



# Circulation, resignification and criticism of a “possible dream”: introductory words

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## ► To cite this version:

Mélanie Toulhoat, Débora Dias. Circulation, resignification and criticism of a “possible dream”: introductory words. Lusotopie, 2023, XXII (1), 10.4000/lusotopie.7240 . hal-04437437

**HAL Id: hal-04437437**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04437437v1>**

Submitted on 4 Feb 2024

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## Lusotopie

Recherches politiques internationales sur les espaces  
issus de l'histoire et de la colonisation portugaises

XXII(1) | 2023

Circulações e ressignificações internacionais dos  
trabalhos, métodos e práticas de Paulo Freire

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### Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/lusotopie/7240>

DOI: 10.4000/lusotopie.7240

ISSN: 1768-3084

### This article is a translation of:

Circulações, ressignificações e críticas a um “sonho possível”: palavras introdutórias - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/lusotopie/7235> [pt]

### Publisher

Idemec - UMR 7307

### Electronic reference

Mélanie Toulhoat and Débora Dias, “Circulation, resignification and criticism of a “possible dream”: introductory words”, *Lusotopie* [Online], XXII(1) | 2023, Online since 01 October 2023, connection on 08 December 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/lusotopie/7240> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/lusotopie.7240>

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The problem faced by all those, even at different levels, involved as educators in a process of freedom, inside or outside of the school system, but always within society (strategically outside of the system but tactically inside), is knowing what to do, how and when to do it, who to do it with, why, against whom and in favour of whom. [...] What seems to me to be fundamental is clarity regarding the political option of the educator, which implies the principles and values that they should have, in other words, clarity about the “possible dream” that should be made a reality. The “possible dream” should always be present in our reflections on methods and techniques. There is indestructible solidarity between them and this “possible dream”.  
Paulo Freire s.d.<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Going back to the sources and trying to decipher the writings of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (1921-1997) in his contexts; giving space to the imagination and creativity in the scope of academic research and in other areas of knowledge production; thinking about the diversity of the emancipatory educational practices inspired by Freirean theory... these are the goals of the “International circulation and resignification of the work, methods and practices of Paulo Freire” dossier published by the *Lusotopie* journal.
- 2 The initial ambitions were built around an invitation: the challenge posed was the construction of a collective reflection on various time, geographic and subject scales,

on the circulation, reappropriation and problems of the educational work and methods developed by Paulo Freire between the 1960s and the end of the 20th century. It was also a question of considering the possible (or not) transposition of the inseparable bonds between literacy, popular education and awareness-raising, pillars of the different experiments idealised and consolidated by the educator and the different working groups throughout his long career in education, in Brazil and around the world. We wanted to try to position Freire and Freirean theory, the projects undertaken, the methods used and the international and collective dimensions as driving forces of change and reinvention, whose historical and educational reach is still being broadly studied.

## **“Experiences are not transplanted, they are reinvented”: the articles in the dossier**

- 3 This *Lusotopie* dossier invites interdisciplinary reflection from different perspectives on the circulation and resignification of the theories and proposals developed by Paulo Freire in the 1950s, which was before he became world famous for his adult education experiment in Angicos in 1963. As we will see below, the dialogue between knowledge production areas, fields of thought and research methods could not possibly be excluded. Apart from trying to position Paulo Freire and his work, methodologies and practices in a historical context, as well as the scope of groups of partners and co-workers, on different scales, we also deemed it essential to open doors to comparative approaches and different visions, while always bearing in mind the possible connections between educational process, popular education inside and outside of the official education system and awareness-raising.
- 4 From this perspective, we open the dossier with the text “Memories of (Un)Freire literacy policies in Southern Africa from the 1970s on: telling the (hi)story through life histories and photography of (dis)empowerment in Mozambique”, by Xénia Venusta de Carvalho. Based on text, oral and photographic sources, the article analyses the mechanisms for coming up with an idea of nation in Mozambique, through the Bagamoyo School study developed by the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) in Tanzania between 1970 and 1975. The history and the memories of the training centre for soldiers fighting for independence during the anticolonial war (1964-1974), which also became a key location for education and literacy after the visit by Paulo Freire in 1972, are told through the verbal and visual narratives of the first teachers and the FRELIMO archives on literacy policies. In short, the article also says a lot about the complexity of the political period of independence and the early years after the end of colonialism in Mozambique, analysing political, linguistic and educational dilemmas and coalescence around schooling and popular education, raising awareness of the reality experienced and the reading of the world.
- 5 Next, Irène Pereira, in the article “La conscience opprimée. Une analyse philosophique à partir de la *Pédagogie des opprimés* de Paulo Freire”, proposes a rereading of the emblematic work by the Brazilian educator on the philosophical theorising on the oppression of the conscience. A specialist in critical pedagogy, the author shows that the work of Freire sought to give an elaborate, original and complex response to a very large political and philosophical problem that runs through philosophy and human and social sciences: what would stop oppressed people or sectors from revolting against the

