

POPULAR EDUCATION AND RESISTANCE DURING THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP IN BRAZIL: networks and clandestine practices

Educação popular e resistência na ditadura militar no Brasil:
redes e práticas clandestinas

Educación popular y resistencia durante la dictadura militar en Brasil:
redes y prácticas clandestinas

FERNANDA DOS SANTOS PAULO

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil. *Corresponding author.

E-mail: fernandapaulofreire@gmail.com.

Abstract: This article investigates the persistence of Educação Popular (EP) in Brazil during the military regime, highlighting how educators and social movements maintained educational practices even under repression. The aim is to understand how these practices remained active and transformed into tools of political and social resistance, perpetuating the ideas of Paulo Freire and other educators. The research, primarily based on bibliographic and documentary analysis, explores the clandestine activity in Popular Education (EP). Additionally, the results highlight the importance of international solidarity and the emergence of a new category: 'Educação Popular as a Network of Resistance and Social Transformation', which underscores the interconnection between individuals and institutions as a network of resistance and social transformation.

Keywords: popular education; militancy; clandestinity; resistance movements.

Resumo: Este artigo investiga a persistência da Educação Popular (EP) no Brasil durante o regime militar, evidenciando como educadores e movimentos sociais mantiveram práticas educativas mesmo sob repressão. O objetivo é compreender como essas práticas se mantiveram ativas e se transformaram em ferramentas de resistência política e social, perpetuando as ideias de Paulo Freire e outros educadores. A pesquisa, baseada especialmente em análise bibliográfica e documental, explora a atuação clandestina na EP. Além disso, os resultados destacam a importância da solidariedade internacional e a emergência de uma nova categoria: 'Educação Popular como Rede de Resistência e Transformação Social', que evidencia a interconexão entre sujeitos e instituições como uma rede de resistência e transformação social.

Palavras-chave: educação popular; militância; clandestinidade; movimentos de resistência.

Resumen: Este artículo investiga la persistencia de la Educación Popular (EP) en Brasil durante el régimen militar, destacando cómo educadores y movimientos sociales mantuvieron prácticas educativas incluso bajo represión. El objetivo es comprender cómo estas prácticas se mantuvieron activas y se transformaron en herramientas de resistencia política y social, perpetuando las ideas de Paulo Freire y otros educadores. La investigación, basada especialmente en el análisis bibliográfico y documental, explora la actividad clandestina en la Educación Popular (EP). Además, los resultados destacan la importancia de la solidaridad internacional y la emergencia de una nueva categoría: 'Educação Popular como Red de Resistencia y Transformación Social', que evidencia la interconexión entre sujetos e instituciones como una red de resistencia y transformación social.

Palabras clave: educación popular; militancia; clandestinidad; movimientos de resistencia.

INTRODUÇÃO

This article seeks to present records of Brazilian Popular Education during the period of the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985), addressing how this pedagogical practice remained active and resilient despite repression. The main objective of this study is to understand how Popular Education remained active and resilient throughout the military regime in Brazil, transforming itself into a tool of political and social resistance. Additionally, it aims to identify the main subjects, movements, and educational practices that sustained the emancipatory ideas of Paulo Freire¹ and other educators, even under intense repression. The main question guiding this research is: how did Popular Education remain resilient and active during the intense repression of the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil?

In this context, the relevance of this study lies in the need to understand how Popular Education practices remained active during a period of repression, providing a deeper understanding of Freirean theories of critical and emancipatory education. The study seeks to deepen the discussion about how these theories not only contextualize but also explain the persistence of Popular Education practices at that time.

The research developed on Popular Education during the civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985) in Brazil aimed to understand the practices of resistance and the continuity of popular movements, even in a context of repression. To achieve this objective, the study relied on a combination of bibliographic, documentary, and oral sources, providing a detailed and rigorous analysis. The bibliographic sources included books and articles by renowned authors in the field, such as Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, Osmar Fávero, and interviews conducted by Paulo (2018) with pioneers of Popular Education, which provided a solid theoretical basis and a critical perspective essential to Popular Education. These authors were fundamental in contextualizing the organization of movements and understanding the strategies adopted in response to the repression of the military regime.

In addition to bibliographic references, documents compiled by Osmar Fávero and Elisa Motta (2015) were consulted, offering a detailed overview of the activities carried out by Popular Education in Brazil. These documents, made available in three volumes titled 'Memória da Educação Popular I', 'Educação de Jovens e Adultos', and 'Nova fase da Educação Popular', were essential to understanding the historical context and educational practices of the time.

¹ Paulo Freire, a renowned Brazilian educator, created a literacy method that linked teaching to political awareness, challenging oppression and promoting educational resistance during the military dictatorship. Arrested and exiled in 1964 for subversion, he spread his practices in Chile and other countries, influencing pedagogy in Latin America and Africa. His 1968 work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* consolidated education as a form of resistance and social transformation, becoming a global reference in critical pedagogy.

The research also utilized oral sources, including interviews with educators who actively participated in Popular Education practices during the dictatorship. Among the interviewees, pioneers of Popular Education such as Carlos Rodrigues Brandão stood out, whose experiences provided an authentic view of the educational practices developed during that period. The oral sources were selected based on the relevance of the participants and their direct contribution to the practices of the period, ensuring that the experiences were preserved and analyzed in a contextualized manner. According to Ferreira (1994), the use of these sources allows the recording and preservation of memories that might otherwise be forgotten, serving as an instrument of resistance and rescue of collective memory.

To ensure methodological rigor, data triangulation², was adopted, consisting of the combination of different types of sources: bibliographic, documentary, and oral. Triangulation, as discussed by De Sá and Henrique (2019), was fundamental to validate information by cross-referencing accounts and interviews with historical documents and other studies. This practice made it possible to mitigate possible distortions and enrich the analysis, providing a broader and more critical understanding of the impact of Popular Education during the military regime.

Recognizing the limitations of oral accounts, such as memory biases, the analysis was conducted critically and contextually³. The documents were carefully selected and analyzed, considering criteria of organization and the intentions involved, which was fundamental to understanding both the limits and possibilities of these sources. Additionally, there was an effort to avoid excessive idealization of Popular Education practices, highlighting the ambiguities and different levels of resistance observed, especially in the case of the Basic Education Movement (MEB), which underwent adaptations during the military regime. Thus, the analysis sought not only to highlight explicit resistance but also to understand the complexities and different levels of adaptation and confrontation of educational practices in the dictatorial context.

this article focuses on the resistance and continuity of Popular Education in Brazil during the period of the civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985). It examines how, in a context of intense political repression, this pedagogical practice managed to remain active and resilient, serving as a tool for social mobilization and awareness. Through data triangulation, the study seeks to reveal how educators adapted and

² In the article, the interpretation of the sources was conducted using the data triangulation method, which combines different types of sources to ensure a more comprehensive and rigorous analysis. This method allows for the comparison and validation of information provided by oral accounts, letters, and interviews with other documentary and bibliographic sources.

