sanitation. Figure 1 portrays an example of the literacy campaigns that occurred in the most remote areas of the country at the time, the Portuguese interior North region.





Figure 1. Literacy campaigns in Trás-Os-Montes, September of 1974 (retrieved from http://memoriacomhistoria.blogspot.pt/2009_04_01_archive.html)

Many of these initiatives focused on getting to know the real country, with the goal of shortening the distance between intellectual work and manual labour. One of the main initiatives of this movement of “going towards the people” (Oliveira, 2004a, 2004b) during this period was headed by the *Armed Forces Movement* (MFA) responsible for the revolution, in the *Cultural Promotion and Civic Action Campaigns*, reflected in one of its participants’ testimony:

As you know, in October we started our (...) Campaigns. We thought that this action beside the people was critical for several reasons: on the one hand because we actually did not [accurately] know the country we had, [they] didn’t let us know the country and, therefore, [one] can’t make a revolution in any country when one doesn’t know the reality of that country. (*People’s Daily*, 17/03/1975, p. 20, cit. in Almeida, 2007, p. 119)

Figure 2 captured another moment of these campaigns in the Portuguese Centre region, within the scope of *Operation Beira-Alta*, which was one of the longest and most complete of all of these MFA campaigns.

In the midst of this amalgam of laborious collective participation activities, the focus of this article is on the literacy campaigns. The justification for this choice is related to the need to gather these experiences in organized and detailed memories, given its relevance in a context where the population had an illiteracy rate that was around 26% (Candeias, Paz, & Rocha, 2007).

In fact, during the 19th and 20th century, Portugal had fallen far behind in adult literacy in comparison to other European countries. In 1800, Portugal had, like other southern European countries, an illiteracy rate of more than 90% (Carneiro, 2000). In 1900, this rate decreased to 75%; in Spain it was 65%, in Italy 56%, while in other countries the situation was very different: in the Scandinavian countries, in Germany, in France and in England it ranged between 10 and 30% (Carneiro, 2000; Nóvoa, 2005). In 1925, in Portugal, it remained at 64%,

while in Spain it was 35%, in Italy 25% and in France 5% (Nóvoa, 2005). During the dictatorship, from 1930 to 1970, the rate decreased about 40%, “in an average of 10% per decade” (Correia, 1998, p. 87). However, this decrease was very diverse for different age groups.

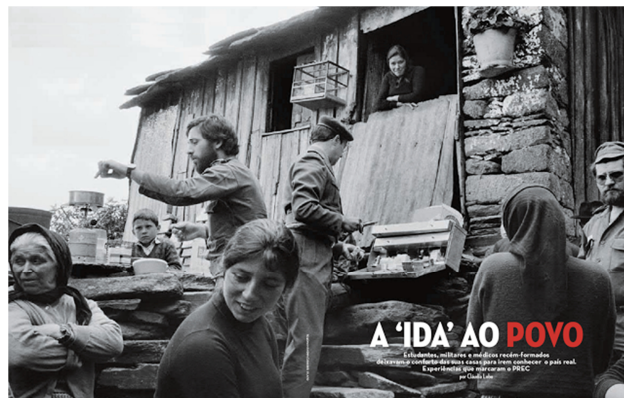


Figure 2. Cultural Dynamization and Civic Action Campaigns conducted by the MFA in the Centre region, retrieved from <http://citizengrave.blogspot.pt/2012/12/a-ida-ao-povo.html>, and originally published in the magazine “Visão História” [Engl. “Vision History”]

During the dictatorship, mostly between 1932 and 1953, the first legal provisions specifically related to literacy were launched, such as night classes for adults and the most visible initiative, under the name of Popular Education Plan, which encompassed the National Adult Education Campaign. Barcoso (2002) refers that this campaign served two main goals: on the one hand, it contributed to the reduction of the illiteracy rates, and, on the other hand, it served as a vehicle for the inculcation of the values of the New State (God, Country, Family, was the prevailing motto of those times), which are evident in the campaign’s fundamentals: “(...) we will form men and women morally and physically balanced, true, loyal, fair, firm, working, resourceful, loyal to their country and their faith... Christ and his Gospel. Portugal and its Empire. The Authority and its hierarchy. The justice and its laws. (Leite & Pinto in *The Campaign*, 25, p. 4)” (Barcoso, 2002, p. 38).

These provisions have not resolved, however, the issue of illiteracy among adults, especially older women (see Table 1). It should be noted that the illiteracy rate refers to people with 7 or more years or with 10 or more years, depending on the census, and therefore reflects the effects of schooling of children. In fact, a closer look at the adult population, with 15 years old and more, and according to the Census of 1970 (see Table 1), shows that illiteracy was more frequent among women (22% of men and 35% of women older than 15 were unable to read); illiteracy was more frequent among the older ones, at least one out of four men with 45 years old or more and one out of four women with 30 years or more were unable to read. It has to be stressed that in those days at least half of the women with more than 50 years old were illiterate.