sources of oppression more frequently in a more substantial or spontaneous way? The author intends to identify and understand the current issues of the subjectivity theory in order to reflect on its application in contemporary situations of violence and oppression. From an analysis of the alienation mechanism in Freire's work, the article underlines the consequences of this theory for the production and development of popular education projects from an emancipatory point of view, where freedom allows the oppressed to make themselves a subject, through case studies in the area of feminist social work and community psychology.

- 6 The analysis of a letter presented as a key element for refuting absences and demonstrating the increase in educational exchange programmes in the period before the 1964 coup in Brazil is the starting point for the article "Ressignificar: Paulo Freire e a Escolinha de Arte do Recife". Founded in 1953 by educator Noemia Varela (1917-2016) and other artists, educators and intellectuals, the Escolinha, as it became known, is still in operation after 70 years, in a project whose roots lie in the interaction between art and education. The article, co-written by Teresinha Maria de Castro Vilela and Aristóteles de Paula Berino, highlights a letter from Noemia Varela addressed to the multifaceted artist and one of the founders of Escolinha de Arte do Brasil, Augusto Rodrigues (1913-1993). The article claims that this is "one of the few documents in the public domain that confirms the name of Paulo Freire in the history of Escolinha de Arte do Recife". If the analysis of the source contributes to better putting the ideas of Freire in the field of art and education into historical context, it is also part of a broader trajectory where the actual project also suffered an abrupt cut following the military coup and the repression of the educator.
- 7 In "Musicalidade Crítica: Ressignificando as teorias de Paulo Freire para o campo da Educação Musical", Alan Caldas Simões develops an empirical-theoretical proposal where he accepts his critical subjectivity. To carry out the case study in a basic and vocational education school in Minas Gerais (Brazil), the work of the Brazilian educator is brought into a dialogue with English musical educator Lucy Green. While teaching music to teenagers and young people, the professor and author mobilises Freirean concepts such as "consciousness", "banking model of education" and "problem-posing education", to test the processes and practices developed by the educator in English schools. Subscribing to the same question proposed by Green: Is it possible to learn music at school the way popular musicians learn and use these didactic principles to resignify the role of teachers and pupils in music classes? Writing in the first person to affirm a path of experimentation and constant reflection does not conceal the challenges, doubts and questions that come up in the field. In an invitation to reading and the continuity of theory and practice in the classroom, the author highlights the tensions between the individual purposes and the collective processes being implemented, with a view to transformations in education.
- 8 The text written by the Swiss contemporary art group Microsillons is also the result of reflection, this time collective reflection, on the possible reinventions of Freirean pedagogy in the artistic and educational fields; it is an analysis of the project "Réinventer la pédagogie des opprimé·e·x·s pour favoriser la participation culturelle dans les institutions d'art contemporain suisses" (January 2021-January 2023) (RPO). The article "Réinventer la pédagogie des opprimé·e·x·s pour développer une approche dialogique de l'art contemporain" analyses the current possibilities of a reencounter with Freirean pedagogy and emancipation through the lens of contemporary art, using

four experiments developed inside artistic institutions in Switzerland, in partnership with clubs and associations. Embedded in a dialogic conception of artistic practices, the work by the Microsillons group reveals an assertive commitment to research-action and a firm belief in the political option of opening up a world of possibilities through art. The text, written by different people, aims to analyse the contemporary legacy of Freire’s presence in Geneva when he was working for the World Council of Churches, while at the same time producing a situated analysis of the resignification work done by the group with different audiences and cultural mediators, geared towards proposing alternatives to the dominant model in artistic education.

