

# **INK OF FREEDOM: the power of writing in challenging dictatorships**

2023-2-PT02-KA220-YOU-000175363

Project financed under the call KA220 - Collaborative Partnerships of  
ERASMUS+

## **NATIONAL REPORT WORK PACKAGE 3 - RESEARCH**



**COUNTRY: Portugal**

## I. Executive summary

This study examines historical memory in Portugal through an intergenerational approach, analysing how seniors recall and transmit the past and how the dialogue among seniors, teenagers and young adults helps to interpret the present. By collecting narratives from various age groups, this report explores the evolution of historical awareness and its impact on identity and collective memory. Using oral testimonies and historical documents (letters), the report shows how historical events are remembered, debated and preserved across generations.

A qualitative, multi-source methodology was used to capture diverse perspectives on historical memory. The research combines:

- a. Semi-structured interviews:** conducted across intergenerational dialogues to examine personal experiences and how historical events are remembered and reinterpreted. Teenagers and young adults interviewed the seniors.
- b. Historical letter analysis:** investigating period letters to complement oral accounts, providing insight into past lived experiences and written recollections. Men wrote all letters and, most of them, while they were imprisoned.

By integrating these sources, the report highlights both personal and collective narratives, identifying generational differences, continuities and shifts in historical perception. This intergenerational perspective offers a deeper understanding of how history is shaped and transmitted within society.

## II. Introduction

Historical memory is a powerful tool to shape collective identity and to understand societal changes. In Portugal, as in many other nations, the reflection on the past plays a crucial role in defining the present and future of the country. Given the complexity of historical events and the diversity of experiences across generations, it is essential to explore how history is remembered, retold and passed down. The importance of this reflection lies not only in understanding the events themselves but also in addressing the impacts these events have on shaping social attitudes, behaviours and values. By exploring historical memory through various sources, such as interviews and period letters, this report aims to offer a multi-faceted perspective that integrates both personal and collective memories. Furthermore, the intergenerational approach allows for a deeper understanding of how different age groups perceive, interpret and preserve the memory of past events, ultimately enriching the ongoing conversation about the nation's identity.

The primary objective of this report is to analyse the historical narratives collected through interviews and letters, to uncover how historical memory is constructed across different generations. It seeks to identify common patterns, convergences and divergences in the ways historical events are remembered, as well as the different influences and perspectives that shape these memories. By examining how memory takes shape across different life stories and written testimonies, *Ink of Freedom* contributes to a deeper understanding of democratic values, the cost of repression and the significance of remembering as a historical act. The findings are intended to promote intergenerational dialogue and serve as a pedagogical tool for reflection in democracy, citizenship, history and human rights.

### III. Theoretical framework and historical context

#### A. Historical context analysed

The period under study goes from 1933 to 1974, corresponding to the duration of the Estado Novo regime, an authoritarian regime led by António de Oliveira Salazar in Portugal. This era is marked by political repression, censorship and a strong centralisation of power, alongside economic stagnation and social inequality. During this time, Portugal was isolated from much of the international community, with limited political freedoms and the suppression of opposition. Key events include the Estado Novo's rise to power in 1933, the corporatist structure imposed on society, the colonial wars in Africa during the 1960s and early 1970s and the eventual peaceful revolution of April 25, 1974, called the Carnation Revolution (*Revolução dos Cravos*), which resulted in the end of the dictatorship. The legacy of this period has profoundly influenced Portuguese society and the memory of its events remains deeply embedded in collective memory, shaping both individual and collective identities.

The Estado Novo was a highly centralised and authoritarian regime led by António de Oliveira Salazar until 1968 and later replaced by Marcelo Caetano because, in September 1968, Salazar suffered a cerebral haemorrhage, his health deteriorated and left unable to govern. As a result, on September 27, 1968, Salazar was dismissed and Marcelo Caetano was appointed as the new Prime Minister until the end of the regime. Another aspect was that it held onto its colonial empire longer than other European powers, maintaining control over Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Timor-Leste until the mid-1970s.

