

# REFLECTIONS FROM A “THIRD AGE” MARRIAGE: PAULO FREIRE’S PEDAGOGY OF REASON, HOPE AND PASSION

An interview with Ana Maria (Nita) Freire

CARMEL BORG & PETER MAYO *University of Malta*

**ABSTRACT.** In an interview with Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo of the University of Malta, Ana Maria (Nita) Freire, Paulo Freire’s widow, sheds light on some of Freire’s concerns during the later stages of his life. She comments on the extent to which those who read him only in translation miss some of the finer points of his very evocative writing in which reason and emotion are combined. The interview also tells us something about Nita Freire, an accomplished scholar in her own right.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Dans une entrevue accordée à Carmel Borg et Peter Mayo de l’Université de Malte, Anna Maria (Nita) Freire, veuve de Paulo Freire, jette de la lumière sur les préoccupations de son mari durant la dernière partie de sa vie et fait remarquer que ceux qui le lisent en traduction ne peuvent apprécier toutes les subtilités de son écriture très évocative qui s’adresse tout autant à la raison qu’aux émotions. L’entrevue permet également de mieux connaître Nita Freire, qui est elle-même une femme d’une grande culture.

## THE OCCASION

This interview with Professor Ana Maria Araujo Freire took place in 1998. Ana Maria (Nita) Freire is Paulo Freire’s widow, and a respected teacher and scholar who worked closely with her husband in his later years. It was almost a year since Paulo Freire (1921-1997) had suddenly passed away. Several activities marking this first anniversary of his death were being organized in Brazil. We were in São Paulo to join an international gathering of educators, community activists and scholars participating at the 1<sup>st</sup> International Paulo Freire Forum organized by the Instituto Paulo Freire. Meanwhile, in Freire’s native *Nord-este*, particularly in the city of Recife, the city for which Paulo always had a special passion, the *Movimento dos Sem Terra* (the Movement of Landless Peasants – MST), was organizing another commemorative event

in honor of a person they regard as an important source of inspiration. We had been barely a day in Sao Paulo when we met with Nita Freire at her residence, not far from the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC) where Paulo Freire taught.

#### KEY COLLABORATORS

The interview, kindly organized on our behalf by the Maltese Dominican priest, Frei Joao Xerri, took place only hours before Nita Freire was to catch the plane for Recife in order to be present at the MST commemorative event. The availability of the interview in English is the result of a truly collaborative Maltese – Brazilian effort which involved Frei Joao as interlocutor throughout the interview (he has been working in Brazil since 1974), Frei Sergio Abreu as the person who transcribed the text and Lilia Azevedo as translator. We (Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo) devised the interview questions, which were not given to Nita Freire in advance. Frei Joao translated the questions and Nita responded in Portuguese. Because of the informal and open nature of the interview we have chosen to use first names in what follows, rather than formal titles. The interview has been read and approved by Nita Freire in both the Portuguese and English versions.

#### PAULO FREIRE (1921-1997)

Paulo Reglus Neves Freire is one of the twentieth century's most heralded educators. Born in Recife, a city for which he continued to have a great passion throughout his life, Freire captured the imagination of many people in Brazil with his innovative approach to education. It was an approach which enabled people to 'read the word and the world.' He was considered a subversive by the military regime which seized control of Brazil following the 1964 coup and, following a period of imprisonment, he was sent into what turned out to be a sixteen year period of exile involving spells in Bolivia, Chile, the U.S. and Geneva. He did consultancy work in a variety of places, including countries which had just obtained independence from Portugal. He wrote extensively during this period of exile. He returned to his native Brazil in 1980. He was a founding member of the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil and at the age of sixty eight took on the onerous task of being Education Secretary in the Municipal Government of São Paulo.

His thinking is radical and postcolonial; his approach to education is one which stresses the politics of knowledge throughout. Despite his constant advocacy of democratic social relations of education, he always affirmed the directive nature of socially transformative education, centering around the notion of *praxis*, in which the educator has *authority* which, nevertheless, should not degenerate into *authoritarianism*.