³ The sources used in this study include both accounts and interviews with pioneers of Popular Education. The accounts, such as those of Carlos Rodrigues Brandão and Osmar Fávero, provide a personal and free-flowing perspective (conversations and meetings I transcribed), while the interviews followed a structured approach, aiming to collect detailed information on specific topics of the thesis (Paulo, 2018).

sustained their educational practices, often clandestinely, facing censorship, persecution, and exile. The research explores the challenges faced and the strategies adopted to keep Popular Education alive, highlighting its importance as a practice of emancipation and social transformation, even in times of extreme adversity.

The literature on Popular Education during periods of repression in Latin America highlights the practice as a form of collective resistance and insurgency. Schlindwein and Catini (2021) emphasize that since the 1960s, Popular Education has consolidated itself in a context of effervescence of social movements, later serving as a channel of resistance against dictatorial regimes and promoting emancipatory practices through social organization. Saviani (2008) points out that during the military regime in Brazil, education was planned through policies that reinforced control and repression, making Popular Education a means of contesting authoritarian practices and seeking to combat elitism and exclusion in the educational system. Additionally, the experiences of the Popular Education Campaign in Paraíba exemplify how Popular Education positioned itself as a response to authoritarianism, connecting to peasant and student movements until it became a target of persecution shortly after the 1964 coup. This tradition of resistance and pedagogical innovation reflects the transformative legacy of educators such as Paulo Freire, Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, Osmar Fávero, and Celso Beisiegel, who conceived Popular Education as a practice of critical awareness and political-pedagogical resistance (Paulo, 2018).

The understanding of Popular Education follows that of Paulo Freire (2008), who defines it as a process deeply linked to social transformation and the liberation of the popular classes. Freire conceives Popular Education as a means of meeting the interests of historically oppressed popular classes, serving as a pathway both in the field of knowledge and in the political realm. He emphasizes that Popular Education should contribute to the critical awareness of the oppressed, enabling them to gain political popular power and become protagonists in the creation of a new social order without domination and oppression. Contrary to the neoliberal discourse, which reduces education to mere training for the labor market, Freire (2008) advocates for education that forms competent workers with historical, political, and social awareness, aiming for the radical transformation of society from its context.

Finally, this article is organized as follows: i) Introduction: this section presents the theme, objectives, relevance of the study, the guiding question, and the methodology adopted; ii) Popular Education during the civil-military dictatorship: this section discusses the context of the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil and how Popular Education was affected, detailing the educational practices that were maintained, altered, or interrupted; iii) Movements and educators of resistance: this section explores the main social movements and educators who played fundamental roles in maintaining Popular Education during the military regime; iv) Clandestine practices and political resistance: this section investigates the educational practices carried out clandestinely, focusing on political and social resistance through Popular

Education, as well as the role of international support for the continuity of these activities; v) Conclusion: presents the main findings of the research, highlighting the resilience of Popular Education and its importance as a practice of emancipation and social transformation, even in times of intense repression.

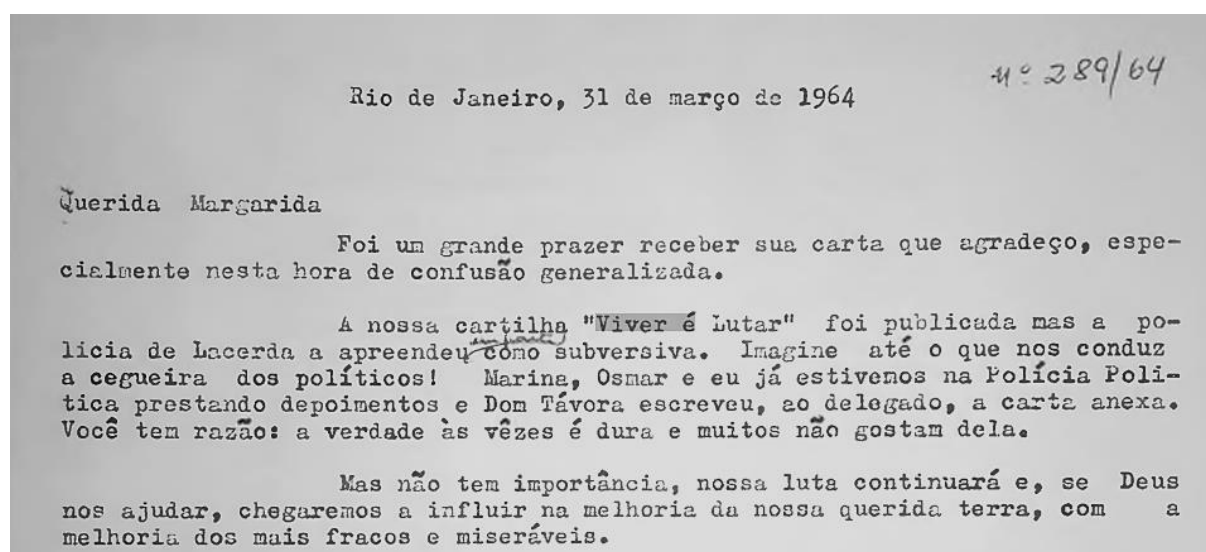
POPULAR EDUCATION DURING THE CIVIL-MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

During the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil, between 1964 and 1985, Popular Education faced intense repression; however, it also stood out as a form of resistance and social transformation. In the preface by Carlos Rodrigues Brandão for Paulo and Gaio (2021), he reflects on the impacts of the dictatorial regime, drawing parallels with historical totalitarian practices, such as censorship and the burning of subversive books. Brandão recalls the period of oppression, during which educational and personal materials were destroyed by educators out of fear of reprisals from the government and the National Information Service (SNI). He highlights the importance of Popular Education in Latin America, a pedagogical practice that, despite being persecuted, proved to be resilient and transformative.

Paulo Freire, one of the central figures of Popular Education, was exiled for almost sixteen years due to his involvement with liberation education. His ideas and works, such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, were banned and censored under the regime (Amoré, 2014; Andreola, 2015; Fávero, 2004; Gadotti & Abrão, 2012). Brandão (2002, 2016) mentions that he published his first book on Popular Education, *Educación popular y proceso de conscientización*, in Buenos Aires under the name of Uruguayan theologian Júlio Barreiro to protect the Brazilian author. Salette Valesan Camba reinforces the relevance of Freire, stating that his work was essential during the times of dictatorship (Gadotti & Abrão, 2012). José Maria Coutinho also recounts that during the student movement of 1967 and 1968, mentioning Freire or the term "conscientization" was almost forbidden, as the regime associated these ideas with subversion (Gadotti, 1996).

