

The Life of Elvia Alvarado as the Voice of the Voiceless Women in Honduran Culture

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In 2016, Honduras was placed at the national stage due to the connection the country has with Tim Kaine, the former Vice-Presidential nominee for the Hillary Clinton Democratic ticket in the 2016 presidential election. According to the *New York Times*, Mr. Kaine was a “sophomore at Rockhurst High School, Jesuit academy in Kansas City, Mo.” in 1974 when he first visited Honduras (Horowitz). The second time he visits is as a 22-year-old volunteer in El Progreso, Honduras. The country is mentioned in the newspaper because the now and still Senator Tim Kaine from Virginia spent time in what is described in *The New York Times*, as an impoverished nation that was surrounded by war, communist and Marxist ideas in the 1970’s and 1980’s.

But much has happened since the “bearded and mop-haired Midwesterner” Tim Kaine visited Honduras. For one, more than thirty-five years have passed and Honduras has changed since a twenty-something “kid” from the Midwest volunteer was in El Progreso. Second, the profile for Tim Kaine has changed from a “sheltered kid” to the national spotlight in the United States. As a result, Honduras’ profile is also catapulted to the national spotlight (in a small way), but the story that Honduras tells about itself is closely tied with the volunteered work Senator Tim Kaine did when he visited. Since Kaine went to Honduras to make a positive change, it also suggests that the country is a place where there is a lot of poverty, problems, and in need of a lot of help. While that is the case for Honduras, it is a country that needs help in all sorts of ways, but the visit

from the Senator also promotes a stereotypical idea about Honduras: it is a banana republic, a term coined in O. Henry's 1904 novel, *Cabbages and Kings*.

Also, the Senator understands that Honduras is subject to foreign power, like the United States, and that influence may have a negative impact on the region, he makes this evident when he says, "[i]t was a very politicizing experience for me because the U.S. was doing a lot bad stuff...It made very angry. I mean I still feel it" (Horowitz). As a result of the visit to Honduras more than thirty-five-years ago, many people in the United States can derive two lessons about Senator Tim Kaine and Honduras: one, the Senator is well-intentioned individual who wanted to make a positive change in a poor country, and for most people in the United States that is the main lesson derived from Tim Kaine's visit to Honduras. And to a lesser extent, the other lesson drawn from the Senator's experience in Central America is that Honduras is indeed a banana republic.

However, Honduras has more to offer than what Senator Tim Kaine experienced during his visits. It is a complex region with ideas and traditions passed down from previous generations, and the main purpose of this study is to present the life of Elvia Alvarado, and show that she is the voice of the voiceless in Honduras. Moreover, her life will be used to show that men marginalize women. In addition, it will demonstrate that machismo culture influences Honduran society, and thusly affects the literature, and as a result, women authors express their frustration with machismo culture in Honduras passed down by previous generations. But before getting into Honduran literature and other ideas, one must look at other elements first. One, to provide a current context (which is done above) about Honduras, how is viewed by non-Hondurans and to establish a literary background about Honduras from non-Honduran authors.

Sadly, the context about Honduras in recent memory is negative. For instance, according to Philip Sherwell, author of the article, “Welcome to Honduras, the Most Dangerous Country in the Planet,” in the British newspaper, *The Telegraph*, deemed the country as one of the deadliest places to live or visit in 2013; and it does not help that the State Department recommended U.S. citizens not to travel to certain areas of the country due to the high level of crime and drug trafficking. Without much investigation, many Americans see Honduras as a place with high crime, drugs, and an unstable government because of the military coup d’état in 2009. So far Honduras does not seem to have a good track record in the 21st century, but the country did not have a good introduction in literature either.

O. Henry visited Honduras during his lifetime and later wrote about his experience in Central America in his 1904 novel, *Cabbage and Kings*. One of the most influential terms from that novel is the pejorative term, “banana republic.” O. Henry’s term “banana republic” has come to mean any small South American Nation that is politically unstable and has an economy based on farming, especially bananas. A notion shared by Alison Acker, author of the book, *Honduras: The Making of a Banana Republic*, in which she confirms the term coined by O. Henry. Another non-Honduran author, Paul Theroux displays a colonialist Western-European point of view, which assumes that Western thought and European ideas are superiors to all other and which automatically denigrates native population. The protagonist of the novel, Allie Fox moves his family from the United States to the Honduran Mosquito Coast for a better life. However, the novel offers other ideas that can be applied to the understanding of Honduras, and it is applied to women. For instance, postcolonialism, a theory raised by

Edward Said in his book, *Orientalism*, argues that Western thought and European ideas are used to judge other cultures.

Allie Fox, a Harvard-dropout-inventor moves because he thinks that capitalism and consumerism are eating at the soul of people, and he thinks he can have a new beginning in Honduras. In order to show that the *Mosquito Coast* introduces postcolonialism themes, one must see the statements he makes. For instance, when Allie Fox says to his son, ““ You can’t drink the water where those savages originate. It’s got creatures in it. Worms, Weeds. They haven’t got the sense to boil it and purify it. Never heard of filtration”” (Theroux 8)—this is a comment about a migrant worker when he speaks with his son, Charlie Fox. Said’s ideas can be applied here because “[a]lmost all colonial schemes begin with an assumption of native inadequacy to be independent, “equal” and fit” (Said 1888). Allie Fox is assuming that people who do not look like him i.e. are not of European descent need instruction, and are not fit to understand simple concepts. Therefore, Said’s postcolonial paradigm can be applied to Allie Fox.

The main point of Paul Theroux’s novel is that it represents the influence the United States and Europe has over Latin America throughout, and consequently Honduras. When one looks at the novel from Said’s theory, it does fit with the notion that Western ideas and European concepts are brought from another land into countries like Honduras. For instance, one of those ideas is the treatment of women. “Mother” Fox has a limited role in the book. She speaks her mind at seldom in the novel, and she is supportive of her husband’s wishes in all regards. Her devotion to her husband is clear when Allie Fox’s son, Charlie makes a comment about “Mother”— “[h]er loyalty to Father gave me strength” (Theroux 52). The fact that her role is limited in the novel

implies that women do not play an important, and “Mother” Fox is seen as an extension of her husband. Her role in the novel is limited to two characteristics: mother and wife. Of course, there is nothing wrong with those two characteristics, but it does limit her role as a woman in the novel.

