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La Mocuana de Sebaco: Power of Women in Society

Since ancient times, women have received disrespectful treatment and have been forced to think as though they only have a place at home, where they can take care of their husbands, children, and families. Women have been denied fundamental rights that all people are entitled to, particularly in Latino countries where men are vastly seen as superior. For example, women did not previously have the right to vote in the United States just because they were females. The progress of civilization has given women a little more credit, but they are still viewed as inferior, while the old generation and even some new generations still regard men as powerful for insignificant accomplishments just because of their connection and level in the hierarchy. As society, history, and mythology evolve, women around the globe have been able to protest and express themselves through writing, such as poetry, and through their connection to myths and literature in general.

Nicaraguan myths and tales have surrounded me since I was a child and have influenced how I view life and women. In every story my great-great-grandmother and grandmother have told me, women have always been the primary characters, but also the ones labeled as villains, monsters, or witches. Women, in mythology, are described as deceitful, manipulative, and dangerous to men. La Mocuana, in particular, is one of the myths that have stayed with me since I first heard it. La Mocuana is one of the most memorable stories from our Nicaraguan ancestors. Although La Mocuana is impossible to obtain on the internet and is not available in English, I

got the opportunity to hear it from my grandmother again and translate it into English. According to my grandmother, Alan Castellon, a Nicaraguan writer, initially wrote *La Mocuana* in 1955. Alan Castellon wrote *la Mocuana* because as he mentioned in an interview, his grandfather would constantly told him the story about a beautiful woman who once was a princess but fell in love with the wrong person. *La Mocuana* focuses on betrayal, especially familial and love betrayal, and how dangerous a woman can be when she is hurt or betrayed by the person she once loved the most.

La Mocuana is about a beautiful young woman, the daughter of Sebaco's cacique. In Latin America, a cacique is a native chief who is in charge of a specific city. In simple terms, a cacique is the head of a group of people, and it is his responsibility to ensure that they are respected and treated well. Between 1522 and 1820, when the colonial era in Nicaragua began, Nicaragua was a gold-rich nation. Since Nicaragua was a very prosperous country, Europeans were very familiar with it. Europeans first came to Sebaco during the colonial period and asked to speak with the cacique (chief), but all they wanted was gold. To prevent a battle, the cacique handed some of the gold with only one condition, to never return to Nicaragua. But their greed was stronger, and they wanted the cacique's entire fortune. After receiving the gold, they departed but came back a year later prepared to attack the cacique and take the entire gold. The very astute cacique put all the gold in bags and urged Mocuana to go with him to the mountains where they would hide it after realizing what these people's true intentions were. The cacique made Mocuana swear not to tell anyone where they kept the treasure because doing so would mean the end of the cacique's life, the lives of Sebaco's inhabitants, and Mocuana itself. Years later, *La Mocuana* made an incorrect love connection. She fell in love with a European tourist, but he turned out to be the son of the cacique's adversary, the same adversary who wanted to

steal all of his money. The cacique disapproved of the relationship, as expected, but Mocuana was unconcerned and devised a plan to flee with the European at night. The only problem was that they didn't have any money.

Mocuana then makes the biggest mistake of her life. She tells the European that she has enough money to support herself and start a family with him. She leads the European to the cave in the mountains where he finds all the treasure that Mocuana and her father hid. Once inside the cave, he was astonished and had no idea what to do with all the gold that was spread out before him. Seeing so much wealth, the European became enraged and decided to betray La Mocuana. The European began to gather a few gold bags and began walking out of the cave. Mocuana was doing the same, but she didn't realize he was closing the cave with a rock, trapping her inside. Mocuana begged and begged him to let her go, but all he did was ignore her laments. Despite her sorrow, she did not give up, and after days and days of trying, she found a way out. Mocuana decided not to return home and instead lingered in the mountains, hoping to find her lover and make him pay for what he did. Mocuana was ashamed because she betrayed her father, and returning home would expose her to confronting her betrayal. She now wanders the mountains and streets of Sebaco, seducing young men into going to her cave to see her fortune because of an evil man. Those young men are said to be trapped there and forced to suffer as punishment for the pain the European inflicted on Mocuana, and it is said that Mocuana's heart craves vengeance to heal her betrayal.

