Educating Nosotras: Feminist Process in the Cuban Literacy Campaigns

by

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Class of 2014

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2014
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to the FGSS department, for nurturing my growth as a critical thinker, learner, academic, and budding teacher over the past four years. I could not have written this thesis without the constant advising of faculty: Professors Christina Crosby, Natasha Korda, and Leticia Alvarado, thank you for encouraging me to dig deeper and recognize nuances when doing so was harder than seeing absolutes. And tremendous gratitude goes to my fellow Senior Seminarians for teaching me so much about what it means to write feminism into being. Over shared frustrations and victories alike, it has been a pleasure to imagine new possibilities alongside you all.

Thank you to Professor Indira Karamcheti for seeing this idea through to a well-written original work. Your attentiveness to every word has made me a better writer and communicator of ideas. I could not have pursued this project without your constant support of its evolution. I have been honored to work with you.

Thank you to the Tulane University Summer Study Abroad in Cuba program for introducing me to a culture not my own and for teaching me all I can learn from it. Thank you to the ANAP, Luis, and the University of Havana for welcoming me into that culture. And to Professor Carolina Caballero, thank you for the resources, ideas, and historical knowledge that has allowed me to interpret the present with new eyes for all the possibilities available. Finally, gratitude goes to my fellow travelers and over-riders of the embargo, specifically to E, R, and G, reminders in Cuba that feminism is a way of moving through the world, even when it feels uncomfortable.

To my father, stepmother, and mother, thank you for reading parts of this thesis and for helping me expand upon its roughness. Thank you for sharing my excitement and passion for teaching and for encouraging my growth as an educator. Dad, thank you for listening to my new ideas and Lauren, thank you for providing me with educational theories, resources, and your own stories of research and teaching. Mom, thank you for letting your daughter study abroad in Cuba instead of Israel – it was well worth the trip! And to those unnamed, thank you for nurturing me as I nurtured this project and for teaching me the practical meaning Gloria Anzaldúa’s words: “Wherever I go, I carry home on my back.”

To my freshman year hall family, Renee, Nathaniel, and Julia. Our passions and fields might be wildly diverse, but I seriously could not have done this thesis without you. R, thank you for being the best thesis carrel comrade and writing partner I could ask for and thank you for joining me on this journey to write about what we, as citizens of a “developed” country can learn from “developing” ones. N, thank you for your honesty and constant encouragement to think more critically. You supported this idea before it felt real and for that I am grateful. J, I could not have done Wesleyan in general without your constant support. Thank you for inspiring me to use Spanish in this thesis and for letting me bounce ideas off you over weekly lunches at Brew Bakers. Also, thank you to T, my “thesis mentor” for showing me what it means to have fun with academia.
INTRODUCTION

In the next year, our people plan to wage a great battle against illiteracy with the ambitious goal of teaching every last illiterate person to read and write. Cuba will be the first country in America, which, at the end of a few months, will be able to say that it does not have a single illiterate person.

- Fidel Castro, Address to the United Nations General Assembly, 1960

From 1959 to 1961, women played a pivotal role at the start of the Cuban Revolution through their involvement in the Literacy Campaigns. The Revolution transformed Cuba from a patriarchal dictatorship to a socialist patriarchy; patriarchy remained the common thread in Cuba’s leadership during and after the transition from Fulgencio Batista to Fidel Castro. Yet the Literacy Campaigns, which served the Revolutionary Project by eliminating illiteracy throughout the nation, are seen as a women’s liberation movement, due to their inclusion of women as Revolutionary agents of change in their role as teachers. How can we make sense of this legacy, given the Revolution’s ideological project of maintaining the patriarchal order of a Cuba in flux? This thesis sets out to understand the tension between the Literacy Campaigns as a feminist movement, as a Revolutionary ideology and as a masculinist ethos.¹

The Campaigns are important and relevant: Cuba increased literacy to the greatest extent and in the shortest span of time in all of the Americas. While statistics measure the increase in literacy, mere numbers are not enough to convey

¹ The “R” in Revolution is capitalized throughout this thesis because in Cuba, the Revolution is treated as the sole religion for an otherwise secular nation. I intend to reproduce this effect of linguistic valuation through capitalization. This carries even more weight within the context of the Spanish language, which is sparse in its use of capitalization; Revolución, as opposed to revolución, thus, makes it akin to identifying a religion rather than simply a historical moment with a particular duration.
the scope of their impact. I seek to look critically at the social, cultural, economic, and especially gendered history behind the success of the Cuban Literacy Campaigns.

This introduction provides the background of the Cuban Revolution insofar as it illustrates the broader context of the Literacy Campaigns. First, it sets out to show that the Literacy Campaigns are one example of other Revolutionary efforts at the time, and share in a greater Revolutionary ideology. Second, understanding the impact and success of the Literacy Campaigns requires an understanding of what has changed, which requires an understanding of what came before. I provide an extensive background to contextualize the aims of the Cuban Revolution, and to reveal the tension between these aims and the political possibilities of a feminist movement with its own revolutionary ideology of cohesive empowerment. Although Revolutionary aims and feminist practices coincide at points, at other points they reveal a tension that this thesis will explore.

**Literacy: The Ticket to Change and Transformation**

The Revolution saw the elimination of illiteracy as a way of liberating and universalizing its citizens. Castro believed in investing everyone in Revolutionary projects. He viewed education as a means of personal investment. The formerly illiterate were personally invested in the Revolution’s progress because their education depended on it. They had teachers stay with them until they learned to read because of the Revolution. Statistically, this was successful. Because of the Campaigns, Cuba now has one of the highest literacy rates in Latin America. In 1961 alone, Cuba decreased its rate of illiteracy from 23.6 percent to 3.9 percent,
according to a comparison between the census administered in 1953 (the last before the Revolution) and the census administered in 1961 (Abendroth 2). Castro officially declared Cuba literate on December 22nd, 1961, in a speech made on the steps of the University of Havana to the U.N. General Assembly (Rogers 87).

The United Nations examined the Cuban Literacy Campaigns to search for effective ways to decrease illiteracy in developing and underdeveloped countries around the world. In Cuba, the Campaigns began with the promise that Fidel Castro made to the United Nations.² One year later, the United Nations issued a UNESCO report on the methods Cuba used to eliminate illiteracy (Halbert-Brooks 43). It considered the possibilities of opening up the Campaigns’ strategies to other nations. This report shines a particular spotlight on the use of women as human resources during the Campaigns, stating, “The educational system instituted in Cuba to favor the rapid evolution of the political and social standing of the woman, is of particular interest….it was necessary to improve their cultural and technical education and, besides, to find them a work adapted to their ability, which would free them from economic and social subjection” (UNESCO 68).

According to the report, Castro and Che Guevara conceived the idea for the Literacy Campaigns in 1959. Castro, his army, and the organizations responsible for corralling the support of different groups spent two years creating the most effective Literacy Campaigns possible. The Ministry of Education dispatched teachers from Havana, the hub of Revolutionary efforts, as it was the urban region with the highest pre-Revolution literacy rate in Cuba. They were sent to the campesinos, the rural farming towns with the lowest rates of literacy.

² See epigraph.
The Campaigns happened with such speed that, often, sufficient thought was not given to their ideological consequences. The Revolution transpired in a hasty fervor, a constant race against the clock to test how much change could occur in the shortest period of time. While technical literacy could be taught in one year, critical thinking could not. Thus, the speed of the Cuban Revolution hindered its ability to impart critical thinking skills because each literacy instructor had only from six to twelve months with their students. Such a short period of time limited the literacy students’ reading based on the Campaigns’ singular rhetoric. Although the Literacy Campaigns are often thought of as a feminist movement, because they put women in leadership roles, critical thinking was absent in the Campaigns’ pedagogy.

**Empowerment vs. Liberation**

Two discourses structure my thesis: the discourse of women’s involvement in the Literacy Campaigns at the time, and the second a retrospective, feminist, theoretical view of that involvement and the larger Revolutionary context in which their empowerment came about existed. This thesis neither claims that the Campaigns were important for women’s autonomy in Cuba nor refutes that claim by saying that they were counterproductive. Rather, it examines the success in both to identify a methodology that we can still critique, learn from, and expand on today in U.S. education reform.

Further, I seek to describe and theorize a feminist pedagogical way of looking at a historical phenomenon to illuminate how its feminist “failures” can be interpreted as contributing to its feminist successes. Feminism and patriarchy aren’t a dichotomy, but a pragmatic spectrum, each point on the spectrum directly
interacting with the others. My feminist theoretical framework develops from the feminist theory that trained me, came before me, and continues to shape the ways in which I see the world.

**Pedagogies for the Oppressed, Curriculum of a Revolution**

Previous scholarship on the Cuban Literacy Campaigns focused on the *what* of literacy: statistics, immediate changes, “facts” that were, for years, propaganda for a Revolutionary rhetoric skimming the surface of social change. However, while the Cuban Revolution both created problems and enforced socialist patriarchy, it made impressive progress in increasing literacy. Although this success is widely known, the knowledge of the Campaigns’ outcomes and knowledge of their process: the *how*, is not. *How* did Cuba's literacy rate improve so greatly in such a short span of time? What pedagogy was utilized? What teaching strategies?

The “how” of the Campaigns lies in their instructors, pedagogy, and curriculum. The Campaigns must be lauded for being both effective and efficient in educating a population in how to read and write. More, they had a practical and empowering impact for women. Young women from Havana found employment as *brigadistas*. Girls and women from the *campesinos* gained literacy.

However, their ideology was that of a socialist patriarchy. What does that mean when women are the ones predominantly transmitting that patriarchal ideology that ultimately prioritizes *machismo* cultural attitudes?³ The Cuban Literacy Campaigns reveal the nuances of real, successful political and educational

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³ *Machismo* is the uniquely Spanish – and for this thesis, quintessentially Cuban – term to describe the sexism that emerged from Spanish colonization and the double colonization of women. *Machismo* refers both to the fundamental and systemic ways in which society operates to serve masculine interests and male supremacy. More implicitly, it refers to the ways in which sexism has infiltrated daily lives, decision-making, and social relations.
movements in their immediate goals: teaching a nation to read and write. However, simultaneously, feminists should closely examine the limits of such movements, both in creating change that lasts, and in dismantling intersecting forms of oppression.

Mestizaje of Theorists

In this thesis, I engage with a feminist theoretical framework that integrates Latina feminisms, progressive education theory, and works from the academic feminist canon. Chela Sandoval, in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, has already brought many of these theorists together specifically in regards to her theory of “differential consciousness.” I expand upon and critique this concept to show how it can provide a more nuanced way of interpreting the work of women in the Cuban Literacy Campaigns.

I use progressive education theory and feminist critiques of it to analyze the pedagogy and curriculum of the Literacy Campaigns. I primarily engage with progressive education in the second chapter on the workbooks. However, effective ways to teach literacy are about more than tangible materials. In many ways, the goal of the Campaigns was, in a grassroots manner, to take education outside the classroom and into daily life.

I draw on United States progressive education texts, and Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in an analysis of the practical implementation of Revolutionary ideology. The concept of “culturally relevant pedagogy” helps to explain the extraordinary effectiveness of the Campaigns. A distinctly U.S. progressive education theoretical framework demonstrates why learning about the Literacy Campaigns is not a one-way discourse in which U.S. educators criticize a
historical moment in Latin American education. The urban *brigadistas* went to the *campesinos* expecting only to teach and were surprised by how much they learned about a culture not immediately their own. Similarly, the United States is capable of learning how to implement 1961 Cuba’s effective strategies for learning to read and write.

Julie D. Shayne in *The Revolution Question: Feminisms in El Salvador, Chile, and Cuba* says that the goal of the feminist movement in Cuba was “increased participation of women” in a non-women-oriented project to serve the government (Shayne 8). The “Revolution Question” that she asks is, “What do women offer revolutions, and how does revolution relate to feminism?” She defines “revolutionary feminism” as “a grassroots movement that is both pluralist and autonomous in structure. It seeks to challenge sexism as inseparable from larger political structures not explicitly perceived to be patriarchal in nature, but from the perspective of feminists, entirely bound to the oppression of women” (Shayne 9). This definition reveals limits to the feminist possibility of women working in an already-existing structure. The Campaigns were not only composed of a majority of women; they also used a traditionally feminized field (the teaching profession) as a revolutionary tool with political power.

U.S. feminist theorist bell hooks defines feminism as “the radical notion that women are people too” (*Feminism is for Everybody* viii). Feminism itself is, a priori, revolutionary, because it imagines a future that does not yet exist, where women are recognized as worthy of rights to their own personhood. Feminism is productively imaginative of social change and transformation. Yet “feminism” in Cuba during the Revolution was dependent on the social value system already in existence.
The Literacy Campaigns tackle the specific Revolution Question of a perceived opposition between the Cuban Revolution and the revolution that is feminism. Are the Campaigns not Revolutionary because they were part of a greater patriarchal project, or were they feminist because they gave women authority as teachers? The Campaigns accomplished three undeniably radical feminist tasks: One, more women and girls – populations traditionally illiterate – learned how to read. Two, there was the acted-on belief in both the education the brigadistas received in their teacher training and in the education they imparted to their students that women were as important as men to teach. And three, women teachers taught men to read, which challenged the patriarchal structure of who can teach whom.

**Methodology**

In Chapter One, “The New Man, the New Woman: Las Brigadistas,” the figure of la brigadista, the Literacy Campaign instructor gets reiterated as a teenage girl, fighter for the Revolution, and experienced teacher. The role the brigadista played in the Revolution is best expressed through Che Guevara’s male lexicon, from “Man and Socialism.” In this speech, he coined a term still relevant in Cuban society today: the “New Man,” which elides women’s roles in Revolutionary projects.

In the second chapter, “The Content of Education and Liberation,” I analyze the workbooks. These helped to make possible the swift success of the Campaigns. I analyze these texts to understand how Cuba went from illiterate to literate: What strategies did the Revolution use? What pedagogical techniques? How was the curriculum designed for both teachers and students? What ideologies were taught?
What impact did those ideologies have on students’ ability to think critically about what they were learning to read? How did the texts account for the varied experiences of the *brigadistas* and their students? Finally, what are the limits of teaching critical thinking within the context of a specific ideological project?

In the third chapter, “Women as Resource: Cuba’s Patriarchal Political Project,” I show the conflicts and intersection of oppressions in Cuba specifically during the first three years of the Revolution. The feminist theoretical frameworks of Gloria Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval, and Cherrie Moraga help show the women’s movement in Cuba at this time as both feminist and patriarchal. Through a discursive analysis of the feminist theory to which we have access today and perceived feminism enacted on the ground in 1961 Cuba, I describe feminism and patriarchy as existing on a spectrum with one another rather than as mutually exclusive political projects.

In the Chapter Four, “The Spectrum: Feminist Methodology in Revolutionary Education,” feminism and patriarchy are presented on a spectrum with one another, as constitutive of feminist process. False binaries between feminism and patriarchy and First World and Third World delay the process of change. The Literacy Campaigns proved that feminism – empowering women to teach, read, and write – is a process that can occur within the patriarchal system of the Revolution. This was a teachable moment, in all of its success and criticism, which education movements can learn from. It is my earnest belief that for a work – mine included – to be considered a feminist project, it must also be visionary and solutions-oriented. This thesis uses a moment in history to improve the future.
CHAPTER ONE
NEW (WO)MEN: LAS BRIGADISTAS

To argue the need to take seriously the everyday lives of women is not to accept as valid the dichotomy between private and public arenas as separate universes. As socialist-feminist theorists emphasize, the role of women in reproducing social life and life itself is essential to the public world of production. What focusing on the everyday life of women should do instead is reveal that connection between public and private, between production and reproduction. In socialist-feminist research, the everyday world is not a self-contained world; quite the contrary, it is an integral part of the social whole.

- Women Teaching for Change: Gender, Class & Power by Kathleen Weiler

Castro used Havana’s educated and eager youth as a resource for teaching literacy to the rural poor. High school students from Havana (the hub and headquarters of the Revolution, the place from which all changes and trends began) were sent to the countryside. 55 percent of the brigadistas were female (Murray 66).

Brigadista is a general term for Literacy Campaign workers, men, women, professional teachers, and young students. While the term was used for both male and female volunteers, the Campaigns were a movement for and by young women.

