

East-Timor in 1974/5: decolonisation, a nation-in-waiting and a Freire-inspired adult literacy campaign

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and

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Map of the World



República Democrática de Timor-Leste



- Portuguese colonial rule 1516-1975
- 1974 Decolonisation and the emergence of political parties
- 1975 The Indonesian invasion and occupation
- 1999-2002 UN Transitional Administration

The history of adult literacy in Timor-Leste

A three year project investigating three moments in the history of Timor-Leste:

- The FRETILIN literacy campaign (1974/5)
- Subsequent adult literacy activities (1975-1999)
- Adult literacy initiatives by national and international NGOs (1999 to Independence in 2002)

Research questions

- What types of adult literacy provision were there in Timor-Leste during different periods of political & social change?
- How and where was the literacy teaching done? By whom and why? What languages were employed and, to what extent were local cultural and linguistic practices taken into account?
- What approaches to literacy teaching and learning were adopted and why? What views of literacy and orthography informed these approaches? And what views of adult learners and literacy learning?

Adult literacy campaign 1974-5

- Estimated rate of literacy in 1974 was 20% of the population (Taylor, 1999)
- Campaign led by some of the university students returning from Portugal in 1974 e.g. Mau Lear (António Carvarinho) & Sahe (Vicente Reis)
- Literacy in Tetun
- Handbook: *Rai Timor, Rai Ita Niang (A Terra de Timor, a nossa Terra)*
- Inspired by the writing of Paulo Freire & the campaigns in Guiné-Bissau & Mozambique
- All the university students from Portugal lost their lives between 1975-1979

Researching the 1974-5 literacy campaign

Research methods:

- Oral history interviews in Portugal & Timor-Leste with participants in the FRETILIN literacy campaign
- Library and archival research
- Gathering of documents and photographic records

In Timor-Leste, October-November, 2009

In Portugal, July 2010

In Timor-Leste, November-December 2010
& June-July 2011

Data for this paper:

Library & archival materials

22 oral history interviews

- 16 women & 6 men

- 16 interviews in Tetun & 6 in
Portuguese

EC's interviewees: 4 groups

UNETIM members

- Group (of 9): former secondary students who were trained in Freirean methods by the university students who returned from Portugal in 1974
- Group (of 5): former secondary students trained after the Indonesian invasion
- Group (of 5): former secondary student volunteers with no training

Other participants:

- Group (of 3): former primary school teachers who volunteered of their own initiative

Diverse views & experiences

- Volunteers with different pathways into the campaign
- With different understandings of the nature and goals of the campaign
- With different ideas about literacy pedagogy

So...the focus of this paper is on the interviews with the Group of 9 (who were in the first cohort to be trained – by the students from Portugal)

1. Preliminary data analysis: themes

1. The campaign leadership & the training
2. The groups of political activists involved
3. Interviewees' accounts of the purposes of the literacy campaign
4. Their ideas about literacy pedagogy
5. Conditions for the conduct of the campaign: before/after the Indonesian invasion

Leadership & training

- The interviews revealed the prominent role of Mau Lear & Sahe, though other students from Portugal were also mentioned e.g. Hatta (Hamis Bassarewan) & Muky (Rosa Bonaparte).
- Some members of the 1974/5 leadership of FRETILIN also provided training & were mentioned e.g. Roque Rodrigues
- The training was initiated in Dili in late 1974 & combined political education with Freirean methods
- It was held in the Liceu and in the gymnasium of the Escola Técnica

Extract 1: Interview with PC, in Portuguese (20/10/09)

- EC: (Você) lembra-se de alguém que estava envolvida, tanto como professor ou monitor?
- PC: Ah... o nosso professor que dava-nos as reuniões era o Vicente Reis, Vicente Reis que dava ne! O irmão Mari Alkatiri, algumas vezes, deu-nos aqui no ginásio e a Rosa Bonaparte

Extract 2: Interview with MM, in Tetun
(19/10/09)

- EC: Ita hanoin hetan ema ruma ne'ebe partisipa hanesan mestre ka hanorin mestre sira?
- MM: Ah! Fou-foun ne'e iha kamarada Sahe, Mau Lear ho Hatta sira na'in tolu mak fó orientasoens ne'e.