For example, the Basic Education Movement (MEB) was one of the initiatives most impacted by the dictatorship, but it resisted through clandestine activities and international support. Before the 1964 coup, the MEB had already established around 8,000 radio schools, promoting awareness and community organization (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] & Ministry of Education [MEC], 2007). However, after the coup, the movement faced intense repression, with schools being raided, materials destroyed, and monitors and educators arrested (Wanderley, 1984). Even so, the MEB and other Popular Education initiatives continued their activities clandestinely, resisting the authoritarian regime. Figure 1 below illustrates the acts of persecution against educators and Popular Education materials.

Figure 1 – Letter from Carlos R. Brandão



Rio de Janeiro, 31 de março de 1964

4º 289/64

Querida Margarida

Foi um grande prazer receber sua carta que agradeço, especialmente nesta hora de confusão generalizada.

A nossa cartilha "Viver é Lutar" foi publicada mas a polícia de Lacerda a apreendeu como subversiva. Imagine até o que nos conduz a cegueira dos políticos! Marina, Osmar e eu já estivemos na Polícia Política prestando depoimentos e Dom Távora escreveu, ao delegado, a carta anexa. Você tem razão: a verdade às vezes é dura e muitos não gostam dela.

Mas não tem importância, nossa luta continuará e, se Deus nos ajudar, chegaremos a influir na melhoria da nossa querida terra, com a melhoria dos mais fracos e miseráveis.

Source: Author's collection.

In his letters, Carlos Rodrigues Brandão reports that many educators continued to exchange correspondence to keep Popular Education alive⁴. Although many of these letters were destroyed, recent research has been recovering part of this historical heritage. Even under repression, institutions such as the MEB and the progressive wing of the Catholic Church continued to operate discreetly, subverting the authoritarian model imposed by the dictatorship. The fundamental role of the progressive⁵ wing of the Brazilian episcopate was reaffirmed by President João Goulart in 1963, who recognized the importance of the MEB for the education of underdeveloped populations (Raposo, 1985).

Throughout the dictatorship, various institutions and movements, in addition to the MEB, played fundamental roles in Popular Education. Among them, the Popular Culture Movement (MCP), the campaign "Learning to Read with Bare Feet", the Popular Culture Center (CPC) of UNE, and the Paulo Freire System (Unesco & Mec, 2007) stand out. These initiatives resisted adversity, keeping alive the ideals of social justice and critical education. In the words of Brandão (2016), in an interview with Paulo, relating Popular Education to Resistance:

⁴ Accounts of correspondence exchanged between educators during the dictatorship, such as those mentioned by Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, are examples of sources that are both historical and personal. They contain people's memories and are influenced by their emotions and perspectives of that historical moment. Regarding Brandão's Letters, there is a study by Paulo and Gaio (2021). These are documents that preserve the collective memory of Popular Education.

⁵ The Catholic Action movements, especially the Catholic University Youth (JUC) and the Catholic Worker Youth (JOC), played a significant role in the MEB, with supporters from the progressive wing of the Church. With the civil-military dictatorship, the MEB faced pressure from the conservative wing of the Church (Raposo, 1995).

At MEB, we developed challenging experiences in which all the "things" studied, learned, and decided had to be lived through exchanges as egalitarian as possible among all people: among our radio school monitors, among the educators of a team, among us from the national team and the members of the regional teams from the Northeast or Goiás, with whom we met in meetings and training sessions. I spent some time away. Back in Brazil, Maria Alice and I joined insurgent people who, since 1964, had been living through a difficult period of different attempts at resistance against military power. A dark and oppressive time of extreme caution; of denunciations, escapes, and the concealment of the most "wanted" people. A time of arrests and torture; of exiles and also of deaths. The expression "João fell yesterday in Goiânia" tended to become commonplace.

Carlos Rodrigues Brandão's account offers a perspective on Popular Education as a form of resistance during the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil. He highlights how the Basic Education Movement (MEB) became a space for sharing, resistance, and solidarity among educators, despite the adverse conditions imposed by the authoritarian regime.

Brandão reflects on the harsh reality experienced by those who rose against military power, facing persecution, imprisonment, torture, exile, and even death. Resistance, in this context, was not only a political action but also a pedagogical practice, in which education became an act of courage and subversion against the established order. The phrase "João fell yesterday in Goiânia" symbolizes the constant threat and fear experienced by educators, who, even under the risk of repression, kept the struggle for social justice and critical Popular Education alive. During this period, Popular Education thus emerged as an act of collective resistance, in which teaching and learning were tools to challenge and subvert authoritarianism, promoting awareness and the emancipation of the popular classes.

Sérgio Haddad (2014) highlights that, in the 1970s, during the height of the dictatorship, new forms of political action emerged, such as the Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). These entities, influenced by the Second Vatican Council and Liberation Theology, approached popular sectors and promoted Popular Education as a social practice of political and pedagogical resistance. International funding, mainly through European agencies, was fundamental in supporting these initiatives, even from a distance, with Paulo Freire as a central inspiring figure (Haddad, 2014).

Conservative reactions against Popular Education are well documented, as Scocuglia (2018) exposes in *Popular Education in the Archives of the Military Dictatorship*. The Military Justice sought to eradicate the Paulo Freire method, monitoring and repressing Freirean practices. However, institutions such as the

Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information (CEDI) continued to promote Popular Education and Freirean pedagogy in Latin America, publishing critical materials and resisting authoritarianism (Fávero & Motta, 2015).

NOVA – Research, Advisory, and Evaluation in Education, founded in 1972, also played a central role in the production of materials and in supporting grassroots groups, keeping the practice of Popular Education alive even under repression. *The Cadernos de Educação Popular* (Popular Education Notebooks), produced by NOVA, discussed topics such as evaluation methodology and the relationship between knowledge and power, promoting emancipatory education (Haddad, 2014).

In the context of Popular Education, the Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) served as spaces of resistance and social mobilization, integrating faith and political action. Inspired by both lay and ecclesiastical initiatives, the CEBs articulated religious practice with the struggle for social and economic rights, questioning the Church's complicity with oppressive structures and promoting a pedagogy of work and active participation (Betto, 1981).

Finally, *O Pasquim*, an alternative newspaper founded in 1969, used humor as a form of resistance, confronting the regime's strict censorship and persisting as an active voice against authoritarianism. Paulo Freire, in exile, continued to work for social justice and revolutionary transformation through education, aligning his pedagogical practice with the struggle for freedom and human dignity (Paulo, 2018).