Young women in Havana were recruited for the Campaigns at their secondary schools, where Castro sought out those who were already literate to take a temporary leave of absence from being a student and teach instead. Senior brigadistas taught in Cuban schools prior to the Revolution. They trained the younger brigadistas in pedagogy and curriculum. The Campaigns promoted experienced teachers to administrators while the budding instructors developed a skill that served them for life.
Volunteer work in the Campaigns was highly valued. Upon being dispatched to the countryside, *brigadistas* were given a valor and place in society like that of being in the army. By association with the military, the teaching profession became one of the most honorable paths a Revolutionary youth could take. The majority of the women *brigadistas* were teenage girls between the ages of 15 and 19 (Leiner 174). While the statistic of 55 percent female volunteers might not seem significant today, that statistic was deeply meaningful in 1961 Cuba. In 1953, only 13.7 percent of women were employed (Farber 2011). This 13.7 percent constituted only 15 percent of the total workforce. Thus, the fact that there was a social and professional movement comprised of over half women was a cultural and political aberration.

While 55 percent might seem like a slight majority rather than an overwhelming one that warrants investigation, scholars internationally have recognized the empowerment of the slight majority. In describing women’s empowerment as a method of combatting Caribbean *machismo*, feminist scholar Patricia Mohammed states, “the 1950s represented a global thrust of women’s activism. The idea of equal education for girls is now so taken for granted that we forget that it was only in the latter part of the twentieth century that education and equal access to employment became available to women in some societies” (Mohammed 47). In the 1950s, the fact that a movement was comprised of over half women was significant, especially in a developing country national efforts were male-dominated.

In her article “Socialism and Feminism: Women and the Cuban Revolution,” Nicole Murray writes,
For the girls [who served as brigadistas] the change was enormous—independent, free of many of the restrictions of their own family life—and this also had some impact on the Cuban public in general, as the campaign was known about and publicized everywhere. Women accounted for 56% of those who became literate as a result of the campaign, and for them too, the effects must have been enormous: not only did their literacy enable them to be more involved and aware of events outside of their immediate environment, but they were also able to partake in follow-up courses through which they could reach sixth-Grade level (the end of primary schooling), and then perhaps beyond to secondary and higher education (Murray 67).

Murray makes a salient point regarding women’s empowerment. This chapter seeks to differentiate between empowerment and liberation in direct reference to the experiences of the brigadistas who were agents of change in a male campaign. Empowerment gives women the tools to operate “successfully” within patriarchal institutions and societies. Opportunities for power in the future was contingent on proper performance of the roles societies doled out. Liberation, by contrast, gives women the tools to think critically about society in order to change patriarchal/oppressive structures and institutions. Empowerment movements work within structures of oppression and domination while liberation changes those structures.

Women’s empowerment and feminism tend to conflate when they are two separate phenomena. bell hooks comments on the difference between empowerment and feminism in Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, “Feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have
equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates culture on various levels and a commitment to reorganizing society” (*Feminist Theory* 194). While women’s activism is capable of empowerment, women’s liberation reorganizes society.

Women’s liberation reorganizes society rather than superficially include women in an already-existing social order. “Liberation” is a relative term, defined only in contrast to that from which one is freed. For every form of oppression, there must be a different form of liberation. Within that, there are also specific ideologies, pedagogies, and methodologies used in the practice of freedom required. Liberation is case-specific and identity-specific; for it to work, it *must* use an intersectional approach, which addresses multiple forms of oppression. The Literacy Campaigns, however, subsumed other forms of oppression under the insufficient umbrella of class oppression. They did not focus on women’s liberation. The Campaigns focused on improving life for people of low socioeconomic classes, but neglected to show how other forms of oppression – racism, sexism, and familial *machismo* – were also in need of address.

55 percent of the *brigadistas* were women. That 55 percent was not homogeneous. That statistic represented the demographic of Cuban women that remained for the Revolution. Cuba’s class differences also represented racial differences; in Batista’s Cuba, whites upheld positions of power and wealth. When the Revolutionary Government eliminated private property, much of Cuba’s white population fled to Miami. Thus, the racial demographic of the remaining population differed from the racial demographic under Batista; there was a greater percentage of Afro-Cubans post-Revolution (Farber 169).
The Literacy Campaigns were an important moment for race as well as gender because after the ruling white elite fled, much of the remaining Havana middle class was Afro-Cuban. Afro-Cuban women were among the first recruits for the Campaigns because their desire for social mobility felt the most urgent. The Campaigns transformed Afro-Cubanidad because for the first time, black women taught white men. This changed the power structure of who could teach whom and helped dismantle racist perceptions of what black women could do.

**Marxist Machismo**

Ostensibly feminist efforts to combat machismo during the first three years of the Revolution were superficial. Cuban studies scholar Samuel Farber, in “Gender Politics and the Cuban Revolution,” explains this superficiality: “In Cuba, feminism is a sort of education of the female masses for work, but we have not had the theorizing that comes with that kind of work” (Farber 191). Castro himself was a product of Batista’s machismo society. In the post-Batista society he created, Castro ironically played a direct role in reproducing the gendered structures of the society he was otherwise trying to transform. He showed indifference to the ideological components of the social change he set forth to accomplish. In doing so, he perpetuated machismo.

**The New Man**

Fidel Castro and Che Guevara wanted to get everyone – men and women alike – involved in the Revolution. However, they engaged the public with masculinist language. They created a Revolutionary persona to represent the
utopian image of the ideal Cuban citizen: how they participate in the Revolution and perform their Revolutionary identity. Guevara called this persona the “New Man.”

The New Man is educated and uses every ounce of his education to serve his country. He works for love, not for money. He has no personal ambitions, but works to further the Revolution’s ambitions. He is driven yet knows himself only to be part of a whole. The New Man serves a country that has only known patriarchy even in its transition to socialism. Thus, his country serves his best interests; the New Man wants to serve his country because in doing so, his country will also serve him.

“Socialism and Man in Cuba,” where the concept of the New Man emerged, was published in 1965 to criticize Cuban citizens who did not live up to socialist ideals of devoting one’s life to serving his country. “Socialism and Man in Cuba” was part of Guevara’s travelogue *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*. After the travelogue’s publication in 1963, Guevara used guerrilla publishing to have this one essay featured in newspapers and magazines throughout Latin America. This essay is a structural explanation for the volunteerism that sustained the Literacy Campaigns. In it, Guevara presents the idea that more education leads to more socialism. Guevara saw illiteracy as dangerous to the Revolutionary project; without literacy, Cuba lacked a medium for unification and universalization. Teaching people to read and write was viewed from the start as a strategy to unify urbanites and the campesinos. The Literacy Campaigns made Cuba into one cohesive whole to reify the Revolution’s mission of socialism.

In *Rebel Literacy*, Abendroth explains that the consequences of the New Man rhetoric led to the surge of grassroots community organizing in Cuba. He writes, “Education became the foundation by which all Cubans became not mere
stakeholders in the Revolution but also citizens capable of participating as change agents…In Cuba, community organizing is part of the national culture with the national government giving its full support” (Abendroth 120). While the brigadistas were the primary change agents, their involvement create tension between feminist possibilities and nationalist successes. This tension manifested itself through the exclusion of women from a New Man discourse.

In “Socialism and Man in Cuba,” Guevara wrote that there needed to be a political remedy “for those whose lack of education makes them take the solitary road towards satisfying their own personal ambitions” (Guevara 372). The Literacy Campaigns favored national goals over autonomous thought. Personal ambition, thus, was dangerous to the Revolutionary project. A lack of personal ambition prohibited the possibilities of teaching critical thinking in the Campaigns. The education system was a vessel for Revolutionary consciousness. In linking education to socialism and socialism to liberation in “Man and Socialism,” Guevara states that liberation comes from the state, not from individual consciousness of one’s own liberation.

The New Woman

To retroactively account for the 55 percent of female brigadistas, scholars of the Cuban Revolution created a new term: the New Woman (Serra). The New Woman, like the New Man, devotes and dedicates her life to her country. She serves socialism through working towards universalization of social services. She mothers not only her biological children, but all Cuban children. She is a wife not only to her husband, but also to all New Men, in all of their iterations. She supports the New
Man. In exchange for her hard work, the Revolution grants her rights insofar as those rights make her a better wife and mother. Her autonomy serves the Revolution, and her limited freedom supports its goals better. She submits to a patriarchal order because she exists for the Revolution.

The identification of the New Woman in the form of *la brigadista* begs the question: Why women for this particular Revolutionary effort when all other efforts including agrarian reform, military involvement, and national security were male-dominated? What made women particularly suited within the context of Cuban society and gendered expectations to be Literacy Campaign teachers? Literacy was and continues to be, in Cuba and in much of the world, women’s work. In tapping into the teaching profession, which was typically done in the home as a component of motherhood, the Literacy Campaigns made the domestic sphere professional.

The qualities associated with stereotypical womanhood are that of the caretaking mother. She is compassionate, loving, and nurturing. She provides in the home for the man as he provides materially outside the home. The mother trains future mothers to be caretakers as well, even as she trains future fathers to fulfill their masculine roles of breadwinner and worker. Work in the domestic sphere (cleaning, cooking, and childcare) is not considered “work” in public eyes; it is considered too soft and feminine to possess dollar value. Because part of this domestic work is childcare, it essentially involves education. From mothers children form habits and learn prerequisite knowledge for elementary education, which often
includes literacy. Even outside being “professional” teachers, mothers are their children’s first teachers.⁴

The New Woman, thus, is always a mother. She is not only responsible for the wellbeing of her children; she is also responsible for the wellbeing of her country. For the New Woman, these two responsibilities become indistinguishable and unified, contingent on one another in order to thrive. In the United States, the education mothers provided in the home was labeled “Republican Motherhood” when situated within a political context. During the American Revolution, the first schools for women were founded. These schools intended to educate women so that they could pass on their knowledge to their male children. Eventually, these male children would become the leaders of society. Their political ideology would start with the basic education they received in the home from their educated mothers. Private lives of women became public through the political personas of their sons.

Jafari S. Allen, an Afro-Cuban scholar from the United States undertook a feminist ethnographical critique of Cuba’s Revolutionary project. In *Venceremos?: The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba*, Allen asserts that the Revolution had a limited definition of freedom. He complicates the gender dichotomy of New Man and New Woman. He writes, “The ‘New Man’ and ‘New Woman’ would have to be in a position to be seamlessly stitched into the fabric of international socialism led by the Soviets. The New Man and New Woman that the Cuban Revolution sought to create are recognized as a man or a woman” (Allen 67). Allen’s critique of the gender binary and the binary’s consequent essentialism goes beyond exposing the limits of gender constructs. He uses the term or to show that there were different roles for

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⁴ Professionalization is attained through either being paid monetarily for education or through having a certificate to teach in schools.
the New Man and the New Woman in Cuban society. Some of the different roles were based on perceived differences between ability and suitability of men and women for different tasks. Others were based on challenging the Cuban status quo just enough to make everyone feel invested to work on a socialist basis (voluntarily) without challenging the status quo so much that society would refrain from participating.

The New Woman was not separate from the New Man. She reified the notion of female dependence on patriarchal social structure. The New Woman was a type of New Man who expressed, in a way that served men, her prescribed female roles in Revolutionary activism. In writing about the _brigadistas_, Cuba scholar Rebecca Herman states in “An Army of Educators: Gender, Revolution, and the Cuban Literacy Campaign of 1961,” “The participation of a mixed group of volunteers, all exemplifying the masculine ideals inherent to the vision of the ‘New Man’, introduced Cubans in rural areas to a ‘New Woman’” (Herman 101). The role of female _brigadistas_ in the Literacy Campaigns entitled women to a piece of the Revolutionary pie. Yet their entitlement was contingent on their demonstration that they could perform a feminine iteration of the masculine performativity of the New Man. In the context of the Revolution, women were equal to men insofar as they acted like men.

_Fashioning La Brigadista into La Revolución: The Teacher-Soldier_

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5 This article, published in 2012, is one of the first to undertake explorations of the challenge to the role of women _brigadistas_. Herman analyzes of the roles they performed as educational soldiers of the Revolution. Her analysis is rooted more in their performance than in the pedagogy they taught. This thesis deals with many of the same themes, but aims to use a different theoretical and pedagogical framework to analyze these roles.
Revolutionary heroic society initiated the *brigadista* as a New Woman through her performance as a sub-category of the New Man. Her role was in the feminine sphere of teaching and caretaking. Simultaneously, she acted out the New Man’s roles to attain the honor that was traditionally attributed to his roles, particularly in the conflation of hero with soldier.

To fuel the rhetoric that mobilized a nation to believe that everyone was entitled to a piece of the Revolutionary pie, Castro framed all individual Revolutionary efforts using military terminology. Teaching people to read and write, rather than a daily task consigned to the educational sector of society, was a “great battle” for which the whole country was enlisted. Women joined the fight for socialism as “an army of educators” (Herman). They could only do so by embracing, in theory if not in practice, the Revolution’s *machismo* terms.

Herman writes,

literacy teachers were organised into batallions, referred to as *brigadistas* (brigadiers), adorned with military-like uniforms similar to those of the armed forces and honoured as soldiers…this mobilisation did not mark a challenge to patriarchy - evidenced by the very fact that in order to make a gendered feminine sphere ‘heroic’, it was made ‘manly’ - the militant language of the literacy campaign and the mass participation of women, which required eschewing previously acceptable norms for female behaviour, illustrate how new values were advanced during this formative phase of the revolution (Herman 95).

The Literacy Campaigns were part of an existing patriarchal system and framed their mission in its *machismo* military terms. In working within patriarchy, the
Campaigns gave women more power. This reinforced patriarchal norms of who deserves to be in power and why. The convoluted involvement of women in a Revolution contingent on their dressing as male soldiers presents a contradictory definition of feminism.

The conflation of brigadista and soldier enabled the women of the Revolution to be included in Revolutionary valor and martyrdom without fully subscribing to traditionally masculine roles. Women were excluded from most jobs, but teaching – part of a traditionally feminine sphere of caretaker and motherhood – did not threaten the status quo. But in order for women to play a role in the Revolution, the New Woman had to adopt the performance of New Men.

In *Fashioning Feminism in Cuba and Beyond*, Cuban feminist Brigida Pastor writes of the limits of a male-centric performative discourse.

The male dominant symbolic order could not conceive that, as a woman [one] could have an independent existence, indeed any existence at all, other than that of the maternal feminine. In other words, women were left the alternative of being ‘like men,’ adopting a male identity of ‘being for-men (a kind of living doll)’ with all the conflicts that entails (Pastor 202).

When the urban brigadistas left their homes for deployment to the countryside, they marched along the Malecón in Havana wearing military uniforms. Like soldiers about to enter battle, they left for their assignments with marching bands.

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*Every city in Cuba has its own Malecón. It is the thread of urban planning that sews together all of Cuba’s cities. It resembles what we might know of as a boardwalk, lining the whole city with a short wall that separates it from the ocean. The Malecón served a socio-political function as a gathering point and marching route for Revolutionary heroes.*
The photograph in Figure 19 from a dissertation published at the University of North Carolina is a visual example of the fashioning of perceived feminism via the performance of masculinity. The photograph was featured in *Vanidades*, a Cuban women’s magazine for the urban elite. Onelia Marín, a teacher-soldier, is featured in this publication to represent the “army of educators” and to showcase the New Woman. The New Woman, in this photograph, exemplifies the militaristic valor of her counterpart, the New Man (Halbert-Brooks and Pérez 39).

In the implementation of the Campaigns, women ended up in a *machismo* activist structure of their own. Their participation was problematic yet effective. Both dressing in military uniforms and the “brigade” and “battle” rhetoric of the Campaigns mobilized and motivated its participants. By performing male military roles, women were implicated in the Revolution’s reinforcement of *machismo*. Efforts to change *machismo* ultimately reinforced a power dynamic wherein women conformed to the standards of men.

**Father in the Home versus Father in the Capitol**

When young women chose to become *brigadistas*, they left their parents and patriarchal family structures. As teachers in the Revolution, they were freed from certain societal expectations inherent to *machismo*. The Campaigns were a way for
young women to work within and for the Revolution. Middle class families from Havana who were ambivalent about sending their daughters out of the home to join the workforce rather than get married suddenly relinquished their patriarchal private interests in favor of the patriarchal public demands of the Revolution. The Revolution thus served as a pathway to independence for women dependent on their families for their livelihoods and fulfillment of social roles.

Prior to the Revolution, middle and upper class young women throughout Cuba depended on what their fathers wanted. Because of their socioeconomic status, these young women had access to education. However, they did not have the right to the professional possibilities education created for their male peers. During Batista’s era, keeping women in the domestic sphere felt oppressive to young girls who did not want to follow their families’ plans for them to become wives and mothers. Parents hesitated to allow their daughters to leave the home. In a study guide to her 2012 documentary on women’s involvement in the Literacy Campaigns, Catherine Murphy writes,

Cuba of the 1950s was dominated by a staunchly patriarchal family structure. Most of the young women’s families refused to let them go to the mountainous regions in such a time of uncertainty. So they entered into an intense process of negotiation with their families, fighting for a degree of autonomy and independence that had rarely been allowed for Cuban women before then. It was a teenage girl uprising (Murphy 2).