Freire is generally acknowledged as the major exponent of what is commonly referred to as *critical pedagogy*. A theorist and activist at the same time, Freire kept producing books until the very end of his life, some of them being published posthumously. It would be foolish to attempt to do justice to Freire's ideas by referring only to his best known work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, since his oeuvre is quite large. He has touched the lives of many with his language of hope and possibility. In the view of such a respected figure as Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, former Cardinal of São Paulo, Paulo Freire has touched not only the lives of people but also such important institutions as the Church. Many people point to the strong Freirean tone of the document on education produced at the 1968 Episcopal Conference in Medellín, Colombia, a landmark in the development of Liberation Theology.

#### THIS INTERVIEW

The interview sheds light on some of Paulo Freire's concerns during the later stages of his life and provides some indication regarding the extent to which those who read him only in translation miss out on some of the finer points of his very evocative writing in which reason and emotion are combined. A similar combination was also very much in evidence in Nita's passionate exposition during the interview.

The interview also tells us something about Nita Freire herself, an accomplished scholar in her own right and author of, among other things, *Nita e Paulo. Cronacas di amor* (Nita and Paulo. Love Chronicles), published by Editora Olho d'Água: *Olho d'Água Publishers*. This book, published around the time of the interview, sheds light on the eventful years of what she calls a "Third Age Marriage". We eagerly await its translation into English.

Meanwhile, this is the full text, in English, of the São Paulo interview. It is a 'free' translation from the original in Portuguese. We were aware of the danger that, in tampering with it to render it palatable to an English readership, we would destroy much of that blending of passion and reason which marked Nita's original responses. We wanted to keep it as close to the original as possible.

CARMEL & PETER: We are convinced that your husband, Paulo Freire, was immersed in a number of political and pedagogical projects at the time of his passing away. Can you tell us something about his concerns at the time and the projects he had in mind?

NITA: Paulo had many dreams and projects, for his life, for his work and which concerned the world in general. He wanted very much to live and because of this we thought that these dreams and projects might give him many years of life – more than is normally possible. Unfortunately, there was no exception in his case.

There is one thing, perhaps only one, that provides me with some consolation following his death, a consolation for these unfulfilled dreams and the sadness of not having him near me: the fact that he died in full activity, at the height of his wisdom and of his ethical, political and pedagogic thought. It wouldn't be fair if Paulo had died when he wasn't any more the extraordinary thinker and achiever that he was. This is, I repeat, the basis for my acceptance of this terrible thing: the death of a beloved one, such as Paulo was for me.

Some of these projects involved writing books and articles; giving courses and seminars; doing interviews; visiting dear friends and places again; listening to good music, eating dishes he liked, drinking good wine. In a word, to "live love," "fulfill my political tasks," "to know and to feel that I am here in this world, so difficult but at the same time so delightful!"

In April last year we had gone to the USA, at the invitation of Harvard University, for Paulo to give classes in the first semester (September 97 to January 98). He organized the bureaucratic matters and the last details of the programme for the course he was to co-teach with Donaldo Macedo. The course was to be about the knowledge necessary for a progressive teaching practice, basically the reading of "Pedagogia da Autonomia": *Pedagogy of Autonomy*.<sup>2</sup> The project was for an eminently critical course and there was already a great number of students interested in this less alienated way of "reading" the world. Paulo and Donaldo were very happy with the enthusiasm shown in anticipation of the course.

Paulo had begun to talk with the professors of the University where he had been teaching since 1980 – the Catholic University (PUC) of São Paulo – about his project of writing, a book about an educational curriculum, in its most ample and critical form. He spoke about carrying out the project even before his trip to the USA. The book would be about the act of teaching-learning, the seriousness of studying, evaluation, etc.

He was obstinate about writing about neo-liberalism with another member of the PT (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* – Workers' Party), from the State of Minas Gerais. He never tired of condemning the proclaimed fatalism with which the neo-liberals justify the historical route they themselves have traced to attain their objectives, as an inexorable force against which there is nothing to be done. They say that this is the natural course of human socio-economic and political evolution and there is no way and even no reason for changing it. He said: "Fatalism is only understood by power and by the dominant classes when it interests them. If there is hunger, unemployment, lack of housing, health and schools, they proclaim that this is a universal trend and so be it! But when the stock market falls in a country far away and we have to tighten up our belts, or if a private national bank has internal problems due to the inability of its directors or owners, the

State immediately intervenes to 'save them.' In this case, the 'natural,' 'inexorable,' is simply put aside." He wanted to clarify and denounce this more complete and perverse form of capitalism, because he felt it was his duty as an educator.

