



# BEING A POLITICAL PRISIONER

SHORT STORY AND
HISTORICAL NARRATIVE
CONTEST 2018

**EDUCATIONAL SERVICE** 

# Aljube Museum Resistance and Freedom

# BEING A POLITICAL PRISONER

# **Short Story And Historical Narrative Contest 2018**

**Educational Service** 

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## **PRESENTATION**

This small booklet gathers the three best works of the first short story and historical narrative contest promoted by the Educative Service of the Museum of Aljube, subordinate to the title *Being A Political Prisoner*.

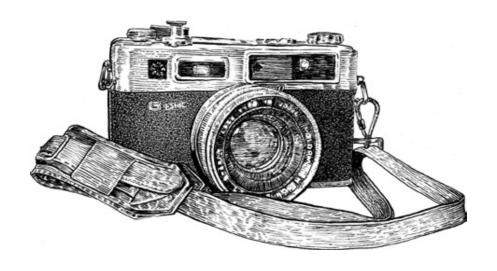
The contest took place between February and May 2018 and brought together more than two dozen exciting participations, in the two set modalities, with texts from students of secondary education and senior universities. This contest was developed in partnership with the History Teachers' Association (APH) and the Portuguese Teacher's Association (APP) and counted with the collaboration of a selection panel that brought together, in addition to elements of the two associations, the writers João de Melo and Risoleta Pinto Pedro.

The publication of these short stories and narratives in paper (and also in e-book format, on the sites of the APH and the Museum of Aljube) fulfils the objective of disseminating the work and knowledge possibilities provided by the themes presented in the Museum, both in the field of Portuguese Contemporary History and in the socialization of the common memory, which we share in an attempt to enrich a living and participatory social and political consciousness.

The experience paved the way for another contest, which will take place during the year of 2019.

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# BEING A POLITICAL PRISONER



# Tarrafal '72

# MARIA AMÉLIA T. N. GUERRA

The abrupt braking led the car to a stop because the soldier had little instruction in driving. The lieutenant jumped right away, before the dust could settle on the road, and solicitously opened the rear doors. In contrast, the passengers were slow to exit, they took their time looking at the ochre vastness of the plateau, where the walls could barely be seen. The Colonial house was the only building in sight; in the shadows, only a couple of greyish barracks lost in the distance. A recently whitewashed long porch, mosquito net windows, banana trees at the end of the backyard, a pebble resistant solitary jacaranda, covered in purple flowers, the only colour in this harsh land-scape painting.

In a disguised impatience for the hour of waiting, the two men descended the steps to the gate for their greetings: "Please come in, my wife will come right away for the introductions, she's finishing the preparations for lunch."

The travellers greeted the owner of the house, the war-

den of the prison, and just behind, another man's bow, a grey figure that reminded them of other times, other grey figures with raincoats and hats, spying and reporting in the cafes of Lisbon – the agents of the political police.

"Has the inspection in the capital been very fatiguing, major?" asked the director. "To rest, nothing better than lunch and a stroll on the beach before I return."

They entered. The table announced the undesired interaction, blessed by the saints who, from the wall's suspended frame, protected the repast of the house. The missus wavered an excuse for the delay and said that lunch was ready, always keeping an eye on the whirl of the half-breed girl, who came in and out of the kitchen. Long drag of chairs "the lady sits next to me," said the boss, solicitous in his deference. When the terrine was served, only the director's pig-like slurping disturbed the usual silence of the soup. "We have stew," said the director while he finished his soup, "with every sausage, black pudding and smoked pork sausage from Beira because my mother-in-law never forgets to send an Easter package." Again the silence that the stew demanded. Only with a praise of the rice pudding, because the policeman had a sweet tooth, did the conversation restart: "A coffee on the porch with bagasse, liquor for the ladies."

Again, the dragging of chairs and the lieutenant, red from the *vinho verde*, and having lunch already been devoured, raised a glass with one hand and pointed to the tray where the mulatta carried the coffee with the other. The grey pide agent returned to the praise: "Great drink, director, I should come here more often."

The fan did not reduce the heat from the high sun that burned the porch.