Table 1. Population unable to read, by age group and gender

Age group	Men unable to read	Total men	%	Women unable to read	Total women	%
15-19	11255	355490	3,17	10590	375410	2,82
20-24	10565	297945	3,55	15545	330095	4,71
25-29	13580	241340	5,63	28045	277395	10,11
30-34	38360	250355	15,32	70525	283630	24,87
35-39	52200	262665	19,87	93605	293075	31,94
40-44	61860	261040	23,70	106585	290345	36,71
45-49	64565	242785	26,59	114650	270445	42,39
50-54	65810	209280	31,45	117350	235320	49,87
55-59	80610	206185	39,10	132190	233565	56,60
60-64	81285	184055	44,16	137230	226095	60,70
65-69	63005	140065	44,98	114840	186185	61,68
70-74	44140	94250	46,83	89040	139470	63,84
75 and more	49295	98230	50,18	119445	174560	68,43
Total	636530	2843685	22,38	1149640	3315590	34,67

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estatística (1973).

As such, it is not surprising that this concern with adult illiteracy has appeared significantly in PREC. As Correia (2000, p. 6) states, in those days,

The educational problem in the context of Western Europe [was] defined (...) around the concern to ensure, in a fair way, the formation of citizens [who were already] integrated in democracy, while in Portugal, what [was] at stake [was] a definition of education which simultaneously contribut[ed] to the formation of democracy and legitimize[d] the exercise of democracy within the educational space itself.

A sign of this analysis is the draft (as it was never approved) Decree-Law establishing the National Literacy Plan, discussed in July 1975 by the 5th Interim Government (which lasted only a month), that reflected the concern of instituting a liberating literacy and a concept of lifelong learning:

A literacy campaign in Portugal should be: 1) a fundamental part of popular mobilization and of the project of releasing all fears, passivity, individualism, and naive and fatalistic consciousness (...); and 2) the principle of a system of permanent education. (cit. in Stoer, 1986, p. 173)

The practical implication of these ideas was increasing access to education, which “also developed and involved a greater implication of education at the local [level] and unschooled educational dynamics that intentionally sought to contribute to the improvement and building of local communities and cities in search of their emancipation” (Correia, 2000, p. 8).

So, the debates over education were openly and explicitly ideological, in line with the highly politicized flavour of that revolutionary period – in fact, the 1976 Constitution assumed that the development of a socialist society was the ultimate goal of education (Menezes, 1999), even if one cannot speak of a “real” education policy but more of the management of sectorial

educational problems (Bettencourt, 1982) or a crisis management policy (Brederode Santos, 1985). Nevertheless, the revolution had an important impact in eliminating non-democratic values from the curricula, dignifying the teaching profession, granting more autonomy to the schools and creating a system of democratic management, valuing the educational role of the community and supporting the access and progression of deprived groups of students (Grácio, 1981). The literacy campaigns – that include military-led initiatives, the MFA campaigns (Almeida, 2007), and the Student Civic Service (Oliveira, 2004a, 2004b), but also other movements – were part of this immediate strategy to deal with the huge need for improving the educational levels of the population and combating adult illiteracy. However, very few references can be found to other literacy-related actions, thereby justifying the relevance of this research, particularly in its contribution to the organization and understanding of this dimension of post-revolutionary movements, exploring their rationale and methods.

2 The adult literacy movements within the scope of PREC

During the so-called *Revolutionary Period in Progress* (PREC, 1974-1977), we can identify four main movements that had explicit concerns about adult literacy, although they included actions in several other areas. In Table 1 we present the foundations of these movements and their timelines, based on information taken from Mogarro and Pintassilgo (2009), Almeida (2007) and Stoer and Dale (1999). We will start by considering the main characteristics of these movements based on a review of the literature and document analysis, and then discuss how Paulo Freire was (paradoxically) invoked as a reference for their design and implementation.

Table 2. Generic characterization of post-revolutionary movements with actions in the field of adult literacy

	Organization	Timeline
Literacy and Sanitary Education Campaigns	<i>National Pro-Union of Portuguese Students (Pro-UNEP)</i>	Summer'74
Cultural Promotion and Civic Action Campaigns	<i>Armed Forces Movement (MFA)</i>	Autumn'74 – Summer'75
Student Civic Service	<i>Ministry of Education and Culture</i>	Spring'75 – '77
Alfa Movement	<i>Union of Communist Students (UEC)</i>	Summer'76

2.1 Literacy and sanitary education campaigns

These campaigns were organized by the *National Pro-Union of Portuguese Students (Pro-UNEP)* and included “students (...) from various leftist movements” (Stoer, 1986, p. 172). Under the title “Student Unity with working people”, the Pro-UNEP declares the beginning of a “literacy campaign and sanitary education among the population” relying on “the support of the MFA, the Ministry of Education and Health, Democratic Movement, Unions, Cooperatives, popular collectives”

(*Newsletter of the Pro-UNEP Committee*, 1974, p. 9). Affirming the post-revolutionary drive, this movement argues the need to “conquer the whole students’ [aggregate] so that they are massively incorporated in brigades, which will invade the countryside and villages of our land” as “the Portuguese student youth [should] collaborate in the reconstruction of our country, where the legacy of fascism left heavy stains that [should] be erase[d]” (*Newsletter of the Pro-UNEP Committee*, 1974, p. 9). It is thus clear that in these initiatives “a markedly ideological dimension (...) [was] assumed by the pedagogical discourse” (Mogarro & Pintassilgo, 2009, p. 2).