The period was strongly marked by nationalism and traditional values. The Estado Novo regime in Portugal was deeply rooted in the moral values of “Deus, Pátria e Família” (God, Homeland and Family), which shaped its ideology and policies. As mentioned by one interviewee, *“In primary school, I remember the photographs of Salazar, the crucifix, and the constant discourse filled with fear of disobedience. Always the idea of family and obedience.”*  
[Female, rural, age 68]

**The first pillar was God**, represented by Catholicism. The Catholic Church was a key ally of the Estado Novo, influencing education, culture and social policies. Salazar promoted religious conservatism, portraying Portugal as a Christian nation and reinforcing obedience, morality and tradition. Religious values were used to justify censorship, repression and the control of public life as mentioned by one interviewee: *"We didn't have the freedom to choose, for example, a religion — the country's motto was 'God, Homeland, Family', and so those who weren't Catholic — there were indeed people who weren't Catholic — were, in a way, marginalized."* [Female, urban, age 70]

**The second pillar was Family**, idealised by the Estado Novo and only the traditional patriarchal family was possible. That meant that women were expected to be housewives and mothers, with limited rights in education, work and politics. An interviewee said that *"basically, it was the men who studied and got their driver's license. In fact, under the dictatorship, it was only men who voted. Women only started voting in what year? 1959, 1960, around that time. [...] People lived off that and agriculture, because most women stayed at home, taking care of the children, doing what we might call domestic work."* [Male, rural, age 60]. Men were responsible for the financial support of the family and divorce was highly restricted. Another person gave details about it. She said that *"as a woman, I felt there was a lot of discrimination between men and women. And then the lack of freedom — the freedom we didn't have to read a book we liked. We could only read books that weren't banned by censorship, and we couldn't leave the country without permission. Women couldn't leave the country without authorization from their fathers or husbands."* [Female, urban, age 70]. Another mentioned the obligations imposed by the regime for those who wanted to get married: *"We had plans—if we were about to get married, we had to send some kind of document [...], salary, that's it. We had to state the salary of the person we were going to marry. [...] He also couldn't earn less than we."* [Female, rural, age 87]

**The third pillar was Nation**, meaning nationalism and colonialism. The regime emphasised a glorified national identity, promoting the idea of a strong, unified Portugal. Nationalist propaganda was used in education, media and cultural celebrations, reinforcing Portugal's supposed mission in Africa. At school, children used to follow strict orders and routines, as said by a [Male, rural, age 60], *"we used to sing the national anthem standing."*

*Every day, every morning. And I'm not sure if we prayed... now I'm in doubt whether we said a Lord's Prayer, a Hail Mary, but we definitely sang the national anthem."*

The Estado Novo's moral doctrine was a powerful tool for maintaining control. By emphasizing religion, patriarchal values and nationalism, the regime tried to preserve its rigid social order and suppress opposition. So, it was necessary to have an armed force to guarantee the control of society. For that role, it relied on political repression, censorship and the secret police (called PIDE/DGS) to suppress dissent. Fear was constant as mentioned here: *"What existed at the time was, well, that control—let's say the control of the regime—because you never knew where there might be a PIDE, a PIDE informant. An informant was someone who gave information to the political police or to the regular police"* [Male, rural, age 60], said a man during the interview. A woman, who was a student at the University of Coimbra, said *"Coimbra had many students. Look, as you know, students were the most enlightened, the most active people, and so, in that context, I — we — felt some persecution when we participated in meetings that discussed topics which could challenge the dictatorship. And we used to joke that even the walls had ears and that any gathering of more than one person was considered dangerous. And then the police — the police were everywhere. In the universities, in the faculties, and there were the uniformed police you see around, right? And then there was the PIDE, who were the ones in plain clothes, you know? They were everywhere. They were in the bars, in the canteen, and so we always knew someone was there trying to monitor our movements and what we were saying."* [Female, urban, age 70].

Opposition parties were banned and elections were controlled by the regime. As part of one interview, a senior said: *"I, for example, had a classmate at school and only later did I find out that she was related. She was the daughter of a leader of the Portuguese Communist Party, and she had to change schools because her father was a member, so a communist—he was politically active and went underground. At a certain point, she had to leave the school we were all attending."* [Male, urban, age 71]. Another person added his memories by saying: *"It was the year 1972, and this young man, who was a good friend of mine — we had been childhood classmates — was studying at a university in Angola's capital, Luanda. And he started being persecuted because he had Marxist-Leninist works at*

*the time. I remember clearly that his parents' house was vandalized as part of a scheme to steal the identities of young people, because he had political books. So, although the persecution was mostly rhetorical, it caused a chaotic psychological situation for his parents, his friends, and himself." [Male, urban, age 77]*