In sight, a group of women on the road shortened their

distance in a growing whisper, sung at the cadence of their footsteps. Cans of water on their heads, a boy hooked to the hip, his mouth searching for the refreshing drops that fell to the rhythm of the swings of the roadside. Barefoot kids, melon bellies, bouncing around, a ball on their feet, these had escaped dysentery, because the weak ones, in years of drought, had turned into angels. The first woman widened her step when she saw the house, she turned her face away from the clearing, and the others stopped their singing; the melody echoed far away, almost like a whimper. Wisdom cut the voices of the group. It was not a place of sorcery, nor their master's address, or even the foreman's. It was the house of a white man, spoken about in whispers by his men, the warless warriors of Tarrafal; the house of those who shackled the companions who fought in the forests on the other side of the ocean, and to the women, they cut their voices. It was the house of the tyrant of the concentration camp of Chão Bom.

In remembrance of the song, neither warm nor *coladeira*, the major's wife recalled other mornings of procession, other tunes, other children, the children of Mindelo. When she went up the platform in chemistry class, and similar whispers, mourner cries, diverted her eyes from the blackboard to a peek out the window.

So many small white coffins heading towards the new cemetery, so small that sometimes the father would carry it on his back. She hadn't forgotten the day when, to her astonishment, she had seen the procession coming back, bringing the empty coffin "It's the drought and hunger, Madam, if it's good for one, it's good for ten." She imagined the next angel-boy and so many others, withered bodies, a christening suit, taken to heaven or down to earth with or without a coffin.

She awakened with the major's voice: "And the visit to the camp, director, when will it be? I would really like to go!" "If you insist, we will go now, before the sun comes down because the rules are strict," was the answer.

When they had their last sip, the four men got up. That's when the major's wife dropped the final sentence, "I'm going too!"

The director frowned in outrage and exploded in a very open complaint. "It is not a visit for the lady or the girl, and the afternoon refreshments are served on the porch, we will return very briefly." Her insistence had no retreat, she grabbed the girl's hand and followed the procession, without hesitation, playing the role she had decided to play. The host's vexed countenance was apparent; complicity shone in the major's eyes, a glance laden with words.

The distance was short – just beyond the road – the ditch, the walls, the two towers, the guardhouses, the gate just a few steps away.

She felt an inexplicable anguish when she crossed the barbed wire, the railings of the "slow death camp." How many women had passed through that gate which had recently been reopened to torture other men, fighters for the same causes?

She remembered stories of ancient struggles, of heroes who were almost legends, of the dead on that floor, of the women who stayed, of the brave example of Herculana, who crossed the sea to visit her son, Guilherme, a friend of whom her father spoke.

The entourage, walking at a wider pace, responded arrogantly to the subservient bowing of the guards-henchmen. In sight, the first black, mulatto, white prisoners. What sentiment disturbed their minds when they saw us pass by; the

answer bothered her so much she tried to think of something else. Where would Luandino and Jacinto be on that day of June 1972? She learned, later on, that they had been released days before. And there she was staring at those eyes where she only read contempt, not humiliation or hatred, but the hope of every fighter, equal to that of so many antifascists in times of dictatorship, which united the prisoners of the Tarrafals, Peniche and S. Nicolau.

The moment had come; she stayed behind and, quickly, took a camera from her purse and ordered the girl: "Inês, go there for the photograph" and began taking pictures, one after the other

The men stopped, speechless because the cowardice of hierarchical subservience did not allow complaints. The major resumed the march, followed by the others, ignoring the episode.

As they walked by the dormitories, men outstretched on the bunks, the director pointed to the kitchen justifying the unjustifiable: "These guerilla soldiers are well taken care of, major!"

She followed the group of prisoners who, indifferent to the visitors, continued their routines: two were reading, others, further away, were doing gymnastic exercises or their daily tasks; close by, a black man, sitting on a box and using another one as an easel, was painting. She drew closer. The attentive director again prevented the stop: "The guards take the paintings to the beach and sell them for tobacco" and ran not to miss the progress of the entourage.

The major's wife measured the distance and stopped, admiring a painting that was on the ground, a controlled fire in the African forest: "Is it for sale? How much is it?" she ventured.