Through collective and clandestine efforts, Popular Education in Brazil managed to survive and strengthen during the dictatorship, playing an essential role in the country's educational and political development. These initiatives, often carried out covertly, ensured the continuity of awareness and social mobilization, keeping alive the ideals of social justice and liberating Education.

Popular Education activities that were interrupted

In the pre-1964 coup context in Brazil, adult literacy emerged as a critical educational proposal aimed at combating political exclusion and fostering active citizenship and education for democracy. Movements such as the Popular Culture Movement (MCP) in Recife and the Barefoot You Can Also Learn to Read campaign in Natal, alongside Paulo Freire's involvement in the National Literacy Plan, integrated education and political mobilization; which was perceived as a threat by conservative sectors. These initiatives were harshly repressed after the 1964 coup, with many activists and coordinators imprisoned and programs abruptly interrupted. The military dictatorship redefined literacy as a technical and apolitical activity, disconnected from social movements and controlled by right-wing ideologies,

stagnating the significant progress in Popular Education and the fight against illiteracy in the country.

Several Popular Education activities were persecuted or interrupted due to the civil-military dictatorship. The Popular Culture Movement (MCP) in Recife, which utilized the Paulo Freire Method, was shut down in April 1964, affecting around 4,000 learners across 135 groups (Scocuglia, 2018). The Popular Education Campaign (CEPLAR) in Paraíba, also based on the Paulo Freire Method, was abruptly terminated (Porto & Lage, 1994), and its leaders were persecuted under accusations of communist subversion (Scocuglia, 2003; 2018). Educational activities associated with the Peasant Leagues, which involved literacy and political training, were heavily repressed after the coup, as were the Culture Circles, which promoted political awareness through group discussions (Scocuglia, 2018).

The Basic Education Movement (MEB), connected to the progressive wing of the Catholic Church, faced severe challenges, including the imprisonment of many monitors and the closure of radio schools (Teixeira, 2008). The Society of Tele Radiofônica Schools (Seter), which used radios and local monitors to promote literacy and awareness, was also shut down after the coup (Costa, 2010). The National Literacy Plan, led by Paulo Freire, representing an innovative initiative to combat illiteracy through methods that encouraged critical awareness, was abruptly interrupted by the military coup, leading to Freire's imprisonment and exile (Brandão, 2005; Gadotti & Abrão, 2012).

The severe repression of Popular Education movements following the 1964 coup illustrates the military regime's clear perception of the subversive potential of Popular Education as a praxis of social and political emancipation. Programs like the National Literacy Plan, which employed critical and participatory methods to promote citizen awareness and critical thinking, were seen as direct threats to the authoritarian stability the military sought to establish. This act of interruption not only silenced progressive voices and restricted civil rights but also redefined the trajectory of education in Brazil, distancing it from its role as an instrument of social transformation. The history of these programs and the brutality of their suppression remind us of the political and pedagogical relevance of Popular Education in the struggle for justice and democracy and of the power that knowledge holds to challenge oppressive structures.

Popular Education activities that persisted or were initiated

Osmar Fávero, a prominent educator and a key figure in Popular Education in Brazil, shares experiences in an interview with Paulo (2018) that marked both his trajectory and the history of Popular Education in the country. His initial training was

in Mathematics at USP, but he soon realized that his true calling was not to be a mathematics teacher. Through his involvement with the Catholic University Youth (JUC) and later with Popular Action, Fávero actively participated in movements that sought a different Brazil, with a strong emphasis on democratizing education.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Fávero experienced an intense period of political and cultural effervescence, which culminated in the creation of several popular culture initiatives. He highlights the vital role that the social and political context of the time played in the formation of movements such as the Popular Culture Movement (MCP) in Recife, led by Miguel Arraes, and the Popular Culture Center (CPC) of UNE. These movements were fundamental in promoting education and culture among the popular classes, using innovative and critical methods, such as adult literacy proposed by Paulo Freire. These movements were persecuted during the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil. His narrative reveals the intersection between education and politics and how Popular Education emerged as a response to social exclusion and illiteracy, offering tools for the emancipation and awareness of people. The political content of these proposals was considered dangerous.

During the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil, established in 1964, the persistence of Popular Education movements demonstrated the resistance and adaptability of initiatives aimed at the awareness and emancipation of the popular classes, even in a context of intense political and cultural repression. This period marked both the suppression of many activities and the survival and transformation of others, which adapted to continue promoting critical education, often under state surveillance or control.

The Basic Education Movement (MEB) is a notable example of resilience during the dictatorship. As mentioned by Brandão (2006), the MEB represented one of the first educational experiences with the popular classes, emerging in the early 1960s. Composed mainly of members of Catholic Action and former members of the Catholic University Youth (JUC), the MEB managed to survive the authoritarian period due to its connection with the Catholic Church, more specifically with its more conservative wing. According to Pinto (2021), this survival was achieved through a restructuring that integrated the movement into government policy, partially distancing itself from its initial project. In 1971, the MEB underwent significant transformation, with the dismissal of critical educators and the signing of an agreement between the Ministry of Education and the MEB, which indicated both an attempt at state control and the movement's ability to adapt to continue its activities. Although its essence as Popular Education was diluted, it was not completely eradicated.

Although Popular Education during the dictatorship is often presented as a practice of resistance and emancipation, it is important to recognize that not all initiatives were unanimous in their purposes or methodologies. Some movements, such as the MEB, as previously mentioned, went through phases of adaptation and

even co-optation by the military regime, introducing a complexity that deserves deeper analysis. However, many members of the MEB, especially those from the progressive wing, opposing this imposed adaptation, organized themselves into other collectives, maintaining the principles of Popular Education and resisting the pressures of the regime (Paulo, 2018).