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In order to further Said’s paradigm with the *Mosquito Coast*, one must keep in mind that Western-European thinkers and explores came to Latin America to teach the “proper” or the “civilized” way of life to indigenous people. And that is the same that Allie Fox intends to do when he arrives to Honduras; he wants to teach the meaning of “civilized” society, or the very least, he wants to make it “better.” Since the Honduran Mosquito Coast is not touched by “civilization” (Theroux 142), it is up to him to civilize the region, and its indigenous people about all kinds of things and that also includes the definition of womanhood. Said’s paradigm explains this notion further when he states:

they are a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possible know themselves. Their great moments were in the past; they are useful in the modern world only because the powerful and up-to-date empires have effectively brought them out of the wretchedness of their decline and turned them into rehabilitated resident of productive colonies. (Said 35)

Said argues that “education” is arriving to non-European and Western places, and most importantly advancement in all areas. However, the people living in the area already have a system of values. Laura Hobson Herlihy, author of the Article, “Matrifocality and Women’s Power on the Miskito Coast,” states that the indigenous people of the Mosquito

Coast, also known as Miskitu, place women in important role, and it is different from Western-Europeans. Women in this culture are landowners, and in fact when the man builds a home for his family, the house becomes property of the woman, and the house will be passed on to the female line (Herlihy135). In other words, the women in Miskitu culture are the ones who hold land, not the men. A woman not owning land may seem like an old idea, but no one has to look back that long in history to see that women had very little rights. For instance, the United States Constitution under the 19th amendment of 1920, which states that no citizen shall be denied the right to vote based on sex; however, at the beginning of the Republic, the U.S. citizens who were afforded the right to vote were the ones who were white, land holders, and men (National Archives and Records Administration). The point is that women were afforded little to no rights in Western culture. By contrast, Miskitu women in the Honduran Mosquito Coast were afforded more rights and responsibilities than men.

But the parallel that one must take from the novel, *The Mosquito Coast* and the Miskitu women is this: the same way Christopher Columbus arrived to the Americas and influenced the region is the same way that Allie Fox is doing when he arrives to Honduras' Mosquito Coast. It is an external influence that shaped the meaning of an idea into something else. Since those ideas are coming from another culture, it does change the social dynamics of a region. The Miskitu women are not limited, nor controlled by men, but when there is an influence from somewhere else, there is a shift in society, and that is the point of Allie Fox in the novel. He is an outsider that is making an impression in a different culture.

Sadly, the disenfranchisement of women goes beyond the pages from a book into

the daily lives of people. In fact, Honduras falls behind in gender equality and according to the United Nations Inequality Gender Index, Honduras ranked 131 out of 188 nation members of the U.N. (United Nations) in 2015 (UNDP). As a result, the idea of woman and what it means to be a woman is already predispose to be passive by Honduran culture and its society. Therefore, a root cause for women's marginalization is machismo culture. Machismo culture determines the lives of women in Honduras from their daily lives. One of the books that investigates this issue and best exemplifies the machismo culture in Honduras is Eliva Alvarado's testimonial *Don't Be Afraid Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks From the Heart*, which reveals her struggle as an activist and a feminist in Honduras. But the reason that women in Honduran writings are bound to their "role assign [ment] to female gender" is a lack of female role models in the country, according to Lety Elvir, editor of the anthology, *Women's Poems of Protest and Resistance: Honduras (2009-2014)* (Elvir 25)—the fact is that women are lagging behind their male counterparts in many areas of society and it is safe to say that Honduran women are held to a different standard than men.

In addition, other Latin American countries have the same problem as Honduras: women are sidelined from participating in their society; and their stories and voices come to light with time. For instances, the story of Maria Teresa Tula, a Salvadoran woman who depicts her struggles with her government in her book, *Hear My Testimony: Maria Teresa Tula, Human Rights Activist of El Salvador*, also exposes the marginalization of women in her book. There is also the story of Domitilia Barrios de Chungara, author of the book, *Let Me Speak! Testimony of Domitila, a woman of the Bolivian Mines*, an indigenous Bolivian woman who also speaks about the turmoil in her community, and the

Nobel Peace prize winner, Rigoberta Menchu, and author of the book, *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, who fights for the right of indigenous people in her country. But like Elvia Alvarado and Maria Teresa Tula, she also speaks about machismo culture in her native Guatemala. All of these stories from Latin American women provide a context about the struggle that many people in Latin America have to deal with on a daily basis in order to gain more rights as citizens from their countries. But these stories also offer a look at the marginalization of women in Latin America, and the fact is that Honduras is no different— these women make the truth available to the masses, and the truth is that women are denied equal rights, and Honduras is included.

As women in Latin American countries and in Hispanic culture continue to experience machismo culture, their discontent about it will come to light in many forms. Either in testimonials, poetry or fiction, women will keep on speaking out about their experience as Hispanic and Latina women. But is also evident that a woman's experience with machismo culture will be one the vehicles that drives these women to write. It is also the fuel that sparks a body of work in Latino and Hispanic literature. For instance, the book *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua provides such as a body of work, and this book helps to understand better the plight of women in countries like Honduras and the struggle of women like Elvia Alvarado.

The portrayal of marginalized women from Honduras is a reflection of the struggles that many women have to deal with in their lives, and it communicates to the reader what it means to be a woman in Honduras. Therefore, the story of Alvarado is a useful tool to merge with the daily lives of Honduran women and the depiction of literary characters in its literature. Her story is that of many women in Honduras who are seeking a voice in a

society that seems to want them voiceless, and it is one of the ways that many women in Honduras are able to seek an audience and talk about their struggles, their dreams, and their needs via literature.

Alvarado is successful in conveying those messages, but it is her life-story and her work as an activist that shows the plight of women. Her story is the same as many underprivileged people in Honduras: in poverty and without education. She is a *campesina* (peasant woman), which is significant because the likelihood of a *campesino* (peasant) person in Honduras to unchain him/herself from poverty is unlikely. To put it in the words of her book, her life had so many obstacles that it was “better to die from a bullet than to die the slow death of hunger” (Alvarado xv), and yet she becomes a voice for women and for *campesinos* in Honduras. She begins her book with her childhood and the relationship her parents had with each other, as she remembers when she was six-years-old child; she also goes on to point out the extreme poverty people endured, but it is her depiction of women that shows the oppression many Honduran women have to undergo throughout the generations.

Alvarado’s book illustrates the harsh conditions she had to fight against as a woman in order to put food on the table. First, poverty plays a role in the lives of men and women, and mainly *campesino* people, that is obvious, and as a result of poverty, Honduran women end up stuck in a difficult position and they cannot get out—the same is true for both men and women. However, for women, especially, it is more difficult because they are not able to gain agency in a patriarchal society, unless they have economical independence as the first step towards equality. For instance, when Alvarado became pregnant when she was fifteen-years-old, she was at a disadvantage. As a young

mother, her options were limited. She did not have the means to raise a child on her own. This experience for her is significant because her economic output declines due to more responsibility, and the fact that she becomes an adult earlier than expected is even more of a challenge for her. Young women in hardship cannot gain access to an education to improve their economic output, so they fall into economic need. Moreover, as a single mother her economic outcome becomes even more difficult to overcome. As a result, she no longer has the opportunity for independence. She is trapped because, as she illustrates in her book, she is in a patriarchal society that tells her that it is “her responsibility, not the man’s, because she let him touch her. If the man didn’t want to marry the woman or help support the child, there wasn’t anything the woman could do about it” (Alvarado 6). The fact that she is the sole responsible party for a pregnancy sends a negative message to women by the patriarchy in Honduras. It says that women have no right to demand or even ask for help because the patriarchy in Honduras deems it not important, and that means that women are not important. And it is a message that was passed on by previous generations.