The *Pro-UNEP Committee* correspondingly reaffirms that this activity falls under the “need to rapidly expand and consolidate the ongoing democratic process” and to that extent it considers “to be entirely fair that students during the holidays provide their input to the process of reconstruction and democratization of our country” (*Newsletter of the Pro-UNEP Committee*, 1974, p. 9). After the recruitment of students, this Committee organized training courses for participants in literacy campaigns, advertised in their newsletter and also in the media. This document also stated that these training sessions for literacy would be “coordinated by prof. Lindley Cintra (...) following the Paulo Freire’s method – adapted to the specific Portuguese situation” (*Newsletter of the Pro-UNEP Committee*, 1974, p. 9).

With regard to the *Sanitary Education Campaigns*, they had a more specific character, and were primarily intended for medical students:

these initiatives also serve to put future doctors in direct contact with the health reality existing in Portugal – breaking the detachment between the Universities and the existing reality, giving us a better training so that we can come to play an actuating role in the transformation of medicine in Portugal. (...) However, we will incorporate with the country's other students in the literacy initiatives and campaigns of dissemination of popular culture – initiatives which are integrated within the scope of the activities of the future National Union of Portuguese Students. (*Newsletter of the Pro-UNEP Committee*, 1974, p. 9)

This effort carried out by “young students [who] believed they could change the world, the reality of the country and, simultaneously, to build democracy” (Mogarro & Pintassilgo, 2009, p. 11) found several resistances along its action, because these agents “were identified with communism and evil acts and immoral behaviour were assigned to them” (p. 12). The research by Mogarro and Pintassilgo offers some very vivid descriptions of these resistances found at the locations where the campaigns were implemented:

In the [North] region (...) clerics reacted very badly to the campaigns’ work (...) In this state of mind, it is easy that campaign elements are pebbled (...) or as (...) nearby the house where there were Sanitary Education sessions, “armed” people with hoes and sticks could be seen (...) two threatening shots in the air were thrown. (*Meeting*, 2nd series, number 1, October /1974, p. 6, cit. in Mogarro & Pintassilgo, 2009, p. 12)

These campaigns had its high point during the summer of 1974 and two years after they were continued by the *Alfa Movement* (Mogarro & Pintassilgo, 2009, p. 13), which will be addressed below.

2.2 Cultural promotion and civic action campaigns.

These campaigns were organized by the *Armed Forces Movement*, specifically by its 5th Division. Residually dedicated to literacy, its objectives mainly consisted in the democratization of society through cultural development and bringing the military close to the people, in an action of “political legitimation of the military movement” (Mogarro & Pintassilgo, 2009, p. 10). The campaigns focused on projecting a unique culture, which was “born from the people” (*Newsletter of the MFA*, 25/10/1974, cit. in Stoer & Dale, 1999, p. 77), envisaging the “transformation of the political culture of the country” (*Newsletter of the MFA*, 25/10/1974, cit. in Stoer & Dale, 1999, p. 77). This inextricable connection between culture and revolution is well reflected in the *Handbook for Literacy* (BASE, 1977, p. 8), which compiled the philosophies and methodologies of adult literacy in this period:

For us, culture is closely linked to the transforming action of [humankind] on nature; the transforming [collective] action of [humankind] towards their journey of liberation, deep and integral, from any and all dominations (...) because for us there is no revolutionary process without [a] cultural process.

Propaganda for these campaigns was diverse, supported in various formats, such as posters, stamps and postage stamps, as well as caricatures. Figures 3 and 4 depict two examples of propaganda surrounding this initiative, clearly demonstrating the goal of rapprochement between the MFA and “the people” through the cultural dimension.

The *Newsletter of the MFA* (12/11/1974, cit. in Stoer, 1986, p. 155) reiterates this concern of rapprochement between the military and the people through culture:

Once again in perfect unity with the *Armed Forces*, we must win the *battle of culture*, which is not only what the books teach us. Schools go out to the streets and the streets go into the schools, through the music bands, folklore, orchestras, songs, dance and poetry, theatre, circus, cinema, crafts, plastic arts.



Figure 3. Propaganda poster of MFA initiatives, authored by João Abel Manta (retrieved from <http://casacomum.net/cc/visualizador?pasta=04791.036>)



Figure 4. Stamp collection on MFA initiatives, 1975, entitled “learning with the people, building the country” (retrieved from <http://casacomum.net/cc/visualizador?pasta=04791.025>)

The military were then seen as educators and, at the same time, as individuals who also needed to learn from the people, as stated in one of the public speeches of Vasco Gonçalves, Prime Minister during these campaigns:

The military is first and foremost an educator, but educators need to learn from those who they seek to help (...) The military when they return (...) from these sessions, they are more politicized themselves, are more aware of their duties, are more democratic; we also

democratize the Armed Forces with these civic clarification sessions of our population, and thus strengthen the unity People-Armed Forces, which is a fundamental condition of our progress, our progress in peace and without shots. (cit. in Stoer, 1986, p. 175)

These campaigns ended in 1975, but the literacy brigades continued to exist through other movements, as we shall observe in the next sections.