Extract 3: Interview with ZS, in Tetun,
22/10/09

- EC: Antes ita halo sá ida?
- ZS:Iha UNETIM ne'e mak ami hetan formasaun, primeiru husi señor Roque Rodrigues, Roque Rodrigues mak fó formasaun, depois estudantes sira iha lisboa nian ne'e fila mai hamutuk ho Roque fó formasaun ba ami kona ba política, mos ba métodu de alfabetizasaun kona ba métodu Paulo Freire nian. Entaun ami halao métodu ne'e iha 75 nia laran iha fulan Abril, Maio.

2. Main groups involved

- União Nacional dos Estudantes Timorenses (UNETIM) – student branch of FRETILIN. (Upper secondary school students)
- Organização Popular das Mulheres Timorensas (OPMT) – women’s branch of FRETILIN
- Organização Popular da Juventude Timorense (OPJT) – youth branch of FRETILIN

Extract 4: Interview with AB, in Portuguese (15/10/09)

- EC: Ensinava sozinha ou com outros? Com quem? Eles eram membros da FRETILIN ou da UNETIM?
- AB: Sim, eu fui ensinar, nós éramos em grupo...nós éramos da UNETIM e ainda não... quando iniciamos não nos inscrevemos ainda como militantes ou membros da FRETILIN! Éramos estudantes, juntamo-nos na organização que foi fundada primeiro...porque, como sabe... eh...havia pouca população com certa formação... educação.

Extract 5: Interview with AB (15/10/09)

- EC: Será que lembra mais de alguma coisa sobre a experiência do ensino de alfabetização?
- AB: Agosto, exactamente a 28 de Agosto, eh... um número relevante que estava na UNETIM, estudantes, mulheres, feminina, passou a integrar na organização popular da mulher Timor.... OPMT continuou mais ou menos com as actividades que a UNETIM tinha começado!

Extract 6: Interview with PC, in Portuguese,
20/10/09

- EC: Ensinava sozinho(a) ou com outros? Com quem? Eles eram membros da FRETILIN ou da UNETIM?
- PC: Sim, fazíamos parte da organização OPJT ne, Organização Popular da Juventude Timorense e somos da UNETIM – o bloco da UNETIM, sim!

3. Group of nine: their accounts of the purposes of the campaign

Those who were trained first as adult literacy volunteers (group of 9) saw the literacy campaign as closely tied to politics. They mentioned two broad political purposes:

- Raising awareness (conscientização)
- Liberation from colonialism and the struggle for self-determination

Group of nine: their accounts of the purposes of the campaign

Extract 7: Interview with AB, in Portuguese (15/10/09)

- EC: [A perguntar sobre os estudantes adultos] Como, e até que ponto, que eles usavam aquilo que aprendiam?
- AB: Sim! Eu penso que até certo modo conseguiu atingir os objetivos, porque não era só ler e escrever mas mas [também] a consciencialização.

Group of nine: their accounts of the purposes of the campaign

Extract 8: Interview with MM, in Tetun (19/10/09)

- EC: Buat saida mak partisipante sira aprende?
- MM: Tempu ida hanorin consciencializa koalia deit pois tempu ida hakerek depois kanta... kanta música revolucionária nebé ke bele dada sira, dada sira, loke sira nia matan, sira neon katak buat sira nebé ke colonialista sira halu ba ita ne'e lalos duni. ... Laos deit iha ne'e mas iha mos fatin nebé nebé alfabetizasaun ne'e iha hotu. Tamba momentu [ne'e] ami nia planu UNETIM ne'e atu loke iha território tomak nebé estudante sira ne'e fahe duni ba iha be, fahe duni ba distrito, distrito.

Group of nine: their accounts of the purposes of the campaign

Extract 9: Interview with PC, in Portuguese (20/10/09)

- EC: O que é que os participantes aprenderam?
- PC: Além de ler e escrever ...também o nosso objectivo é politizar e fazer campanhas de agitação, semear no espírito dele, o espírito de... da independência nacional ne? ...Porque, na altura, o nosso objectivo era como politizar o nosso povo e por outro lado também queremos que... queremos levar o nosso povo para conhecer ler e escrever ne?