- 9 Collective writing is also a basis for the reflection proposed in the article “Leitoras de Paulo Freire na França: as bonitezas das andarilhagens de mulheres migrantes e os desafios da reinvenção”. The authors, Ana Lúcia Souza de Freitas, Maria Luísa Souto Maior and Claudia Becerra Baudry, refer to the practices of the Paulo Freire reading group in Paris. The text presents and analyses the different experiments developed from the first workshop on pedagogical letters held in November 2019, recalling the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. From the daily experiences of the members of the group and a rereading of key concepts of Freirean theory, such as “beauty” and “wanderings”, the proposal develops tips for reflecting on the different courses of action taken. They emphasise the contemporary Brazilian political context and its consequences on the very recent migration mechanisms, as well as for the organisation of entities created abroad in defence of Brazilian democracy. The authors reflect on the group practices to analyse the meetings, the challenges and the problems that characterise the first group. In a first attempt to theorise these ongoing experiments, the article suggests a series of ways that could be explored to continue and expand the different aspects of the group work.
- 10 In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Culture Circle experience was revisited by André Gustavo Ferreira da Silva and Allan Diêgo Rodrigues Figueiredo in the article “Ressignificações em torno dos círculos de cultura freireanos no espaço-tempo on-line no (con)texto da Covid-19: reflexões para a formação política dos sujeitos sociais”. The authors discuss the online experience developed during the “*Paulo Freire, o educador do povo*” course held in the MST Landless Workers Settlement called Normandia (Pernambuco/Brazil). Due to the health obstacles, the Movement opted to make use of virtual spaces, conceiving new and contemporary lines to the pedagogical experiences that started in Angicos and the Popular Culture Centres in the early 1960s. The authors analysed the 2020 and 2021 experiences through participant observation and sources from the participants and organizers.
- 11 This route is dealt with in the text “The timeliness of Freirean praxis, the dialectics of situated criticism and the anti-Freire movements. Written dialogue with Joana Salém Vasconcelos, by Débora Dias and Mélanie Toulhoat”. We underline *written* to describe how the proposal was built and the final shape it took, as well as to suggest a moving closer to the potentials of correspondence as an institution of meeting and producing knowledge. From Portugal, the coordinators of the Dossier sent questions on four topics: “The reception of Paulo Freire in Brazil”; “The detractions and the detractors of Paulo Freire on the right and the far-right”; “The Marxist criticism of Paulo Freire and the discordant dialogues”; “Contemporary reading of Paulo Freire and his effective transformational capacity”. Brazilian historian Joana Salém Vasconcelos, a public intellectual, university professor, co-founder of the Popular Education Emancipa

network, delved into topics that refer to the current state of Freire’s pedagogy – where social movements are its strongest driving forces. The highlight is the leading role of public schools in Freirean pedagogy as a strategic field of dispute. In this area, the author reflects on the contradiction and challenges in the field of education, as well as the ongoing clashes with the advance of the far-right worldwide. From a historical and philosophical perspective, the work of Paulo Freire is brought into a dialogue with authors such as E.P. Thompson, Rosa Luxemburgo, Georg Lukács and Franz Fanon, for example.

- 12 We point out that all the articles contain concrete experiences that invite continued interpretation and criticism and that must be constantly updated according to their social contexts: whether among educations fighting for colonial freedom in Mozambique in the 1970s, immigrant women readers in France during the Covid-19 pandemic, art teachers in Recife in the 1950s or music teachers in Belo Horizonte in the 2000s, as well as cultural mediators in Geneva and disadvantaged young people all over Brazil who want to go on to higher education in the near future. Following the perspective defined by Paulo Freire himself in *Cartas à Guiné-Bissau*, where he says that “experiments cannot be transplanted; they must be reinvented” (Freire 1977: 17), this *Lusotopie* dossier is consequently fuelled and coordinated by the analysis of these multiple reinventions and also by the immense diversity of educational projects with an emancipatory leaning inspired by Freirean pedagogy, which are not here but take part in the dialogue for this proposal.