2.3 Student civic service

In the fall of 1974, nearly 28,000 young students, twice the number of students of the previous year, awaited their entry into higher education (Oliveira, 2004b), but the State could not provide them a structured response, taking into account the country’s transition conjuncture, and its incapacity to accommodate such a high number of students. The *Student Civic Service* (SCE) emerged as a response to the lack of solutions for these young people, and involved a diversity of actions not only educational, but also cultural, infrastructural, health and sports related, etc. In Oliveira’s words,

[the] massive students’ initiatives of ‘going towards the people’ in their student condition (...) could allow to gain time to try to solve conjuncture problems or make structural modifications, to perform operations of a new socialization, both of the students and other population layers, in order to create revolutionary identities and eventually to spread innovations, contributing to national integration’. (2004a, p. 2)

This initiative was legally created by the *Decree-Law No. 270/75 of May 30*, as “a nationwide service, to be provided by students of both sexes by voluntary subscription” (Article 1), with the following objectives:

- 1) Providing opportunities for students to contact with the reality of the country and the needs of the population;
- 2) Articulating the theoretical and practical content of education with the concrete reality at a national level;
- 3) Approaching intellectual work and manual labour, “break[ing] the isolation of the school in relation to life, the city in relation to the countryside” (paragraph c, Article 2);
- 4) Contributing to students’ vocational choices through the contact with different professions;
- 5) Contributing to the formation of collective work and cooperation and “ensuring the participation of students in the tasks of building the country’s democracy and progress” (paragraph e, Article 2);
- 6) Supporting the creation of social infrastructures;
- 7) Developing actions to improve the “living conditions of the most disadvantaged populations by conducting urgent tasks that [could] not be secured by recourse to the labour market”. (paragraph g, Article 2)

This service was directly supervised by the Ministry of Labour and required prior training. Students involved were entitled to some benefits, for example, to family allowance, bursaries for food, accommodation and transport (in the case of displaced students), and accident insurance. Supposedly, the program should have lasted three academic years, but it was only

developed in the years 74/75 and 75/76 and was formally abolished in 1977. According to Oliveira (2004a, pp. 2-3) the

Student Civic Service was not a politically homogeneous creation. It emerged at the intersection of three key policy areas, at the time known as the Republican-Socialist, Communist and Catholic-Progressive, areas whose members had not always identical positions. The personalities and relevant forces for the formation of public opinion and those responsible for the implementation of the Student Civic Service supported themselves in the possible repertoires.

In fact, the third year of the SCE implementation was “characterized by a slurred agony and long predicted death” (ibid.) and, such as other homologous initiatives, it was eventually extinguished with the “constitutional standardization” (Oliveira, 2004a), particularly with the introduction of *numerus clausus* for all courses and the corresponding input in the students’ selection procedures in higher education. In conclusion, “the itinerary of SCE expresses (...) the combination of material constraints, resources and ideas in the field of social experimentation as well as the rhythms and contradictions of democratization in Portugal” (Oliveira, 2004a., p. 4).

2.4 Alfa movement

Also known as the *Students Work and Literacy Brigades*, they were created and implemented by the *Union of Communist Students* (UEC) in the summer of 1976 (concretely in August and September), and they intended to extend the literacy campaigns to populations of “districts with high illiteracy rate[s]” (*Press conference on the Alfa Movement’s* activities and objectives, retrieved from <http://repositorio-tematico.up.pt/handle/10405/24809>). Volunteer students should not only participate in literacy campaigns, but also undertake cultural activities among the population, such as “collection of poems and folk tales, [organization of] film exhibitions, promotion of youth parties, construction of kindergartens, sports initiation and sanitary education” (ibidem). This movement was the continuation of the 1974 *Literacy and Sanitary Education Campaigns* and had a great informative and media projection, as shown in Figure 5.

According to Mogarro and Pintassilgo (2009, p. 13), this movement’s “organization was highly centralized, with a steering committee and base in the Faculty of Arts of Lisbon, regional commissions, literacy nuclei and mobile and fix brigades, working on a voluntary basis”. Their goals did not only focus on literacy, but also on the “consolidation of the most important revolutionary achievements, such as the Land Reform” (Mogarro & Pintassilgo, 2009, p. 13). Since its politicized nature was greater than the other movements, Alfa was refused state support for the implementation of literacy campaigns on the basis of its strong ideological component.