4. Group of nine: their ideas about literacy pedagogy

- They followed a Freirean method e.g. use of key words in Tetun (like *fós* [rice], or *tabaco* [tobacco]).
- They engaged in dialogue with learners about how to ‘read the world’, in particular the world of Portuguese colonialism
- They combined the teaching of reading and writing with raising awareness (consciencialização)
(See longer examples on the handout)

Extracts 10-13

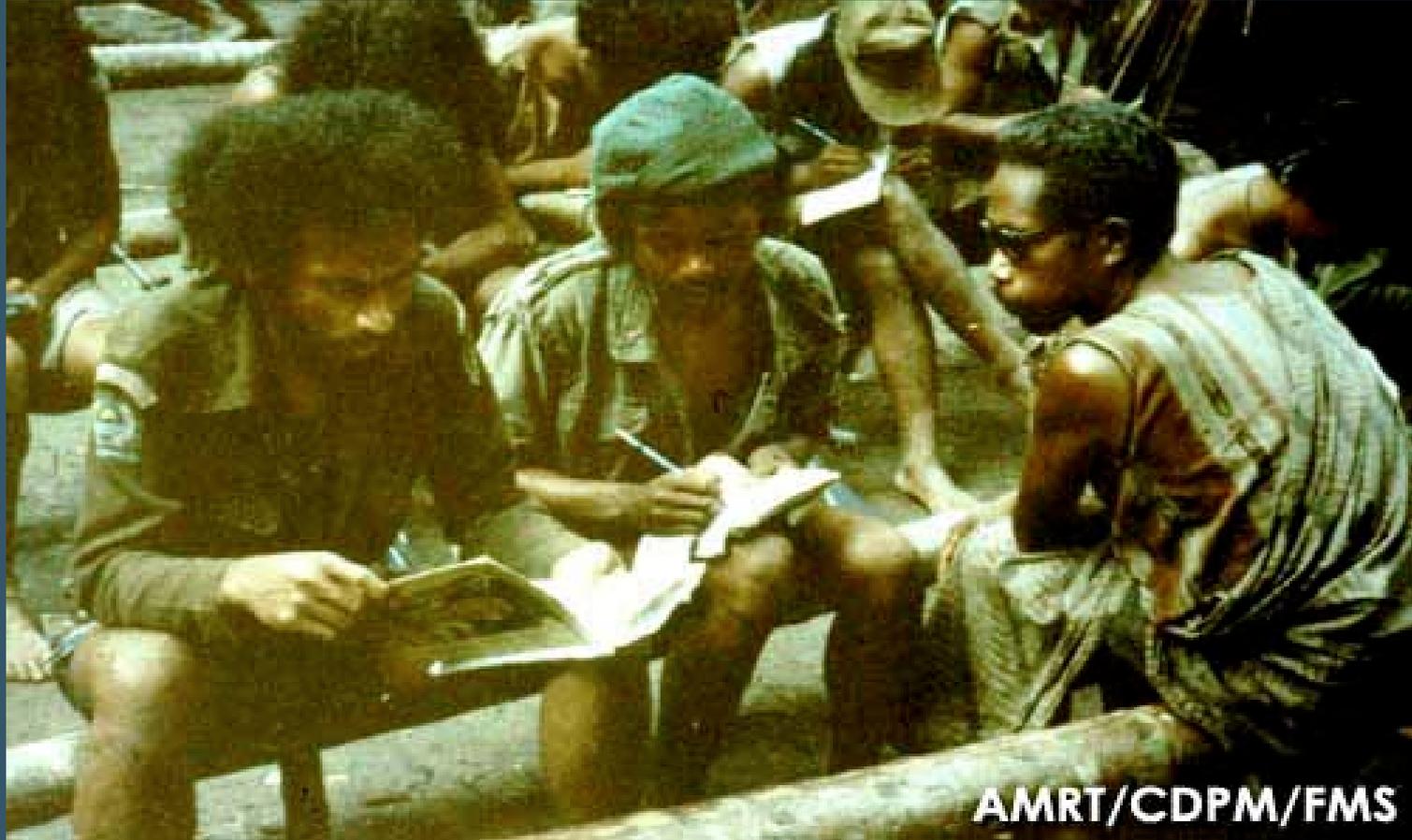
5. Conditions for the campaign: before the Indonesian invasion