"Whatever you want to give," replied the artist in a per-

fect Portuguese. She opened her purse again and quickly gave him all the money she had on her, "keep it, quick!"

Only then, astonished, did he take his eyes from the painting and the glances they exchanged were of such complicity that she still remembers, today, the captive painter whose name she never knew.

He carried the painting with a joyful smile after a new eccentricity, fulfilling the programmed performance. And so, she went her way, always paying attention to the major's steps and recording in her memory the smallest details for future reports. Where would the infamous "frying pan" be? She didn't see it.

The return was hasty, the farewells quick, full of convenient thanks. The driver was already waiting at the gate.

A trip of contained words, only the lieutenant insisted on breaking the silence by recalling the flavours of lunch. The child slept among the couple who, in the back seat, dived into cogitations that couldn't be shared by others.

She returned to Mindelo, to the secondary school, to chemistry classes, to the students who she felt were more attentive every day, closer, friendlier. Even more intimate, after that class in January, six months later, when the news of the murder of Amílcar Cabral was whispered in the halls. The tragedy shined through the faces of many young people, the same who understood the teacher's speech when she decided not to teach her class because she shared the general consternation.

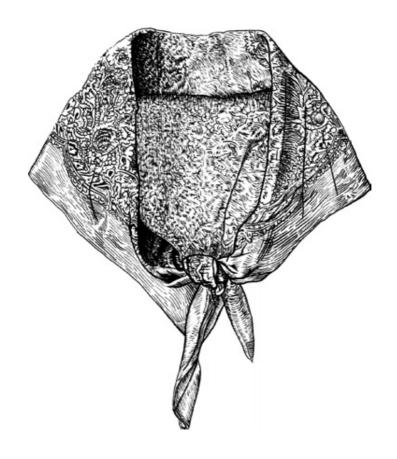
Eight days after her return from Tarrafal, the letter arrived. The military command demanded the immediate delivery of the film and photographs taken in the labour camp of Bom Chão. The major ignored it and didn't answer. The photos followed another path.

Two years later, in an April of freedom, the Tarrafal ceased to have railings, walls, gates, "frying pans".

And one night, in Lisbon, when the lights of the theatre illuminated the stage, and the actors evoked the memories of the dictatorship and repression, the screen-scenario reproduced photographs of Tarrafal.

In the darkness of the audience, they smiled intimately as they saw the photos that they believed had been lost.

The major would die four decades later. But the painting of the anonymous prisoner-painter continues to tell the stories of the concentration camp, the stories of burnt slave quarters, of tortured men and the liberation struggle of the people of Africa.



# You won't take me again

# MARIA INÁCIA PACHECO

Alentejo, 1950s, end of May beginning of June, the harvests had just begun. In her peasant costume, with a colourful scarf framing her still young face, Mariana went up the small slope that took her home. She stopped halfway, perhaps due to the fatigue of a long day's work. She stared at the landscape, the same of every day, but she wanted to appreciate a few details: her house, which was a small property away from the village, exquisitely whitewashed and with blue bars for decoration, the chimney, which would remain smokeless until she arrived home to prepare supper. Next to it, an old haystack that wasn't hers. Like everything around the house, nothing belonged to her. Further down, the well and the stream, which at that time of the year ran peacefully with the lightness of a creek. For her, the stream served only to wash her clothes or to make her journey more difficult in harsh winters, when the waters exceeded its limits. She didn't know, at the time, that these excesses would still be useful to her because the water takes everything

and washes everything. The sun was long gone, but there was that warm clarity of dusk.

She looked at the fields... so much land, so much wheat and at the bottom of the vast plain, the horizon, still marked with red. It was time to go home, there was much work waiting for her, but she did not know that what awaited her was, as the people say, a hell of a job.