Figure 5 Propaganda posters of the Alfa Movement (retrieved from <http://ephemerajpp.com/2014/01/26/materiais-de-propaganda-politica-119-movimento-alfa/>)

3 Paulo Freire’s method in the literacy campaigns

Stoer (1986) noted that these campaigns were based in the Cuban literacy campaigns in several of their theoretical and practical dimensions. In addition to this, there was a recurrent reference to the inspiration in Paulo Freire’s method as Stoer underlines:

Virtually in all ‘literacy’ activities, Paulo Freire’s methods were used or taken as a reference. This shows us an interesting apparent contradiction, in the sense that the planned and centrally controlled activities were ‘assessed’ and put into practice through (...) the work of a man usually associated to a ‘popular’ and local dynamic. (p. 161)

This peculiarity, which eventually crossed all the movements related to adult literacy, transformed the Portuguese experience into a “unique case study of the kind of work influenced by Freire” (Stoer & Dale, 1999, p. 80), and even the “only example of explicit use of Freire’s ideas in a revolutionary context in a semi-peripheral country; [as] in the Portuguese education between 1974 and 1976, Freire’s pedagogies were the norm and not the ‘alternative’” (p. 68). The engagement with Freire’s perspective was not surprising: “he wrote in Portuguese, lived in exile (as many of the intellectual elite returned [to Portugal] after the revolution), and had ideological and political proximity with the goals of the Portuguese socialist revolution” (Menezes, Teixeira, & Fidalgo, 2007, p. 319).

Despite the uniqueness of the Portuguese experience, the fact is that, in those days, “Paulo Freire was a myth, his ‘method’ [was] assumed as the emblem of action, mimeographed texts [were] reproduced [in Spain]” (Fernández, 1990, p. 57). But it was also the case in several countries in Latin America (Barranquero, 2011; Boughton & Durnan, 2014) and in post-colonial Portuguese-speaking countries such as Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe and Mozambique (Mesquida, Peroza, & Akkari, 2014), where mass literacy campaigns were taking place as a result of liberation processes. These movements were characterized by an educational debate which was explicitly ideological, in highly politicized environments, due to the possibilities provided by the emergence of social critical awareness and the opportunities of transformation of reality, now liberated from the oppression to which they had been subjected until then. In this sense,

Immersion in Freire is absolutely essential, because it supposes historical subjects and their non-alienated critical consciousness. It is

a political and educational work. That's why dialogue is the fundamental and basic tool. It will not be possible to fully agree on major issues but we need to hear each other and, possibly, change our positions. And that is the basis of democratic education. (Ferrer et al., 2013, p. 148)

In Portugal, Freire's pedagogy (1967, 1972) is evident in the publications on the topic of literacy at the time: for example, the *Handbook for Literacy* (BASE, 1977), the *Roundtable between Paulo Freire and the militants of BASE – Unitary Workers Front* (Freire, n.d.), and also the draft of the *National Literacy Plan* (as noted by Mogarro & Pintassilgo, 2009, p. 17). These last authors reflect on the transversal utilization of Freire's methods, namely on the set of 20 *generative words* (or *themes*), introduced in Portugal by the university professor and linguist Lindley Cintra. These generative words, or themes, are the basis for literacy, and nuclear in this method; they are extracted from the daily experiences, contexts and lives of the learners, they are meaningful and interesting. The method then proposes that those words are divided into syllables, which are memorized, allowing for the learners to build new words.

The ultimate goal of this method is to provide the opportunity for learners to go through the process of *conscientization*, which implies developing a critical awareness of one's reality, by means of action and reflection, or *praxis* (Freire, 1972, 1982). This praxis evokes a collective action which is transformative of the context, again providing elements for critical reflection. But, in the Portuguese experiences, and according to Mogarro and Pintassilgo, "the process of *conscientization*, which is claimed [by the literacy campaigns], is very close to political indoctrination and its goal is the construction of a new man, citizen, active, free and lucid in a socialist society" (pp. 17-18). In fact, the voluntary and "generous" impulse, with which the students movements participated in these brigades, may possibly have been the basis of some contradictory aspects of their action, as recognized by Paulo Freire himself in an interview to newspaper *The Capital* (15/7/1976, p. 2, cit. in Mogarro & Pintassilgo, 2009, p. 18):

One of the possible errors they may have done was to arrive to the rural areas with a somewhat patronizing attitude. Although all possible errors, there was, however, an impulse to take concrete action, and it doesn't matter that there were mistakes.

One of the participants in these brigades, quoted in *The Teacher* (ibid.), sums up his experience as follows: "We couldn't do much about literacy ... but we did a lot on the sanitary plan and politicization", reaffirming the dimensions considered urgent for the democratic construction, and that were connected to the creation of infrastructures and political education. On the other hand, the brigade members recognize that "fundamentally, [the ones] who learned in the campaigns were we, the students" (ibid.), discourse which is repeated in the words of one of the participants in the previously cited roundtable with Paulo Freire, commenting on her experience as a literacy monitor in a

fishing community: "we learned a lot from people (I think we learned more from people than they learned from us)" (Freire, n.d., p. 10). In a later work, written in the late 1980s, Paulo Freire discusses the relationship between literacy and citizenship, arguing for the need of recognizing education as a political act, but underlies that

one of the obstacles to our practice [of popular education] is this. We go to popular neighbourhoods with our 'theoretical' schemes already constructed and we do not care with what people know, the individuals that live there, and how they know it. We do not care to know what men and women from popular neighbourhoods know about the world, how they know it and how they see themselves in it, we do not care to understand their language about the world. (Freire, 2001, p. 30)