During his last years, Paulo always denounced, in his speeches, the horror of neo-liberalism that denies history, ideology, the existence of social classes, the better to invade, oppress and exploit those who have less, either persons or countries, for the purpose of announcing better times for all. He was concerned with the number of persons who let themselves be deceived by neo-liberal slogans and so become submissive and apathetic when confronted with their former dreams. Paulo used a metaphor for this situation: "They have gone to the other side of the river!"

He used to say, like Ionesco's character at the end of the play "Rhinocéros": "I am a man, I refuse to be a rhinoceros." When Paulo said this, he meant that he would never be converted to this distorted way of being in the world. "I will stay alone in this world, Nita, but I will never ally myself to the neo-liberal principles." I am sure – we are all sure – that Paulo would never go to the other side of the river!

Traveling all over this immense Brazil, we saw and cooperated with a very large number of social movements of different sizes and natures, but who had (and continue to have) a point in common: the hope in their people's power of transformation. They are teachers - many of them are "lay": embroiderers, nuns, workers, fishermen, peasants, etc., scattered all over the country, in favelas (shanty-towns), camps or houses; men and women with an incredible leadership strength, bound together in small and local organizations, but with such a latent potential that it filled us, Paulo and me, with hope for better days for our people. Many others participated in a more organized way in the MST (Movimento dos Sem Terra: *Movement of Landless Peasants*), the trade unions, CUT (Central Única dos Trabalhadores), and CEBs: *Christian Base Communities*. As the man of hope he always was, Paulo knew he would not remain alone. Millions of persons, excluded from the system, are struggling in this country, as they free themselves from oppression, to also liberate their oppressors.

Paulo died a few days after the arrival of the MST March in Brasília. On that April day, standing in our living-room, seeing on the TV the crowds of men, women and children entering the capital in such an orderly and dignified way, full of emotion, he cried out: "That's it, Brazilian people, the country belongs to all of us! Let us build together a democratic country, just and happy!"

Such was Paulo during the last days of his life – the same as when he was a boy in Jabotão, going hungry. Then he thought of struggling against

injustice. He spent his life showing how, through education, one can eliminate injustice and build a really democratic society.

CARMEL & PETER: Since we do not know Portuguese and so can only have access to Paulo Freire's thought through translations, we ask: what are we losing, as a result?

NITA: Ah! I think you lose a lot, not because of the translators, who are usually very good, but because Paulo's language was so rich. Since he mastered the Portuguese language with such precision and beauty, he had the ability to recreate words, give them new meanings and even create new words. Paulo's language is so rich, strong and radical that it becomes impossible to provide an absolutely faithful translation. By the way, this is the difficulty translators have with any writer. With Paulo it becomes a challenge that goes beyond a translator's capability. Paulo says a lot through his language, which is completely his own and is, at the same time, poetic and precise. His ideas are universal because they refer to and deal with the problems of men and women, but the language he used is deeply Brazilian. Perhaps this is why he said: "I write in Brazilian and not in Portuguese!" You see, he certainly said this because of the radical way in which he said and wrote what he thought.

*Conscientização* (to make someone aware of his or her own reality); *quefazer* (What-to-do); *oprimido* (someone who is oppressed); *denúncia-anúncio* (denunciation-annunciation); *pronunciar o mundo* (to proclaim the world); *leitura do mundo* (to read the world); *boniteza* (prettiness); *paciência impaciente* (impatient patience) and hundreds of other words he used were recreated by him and so carry the political specificity of his language. He used words of such beauty and plasticity, organized in phrases and these in turn in the context of the totality of the text, with such aesthetic and political force that, I repeat, they cannot be transposed so easily into other languages because a language cannot be translated literally. And it is important to emphasize that his language is extraordinarily beautiful, rich and full of his particular way of being.

Paulo was not using the word *conscientização* anymore. (*Conscientização* did not exist as a Portuguese word. D.Helder Câmara used it, but it was Paulo who filled it with such meaning). This was because of the criticism he had received from those who understood it to be an idealistic concept. However, lately, he used to tell me he was going to use it again, because he found it to be very rich: it indicates movement, the beginning of an action, preparation of the action that must follow. In no way did it indicate a sense of "spontaneity" or "voluntarism." Neither did it imply that unchecked action or idealism were among its ingredients. In short, he did not intend it to convey a sense lacking in or separated from true political praxis, the praxis that reaches for theory, and goes back to it, illuminating it.