The message that Alvarado heard growing up further demonstrates how women are second-class citizens in Honduras. But the fact that women “were taught that women should have as many children as they can” (Alvarado 6) does not help them to get out of poverty and develop their lives in other ways like economically and educationally. Women are trapped because their purpose in life is to produce children. And since it is her (woman’s) responsibility to provide for the child because it was the woman’s fault that she got pregnant, men are not held accountable for their role as fathers. Consequently, women stay in poverty, disfranchised and without help.

Alvarado's book is not the only testimony about the marginalization of women in Honduras. Other women write about their plight in Honduras, women like Clementina Suarez, an influential figure and poet in Honduran letters writes about women and the struggle they endured during the 20th century. Janet N. Gold, who writes about Suarez in her book, *Clementina Suarez: Her Life and Poetry*, points out that "Honduras, [is] the country that raised her but rejected her desire to be free" (216) and she goes on to argue that as a woman in the middle of the 20th century Honduras, Suarez lacked the agency needed to be an equal member in a male-dominated society. Suarez tried to make her way into the world of letters, but she was rejected because "the powerful role that sexual attractiveness plays in a woman's ability to penetrate the traditionally male literary establishment" had not room for women who speak their minds (Gold 124). As a young woman, Suarez is left defenseless to pursue her ambition to be writer because she is not supposed to play that role in society. Her role as woman is something else, not a writer. Even if she is from a wealthy family, her role in society is to be a "monogamous, maternal, and domestic" (Gold 14). Her destiny is the same as the lower-class women in Honduras: she is destined to a life of servitude to men.

The story of Suarez is important to get to know because she is the connection between the overlooked and the patriarchy in Honduras. Her story as a poet and writer is a reminder of the power the patriarchy has over women for most of the 20th century. Furthermore, her work as a writer and her life-story is useful to point out that Honduran and machismo cultures are entwined with literature. There are interconnected because women writers in Honduras frequently see literature as their only way to express frustration with system that excludes them.

For instance, when Suarez struggled to be part of the literary scene in Honduras. She learned that Honduran society and Honduran literature, “had no mechanism for absorbing a young single woman with a romantic imagination and a will to be free,” according to Gold (53). Suarez shows this when she writes, “Mother or sister, taciturn and distant, /you have illuminated your sad solitude, / softened the plaint and quieted the rage/ and offer the despondent the shade of your compassion” (Suarez 1-4).

Suarez is referring to woman’s plight in Honduras with these verses. The unfortunate situation for her and many women is that they are alone. When she states that, “you have illuminated your sad solitude” (Suarez 1-4); she shows that women in Honduras are alone in the sense that they have no support from their society to realize their dreams. And yet women and society are aware that women do not have the same rights as men to experience life.

Suarez in her poetry argues that women are isolated from various parts of Honduran society. Machismo culture and the patriarchy do not allow the evolution of women: and that is point of her line. Women are left behind in education and equal rights because men know what is best for them. Women are not expected to fulfill their dreams, and go beyond motherhood and housewives. Suarez points out that a woman’s “solitude” is a useful tool to recognize their plight, but it is an instrument that can be used to recognize that they lack growth as individuals, meaning that woman does not have the opportunity to climb the social ladder in Honduras—their roles in society are limited.

To better understand her argument, one must take a look at her first line, “Mother or sister, taciturn and distant” (Suarez 1-4); she makes a reference to older generations who do not have a voice to fight against their deprived rights. However, when she makes

that reference to the past, she is making an argument about a buildup of grievances by previous generations that will one day come to light. Before writing her poetry, she already knew that women are marginalized and kept down, but the passing of each generation, will create frustrated women that cannot be stopped by men. Therefore, Suarez recognizes that over time women will demand a greater role in Honduran culture and society. And one of the points of her poem is to let the reader know that as time passes by, women will be part of the conversation of the nation instead of watching men talk about it while they wait to be called into the debate. Suarez's poem says that women are in the sidelines watching change in their country, but they are unable to make change for themselves because they are not allow to do so without the permission of men. However, Suarez's prediction that women will come forward to talk about the plight of women in Honduras is fulfilled in the anthology, *Women's Poem and Protest and Resistance Honduras (2009-2014)*.

Over the years, women have done so, and the example that best signifies this change in women culture is the anthology, *Women's Poems of Protest and Resistance Honduras (2009-2014)*, edited by Lety Elvir, in which the collective voice of Honduran women come to discusses about their plight in Honduras and issues about their country. Heidi Barahona Alachan, a contributor to the anthology, and a young woman in the 21st century writes:

I am woman
with thought
clothing my skin.
I don't accept

the lies
 men and many others wrote about me
 even knowing me because they wanted to hide my words
 being imposed silence. (Alachan 71)

The poem “I am woman” by Alachan speaks about the same issue Suarez writes about in her poem. The distinction between these two poets is that these women are from two different generations. Suarez was a poet and writer during the 20th century, and Alachan is a young woman in the 21st century. Suarez writes about how future generation would speak out about the plight of women in Honduras during her lifetime. While Alachan writes her grievance about men who silenced her, and she does not welcome the treatment imposed on her. While Alachan’s poem is personal, it also speaks to the issues that many women in Honduras are facing: sexism and gender inequality—which was the same issues that Suarez wrote about during her lifetime. The poem “I am woman” by Alachan is an accidental continuance from the writings of Suarez during her lifetime. But it is also about what Suarez cautioned about in her poetry: others will keep writing about unfair treatment of women in Honduras.

When Alachan states, “I don’t accept/the lies”(Alachan 4-5) is a challenge against machismo culture in Honduras and for what it stands. The poem refutes the notion that women are unable to be equal to men. In other words, the poem argues against machismo culture in Honduras. The “lies” are the ideas that many women are brought up thinking that the place for women is in the kitchen, at home raising children, and cater to a man’s need. And this notion is reinforced by the poet when she writes, “Yes, I am a woman/and I don’t just exist/ I also think” (Alachan 28-30). When the poem ends, it is a cue to the

reader that women are oppressed, but there is a sense of hope for the poet, and for women the poem signals a change in culture. It is a fact that women were left behind, as mentioned by Suarez, and women are now coming forward to fight for their rights. The life of Alvarado is an example of women coming forward to demand their rights as people, women and citizens of Honduras. At some point, it was harder for women to free themselves from machismo culture, women are now speaking more about their harsh treatment, and at the very least others are hearing their grievances. The poem signals progress, but most importantly, “I am woman,” proclaims that women are individuals, and their place in society is not to be a decorative object for men; they are people who can think, feel and have opinions of their own. However, during Alvarado’s lifetime, from her early years to her work as an activist in the 1980’s, the message was different.