The strictness of traditional family structures made it difficult for women and girls to pursue their educational goals. Through the Campaigns, young women caught a glimpse of independence under the socially acceptable umbrella of the
teaching profession. Some individual patriarchs felt threatened; fathers wanted their wives and daughters in *their* homes and many were unwilling at first to give the women in their lives up to the state. During the Campaigns, women worked in their students’ homes yet they departed from the patriarchal homes they were born in or married into.

The public use of women as teachers threatened the private use of women as mothers and daughters. Formerly middle class urban families hesitated to let their female members participate in the Literacy Campaigns. Castro, however, encouraged their participation from his perspective as the national patriarch; he wanted to better a country, not individual families. A tension thus grew between the less powerful patriarchs in what were once educated middle class homes in Havana and Castro himself.

Norma Guillard is a former *brigadista* and current professor at the University of Havana. Murphy interviewed her in *Maestra* to convey that the Campaigns were a path for independence for young women. Guillard participated in a follow-up interview at a viewing of *Maestra* at the City University of New York (Fernandes). She said, “Many of us left our homes, abandoned our families, and dedicated our lives. I separated myself from my family. I became an independent person related to the social development of my country.”

Guillard is an example of the growth of women’s independence through their involvement in the Campaigns as teachers. Geographic mobility through the Campaigns liberated women to make their own choices and to perform public rather than private services. To this day, on the streets in Havana, the words, *Todo por la Revolución* are spray-painted on streets and alleyways in Havana. These words are
reminders of Castro’s 1961 speech “To the Intellectuals” in which he lauded the Campaigns for transforming Cuba into a nation that prioritized education. In this speech, Castro stated, “For the Revolution, everything. Against the Revolution, nothing.”

These words complicate the perception that the Campaigns liberated women; rather than liberate women, the Revolution shifted women’s dependence from their father’s wishes to the state’s aims. In *Venceremos?*, Allen warns us that “women’s autonomy [is] not to be conflated with ‘equality’” because this autonomy in its state of co-dependence on the government “increasingly posed threats to the Revolution’s bedrock discourse of national consolidation” (Allen 109). Allen warns against the conflation of autonomy and equality because the difference between the two is akin to the difference between synthetic empowerment and sustainable liberation. Synthetic empowerment is the feeling of independence the *brigadistas* gained by leaving patriarchal family structures. Sustainable liberation in which women make their own choices independent of what the national discourse instructs was prevented because women joined a movement dominated by nationally-recognized patriarch: Castro.

**Professionalization of the Domestic Sphere: Republican Motherhood and Marianismo**

In Cuba during the time of the Literacy Campaigns, public and private spheres divided into *calle* (street) or *casa* (house). Yet the field of education occupies both *la calle* (schools and the public policies of education enforced by the government) and in *la casa* (the education that happens in the home through
language-learning, reading, home-schooling, and what mothers informally teach their children through the everyday acts of parenting). When the Revolutionary project made literacy a primary goal, calle and casa melted into one entity; brigadistas literally went into peoples’ homes and taught within them, but they did so for the public – political – project of La Revolución. This made, in basic feminist theoretical terms, the personal political. The Revolution prioritized homes and family life in the campesinos because they were central to a political project that extended outside the home. Before the Revolution, schools were part of the public calle, yet houses turned into schools, pushing education into the private casa.

Cuba had its own version of Republican Motherhood that served as the historical-ideological background for the professionalization of the domestic sphere. Marianismo, a Catholic concept, idealized women who martyred themselves so that their husbands, children, and country could prosper, and so worked in favor of the Revolution (Halbert-Brooks and Pérez 34). Marianismo was an accepted norm during Batista’s era and its remnants helped the Literacy Campaigns prosper. The brigadista gained political power not through taking on traditional male roles, but through revealing the use of what was seen as universally feminine roles from Marianismo to Republican Motherhood. The Literacy Campaigns was, for many, the one project in which being a woman provided an advantage. Many women were teachers already, whether they had degrees or not, simply by virtue of providing the basic education reminiscent of Republican Motherhood and Marianismo for their siblings and children.

Freire Lives in the Daily Lives of Las Brigadistas
The daily lives of the *brigadistas* reveal how the routines they performed contributed to a new perception of education and compassion that extended across class, geographic, and cultural lines. The *brigadistas* lived with their students and the families whom they taught to read and write. Their students, in turn, taught them about cultures different from their own. The majority of *brigadistas* came from urban households; they were unfamiliar with the ways of life in the *campesinos*. During the day, *brigadistas* were treated as part of their host families and worked in the fields alongside them. By lantern light at night, they taught the families they worked alongside in the fields how to read and write. They engaged in an exchange of information that enabled *brigadista* and *estudiante* to educate one another through a horizontal power structure versus the typical vertical hierarchy between teacher and student.

Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* identifies the vertical hierarchy between teacher and student as the banking model of education (Freire 72). In a banking model of education, the teacher educates the student without considering what the student could teach the teacher. To go against a banking model of education requires feminist flexibility of cultural norms and challenging the status quo of who is in possession of knowledge worth knowing. The *brigadistas* went against a banking model of education by the very nature of how they spent their days in the *campesinos* and interacted with their host families.

In her talk at CUNY, Guillard said, “But the learning wasn’t only for the [illiterate students]; they learned how to read, but we learned how to live. If we were supposed to open their eyes to the world, for us, it was the double.” Guillard’s
testimony illuminates an interpretation of the Literacy Campaigns as a Freirean way to teach and learn collaboratively. As an antidote to the banking model, Freire proposed a Revolutionary model of education. The pedagogical structure of the Campaigns whereby brigadistas lived with their students and participated in their daily lives outside the literacy lessons lent itself to an Revolutionary model of education.

Freire defines a Revolutionary pedagogical model as one where “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire 72). Former brigadista Guillard’s testimony provides an on-the-ground example of the reconciliation of the tension between the student and teacher. In her feminist critique of Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Kathleen Weiler writes, “The role of the teacher is to instigate a dialogue between teacher and student, based on their common ability to know the world and to act as subjects in the world” (Weiler 454). The setup of the Cuban Literacy Campaigns removed the hierarchal roles implicit in the teaching profession, which Freire, in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, makes explicit. Living in host families, brigadistas were part of a collective. They exchanged knowledge: verbal for physical and literacy for agrarian cultural currency.

The Brigadista After: The Revolution Lives in the Bodies of Women

Piya Chatterjee, a scholar of Third World literacy, defines “seed transformation” as “the detachment of the ego from pedagogical acts of change.” Seed transformation is the idea that historical events have unintended consequences that emerge after the event occurs. Seed transformation does not take place on a
linear timeline, nor are its possibilities imminent. The Literacy Campaigns and their influence fifty-four years after their occurrence are an example of seed transformation in action.

The Literacy Campaigns of 1960 continue to possess endless possibilities for feminist transformation. While that was not the active project at the time, it does not mean that a tree cannot grow from those today. A seed of a revolutionary project will eventually grow into liberation, intended or otherwise. In her talk at Wesleyan University, Chatterjee said that liberation occurs when the intersection of education and activism take on their own will. The brigadistas did not exercise their own when teaching their students; their country employed to serve its overarching political project. They were tools of a patriarchal message, which limited the critical discourse essential in feminist pedagogy. In pursuing their own independence and synthetic empowerment, they participated in a patriarchy. Yet their work as teachers did not end on the New Year’s Eve that put an end to the official Year of Literacy (Fagen 21). Their work as brigadistas planted a seed for transformation to occur later on, which created feminist possibilities for women in Cuba today.

Upon completion of their work in the Campaigns, brigadistas were offered full government scholarships, called becas, for higher education (Padula and Smith 34). Guillard used her scholarships to pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of Havana. The education that Guillard received through these scholarships enabled her work as a feminist activist and academic later in life. Her work now focuses on engaging in the critical discourses concerning representation and subjectivity that the Literacy Campaigns lacked.
A woman in the audience at CUNY asked Guillard if she saw the Literacy Campaigns as an “open sesame” moment for women in Cuba. Guillard responded,

In 1993, I formed an independent organization of women in communications. With this group of women, I learned to identify as a feminist. I began to understand where there was inequality and disequilibrium [between men and women]. Today, we haven’t achieved what we wanted in our country, but we feel like we’re on the road. There are telenovelas that still enforce machismo or sexism. The media is very important all over the world and if the media doesn’t try to change [this inequality], who will?

Guillard’s definition of seed transformation speaks to the feminist possibilities the Cuban Literacy Campaigns opened up: “We have to transform ourselves and if we have children, those children can change.” The long-term possibility of seed transformation reveals the nuances possible when we move past viewing patriarchy and feminism as dichotomous and separable. Feminism, a solutions-oriented present to achieve a better future, emerges from patriarchy, the present that is in need of solutions.

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8 soap operas
CHAPTER TWO
THE CONTENT OF EDUCATION AND LIBERATION

“reading texts intra-actively, through one another, enacting new patterns of engagement, attributing to how exclusions matter”
- Karen Barad in Derrida Today

Foreword to the Chapter Ahead

I am sitting in Espwesso, the student-run cafe. This cafe is four years old. The tables, computer, blackboards, and mugs look like they have been made within those four years as well. To my left is a copy of a manual last used in 1960 that has somehow made its way from Havana to Yale University and through Interlibrary Loan to Wesleyan. The pages are tattered yet strong and thicker than the pages I print my college essays on and the contrast between this manual and this cafe seems oddly appropriate. The page numbers are illegible but I can read the words and some seem arbitrarily bolded as a result of use and age and probably travel. When I first picked up this manual, I thought it should be encased somewhere in an archive, not just shipped off through a random online request by an undergraduate. But the United States education system does not seem to care much about what goes on “down there” and this thesis is about trying to get the U.S. to care because there is a lot to learn.

To my right are two literacy tutors from a program at Wesleyan called WesReads. They are talking about Teach for America, another massive education corps program. They do not know that I am listening or that as they speak about literacy, I am writing about it and reading about its Cuban roots from Alfabeticemos. I hear one of them say, “How do we even learn to read? It’s such a bizarre thing.
One moment we don’t know how and the next we’re saying that letters, when put together, have meaning.” That is what this chapter plans to address: How do we learn to read? I respond to this question through attempting to answer the question of “How did 54 percent of the Cuban population suddenly learn to read in one year? How did the brigadistas make their students literate?”

**Alfabeticemos: Together, We Learn to Read and Write**

The Literacy Campaigns produced exceptional numbers (statistics) of people who became literate because of the Campaigns. The statistical representation of the efficacy of the Literacy Campaigns encourage a clear binary between the identities of “literate” and “illiterate.” But what are the nuances of these terms? What do they mean in terms of the Cuban Literacy Campaigns, in 1960? At its most basic level, “literacy” is the ability to read and write. *Alfabetación* (literally translated to “alphabetization”) is the Spanish term for literacy used in the Campaigns in Cuba. The teachers who volunteered in the Campaigns were called *Alfabetizadores* (literally translated as “alphabet tutors/experts”). The manuals the literacy instructors used were titled *Alfabeticemos* (“we learn to read and write”). Literacy, in Spanish, is both a noun (theory) and a verb (practice). The goal of the Literacy Campaigns of 1959-1961 was to universalize that practice amongst the Cuban population.

*Alfabetizadores*, unlike *brigadistas*, were schoolteachers before the Revolution. They were official teachers, trained and certified by the Cuban government under Batista to teach literacy and a wide array of subjects. Those teachers who aligned themselves politically with the Revolution became *alfabetizadores* to provide expert training for the *brigadistas* because the typical *brigadista* did not have teaching experience prior to the Campaigns. The *alfabetizadores* trained the *brigadistas* to
become literacy instructors at a resort in the beach town of Veradero. The
Revolution transformed resorts into public property because they were previously
estates for the upper class they were trying to eradicate. A place where thousands of
people could convene for short periods of time proved convenient for the facilitation
of this teacher education. There, the alfabetizadores co-led this training alongside
members of the Revolutionary Government and Ministry of Education (Abendroth
xi).

At the start of their ten-day teacher training and orientation at Veradero, the
alfabetizadores handed the brigadistas their teaching manuals (Halbert-Brooks and
Pérez 28). The alfabetizadores taught the brigadistas how to best use the manuals in
their teaching and in conjunction with the primer they were to give their students:
¡Venceremos! The inter- and intra-actions between the primer and manual represent
the sole curriculum the brigadistas were given in their brief ten-day teacher
education. After those ten days, the manual was not taught to teachers; it was the
teacher. Off in the Cuban countryside without any resources at their disposal, the
brigadistas used the manual as their sole resource in conjunction with ¡Venceremos! to
impart literacy.

The Political Content of Literacy Education: The Manual and the Primer

Alfabeticemos is an 89-page-long manual. It looks like a published book: long
chunks of text punctuated by photographs of the participants in the Literacy
Campaigns. Despite the fact that the majority of the teachers of the Campaigns were
women, the manual’s black-and-white cover includes a photograph of men and boys
sitting in a circle learning to read and write.
¡Venceremos! is a 110-page-long workbook for the illiterate. Like Alfabetemos, the exterior of ¡Venceremos! appears like a book, with binding on the side and a cover illustrated in color. The color cover of the primer looks like a shrunken Revolutionary poster; it is a photograph of a mob of Cuban people, approximately half men and half women, with one man waving a large Cuban flag and the red capitalized letters spelling out ¡VENCEREMOS! loom above. The wind is blowing through the flag in the photograph, inciting the call to action present in the title as well. While the manual was a call to action for the brigadistas, the workbook was a call to action for the illiterate, a call to journey from perceived ignorance to knowledge.

Authorship

Both books were co-published by the Revolutionary Government, Cuban Ministry of Education, and the National Literacy Commission, the latter of which was an umbrella organization for identity-based affiliation groups throughout Cuba (Alfabetemos 3). Some of modern Cuba’s patriarchs also played an authorial role in creating the text. For example, Castro was one of the authors of Alfabetemos.

Reflecting its authorship, each section of the manual begins with an epigraph from a Cuban patriarch that commands the brigadista to act for the betterment of the
nation. The manual uses over thirty such epigraphs, one on almost every page. In addition to Fidel, José Martí, Antonio Maceo, and Raúl Castro are also among the patriarchs quoted with claims for the “Fatherland” as a place for all (*Alfabeticemos* 5). The epigraphs, most of which are calls to action by Castro, are calls to action for the Cuban population. They are mandates, many written in the Spanish imperative verb tense. The epigraph to the section on democracy, for example, is a quote by Castro:

“Democracy is this, that which delivers it a rifle to how many citizens request to defend a just cause” (*Alfabeticemos* 54). The men quoted in the epigraphs in the manual are also the patriarchs the students familiarize themselves with in the primer. Exercise B in the primer, for example, teaches the literacy student how to write vowels by locating vowels within the names Camilo, Fidel, and Raúl.

*Structure*

*Alfabeticemos* is composed of three parts. The first section of the manual states, “The material that we have prepared for the literacy education consists of this manual and the primer ‘Venceremos’. The review of the Primer tells of three fundamental points: 1) The reality of our Fatherland. 2) That of the illiterate. 3) That of the literacy teacher” (*Alfabeticemos* 14). The primer, ¡*Venceremos*!, meaning We Will Win! serves as both an abbreviated and abridged version of the themes presented in *Alfabeticemos* and as a workbook of exercises in its own right. Also like *Alfabeticemos*, its first page is contains a poem, entitled “Our Cover,” which describes the desire to triumph over illiteracy.

¡*Venceremos*! was the vessel for the content of the education the illiterate received through the Literacy Campaigns. The political content of the primer is

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9 As is the case with most of the Spanish passages in this thesis, this is my own translation. The original texts of the manual and primer can be located in Appendices A and B, respectively.
embedded in lessons on grammar, spelling, diction, and verb conjugation. The 110-page primer consists first of learning the individual letters of the alphabet. The primer groups the letters into vowels and consonants. When pronounced side by side, they constitute acronyms for political groups. The first page of the primer teaches the vowels O E A, which stand for Organización de Estados Americanos.¹⁰

Exercise A, thus, consists of the student learning to write out the letters O E A in both print and in cursive. The final two pages contain the alphabet. The later pages of the primer have more poster-like images and Revolutionary slogans that students were able to read out loud by the time they reached that point in the primer, and chant with the rest of the country. Pages 102 through 107 include photographs and poems that congratulate the newly literate and welcome them to their new place in Revolutionary society.