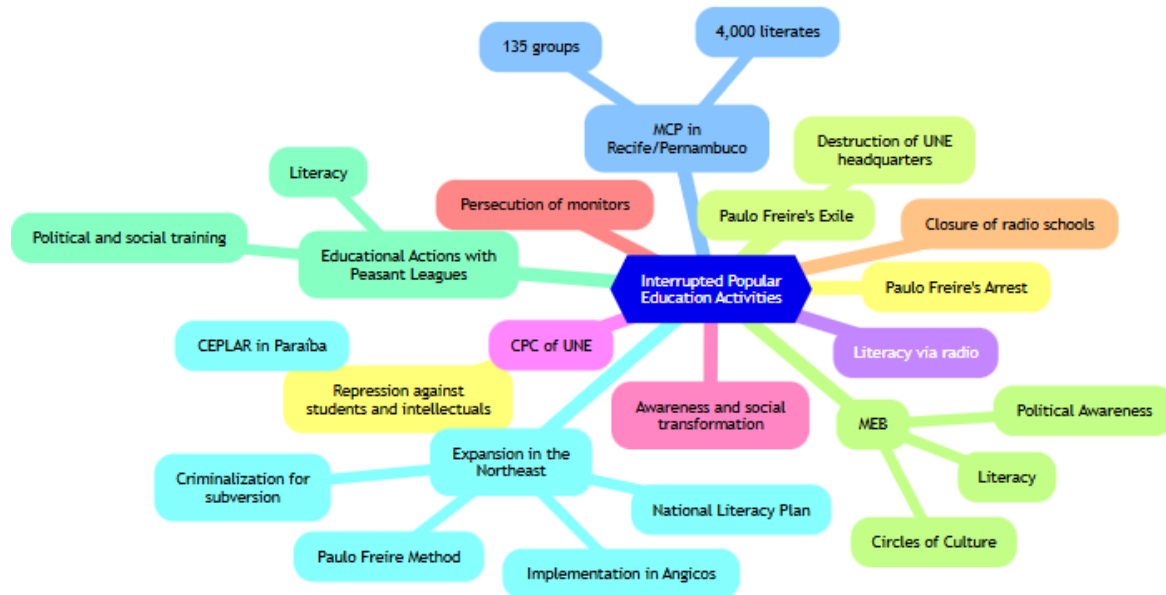
Therefore, it is essential to examine the ambiguities and different levels of resistance that took place, avoiding a simplistic idealization of the actions of social movements. In this way, it becomes possible to understand how this resistance actually took shape, highlighting the role of educators and intellectuals who remained steadfast against dictatorial practices.

Similar to the progressive MEB, another movement that emerged during this period was the Literacy Movement (Move). Inspired by Paulo Freire's pedagogy, Move was an autonomous initiative of university students who, between 1964 and 1968, sought to teach literacy to adults in working-class neighborhoods of São Paulo. This movement highlights how Popular Education found ways to resist and operate even under strong repression. The initiative, led by figures such as Sílvia Maria Manfredi, reinforces the importance of education as a practice of empowerment and social transformation, remaining faithful to Freirean principles of awareness and praxis.

The Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information (CEDI), which evolved from the Ecumenical Center for Information (CEI), also illustrates the adaptability of Popular Education movements. Initially focused on adult literacy and the application of Paulo Freire's pedagogy, the CEI had to adapt to continue its activities without attracting the attention of the dictatorship's repressive agencies. In 1974, it transformed into CEDI, expanding its activities to include research and advisory work with rural and urban workers, as well as ecumenical seminars. This transition demonstrates the flexibility of Popular Education movements, which found ways to keep the political-pedagogical struggle alive even under severe repression.

The foundation of NOVA – Research, Advisory, and Evaluation in Education in 1972 is another significant example of the resilience of Popular Education during the dictatorship. Founded by professionals from the Catholic and Protestant Churches, NOVA initially focused its activities on the Northeast, offering research and advisory services to grassroots groups, with financial support from international entities. The production of the *Cadernos de Educação Popular* (Popular Education Notebooks) by NOVA (1975) highlights the contribution of the Church to popular mobilization and reinforces the idea that Popular Education not only survived but also diversified and strengthened, adapting to new realities and continuing its mission of emancipation and social transformation.

Figure 2 – Popular Education Interrupted: Repression and Its Impacts



Source: The author.

The conceptual map (Figure 2) highlights the influence and developments of Paulo Freire's pedagogy, demonstrating its presence in literacy and Popular Education programs, as well as adverse reactions such as political repression, Freire's imprisonment, and exile. This image shows the interconnection between education, politics, and social movements, underscoring how Freirean ideas spread beyond Brazilian borders despite attempts at suppression.

The repression instated by the 1964 coup in Brazil had profound and lasting impacts on Popular Education, silencing voices and interrupting educational processes aimed at the emancipation of the subaltern classes. Among the main subjects affected by this repression were educators, community leaders, and social movements involved in promoting critical literacy and political awareness.

Paulo Freire, an icon of Popular Education, was one of the most notable targets of this persecution. His innovative literacy method, which went beyond mere word decoding to promote critical reflection on reality, was deemed subversive by the military regime. Freire was detained for 72 days and subsequently exiled, taking with him a pedagogy that would find fertile ground in other countries but was brutally interrupted in his homeland.

Other educators and leaders, such as those involved in the Popular Culture Movement (MCP) in Recife and the Popular Education Campaign (CEPLAR) in Paraíba, also felt the weight of repression. These organizations, which gathered thousands of learners and fostered spaces for discussion and awareness, were dismantled. Their

members faced imprisonment, exile, and stigmatization as "subversives," as highlighted by Scocuglia (2018).

The Peasant Leagues, which combined the fight for agrarian reform with political education, saw their educational activities stifled. Rural leaders and lawyers representing them, such as Ophélia Amorim, faced persecution and violence, highlighting the regime's fear of a rural population aware of its rights.

Organizations linked to the Catholic Church, such as the Basic Education Movement (MEB), also did not escape repression. Monitors were imprisoned, radio schools were closed, and community leaders were silenced, despite efforts by some members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to protect them.

The image of "interrupted Popular Education" symbolizes not only the suppression of educational initiatives but also the attempt to stifle dreams and resistance. However, even in the face of oppression, what is called Popular Education persisted, finding new paths and strategies to keep the hope of social transformation alive.

Subjects related to Popular Education

Regarding the subjects related to Popular Education in the research conducted, various educators, activists, and institutions involved in significant initiatives throughout the 1960s and 1970s are included.

The Basic Education Movement (MEB), formed by members of the Catholic University Youth (JUC) and Catholic Action, received support from political leaders, the Catholic Church, and international institutions. Within the MEB, Carlos R. Brandão and Osmar Fávero stand out, as they disseminated Popular Education proposals since the 1960s (Paulo, 2018).

