work on fairly formal lessons, prepared by the Ministry of Education. Students do exercises and practice writing. Often they attend these classes in less than ideal conditions. In a building in the very poor *barrio* of Ciudad Sandino, torrents of rain pour through the doors and windows. Most schools don't have enough chairs, and the blackboards haven't been in useful condition for years. Books are supplied to every program, but there are certainly no extras. Something is bringing people out to these programs, some personal satisfaction or knowledge that studying brings them closer to power for themselves and for the whole community. This notion is unfamiliar to us, but it seems natural to a people whose struggle has been a collective one.

Such a literacy movement could not exist without flexibility and more than a nod to reality. Many women with families cannot leave for classes five days a week. Consequently, literacy classes are offered both in the centers and in the homes of the learners. Predictably not all of the men in the households (though the majority of families are without men) are in favour of these programs, and organizers often find themselves in the position of having to raise the consciousness of men in the community in order to do productive literacy work.

This is less of a contradiction in Nicaragua than it is in North America. Becoming literate is perceived as just part of a larger process of education and empowerment. If the reading material supplied by the state appears at first to focus as much on revolutionary history and radical vocabulary as it does on the letters of the alphabet, this is because here literacy is, by definition, politicization. Literacy teaches people who causes the war, who carries the guns. Literacy reminds people of what their struggle has been and where their strength could take them. The Nicaraguans know what we pretend not to; that education is always ideologically based. So for women, empowerment comes not only from knowing how to read and write, but from reading about and discussing their own situations as women. Dialogue is a major part of each lesson and is crucial to the process.

IF THE READING MATERIAL SUPPLIED BY THE STATE APPEARS AT FIRST TO FOCUS AS MUCH ON REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY AND RADICAL VOCABULARY AS IT DOES ON THE LETTERS OF THE ALPHABET, THIS IS BECAUSE HERE LITERACY IS POLITICIZATION.

The changes are slow in a post-revolutionary country halted by the American economic blockade and the war with the Contras. Nicaragua is frustrated in its efforts to progress in education and health care by lack or resources. It's too easy to glance at literacy in the small Latin American country and see only the surface details of a large number of small community based literacy programs. But the Crusade itself and the strength of the movement nine years after the Revolution are almost too radical to believe. Can it be true that 80-90% of adults in Nicaragua are participating in the programs? Can we quite grasp the notion that literacy is a priority and a national mandate of the Sandinista government? In a country that has fought bloody wars and lost many children in the quest for autonomy, literacy is a tool being offered to the people to achieve this end.

For women in Nicaragua, *'alfabetization'* means change. Mothers express the wish that their daughters have opportunities that weren't available to them, that they not find themselves poor and illiterate and mothers themselves before they finish their schooling. But these mothers themselves see a new future in their own lives, and access to schooling is a concrete manifestation of their own hopes and dreams.

References

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PATRICIA ELLEN K. ANNWN CRESSWELL

Reading Daughters of Copper Woman

I dove into your words
as a child dives into a pile
of crisp brown leaves
tossing them into the air
pushing my way to the center
to make a warm dry nest
hugging them to my breast.

I drifted on my back
in the middle of your words
feeling them buoy me up
their direction mine
we flowed together
into ancient knowledge.