She stopped at the entrance, quiet and mute, with her lunch basket tucked in her arm. The man, her man, was walking around, speaking, gesticulating, as if insulting someone who was not there, indignantly raising his voice: "you won't take me again, you won't" and, continuing in his monologue: "no more doing what you want to me, no more beatings, no more humiliations!" She kept still, she had forgotten to put the basket down, not knowing but already guessing, the seriousness of the situation. He hadn't even noticed her, lost in his litany, scurrying in a house that was too small for such anguish. "You won't take me, you won't take me" and already feeling trapped, the thick walls, the iron door, the bars, the torture, the interrogations... It was not so much the physical pain, despite it being almost unbearable, the worst was the humiliation, the rage of being treated like a criminal by those bestialised men. He could still hear their laughter and smell those infernal days that he had spent in prison, he didn't even know what he was being accused of. Was it because he had made some demands, because he had complained when wronged and offended, was that a crime?

Pide, communism, politics, he didn't know much about it... he knew that he felt the sharp claws of the dictatorship strong on his skin and that the word freedom, as well as many others, was forbidden. But even if they killed him, he had nothing to tell. When he came out, they had warned him, "you're going home now, but if you ever come back it's going to be much worse, this was just a sample, the repeat offenders get special treatment, so special you can't even imagine." He had swallowed all the words he wanted to throw in the faces of those cowards who, hidden behind their uniforms and power, the first which had been given to them, the other which they had made up, used their brutality to unload frustrations.

He shut up that day, but staying quiet when provoked wasn't in his character. So now he was there, waiting for them again. He looked at his wife as if he had only just noticed her presence and lowered his voice "they are coming, but this time, I won't let them take me." She could have told him:

-I'm tired of telling you to stay out of this stuff, you know they're in charge, and they don't allow any confrontation! But reproaches or sermons were the last thing he needed.

So, she finally put her basket down and, in a gesture of affection, held his rough and callous hands between her own. She was proud of the handsome, honest and hardworking man that was her husband, she looked at him tenderly: he was tall and thin, but well built, his tanned skin, burnt by the sun, evident in his dark face, those bright and gentle eyes. She came closer to him and, in a sweet voice, as if to protect him, said:

No, not again, but now tell me, how do you know that they're coming. José knew that when someone spoke too much, they wouldn't show up for work the next day, and the co-workers, in a quiet voice commented: "the guard came to pick him up, took him God knows where."

Revolt and protest were a given in the midst of such repression, always spoken in quiet voices, but some more attentive ears listened to what others dared to say, which was very little, and in an instinct of bad faith, there came the accusation. The boss and foreman's doormats and bootlickers, who betrayed their colleagues for a few lousy pennies and a lot of contempt, who turned them in, were used because they were useful, but they were treated and seen as trash.

In that afternoon it had been a little different, but it all came down to the same. He had spoken for him and his colleagues, they wanted higher salaries, a more dignified life and some respect. It was no big deal, and it wouldn't have been anything serious if he hadn't confronted the foreman and, in the heat of the conversation, said what he shouldn't have said. Not what he shouldn't have, but what he wasn't allowed to, because the foreman had the top job over there. Above him, there was only the boss, the so-called landowner, the owner of the lands, of the wills and, in their minds, of the people as well, those poor souls who depended on him to survive. But the bosses, the masters, most of them lived in the village or in the city and only showed up to get the fresh air of the countryside, to feast their eyes with their wealth, to make sure all that abundance they enjoyed without having to stir a straw was still there and to show who was in charge, to let the workers know who they had to take their hats off for as a sign of respect. There might have been some exceptions, but these were few, and it wasn't the case here. The foreman only had to obey the boss, and since he obeyed, faithfully like a dog who then showed his teeth to the weakest, he was the one who was there to tame them, to lead them with a short leash. The motto was obedience and silence, and it was because José did not shut up that in that lit discussion, the foreman, furious, put an end to the conversation, saying:

- You're fired, you will never set foot here again. And, like a bull, ready to strike, he looked at the others and added:
- If anyone else has anything to say you can speak up, but the same will happen to you. Nobody said anything, but everyone knew that the foreman would go straight to the guard post, and that what he was about to report to the sergeant was more than enough to arrest the man who wasn't intimidated and said what he had to say. José knew they were coming to get him and they did, at nightfall, which was how it should be.