In fact, the message that Alvarado heard growing up further demonstrates how women are second-class citizens in Honduras. This is done by demanding women to have “as many children as they can” (Alvarado 6) and pressing them into perpetual poverty, as mentioned before in this study, when a woman is obligated to be the sole breadwinner for a family, it keeps them at a disadvantage. The second way that a woman is kept as a second-class citizen is sex. This promotes the notion that men are meant to use women; and there are no negative consequences for using women. When women are treated only as a means for pleasure, it disregards them as humans, and they are viewed differently—when that happens, is not equality; it is viewing another group of people as second-class-citizens. Alvarado aims to make this point clear when she writes, “[m]y father never let my older sister go to school. He couldn’t see why girls needed an education, since they’d only go to live with a man and have babies” (2). Women are not held to a higher standard

than men because women are not allowed to have other aspirations besides motherhood. And thirdly, education is the other way women are set back, a woman's education is not considered important because there is only one path for women: motherhood and that also grants them second-class-citizenship in Honduran culture. If women are not educated, it places them in at a disadvantage position, and as a second-class-citizen.

The other concerning aspect about this type of thinking is that Honduran culture has a clear idea about what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. It is clear that women in Honduras are considered the "softer" of the two sexes, while men are portrayed as the "stronger" sex, always. Judith Butler, author of the 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*, she argues that gender is not defined by biological markers—that means that femininity and masculinity are not completely based on a person's reproductive organs. Women do not have to act like women because they are women and in vice versa for men. Butler ideas can be applied in Honduras because women in Honduras are accepted as "*prima facie*," (Butler 2543) meaning that since women are physically different than men, women can be marginalized because their physical appearance. This notion suggests that until women are portrayed as strong person, or equal to men. Women will be marginalized in Honduran culture and in its literature, and it is up to literature to make that change. Butler writes about this type of thinking, about what it means to be a man and a woman, when she argues, "the body is always under siege, suffering destruction by the very terms of history. And history is the creation of values and meaning by a signifying practice that requires the subjection of the body" (Butler 2543). Butler claims that the human body is under control by other external forces like history and ideas. For instance, in the case of Alvarado's book, women are treated as second-class citizens

because it is the norm of Honduran culture to disregard women. These types of ideas are evident when Alvarado writes:

Instead of making things clear, they [the Catholic Church] leave everyone in the clouds. They say the poor are poor because they were born poor. So that's their lot in life. Period. You must live your live your life as God gave it to you. And if you're content with what God gave you and you live your life humbly without causing trouble, you'll be reward[erd] in heaven.

(Alvarado 31)

Alvarado illustrates Butler's paradigm in her book well because she shows that external forces like ideas from history influence people's life. Alvarado explains to the reader that when a person is born into poverty there is nothing he/she can do about it—and that idea has been passed on by the Catholic Church throughout the generations, and accepted by people in Honduras. Butler depicts this very idea, but she does it about gender and the influence ideas have on the image of the “body” as well when she argues that history creates value and meaning for the body. In the case of women, they are born into servitude because their bodies have a value and a meaning. They are weaker sex and therefore subject to servitude.

When women are born in Honduras, they are at a disadvantage because the notion of womanhood is already set for them and there is nothing that women can do about it. The same way that poor people are born into poverty, they cannot do anything about it. In fact, the only acceptable solution for poor people is to accept their condition and make no efforts to change their condition in life—the same applies to women in Honduras. The point that Butler argues is that there is a collective thinking about what it means to be a

woman and as a result, women have an assigned a gender role—and that is the case for Honduras, gender roles are distributed to women and men regardless of skill, intelligence, or attitudes towards what it means to be a man or a woman.

In Honduras, the meaning of women and their bodies is defined by patriarchal society. Alvarado is able to show it in her book that this sort of thinking is accepted in Honduran society when she writes, “[m]ost men don’t want to get married because they say that marriage ties them down. They say that if they get married, they can’t have a woman on the side”(43). By illustrating the attitude of men towards marriages in Honduras, Alvarado shows that women are a body, or a thing to be used; this type of thinking is a reflection of Butler’s ideas when she states, “‘men’ and ‘women’ and the internal stability of those terms? What restriction is here at work? Are those terms untroubling only to the extent that they conform to a heterosexual matrix for conceptualizing gender and desire?” (2540). Alvarado is able to answer these questions in her book by showing that men in Honduras are raised thinking that polygamy is the norm for men, and women are supposed to be subjected to a man’s will. A woman’s body is utilized as a tool for men to satisfy their sexual needs. Butler’s ideas about body argue that since there is no reference to define the body and its purpose, the definition of the body is left as a “blank page” (Butler 2543) to be fulfilled by society and historical traditions. Butler makes this argument when she states, “cultural values emerge as the result of an inscription on the body” (Butler 2543). The “blank page” in Alvarado’s book refers to the hierarchy dynamics between men and women. Men are at the top of the hierarchy while women are at the bottom, and as a result, men can freely place women at a lower level than men because it enables men to stay in power and have control over

women. As showed by Butler, in order to have a functional society, the “body” must have a value imposed on it in order to have social stability. It is evident that Honduran society has clearly marked the value of a woman’s body as weaker and less valuable, and Alvarado demonstrates that men are in charge because a man’s body is simply considered more important. She demonstrates this by showing that the heterosexual proud man is in control due to their body assignation by Honduran culture, and as a result they are in charge of society and thus women, and this is evident when she writes:

The wife called her boyfriend and made a date in a hotel. She got all dolled up and left the house in a taxi. After she’d been in the hotel about a half hour, the husband broke down the door, found them there in bed, and shot them both. Sometimes the men just kill the wife, because they say it’s the woman’s fault. (Alvarado 46)

Again, Alvarado demonstrates that Honduran culture favors men over women and as a result, men are in charge of women and Honduran society. Moreover, their attributes as men reinforces their value as first-class-citizens and women have one as second-class-citizens—this type of attitude shows that women in Honduran culture do not hold agency because of double standard for men and women, “[a] man will sleep with any woman he gets a change to sleep with, so they say it’s the woman’s fault if she goes with him.” (Alvarado 46) When Alvarado makes this point in her book, she demonstrates the little agency women have in Honduras. It shows that men in Honduran culture are never wrong and whatever agency women have is insignificant because women are viewed at fault, never the victim. As a result of shedding a light on machismo culture, Alvarado goes into other progressive ideas by simply mentioning them, and by doing so, she raise the profile

of them, and one of these issues is economics.