“Orientaciones para el alfabetizador” (Orientation for the Literacy Instructor)

The first section in Alfabeticemos is entitled “Orientations for the Literacy Instructor.” This section outlines in detail the connection between the Alfabeticemos and ¡Venceremos!. It also explains how the brigadista must teach her students and what her interactions should be like in order to facilitate maximum progress and efficiency. This was the main topic that the alfabetizadores elaborated upon in the training at Veradero. This orientation pamphlet embedded within Alfabeticemos describes in minute detail how the brigadista was to conduct herself with the analfabetos (illiterate). The first instruction says that brigadistas must establish friendly relationships with students situated in a respectful cordiality because they need help (Alfabeticemos 11). On the following page, the brigadistas are prescribed

¹⁰ Organization of American States
scripts to use with their students to give them a dialogue that is not dependent on a hierarchical power structure typical of student-teacher relationships. They are told, “Avoid an authoritative tone” and to “remember that the work of literacy realizes a commonality between the literacy instructor and the illiterate” (Alfabeticemos 12).

The beginning of Alfabeticemos introduces the manual as a text in conjunction with another. In this first section, the Revolutionary Government, National Commission of Literacy, and Ministry of Education, co-authors of both texts, explicate how the primer and manual should be used intra-actively. The eighth page of Alfabeticemos states, “We establish the continuation of a relation between the issues of the Primer and the themes of the Manual, in that which you will encounter the material of necessary information for the initial conversation.” Below that is a list of the historical, political, and social themes enumerated and elaborated in the manual and their corresponding workbook pages in ¡Venceremos!. The chapter in Alfabeticemos that follows contains a detailed curriculum for the brigadista on how to use the Primer as an interactive and intra-active text.

24 Themes

The second section of Alfabeticemos is broken down into twenty-four “themes” or issues that the Revolution has or intends to change. These themes are included to teach the brigadista about what Cuba is like outside Havana and how the Revolution affects the entire country. Members of the Revolutionary Government and Ministry of Education emphasized the importance of the twenty-four themes in the training at Veradero (Halbert-Brooks and Pérez 28). These twenty-four themes transform Alfabeticemos from simply a manual for teaching literacy into a manifesto for the Revolution at large, even as it extends outside the work on the Campaigns. It delves
into Agrarian Reform, laws against racial discrimination, and Cuba before and after Batista’s rule.

The instructions to the *brigadista* laid out in *Alfabeticemos* state, “We have taken fifteen issues of national interest that form the fifteen lessons that are used in ‘Venceremos’ and through these we have proportioned the necessary exercises to achieve the mechanisms for reading and writing. The method is easy and adjusted to the reality of the illiterate Cuban” (*Alfabeticemos* 12). ¡Venceremos!, thus, simplifies the twenty-four themes in *Alfabeticemos* into fifteen. The Revolutionary themes are also simplified in the primer through the use of photographs, which allow the students to visually relate to the content. The exercises in the primer are a mixture of dictation and fill-in-the-blank exercises. Almost every page includes both the print letters and the cursive letters for the phrases. Each section is organized around one of the themes first presented in *Alfabeticemos*. The beginning of each new section and theme includes a brief three-sentence description in simple vocabulary with large print. To the left of these descriptions are photographic illustrations.

The fifteen themes of the exercises can be grouped into three more general sub-categories: Fatherland, Military, and Agrarian Life. In one of the first lessons on vowels, students are instructed to find the vowels within the words “*Patria pueblo cubano,*” or “Fatherland Cuban Countryside” (¡Venceremos! 5). In another exercise midway through the workbook, the students are instructed to fill in the missing words (in brackets) in the following paragraph: “United [young] and old, [we pledge allegiance] with Fidel: [together] to defend Cuba. They will [never] defeat us!” (¡Venceremos! 62).

* Agrarian Life
The most important of the three themes on which the primer is based is agrarian life. The Agrarian Reform Law of 1959 was one of the first Revolutionary efforts. It granted the then-illiterate patriarchs of campesino households the deeds to their land. Before the Literacy Campaigns, as it was explained to the brigadistas in Alfabeticemos, peasant farmers were cheated out of the deeds to their land for a variety of exploitative reasons. Landowners exploited farmers through using the farmers' illiteracy to their advantage. Landowners forced farmers to sign contracts they could not read that ceded their land to wealthier consumers of their crops. Or, farmers signed their contracts with their thumbprints, as most were unable to even sign their names.

In ¡Venceremos!, the first exercise after the vowel exercise is intended to teach syllables. Exercise A uses the phrase “Agrarian Reform” and the rest of the page breaks up these words into different compositions. The students practiced the pronunciation and separation of sounds to discern the syllabic formation. Most of the students likely did not even know what this law was or that it had passed. The year after the Revolutionary government initiated it, most farmers were still ceding their rights to their land to the latifundias because they were not aware that they did not have to.¹¹ They did not have access to newspapers, could not read them if they did, and were excluded from the discourse in urban communities about the Revolutionary laws that were passed.

The primer introduced the concept and institution of Agrarian Reform Cooperatives. It states, “There are cooperatives formed by farmers. In these

¹¹ Latifundias are large private estates in Latin America wealthy distant owners who profit from the crops exploit the workers who live on the land and grow the crops. Latifundias were seen as essential to the capitalist Cuban economy under Batista and were immediately revoked through the Agrarian Reform Law, which gave workers the rights to the land.
cooperatives they cultivate the land. The farmers work in the cooperative
(¡Fenceremos! 17). Exercise C is another example of Agrarian Reform in an exercise
in the primer This exercise teaches possessive nouns with the preposition “su,”
which means “their.” To understand the power of the possessive in language, they
read and then conjugated parts of the sentence, “The farmers cultivate their land”
(¡Fenceremos! 32). For the first time, these Cuban farmers were able to lay claim to
their land as their own. They did so through the process of learning a key
grammatical concept. To learn about passive versus active verbs literacy students
learned the progression from saying “The Agrarian Reform was born in the
mountain,” to “The Agrarian Reform gives land to the peasants” to “The Agrarian
Reform advances.”

Race and Class

The focus on Agrarian Reform in the exercises in the primer signals that both
books for teaching literacy are cultural texts. Alfabeticemos is a vivid description of
how Cuban society functioned in 1960. Alfabeticemos covers multiple categories of
identity, including race and class. One chapter specifically demonstrates a clear
commitment to exposing class inequities as they related to Cuba’s socialist
Revolutionary project. An additional chapter demonstrates a historical and social
commitment to connecting racial discrimination to class discrimination, as the
majority of the poor was – and still are – Afro-Cubans. The chapter on race closes
with the statement, “There is no hatred of races because there are no races”
(Alfabeticemos 42). At the end of a description of racism in Cuba, the authors of this
manual claim that Cuba is a race-blind nation. It says that during the Revolution,
racism does not exist because race as an epistemological category of identity must
Praise

The manual and primer do not focus on what the illiterate do not know: how to read. They focus on what the illiterate do know and what the urban literate do not: life in the countryside. The manual documented the systemic issues surrounding the oppression of workers and families living in the campesinos. The Ministry of Education tailored the content of the primer to the experiences of its readers, which resulted in positive pedagogical consequences.

¡Venceremos! served the dual purpose of teaching the alphabet and of consciousness-raising. Deciphering the alphabet and consciousness-raising came together to define literacy in the Campaigns’ pedagogy. Through its practical exercises, the primer drew on the personal experiences of the students. It used the context of their everyday experiences so they would understand the content better.

Prelude to a Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Alfabeticemos is a requisite prelude for a pedagogy of the oppressed. It documents the systemic issues surrounding the oppression of workers and families living in the campesinos. The exchange of knowledge between campesino and brigadista not only impacted but was also part of the pedagogy of the Literacy Campaigns. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire uses the term praxis—a crucial analytical concept in this thesis, defining it as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire 51). In Freire’s view, true reflection leads to critical thinking and critical thinking in turn leads to the informed action crucial to liberation of the mind.
For the first time in formal Cuban education, teachers abandoned formality with their students. They facilitated the learning of literacy through informal praxis where they engaged in reflection and dialogue with their students. The first thing they were instructed to do as teachers was to abandon their authoritarianism within the pedagogy. The manual states, “Avoid an authoritative tone, remember that the work of literacy realizes a commonality between the literacy instructor and the illiterate” (*Alfabeticemos* 12).

The instructions for the use of the primer can now be interpreted as very much in line with Freire’s model; they instruct relating to the literacy student horizontally rather than hierarchically. In the specific instructions for the primer’s use is an outline of Freirean educational methods of how to impart information without simply transmitting it in a banking model. The manual provided a time limit for literacy learning (two hours per day) so that the rest of the time could be used for the knowledge to assimilate, for students to engage in conscious reflection of what they were learning, and for the *brigadistas* to learn about daily life in the *campesinos*.

**Feminist Pedagogy**

My feminist pedagogical analysis begins with reorganizing how *brigadista* and student shared life experiences with one another. Yet feminist pedagogy includes more than an acknowledgment of these experiences. The content of the Literacy Campaigns through the manual and primer have feminist potential. The list that follows assesses the role of the Campaigns’ pedagogy, in terms of where it falls on a feminism-patriarchal spectrum.
1. Feminist pedagogy occurs in spaces of accessibility that have traditionally been devalued. Through teaching in these spaces, they become valued. What they represent and the types of labor that occurs with in them becomes valued as well. In the Literacy Campaigns, the teacher entered the home, traditionally seen as the female sphere. She, the teacher, is going to where her students are rather than telling her students to come to her. The scene of learning, in the home and in the domestic sphere, becomes a quintessentially female space.\textsuperscript{12}

In \textit{The Feminist Classroom}, a seminal text on feminist pedagogy, radical educator Frinde Maher states, “the practice of teaching and the concept of pedagogy have always occupied an anomalous position. Education as a discipline is often demeaned as a ‘woman’s field’” (Maher 6). It is thus a feminist act of the Literacy Campaigns to value what was considered a “woman’s field.” Until the Literacy Campaigns, teaching and pedagogy were undervalued in Cuba because it was considered women’s work. The Literacy Campaigns did not start to value women’s work by valuing a female gender identity. Rather, the Revolution came to value women through valuing the sector of work they were most often found in.

Interactions between \textit{brigadistas} and their students shows feminism at work within the pedagogy. The teaching of literacy took place within the home, within the domestic sphere. Living rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens were transformed into classrooms with the use of a lantern.\textsuperscript{13} The exchange of knowledge was essential to

\textsuperscript{12} Feminine does not equal female and, while I want to acknowledge the valuing and reality of gender roles at the time, I do not want to limit feminist to feminine.

\textsuperscript{13} Before they embarked on their teaching journeys, each \textit{brigadista} was given a backpack, which contained uniforms, the manual, copies of the primer for each of their students, and the ever-symbolic lantern. The houses the urban \textit{brigadistas} taught at were often without electricity and lanterns were needed to see the text. The requisite lantern is seen for many historians as an emblem of the Literacy Campaigns and the bringing of light to darkness as a metaphor for bringing knowledge to the ignorant.
the formation of the Campaign pedagogy. Teaching took place through the context of the brigadista living with a host family. The majority of the knowledge exchanged was domestic knowledge, involving labor done in the home and for the family that is usually unpaid. Within the context of the Campaigns, where knowledge was seen as precious and the most important contribution to the Revolution, domestic work was seen as such as well. The valuing of domestic work within the pedagogy of the Campaigns makes an analysis of the Literacy Campaigns as a potentially feminist movement possible. Thus, the how the pedagogy was communicated: the abandoning of hierarchy and traditional authority coupled with the valuing of domestic work allows for a feminist pedagogical analysis of the Campaigns.

2. Feminist pedagogy encourages internal factors, which can triumph over external factors. In other words, it encourages the critique of patriarchal society from within it. Feminist pedagogy does not necessitate work outside the system. In progressive feminist education, which takes into account both critical thinking and pedagogies relevant to students’ lives, students are taught about external factors of their society they live in and function as necessary parts of, while still being encouraged to think internally (critically) about how and why they function in that society in the ways in which they do. They understand their part, but do not take it for granted.

In the Literacy Campaigns, the external conditions of Revolutionary society were a core part of the curriculum and pedagogy. Alfabeticemos provided an orientation to these external conditions in detail, while ¡Venceremos! emphasized through literacy activities how the rural students functioned as part of society with sample sentences such as “The farmers cultivate their land” in which the students
were instructed to spell out each syllable in “cam-pe-si-nos” (farmers), labeling their own position in society as they did so. Although Alfabeticemos encouraged a critique of the remnants of pre-revolutionary Cuba society, a critique of the Revolution itself was not a part of the Campaigns’ project. Women were not encouraged to look critically at their role in the Literacy Campaigns. Yes, they were valued as leaders and teachers, but they were also tools for the Revolution. The Revolution gave them scripts in Alfabeticemos in the Orientaciones section for how to interact with their students; they were told to not question patriarchal Revolutionary society.

3. Feminist pedagogy does not reproduce dogma, even in its own terms. It uses form and content, use and what is used, to achieve a vision through the means of education. This is about what society can become versus what it already is. Those who benefited from the Literacy Campaigns did not have the privilege of learning for learning’s sake. They became literate in order to understand the rights they had to their land and to keep from being exploited. The Revolutionary vision evidenced in the manual and primer indicates that the students were encouraged to think about their place in society in empowering and liberatory ways. Yet the language of liberation the manual uses is dogmatic; it explains to the brigadista how to convey to the student why they should learn to read and write, rather than to allow students to draw their own conclusions. Alfabeticemos, “Orientations for General Character,” states,

Have them understand that this is the best moment to learn how to read and write and the benefits that this represents for the Fatherland and for them. For the Fatherland, because you will help them with your strength in their farming and industrialization and for them, because with the lesson they will
acquire knowledge without which they will not be able to inform themselves of what happens in Cuba and in the world. And with the writing you will create conditions for communication with the rest of the world through letters, telegrams, and notes; covering applications, receipts, money orders and other documents that will allow them to improve in their work (Alfabeticismos 11).

There is a difference between teaching literacy and teaching for critical thinking. Yes, the authors of the primer told students in the Campaigns why literacy was connected to their lives on a culturally relevant level. However, students had a lack of agency in deciding how they themselves felt about the place they occupied in the “Fatherland.” Part of seeing what society can become versus what it already is, is seeing student potential. In The Feminist Classroom, Maher identifies this as an issue of positionality, “in which people are defined not in terms of fixed identities, but by their location within shifting networks of relationships, which can be analyzed and changed” (Maher 164). In being taught literacy only as it applied to their lives at present, students did not envision post-literacy opportunities different from their upbringing. Especially for women, whose roles were fixed in the domestic sphere, the issue of positionality needed to be more at the forefront of the literacy education.

The Revolutionary Government and the Ministry of Education needed to ask: What are new and creative ways outside the scope of their current lives that students can use their newfound literacy? How can they use literacy to think critically about Revolutionary society? How can they use their experiences and current situations as farmers for the Fatherland and build upon them to create new ones?
4. Feminist pedagogy makes the linkages between past, present, and future clear, especially as they acknowledge gender-based ways of experiencing the world. As I have already discussed, the workbooks were blind to issues of gender. This is ironic because the Literacy Campaigns represented a major turning point for the treatment of gender issues in Cuba. In Chapter One, I discussed how becoming teachers granted women independence. In this chapter, I discuss how female students were empowered through learning to read and write.

Yet, the real omission in the manual and primer is gender. Implicitly, this conveys that gender does not matter in Cuban society and that oppression based on gender did not need to change. Women’s gender-based experiences and ways of viewing the world were not taken into account in the experiences the workbooks represent. The represented experiences are based on class. The workbooks mention race, but gender is elided. The pedagogical material of the Campaigns, thus, was for the Cuban people in general, but not for women specifically. This is problematic insofar as women were oppressed differently based on their gender. In Cuba, women were doubly colonized yet it is only the secondary colonization – that of the citizens of the country as a whole – that is acknowledged in these materials.

5. Feminist pedagogy addresses difference. Racism, and the effects of multiple intersecting oppressions, is acknowledged and discussed. The workbooks outlined a solution to eradicating racism that wrote it out of existence. The manual simplified the issue by stating, “The racial discrimination always has a socioeconomic origin” (*Alfabeticismos* 41). While true in some regards, this statement also has the underlying assumption that where socioeconomic oppression does not
exist racial discrimination does not either. While the manual did not omit issues of race as it did gender, it did overly simplify racism.

Feminist pedagogy, however, deals with issues of race in all their complexity as a way of relating to student experiences. It opens up a dialogue rather than assume a common solution. Students arrive at their own conclusions, answers, and questions; the pedagogical materials support inquiry of the self and society.

6. Feminist pedagogy encourages agency on the part of both student and teacher in choosing their material and subject matter. *Alfabeticemos* describes a pre-designed curriculum given to the *brigadistas*. They were handed the manual at the start of their ten-day-long teacher education. Within the manual, they were told how they were to use it. Similarly, the *brigadistas* were responsible for handing their students copies of *¡Venceremos!* and the students were told to simply do the exercises. Within the exercises, however, they were told why they were to do them and the relevance of the exercises on the rest of their lives. Thus, while the *brigadistas* were encouraged to teach dialogically with their students, the *brigadistas* were not extended that same courtesy by the Revolutionary government in co-creating the materials they were to teach with. This limited the positionality and agency of the teacher and made them tools for a political project rather than full agents in their own right.