## A dossier of dialogues; intentions and context reading

- 13 The essence of the dialogue is a matter of importance in the theoretical construction of the work of Paulo Freire. Like a foundation highlighted in *Educação como Prática da Liberdade* (Freire 1967), it is developed from its constituent elements in *Pedagogia do Oprimido* when dealing with the correlation between problem-posing education and the dialogic nature of education (Freire 2010: 89). For Freire, dialogue is a human phenomenon, “mediated by the world, to *speak it*, therefore not limited to the I-thou relationship” (*ibidem*: 91). If the word (logos) is in the etymology, the educator calls attention to “something more” of this as a means to make the dialogues occur. He advocates radical interaction, in the word, between action and reflection: “There is no true word that is not at the same time praxis” (*ibid.*: 89). His commitment to its preparation is reflected in the ways and titles that all his publications also adopt: letters (Freire 1977, Freire 1980, Freire 1993, Freire 1994), debates (Freire 1979a), interviews<sup>2</sup> (Freire 1982a), talks and co-written texts (Freire & Illich 1975, Freire 1979b, Freire *et al.* 1980, Freire & Guimarães 1982 and 1984, Freire & Faundez 1985, Freire *et al.* 1985, Freire & Horton 2002).
- 14 Looking closely at the Freirean conceptualisation of dialogue, we seek to highlight this dimension and use it as inspiration, process and learning. Seen as a whole, the proposal also includes dialogue between understandings in different areas, whether these are history, music, education, anthropology, pedagogy, art, social services or group experiments. The topic, which runs through the entire Dossier, is presented in the discussions that make up this volume. Such as in the text “Musicalidade Crítica: Ressignificando as teorias de Paulo Freire para o campo da Educação Musical”, which defines “dialogue” as a “driving force of critical thinking and problem-posing,



establishing a real connection with the subjects” (§ 32). The author reflects on the existential, ethical-political and methodological dimensions and the use of Freirean dialogue in teaching music to children at schools. The members of the Swiss contemporary art group Microsilons based their practices on the theoretical legacy of “dialogical art” (§ 1), while the members of the Paulo Freire Reading Club in France show how the search for and the development of a collective space for dialogue were crucial to the gradual construction of their educational and activist activities (§ 33). One of the texts affirmatively looks at this meeting place and act of creation, which we call “Dialogue in writing”, with historian Joana Salém Vasconcelos.

- 15 Looking at dialogue as an exercise, this dossier sought to remain open to the diversity of expressions, interpretations and positionings. This is why there was no issue in defining a linguistic variant to be required, for example, to use Freirean or Freirian, both of which are popular. Maintaining the clarity and coherence of choice, each text assumes its own adopted language referential, whether in English, in French or in Portuguese. This is also reflected in the use of terms that, in certain places, may or may not be accepted by their communities. This is the case of the adoption of the term “black people” in Brazil, while in Portugal, the same expression can have pejorative connotations. We leave you this invitation to read the texts and their contexts. And if mutual interest aimed at reflection and discussion is one of the interests guiding this dossier, we know and we assume that this does not imply unrestricted agreement<sup>3</sup>.

## After the centenary...? The timeliness of the future

- 16 On the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Paulo Freire, the period around 2021 was characterised by a significant number of events, publications, seminars and discussions about the contemporary nature of the emancipatory educational practices developed by the thinker, patron of Brazilian education since 2012<sup>4</sup>. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and the rise of the far-right in the world, with particularly drastic consequences in Brazil<sup>5</sup>, the event took place at a time when there was intense need to find the “speaking of the world”, and its timeliness in discussing the terms of its transformation became clear.
- 17 In the words of Paulo Freire, the “world *spoken*, in turn, again poses problems for the *speakers*, requiring them to *speak* again” (Freire 2010: 90). Paying attention to what the basis for the dialogue is, we reach the phase of assessing and reflecting on the next moment. Following this torrent of initiatives, somewhat renewed, the time comes for challenges, learning, taking stock and rethinking routes.
- 18 In this way, the stated search for dialogue also highlighted the major challenges in the clash with antidiologue, imposed and fostered in several areas. Notably, in the education area, *antidiologue* is associated with historical and fundamental challenges, reaching the extremes of detraction and violence. It is not by chance that in Brazil, for example, the rise and arrival to power of the far-right spreading through international networks went hand in hand with a mass movement to criminalise education (Dantas 2022), pointing to Paulo Freire as one of the main enemies constantly on the attack<sup>6</sup>. Built on well-known bases, there was strong emergence of the hatred in conservative sectors, which widely associated Paulo Freire with “ideological subversion”, “communism” and attacks on morals by the thinker who, supposedly, invaded and took over the public school and university system in the country.