There was resistance to the regime. An interviewee, who was studying at the University of Porto at that time, explained how students created and organised strategies to fight against Salazar's rules. *"Life during the dictatorship—the period when I most felt the dictatorship, as I said—was when I was already a young university student, and we met clandestinely and collaborated in secret. Not all of our classmates had those objectives, so we had to know who we were dealing with so we wouldn't be denounced. We created underground newspapers, clandestine manifestos, and held secret meetings, and that affected our lives. It clearly had an impact, so we tried not to take risks so as not to get arrested. There was a lack of freedom, freedom of expression, and our university was even invaded by the police to arrest one or another colleague who had been denounced or who became known as an undesirable person, a communist—it was always the accusation that they were communist. Woe to anyone accused of being a communist—they were arrested, just like in the film 'Still Here I Am'." [Female, urban, age 76]*

In terms of economic and social matters, the economy remained underdeveloped compared to Western Europe, being dependent on agriculture and limited industrialisation. *"Most people lived poorly. [...] There weren't jobs like there are nowadays. There was no work, [...] there was no pay that matched the labor. People earned very little. Jobs were mostly agricultural, in services, because [...] there was no industry. Most people lived off agriculture, vineyards, and people were working under others from morning to night, finishing everything by hand, manually—there were no machines." [Male, rural, age 60]*, mentioned a senior. High rates of illiteracy and poverty persisted, particularly in rural areas. And, due to these conditions, mass emigration occurred between 1957 and 1974, with around 1.5 million Portuguese leaving for France, Switzerland and other European countries in search of better opportunities.

It is relevant to mention that, during the dictatorship, the Colonial Wars occurred between 1961 and 1974. Three colonies (Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau) were

fighting for independence simultaneously and, for that reason, the wars drained the Portuguese resources, increased compulsory military enrolment and fuelled internal dissatisfaction with the regime. One of the interviewees mentioned that *"military service was tough back then because they had to prepare the soldiers for the overseas war, which was already going on at the time, right? So, I had a tough training, but I ended up here in Aveiro doing recruitment, and from here I went to Timor. The boat trip took 46 days to get to Timor. And then I was there for over 2 years, then I came back and joined the bank. I joined the bank in 1970, and in 1974 we had the liberation."* [Male, urban, age 78]. Another person commented on the impacts of the wars and how the young soldiers found a way to safely communicate with their families. She said that *"many died, and then the list of those who had died would be published. [...] And then there were the aerograms, which were letters, already stamped, made specifically for communication between them and the family. They were called aerograms [...] between his mother and him, they had a kind of language so that no one [could understand it]—because everything was confiscated there. Nothing left or entered without being inspected, so they had a language that no one else understood. It was how they talked about whether things were going well or badly."* [Female, rural, age 87]

The combination of the economic, social and military aspects resulted in the Carnation Revolution on April 25, 1974, led by a military coup, causing the overthrow of the dictatorship. The revolution marked the beginning of democratization and decolonization, with all African colonies gaining independence by 1975.

Two of the interviewees were born overseas and, because of the Carnation Revolution and the independence of the colonies, their families decided to return to Portugal. One of them compared her life in Africa and Portugal. These are her words: *"There were huge differences, because life over there was already much more advanced than here, and when I came back, the reality—well, it was a bit harsh, because there we had a bathroom, we had a bathtub, we had, I don't know, we had everything, right? And a nice house where we felt good. Here, no. Here it was—well, I don't know—it was like going backwards, wasn't it? I was here during that time, and we regressed a lot. So we had to bathe in a basin, right? With water boiled over a fire. There was no electricity, no running water, obviously. It was a huge setback."* [Female, urban, age 61]

Some residents of the colonies, called *retornados*, struggled when returning to Portugal between 1974 and 1979. Kalter (2024, p. 140) explains that

the *retornados* or 'returnees' [...] sought refuge in the metropole, were post-imperial migrants, too, even if the overwhelming majority held Portuguese citizenship and were white. Their exact number is unknown, but at least half a million, and possibly as high as 800,000. This means that with 8.7 million residents as of 31 December 1973, the returnees added between 5 and over 9 per cent to Portugal's population within a very short period.