The hooves of the horses, in their cadenced step, could be heard at a distance, the noise was well-known; the Republican Guard was a constant presence in that area. The animals stopped abruptly, the beasts frightened and not less amazed. Two men rode them, in uniform, armed, with shotguns well in sight; one displaying his sergeant's stripes, the other without stripes, showing his subordinate condition. The flames lighted up the night, rising to the sky, of a proportion already impossible to control. Mariana, with her arms also raised up to the sky, screamed in afflictive despair:

- Help, help, he's in there!

The guard with the chevrons, recomposed from the shock and already assuming his position as chief, yelled:

- Who, miss? Who is inside? Even more immersed in her drama, she exclaimed:
- My husband, my husband closed himself inside and set the house on fire.

The sergeant merely said:

- And what do you want me to do? Whatever was inside has already burnt down. He was right because the whole structure of the haystack had already burned to ashes. The guard with no chevrons, who had been quiet until then, suddenly started to cough, perhaps because of the smoke, or maybe due to the commotion. He looked at the sergeant, as if he was also asking for help, then, he looked at the woman, with pity in his eyes, but there was nothing he could do. What he did was show that the uniform does not always harden the spirit or bestialise who has nobility of feelings. He looked once more at his superior, but he reprimanded him with a glance of censure, while he commanded:

- Let's go, there's nothing else to do here. And he continued to the woman:
- As soon as the sun rises, we'll come back to remove the debris

They prompt the horses and left. The guard without stripes still looked back, in a farewell attitude or to convey encouragement to those who stayed behind, but out of respect, he kept quiet, next to the chief.

That morning, what you might call a miracle happened. A quiet night, the sky adorned with stars, the moon wanting to shine but, without order or warning, the clouds condensed around it. The light from the moon was extinguished, the stars were erased, the sky turned pitch black, and the storm collapsed. For the crops, so much rain at the beginning of summer was not welcome, but it came, and it played its part perfectly. When the morning rose, clear and bright, as it should in that time of the year, there was no sign of fire, nor barn, nor ashes, nor burnt body. The water had taken all of it, everything had gone downstream to where the dam awaited to receive its excesses. There, in the place of the tragedy, there was only washed land and the woman, sitting in the stone bench, as if she had stayed there all night, waiting for them to return. They came back, but now there was nothing for them to do.

They departed, suspicious, and came back again and again, day and night, sometimes on foot, to hide their arrival. Eventually, weary or vanquished, they started to forget, the fire, the man, the widow...

Twenty years of widowhood, grieving, longing and sometimes, a little hopeful, when small messages or code notes were delivered to her by friends, all in the utmost discretion. Tears and sacrifices, which ultimately bore fruit.

May 1974. Mariana, who had worn black the day before, dawned in bright colours, adorned as if it was a day of celebration. Twenty years is a long time, and the girl with the colourful scarf and young face had changed, but she was still a beautiful woman, with a light and determined step. She arrived at the village's square where the bus would also arrive, bringing her man, reborn from the ashes. They embraced each other for a while; José looked fondly at the sky of his country and, emotional, only managed to say:

- I told you I wouldn't go back to that prison, I told you...



# The Released Poet

# **SOFIA NETO OLIVEIRA**

Whenever he felt bored, Augusto scribbled something on his usual notebook: that little notebook with a black cover, that he hid inside his mattress. He spent most of his days bored. The butcher and the labourer, who occupied the cells next to his, were not very communicative and whenever they opened their mouths it was to speak of a great escape they had been planning for more than eight months, and which they considered to be unyielding. They still lived in the hope of escaping that horrendous fort, and following the example of Álvaro Cunhal, carrying out another great "escape from Peniche":

We will still meet outside, my dear friend. This building is not as impenetrable as you think! We're gonna make it,
 Augustito... it's a matter of time – the labourer whispered.

Augusto, a lawyer who until then had been very prestigious, had been captured by the PIDE, arrested for expressing his opinions, leaving his wife alone with three children, and the eldest, Carlos, who was eighteen years old at the time, had already joined the military academy.

The days in the cell number twenty-two, which stood at the end of the corridor of the highly secured block A in the political prison of Peniche, were lived in anguish. The days seemed weeks, the weeks more prolonged than months, and months were as hard as years.

- What a waste of life! - Augusto thought.