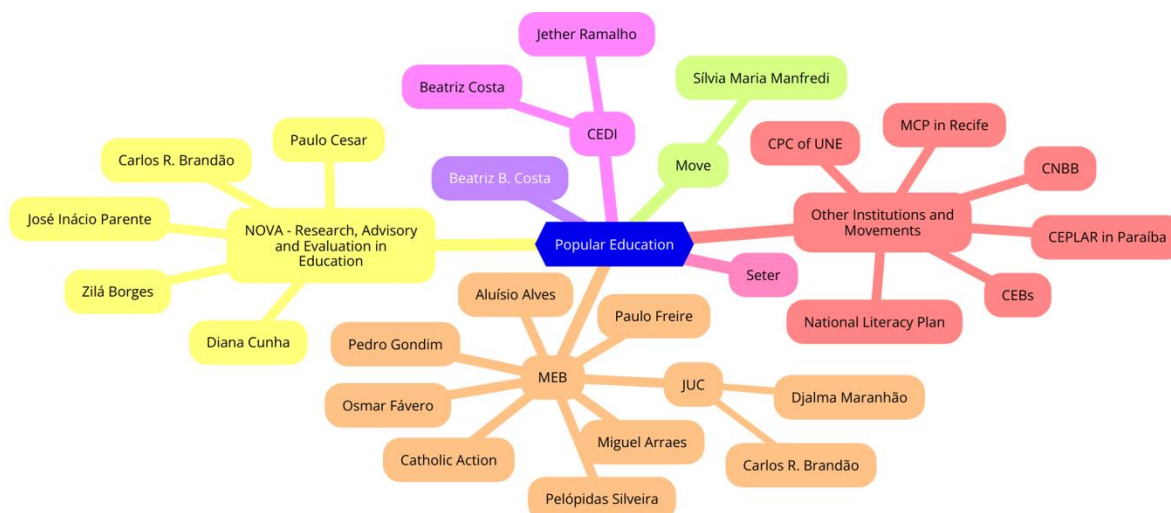
Paulo Freire, a major influence on MEB's pedagogy and on the critical literacy of adults, was a reference for Popular Education institutions throughout the civil-military dictatorship. Another significant example is the Literacy Movement (Move), in which Sílvia Maria Manfredi, inspired by Freire's method, actively participated in adult literacy initiatives.

The Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information (CEDI), with Jether Ramalho as one of its key leaders, contributed significantly to Popular Education and supported political dissidents during the military dictatorship. Beatriz Costa, a pedagogue and educator, worked closely with Jether Ramalho and was one of the founders of NOVA – Research, Advisory, and Evaluation in Education. NOVA provided advisory services for educational programs in various regions of Brazil, reflecting on and publishing its Popular Education practices. Among its notable members are José Peixoto (Peixoto Filho, 2003), José Inácio Parente, Carlos R. Brandão, Zilá Borges,

Diana Cunha, Paulo Cesar, and Beatriz Costa (NOVA, 1975). These individuals played decisive roles in promoting and implementing Popular Education practices, contributing significantly to the literacy and awareness of the popular classes.

The adaptability and persistence of these movements and organizations reveal Popular Education's ability to resist adverse contexts and reinvent itself, emphasizing the importance of solidarity and collaboration in the fight for education and social justice.

Figure 3 – Networks and Influences in Popular Education 1964-1970



Source: The author.

The image provided (Figure 3) represents a conceptual network diagram by Fávero that connects various individuals and institutions relevant to the history of Popular Education in Brazil, especially between the 1960s and 1970s. The diagram is divided into different groups of influence, highlighting central figures such as Carlos R. Brandão, Paulo Freire, and Osmar Fávero, as well as key institutions like the Basic Education Movement (MEB), NOVA, and the Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information (CEDI). The critical analysis of this diagram reveals the interconnections between individuals and institutions surrounding Popular Education.

These individuals and institutions played significant political and educational roles in promoting and implementing Popular Education practices in Brazil, contributing primarily to the literacy and awareness of the popular classes. The movements and organizations they belonged to demonstrated the adaptability and persistence of Popular Education, showcasing its strength in adverse contexts. The interaction and mutual support among these initiatives underscore the importance of solidarity and collaboration in the fight for education and social justice, reinforcing the ongoing relevance of these practices. Furthermore, in the critical and interpretative analysis, the following points were identified:

- a) Observing the figure, which resulted from bibliographic and documentary research, Popular Education stands out as the central nucleus from which different movements and individuals radiate. This reflects the importance of this concept as a structuring axis in the formation of pedagogical practices that not only aim at literacy but also at political and social awareness. The presence of Paulo Freire, Beatriz B. Costa, and others confirms the influence of these educators in disseminating a pedagogy that seeks to transform social realities through critical education.
- b) The diagram suggests the interconnection between different movements and institutions, such as MEB, NOVA, and CEDI. These connections illustrate the collaborative and solidaristic nature of Popular Education initiatives, which, despite operating on different fronts (religious, political, educational), converge on common goals of social emancipation and the fight against oppression. The inclusion of individuals such as Pedro Gondim and Pelópidas Silveira highlights the relationship between the political and educational spheres in advancing these practices.
- c) The participation of movements and institutions operating in contexts of repression, such as during the military dictatorship, demonstrates the adaptability and resistance capacity of Popular Education. The involvement of organizations like CEDI, which supported political dissidents, reveals how education intertwined with the fight for human rights and social justice, constituting itself as an act of cultural and political resistance.

A new category that can emerge from this analysis is "Popular Education as a Network of Resistance and Social Transformation." This category would emphasize the interconnected nature of the individuals and institutions represented in the diagram, highlighting how Popular Education functioned not only as a pedagogical movement but also as a network of resistance against political and social oppression. This network, composed of educators, activists, and politicians, operated on multiple fronts to promote social transformation through awareness and critical education.

"Popular Education as a Network of Resistance and Social Transformation," according to critical pedagogy, is a political practice aimed at awareness and social transformation. In this context, it became a network of resistance against structural oppression. This type of political and pedagogical resistance was fundamentally dialogical, based on the sharing of experiences and knowledge throughout the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil, whether through institutions that resisted political persecution or through the exchange of letters, as Carlos Rodrigues Brandão did (Paulo & Gaio, 2021). Freire (1979, 1982, 1992, 1994, 2008) argues that education must be an act of freedom, not domination; in this sense, Popular Education established itself as a practice of political, cultural, pedagogical, and social resistance, seeking to transform the structures that perpetuated oppression.

Freire (1980) introduces central concepts such as awareness, which is the process through which people perceive social injustices and develop the desire and capacity to fight against them. He also addresses praxis, the union of action and reflection, as a path toward social transformation. Popular Education, therefore, was a political act of encounters, solidarity, connection, and transformation, aiming to promote a new critical consciousness that leads to transformative action. This new category, emerging from this research, reinforces the idea that Popular Education, at its core, is not limited to a pedagogical practice but is fundamentally a social movement that seeks to transform power structures through education. The connections among the different elements of the diagram (Figure 3) support this interpretation, revealing the collective strength of these networks in the struggle for a more just and equitable Society.

FINAL REMARKS

In conclusion, the bibliographic and documentary research on Popular Education during the civil-military dictatorship highlighted the political resistance and courage of popular educators and progressive institutions that, despite intense repression, continued to promote educational practices of awareness and social mobilization. This period was marked by censorship, persecution, and exile, which greatly hindered educational initiatives aimed at the emancipation of oppressed classes. However, the persistence of movements such as the Basic Education Movement (MEB), the Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs), and ecumenical movements, in addition to educators who continued to disseminate Paulo Freire's ideas, illustrates the political-pedagogical role of Popular Education as a social practice and a tool for political resistance and social transformation.