- 19 In some cases, in response to the even more adverse political circumstances in the last paragraph, we underline the variety of popular education initiatives launched or that continued to exist during this period: whether from the school system, as projects extending to universities, or implemented autonomously by social movements. We mention here, out of many others, the example of the work done by Rádio Paulo Freire, organised by communication teachers at Pernambuco Federal University, through making a connection between training, experimentation and citizenship in the area of public communication<sup>7</sup>. As well as the activities of the National Paulo Freire Day organised by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), which included international solidarity campaigns with the Internationalist Samora Machel Brigade in Zambia<sup>8</sup>. It is in this context marked by contemporary clashes that the many dimensions of the works of Freire take on particular resonance.
- 20 Aware that the tasks required encounter difficulties in the precarious nature of the academic world and associations, we highlight the relevance and the need for a joint effort to be made for renewed, in-depth analyses to be made of the methods and practices developed by Freire and his teams on subjects such as dialogical and critical education, popular education, emancipatory pedagogy, participatory communication, cooperation, sustainable development, adult literacy, community work, decolonisation of education, the struggle against oppression and racial, social, economic and cultural inequality, and many more. In the meandering efforts that unite theory and action, it seems to us that it is important to value more honesty and openness in some and call for this in others in relation to the limits, the difficulties and the obstacles encountered in the implementation of emancipatory projects. The idealisation or the instrumental use of concepts detached from their contexts; the acritical use of terms voided of their meanings, the Manicheism that theoretical deception or redundancy are misconceptions that, in the end, can lead to works or initiatives pretentiously described as or taken to be progressive, to accentuate conservativeness or even reactionism.

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- 21 In 1980, shortly after returning to Brazil following 15 years in exile, Paulo Freire was one of the guests at the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Congress of Education Supervisors in Goiânia, Brazil. Along with other educators such as Marilena Chauí, Rubem Alves and Miguel Arroyo, he chose the title "Education. The possible dream" for the conference, which was then made into an article for the book *O educador: vida e morte*, organised by his long-time friend, Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, who passed away in 2023. Maintaining the rhythms of the spoken word in the written article, he developed an issue that he said he had been reflecting on for some years, about "a place in education or in educational practices for possible dreams" (Freire 1982b: 99).
- 22 For Paulo Freire, the possible dream or the feasible dream (a term he also uses), requires us to think every day about our practices for constantly discovering the limits of this and the free spaces to be filled. The criterion of the possibility or impossibility of these dreams is *historical and social* and not *individual*, so too is the way they relate to liberatory education as opposed to domesticating education. It is not by chance that when speaking on this subject, he referred to the words of a soldier in Guinea-Bissau about Amílcar Cabral, seen as a prophet because "he is a man who lives so intensely

today, and because of that he can figure out tomorrow” (*ibid.*: 101). This is how Paulo Freire makes his appeal to the educators at the meeting, transmuted into readers in the book: “visiting tomorrow, the future, now and then for deep engagement with today, with the here, with the now”. On the contrary, they would be under penalty of remaining in a present-past “of routine exploration”. The possible dream for Freire is what is done in the experience of the dynamics between “denouncing and announcing” because it has a Utopian dimension.

- 23 From the epigraph with these “introductory words”, we are also engaging in an exercise of fraternal dialogue, we seek to value consciously and assertively the multitude of interpretations of the complex Freirean theory, which are processed in different places and circulations and on different scales, rejecting a Eurocentric, vertical epistemology. In this continuous process, we highlight the intrinsic link between the “possible dream” and the challenges of seeking out the “feasible unseen”, concepts of the educator that are centred on the possibilities and perspectives of building emancipatory futures.