He spent his time scribbling, sometimes love poems, sometimes experimental poetry. In this way, he freed his soul from the imprisonment of his body, which is impossible to imagine. When he heard the whistles of the guards or the sound of the phone, Augusto rushed to put his notebook inside his straw mattress, then he sewed it with a needle and some thread that his wife had given him, inside a ham sandwich, when she visited him for the first time.

The tiny cell smelled of mould and excrements.

Augusto missed the smell of hygiene if it had an odour. The low light that crossed the window grills did not last for many hours; therefore, this still unknown poet would write in the morning, after the distribution of the dry bread, which would give him strength to survive another day. In a bigger cell further ahead, was Augusto's great friend, Carlos Brito, who had been arrested for his activity as a communist militant.

Suffering was a constant.

– All political prisoners, without exception, were barbarously tortured – witnessed Augusto who, thanks to the persistence of his favourite son, Carlos, could see the sun rise again. After all, this star does not rise for everyone. Augusto, who had been incarcerated in the Fort of Peniche for two and a half years, now reports the most painful punishments that were inflicted on him, from which he highlights sleep torture and the "statue" – forcing him to stand for a long time. However, this

man stood firm and did not let them crush him. All forms of torture, from physical to psychological, put him to the test and taught him his limits. Circumstances that forced him to look inside himself. He was surprised he had lasted more than one week without sleeping when he thought he could only handle a little more than a day.

Carlos, who had already finished his training at the military academy, was placed in the barracks of Caldas da Rainha. He tried everything to accelerate the release of his father: he established contact with members of the PIDE and guards of the prison of Peniche; he sought the help of Mário Soares, a great friend and colleague of Augusto, who actively fought for freedom during the Estado Novo. In this way, Carlos was able to win the case and free his father from that nightmare. Mário Soares, the man, the politician, the thinker, the founder of democracy, who fought against so many injustices, defended political prisoners, changed the lives of so many people... also transformed the life of Augusto. In 1968, he was finally a free man, so much had been lost... so much freedom had been stolen from him. It was spring, Wednesday, May 15, the sun was shining, almost as much as Carlos' smile! In the Fort, he had left the sorrow, hatred and sadness that had accompanied him during his incarceration, and that would now be thrown into the sea. Maybe someone would find them on the Berlengas Island, along with all the inmates who got stranded there when trying to escape.

After his release, Augusto was subjected to reinforced surveillance, so the family decided to change their residence and move to the outskirts of Lisbon, so they rented a humble house in Cascais where they could live a more relaxed life. The eldest son, who was still in the army in Caldas da Rainha, progressed in his career, becoming a captain. He visited the family

regularly. This brave young man, who inherited the strength and courage of his father, would participate in the last attempt to overthrow the fascist regime, on March 16, 1974, which eventually failed and became known as "The Caldas Uprising".

Peniche had become a black mist in the memory of Augusto, but one which he did not intend to forget; so he remembered and shared with his family and friends all the moments he had experienced. He had acquired the habit of walking around the Cascais bay, every day, before sunset.

September 1971. He was sitting on the sand and writing a little more on his little black notebook while recalling the horrid whistle of the guards. That's what inspired him. However, that day, his imagination was distressed; after lunch, he had read some news that had troubled him: two fugitives, from the Fort of Peniche, a butcher and a labourer, had been brutally murdered by the PIDE.

- Either I am mistaken or my old comrades, who had dreamed so much of that escape - he thought aloud.

Augusto is finishing his first book of poetry, dedicated to the time in which his soul lived muzzled. It will soon be published. The so prestigious lawyer gave up his career and decided to devote himself to writing and distinguish himself as a poet.

Times change and so do wills. Augusto Silva changed... just as the dark repression changed him! He is now a new man... a free man!

# MARIA AMÉLIA ROSENDO TEIXEIRA DE NÁPOLES GUERRA

She was born in Lisbon in 1935. In 1958, she graduated in Pharmaceutical Chemistry from the Faculty of Pharmacy of the University of Porto. She performed her professional activity of pharmacist until her retirement in 1994. She also directed the Forensic Toxicology service of the Institute of Legal Medicine and was a Professor in the Higher Course of Legal Medicine.