- First classes held in Kintal Bot, Dili 1975
- Spaces to meet: classes (for 4/5 people) held in private houses
- Those who were trained had access to the literacy manual (*Rai Timor, Rai Ita Niang*)
- They also had notes to work from
- September 1975 – increasing threat of invasion & many students volunteered to go to the military front
- The literacy campaign in Dili (the capital) ended but the campaign in other districts continued e.g. in two literacy centres: in Aileu and Bucoli - Centro Piloto 1 & 2

Conditions for the campaign: after the invasion

- Literacy campaign continued ‘behind the lines’ in the mountains of East Timor
- New volunteers were trained by those from the first cohort
- Few writing materials available so used natural resources e.g. charcoal, bamboo, writing in sand on the river bank (as shown by the following photographic evidence from the archives).
- Occasionally writing materials were supplied by the clandestine front

A literacy class in a makeshift camp behind the lines

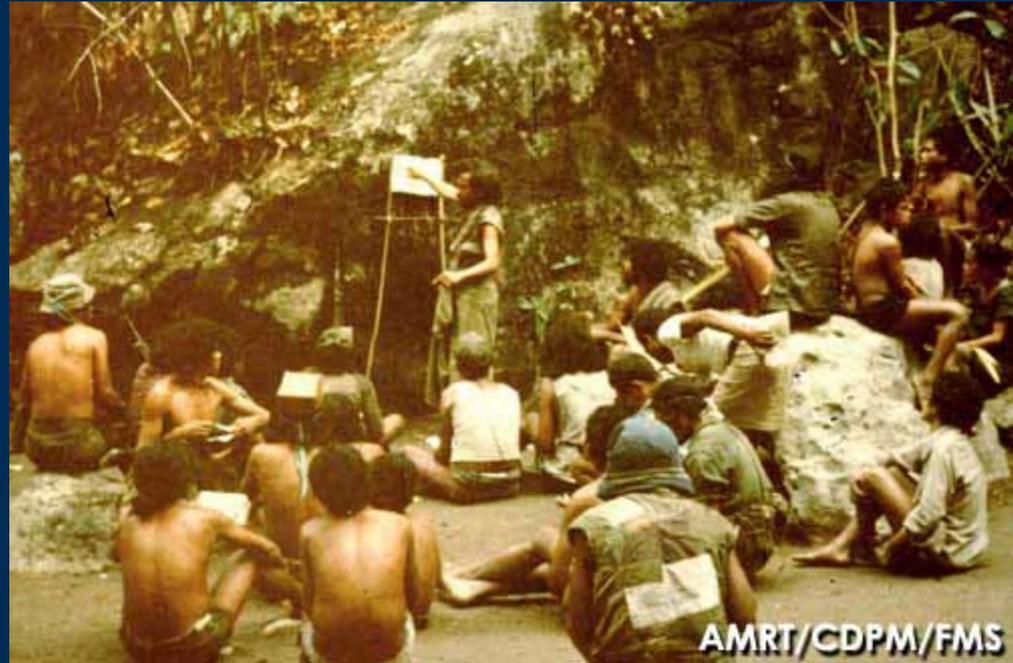


AMRT/CDPM/FMS

Another literacy class



A literacy class on a river bank



A small literacy class with learners of different ages



Women students reading by torch light



Key insights thus far

- The first training was mostly provided by the students returning from Portugal in late 1974
- The first cohort of volunteers began teaching in Kintal Bot, Dili in early 1975
- UNETIM volunteers initiated the campaign and OPMT & OPJT built on their initiative. They were involved in taking the campaign out to the regions e.g. Centro Piloto 1 in Aileu
- The interviewees in the first cohort of volunteers were broadly familiar with Freirean 'methods'

Key insights thus far

- Group of nine: their discourses about the campaign were closely intertwined with discourses of liberation
- Those in the group of nine (& others in this first cohort) went on to train new groups of volunteers
- Across all 22 interviewees there was a diversity of views and experiences e.g. about the campaign & about literacy pedagogy.
- The campaign continued after the invasion despite the deteriorating conditions

References

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Thank you!

Your comments would be welcome,
since this is work in progress.

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