## B. Current situation in relation to the context

The legacy of Estado Novo remains a topic of debate and reflection within Portuguese society. The interpretation of this historical period continues to generate tension, especially in discussions of national identity, historical justice and memory policies. The April 25 Revolution is celebrated as a symbol of liberation, yet the decades of dictatorship that preceded it still evoke profound emotions. There is a growing movement toward reconciliation and the recognition of the voices that were silenced under the regime, such as those of political prisoners, opposition figures and marginalised communities. Commemorations, such as the annual April 25 celebrations, the opening of historical archives and efforts to preserve testimonies through oral history, play a crucial role in shaping contemporary perceptions of the dictatorship.

At the same time, many of the interviewees pointed to the lack of reparations and institutional recognition of past abuses: *"Psychologically, few were the people who received support for the traumas of war. Even today, some of them still suffer from this issue, especially those who were exposed to very complicated war zones, such as in northern Mozambique, in some areas of Angola, and especially in Guinea-Bissau."* [Male, urban, age 71] noted one participant. Another added that *"they didn't get any support either. No psychological support, nothing, nothing."* [Female, rural, age 87]

When asked about comparisons between the period of the regime and nowadays, all interviewees mentioned that Portugal has changed drastically. A woman gave a long answer that helps to sum up those differences: *"Just having freedom makes any comparison impossible. Look, just the fact that — even though there are still differences and we know that change takes time — men and women today have the same rights, the same duties, and*

*should be treated equally. There are no restrictions on professions, right? Back then, women couldn't join the armed forces, couldn't be airplane pilots, couldn't do any of that. So that's a big, big difference. There's also the possibility of belonging to the world today, of being part of Europe and the world. We used to live completely closed off, didn't we? Crossing the border was practically an odyssey, wasn't it? And even then, we hardly ever managed it. So, there's also access to education. At that time, about half the population was practically illiterate; people only completed what was called primary school back then. Today, all students have to attend school. All young people must be in school until at least the age of 18. And they can follow other paths. So that makes a very, very big difference."* [Female, urban, age 70]

There is a growing movement toward reconciliation and the acknowledgment of those who were silenced under the regime, including political prisoners, opposition activists and marginalised communities. Oral history, historical archives and commemorative events—such as the annual April 25 celebrations—have become essential in shaping contemporary understandings of dictatorship and democracy. Yet, some sectors of society continue to express nostalgia for the regime, revealing unresolved tensions in Portugal's collective memory. In the face of these contradictions, the voices of older generations carry urgent messages for the present: *"Don't let fear return,"* warned one woman [Female, urban, age 68]; *"You don't play with democracy. It can disappear if we're not careful,"* said another [Female, rural, age 70]. Other alerts by saying *"I wish young people were more aware of this situation, because many young people today, in universities and elsewhere, are not alerted to the problems that existed in the past, when there was no freedom of expression, no freedom of any kind. Today we are heading toward a deep hole, where individuals with a lot of money and power are starting to try to take over the world again — and that's where we're at."* [Male, urban, age 77]. A fourth testimonial emphasises that *"Look, as someone who always worked with young people your age, what I used to tell them is: preserve democracy, preserve freedom, because they are fundamental values, and only with them can you truly be part of the world and build a better and fairer one. And, since you don't know the difference, right? — because you never lived that way, sometimes it's hard for you to understand what it means to live without them."* [Female, urban, age 70]. Another

impactful testimonial was given by a woman who said: *"The message I leave is that, in any generation, we must pay close attention to what is happening around us, because what was achieved with the end of the dictatorship is not guaranteed—it must remain in people's minds. We must fight for fundamental freedoms because new dictators can emerge who will once again limit those freedoms, and this is not something we can take for granted. Everyone must stay alert and fight for their rights, and democracy happens through voting. Voting must be an informed act so that we vote wisely, because through the vote, we can also end up electing dictators. That's why more and more attention is needed, especially now that there are more political parties and more people eager to gain positions of power that give them even more power. This is very serious and could lead to the end of democracy through voting itself. Therefore, an informed vote is fundamental."* [Female, urban, age 76]

These reflections show that memory is not only about the past—it is a call to responsibility in the present and a safeguard for the future.

## **IV. Methodological considerations**

### **A. Approach**

To explore the Estado Novo regime and the Carnation Revolution, a literature search was conducted on Scopus, a leading academic database. The search criteria were:

- Timeframe: Articles published between 2020 and 2025 to ensure recent perspectives.
- Citations: Only articles with at least one citation, ensuring relevance.
- Language: English-language publications for broader accessibility.
- Access: Open-access articles allowing unrestricted reading.
- Keyword: "Carnation Revolution" to focus on directly relevant studies.