As part of their discussion on consciousness-raising in pedagogies of liberation, Maher and Thompson write in *The Feminist Classroom*, “Feminist and liberatory pedagogies aim to encourage the students, particularly women, working-class students, and members of underrepresented ethnic groups, to gain an education that would be relevant to their concerns, to create their own meanings,
and to find their own voices in relation to the material” (Maher 9). To assess the manual and primer in this way suggests that, pedagogically, there is room in these scholars’ definition for a feminist pedagogical analysis of the Literacy Campaigns. It is the work of feminist educators to critique and encourage a critical discourse around the content of the text itself, no matter how rudimentary the knowledge it conveys is.

The “Father” of Feminist Pedagogy: John Dewey and the Continuity of Experience

The feminist pedagogy I describe above is derived primarily from two theorists and educators: John Dewey and Gloria Ladson-Billings. In *The Feminist Classroom*, Maher defines “feminist pedagogies” as a “new field evolved from many different sources: the consciousness-raising practices derived from the women’s movement and other movements of the 1960s, the progressive tradition in American education created by John Dewey, and the more general forms of “liberatory teaching” espoused by Paulo Freire and others” (Maher 9). In *Experience and Education*, John Dewey articulates a theory of the connection between education and personal experience. Like Freire, Dewey initiates a discussion of the differences between “traditional” (banking model) and “progressive” (liberatory) education (Dewey 9). He philosophizes that an experience is educative insofar as it enables the creation of future enriching experiences. He believes that students and teachers alike must hold factors of past, present, and future concurrently in order to create an educational experience that incorporates them all. He believes that education should start with a student’s past and current experiences. Good education, then, takes
students to a place where they can use those experiences in an informed way to create new ones.

Dewey is credited as one of the founders of progressive education, a nineteenth century pedagogical movement in the Americas, which places emphasis on critical thinking, opinion-formation, personal experience, and processes over outcomes and results. Progressive education has become an umbrella term for different related molds of pedagogical thought, including culturally relevant and feminist pedagogies. While Dewey is considered a father of this movement, his later work in *Experience and Education* critiques his own movement from within. He believes that a linear notion of progress ignores past experiences in ways that are culturally irrelevant to the student.

While they acknowledged the past experiences that had to do with class, the Cuban Literacy Campaigns ignored past experiences of both students and teachers that had to do with gender and minimally acknowledged those about race. Dewey writes that experience-based education requires “a well thought-out philosophy of the social factors that operate in the constitution of individual experience” (Dewey 21). One of these social factors that the Campaigns ignored was the treatment of women as a category of identity with a long-standing history of inequality and discrimination. The Revolutionary government started with an assumption of gender equality. That was, however, the aim, but not the reality. The pedagogy ignored the country’s past sexism and was therefore not culturally relevant to the female student and *brigadista*. A critique from within is useful in analyzing the pedagogy of the Literacy Campaigns because it argues for accountability for their effectiveness in the past, present, and future. The past accountability consists of the
positive change the Revolution allowed for in speaking directly to the experience of the Cuban people in terms of class oppression. The accountability during the present of the Literacy Campaigns argues for the culturally relevant pedagogy of the manuals, and the future lies in the seed transformation the Literacy Campaigns made possible.

Dewey’s theory and a feminist theory of experience differ in crucial ways. In introducing his argument, Dewey writes of education “as the scientific method by means of which man studies the world, acquires cumulative knowledge of meanings and values, these outcomes, however, being data for critical study and intelligent living” (Dewey 10). A feminist definition of education is more humanizing because it is not just a scientific method; it is also a method of liberation through critical thinking. It critiques the way society already is to make space for and to liberate what it can be.

To explore this potential, Dewey suggests that students bring their old experiences into their new ones. He suggests that students cannot leave any aspect of their identity or life experiences behind. Rather, they must bring it with them to strengthen and facilitate the understanding of the new knowledge and new experiences gained. It is in this aspect of Dewey’s argument that the connection between experience-based learning and the pedagogy of the Literacy Campaigns is strongest. The acquisition of literacy cultivates the potential to start afresh, to abandon past experiences and identities in favor of identifying more fully with those who were already literate. Yet the Cuban Revolution did not use literacy as a tool for social mobility; it used it as a tool to serve the culture and class its participants were already in and to allow them to participate in that culture and class more fully.
That message was carried across was through the cultural pedagogies exhibited in the content of *Alfabetíamos* and *¡Venceremos!*

Dewey encourages movement along the lines of continuity of experience. He says that good experiences are only ones in which continuity can be had after the initial experience occurs. The organization of the Literacy Campaign workbooks reflects this. The primer *¡Venceremos!* intended to give the illiterate students tools by which to enable future experiences where they could be put into practice. In terms of Agrarian Reform, for example, they learned to read and write for the sake of comprehending and signing documents that would secure their rights to their land. The workbook exercises were relevant to the lives of its users; they created continuity of experience through making clear the cultural aims of each exercise. In other words, it told students directly why they were learning what they were learning and the relevance it would have to their lives.

**Liberation for Whom? Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Dewey’s theory of the need in education for the continuity of experience is the basis for the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings. Ideologically, the Campaigns aimed to fill the ideological purpose of using what the some in the U.S.-based progressive education movement refer to as “culturally relevant pedagogy.” This pedagogy of teaching that which is close to home to the illiterate populations was used because it is most effective in transmitting ideologies of liberation. Culturally relevant pedagogy is “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or
explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right” (Ladson-Billings 20).

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a school of thought that has feminist potential, though it, like Dewey’s theories, is not inherently feminist. The working definition of the feminist pedagogy that progressive educators practice and reflect upon is made possible by the discourse surrounding culturally relevant pedagogy. I bridge these two definitions of feminist pedagogy to create my own critical assessment of the pedagogy in the Cuban Literacy Campaigns, using each workbook and the pedagogy of how the teachers interacted with their students as case studies.

Ladson-Billings’ work draws on that of international literacy campaigns to cull together effective pedagogies for liberation. She recognizes the relevance of literacy campaigns to culturally relevant pedagogy. In *The Dreamkeepers*, she writes, “One of the critical national indicators of educational progress (and national development) is the literacy rate.” She quotes literacy scholar Bernardo Ferdman, “literacy has been seen as a process of consciousness-raising aimed at human liberation” (Ladson-Billings 111). She identifies literacy as not a product that can be acquired – literacy as a noun. Crucial to culturally relevant pedagogy is literacy as a verb, in the form of cultural activities in the process of learning.

Ladson-Billings quotes Ferdman’s articulation of this mode of viewing literacy, “In a society tending toward homogeneity, it is easy to think of literacy simply in terms of specific skills and activities. Given broad cultural consensus on the definition of literacy, alternative constructions are either remote or invisible, and so literacy becomes a seemingly self-evident personal attribute that is either present or absent.” Ferdman asserts, “[B]eing literate has always referred to having
mastery over the processes by means of which culturally significant information is encoded. In a culturally heterogeneous society, literacy ceases to be a characteristic inherent solely in the individual. It becomes an interactive process that is constantly redefined and renegotiated, as the individual transacts with the socioculturally fluid surroundings” (Ladson-Billings 112).

The Cuban Literacy Campaigns used both the primer and manual to (re)define literacy as an “interactive process” where “the individual transacts with the socioculturally fluid surroundings” (Ferdman quoted in Ladson-Billings 112). In 1960, Cuba was in a heightened state of change and tumult. *Alfabeticemos*, as a manual for the teacher, described the changes the country was going through. These changes were not only educational; they broadened the definition of the sociocultural knowledge literacy instruction requires. The twenty-four themes from the manual made the literacy instruction relevant to the lives of the illiterate by placing the activities within their cultural contexts and personal experiences.

Yet in both the Literacy Campaigns and in Ladson-Billings’ articulation, culturally relevant pedagogy has its limits. Its focus on class (the Literacy Campaigns) and race (Ladson-Billings) does not extend itself fully to a discussion of the pedagogy’s use when educating on and around gender issues. Ladson-Billings’ work centers around case studies about African American teachers and students. She writes, “Even when the curriculum materials are limited, culturally relevant teachers know how to mine them to stimulate students’ thinking and their learning of critical skills” (Ladson-Billings 121). The relationship of the curriculum materials of the Literacy Campaigns, the manual and the primer, to culturally relevant pedagogy was a fraught and necessary one.
Literacy and its Limits

Omission of Women

An analysis of the Campaigns in terms of culturally relevant and feminist pedagogy is strongest in terms of class, which the primer and manual directly address. The content of the education is expressed through the experiences of the oppressed in society, yet only through their oppression in specific contexts. While class oppression affected both men and women, this workbook turned a blind eye to how class oppression doubly affected women. It ignored the doubly-colonizing effect of imperialism as it relates to land ownership. Yet despite the Campaigns’ similarities to feminist pedagogy, they worked contrary to feminism because they marginalized gender through ignoring it as a category of identity.

One of the Revolutionary themes described in Alfabeticemos is racial equality. In this publication, the Ministry of Education explicitly claims that Cuba is race-blind. Throughout the whole text, Alfabeticemos implicitly claims that Cuba is gender-blind as well. Alfabeticemos does not even mention that gender is a category of identity and discrimination. Most other obvious categories of identity and social change are described in this manual yet the role of women outside their function in the family is ignored throughout. Alfabeticemos promoted Cuba as a gender-blind society, leaving the contemporary reader with the question: What are the ramifications of this omission when the readers and users of the manual (the brigadistas) were women? They were led to believe that their country was blind to how they had always been treated based on their gender.

Throughout the primer, the names of Cuban patriarchs are mentioned for the
purpose of literacy exercises, but not once is a woman’s name used. In an effort to encourage the illiterate to relate to the Revolution and learn about its leaders as they learned to read, the illiterate also engaged implicitly with issues of representation: Who was accounted for in the content of their education and who was not? In the case of both Alfabeticemos and ¡Venceremos!, women are omitted. This ironic exclusion of women remains evident throughout the primer, even as the exercises and concepts build on one another to create a more holistic definition of literacy for the student.

Both Alfabeticemos and ¡Venceremos! made important social contributions to speaking through and to the experiences of the oppressed, who were previously underrepresented. Yet in that space of progress also exists its weakness: its political content expresses only a limited point of view of what it means to be oppressed and of whose oppression matters. While the way in which the Campaigns were set up included a structure of women teaching women how to read and write, they needed a more critical pedagogy relevant to the specific oppressions of women in Cuba at this time.

Freire vs. Banking Model

The form of Alfabeticemos, which was didactic for the teacher, did not match its content, which instructed the brigadistas to abandon hierarchy and formality with their students. The rhetorical style of Alfabeticemos uses a hierarchy in order to mandate information and pedagogy to the brigadistas. The manual is thus on top and the brigadistas on bottom. That is to say that the authors of the manual (Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, and the Minister of Education) spoke to the brigadistas rather than engage directly with them, as the brigadistas were instructed to do with their
students. These patriarchal leaders address the women *brigadistas* using the verb tense that, in the Orientation to the Teacher, they instruct the *brigadistas* not to use, claiming their authority as leaders over their commonalities as Revolutionaries.

*Alfabeticemos* addressed the *brigadistas* as “a mass audience rather than as participants in a common discourse” (Ohmann 680). While the content of the manual is in line with a feminist Freirean analysis of encouraging a common dialogue between teacher and student, its form neglects the mandates of its content. *Alfabeticemos* detailed exactly how every single lesson should go. It provided scripts for how the *brigadistas* should respond to their students. It presented a non-negotiable, however liberal, way of viewing the state of the nation. Within all this prescription, was there any room in the curriculum for critical feminist pedagogy?

*Todo por la Revolución*¹⁴

The Literacy Campaigns were explicitly for the Revolution. Campaign workbooks were thus used to transmit knowledge that explicitly supported the Revolutionary effort and the cults of personality of its leaders. Basic literacy exercises, rather than a simple writing down of the alphabet, consisted of writing letters to government leaders, copying phrases like “Fidel is our father,” and exercises on verb tenses that situated students in relation to their contribution to the Revolution. The goal of the Literacy Campaigns was thus not just to teach the ABC’s; it was to use the ABC’s to encourage nationalism.

Systemic issues are included in the manual and primer insofar as they were important to the Revolutionary project. The specifics of the text reveal patriarchal and masculinist ideologies embedded within the wording and showcasing of certain

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¹⁴ Everything for the Revolution
experiences and oppressions over others. Alongside this impact, the Campaigns also used a patriarchal rhetoric in conflict yet coincidental with the empowerment of its pedagogy. In the case of the Campaigns, the pedagogy includes the ideologies of socialism (Agrarian Reform) and the ideology of the patriarchy that accompanies that socialism in Cuba. Rights were granted to oppressed populations on the basis that the oppressed populations would respond to being granted those rights by participating in the Revolutionary project.

**The Spectrum of Feminist Context and Patriarchal Content**

Catherine Murphy, the director of *Maestra*, interviewed *brigadistas* and some former students from the countryside about the content of the literacy education, as it related to the context, i.e., the overall structure of the Campaigns themselves and the teacher-student relationship that was part of their pedagogy. Murphy, after these interviews, claims that the recipients of the Literacy Campaigns believe that the teaching structure (the context) made a more lasting impression than what they were taught in the workbooks themselves (the content). What the former students remember is being taught how to hold a pencil properly through the undivided and patient attention of the *brigadista*. They do not remember the content of the workbooks themselves as much. These firsthand claims leave me with two questions: Did the former students forget the content because its politicization was so deeply and implicitly embedded in the formation of their consciousness as they learned to read? Or, do they not remember the content because, when weighing different aspects of the pedagogy, the teacher-student relationship carried more weight than societies typically give personal relationships in education, thereby
furthering the Campaigns as a feminist pedagogical project?

Maher writes, “If there is anywhere that one ought to look to find out about the transformation of the curriculum, in the ways that students relate to one another, and the impact and significance of the gender, race, and social class of students and teachers in creating knowledge, it ought to be the classroom” (Maher 6). The how of the education - the feminist Freirean ways in which the brigadistas related to their students - is more important in explaining and defining a feminist educational project than the “what” of the education: the content. Yet the what complicates this analysis of the Cuban Literacy Campaigns as having feminism within the pedagogy. The efficacy of the feminist pedagogy revealed in how brigadistas related to their students also depends on what they related to their students with. This was the content of education, which expresses contradictions because pedagogically, it relied on a politicized framework situated within a socialist patriarchy.

The Campaign materials – the workbooks – and how they instructed the brigadistas to teach their students are two necessary aspects of the pedagogy of the Campaigns. While the content of the Campaigns was imbued with a patriarchal rhetoric, the Campaigns still had feminist consequences because the methodology of the student-teacher relationship was feminist in its abandoning of a traditional hierarchy between teacher and student and valuing of domestic work. These two aspects of the pedagogy came into conflict with one another. But practically, these two aspects complemented one another efficaciously in the Campaigns through leading a country away from illiteracy and into literacy. These two components of the pedagogy – the content and the context – only come into conflict with one
another when feminism and patriarchy are viewed as binaries. If, however, feminism and patriarchy coexist on a spectrum, greater possibilities open up for the practical application of feminist education.
CHAPTER THREE
WOMEN AS RESOURCE:
CUBA'S PATRIARCHAL POLITICAL PROJECT

Oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group. This requirement often changes the meaning of our ideas and works to elevate the ideas of dominant groups.

- Patricia Hill Collins

The brigadistas conveyed the Revolution’s messages through their work in the Campaigns. Women were political vessels for the Revolution as both the deliverers and teachers of the manual and primer. In this chapter, I ask: if feminism and patriarchy are defined on terms of an inclusive spectrum rather than as binary opposites, does the context of the Campaigns contradict the content or do they complement one another? Through investigating what it means for women to be vessels of a patriarchal Revolution, I look at the feminist implications of the Literacy Campaigns. To determine these implications, I zoom out to women’s rights in Cuba during the first three years of the Revolution, when the Literacy Campaigns formed. In order to paint a fuller picture of the Campaigns, this chapter acknowledges what the workbook and manual do not: the experiences of women in Revolutionary Cuba and what the Revolution did and did not do for women’s rights.

Human Resources

Women’s personal investment in the Campaigns is an argument for their empowerment, yet the reason for women’s involvement in the Campaigns served a larger revolutionary project with an ideology that did not necessarily have their best
interests at heart. The New Man and New Woman rhetoric that Guevara
perpetuated to encourage volunteer labor for the Revolution was a call to action.
This call to action, shouted out by men, but shouted to both men and women,
encouraged every Cuban citizen to act as a human resource for the Revolution. Men
and women alike acted as vessels for the Revolution’s messages. These messages,
while carried out by both men and women, were still created by men.