4 Memories, literacy campaigns and revolution

The literature review and document analysis demonstrate the relevance and intensity, however short-lived, of the Portuguese literacy campaigns during the revolutionary period. But the existing information, documents, and relevant agents are scattered and, more than that, difficult to access. Thus, there is clearly the need for research that allows for the reconstruction of the memory of the literacy campaigns in their various forms and shapes, and taking into account their perceived impact for participants and communities. Additionally, it would also be important to study "in what manner Paulo Freire's methods were used during the revolutionary period, as well as on the conception that was the basis for the use of such methods" (Stoer, 1986, p. 162). What we present here is a preliminary contribution to this larger research endeavour, with two semi-structured interviews with two women who were actively involved in these campaigns. The interviews elicited discourses produced retrospectively about these experiences and data analysis used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in order to identify and analyse "patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). The two participants are now middle-aged women who were involved in the campaigns in 1975-76: Amelia in the context of the Student Civic Service but also through a youth organization that was created to "change the world" and worked mainly in a small city in the North; Belinda also participated in the context of the Student Civic Service but was a member of the Union of Communist Students and was later involved in the Alfa Movement in the area of Lisbon.

4.1 Amelia changing the world

Amelia gives a vivid description of the social climate during those days, "we lived in the streets, no one was home at night", emphasizing a high level of engagement in literacy campaigns: "I got married and both me and my husband went out at night. The kitchen might remain untidy, but we went out for literacy campaigns". In this sense, there was clearly a sense of urgency of change: "we did really incredible stuff ... and risked ... and thought we were going to change the world" even more because "everything was undone". Among the activities of the youth association she belonged to there were



literacy campaigns, sanitary education, and the organization of a survey on health conditions of local housing.

Amelia remembers there was an initial training for the literacy monitors, probably “during one week”, and even though she recalls the use of Paulo Freire’s method because they “didn’t give literacy to the adults as [they] did to the kids”, she admits that their initial training had “much influence of the PCP [Portuguese Communist Party]”. The method itself is vaguely described, yet she clearly identifies the *syllabic division* as the predominant tool in literacy sessions, as well as the *generative themes* (such as “shoes” and “bricks”), which emerged from the *dialogue* between the adults and the literacy monitors, which ended up in a *conscientization* process:

The method of Paulo Freire was based on (...) life experience (...), they had to talk about things (...) people were all on the table, we sat with them (...) people talked about shoes, we took a shoe (...) and visualized the word in capital letters (...) then they devised the word in bits (...) sa, se, si, so, su (...) but this was a little bit of the process because the goal was to get them to conscientize that they [already] knew many things.

Amelia notices that, after all, “the reading and writing was something that they could solve”, as the main goal of these sessions was to raise awareness among these adults of how significant their learning was. Her description on the adults she monitored reveals that “it was a heterogeneous group”. She intensely remembers women, because as she phrases it, “there were many women, women adhered well to literacy”: “a lady with more than 60 years (...) [who] had a son and grandchildren [living] in South Africa (...) and so she wanted to write letters to her grandchildren”. Amelia also thoroughly and emotionally recalls

a woman who went there every (...) night from [a very distant location] (...) because she wanted to learn. (...) that woman was amazing, [she] went every (...) night to learn to read and write (...) this lady from [a recondite place in the region] stroked us all because (...) she was 70 or 72 [years old] (...) she went [there at] night all alone, (...) she went every day on foot and came just to learn to read, so it was one of the people (...) not having had the opportunity to attend school before was clearly a major ‘crime’ for this woman.

Reflecting on the personal impacts of this experience, Amelia confirms the intensity of the experience, as a student, of *going towards the people*, as a profoundly life learning experience, as if they, the young students, had been strayed from it during the past times: “For us, it was the point of view of life learning, we were students who were to return to earth and the world of work (...) the contact with life and (...) with these people helped a lot to understand life”. This movement of approximating the people is assuredly joyful and enlightening, or as she puts it: “We did that up with joy (...) being with people, listening to their problems (...) [their] knowledge”.

Finally, Amelia emphasizes the political impact of this involvement, as it contributed to her political thinking and later becoming member of the communist party:

... this was very compelled by the PCP (...) and we were not the PCP, you see, we were not, perhaps it helped us to realize (...) and

some of us came to be (...) including I (...) we were all left, of course, but (...) free and idealistic (...) I was there in a student environment in Porto (...) when I come to the field I began to see that PCP was probably right.

4.2 Belinda and the idealism and hopes of a young communist

When she remembers those days, Belinda describes the effervescing climate in the capital city, stressing the cultural eagerness of the society as well as the generalized participation of the citizens in the most diverse public activities:

life was so intense at that time (...) It was a time when there were, in addition to these organized movements, either by parties, by troops or by the government, diverse and varied public events, debates and public participation, free singing and recital sessions, widely participated either by the intellectuals or by the working [class], avid of culture, all of them.