La Mocuana was written to demonstrate women's power, not to victimize them in any way. In mythology, women typically are the monsters. Women play an important role in society, and they are portrayed in various ways by people, particularly men. Women are frequently perceived as weak, inferior, and only belonging where men decide. But the truth is that women

are assertive, innovative, strong, and fearless, contrary to popular belief. Some female monsters, for example, are known as the ten most powerful and feared monsters in Greek mythology.

Three of the ten most powerful female monsters are the Erinyes (Furies): Goddesses of Retribution. The Erinyes and La Mocuana are similar, both figures are associated with justice and supernatural powers and abilities. After all, both female monsters are seeking vengeance for an evil act committed against them. Women monsters are frequently portrayed as the devil rather than as powerful beings capable of claiming vengeance when wronged. Women monsters seek vengeance not only because they are evil, but also to punish, in some way, whoever treated them as nothing during their lifetime. In most novels and myths males are penalized for something they did or are doing to women. "It's Time for Women to Reclaim Their Monstrosity" by Deirdre Coley explains that now is the time for women to reclaim who they are and to speak up without fear and doubt. According to Coley, when women express their pain, it is frequently ignored by others, and all they are left with is judgment and unreasonable remarks. People frequently call women who express their feelings "weak," and this is just inappropriate because it implies that women shouldn't be allowed to express how they feel, that word is said to women as an offense. "All the stories you're being asked to analyze and, in many ways, internalize are built on women's pain, but nobody mentions it" (Coyle). The injustices that women monsters like La Mocuana and The Erinyes endured throughout their lives led to their transformation into monsters. Because of societal stereotypes, they started seeking revenge. Everything that society does to make women feel less valuable and less important, including supporting sexism, is to blame.

Women had no rights from the moment they were born, particularly in Latin American nations. Particularly in rural areas of Nicaragua, men view women as objects. It's heartbreaking

to see how they're treated since they're only expected to please men and give them children without complaint. Women in Nicaragua suffer sexual harassment, political underrepresentation, and violation of their human rights just for being women. Most Latino women are treated as men-pleasers rather than as human beings. Women have had to fight for their fundamental rights, which is illogical given that all humans should be treated equally and without gender bias.

Women have been denied basic human rights such as the right to vote, to speak out, and to walk alone without fear of being catcalled, kidnapped, or killed. Women monsters exist not only to take revenge and punish men but also to challenge patriarchy. According to the Smithsonian Magazine article named "Men Have Feared Women for Millennia. Just Look at the Monsters of Greek Mythology," female monsters in myths reveal more about patriarchal limits on womanhood than they do about women themselves. Some well-known female monsters represent the downfall of patriarchy in one way or another. One female monster fighting the patriarchy is Medusa. According to the Greek mythology, Medusa was raped by the god Poseidon in the temple of Athena. Medusa's rape at the hands of Poseidon is an example of the sexual violence against women and the lack of justice for victims of such crimes. Fearsome monster Medusa has the power to turn men into stone. "The Power to Turn the Patriarchy into Stone" by McKenzie Schwark reinforces the idea that women monsters help protect each other from the evilness that some men have towards them. Schwark explains that Medusa forms a new mythological world where women are protective of each other in a patriarchal society. This relates to real life; for example, misogyny and oppression of women's rights are still widespread in the United States. Even though this is a well-developed nation, women still encounter misogyny and sexism in the streets because of their body types. What can we expect from women in other countries like Nicaragua if there is oppression in the United States?