"Denunciation" was a worn out word, with an aggressive and ugly connotation, that of a persecution of someone or something, of a condemnation or reproof of an unjust or unscrupulous act made by the other person. Paulo rescued this word, giving it the meaning of the moment in which a person becomes aware of a certain problem. With this awareness, there already appears, dialectically, the possibility of change, of revelation (un-veiling), of hope (if men and women want it and are able to do it, rendering it concrete in a "viable original", which is also a very rich category created by Paulo), through the dialectical pair to which he gave the name of "annunciation."

I chose these words, from among others I could cite, to show how Paulo "loaded" his phrases with a beautiful and difficult subtlety.

Another problem for translators who did not know Paulo well is the fact that his language is loaded with his feelings, since he never provided a dichotomy between reason and emotion. Paulo was a radically coherent man: what he said contained what he felt and thought and this is not always easy to translate. There are emotions whose meaning can only be well perceived, understood and felt inside a certain culture. And we Brazilians are unique in this way. I think this is so, isn't it?

Without any prejudice, I think it is difficult for translators who have only studied the Portuguese language, albeit accurately, to express Paulo in all his aesthetic and even cultural-ideological richness. I say so because the academicism of many persons from the so-called rigorous cultures who study him leads translators from these languages to be very concerned with the fidelity of the form, the word they use, leaving aside other words that could seem to be too full of feelings and so should be avoided, because after all "Paulo was a philosopher of education and not a novelist". And so unwittingly the "careful" translator cannot do exactly what Paulo did: to choose words recreated by an imagination in love with the knowledge and the beings of the world, which represents one of his humanist marks on the world.

I can provide an example here. First World intellectuals said to me: "Don't cry, don't become emotional! You are giving a scientific speech, an academic work in surroundings where there is no place for emotions!" Can you imagine? I was in Hamburg, at an Adult Education congress where everything, or almost everything, turned around Paulo. The conference paid great homage to him. His ideas and his name filled the atmosphere of the meeting. And I had lost Paulo less than three months before! The terrible sense of loss was strongly reflected in the form of working I had learnt exactly from him: to say what one felt when thinking. Why would it be wrong to think, crying? Can it be true that when we cry we lose our reason? I felt and could not even control myself to stop crying, but I knew I was thinking. And so, why control myself? That is the question!

Paulo was a man who was never ashamed to say that everything he knew came from his curiosity, awakened by his feelings, by what his skin said, his intuition aroused, his emotion dictated.

From there he went on to deep and reflective thought, to that which had been aroused in him from different sources. Intuition, as a principle, derived from his sensibility to see what was in the world, which obviously required the use of reason and the exacting steps of science to constitute an historical scientific truth. One can here speak of *an intuition rigorously systematized*. After all, intuition or emotion, without the necessary discernment that comes from a serious and deep questioning, from an exacting reflection, leads to distortions and misunderstandings.

For Paulo, intuition or emotion, or both, provided the beginning of knowledge. They provided the beginning of the curiosity that slowly becomes an *epistemological curiosity*.

Paulo always criticized the use of an absolutely emotional speech. Here are a few examples: the explosive words with which, during the fifties and beginning of the sixties, the Brazilian left manifested the need for changes in our society: "Let us kill the bourgeoisie, take over their factories and expose their heads on the street posts". He never tired of saying that these highly aggressive speeches were terribly imprudent and could not lead the revolution to its goal. And this could not happen also because it could well be that the proclaimers themselves did not really want to do what they proclaimed. And, even if a few really wanted it to occur, feeling this desire, it was impossible, in the Brazilian context, to have it applied to the bourgeoisie as a whole.

There are limits even to the expression of our emotions, most of all when it is a matter that requires scientific accuracy: I wish to make this very clear. Paulo never maintained that emotion should subjugate reason. But he also vehemently rejected the opposite "academicist" view.

Finally, for Paulo, starting from emotions necessarily implied that they be controlled, filtered and elaborated to become the starting point for the construction of lucid ideas and humanizing actions. And this should never entail the generation of emotions that distort the sense of BECOMING, which is the true ontological destiny of men and women. Let emotion be the "starting motor" of systematized knowledge.