Belinda thoroughly describes the “huge impact [of the revolution] on the lives” of the people: “the way people related changed radically over a certain, however short, period of time (...) people were available for others, to collaborate in literacy campaigns, to open roads or build collective spaces”. In addition, she refers to the overcoming of the huge gender gap in the Portuguese society, as the revolution allowed “putting an end to the obscurantism and the acceptance that women and men [had] the same rights”.

Belinda was involved through the Student Civic Service in analyzing the quality of drinking water in Algarve as her field of interest was Biology. Later, she participated in renovating buildings (e.g., primary school, nursery) and in literacy campaigns, recruited “within her militancy in the Union of Communist Students, in the case of Alfa Movement”, because “teaching was always a passion for” her. Her initial training as a literacy monitor was conducted at the University of Lisbon, focusing on Paulo Freire’s method but also on “knowledge in economy and politics”. When remembering the method, she – as Amelia – identifies the syllabic division of words, and also the use of images in which the word was pictured. In her opinion, there were not specific instructions for the use of this method, and the literacy monitors used their “intuition” and a “trial and error” approach to teaching, sometimes “taking [the adults’] hands to teach them to do the letters”, revealing the relational proximity built between literacy monitors and the adult learners. Addressing, once again, the theme of the post-revolutionary climate and the political debate that was transversely in progress, Belinda affirms that

what was really worth was the delivery to the cause (...) it was obvious that given the political excitement of the time there was a tendency for the conversations held between us [to address] the political issues (...) not for political instrumentalization, but for being young and emotional (...) we wanted to convince others of the goodness of our ideas.

Similarly to Amelia’s experience, Belinda worked mainly with women, some of them subject to their husbands’ resistance to their participation by means of comments like “what are you doing in the street at night (...) you



should be at home". Generally, these adult learners were "simple people residing in the most popular zone" of a typical neighbourhood in Lisbon and their motivations for participating "were diverse", for example, "those who wanted to know how to do the accounts of their small grocery store", or people "who were more politicized and belonged to a group that had occupied houses, and wanted to read the documents and pamphlets that proliferated at the time", or even those "who just wanted to be able to read the newspaper in the coffee shop". Belinda retained their will to learn, but also the swiftness of their learning: "one of [the women], completely illiterate, who didn't even know how to handle the pencil, over 60 years old, learned to write in eight days".

In her opinion, the most important element of this experience was the encounter between the illiterate adults and the young and educated literacy monitors, who came from different social statuses and "contrary to what they were used, treated them as equals", which allowed them to rebuild their social conceptions and their interactions. On the other hand, the age gap between them allowed adults to "revive memories and renew energy and enthusiasm for life", by means of this encounter with "enthusiastic and politicized youngsters". At a personal level, Belinda describes this experience as a "fantastic" one, which was in accordance with "all [her] idealism and communist youngster hopes (...), it was a joy and an immense enthusiasm for me". Contact with people from a different social background, knowledge of another reality, other life worlds, was in fact one of the most significant dimensions of this experience:

[being] with people [who were] very different from those with whom I was used to deal in my day-to-day, that is, middle-class, educated people with whom I grew up or politically enlightened people with well-defined political options, either in the family or in the party context, it was really enriching and perhaps carved a lot of what I am today.

Underlying again the gender inequality of those days, she considers that she had the opportunity to be exposed to stories of oppression with an actual transformative effect in her personal development:

[facing] the harshness of daily reality for many of those women who for the first time in their life had the courage to think for themselves and face the sexism of husbands and sons. The life stories they told me (...) their popular [expressions] that made me blush, made me a different person (...) I learned not to waste opportunities.

5 Discussion

Mass literacy campaigns, as Boughton and Durnan (2014, p. 559) assert, "enjoyed wide support in the 20th century, when they were seen as a way to increase the participation of previously marginalized and excluded populations in national development". Yet, during the 1990's, the "scholarly interest in them declined under the influence of World Bank empirical critiques of their effectiveness and increasing postmodern skepticism towards the socialist 'grand narrative' of liberation which underpinned some of the more famous examples" (p. 559). However, this interest seems to be re-emerging, as

a response to the neoliberal tendencies that have taken over the global education scenario, with a particular emphasis on critical approaches such as Freire's:

Freire's example is more important now than ever before: with institutions of public and higher education increasingly under siege by a host of neoliberal and conservative forces, it is imperative for educators to acknowledge Freire's understanding of the empowering and democratic potential of education. (Giroux, 2011, p. 154)

In fact, Freire's work is increasingly being revisited, recovered and reinvented, and one of the world's most significant example is the Cuban literacy campaign "*Yo sí, puedo*" (Yes, I Can), which has inspired, among others, mass literacy campaigns in East-Timor and Aboriginal Australia (Boughton & Durnan, 2014; Boughton, 2010), and motivated comparative studies from an empowerment framework perspective. These studies have shown, on the one hand, that further longitudinal observation and analysis are crucial for a thorough understanding of the impact of these campaigns on social transformation and, on the other hand, that there is a clear geographical polarization of cooperation forces (north-north versus south-south partnerships) which determine the possibilities and shape the impacts of these mass literacy campaigns. However, as Paulo Freire (1972, 2001) assumed, even if the links between literacy and citizenship are not automatic – and the relations between "social capital" and "civic participation are under-studied" (Vorhaus, Litster, Frearson, & Johnson, 2011, p. 49) until today – it makes sense to expect that

adults who improve their literacy skills do much more than get better at reading and writing; they improve their self-confidence, develop better attitudes to learning, improve their health, and increase their levels of civic and social involvement. (EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012, p. 77)