If one takes a look at women from an economic point of view, women provide a community with a very important commodity: children. As a result, a community can benefit from the expansion of the labor force, and this is appreciated by many in Honduran culture because that many children who are born in Honduras are useful in developing economies—the reason why large families are created “is the fact that old-age security for parents comes from children,” according to Mukesh Eswaran, author of the 2014 book, *Why Gender Matters in Economics* (255), that is to say that children will provide for their parents once they reach retirement age. Moreover, many families like Alvarado’s family benefited by another pair of hands that can help with farming, and/or other types of jobs, and that means more income a family unit can potentially earn with a larger family; the larger the family, the more a family can benefit. Moreover, fertility is an important component for an economy because it rejuvenates the workforce; a young workforce that is busy working is a workforce that can pay taxes. Therefore, it would be logical to think that women in machismo culture would be very important, and revered; however, that is not the case for women; instead they are left behind. They are viewed as something else. Women are seen as caregiver is that it is a traditional, or a more appropriate role for women to play in society. To understand why women are look as caregivers, one must take a look at history and quite possibly before the written word.

Blanche C. Carter, author of the article, “Women—Then and Now” may be speaking to the plight of women in 1919 (before women could vote in the United States), but the concept about how women were placed as caregiver does provide a historical context that can be applied today. The author argues that as humanity evolves from

simple to complex beings, women delay in progress because the idea that women are meant to stay at home and cater to men did not evolve with time; and as a result, women are viewed as less important than men.

Moreover, since women have to stay home, their status and role as women is associated with “less important” jobs, or tasks that require less skills—this type of thinking is archaic, and it is derived from the “hunter-gathering” mentality, as mentioned by Carter. She goes on to explain that when males had to go out into the wild, hunt and gather food for the tribe, it was a dangerous task, but the problem with that notion is that since then, there have been some changes in history, and survival for humans has changed as well. Therefore, the notion that males have to put their lives in danger is obsolete. Women and men are equal and capable to be the breadwinners in their families, and both have the skills needed to make a living in today’s world. Males no longer need to depend on their physical strength to be the breadwinner and provider for a family. However, the issue is that there is a belief that men are in charge because their jobs are more important than women—it is an idea that has been passed from previous generations. Carter articulates this idea further when she writes:

When Mr. Caveman of primitive age decided to make unto himself a mate, he went out and got her. The fact that she was already mated made no difference to him. He took her quietly, if possible. If not, he fought for her and when successful threw her over his shoulder and took her to his cave. Perhaps in the depths of her savage heart there was a glow akin to pride, in his strength and force. To sit on the ground and gnaw a bone, and to have a new animal skin occasionally for her wardrobe was all that she

desired...After a time fire and its uses were discovered, probably by accident. As it was hard to kindle, it became very desirable that it should be kept burning, so the men went to hunt alone, and the women kept the fire. Thus with advent of fire, woman lost her liberty and freedom, and finally became subjected to man—his slave, to be taken or cast off as fact seized him. (Carter 30)

As Carter explains, women have been held hostage to their role as housemaids and caregivers of the household because it was forced upon them due to circumstance from a long time ago. She explains that women became slaves because men forced themselves on them first, but their status as slaves solidify when fire was “discovered, probably by accident” (Carter 30), and women had to stay home in order to ensure the fire did not go out. Women were left with no option, but to stay at home, and that notion has been carried since then.

Alvarado provides some examples about this type of mentality in Honduran culture. For instance, when Alvarado depicts the daily lives of men and women, she states that men and women have their jobs and responsibilities, and those responsibilities are done based on one's gender. She makes this evident when she states:

It's true there are some jobs that require a lot of strength and that women can't do as well as men. For example, when we have to clear a piece of forest, it's the men who go out with the axes and cut down the trees. Other work we consider “men's work” is chopping firewood and plowing the land with a team of oxen. There are things that men do better than women, because they're stronger. I don't know if it's physical difference from

birth, but the fact is that here in Honduras women are usually either pregnant or nursing, and that takes a lot energy out of you. Men may be working during the day, but when they come home they usually don't do a thing. (Alvarado 51)

Alvarado's example demonstrates well that the hunter-gathering mentality is practiced in Honduras. This example also illustrates that there is a particular job for men and women. Men have to work outside and women have to stay inside. This type of thinking is a reflection on Carter's claims, and it helps further the claim that it is a historical practice, or tradition. But if one looks closely at Alvarado's words, she questions the validity of this notion. She is not sure of it because that is something she grew up as a *campesina* woman, is something she experienced. Still, she does recognize that men are stronger than women, and the men are the main breadwinners, but she is not ready to concede that a woman's job is more important than man's.

However, the problem is if a woman is not making the money to support a family, it is difficult to get away from the notion that woman's job is less important. This is challenging because no matter how much a woman like Alvarado does in her home, her job is not viewed as important as a man's job. The same can be argued today with the issue of gender pay gap in the United States. Carl Richards, author of *The New York Times* article, "Fighting the Gender Pay Gap" argues that part of the problem for gender pay gap is that women are seen as less valuable than men. The article makes this point when the author writes that women make less money, "simply because they're women" (Richards). Richards goes on to point out the example of a female friend learned that "after getting hired men made more at her company for doing the same job" (Richards).

This shows that even today the work that men do is considered more important because married men have responsibilities, and women are working because they want to, not because they have to work like married men. This means that more value is placed to men than women; the same issues in Honduras, men have more value or worth than women because they are men. This suggests that women and men have a double standard; it also suggests that women have different worth than men. And as result, men get paid more than women.

Louis Althusser, author of the essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)" provides a specific example on wages and how workers agree to that set wages. Althusser argues that the wage is set depending at what wage the worker is willing to work for in the workplace. So, for the sake of argument, wage represents worth. And in order to make this argument, Alhtusser offers the example of the English beer drinker and the French who preferred wine. Also, for the sake of argument, beer is worth less than wine. If the English worker represents women, the women are paid with beer; that means the paid is less, and thus so is the worth of women. And if the French worker symbolizes the men, and are paid with wine, it suggests that the worth for men is higher than women. This idea can be applied to Alvarado's book because there are examples that do suggests that a man is worth more than a woman. For instance, Alvarado relates the story of a woman in abusive marriage and how the woman withstand the abuse from her husband, but the main line that she uses to tell the reader that men are in charge, worth more than a woman and that they belong to a machismo culture that allows for abuse is: "I am the man in this family, and nobody tells me what to do" (Alvarado 54).

The story narrated by Alvarado illustrates that men are in charge, and they are worth more. Neither Alvarado, nor the abusive husband says that he is worth more than a woman, but it is implied. “Nobody tells [him]” (Alvarado 54) what to do, which implies that he is the person in charge, and his words are law at his household. That suggests that his wife has no worth to him; she is an extension of him, and he is the person that can tell her what to do, and that also means, she has no agency. She blames machismo culture when she states, “[m]achismo is a historical problem. It goes back to the time of our great-grandfathers, or our great-great-grandfathers” (Alvarado 54).