I met Paulo when I was almost four years old (he was 17, a late follower of the 2nd grade in my father's high-school) and so I was able to perceive all through his life that he allied his immense intelligence and his charismatic character to the will to educate his own abilities and virtues. These virtues include coherence, tolerance and respect, which are embedded in his words, in his political-ideological humanistic discourse, and which his translators

must learn. And they must be learnt in all their magnitude and with all their ethical weight! And this is not easy.

Even though this is not entirely pertinent to your specific question, I would like to emphasize these qualities of Paulo in his every day actions. When he asked me to write the Notes in his books, *Pedagogia da Esperança* (Pedagogy of Hope), *Cartas a Cristina* (Letters to Cristina) and *À sombra desta mangueira* (Under the shadow of this mango-tree), he totally respected my condition as writer and researcher. I read the text and wrote in the Notes according to criteria chosen by myself. Only one of them was written at his request, "A *turma do lenço*" (The handkerchief band) because his father had taken part in this movement and he knew almost nothing about this subject. This research gave me a lot of trouble but I managed to do it.

I can provide another example of the respect Paulo had for persons and cultures. In Europe, we observed professors who presented their "Freirian way" of teaching adults to read and write. Surprised by what I saw and heard, I said: "Paulo, this is a far cry from what you have been proposing!!!" He answered: "Nita, you are not making allowances for the differences in culture, for what conditions them."

I don't know if it is clear why I have talked about so many things. I want to say that to respect another person and other cultures requires many other qualities and not just knowing the author's language. Here's another example: "What is to be done"? Paulo would say: "what-to-do"! How interesting, isn't it? It is a rich, deep political category that indicates action with commitment. Now, how can a translator, who knows the language but not Paulo's tongue – i.e. his way of speaking, understand this subtlety of expression?

Paulo's texts are so "wet" – this is another of Paulo's fantastic expressions – that I am afraid his metaphors will not be well understood. Neither understood would be his way of "reading the words," which also carry a certain typically Brazilian sensuality that he enjoyed so much. I repeat: language is culture.

The translators who were able to translate him faced a very difficult task and should rejoice, because the pleasure of reading a text from Paulo in Portuguese, or better still, in Brazilian, is unique. Let's hope they were able to overcome all these barriers in their translations!

CARMEL & PETER: At a recent conference on Adult Education, held in England, one of us heard a professor say that Paulo once told him that he was not happy with the English translation of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. We find this hard to believe. What is your reaction?

NITA: Paulo wrote "*Pedagogia do oprimido*" while living in Chile. "He wrote it in his head." With this I mean that Paulo's thought, based upon his

practice, his theoretical knowledge and his sensibility, created his ideas without his ever putting them down on paper. The moment he felt he had finished what he wanted to say about a particular subject, he sat down and wrote his ideas.

He inaugurated this way of writing, from which he seldom deviated, with the "*Pedagogia do oprimido*." And so, in one particular year, 1967, he mentally elaborated his book. He wrote it down on paper in a single effort during his 15 days holiday, because he already had it in his head.

He gave the originals to his great and dear friend, Ernani Maria Fiori, to write the preface. Fiori was a great philosopher. A few days later, with an extraordinary essay in his hands – "*Aprenda a dizer suas palavras*": Learn to pronounce your words – that presents Paulo's book, Fiori said: "Paulo, this is a fantastic thing! But I believe you should round off the work with a political analysis of what you said in these three chapters".

Paulo spent a few months reading and studying all he could muster about political science, and, at the same time, writing the fourth chapter. This took months and the few hours he had left each day, after working for so many hours. He told me he wrote while traveling by car in the then dusty roads of the Chilean hinterland, or even in the simple hotels that did not always have an adequate and sufficient lighting.

This was how he finished his "*Pedagogia do oprimido*" in 1968. He and Elza, his first wife, said to each other: "If we manage to have a Chilean edition of 3,000 copies, it will be splendid." For political reasons, this edition was not produced.