In specific periods, she was a teacher of secondary education: in Angola (1968/69) and Cape Verde (1972/73), and a member of the Municipal Assembly of Lisbon, for the CDU, between 1994 and 2002.

This was the first literary contest in which she participated.

# MARIA INÁCIA PACHECO

She was born in Alentejo, in 1949.
Witness to fights and toils and many injustices, it was from there that she brought all her dreams and thirst for freedom.

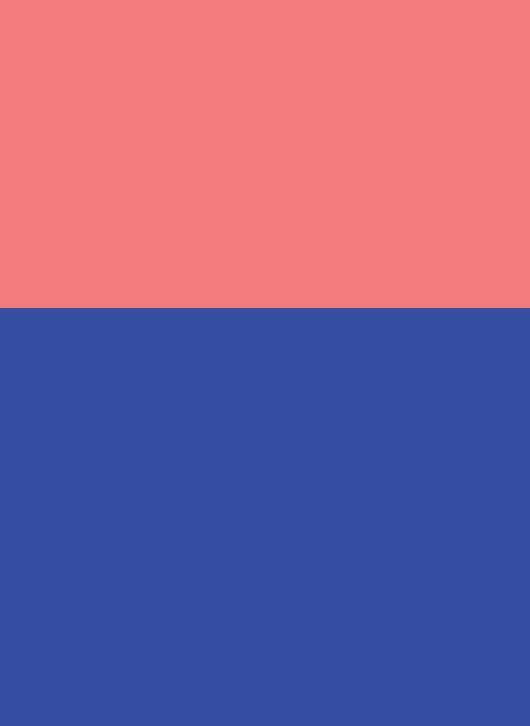
Now, retired and always wanting to learn, she attends the Intergenerational Senior University of Amadora, where, in the creative writing class, she was invited to participate in the contest promoted by the Aljube Museum: "Short Stories and Historical Narrative", in tribute to the political prisoners, which she accepted with great pleasure and pride.

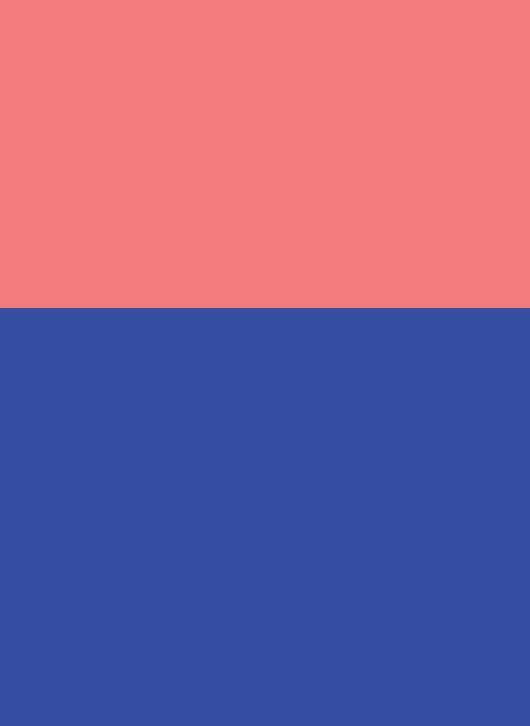
Writing is a passion and a part of her identity. Plagued by a constant sense of uneasiness, it is in the act of writing that she frees herself. A resistant and persistent woman used to long and difficult paths, Maria will soon see her first poetry book published.

# **SOFIA NETO OLIVEIRA**

She was born in 1999 in Coimbra. She is a native of Sangalhos and studies at the Secondary School of Oliveira do Bairro, through which she participated in the contest Short Stories And Historical Narrative – "Being a Political Prisoner", promoted by the Aljube Museum. According to the author, it is thanks to her love for reading, her fascination with writing and the determination of her history teacher, that she decided to participate in this contest, in which she saw her text being awarded.

Currently, "The released poet" is her only publication, but she intends to continue to develop her taste for humanities, which is fomented both by her family and by the teachers of the course of Languages and Humanities of her school.







# Tarrafal '72

MARIA AMÉLIA T. N. GUERRA

# You won't take me again

MARIA INÁCIA PACHECO

# **The Released Poet**

SOFIA NETO OLIVEIRA