It is this last dimension that grounds the intentions of the work in progress discussed in this paper, which presents a first approach to the memories of the Portuguese literacy campaigns that were developed in the post-revolutionary period, between the years 1974-1977, resulting from the initiative of diverse groups, but always under the theoretical affiliation of Paulo Freire's *pedagogy of the oppressed*, as becomes clear both through document analysis and the literature review. The analysis of the discourse of the two women involved as literacy monitors in these campaigns reveals the meaningfulness and significance of these campaigns from various perspectives. Firstly, the post-revolutionary period was clearly a time with a strong participatory logic that contaminated the whole Portuguese society – and the literacy campaigns were only one example of this movement of "going towards the people" that aimed to solve the deep infrastructural needs of the country (such as health and sanitary conditions, social structures, etc.) that resulted from the dictatorship. This framing, together with the lack of a consistent support and management of these campaigns, contributed to their discontinuity with accusations of political indoctrination, making the memories of that period somewhat fuzzy and

more difficult to rebuild in terms of the actors, the places and the resources involved.

The literacy campaigns appear, nevertheless, to have been marked by the massive levels of gender inequality and poverty at the time of the revolution. As mentioned above, the levels of illiteracy were very high: the schooling rate for the primary school in the early 1970's was slightly above 80%, leaving close to 20% of children without access to school, and the levels of illiteracy for women double that of men. Women rights were completely denied during the dictatorship: there were no voting rights for most women, and men, as fathers and husbands, had the ultimate word in all aspects of life. In this context, the affirmation of equality of rights made a huge difference, even if it took decades to bridge the gap between policy and real life. On the other hand, literacy campaigns also exposed the extremely high levels of poverty and lack of basic resources and infrastructures that characterized especially the rural world. Life expectancy in 1970 was 67.1 years (and grew to 72.9 by 1985 when Portugal entered the European Economic Community), infant mortality rate was 55.5 (and declined to 17.8 by 1985), and GDP per capita was 6,201.6 Euro in 1970 (and grew to 9,121.5 Euro by 1985). So, the idea expressed by our interviewees of a sense of urgency must also be interpreted in this context, together with the revolutionary climate of the time.

Even if vague, the descriptions reveal that Paulo Freire's ideas and method were central in the (very short-term) training of the literacy monitors who, not surprisingly, appear then to implement a combination of Freire, intuition, enthusiasm and learning-by-doing, testing different approaches, tools and methods. Therefore, it is essential to further research the uses of Freire's method, but also the possible implication of this experience in the *conscientization* processes of both young literacy monitors and adult learners.

Clearly, both groups learned a lot from the experience that appears to have resulted in the encounter of two worlds: the world of the adult illiterates, from rural and working-class backgrounds, and the world of the young literacy monitors, frequently from urban contexts and educated, middle-class backgrounds. This encounter is therefore twofold: it has effects on both sides, as two different cultures come together, acknowledge each other and learn from each other. For the adults, learning to read and write, in spite of different motivations, is inevitably an empowering process that brings about social autonomy to communicate, to deliberate and to be aware of the world. As Maria Beatriz Duarte (Geschwind & Nascimento, 1992, p. 9) puts it in the introduction of a book on literacy campaigns in Brazil: "It is impossible to watch passively the changes that take place within each literate little head (...) the brightness of the eyes is more intense, and their lives are more colorful ... after all, they read the world". On the other side, young educated literacy monitors have what they describe as a life changing event that also allowed them to expand their understanding of the world, suggesting that there might

also have occurred a conscientization process also noted in other experiences. As Torres (1990, p. 123) states, the

experience in literacy leaves in students and teachers an indelible mark (...) in the rupture that this experience brings regarding their everyday lives, in their own self-discovery of unknown capabilities and values, of that 'sense of community' that allows them to feel socially useful, developing new cooperation and solidarity values.

Literacy campaigns are part of the Portuguese historical, social and educational patrimony, while simultaneously revealing the construction of democracy as they involved a discussion on the "democratization of knowledge [that implied] the educational debate, the ideological debate, and the political debate itself" (Torres, 1990, p. 124). Therefore, reconstructing the memories of literacy campaigns, a topic undervalued in educational research in Portugal, is essential for a broad understanding of the revolution and the transition to democracy in its very complex relationship with education.

In sum, it is our goal to deepen the discussion on "[h]ow Freirean" (Boughton & Durnan, 2014, p. 562) were these campaigns, namely in the context of a high level of social mobilization, characterized by a transversal political debate, and the implicit risk of indoctrination. It is thus necessary to recover these memories in order to understand the ongoing debates on the relationships between literacy, participation, social transformation and, ultimately, democracy – considering the vast interpretations that this concept might entail.

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Endnote

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