A friend then took the originals to a great American theologian, Richard Shaull, who read them and said to Paulo something like this: "This book will cause a revolution in the world. It came at a good moment to support political practices in many areas, including Liberation Theology!" He wrote the preface for the American edition and indicated a young compatriot of his who, having lived and worked in Rio for many years, having even married a Brazilian, had systematically studied the Portuguese language. This woman is Myra Ramos. Paulo told me that, with a unique dedication, she translated the originals, consulting him every time she had a doubt: "Is this good or not? Is this really what you are saying?"<sup>3</sup>

It is true that many persons criticize the translation she made, saying that many things could be improved, but Paulo never accepted this criticism. He always answered that Myra had done it carefully and with his approval. During the last years many persons had asked Paulo to have a new translation made, saying that after 20 years it could be "updated." But Paulo always rejected this argument, remaining faithful to the translation and the translator. He did agree in part saying: "There are possibly things to be improved,

in my text also, but both will remain as they are. I must only correct some distortions I made, due to the "*machista*" vision I had then, insisting that when I said MAN, I was also including WOMEN in this category. I have already authorized all the editors to change this, but nothing else shall be changed, and I include Myra's translation in this or 'nothing'." That's the truth. That was how Paulo understood what had been accurately and seriously done at a certain moment in a person's intellectual journey, even though he respected those who differed from him and chose other forms of treating their texts.

He said: "If I want to say something better, I write another text saying it more carefully, in a more proper and profound manner, saying what I had not said before, because I now know more about it. I re-elaborate what I already said in other texts. I don't like to go around changing what I wrote, according to the historical developments or because my awareness of the themes I treated is clearer and more lucid."

I ought to point out that Paulo's work began with a small report - some 5 or 6 pages - he wrote for the II National Congress of Adult and Adolescent Education. And practically everything is already there in these writings of 1958. He went on growing intellectually and politically and his initial ideas continued to be, in a sense, re-elaborated, because he made his first writings become more profound, more complex, more radical.

Anyhow, this was how Paulo saw the act of writing and of translating: as a fact, historically dated.

CARMEL & PETER: One of the challenges for us as critical educators is to move outside the academy and make our mark in the 'public sphere'. Carmel is currently very much involved in the drafting of the preliminary document for a new national curriculum which is intended to render the Maltese educational system more democratic, guided by the principles of equity, inclusion and entitlement. We are also both involved in a parental empowerment and education project in a working class area of Malta. We are therefore very interested to learn, during our stay here in São Paulo, about Freire's work as Education Secretary in the Erundina Municipal Government. What, in your view, were Paulo's major achievements as Education Secretary?

NITA: About your question on Paulo's work in the Municipal Bureau of Education in São Paulo, I would say briefly - because it requires a long answer - that he worked very much and seriously to 'Change the face of the school'. This means: to make it really popular because it would be happy, pretty, efficient, agreeable. To this end, he would be counting upon the participation of the educational agents (teachers, students, directors, supervisors, people in charge of pedagogic orientation, guards, people in charge of the meals, cleaners, janitors, mothers and fathers of the students, etc.).

For this purpose, Paulo delegated initiatives to his advisors and the leaders of the *Núcleos de Ação Educativa*: Educational Action Centers (the former *Delegacias de Ensino*: Teaching Precincts); he signed cooperation agreements with the PUC-SP (Catholic University of São Paulo), with the USP (São Paulo State University) and with the UNICAMP (University of Campinas) to improve educational practice. And so the curriculum for the schools underwent a revolutionary change. It was placed at the service of the popular classes because it was born out of the needs and desires of the communities who frequented the schools, enriched by the systematic knowledge which had been elaborated.

Paulo created a really loving dialogue in this small world that he directed from January 1989 to May 1991, because all of those who took part in it, directly or indirectly, could discuss, demand, improve themselves, suggest and create new things and, for the most part, decide.

The formation of all the educational agents, in particular that of the teachers, was of great concern. Other concerns were: the contents of the curricula, de-compartmentalization of knowledge; the act of teaching-learning, seen as an indivisible act (this means that when professors are teaching they are also learning with their students and, while the students are learning, they are teaching the professor); the valorization of the *menino popular* (child of the people) as a person and with her or his own knowledge. This concept even triggered off academic discussions. In response to someone who pointed out this fact, Paulo argued: "It is possible that sociology does not have this category, but the fact that the *menino popular* (popular child) exists is indisputable! These children are in the streets, in the favelas, among the underemployed and exploited . . . and, most of all, out of school." I cannot fail to mention also the School Councils, among other collegiate bodies established during Paulo's administration.