This search resulted in six articles, but one was not considered because it referred to architecture. The articles offered insights into the revolution's causes, consequences and legacy. These sources help build a clearer picture of the period and its impact on Portuguese society.

### **B. Methodology**

To analyse how the Carnation Revolution is remembered, this work used mixed-methods approaches. These methods work well for exploring collective memory, political narratives and historical impact.

Common research techniques included:

- Recording and transcribing oral testimonies, followed by narrative analysis to interpret personal and collective perspectives.
- Digitising and categorising historical documents, media archives and testimonies, allowing for content analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns.

This approach helps understand how the revolution is remembered and its role in shaping Portuguese identity today.

## C. Selection criteria and ethical procedures

- **Participant selection:**

The selection of participants for the *Project Ink of Freedom* was conducted through a voluntary subscription process. Seniors were invited to participate via an online form, which was shared through direct email communication with *Universidades Seniores* in Portugal and affiliated associations. A total of approximately 200 emails were sent, resulting in the selection of 10 interviewees.

The interviews were conducted by young adults and adolescents who are either volunteers at *DCTR* or family members of associated members of *DCTR*. This intergenerational approach was designed to create an environment of meaningful dialogue between younger and older generations, reinforcing the project's objectives of knowledge-sharing and historical preservation.

- **Ethical considerations:**

To ensure ethical integrity and compliance with legal regulations, the following measures were implemented:

1. **Informed consent and legal compliance:** Participants were informed about the project's objectives, methodology, and their rights before agreeing to participate. They provided consent by filling out an online form, where they had to explicitly acknowledge that their participation complied with European data protection laws, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Additionally, they signed a formal consent document, available in both Portuguese and English, confirming their voluntary participation.
2. **Anonymity and confidentiality:** All personal data will be anonymized in reports and publications. Any identifiable information was securely stored and accessible only to the research team, ensuring strict confidentiality.
3. **Respect for participants:** Interviews were conducted with sensitivity and in a non-intrusive manner, allowing participants to share their experiences at their own pace. They retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, but all interviewees expressed their willingness to share their memories until the end of the interviews.

4. **Data protection:** Collected data was handled in accordance with ethical research guidelines and European legal requirements. It was securely stored and will be retained only for the necessary duration, in compliance with GDPR standards.

## V. Data analysis

### A. Interview analysis

To better understand the lived experiences under the Estado Novo dictatorship and the long-term impacts of Portugal's transition to democracy, 10 interviews were conducted with individuals from different regions, generations and social backgrounds. These oral testimonies offer valuable insight into how people remember, interpret and narrate the past. The interviews revealed not only personal stories, but also broader patterns of repression, resistance, transformation and hope. The following analysis explores the main themes and recurring patterns that emerged across the interviews, highlighting both common threads and unique perspectives that shape the collective memory of this historical period.

These are the main themes and emerging patterns observed in the interviews:

#### 1. Childhood and youth in poverty and deprivation

Nearly all interviewees recall material hardship, limited access to education and precarious infrastructure when they were children and adolescents during the Regime. A recurrent contrast appears between rural and urban areas (e.g., Ílhavo, Fundão, Alto Douro, Trás-os-Montes), since childhood in rural Portugal during the dictatorship was marked by systemic exclusion, especially for women and low-income families. As one interviewee stated that *“Primary school was in a very old building, and when it rained, water would drip inside the classroom. We had almost nothing.”* [Female, rural, age 72]. Another said that *“there was a lot of poverty, and I also remember my parents, who weren't wealthy, helping some people who were even worse off than they were. Truly, there was a lot of misery and neglect. People went through great hardship. I remember us taking in two people who were really at the edge of survival.”* [Female, rural, age 68]

#### 2. Fear, censorship and social repression

The political surveillance (called PIDE), the self-censorship and the fear of denunciation were almost universal. Some interviewees experienced this directly, others through the community's atmosphere of silence. Undeniably, silence and fear shaped the interviewees' lives and most of them recall that this period of their lives was surrounded by

the restriction of critical thought, expression and political participation. The saying *"even the walls had ears"* was used more than once and reflected the omnipresent threat of repression. One participant recalled, *"My mother always told us not to speak loudly because the neighbour could be with the PIDE."* [Male, urban, age 65] Another added, *"There was fear. Fear of everything. Fear to speak, to think, to exist."* [Female, rural, age 70]. *"Going out at night was forbidden, walking alone was forbidden—it was unthinkable for a woman to walk alone in the street at night."* [Female, rural, age 68]