Growing up in Nicaragua exposed me to how women are treated and what they are expected to do daily. In Nicaragua, macho men are still very predominant, and women are required to follow their rules and ideologies, which involve dressing a certain way or staying at home to take care of the family. Nicaraguan women have been protesting against the lack of rights since 1975. According to the Organization for World Peace, anti-women beliefs pose a threat to democracy particularly in Nicaragua, where the current president (and dictator) Daniel Ortega, “spews harmful language and passes discriminating legislation from the presidency” (Purushottam). Women have fought against social injustice for a long time, particularly in politics, where men are typically the ones in charge, and women are consistently given lower positions. “Women fail to be represented in politics; men continue to dominate society” (Purushottam). Even if women have a higher education or work harder, men will always have better employment and higher pay in Nicaragua. “Despite having higher average education levels, Nicaraguan women still earn much less than men” (Herrera). Women have long been believed to be incapable of performing demanding tasks. Nicaragua's lack of stability in terms of women's rights continues to deteriorate because, despite objections, women are not heard and, in the worst-case scenario, are killed or imprisoned by the government. “In Nicaragua, men are often let off scot-free for physically abusing their partners” (Purushottam). Despite the protests and agony that women face daily in Nicaragua, they are ignored, leading to an increase in femicides. Misogyny and feminism are extremely common in Nicaragua. Nicaragua has a long history of denouncing inappropriate female behavior such as the idea that if a woman speaks against gender-based violence often encounter hostility and ostracization. “The women’s movement for equality was birthed during the overthrow of the repressive Somoza dictatorship” (Miller). The Somoza dictatorship was the formation of a political family ruled by Anastasio

Somoza, who ruled Nicaragua for forty-three years. Somoza wanted complete control over women and forbade them from freely walking around the streets of Nicaragua without their husbands, which is when women gained the courage to begin a peaceful protest against his absurd rules. Most Nicaraguan women suffer as a result of the machismo that society and government leaders continue to promote. The Nicaraguan government is corrupt, which is why women do not have the same opportunities as men. Daniel Ortega, the current president of Nicaragua, uses corruption to put men in charge and to make misogynistic remarks about women. Despite the unique strength that defines and distinguishes them from men, the corrupt government of Nicaragua denies them the same opportunities as men. La Mocuana encourages women to recognize their strength and not be afraid to show it to the world. In the myth, La Mocuana recognizes her own strength—her beauty—and uses it to seek vengeance on those who have wronged her. This myth has been passed down from generation to generation, and it will continue to be told because La Mocuana represents power. La Mocuana is not only a woman seeking vengeance, but also a strong woman who managed to escape the cave of her misery despite her agony. La Mocuana is a symbol of perseverance; it demonstrates that in the real world, women are able to resolve situations like this. In the real world, women don't have to be inside a cave to be trapped because sometimes their homes, husbands, and even their children are their more oppressive caves. La Mocuana encourages women to emerge from their caves before it is too late.

Feminism has existed in Nicaragua and around the world since the beginning of time, even if most people are unaware of it. Women have been abused, tortured, and even murdered by their partners. “It is not uncommon for Latin American countries to revolve around highly macho and patriarchal societies”(Miller). Even though society has advanced significantly over time,

men continue to practice the "machismo way of life" to show their manhood to the world. Men are afraid of being perceived as insufficient or emotional, and women suffer the consequences of those ideologies. When most people think of "machismo," they think of Hispanic men, which is partially true because most Latino men behave in this manner. However, there is a minority of men who respect women and don't make them feel inferior. Machismo is a non-ending way of living in most Latino countries because people have been carrying it since they were born. Because of the way men were raised by their parents, particularly by their fathers, all the machismo practices that women in Nicaragua are subjected to today, were also experienced by their grandmothers and mothers. Knowing how to treat and respect women starts at home, and in most cases, fathers teach their sons to be "macho" which then leads to misogyny and sexism towards women. Teaching kids to be "macho" only makes them feel as if they have the right to mistreat women and treat them however they want to.