At the start of the Revolution, only men occupied positions of power in the
Padula convey the salience of Cuba’s male dominance

the reins of power in revolutionary Cuba were not only male dominated, they
were in the hands of one man, Fidel Castro. In such a system women remain
effectively minors, beneficiaries of the goodwill and interest of the patriarch.
To a large degree women in Cuba were lucky in that women’s advancement
was of interest to the patriarch. Thus from the beginning women were
encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities that established new,
more independent, and more militant images of womanhood (Padula and
Smith 182).

Cuba was governed by three patriarchs: Fidel, his brother Raúl, and
Guevara. These men acknowledged that they needed women to sign on to the
Revolution’s aims. They mobilized women to gain support from and access to the
private domestic sphere. Thus, the sphere of *la casa* became another resource for the
Revolution. These patriarchs granted women rights and positions of leadership only
to the minimum degree necessary for those women to agree with the Revolution’s
goals. The Revolutionary patriarchs did not target women as individuals; they
targeted women as a biological identity incapable of forming individual values and opinions. Thus, the leadership decisions made for women were not made by women; the lack of representation of women in the government challenged women’s ability to have their experiences accounted for in their new rights.

**Getting Women On Board the Revolutionary Boat: The FMC**

On August 23rd, 1960, one month before Castro publicly announced the Literacy Campaigns to the United Nations General Assembly, he founded the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (Allen 112). He granted the Federation of Cuban Women the legal authority to propose and pass laws for women, including universal employment laws, maternity leave legislation, and a mandate for daycare centers in the workplace (Farber 193).

In *Socialism and Feminism*, scholar of Latin American feminisms Nicola Murray writes, “The stated purpose of the FMC was to ‘prepare women educationally, politically, and socially to participate in the revolution…Its main functions are the incorporation of women in work and raising the educational consciousness of women’” (Murray 64, emphasis mine). Murray makes the claim that the FMC is not a feminist organization because it was created to serve a socialist patriarchy. Women collectivized through the FMC, but only within the context of the state; their collective political power was limited by the state’s aims. It prepared women to serve the socialist patriarchy through mobilizing them in the three fields Murray outlines.

The FMC is a women’s organization, not a feminist one. There is a difference between *feminine* organizing and *feminist* organizing; the FMC organized based on
shared femininity rather than shared feminist goals. The Revolutionary Government encouraged the FMC to host informal study groups to teach women to support the Revolution from the domestic sphere. Despite their intention to spread the messages of the Revolution, these study groups resemble the consciousness-raising groups popular in Western feminist movements that occurred in the same time period. Murray writes of the difference between the FMC’s study groups and the consciousness-raising groups that inspired activism in Second Wave U.S. feminism, its study-groups, while playing ‘an important role in the ideological training of all Cubans, especially women’, are led by a cadre around a specific topic or text, and do not promote the same mutual support and self-awareness as do ‘consciousness-raising’ groups in the feminist movements within contemporary capitalist society (Murray 64).

“Mutual support and “self-awareness” are crucial to feminism. The Revolution, thus, fell short of providing these two aspects of feminist (though not feminine) consciousness.

Murray also says that the Revolution mobilized women in the field of education through recruiting them as teachers. The FMC was part of the National Literacy Commission, a strategic array of eighteen identity-based organizations created alongside the Literacy Campaigns. As part of the National Literacy Commission, the FMC worked alongside the Ministry of Education to develop the Campaigns immediately following Castro’s founding of the organization and subsequent announcement of Cuba’s effort to eliminate illiteracy (Supko). The FMC played a crucial role in the technical structure of the Literacy Campaigns. The FMC
monopolized the women’s rights discourse and advocacy in Cuba at the time. Yet simultaneously the FMC showed limited feminist possibility. The FMC was not an independent organization with its own mission and executive powers. As a government institution, its aims depended on the Revolution’s aims. This dependence automatically stunted the possibility for a feminist revolution concurrent with Castro’s socialist one.

“Eso es lo que completa la mujer: una familia.”

The Revolution mobilized women politically by giving them limited positions of power in the government. In these positions, however, women mainly drafted family rights laws. The above quotation, “This is what completes the woman: a family,” is drawn from Cuban feminist author Marilyn Bobes. It is from her short story “Alguien tiene que llorar,” a cultural critique of how the Cuban Revolution did not serve women. The Revolution offered progress for women, but only to an extent. The Revolution wanted to transform society by changing how resources were distributed to social sectors. Its goal was liberation from oppression and its methodology for accomplishing its aim was to universalize all basic rights such as education, healthcare, housing, and employment. Universality aimed to give everyone, regardless of race, gender, or age, the same opportunities. While this might seem like progress, universalizing rights assumed a gender-blind and race-blind society where that was not the case. Oppression still existed even as the Revolution granted new rights because that oppression was ignored.

During the first three years of the Revolution, Cuba was in a liminal and transitory state as it moved from Batista’s dysfunctional dictatorship to Castro and
Guevara’s socialist model for society. The Revolution granted women legal rights at the breakneck pace characteristic of the Revolutionary ethos of rapid change. The possibilities of those rapidly granted rights were limited by their orientation to women’s traditional roles within patriarchal family structures. Women’s rights were made equivalent to family rights in order to serve the Revolution. “Feminism” in Cuba, tenuously defined, depended on the Latin American valorization of motherhood (Farber 186). Cuba’s family-centric women’s rights movement put the patriarchal family first, which subordinated women.

On paper, Cuba appears a legally progressive country for women. This progress was realized through a set of legal rights called the Family Code, drafted by the FMC. However, this set of laws was not passed until 1975.¹⁵ These laws included equal access to employment and compensated maternity leave (Farber 186). In general, the conflation of family rights with women’s rights keeps women in the domestic sphere. It also keeps men in the public sphere, which dissociates them from the daily life of the family. Ideals of masculinity went unchanged. While legislation changed, machismo attitudes did not. Machismo prevailed because masculinity went unchallenged even as the Revolution granted women new rights through greater recognition of the domestic sphere in society.

Why Feminismo is a Masculine Noun

Machismo prevailed because Castro and other patriarchs decided that the main aim of the Revolution was to universalize all basic rights and subsume diverse

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¹⁵ These laws were not passed until 1975 because at the start of the Revolution, women’s rights that did not have to do with specific government initiatives were postponed until after the initiatives were completed. The Literacy Campaigns was a main initiative that can be grouped into this category.
experiences into the umbrella category of La Revolución. The Revolution did not acknowledge the different types of oppression experienced by different identity groups. Acknowledging the specific oppressions women faced means acknowledging machismo attitudes acted out towards women by men. In the case of the Literacy Campaigns in Cuba, the facts of literacy served the deceptive purpose of making it seem that all were equal so long as they could read. Socialism in Cuba evaded multiple systems of oppression. In its implementation in Castro’s Cuba, people thought only in terms of Revolutionary terms and goals.

When multiple oppressions (including racism, sexism, and classism) are subsumed under one category, the onus is put on the oppressed for their own freedom rather than on the cause of the oppression: patriarchal society and the oppressor. Padula and Smith write,

Cuba had adopted the standard Marxist position that true sexual equality can be established only through socialist revolution, that socialism and women’s liberation were one—that ‘one’ being socialism. Feminism was roundly denounced by the revolution for being a bourgeois indulgence and an imperialist tool to divert women from the more important class struggle by tricking them into rejecting men (Padula and Smith 4).

Socialism assumed a solution only on the part of the oppressed groups taking initiative rather than by encouraging the oppressors to take initiative.

The Revolution blamed sexism on pre-Revolutionary Batista society. Despite the influence of machismo and upholding the patriarchal family, Cuba assumed a gender-blind society during the Revolution by universalizing and subsuming various categories and identities under the umbrella heading of the Revolution. The
role the FMC played in the Campaigns, however, gave women political influence in a movement considered politically valuable and necessary to the functioning of a larger Revolutionary project. It enabled the Revolution to mobilize women. The goal of the Campaigns was “increased participation of women” to further along a specific non-women-oriented project; it was government-serving (Shayne 8). The Campaigns bolstered the political influence and Revolutionary valor of Cuban women outside of the Campaigns as well, as their heroic status came to be known on a national level.

Moving Towards Feminism in Pedagogy

Intersectionality encourages freedom from individual oppressions on the basis of both their similarities to and differences from one another. It is a systemic understanding in social justice work that different forms of oppression are connected to one another. Intersectional approaches are necessary components to feminist social justice work because they do not assume similarities where there are actually differences. An intersectional approach addresses multiple forms of oppression simultaneously, through the ways in which they relate to one another. When patriarchy is the functioning of systems based on the needs and interests of male-dominated groups, an intersectional feminist approach is an intervention. It examines the implicit ways in which oppression manifests itself in daily life have to be examined and then deconstructed individually.

Intersectionality, thus, is a feminist theoretical concept, which acknowledges different aspects of oppression explicitly whereas universalism subsumes aspects of oppression into one category, addressing only the most dominant forms of
oppression are addressed. The Revolution did not use an intersectional approach because it universalized all sectors of society under one heading. I do not seek to place “universalism” and “intersectionality” against each other, in any sort of binary system. But, it is important to note that subsuming different identity-based groups under one heading belittles and diminishes each group’s individual goals in favor of a larger one: the dissemination of Revolutionary values, which were inherently state-focused.

Yet as I have already discussed, the radicalism of forming collectives of women stopped at empowerment. As an agent of power, Castro granted women rights, which recognized their personhood more than Batista’s political project, but not enough to liberate them from entrenched patriarchal social structures. Although the Campaigns empowered Cuban women, they did not liberate the brigadistas. Based on what we perceive as independence, it was not inherently a “women’s rights” movement aimed at sustainable sources of female empowerment. However, I do not maintain that because the Campaigns were not inherently a “women’s rights” movement, they were not feminist. Although I challenge the essentialist claim that because large numbers of women participated in it, it can be inherently thought of as feminist, I also challenge the claim that it is not feminist because the ideology of the official Revolutionary curriculum was patriarchal.

The distinction between universalism and intersectionality pre-empts the difference between empowerment and feminism. The Literacy Campaigns empowered women because specific acts gave agency and independence for one specific cause, outcome, and reason. They gave Cuban women social and geographic mobility that, as I explored in Chapter One, enabled them to leave patriarchal family
structures. But when the Campaigns ended in 1961 many of the *brigadistas* returned to their homes and patriarchal family structures. This follow-up to the work of the Campaigns and a return to *machismo* from what many consider *feminismo* lend itself to an interpretation of the Literacy Campaigns as an isolated incident.

The Literacy Campaigns were an empowerment model, defined as a movement that provides greater autonomy than previously existed. This autonomy is, however, limited because it does not prioritize a change in *machismo* social consciousness that would realize women’s full autonomy. An empowerment model is limited because it relies on the oppressor granting rights to the oppressed, which still depends on a patriarchal hierarchy. In an essay on feminist pedagogy, Jennifer Gore distinguishes empowerment as falling short of a feminist model of liberating oppression,

the term ‘empowerment’ often does, more generally, presuppose (1) an agent of empowerment, (2) a notion of power as property, and (3) some kind of vision or desirable end state. To *em-power* denotes to give authority, to enable, to license. As such, it is a process, which requires an agent—someone, or something, to *em-power*. Even the notion of ‘self-empowerment’ presumes an agent—the self (Gore 56).

Castro was the “agent of empowerment” in the Literacy Campaigns. The “property” he gave the *brigadistas* to *em-power* them included the ten-day teacher training at Veradero, the manual and primer, and geographic mobility through the host family structure of the Campaigns. The “vision or desirable end state” was a nation with a magnified rate of literacy for both men and women.

In writing about the limits of empowerment, I want to be careful not to
belittle the fact that the Campaigns did wonders for women, especially in terms of what they were capable of after the Campaigns. Feminist author Audre Lorde is famous for saying, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” The Literacy Campaigns were an empowerment movement rather than an explicitly feminist movement with its own autonomy and agency. As such, they alone could not dismantle the master’s house (patriarchy in Cuba and in pedagogy). What they were capable of, however, was making a crack in the master’s house that further enabled its dismantling.

**A Step in the Right Direction: Feminist Process versus Feminist Product**

I originally defined patriarchy as male-dominated systems of oppression that function based on a gender binary and hierarchy, in which men are more important and have greater power than women. Patriarchy also accounts for the functioning of systems based on the needs and interests of male-dominated groups. In “Unmasking Masculinity and Deconstructing Patriarchy: Problems and Possibilities within Feminist Epistemology,” Caribbean feminist scholar Patricia Mohammed writes,

A contemporary deconstruction of patriarchy requires a revisiting of the term patriarchy, moving away from the glibness or taking-for-granted with which we have come to use the term in feminist discourse. The recognition of patriarchy as both ideology and practice led feminism into a search for origins, a search which, though proving inconclusive, has still been necessary and worthwhile…if patriarchy has been constructed through history, then it can also be deconstructed (Mohammed 59).

In her essay, Mohammed proposes a deconstruction of patriarchy through its
own means. She challenges Lorde’s assertion that the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house by acknowledging, metaphorically speaking, that if enough cracks are made with the master’s tools, the house will be a lot easier to dismantle. She explicitly connects patriarchy and feminism, which are typically seen as mutually exclusive and operating on dual sides of a binary with one another. This process-driven definition of feminism includes both patriarchy and empowerment as necessary steps in its formation. Empowerment stems from patriarchy; therefore, patriarchy can lead to feminism. Patriarchy and feminism, then, exist on a spectrum with one another where patriarchy can progress in a direction that leads to feminism even while it serves its own projects. In progressing in this way, the power of patriarchy diminishes.

Julie D. Shayne’s concept of Revolutionary Feminism acknowledges this spectrum. She writes,

Revolutionary feminism refers to a grassroots movement that is both pluralist and autonomous in structure. It seeks to challenge sexism as inseparable from larger political structures not explicitly perceived to be patriarchal in nature, but from the perspective of feminists, entirely bound to the oppression of women. In this sense, revolutionary literally refers to the type of historical process that enabled the development of the feminist movement (Shayne 9, emphasis mine).

Shayne continues her definition of Revolutionary Feminism by listing its five factors. These factors are listed in the order of their progression on a spectrum of patriarchy leading to feminism. These five factors allow me to interpret the Literacy Campaigns as one spectrum of both/and (rather than either/or) patriarchy and
feminism.

1. Gender-Bending: women revolutionaries challenge socially prescribed “feminine” roles and the gender relation of tasks. The *brigadistas* used the traditionally feminine domestic sphere to their advantage in finding their own place in Cuba’s Revolution because teaching is traditionally a feminine role and because it took place in the homes (the domestic sphere) of the illiterate students. Simultaneously, they were *en*-powered (given power) through their recognition as “an army of educators.” As I explored in Chapter One, the *brigadistas* wore male military uniforms; many women wore pants for the first time because of the Campaigns. The incorporation of women into the masculine sphere of the military as teacher-warriors reveals the ways the Literacy Campaigns employed gender-bending to create a Revolution that included women.

2. Logistical Phase: women revolutionaries are trained as activists within the Revolutionary process. The Revolution believed that teaching was a potent form of activism. The Campaigns trained women to be activists in the ten-day teacher training at Veradero. This logistical training in Revolutionary activism both empowered and disempowered them. It was their first step towards independence from their patriarchal families, but it was also their first step towards dependence on the patriarchal Revolution, which gave them manuals that ignored the ways they were oppressed.

3. Sociopolitical Cleavage: the post-revolutionary space for mobilization that uses the momentum of the Revolution to gain even further and more transgressive progress. The Revolution’s rhetoric, aims, and actions, while patriarchal, also created a post-revolutionary space for mobilization that furthers the
progression of feminism along this spectrum that begins with patriarchy. While I posited the Literacy Campaigns as an “isolated incident,” they also carry with them political opportunities that enabled women’s progress to continue and grow after the Year of Literacy ended. “Seed transformation” fills the crack created by sociopolitical cleavage.¹⁶ The Revolutionary Government granted the brigadistas scholarships to universities in Cuba upon successful completion of their work in the Literacy Campaigns. These scholarships, while earned by the empowerment work of the Campaigns, contributed to the development in feminism in Cuba later on.