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## NOTES

1. Source: Working paper by Paulo Freire, s.d. (1970s), "L'alphabétisation et le 'rêve possible'", Geneva, World Council of Churches Archive: 6.  
Original quotation: "Le problème qui se pose à ceux qui, même à des niveaux différents, s'engagent dans un processus de libération en tant qu'éducateurs, à l'intérieur ou en dehors du système scolaire mais toujours à l'intérieur de la société (stratégiquement en dehors du système mais tactiquement à l'intérieur), c'est de savoir ce qu'il faut faire, comment, quand, avec qui, pourquoi, contre qui et en faveur de qui. [...] Ce qui m'apparaît comme fondamental c'est la clarté par rapport à l'option politique de l'éducateur ou de l'éducatrice, ce qui implique des principes et des valeurs qu'il ou qu'elle doit assumer, c'est-à-dire la clarté par rapport au 'rêve possible' devant être concrétisé. Le 'rêve possible' doit toujours être présent dans nos réflexions sur les méthodes et les techniques. Il existe une indestructible solidarité entre elles et ce 'rêve possible'."
2. Of note too, among many others, are the following press interviews: Freire, P. 1977, "Paulo Freire: não há educação neutra" (Interview with Maria Helena Mateus, Maria José Martins & Norma Barata), *Jornal da Educação*, 1: 6-8; Freire, P. 1978, "Paulo Freire no exílio ficou mais brasileiro ainda" (Interview with Claudius Ceccon & Miguel Paiva), *O Pasquim*, 462: 10-14; Freire, P. 1982, "Mitificação, o fantasma que mete medo a Paulo Freire" (Interview with Maria do Rosário Caetano), *Correio Braziliense*, 24 October: 12.
3. The organisers of the dossier use the term "military dictatorship" for the period from 1964 to 1985 in Brazil. They believe that this term speaks to the leading role played by the military on behalf of the regime and the final period is marked by the first civil presidential election, thus ending a cycle of military leaders in this position. However, the term "civil-military dictatorship" could also have been used by the authors and the final milestone of the period taken as 1988, when the first direct municipal elections were held, with the proviso that important historiological debate is underway and there are theoretical divergences as to their use.
4. Federal Law No. 12,612, of 13 April 2012, accessed on 25 July 2023, [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_Ato2011-2014/2012/Lei/L12612.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_Ato2011-2014/2012/Lei/L12612.htm).
5. In April 2021, one third of the daily deaths from Covid in the world were concentrated in Brazil, even with only 3% of the world population, according to data from the World Health Organisation (WHO). Cf. Magenta, M. 2021, "Um terço das mortes no mundo: 3 gráficos fundamentais para entender a pandemia no Brasil", BBC, 2/4/2021 (<https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-56607007>). On 25 July 2023, the updating of the data from the Centre of Strategic Intelligence for the State Management of the Health System (CIEGES), developed by the National Council of Health Secretaries (CONASS), indicated a total of 704,659 confirmed deaths in

Brazil since the beginning of the pandemic (<https://cieges.conass.org.br/paineis/listagem/situacao-de-saude-da-populacao/casos-e-obitos-covid-19>). This extremely high number is linked to the implementation of a genocidal policy of denial, inaction and spreading false information by the government of Jair Bolsonaro.

6. We would like to remind you here that in May 2019, a member of parliament affiliated with the Social Liberal Party (PSL), whose name we have chosen not to mention, proposed a draft bill to repeal Law 12.612. In 2023, the Governor of São Paulo, from the same political field, tried to change the name of a Metro station from Paulo Freire to Fernão Dias, a frontiersman from São Paulo, also unsuccessfully.

7. See the Rádio Paulo Freire website: <https://sites.ufpe.br/rpf/>.

8. According to the MST, in 2021, several events were held based on the Reading, Speaking and Writing the Word and the World during the Fred M'membe Literacy and Agroecology Campaign, whose aim was to teach literacy to 2000 workers in the countryside and in the city in Zambia (<https://mst.org.br/especiais/jornada-nacional-viva-paulo-freire/#fotos>).

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