People fail to recognize how harmful it is for a woman to be treated unfairly just because of their gender. Women do so much in this world, and all they receive are stereotypes and an unsecured environment. Endless women involved in mythology have found their way to raise their voices, and Jess Zimmerman has been one of them. In *Women and Other Monsters*, her idea connects back to telling women to not be afraid to show their monstrosity and to reveal their bold side. During an interview made by Electric Lit, Zimmerman emphasizes the idea that "there's a degree to which the engine of Greek mythology is women's pain and exploitation." Jess Zimmerman invites women to use these myths as an inspiration to show their power and not be afraid of society, particularly of men. La Mocuana and *Women and Other Monsters* both encourage women to be themselves and not to be afraid of the patriarchal culture that society has preserved for centuries. Females are the only ones who can end this patriarchy and machismo

with their monstrosity and strength. Women are competent in doing anything they set their minds to. *Women and Other Monsters* connects back to La Mocuana to alert women that it is time for them to make a change, that all this time they could have made a change but because of fear didn't, but now is the time. Now is the time to claim who they are, to acquire their rights, to be strong, indestructible, and ready to obtain what has been taken away.

Even if the macho culture is still predominant, women can end it and connect back to their beliefs by showing the power and resilience that men once unfairly took from them. If women do not exterminate patriarchy now, future generations of women will face the same challenges that women are currently facing. Nicaraguan women continue to reveal and raise their voices despite government threats because they want a better future for their daughters and a better education for their sons on how to treat women. Mothers who have suffered at the hands of macho men or have lost a daughter are protesting because they know what it is like to live with the inequitable treatment of women in Nicaragua. Women in Nicaragua claim that they will keep protesting and will not give up, no matter if they have to protest for years and years to obtain their most desirable freedom. Looking back to when women first began protesting in Nicaragua during the Somoza dictatorship, they have not given up amidst everything. This is a characterization of women who are ferocious and determined, much like La Mocuana was when she was confined in that cave. Women are emerging from their caves in search of a better future for the next generation.

La Mocuana is now an essential component of Nicaraguan culture; this legend is still told to illustrate women's power and to educate children on the significance of legends and myths to Nicaraguans. Nicaragua is still the land of volcanoes and full of tales, culture, and rhythm that still fills the hearts of all Nicaraguans with music and bright colors bringing life to its residents

and tourists. La Mocuana is the most famous myth among residents, and it is said that this legend is genuine and that the beautiful woman that is mentioned, really existed. La Mocuana represents that the importance of legends is still alive among Nicaraguans. This kind of legend is still alive because it helps reconnect with people's childhood, it helps people remember their family members that once told these stories and unfortunately are no longer with them. La Mocuana is so prevalent among Nicaraguans that the cave where she was imprisoned and escaped has remained untouched, and people are terrified of it. The cave is located near the exit of La Trinidad, a town in northern Nicaragua. According to ABC Stereo, which is a Nicaraguan radio station, people say that talking about la Mocuana among residents brings memories to those people who heard it from their great-grandparents. "A través de los años, hablar de esta peculiar leyenda trae consigo los recuerdos de cientos de personas, que por años han escuchado de sus bisabuelos, abuelos y padres contar sobre las apariciones de La Mocuana" (Ortega). This translates to: "Over the years, talking about this strange legend brings back memories of hundreds of people, who for years have heard about the apparitions of La Mocuana from their great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents." La Mocuana is in the hearts of all people around Nicaragua, especially around the North of Nicaragua. La Mocuana will be passed down to later generations because that is who Nicaraguans are. This legend represents the culture and the unending love for legends to come, but most importantly the one that ancestors told their families.

The legend of La Mocuana is deeply ingrained in Nicaraguan culture. La Mocuana stands in for all the Nicaraguan women who are awaiting recognition and to be rescued from those who only want to harm them. The story of La Mocuana has inspired women to leave their caves and go in search of the things that have been taken away from them. All women who are willing to

change and who are willing to display this abomination regardless of the criticism they receive hold the key to ending patriarchy. All people and women in danger require women to be monsters, and La Mocuana exists to show women how to end patriarchy.

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