### **3. Education as a tool of oppression and liberation**

Under the regime, education was authoritarian, rigid and deeply sexist. Female interviewees mentioned some restrictions in their daily lives, such as the prohibition to study courses other than the ones to become teachers or nurses. They mentioned that after the revolution, education became a catalyst for social mobility, critical thinking and citizenship. The transformation of education is a central narrative: from indoctrination to social transformation. *"At school we only spoke about Salazar and God. It was memorizing and repeating."* said one woman. After the revolution, she recalled, *"For the first time, I could speak in a classroom. It was a liberation."* [Female, urban, age 68]. Another confirmed that *"It was quite strict and, well, one thing I found interesting, right? Was that, at school, there was a photograph of Salazar. And then we used to pray."* [Female, urban, age 61]

### **4. The Colonial War and its silent wounds**

Many interviewees served or had family members in the colonial wars (Angola, Mozambique, Goa, Timor). Psychological trauma, censorship of letters and lack of state support are recurrently mentioned. The war left invisible scars (trauma, silence, and unacknowledged losses) still unresolved in collective memory, according to the interviewees' perspectives. As one participant shared, *"My brother went to Angola and came back silent. He never spoke about what he saw."* [Female, rural, age 67]. Another explained, *"The letters we received came cut, with pieces torn out."* [Male, urban, age 75]. The third said that *"We had a cousin, our cousin Zé, he was about to join the army, so my parents, to prevent him from going to Angola—because many young men died there in the*

*war—sent him to their house. He stayed there for a few years before joining the army, right? Because once in São Tomé, he did his military service in São Tomé and Príncipe. That way, he avoided going to Angola or Mozambique, which were much worse. So yes, my parents did that. They took him there so he could do his service there, and afterward he returned to Portugal, so he didn't go to Angola. And they did that precisely because of the regime we were living under, you know? They would send young people there, and they would die. Many mothers lost their sons that way. It was horrible, unfortunately."* [Female, urban, age 61]

## **5. April 25, 1974 – The revolution as awakening**

All describe the Carnation Revolution as an emotional turning point and the most common feelings were surprise, hope and transformation. Rural communities experienced the changes more gradually; urban ones saw immediate shifts. The revolution is seen as both a political rupture and a deeply personal awakening. One interviewee recounted, *"I remember seeing people running to the street, hugging each other. I didn't understand everything, but I felt that something very important was happening."* [Male, urban, age 66] Another shared, *"It was like opening our eyes for the first time."* [Female, urban, age 61]

## **6. Frustration with contemporary democracy**

While democracy is appreciated, many express disillusionment with persisting poverty, housing issues, inequality and low wages in Portugal nowadays. They perceive democracy as essential, but incomplete, when it fails to guarantee basic dignity for all. One voice remarked, *"We have freedom, yes, but we still have miserable salaries and houses we can't afford."* [Male, rural, age 71] Another reflected, *"Democracy is a precious good, but it's not enough. Social justice is missing."* [Female, rural, age 72]

## **7. Memory, justice and historical reckoning**

Most note the lack of reparations, insufficient state recognition and fragile historical memory. Education, testimonies, and museums are seen as vital tools to safeguard democracy. Memory is not just personal; they see it as a political, educational and

fundamental experience for preventing authoritarian resurgence. One participant expressed, *“The history of the regime should be mandatory in schools. Young people need to know what fear was.”* [Male, urban, age 65] Another emphasized, *“Memory is our weapon against forgetting.”* [Female, urban, age 63]

## 8. Messages to future generations

Almost every interview ends with a direct appeal to younger people: to protect democracy, stay informed and resist authoritarianism. Several warn against electing dictators through democratic means. There's a strong intergenerational call for vigilance, critical thinking and active citizenship. One interviewee warned: *“You don't play with democracy. It can disappear if we're not careful.”* [Female, rural, age 70]

Through the lens of these deeply personal testimonies, the *Ink of Freedom* project fulfils its mission: to transform memory into a living force for democracy. These narratives recount a repressive past, bridge generations, challenge silence and cultivate a collective awareness rooted in democracy, justice and vigilance. Through these memories, the interviewees reminded that democracy must be defended, nurtured and critically examined, not only through institutions, but through the lived experiences and ongoing narratives of the people themselves.