Movements such as the MEB and the CEBs played fundamental roles by offering spaces for Popular Education and promoting political and social awareness. These institutions functioned as hubs of cultural and educational resistance, using critical methodologies to subvert the authoritarian model imposed by the dictatorship. Clandestine operations and international support, especially from ecumenical networks and European agencies, were crucial to the continuity of these activities, highlighting the importance of international solidarity in the fight for human rights and social justice. Thus, Popular Education not only survived the dictatorship but also consolidated itself as an essential Latin American pedagogical movement for the promotion of a more just and democratic society.

The analysis of Popular Education activities during the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil revealed that movements such as the MEB and the Literacy Movement (Move), despite times of repression, managed to remain active and relevant thanks to institutional support and the courage of their educators. Educators

like Paulo Freire (1978) and institutions such as the Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information (CEDI) and NOVA were instrumental in promoting transformative educational practices. The research revealed that Popular Education in Brazil remained resilient and active during the civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985) thanks to the courage and resistance of educators and progressive institutions. Even under intense repression, educators like Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, Osmar Fávero, Beatriz Costa, and Aida Bezerra continued to promote transformative Popular Education practices, often in secrecy.

International support was essential for the continuity of Popular Education initiatives, providing resources that enabled the survival and operation of educational movements and highlighting the importance of international solidarity in the fight for human rights and social justice. Many Popular Education activities had to be conducted covertly due to repression. Clandestine operations were a fundamental strategy for the continuity of Popular Education, allowing educators to disseminate transformative and critical ideas even under the threat of persecution.

The recovery and preservation of the memory of Popular Education practices during the dictatorship are essential to understanding the transformative role of education in contexts of repression. Documents organized by Osmar Fávero and Elisa Motta, as well as interviews with pioneers of Popular Education, provide a valuable historical record of the strategies and forms of resistance developed during this critical period. These memories are fundamental to comprehending the importance of Popular Education as a social practice of political resistance and social transformation. The triangulation of data strengthened the interpretation by cross-referencing testimonies with historical documents and academic analyses, ensuring a more robust understanding of the phenomenon studied.

Thus, we can characterize a clandestine Popular Education during the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil, referring to educational practices that were secretly (or discreetly) developed and maintained by educators and progressive institutions as a form of resistance to the authoritarian regime. These practices aimed primarily at continuing educational work with the popular classes, even in an environment of intense political repression, censorship, persecution, and threats. Clandestine Popular Education utilized strategies of concealment and disguise, with activities carried out in safe locations and at unconventional times to avoid detection by repressive forces. This movement not only preserved the essence of emancipatory and critical education but also strengthened solidarity among educators and communities, creating a support network for the survival of these initiatives in times of great adversity. Clandestinity, therefore, was a necessary and strategic response to ensure the continuity of the fight for social justice and political transformation during a period of extreme oppression.

In other words, clandestine Popular Education during the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil was a necessary response to the repression of the authoritarian regime. Educators and progressive institutions developed and maintained educational practices in secrecy to ensure the continuity of literacy and awareness-raising for the popular classes. The clandestine activities, especially those carried out by educators linked to Popular Education movements and institutions interrupted in this context, enabled the dissemination of transformative and critical ideas, which were fundamental to political and social resistance.

The practice of clandestine Popular Education kept the essence of emancipatory Popular Education alive, strengthening solidarity between educators and communities to this day (Paulo & Gaio, 2021). Thus, the history of clandestine Popular Education is a powerful testimony to popular resistance and the capacity for adaptation in the face of oppression, demonstrating that even in times of great adversity, education can be a social practice with political-pedagogical methodologies aimed at social transformation.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to present some recommendations for future research to include the preservation and dissemination of the memory of Popular Education practices developed during the dictatorship, ensuring that documents, accounts, and interviews with pioneers are widely accessible to future generations. Furthermore, it is crucial to strengthen and expand international solidarity networks, which were fundamental during the military regime, establishing partnerships that can support Popular Education in contemporary contexts of repression.

Methodological innovation, through the use of letters that communicate and transgress silencing orders, is also highlighted, suggesting that the experiences of popular educators during the dictatorship be incorporated into new pedagogical practices, expanding the possibilities for critical and emancipatory education. Equally important is the integration of these historical experiences into the Brazilian educational curriculum, as Popular Education is scarcely addressed in teacher education programs. Finally, the continuation of research on Popular Education during the dictatorship is recommended, aiming to broaden knowledge about resistance strategies and explore the relevance of these experiences in the current educational context, as well as to investigate the connections between Popular Education, individuals organized in social movements, and educational institutions, both formal and informal, offering new perspectives for pedagogical practice.

In conclusion, Popular Education remained resilient and active during the intense repression of the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil due to a combination of resistance strategies, international support, and methodological adaptation. This research was based on a careful analysis of bibliographic and documentary sources, including historical archives and interviews with educators who experienced the period. These sources revealed that, despite adverse conditions, movements such as the Basic

Education Movement (MEB) and the Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information (CEDI) continued their activities, often clandestinely, using critical methodologies inspired by Paulo Freire. The support of international ecumenical networks was also crucial, providing necessary assistance for the survival of these educational practices. The resistance of Popular Education, therefore, was the result of a solidarity network and the educators' ability to adapt their pedagogical practices to confront repression, keeping the struggle for social and political emancipation alive.

REFERENCES

- Amoré, L. M. (2014, outubro). *O Pasquim na campanha pela anistia (1978-1979)* [Apresentação]. XIV Encontro Regional de História: 1964-2014: 50 anos do golpe militar no Brasil, Campo Mourão, PR.
- Andreola, B. A. (2015). Biografia intelectual de Balduino Antonio Andreola. *Revista Pedagógica*, 17(36), 51-68. <https://doi.org/10.22196/rp.v17i36.3147>
- Betto, F. (1981). *O que é comunidade eclesial de base*. Brasiliense.
- Brandão, C. R. (2002). *A educação popular na escola cidadã*. Vozes.
- Brandão, C. R. (2005). *Paulo Freire, educar para transformar: fotobiografia*. Mercado Cultural.
- Brandão, C. R. (2006). *O que é Educação Popular* (1a ed.). Brasiliense.
- Brandão, C. R. (2016, junho 10). *Entrevista com o Prof. Dr. Carlos Rodrigues Brandão* [Entrevista concedida a Fernanda dos Santos Paulo].

Costa, B. (2010). Jether Ramalho: companheiro de muitas andanças até hoje! In J. R. Ramalho (Org.), *Uma presença no tempo: a vida de Jether Ramalho* (pp. 1-20). Oikos.