Nevertheless, Alvarado’s story is not unique in Latin America, and for other women of color, the fact is that her tale bears a resemblance to other stories in Latin America, and Hispanic literature. For instance, the Mexican-American Chicana writer, Ana Castillo writes about the mistreatment of women, especially Mexican Amerindian women when she states in her book, *Massacre of the Dreamers*:

to my mind, the Mexic Amerindian woman had been gagged for hundreds of years. I not only refer to the literal silencing of the Mexican indigenous population, economically impoverished and therefore powerless and voiceless, but also the censorship that results from double sexism, being female and indigenous. The Mexic Amerindian woman has inherited the sexism instituted by dominant Mexican and U.S. society compounded by the sexism within certain oppressed indigenous cultures. (Castillo 7)

Castillo argues that her study of “mestizos, criollos, Spaniards and Anglo from the nineteenth century up to that time (1979)” (7) had revealed “anything more than stereotypes” (Castillo 7) about *mestizo* culture. This is significant because Alvarado is a

mestiza woman, and her story provides more than stereotypes about mestizo people. Also, her story explains other issues dealing with Hispanic culture and literature. So, when Castillo tackles issues like sexism, anti-women views, and attitudes about women, it helps further the study of women from Latin American literature as complex individuals and not as stereotypes. In other words, Castillo is going beyond the stereotype by exploring, and explaining why machismo attitudes are so predominate in Hispanic culture.

Moreover, her study of women show that machismo attitude is widespread in Hispanic culture, its countries, and in the United States. One of the views that these two women share is the role of men in Hispanic families. The way that Castillo looks at this is by using the word, “vendetta.” She explains this further when she writes, “[t]he male members of a family are responsible for a vendetta; in the case of an absent father, the task usually falls on the eldest brother” (75). Castillo claims that “good” machismo is done when a man “saves family honor” (Castillo 75); and in the case of Alvarado, she provides a negative example of a macho when her older brother must “save family honor” (Castillo 75).

When Alvarado became pregnant at fifteen, she dishonored the male authority in her life, her older brother. During the time of her pregnancy, she was living with him and the fact that she got pregnant created a problem in the household. Of course, it is completely logical for a guardian or a parent to be upset when a minor becomes pregnant before reaching adulthood. But in the case of Alvarado, it is a different story because she, in effect, defies machismo culture. As Castillo explains, “[s]ince women have had no real social status in and of themselves; they have had to count on whatever status they may

receive as possessions of men” (73). Since she is an extension of her brother, she is defying her brother and the machismo culture, he represents. It looks bad for her older brother because the family honor is disrespected, and revenge must be done in order to restore honor to Alvarado’s older brother’s household. As Castillo points out, a “good” macho will act and manifest in some way to “regain some material loss; women are counted as man’s material property,” which allows men to commit crimes in order to protect their property and honor, and women are included as property, according to Castillo (75). Alvarado is able to provide a good example on how machismo culture reacts when a man’s property is insulted when she recounts her brother’s statement, “OK. Tell that little slut that I’ll be back, and that I’m going to get her with the six bullets I have left in my gun. Because I don’t like what she’s done to me. I’ve taken care of her for two years, and look how she’s repaid me” (Alvarado 3).

Nonetheless, there is another point to Alvarado’s brother: her brother’s masculinity was insulted. It is his job to show strength and control in his household, but when Alvarado became pregnant, those attributes go under question in front of machismo culture. And the reason that is important is that “only the masculine has been allowed to reign,” according to Castillo, and men, historically, have been in charge (11). So, when Alvarado becomes pregnant, it means that her brother has lost control and no longer is the men in charge of his own household.

Of course, it can be argued that Alvarado’s brother is simply upset that he invested time to raise his sister, and she ends up getting pregnant. The answer is deeper than that, because Alvarado ignores social norms by the patriarchy, and she encourages jealousy. According to Castillo, when a father is absent, the older brother must take over the role as

the father figure in the family (75). It also implies that a man is responsible of a female family member like a father, and that also includes jealousy. According to Castillo, “jealousy demonstrates to some women their value. It assures them of a secure position in society” (73). Hence, Castillo argues that since fathers are responsible to keep their daughters in line, be protective, own them, and be jealous of them, the elder brother must mimic the father. Moreover, the rules of the patriarchy say that women have “only existed to serve man,” according to Castillo (13), and Alvarado disobeyed. That means that she is not fulfilling her duties as women under machismo rule, and that sort of behavior is not tolerated.

Since machismo culture has a close grip on Honduran culture, women are in constant physical danger, and negative publicity. This is possible due to machismo attitudes in Honduras. Women are supposed to be chaste, and avoid sexuality; otherwise, the consequences are negative. The consequence for an immoral behavior by a woman is stigma by her community, and, as mentioned above, even physical harm. Moreover, when a woman in Honduras and in Latino/Hispanic culture decides to become a sexually active, the stigma can be damaging and unfair to say the least. Castillo explains this attitude further when she writes:

A sexual woman was a woman begging rape, begging vulnerability to society, begging to be treated as nothing more than as what she was born: a female who merits no respect for her emotions, her mind, her person. No, if one admitted sexuality, she was discarding the disguise she alone had worn as the “decent” woman, the “good girl,” and was revealing that underneath she was nothing more than a bitch in heat. (Castillo 122-123)

Machismo culture oppressed Alvarado when she became sexually active, but most importantly, machismo culture told her that she no longer is a “good girl.” However, that is far from the truth because Alvarado is a human being. Machismo culture denied her the right to make mistakes and to explore herself as a person. Before she could express any regret or provide an explanation for her “mistakes,” she was deemed “nothing more than a bitch in heat,” as Castillo explores (123). This happens because there is no separation between liberty and social norm. In Alvarado’s case, there is no distinction between her rights as a free individual and her role in a patriarchal society—her individuality is connected to the role she is supposed to play in Honduran culture. She is supposed to be submissive and always follow the rules passed onto her by men. But what is even more unfortunate for women is that an education beyond machismo customs is deemed unnecessary in Honduras, and in Latin America, and Castillo agrees with this notion. (Castillo 50).

Once machismo culture becomes the social norm for people i.e. culturally acceptable, it is difficult for women to gain more agency than what was made available to them. For Alvarado, it was already hard to gain more influence in her own life because it was already determined how much individuality she is going to have as a woman. That type of training and education is done early on in life, and it is used to perpetuate gender roles for men and women. In fact, according to Ruby B. Rich, author of the article, “Feminism and Sexuality,” points out that “[t]he training we received as girls encouraged us to renounce acting on our own behalf and for our own pleasure. Our...desires threatened Mom and Dad and they told us how dangerous sex was, especially curiosity or experimentation” (Rich 528-529).

Alvarado's training, education, and upbringing as a young woman is to be submissive, gain little education, be denied any form of independence, and to retain the hierarchy by keeping the men at top. Alvarado, and many women in Honduras, were educated indeed, but the type of education is not one that allows women to become more than a mother, and/or a submissive woman. If a woman wants more out of life, it would be difficult to achieve it because anything more than what society has for her, it is a "daughter's revolt" (Rich 529); that means that a woman is against tradition, and she wants to rebel against society. However, when they offend her parents, the social norm, machismo culture, and the patriarchy in Honduras women learn about their status as second-class citizens.

