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EAST TIMOR 1974/5: DECOLONISATION, A NATION-IN-WAITING AND A FREIRE-INSPIRED ADULT LITERACY CAMPAIGN

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This talk draws on historical research on literacy which was carried out in East-Timor and Portugal from 2009 to 2012¹. East-Timor is a former Portuguese colony in South East Asia and it finally became an independent nation in 2002. During a brief period of decolonisation initiated in 1974, after the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, the pro-Independence party, FRETILIN, launched a literacy campaign which was inspired by the work of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. The campaign was initiated by a group of students returning from Lisbon to join the struggle for independence against Portuguese colonial rule. The campaign was conducted in Tetun, the local *lingua franca*, and was based on a literacy manual, *Rai Timor, Rai Ita Nain* (the Land of Timor, our Land).

The brief period of decolonisation (in 1974 and 1975) was brought to an abrupt end with the Indonesian invasion of East-Timor in December 1975. However, the literacy campaign continued as an integral part of the East Timorese Resistance to the invasion and subsequent occupation. It continued on the clandestine front and on the armed front, behind the lines, in the mountains of East-Timor (Cabral and Martin-Jones, 2008). Within this broad historical context, the aim of the research was to provide a historical account of the FRETILIN literacy campaign, including the range of social actors who were involved, their ideas about literacy and about literacy pedagogy and the changing conditions for the campaign.

In this talk, we will give an account of insights gleaned from oral history interviews conducted with the surviving participants of the 1974/5 adult literacy campaign. The focus will be on the diverse backgrounds of the participants in the campaign, their understanding of its purposes, on the ways in which they talked about literacy pedagogy and on the rapidly changing conditions in which they worked. We will also note the increasing participation of women. The presentation will be based on our analysis of a corpus of 22 interviews with East Timorese men and women, conducted in East-Timor and in Portugal in 2009, 2010 and 2011. It also draws on archival material from East-Timor and Portugal, including documents and photographs.

References

Cabral, E. (2012) Discourses about adult literacy and about liberation interwoven: recollections of the adult literacy campaign of 1974/5. In: M. Leach (et al.) *Communicating new research on Timor-Leste*. (Proceedings of the Timor-Leste Studies Association Conference, June-July 2011, Comoro, Dili).

Cabral, E. & Martin-Jones, M. 2008 Writing the Resistance: literacy in East Timor 1975-1999. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 11, 2, 149-169.

¹ The research reported here is part of a wider research project based at Tilburg University, the Netherlands, entitled: *Becoming a nation of readers in Timor-Leste: Language Policy and Adult Literacy Development in a Multilingual Context*. The project is funded by NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development, Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (project no: W01.65.315.00). The principal investigator for the project is Sjaak Kroon.