## B. Focus group analysis

As part of the *Ink of Freedom* project, a focus group activity was planned in partnership with a local school in Aveiro. The initial arrangement included the designation of a history teacher who would help identify and prepare students to participate in intergenerational dialogues with senior citizens. Unfortunately, despite the school's expressed interest and commitment, the coordination efforts did not progress as expected, and the necessary support for assembling the focus groups was not fully implemented. To compensate for the absence of these focus group discussions, we decided to expand the analysis of personal letters written by prisoners during the dictatorship, ensuring the project maintained a strong foundation of perspectives and lived experiences.

## C. Letters analysis

To deepen the understanding of personal experiences and emotional landscapes during the Estado Novo dictatorship, the *Ink of Freedom* incorporated the analysis of 115 letters, of which ten were translated for closer examination. These letters were obtained from two important historical archives in Portugal: Museu do Aljube – Resistência e Liberdade and Fundação Mário Soares e Maria Barroso. Each letter was written by individuals who were either imprisoned or living in political exile for opposing the dictatorship. These personal documents offer rare and intimate perspectives from these people. Through these writings, we gain access to voices that were silenced by the regime but preserved through memory and resistance.

These are the key themes and emerging patterns across the letters:

### 1. Resistance and inner freedom

Despite the physical constraints of prison or exile, many letters reflect an unbroken sense of inner freedom. Prisoners often spoke of maintaining their ideals, studying political texts, and keeping their minds sharp and disciplined. For example, one wrote: *“I’m reading and studying. I believe that’s the best way to stay sane and not waste time.”* This reveals an active form of resistance through intellectual engagement and mental resilience.

### 2. Censorship, silences and hidden codes

Several letters contain vague expressions and a careful tone that reveals awareness of the censor’s eyes. Most of them have a stamp on it to show they were censored and one of the original letters has the signature of the censor. Writers adapted their language using discretion, subtlety and emotional indirection. For example, affectionate moments such as a child’s birthday are mentioned with tenderness but restraint: *“I’m sending a big kiss and a hug for your birthday”*, a line that carries profound meaning within the limits of what could be written. These silences and carefully chosen words became forms of creative resistance and emotional resilience.

### 3. Family ties and emotional endurance

A recurring emotional thread is the intense bond with spouses, children, and loved ones. The letters are filled with tenderness, concern and longing. Writers asked about school progress, health, birthdays or small everyday details, often saying more in what they *couldn't* say. One prisoner noted: *“A kiss to our little one. I imagine him playing, and I miss his laugh.”* In the face of separation and uncertainty, love becomes an act of endurance.

### 4. Solidarity and collective strength

Inside prison, letters reflect collective dynamics and mutual support among detainees. Some mention roles like “cantinier” (someone who helped manage shared meals) or describe communal reading and debates. Laughter, humour and solidarity helped maintain morale. Even in exile, figures like Mário Soares shared strategic reflections with comrades, showing how personal correspondence was also political coordination.

### 5. Hope, doubt and the future

contradictory feelings are expressed. it is possible to observe that hope pulses through the correspondence, sometimes accompanied by doubt and exhaustion. Exiled writers reflect on strategies for Portugal’s democratic future, while imprisoned ones describe dreams of reunion. Hope is not abstract—it is built in small gestures, everyday planning and unbroken ideals. One letter ends with: *“Let’s not lose hope. We will meet again, and freedom will return.”*

These letters are more than personal messages—they are historical documents of resistance, testaments of emotional intelligence and political artifacts of a time when communication was both crucial to maintain life as normal as possible and a weapon against the regime. In the context of the *Ink of Freedom* project, they enrich our understanding of memory, censorship and resilience. They help fill the gap left by the unfulfilled focus groups, giving voice to those who were silenced but never surrendered their hope.

#### D. Integration and triangulation of data

To build a comprehensive picture of the lived experience under the Estado Novo dictatorship, we applied a triangulation approach by comparing and contrasting findings from two key data sources: oral history interviews and archival letters. Despite the inability to conduct focus groups, the integration of these two rich sources provided a multidimensional view of memory construction, enabling both emotional depth and thematic breadth.