In the case of Alvarado, when she gained some education and independence, it taught her a valuable lesson about machismo culture; she learned that machismo culture did not represent her interests as a woman. Alvarado makes this point when she states, "[w]e learned that we (women) had rights just like the men did" (11)—it was during her time as an adult-student with the Catholic Church that she learned that the machismo culture forced her into a life she did not want. During her childhood, she was brought up to think that since she was born a woman, "it's natural to have children and that going against nature is going against God" (Alvarado 47). It was Alvarado's access to education that allowed her to become a woman of agency, freedom, and activism. She also learns that the machismo culture is the means to keep her quiet and obedient to a patriarchal society and machismo culture in Honduras—she makes this point clear when she writes, "[w]e learned we had to stop being so passive and start sticking up for our rights" (Alvarado 11).

Alvarado is right about the meaning of an education for women: it will create agency, and it will create an opposition to machismo culture in Honduras. As women become more educated, there is a redefinition for women because of the skills and lessons learned from an education. According to Malini Ghose, author of the article, “Literary, Power and Feminism” (1616)—that means that they have a better opportunity to gain more economic mobility, social class mobility, and they will have achieved an equilibrium with men. As the beneficiary of more education, Alvarado is a good example of what happens when a woman in a machismo culture is exposed to other ideas, and a different way of thinking that conflicts with her own worldview. She questions her role as a woman in a machismo culture, and she is able to be a more independent thinker.

Her motive to access more education is not to oppose machismo culture in Honduras, at first, it is to discuss issues in her community (Alvarado 11). Still, Alvarado benefited beyond her expectations because as she claims, “I was more independent... Before I was stupid; now I’m not the idiot I used to be” (11). Clearly Alvarado noticed that the benefits to more education go beyond helping her community, it helped her as well. Education extended her role in society; she is an equal to men and as a result, she redefined herself as woman, and that type of redefinition is a threat to men and to machismo culture. The first person that felt the threat of machismo culture diminishing is her “husband”(not legally married, but the couple lived together) of eighteen years, who disagrees with her involvement with the Catholic Church classes on *campesino* issues once his wife’s schedule as an activist started, it defied machismo culture and his machismo attitude. Alvarado made a shift in her life, and that shift did not fit into what it means to be a woman in Honduras. Also, she learned another way of communicating in

Honduras and she redefines herself as a new woman.

Ghose, who writes about women, feminism and language, states that women in India speaking Bundeli were unable to gain a voice as people and as intellectuals because “the actual words being taught and the texts being created were in Hindi” (1617) and as a result, women in India who speak Bundeli are marginalized and education becomes challenging. Alvarado had a similar challenge, she experienced the inability not to speak in the mainstream language, the language of power and as a result, women in Honduras are marginalized. When women are not allowed to speak the same language as the mainstream or the same language as men (the language of power), then oppression of women is easier and better controlled.

For the Bundeli women, they were left with no agency because the mainstream, or the men in charge do not recognize their language. As Ghose writes, “Hindi symbolised the language of power; the women themselves perceived their language as inferior” (1617). For these women the blockade to express themselves is both, literally and figuratively, the problem for them is that their lack of agency is a multilayer obstacle, a barricade for agency and free thinking for women. The same idea applies with Alvarado, in a metaphorical way, because the language she uses is not from the mainstream, meaning that she did not have the ability to express herself, or she does not have the language of power—she was oppressed because of her status in Honduran culture; therefore, it limited her language, that is to say, that since her status as a woman did not recognize her as the same as men, machismo culture did not allow her to have a voice as men do. Instead women are seen as property, and therefore women in Honduras are voiceless. H.M. Parshley’s introduction to Simone de Beauvoir’s book, *The Second Sex*

may provide some explanation.

H.M. Parshley who, translated the book, *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, points out the reason women have been placed in “second place” in many societies like in Honduras because:

since patriarchal times women have in general been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men, a position comparable in many respects with that of racial minorities in spite of the fact that women constitute numerically at least half of the human race, and further that this secondary standing is not imposed of necessity by natural “feminine” characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of educational and social tradition under the purposeful control of men. (Parshley vii)

For many women in Honduras that reality is too familiar for them, because it is a fact of daily life. Women are second-class citizens because of their sex and Alvarado’s book illustrates that notion well. But the most notable feature about Alvarado and de Beauvoir is that there are similarities. De Beauvoir articulates the lack of agency of women and Alvarado embodies de Beauvoir’s ideas about the lack of agency women have to deal with for years. Some of the ideas that de Beauvoir articulated in her book can be applied to Alvarado’s book and her life, but an idea that de Beauvoir uses can help further Alvarado’s story, and the idea is “destiny.”

According to de Beauvoir, women are destined to be empty vessels or prized property on which men can control at will because of their sex. Her assessment about how women are treated due to their sex is not too far off from the treatment of Honduran women. Alvarado writes about this when she states, “[m]en may be out working during

the day, but when they come home they usually don't do a thing. They want their meal to be ready, and after they eat they either lie down to rest or go out drinking" (Alvarado 51). Alvarado is able to show that while men are working during the day—women are stay-at-home servants who are there to provide the need of men. And one can derive that men see women as prized trained property for men.

Alvarado is able to demonstrate this when she depicts the men in Honduras as careless owners. Once they get what they want from their prized property (women), things like sex, food, and housekeeping work—they go about their day without any concern about them as persons. However, the implication about how women are viewed by Honduran men is what de Beauvoir writes about in *The Second Sex*, De Beauvoir argues that the fact that men and women are biologically different, makes women a different species and therefore naturally inferior to men. She makes this more evident when she writes:

The term "female" is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman's animality, but because it imprisons her in her sex; and if this sex seems to man to be contemptible and inimical even in harmless dumb animal, it is evidently because of the uneasy hostility stirred up in him by woman. (de Beauvoir 3)

Alvarado's book is relatable to this notion. And although Alvarado does not say that women are empty vessels, women are used as such by men. This is evident when she writes:

If the woman can't take it any more, she leaves him. But even after the woman leaves, the man usually follows her and keeps harassing her. We

know it's against the law to beat someone like that, but the police don't get involved in fights between couples. They say it's none of their business. They say it's something for the man and wife to figure out by themselves. (Alvarado 54)

A man is able to mistreat, or treat, a woman the way he wants because of machismo culture, but it also suggests that when, a woman is harassed and beaten by a man, it means that a woman is being treated like prized property. The man (the owner) is able to do what he wishes with his property. When one applies de Beauvoir's ideas, one can gain a better understanding about the condition of women in Honduras—one can see that Honduran women are indeed are treated like trained animals in the sense that they are like a Kentucky Derby horse. Competitive horse racing is about the value the horse can bring to the owner. The same works for women—women are rated in physical appearance, how much worth they can bring into a household and how much a man can get out of a woman. Also, men must control women because like a horse, women are property that must be dominated and domesticated in order to serve its purpose to men. Thus men look at women as prized property, and the value that property is an investment that can bring the owner (men) value. There is a parallel with women and racehorse; women are property that once it fulfills the needs and wants of the owner, it is dispose of by the owner.