Paulo created MOVA – *Movimento de Alfabetização de Adultos e Jovens* (Adult and adolescent literacy movement), which is today the model for Popular Education in many municipalities and progressive governments in the country. This movement led to the organization of the First Adult Literacy Students Congress. This is, to date, the only congress of its kind in the world. It was held on the 16 December 1990, and 3,000 students participated.

CARMEL & PETER: Now that the PT is no longer in government in the city of São Paulo, what is left of the reforms which Paulo and his team had introduced?

NITA: Little is left, and yet contradictorily there is much left to be said. When Paulo left the Bureau in order to go back to writing, his work, based on the idea of a committed education, primarily concerned with the popular

masses, who attend public schooling in Brazil, was taken up by Mario Sergio Cortella in Mayor Luiza Erundina's Democratic Government of São Paulo. When this extraordinary mayor's term of office ended, a man from the extreme right took over the government of São Paulo and immediately began to enjoy the benefits of the former administration. Authoritarian acts reappeared, especially in the educational area. The voices of the illiterate, directors, teachers, students and parents were silenced. Punishments came back and also threats and persecutions; in a word, he changed the educational practice into something consistent with his own political practice – the consistency of (and for) the absurd, but consistent, nevertheless!

However, the fruits of the real democratic school remained; even though they were denied from January 1993 on, they are still there, because they came with enough strength to stay. And they will reappear at the first sign of a progressive government, that is, one which is in favour of and not against the popular classes. The testimony of a great many teachers from the municipal schools in São Paulo made this clear to Paulo.

Teachers are "stubborn" people who do not lose hope! Patiently impatient, they wait as Paulo waited for the right time to reinvent, once again, the education for citizenship they had learnt to make available for their pupils, mainly through Paulo's practice as secretary. He left more than a seed. He left a tree with fruits and flowers, which, though submerged for the time being, will opportunely emerge with the same force of the dream with which it was planted by Paulo. I am sure of this!

CARMEL & PETER: It would have been most unfair, in an interview such as this, to focus exclusively on Paulo and not on your own work also. You are an established academic and activist in your own right. Can you tell us something about your work?

NITA: I had been giving classes in different Universities in São Paulo (Moema Faculty, which was later closed, Catholic University of São Paulo, São Marcos University) and in some teacher education courses, when I married Paulo. It was a "third age" marriage, and we didn't want to be far from each other. We wanted to be always close to each other, touching, caressing each other, talking about everyday matters or about educational problems and the world. Paulo used to say: "We have no time to lose!" A touch of Brazilian culture, not so common nowadays but still very strong in Paulo, made him say: "Look here, Nita, I can't see why you are always away from home! We got married in order to be always together, didn't we? Who will I talk to during my moments of reflection if you are always busy preparing and giving classes?"

This is why he asked me to stay with him, to study and work with him. It was really unthinkable, or too difficult, for him to remain a long time alone

while I was running from one university to the other, either during the day or, particularly, in the evenings. (São Paulo is a dangerous city, there is a real problem of personal security).

And so, I gave up the work that was linked to my formal jobs. I understood it was a legitimate desire of his and that it would be important also for me to enjoy, as much as I could, his tender, intelligent, loving presence.

I presented my Master's thesis, a work he had supervised, even though, because of our marriage, he was not a member of the examining board and neither, to my great frustration, did he appear officially as Supervisor. I acquired other credits and received my doctorate in 1994. As I have already said, I wrote the notes that explain the context which Paulo addressed in three of his books: *Pedagogia da esperança*, *Cartas a Cristina* and *À sombra desta mangueira*. I published three books of my own: *Analfabetismo no Brasil – Illiteracy in Brazil* (Cortez Editors), *Centenário de nascimento de Aluizio Pessoa de Araújo – Hundredth anniversary of the birth of Aluizio Pessoa de Araújo* (Editora do Autor: Author's Publishing House) and *Nita e Paulo: Crônicas de amor – Nita and Paulo: love chronicles* (Editora Olho d'Água: Olho d'Água Publishers). I have had many articles published in journals in Brazil and abroad, particularly after Paulo's death.

My work in the field of the history of education, during these 10 years of daily living and sharing with Paulo, enabled me to delve deeply into Paulo's thoughts, and so I became able to understand, with greater clarity and propriety, the revolutionary power of his understanding of education. I learnt every day, listening to him or discussing his writings with him.