4. **Incomplete Revolution:** women have to understand that the Revolution has not ended until they too have their own crafted rights and previously unmet needs met. This understanding can be expressed with Freire’s development of conciencización de sí, awareness of oneself in relation to the greater whole. Freire claims this as necessary to pedagogies of the oppressed. However, the Campaigns’ formal curriculum discouraged the conciencización de sí of an incomplete Revolution when they omitted of the ways in which women were oppressed. However, under this heading of conciencización de sí, Freire also claims that once one is educated, [she] can “dismantle the world.” The onus is thus put on the educated to acknowledge and address the ways the Revolution is incomplete. The brigadistas took advantage of sociopolitical cleavage and to obtain further education that challenged Revolutionary society. But what about the students the brigadistas taught? Were those newly literate female students encouraged to stay in the countryside given that same opportunity to acknowledge “their” Revolution as incomplete?

¹⁶ “Seed transformation” is introduced earlier on in this thesis in Chapter Two; it is a term coined by Piya Chatterjee for a movement’s unintended consequences.
In her feminist critique of Freire, Weiler claims that we need a “consciousness of the inadequacy of classical liberatory pedagogies” (Weiler 450). The definition of progressive education, a term that encompasses “classical liberatory pedagogies” means forward and solution-oriented thinking that stem from Freire’s method of problem-posing education in which students create their own solutions to educational problems rather than blindly go with the solutions a banking model teacher would pose as fact. Weiler asserts a need for intersectional praxis in applying Freire’s work, which poses multiple problems that each have multiple solutions. This is an intersectional approach to education; the multiplicity of both the problems and solutions are acknowledged as relevant.

I analyze two simultaneous forms of oppression in this thesis: the oppression of a lack of access to literacy education, and the oppression women of all social classes face: the aforementioned oppression in the home. The specific pedagogy used in the Campaigns only reflected a consciousness of the former. Consciousness of both is necessary for the realization of feminism.

5. Collective Feminist Consciousness. This fifth factor represents the fullest progression from patriarchy to feminism on the spectrum I propose in this thesis. Collective Feminist Consciousness combines a conciencización de sí with a conciencización de nosotras (“consciousness of us, as women”), my own comparable term for a collective feminist consciousness that can emerge from an understanding of the Revolution as incomplete for women in the full realization of their rights and situation in society. In Cuba, women’s full rights were not realized because, while they had more independence than they started out with, that independence was

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17 A more thorough analysis of Weiler’s feminist critique of Freire can be found in Chapter Two.
dependent on their subordination to the Revolution’s goals. Collective Feminist Consciousness challenges the notion that a feminist movement can exist independent of preceding patriarchal ones, as independent of the “master’s tools,” so to speak. It asserts that feminist work even on the ground is an interdisciplinary movement and dependent on other systems and institutions.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE SPECTRUM: FEMINIST METHODOLOGY IN REVOLUTIONARY EDUCATION

I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry “home” on my back.
- Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera

Until this point, this thesis has toggled between two discourses. Chapter One expresses the feminist methodology of the Literacy Campaigns in the ways in which the Campaigns provided social mobility for women and value to the teaching profession. Chapter Two analyzes the patriarchal limits to the textual pedagogy of the Literacy Campaigns through an analysis of the manual and primer. Chapter Three exposes again the patriarchal limits of the Campaigns through revealing the ways in which the empowerment of women as resources is a start to yet insufficient in the development of feminist consciousness. This final chapter, however, seeks to bridge these two discourses into one project: a spectrum that shows how movements between these two discourses actually constitute feminism in its inherently processual state.

The Spectrum

Looking at feminism and patriarchy on a spectrum demystifies feminism; it shows that feminism is not a magical, anomalous achievement that a society either does or does not attain. Like literacy, it is both a noun and verb. It has its moments – borders – where its manifestations become clear, but it also occurs between and around these points. The Cuban Literacy Campaigns exemplify a feminist process. Different points on the spectrum have traditionally identified their progress: as
Revolutionary Feminism, as an empowerment movement, and as promoting independence for Cuban women through their mobilization on behalf of the Revolution. Yet notions of feminist “progress” in the current discourses are constantly shadowed by the patriarchal ideology of the leaders of the Campaigns and the Revolution of which they were a part. Rather than negating Cuba’s feminist progress in which the Campaigns played a part, this patriarchal ideology is a necessary part of feminist process.

**Borderlands: Borders and their Bridges**

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa writes, “I am a turtle. Wherever I go, I carry home on my back.” Anzaldúa, a Chicana feminist, claims *mestizaje* identity and politics. Her project within feminist discourse combines theories and practices that are usually not grouped together, similar to this thesis’ combination of feminist theory and progressive education practices. This quote is useful because “home” is the place of origin, the society that already exists. It is patriarchy. The “turtle,” then, to follow this metaphor, is feminism. Feminism always necessarily carries with it the effects of patriarchy, but has the visionary capability to peek its head out from underneath its limiting shell. The turtle in Anzaldúa’s famous quotation defines feminist process as a spectrum, which includes its uncomfortable home: patriarchy.

Anzaldúa writes that home – the patriarchal society in which she and the Campaigns live – is uncomfortable, but a necessary point of beginning. She says,

There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being ‘worked’ on…dormant areas of consciousness are being
activated, awakened. Strange, huh? And yes, the ‘alien’ element has become familiar—never comfortable, not with society’s clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable but home (Anzaldúa, preface).

The “alien” element is patriarchy: a system that oppresses women, but which women nonetheless grow up in.

In the Campaigns, the teaching methodology – how the brigadistas interacted with their students by exchanging knowledge with them – is more important than the words in the primer or manual in identifying the Campaigns’ feminist pedagogy and consequences. The relationship between the brigadistas and their students was about connection. The texts and ideology used were about connection in some ways when it comes to class, but they also encouraged a disconnect for women based on the ways in which their specific oppression differed from the oppression described in the texts and by the Revolutionary Government.

Anzaldúa writes that fixed points of disconnect form borders between people, places, and terms. She defines a border as “set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge” (Anzaldúa 3). Borders were present in the inability of the brigadistas to identify their own experiences within the texts they taught. Borders are also present any moment a binary, dualism, or dichotomy is created. The problem with borders is that only those in power at the time benefit from them (Anzaldúa 4). Thus, what a spectrum seeks to do is show how a movement involves the process of crossing those borders.

Each leap on this spectrum from point to point is a bridge; it requires a
crossing (Anzaldúa 48). Anzaldúa and another Chicana feminist, Cherríe Moraga, co-authored an anthology entitled *This Bridge Called My Back*. The bridges between points are the turtle’s back. Bridges provide a way to cross over borders, fill the gap between patriarchy, the known explicit and implicit forms of oppression, and feminism, the unknown, only imagined possibility of what reality can, but does not yet, look like. In the Campaigns, these bridges between points indicate methodology, moments of connection formed between teacher and student, and the possibilities both for literacy and outside its bounds that the Campaigns opened up for women in Cuba.

Anzaldúa defines a borderland as “*una herida abierta*” where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country.” She continues, “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants” (Anzaldúa 3). There are two types of borderlands I explore in this project. First is the borderland of the time period. The second are the smaller borderlands in the above spectrum of feminist process. The first three years of the Revolution were a borderland because they represented the Revolutionary crossing between two times and social structures: Batista’s patriarchal capitalist dictatorship and Castro’s socialist Cuba. The Literacy Campaigns, as a moment that spanned and defines these three years from 1959-1961, is “[an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first” because illiteracy was and is associated with the Third World and literacy with the first.

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18 An open wound
The borderlands that create feminist process are the connections between each unfixed point on the spectrum. They are the fluid spaces – oceans of inconceivable possibility and horizon – beneath the bridges formed by the false linearity of representing these “points” on a spectrum. In defining feminist process, the borderlands between these points are more important than the points themselves.

**Feminist Praxis vs. Hegemony**

Praxis – action and reflection in critical dialogue – took root in Cuba during the Literacy Campaigns via the primer where students used culturally relevant pedagogy to reflect on their own experiences of class oppression. Praxis led to a conciencización de sí, an understanding of one’s own situation and place within the socialist patriarchy of Revolutionary Cuba.

The use of praxis, a tool for critical thinking, was limited during the Campaigns because its reflection and action were limited to issues of class oppression. Later, however, praxis aided in a conciencización de nosotras: the development of a collective feminist consciousness. This stemmed from women brigadistas’ realization that the roots of praxis in the Campaigns were insufficient in helping them analyze and change the ways they continued to be oppressed because of their gender within a new socialist, but still patriarchal regime. They identified the Revolution as incomplete for them.

**Feminist Progression in Methodology and Borders**

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval engages in a critique of the
current discourse separating liberation from oppression. As already stated, discourses around oppression led by white male patriarchs universalize the term “oppression” to signify class oppression and subsume other forms of oppression such as sexism and racism under that one heading. Eventually, in Cuba, non-white men began to reform the discourse to address racial oppression as well.

Sandoval’s work is both revisionist and visionary; she engages in a critique on the representation of feminist process throughout history. Her title is also a direct critique of Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Yet her diction shifts the focus to the context of social relationships in education rather than the content of what gets learned. She also envisions new ways in which feminists can change their representation and impact. She defines a “methodology of the oppressed” as “a set of processes, procedures, and technologies for decolonizing the imagination” (Sandoval 68). She believes that change comes from within and then moves outward; it begins first with the mind – a changing of consciousness (conciencización) – and then a changing of society. She believes, as I do, that feminism is at work even within patriarchal social(ist) structures.

“Hegemonic feminism” is Sandoval’s umbrella term for both Marxist and Liberal Feminisms. Marxist Feminism operates along the lines of a horizontal power structure where men and women maintain their differences through equivalent – but not equal – rights. The Literacy Campaigns are ostensibly an example of Marxist Feminism at work; women were given the same rights to work as men, though the fields they were told to work in differed from those of men at first. Yet just over half of the brigadistas were female, meaning that both men and women were, to an extent, encouraged to engage in the same kind of work.
Differential Consciousness

To understand the procession of different points on a spectrum, I use Sandoval’s theory of differential consciousness. This theory expresses a dialogical relationship between all these “points” on the spectrum, showing that none of them can be considered fixed. Differential consciousness, unlike feminist process, acknowledges and works with the fixed points on the spectrum. This form of consciousness emphasizes these points rather than the borderlands between the points. This is helpful because these are terms used in canonical feminist discourse.

While this thesis focuses on the Literacy Campaigns to reveal the spaces between these points of progress, the process through which society arrives at progress is revealed through differential consciousness.

Sandoval writes that differential consciousness permits the poetic movement of consciousness both “backwards”…and “forward” to create new levels of metaideology: it represents a cruising, migrant, improvisational mode of subjectivity. This subjectivity is prodded into existence through an outsider’s sensibilities: a lack of loyalty to dominant ideological signification, combined with the intellectual curiosity that demands an explosion of meaning (in semiotic and deconstructing activities), or to meaning’s convergence and solidification (in meta-ideologizing), for the sake either of survival or of political change towards equality (Sandoval 180).

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19 In this thesis, I differentiate between “progression” and “procession” because progress, a term used to describe the movement of points on a spectrum during a historical moment or moments, implies linearity. The Cuban Literacy Campaigns, however, show that there is a back and forth between points, a circularity where each point on the spectrum, as it is momentarily left, can never be forgotten.
Differential consciousness, then, points back and forth on the spectrum of feminist process, which necessarily involves patriarchy. Differential consciousness is the ultimate bridge and borderland, which is a means of understanding these borders and points on the spectrum in relation to one another. Differential consciousness is the dialogical relationship between points on this spectrum to show that feminism does not begin where patriarchy ends; if this were the case, feminism would not yet have begun. Rather, they co-exist in varying degrees.

Sandoval writes of “a lack of loyalty to dominant ideological signification,” which was challenging for the brigadistas in the Literacy Campaigns because in volunteering, they were also co-opting into the dominant ideology. They had to compromise their own consciousness – a conciencización de nosotras – for the Revolution’s conciencización de sí arrived at only through its limited pedagogy. Essentially, the brigadistas were tasked with reconciling two seemingly irreconcilable needs and forms of consciousness. On one hand, they needed to have their independence fully realized through autonomy of action and thought that extended outside Revolutionary rhetoric; only this degree of autonomy could produce a Collective Feminist Consciousness. On the other hand, the only way women could have parts of their independence realized was through being granted immediate autonomy within the bounds of the Revolution. They addressed this more immediate need by signing up to perpetuate its socialist patriarchal consciousness.

Differential consciousness is useful in understanding this supposed contradiction because it is a way of understanding the disparate forms of consciousness revealed in each point on the spectrum; it believes that yes, there is a
difference in consciousness that women who are part of a socialist patriarchy have from women who recognize that the Revolution is incomplete for them. Yet, while it understands these differences of consciousness, differential consciousness also calls for their convergence. No one form of consciousness is privileged (all the arrows are the same lengths) and all are capable of effectiveness in producing feminist change.

Those who possess differential consciousness, thus, are aware of the identity they have and use identity as a tool in the ways it is useful. The *brigadistas* did that by using their identities as women, subordinated as natural workers in the domestic sphere, to progress along this spectrum. The Revolution mobilized female *brigadistas* to work in the Campaigns because they were an oppressed identity group; this was, for many, their only option to get out of the house and the female *brigadistas* took advantage of their identities as oppressed women who did not have other forms of work they could take on and who were stereotyped as being good teachers because they were destined to be mothers.

**Oppressive Pedagogy, Feminist Methodology**

In *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*, Luke and Gore write,

As feminist educators, we are also women who stand hip-deep in cultures saturated with phallocentric knowledges, in institutional structures ruled epistemologically and procedurally by men and masculinist signifiers, and in a discipline which, despite its historical terrain as ‘women’s work’—a caring profession—remains the theoretical and administrative custody of men (Luke and Gore 2).

In the introduction to their book, Luke and Gore present the central questions and
contradictions of feminist education at moments when points on this spectrum seem too fixed: How can women teachers educate in a way that works to eradicate their own oppression? How do they do this when empowered to be teachers by a society that also oppresses them?

The *brigadistas* found a way to answer this question; they possessed a differential consciousness that allowed them to produce massive change in both statistics of literacy and for women in Cuba. They did so through accepting Revolutionary ideology on paper, enabling them to continue their work and have the nation’s support and resources in doing so, yet *how* they taught was feminist; it humanized both men and women, literate and illiterate. Their empathetic methodology used the stereotypically female identity of women as caretaker to engage with their students in liberating ways that showed that all knowledge was of equal value. Their methodology, which is a necessary part of pedagogy, enabled them to arrive at a practical feminist consciousness even while working within the confines of their socialist patriarchy.
CONCLUSION

If you work for freedom, you move away from the space of binaries, of simplistic either/or’s, both/and’s and to be able to look at the picture that offers us complexity. – bell hooks at the New School

I began this thesis by asking the question: Were the Cuban Literacy Campaigns feminist? I wanted to make a decision: were the Literacy Campaigns either a means of enforcing Cuban Revolutionary patriarchy or a transformative moment of Cuban feminism? Yet the conclusion I have arrived at deviates from absolutist borders, which would provide me with a “yes” or “no” answer to this question. I instead arrive at the more socially productive and ambiguous borderland of feminist process, which includes both feminism and patriarchy as necessarily coexisting and informing one another on a spectrum. This allows for a historical moment with feminist potential in the future. This borderland indicates that the Campaigns are indicative of feminist process in Cuba and beyond. Feminist process can only be recognized when patriarchy, too, does not register as an absolute term with a singular definition, but as its own process as well. This process can, as happened as an unintended consequence of the Literacy Campaigns, accidentally lead to feminist process.

The Literacy Campaigns, as a borderland, had effects and results that crossed Cuba’s borders – una travesía – and shaped literacy for many other countries. This project is important to me because to look at the feminist movement in Cuba in 1959-1961 is to look at the feminist movement in the United States during that time as well. To look at the Literacy Campaigns is also to see the ways in which they can

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20 Una travesía is a crossing of borders, a term used by Anzaldúa in describing the formation of borderlands.
be useful to U.S. education. Before I even began this project, I was interested in the classroom dimensions of education reform in the United States. I tutored eighth grade students who had trouble sounding out words and offered advanced reading groups for first graders who just seemed to “get it.” I wanted to learn about the experience of learning how to read in order to arrive at effective practices for teaching reading. I decided to look outside the confines of U.S. education reform to find answers.

Why it Matters to U.S.

The paternalistic attitude applied towards the predominant Cuban discourse in the United States is that of Cuba needing to learn from us, from the U.S. I first learned about Cuba in my tenth grade global history class. I learned, like most U.S.-American kids do, about the embargo. About the Bay of Pigs invasion. About that which directly affected the U.S. and portrayed Cuba in a negative light. We learned about Cuba within the context of analyzing politicized cartoons of Uncle Sam preaching down to his misbehaving nephews of Latin American nations. We learned about it as a country that our country thought needed saving.