De Sá, L. T. F., & Henrique, A. L. S. (2019). A Triangulação na pesquisa científica em educação. *Práxis Educacional*, 15(36), 645-660.
<https://doi.org/10.22481/praxisedu.v15i36.5941>

Fávero, O. (2004, abril). MEB – *Movimento de Educação de Base: primeiros tempos: 1961-1966* [Texto apresentado]. V Encontro Luso-Brasileiro de História da Educação, Évora, PT.

Fávero, O., & Motta, E. (Orgs.). (2015). *Educação popular e educação de jovens e adultos* (1a ed.). De Petrus.

Ferreira, M. M. (1994). *História oral: problemas e métodos*. Editora da Fundação Getúlio Vargas.

Freire, P. (1978, dezembro). *Paulo Freire, no exílio, ficou mais brasileiro ainda* [Entrevista concedida a Claudius Ceccon]. *Pasquim*, 7-11.

Freire, P. (1979). *Educação e mudança*. Paz e Terra.

Freire, P. (1980). *Conscientização: teoria e prática da libertação: uma introdução ao pensamento de Paulo Freire*. Cortez & Noraes.

Freire, P. (1982). *A importância do ato de ler: em três artigos que se completam*. Cortez.

Freire, P. (1992). *Pedagogia da esperança: um reencontro com a Pedagogia do oprimido*. Paz e Terra.

Freire, P. (1994). *Cartas a Cristina reflexões sobre minha vida e minha práxis*. Paz e Terra.

Freire, P. (2008). *Pedagogia do compromisso: América Latina e educação popular*. Villa das Letras.

Gadotti, M., & Abrão, P. (Org.). (2012). *Paulo Freire, anistiado político brasileiro*. Editora e Livraria Instituto Paulo Freire.

Gadotti, M., & Freire, A. M. A. (Orgs.). (1996). *Paulo Freire: uma biobibliografia*. Cortez.

Haddad, S. (2014). Paulo Freire e o papel das Agências de Cooperação Europeias no apoio à Educação Popular no Brasil. *Pro-Posições*, 25(3), 123-141.
<https://doi.org/10.1590/0103-7307201407507>

Nova - Pesquisa, Assessoria e Avaliação em Educação. (1975). *Nova e educação popular: pesquisa e assessoramento em avaliação*. [s.n.].

Organização das Nações Unidas para a Educação, a Ciência e a Cultura [UNESCO], & Ministério da Educação [MEC]. (2007). *Católicos radicais no Brasil* (Coleção educação para todos, 17).

Paulo, F. S. (2018). *Pioneiros e pioneiras da Educação Popular freiriana e a universidade* [Tese de doutorado]. Unisinos.

- Paulo, F. S., & Gaio, A. (2021). *Educação popular nas cartas do educador Carlos Rodrigues Brandão: contribuições para a pedagogia latino-americana*. Livrologia.
- Peixoto Filho, J. P. (2003). *A travessia do popular na contradança da educação*. Ed. da UCG.
- Porto, D. O., & Lage, I. C. (1994). *CEPLAR: uma experiência de educação popular na Paraíba destruída pelo golpe de estado de 1964* (Edição própria).
- Pinto, P. V. S. (2021). *Movimento de educação de base (1967-1971): caminhos da sobrevivência em tempos autoritários* [Dissertação de mestrado]. Universidade de São Paulo.
- Raposo, M. C. B. (1985.). *Movimento de Educação de Base – MEB: discurso e prática, 1961-1967* (Coleção ciências sociais. Série educação, 1). UFMA/Secretaria de Educação.
- Saviani, D. (2008). O legado educacional do regime militar. *Cadernos Cedes*, 28(76), 291-312. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0101-32622008000300002>
- Schlindwein, I. G. C., & Catini, C. R. (2021). Educação popular como prática coletiva de insurgência e emancipação. *Revista Tempos e Espaços em Educação*, 14(33), e14279. <https://doi.org/10.20952/revtee.v14i33.14279>
- Scocuglia, A. C. (2003). *Educação de jovens e adultos: histórias e memórias da década de 60*. Plano Editora.
- Scocuglia, A. C. (2018). *A educação popular nos arquivos da ditadura militar: o método Paulo Freire, a justiça fardada e as reações conservadoras* [Livro eletrônico]. EDUEPB.

Teixeira, W. S. (2008). *Educação em tempos de luta: história dos movimentos de educação e cultura popular (1958-1964)* [Tese de Doutorado]. Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói.

Wanderley, L. E. W. (1984). *Educar para transformar: educação popular, Igreja Católica e política no Movimento de Educação de Base*. Vozes.

FERNANDA DOS SANTOS PAULO: Popular Educator, PhD in Education, with a background in Pedagogy and Philosophy. Completed postdoctoral research at UNISINOS, focusing on the history and memory of Popular Education. Actively involved in various Popular Education movements, such as the Association of Popular Educators of Porto Alegre and the Forum of Youth and Adult Education of Rio Grande do Sul. She was one of the founders of the Forum of Social Educators of Porto Alegre in 2016. Faculty member at FAGED-UFRGS, specializing in Rural Education. Member of Latin American networks of Popular Education.

E-mail: fernandapaulofreire@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8022-9379>

Received on: 2024.08.10

Approved on: 2024.12.01

Published on: 2025.02.03 (Original)

Published on: 2025.02.08 (English version)

RESPONSIBLE ASSOCIATE EDITOR:

Carlos Eduardo Vieira (UFPR)

E-mail: cevieira9@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6168-271X>

PEER REVIEW ROUNDS:

R1: two invitations; two reports received.

R2: two invitations; two reports received.

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Paulo, F. dos S. (2025). Popular education and resistance during the military dictatorship in Brazil: networks and clandestine practices. *Revista Brasileira de História da Educação*, 25, e357. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4025/rbhe.v25.2025.e357.en>

FUNDING:

The RBHE has financial support from the Brazilian Society of History of Education (SBHE) and the Editorial Program (Call No. 30/2023) of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).

LICENSING:

This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY 4) license.

TRANSLATION:

This article was translated by Alfonso Torres Carrillo.



Available in:

<https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=576180090012>

How to cite

Complete issue

More information about this article

Journal's webpage in redalyc.org

Scientific Information System Redalyc
Diamond Open Access scientific journal network
Non-commercial open infrastructure owned by academia

Fernanda dos Santos Paulo

Educação popular e resistência na ditadura militar no Brasil: redes e práticas clandestinas

Popular education and resistance during the military dictatorship in Brazil: networks and clandestine practices
Educación popular y resistencia durante la dictadura militar en Brasil: redes y prácticas clandestinas

Revista Brasileira de História da Educação

vol. 25, e357, 2025

Sociedade Brasileira de História da Educação,

ISSN-E: 2238-0094

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4025/rbhe.v25.2025.e357>