A comparative analysis of interviews and letters reveals significant convergences, as well as some divergences, in how individuals experienced and remember dictatorship, resistance, and the transition to democracy:

Theme	Interviews	Letters
<b>Poverty and exclusion</b>	Recurrent in rural childhoods, especially among women and low-income families.	Rarely addressed directly, but material deprivation is implied in the background.
<b>Fear and censorship</b>	Explicitly discussed as shaping behavior, speech and thought (“even the walls had ears”).	Implicit through silences, vague expressions, and adaptation to censorship (“a kiss to our little one”).
<b>Education and political awareness</b>	Seen as a tool of both oppression and post-revolution emancipation.	Used as intellectual resistance inside prison (studying, reading as mental survival).
<b>Emotional endurance and family bonds</b>	Present in reflections on the past, but less emotionally detailed.	Central and vivid—love, longing and endurance thread through nearly every letter.
<b>Resistance and hope</b>	Often tied to the revolution or later reflections, revolution as an awakening.	Hope and resistance are continuous, even in isolation, expressed through strategy, planning, and small acts of survival.
<b>Solidarity and collective experience</b>	Mentioned in wartime and post-revolution contexts.	Deeply embedded in prison life—collective reading, humour, shared routines.
<b>Justice, memory and transmission</b>	Memory as duty and political weapon; emphasis on educating youth to preserve democracy.	Memory lives through coded letters, emotional resilience, and symbolic acts of writing and receiving.

Together, these two sources form a layered narrative of Portugal’s past. While interviews offer reflective, often explicit perspectives shaped by the passage of time, the

letters provide a real-time window into the emotional and political texture of life under repression. In their convergence, we find a powerful continuity of resistance and the enduring human will to love, think, and dream under authoritarian rule.

## VI. Conclusions

The *Ink of Freedom* project demonstrates the power of memory in shaping historical understanding, civic consciousness and intergenerational dialogue. Through the integration of oral testimonies and archival letters, this report reconstructs a nuanced view of the Estado Novo dictatorship and the democratic transition in Portugal.

While interviews provided reflective, emotionally rich perspectives filtered by time, the letters offered immediate, intimate snapshots of resistance and daily life under surveillance. Together, these sources illuminated recurring themes of fear, censorship, deprivation, gender inequality, resilience and hope—each shaped by personal experience and collective memory.

Despite the absence of the planned focus groups, the voices that emerged from interviews and letters complement one another to form a deeply human archive of survival, longing and the moral duty to remember. Seniors involved in the project expressed a strong desire to pass on lessons to younger generations, warning against the danger of not defending democracy and calling for vigilance against authoritarian resurgence.

This document affirms that memory is not merely retrospective—it is active, political and necessary for building a just, democratic future. It also reinforces the importance of creative methods to engage society in remembering and reimagining history.

## VII. Recommendations

Built on the insights gathered through interviews and historical letters, the following recommendations aim to preserve and activate Portugal's historical memory in meaningful ways. By bridging research, artistic creation and public engagement, these suggestions seek to honour the past while empowering future generations to uphold democratic values, cultivate critical reflection and keep memory alive through education, culture and intergenerational dialogue.

### 1. Recommendations for artists

To deepen public engagement and create emotional connections to historical memory, artists are encouraged to:

- Develop participatory performances that blend documentary theatre with real testimonies, highlighting the voices of seniors and pieces of the censored letters, visualising missing words and hidden codes as metaphors for repression and resistance.
- Use music, dance or spoken word to represent themes like exile, censorship or the emotional endurance of families during imprisonment.
- Engage public spaces with performative interventions that symbolically reconstruct moments of resistance, silence and liberation.

### 2. Recommendations for the preservation and dissemination of historical memory

- Open public access to archives of letters and oral testimonies, especially from underrepresented voices such as women, exiled citizens and rural populations.
- Encourage schools and universities to include first-person narratives in their history curricula to humanize learning and stimulate critical thinking.
- Support community-based oral history projects, especially those led by youth in partnership with senior citizens, to strengthen bonds and local memory.
- Create a podcast in which teenagers and young adults interview seniors and vice versa to talk about life experiences and expectations.

### 3. Recommendations for future research

- Investigate the role of silence and trauma in post-authoritarian societies, especially regarding psychological legacies and intergenerational transmission.
- Examine the impact of nostalgia for authoritarianism in contemporary political discourse, linking past memory with present-day threats to democracy.
- Analyse artistic responses to dictatorship (past and present) as a lens for understanding resistance, catharsis and civic reimagination.

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## IX. Annexes

- **Supplementary Documentation:**
  - Interview and focus group scripts.
  - Examples of letters and transcriptions.