For years, I forgot about Cuba, as most do. It is not a memorable country because what is taught about it tends to be rote and centered around a few key events rather than a cultural ethos all its own. Six years after that high school global history class, I found myself in a classroom at the University of Havana with resources reminiscent of the public school I grew up in. I found myself, just as I was years ago, ideologically frustrated with my U.S.-American peers. In my Cuba Society and Culture class one day at the beginning of the trip, we discussed what I
referred to as the study abroad group’s major struggle: the desire to compare everything to America and assert that Cubans should do as we do. In other words, the American college student who cannot even do their own laundry’s assertion that they are Uncle Sam, striving with all the resources (and no idea how to use them) to teach an ignorant nation how.

Especially when it comes to universal education, the U.S. has a lot to learn from this country it desires so much to teach. The Literacy Campaigns worked. They worked as a women’s movement, bringing women out of the professional woodwork by valorizing the teaching profession. The Literacy Campaigns were also a historic education anomaly; in one year, a country went from a United Nations illiterate to literate status. One year. Clearly, we do not have all the answers.

Yet, due to the embargo, it is challenging to get information on Cuba out of Cuba. It, then, becomes the job of American scholarship to bring back information to further enrich our own educational praxis and feminist pedagogical movements here at home. We too have a lot to learn if we are to grow the teaching profession. I, an aspiring teacher, have begun a study of Cuba’s best practices. In my research coupled with teaching experience, I am finding a way to make them my own.

In attempting to provide an answer to my initial question, I arrived at a new question instead: What can the Literacy Campaigns teach us about feminism and pedagogy – and feminist pedagogy – in the United States? Sandoval’s concept of U.S. Third World Feminism is particularly salient to my project because it shows us what a careful examination of feminism in Cuba can lend to the feminist movement in the United States not through what makes the two separate but where the two forms can encourage, in a non-imperialist way, each other’s growth. Through
analyzing the pedagogy of the Literacy Campaigns, I extended U.S. Third World Feminism to include pedagogy as a necessary means of communication feminist ideology.

Through analyzing the pedagogy, I now see how feminist possibilities can arise in education even through a patriarchal context. Education in the United States, too, exists within a patriarchal context: it exists in an oppressive white supremacist system that hires mainly women, but where decisions in education and education reform are made by a government with a large – albeit cracked – glass ceiling. In answering a question on U.S. education reform at her and bell hooks’ talk at the New School, black feminist cultural spokeswoman Melissa Harris-Perry said, “It is no mistake that the sector that is dominated by educated women of color that perform a task of reproduction is the one where there is bipartisan consensus to destroy it.”

The connection between education and feminism – or, rather, education and sexism – lies in their shared problem: value. As long as a society – Cuban or U.S. American – continues to devalue women through sexist ideology perpetuated either aggressively or passively, it will also devalue education because education is a woman-dominated field. The flipside of that is what I learned through doing this project: once education is valued as a necessity and basic right, the possibilities for women as active agents of change gain credibility as well. The United States can learn from the Cuban Literacy Campaigns how to reverse the problem to arrive at a solution.

**Methodology’s Importance in Spectrum Pedagogy**
The feminist impact of the Literacy Campaigns is revealed in its methodology. Methodology is part of pedagogy; it is how pedagogy is communicated through the relationships formed between teachers and students. In Chapter Two, I determined that while the pedagogy of the Literacy Campaigns was patriarchal in its messages, the Campaigns liberated women in how they carried out the pedagogy. Half the pedagogy is how the content is executed. Then, another part of the pedagogy is what is actually written down in the pedagogical materials. While these materials are not indicative of feminist pedagogy, the means the *brigadistas* used to convey these materials is.

To conclude with an emphasis on the methodology of the Literacy Campaigns emphasizes the *how* of learning, which is to value teachers and the emotional connection of the student-teacher relationship. The national and Revolutionary success of the Campaigns is undeniable both statistically and through the testimonies of the formerly illiterate. When Catherine Murphy, the director of *Maestra*, spent ten years interviewing *brigadistas* and the illiterate, very few of them actually spoke of the impact of the tangible pedagogical materials (the manual and primer) of the Campaigns. They instead talked about the relationships they formed – relationships of mutual trust, understanding, and respect that enabled them to learn to read.
The above photographs are from an anthology of photographs and posters from the Campaigns, *In the Spirit of Wandering Teachers*. Relationships like those pictured formed between teachers and students of different genders, races, class, and overall experiences (Keeble). Those relationships conveyed what was not written in the primer and manual. The spoken words, the oral valuation of different
experiences in the ways that they were both different and similar created a space within a pedagogy intended to be patriarchal for feminist methodology. In *The Feminist Classroom*, Maher and Thompson write, “If there is anywhere that one ought to look to find out about the transformation of the curriculum, it is the ways that students relate to one another, and the impact and significance of the gender, race, and social class of students and teachers in creating knowledge, it ought to be the classroom” (Maher and Thompson 6). They assert that the “how” of the education - the feminist Freirean methodology of how the *brigadistas* related to their students - is more important in explaining and defining a feminist educational project than the “what” of the education: the content. This thesis did not shy away from pointing out the problematic nature of the manual and primer. However, that critical analysis should not undermine the feminist impact of the methodology. It is in that methodology that the United States can learn the most from the Campaigns for how to further its own education reform.

**Using Cuba to Teach for America**

The concept of young educated urban people educating the poor, as occurred in the Literacy Campaigns, is nothing new or foreign to the United States. There are a plethora of educational and teacher education programs out there such as Teach for America, the Teaching Fellows, and the Urban Teaching Fellows, which emerged from the progressive pedagogy and idealistic thinking, which befit the U.S. education reform movement. These are relatively new movements in the United States; their ultimate efficacy has yet to be determined. Yet Cuba has already had sustained success in literacy with the pedagogies and structure of the Literacy
Campaigns. We, as a nation on the brink of transformative discoveries on how to progressively teach literacy, have a lot to learn from a country that proved in 1961 that they might hold the key.

Of these various programs that are part of U.S. education reform, the closest parallel that can be drawn between the United States and the dramatic Cuban education reform that were the Literacy Campaigns is through the example of Teach for America (hereon referred to as TFA). TFA is the brainchild of Wendy Kopp’s undergraduate senior thesis at Princeton. Similar to what I address in my thesis, Kopp explored in her thesis possibilities for large-scale social change through U.S. education reform. The program she outlined and then expertly raised the funds for, recruits recent college graduates to enter the nation’s most underserved and underresourced classrooms the September after they graduate college.

Like the **brigadistas**, TFA teachers undergo minimal teacher preparation, which can be measured in mere days. Like the **brigadistas**, they enter communities they are unfamiliar with. Like the **brigadistas**, they received a relatively privileged education whereas their students have not. And, finally, like the **brigadistas**, their time as teachers is seen as temporary, as a pathway to future careers. Harris-Perry sums it up best at her New School talk with bell hooks: “TFA is a lovely program in its initiation: before you go out and make policy, before you go to Wall Street, before you go and run for office, spend two years in the classroom.”

Yet TFA is also one of the most widely-criticized attempts at education reform (Feministe, “Why I Hate Teach for America”). The education of students is compromised in an effort to provide an educational experience for the temporary teacher. With TFA, the most underserved and uneducated youth of America receive
the least qualified teachers with the highest rates of burnout and turnout. TFA teachers are charged with being culturally insensitive in their teaching methodology because they come – and intend to return to – social settings drastically different than those where they are placed. Finally, its temporariness encourages potential teachers to go on to be policymakers; it discourages teachers from leading education reform. This subsequently discourages women who make up the majority of the teaching profession from having authority in issues of policy. Yet why, when TFA and the Literacy Campaigns have so much in common, are so many educational failures attributed to one, but not the other? The below outlines what I believe U.S. education reform (using TFA as only a case study) can learn from the Cuban Literacy Campaigns, based on the reasons why I think the Literacy Campaigns were so successful.

1. Learning Communities. In Chapter One, I wrote about how the _brigadistas_ supported one another beginning with their ten-day teacher training at Veradero. From that point forward, they relied on each other’s input for how to teach and develop smaller learning communities with the families they taught.

2. Mentorship. In the TFA model, the young new teachers it recruits are seen as threats and job-takers of the veteran teachers. In the Literacy Campaigns, however, the veteran teachers established mentorship relationships with the inexperienced _brigadistas_. In Chapter Two, I wrote that those who were professional teachers before the Literacy Campaigns played a large role in educating the newer teachers through explaining the usage of the primer.
3. **Community Engagement.** In Chapter Two, I also provided an analysis of the manual the *brigadistas* carried with them, which educated them on a community not their own. The *brigadistas*, unlike many TFA teachers, entered the underserved communities they were placed at with prior knowledge of the specific problems that community faced. They also played active roles in those communities outside of literacy education by helping in the fields of the *campesinos*, they were completely immersed the environments of their students.

4. **Family Involvement.** A major goal of U.S. education reform is to involve the family in the process of education, especially because the family is responsible for the child’s initial education in the home. In the Literacy Campaigns, the family was directly involved because often, education was a family effort because multiple family members were illiterate. Also, the Campaigns used the space of the home – home-schooling – as the classroom for learning.

5. **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.** In the end of Chapter Two, my pedagogical analysis arrives at the core reason for why Cuba decreased its rate of illiteracy from 23.6 percent to 3.9 percent in less than one year. The materials and methodology of the Campaigns used culturally relevant pedagogy by speaking and teaching to the direct experiences of the illiterate, rather than assume that those experiences are similar to those of their literate teachers.

6. **Funds of Knowledge** (Gonzáles, Smith, and Amanti). Throughout this thesis, I explore how the methodology of the Campaigns was founded on
a mutual *exchange* of knowledge rather than a banking model where the teacher imparts information to the student, but not the other way around. Often, when teachers think of how to educate rapidly or for a test, as is the case with the standardization of education, they believe that for efficiency’s sake, they cannot have a dialogue with their students. The Literacy Campaigns revealed, however, that efficiency lied in exchanging funds of knowledge: the exchange of household and *campesino*-related skills for literacy education, where both were equally valued.

**Radical Decentering**

As a FGSS major, I did not intend to write a history thesis. Rather, I intended to illuminate how a moment in history that changed thousands of lives in radical ways, can continue to do so. My first class at Wesleyan was entitled “Gender in a Transnational Perspective.” My final paper for that project was on teaching feminism in K-12 education. Needless to say, the main point of feedback I got after writing that paper was that the topic was too broad. Yet what I attempted to do is similar to what I attempt in this thesis: to create a bridge between feminism and the education that occurs before we enter the academy where feminist education becomes self-selecting. In studying the Literacy Campaigns through the lens of a spectrum of feminist process, I return to my initial academic inquiry in FGSS: How can a feminist movement that values all people and is inclusive of identity-based differences combat oppression through education?

At her talk at Wesleyan University, Piya Chatterjee spoke of the “radical decentering” required of both feminist academics and education reformists. At her
talk, I asked the question, “Is there an ethical way to engage in a feminist cultural re-appropriation of educational methods in order to transmit best practices? If so, what are they?” The answer I have arrived at is that to empower the possibilities of feminist education is to engage in a socially productive radical decentering for (the) “US” to learn from “them.” The Literacy Campaigns are far from the perfect picture of including feminist process in liberatory education. Yet they encompass reality, a reality, which does not exist on a binary that separates patriarchal reality from distant feminist possibility, but on a spectrum that allows for a *conciencización de nosotras* to exist in society’s *imperfecciones complicadas*. 
APPENDIX A

The Manual


Figure 1:

[Image of a page from *Alfabetemos*]

Cover of *Alfabetemos*, the manual for the *brigadistas*, which they were handed at the start of their 10-day training at Veradero.

Figure 2:

[Image of a page from *Alfabetemos*]

*Alfabetemos* pages 2, 3. 2: Poem that begins with “This cover is a message,” addressed to the *brigadista*. 3: Title Page, published by the Revolutionary Government, Ministry of Education, and National Commission of Literacy.
Figure 3: 

Alfabeticemos pages 4, 5. 4: Epigraph. 5: Letter to the literacy instructor

Figure 4: 

Alfabeticemos page 6: Structure of the manual.
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**Themes of the Revolution**

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**Outline of the relationships between the manual and the primer; correlation of themes of Alfabeticos with Venceremos**

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[1] La Unidad Internacional y La Unidad Popular.
Part One: Orientations for the Literacy Instructor

Pages 12, 13. Instructions for conduct between *brigadista* and student; guidelines for roles and optimal times of day for instruction
Pages 14, 15: Outline of instructions that are common in all the exercises in the primer, *Venceremos*, and guidelines for how the *brigadistas* should orally instruct them.

Pages 18, 19: Verbal instructions for how the *brigadista* should orally communicate exercise directions to her students.
Page 20: Continuation of instructions from pages 18,19; lesson for the illiterate on how to sign their name

Page 21; Part Two: Themes of the Revolutionary Orientation
Figure 13:

Pages 40, 41: Theme 10; Racial Discrimination; Epigraph by José Martí: “Man is more than white, more than mixed race, more than black. Tell him that man is as much as he is given all his rights.”

Figure 14:

Page 42: Continuation of Theme 10; Racial Discrimination
Figure 15:

“Democracy is this, that which delivers it a rifle to how many citizens request to defend a just cause.”

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Pages 54, 55. 54: Theme 16; Democracy; Epigraph by Fidel Castro; “Democracy is this, that which delivers it a rifle to how many citizens request to defend a just cause.”

55: Theme 17; Workers and Farmers; Epigraph by Fidel Castro; “The workers and farmers are very clear, as also in the sacrifices, they are the vanguard.”
APPENDIX B

The Primer


Figure 1:

Cover and title page of *Venceremos!*, the workbook for the illiterate students, which the *brigadistas* brought with them from Veradero to the *campesinos*. Only the front cover and final pages of the workbook are in color.
“The Agrarian Reform Cooperatives:” practice sentences for the illiterate correlated to the Agrarian Reform theme of the manual

Patriotic Vowel Lesson, Exercises 3–5
Exercise B: words grouped together to understand diction and plural versus singular
Exercise B (another section): syllabic formation; Fidel Castro diction lesson

“Now We Begin the Year of Education!” “Fatherland or Die!” “We Will Win!”
Figure 7:

“Millions of Cubans Want to Read;” Right: Cubans lining up to register for the Campaigns; Left: Campesinos reviewing the primer together
APPENDIX C

Key Terms

Assemblage: the nonlinear grouping together and making sense of definitions

Consciousness: a personal way of knowing the world rooted in experience and informed by self-reflection

Critical Thinking: developing one’s own opinions; the active questioning of given knowledge

Domestic Work: labor done in the home and for the family that is usually unpaid

Empowerment: specific acts that give agency or independence for one specific cause, outcome, or reason

Feminism: the practice of changing the treatment of all people based on establishing rights for women and in feminine spheres that also change the treatment of all others

Feminist Pedagogy: a working grouping of strategies for teaching students rooted in education as a basis and starting point for further equality; the practices of teaching and learning that encourage challenging patriarchal society as it is

Ideology: conscious and unconscious beliefs as to how society should function

Independence: agency in making personal choices outside of cultural, familial, and social norms or expectations

Intersectionality: a systemic understanding in social justice work that different forms of oppression are connected to one another

Intersectional: approaching liberation-based work by addressing multiple forms of oppression simultaneously, through the ways in which they relate to one another

Liberation: the eradication of oppression

Literacy: learning to read and write

Nationalism: the attachment and identifying of people to the overall political goals of their country

Patriarchy: male-dominated systems of oppression that function based on a gender binary and hierarchy of men as more important and with greater power than women

Patriarchal: the functioning of systems based on the needs and interests of male-dominated groups

Pedagogy: how to teach

Praxis: action and reflection in a critical dialogue (Freire)

Progressive Education: a 19th Century pedagogical movement in the Americas, which places emphasis on critical thinking, opinion-formation, personal experience, and process over outcomes

Revolution: a movement; the rapid change of the social, economic, and political structure of a nation following imperialism and/or dictatorship

Revolutionary: the radical ways in which the people of this country support that movement

Socialism: a system of government that enforces free housing, healthcare, education, and universal employment, which works to eliminate class differences

Universalism: the subsuming of multiple interests and identities under one category; assuming a one-size-fits-all solution
**Visionary:** using the past in order to think forward into an imagined future that does not yet exist

**Alfabetizador:** literacy teacher, within and outside the context of the Campaigns

**Beca:** the scholarships the *brigadistas* received for higher education after their work in the Campaigns

**Brigadista:** general term for Literacy Campaign workers; men, women, professional teachers, and young students

**Campesino:** farm/countryside

**Conciencización de si:** awareness of oneself in relation to the greater whole (Freire)

**de nosotras:** development of a collective feminist consciousness
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Murphy, Catherine. "Interview with Director of Maestra Documentary." Personal interview. 16 Feb. 2014.