All of a sudden, when he was full of engagements, projects and life, there came the heart attack that took him away. He smoked many cigarettes a day. His organism was compromised, undermined by nicotine. One of the kidneys was not functioning any more; he had a brain ischemia and his blood pressure was controlled by drugs. Unfortunately his whole circulatory system was weakened, but we never thought he could die so soon.

As you can see, the immense pain of losing days so intensely lived, which Paulo's death stole from me, did not paralyze me. Rather, I wished him to continue in me in several ways, including my writing about both of us and about his thought as an educator. And I wished this, not only because of what the first hours of the 2nd May 1997 represent in my life – a terrible moment of loss, amazement and pain, that does not even allow us the capacity to truly realize what is happening; the sensation is that our own life is ending. When I was able to think, I decided that I should continue to think what Paulo thought. Reliving what we had lived. "Thinking him" my way, with my own resources. This means that I continue to work so that

Paulo's real legacy, his authentic liberating thought,<sup>4</sup> is not erased or distorted.

This year, a group of friends, the majority of whom I got to know through Paulo, because they were old friends of his or had worked with him, approached me so that we can create together the *Movimento Paulo Freire Vivo*: "Paulo Freire Alive Movement."

The main purpose is to disseminate Paulo's ideas as much as possible, either by assisting popular communities to recreate him faithfully and adequately,<sup>5</sup> or by encouraging the setting up of documentation and theoretical study centers by admirers of Paulo and his work, because this is a huge task which therefore requires - it is important to emphasize - a collective and committed effort.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to all those who made this interview possible, and especially to Dr. Ana Maria (Nita) Freire herself.

#### NOTES

1. The book has been translated into English by Donaldo Macedo
2. The book has been published in the U.S. as *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy and civic courage*, Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.
3. Nita: The work related to the translation of *Pedagogia do oprimido* coincided with the period during which Paulo lived in Cambridge, USA, when he taught at Harvard University, between April 1969 and February 1970. Myra lived in a city nearby and she never hesitated to phone him to ask for help whenever difficulties arose with the translation. So the first edition of this book by Paulo came out in 1970 and in English. Only in 1975 was it possible to find a way of getting around the Brazilian censorship and to publish it in Brazil.
4. Nita: On July 1st of this year (1998), as I was revising this interview for publication, I had the pleasure of hearing from Dra. Isabel Capeletti, the Coordinator of the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação - Currículo (Post-Graduate Programme on Education - Curriculum), the news of the creation, at the Catholic University of São Paulo / PUC, of the "Cátedra Paulo Freire" (Paulo Freire Chair). This will offer students, following a Master's or doctoral degree program at PUC or other universities in Brazil, courses about the work and thoughts of Paulo Freire. I had the honor of being invited to give the inaugural course, between August and December 1998.
5. Nita: The "Escola de Samba Leandro de Itaquera": *Leandro de Itaquera Samba School*, in São Paulo, chose 'the life and work of Paulo Freire' as their theme for the February 1999 Carnival. As his widow, an expert on the subject and a member of the *Movimento Paulo Freire Vivo*, I helped them in an advisory capacity.

**CARMEL BORG** is Lecturer in the Department of Primary Education, University of Malta. Dr. Borg is co-founding editor of the *Journal of Postcolonial Education* and is Director of University of Malta's Teaching for Diversity Programme.

**PETER MAYO** is Lecturer in Sociology of Education and Adult Continuing Education at the University of Malta. He is co-founding editor of the *Journal of Postcolonial Education* and is the author of *Gramsci, Freire and Adult Education. Possibilities for Transformative Action* (Zed Books, 1999).

**CARMEL BORG** est chargé de cours au département d'enseignement primaire à l'Université de Malte. Elle est cofondatrice du *Journal of Postcolonial Education* et directeur du programme d'enseignement axé sur la diversité de l'Université de Malte.

**PETER MAYO** est chargé de cours de sociologie de l'éducation et de formation des adultes à l'Université de Malte. Il est cofondateur et rédacteur en chef de la revue *Journal of Postcolonial Education* et auteur de *Gramsci, Freire and Adult Education. Possibilities for Transformative Action* (Zed Books, 1999).