De Beauvoir explores this idea when she argues that if the relationship of men and women is based on the natural world, meaning, that if men and women are judged based on their sex, women are inferior to men, but she goes on to say that it does not make sense to judge men and women based on sex because:

Males and females are two types of individuals which are differentiated within a species for the function of reproduction; they can be defined only correlatively. But first it must be noted that even the *division* of a species into two sexes is not always clear-cut. (de Beauvoir 4)

De Beauvoir goes on to argue that if a woman is to be treated as prized property, or an inferior being, then the natural state of woman is to be inferior to men, but men cannot treat women like prized property or an inferior being because nature is not “clear-cut.” Nature is more complicated, she argues, and in order to make her point she provides the example of asexual reproduction in the animal kingdom. She argues that many animals and organisms can go on to reproduce without the need of two species i.e. male and female life-forms. Therefore, the notion that there is a need for “two individuals” (de Beauvoir 3-4) to make more offspring, and rejuvenate a population cannot be made. And to argue that nature has a set place for males and females is false. Her main point with this argument is: that the idea of natural status of women is wrong.

Nature does not provide an example on which women are socially inferior to men. It needs to be reexamined because the state of nature is, as de Beauvoir argues, “not always clear-cut” (4). Nature has different ways in which male and female organism interact with each other, and the same must be for men in women in Honduran society. Alvarado shows that women have only one social standing in Honduran culture: a prized property that is only good until the owner decides is no longer a good investment. Women have no agency because it is decided based on the law of nature that females are inferior to men, but the problem is, it cannot be proven. In fact, both men and women can be brave and fearless as any human being. But in the case of Alvarado, she displays a

good example of bravery by a woman when she has to confront the Honduran government. She goes on to state:

When we entered the field there were 80 of us, all men expect for me. We snuck in very quietly at 2 a.m., taking out mats so we could sleep... When the landowner found out we had recovered the land, she went running to the police and the army... “Don’t be afraid,” I said to the campesinos.

“They’re not going to kill us.” (Alvarado 70)

Alvarado is brave and in charge as well. In a machismo culture, she demonstrates she is capable, courageous, and a leader among men. The fact that she is a woman does not diminish her ability as a leader, a role that is usually left to a man. But most importantly, it shows that she is not an empty vessel, or an inferior organism, and it shows that she is far from a prize position that can be disregarded by a man whenever he wants. Honduras has to look at the Catholic Church for help, but sometime the church goes against progressive ideas.

The Catholic Church through helped Alvarado gain more education and promote progressive ideas to help the poor, but the church has another type of influence in Honduras. According to Frederick M. Shepherd, author of the article, “Church and State in Honduras and Nicaragua Prior to 1979,” writes that “[t]he Catholic Church has played a dominant role in the cultural life of all Central American nations” (282), and as a result, the Catholic Church has helped shape the relationship between men and women in Honduras in a less progressive way. In fact, Ana Castillo writes about the influence Christianity and the Catholic in her book had in Latin American when she writes in her book, *Massacre of the Dreamers*, that the Catholic Church cannot lead Latin American

women into the 21st century (Castillo 95-96).

Jennifer Ferrara, author of the article, “Women Should Not Be Priests,” presents the conservative view that the role of men is to influence and grant love to women who are there to receive the love that men have to give (Ferrara 38-39). As an influential player in Honduran culture, the Catholic Church is also able to reinforce machismo culture—the role of men is explained by the Catholic Church, and, as a result, the church sways Honduran culture. This is more evident when Ferrara writes, “[t]he husband is the one who loves while the wife is the one who is loved and in return gives love” (39). The fact is that the church has a role for men, and that role goes beyond the church’s walls. Furthermore, she says that the church also argues that:

all women need to accept their maternal nature if they are to accept their vocation specifically as women. This means that every woman, no matter what she does, brings maternal characteristics to her vocation. All women, married and celibate, are mothers all the time. (Ferrara 39)

When the Catholic Church argues that women must be virtuous, it conveys that women are sacred because they represent motherhood, and as the Catholic Church argues; therefore, women must be ready to receive the love of Christ—and when men represent Christ, it helps reinforce machismo culture and attitudes towards women. The notion is that women are like a church and therefore sacred, that indicates that women are open and subject to machismo culture, and that does not help women to advance as people in Honduras beyond the work they do at the church. Besides the Catholic Church, has other means to influence machismo culture in Honduras. For Alvarado, the liberal church was the means to gain her agency, but again, the conservative church also help shape

machismo culture, and they want women and men to have a proper role in society.

One of the best examples that Alvarado gives to illustrate how the church helps and keeps women behind when she writes:

It was the church that first started organizing us women...The church forged the path for us, but they wanted us to follow behind. And when we started to walk ahead of them, when we started to open new paths ourselves, they tried to stop us. They decided that maybe organizing the women wasn't such a good idea after all...They wanted us to give food out to malnourished mothers and children, but they didn't want us to question why we were malnourished to begin with. They wanted us to grow vegetables on the tiny plots around our houses, but they didn't want us to question why didn't have enough land to feed ourselves. (Alvarado 16)

Alvarado recognizes that the church helped her gain agency, but she also knows that the church does not want too progressive ideas. The church wants women to have a role in society. That is obvious, but it is also clear that the church thinks that women have a place in society, and that position is behind the leadership. By Alvarado's account, the church is willing to have women around, but it has to be behind the people who run it, the priest, who are men. That type of treatment suggests that the church has promoted ideas about the role women and men are supposed to have in society: men are in charge while the women stay behind the scenes. That idea is literal and metaphorical because women are being silenced by machismo culture, and they are being told that they need to stay behind the men. However, the church is doing more harm because it suggests that women

can have agency as long as they have it under the supervision of a patriarchal system. The problem with that notion is that it still denies women agency. But the work of Alvarado as an activist is inspiring to Honduras and its literature.

Alvarado's work as activist in Honduras is also an inspiration for the average Honduran. What is most impressive about her life story is that she faced many obstacles, and yet she overcomes the challenge presented to her. Some of the challenges in front of her were poverty, machismo culture, poor education, and no help from the government to help the poor. Still, she tries to make differences in Honduras; a country that is known as a term, "banana republic," and followed by negative press stories. However, in order to better understand Honduras, one must have some context about the area. The context of Honduras does not stop at newspaper stories and some non-Honduran authors wanted to provide a context about Honduras, as they understand it.

Still, there are many layers to this nation, and its complexities go beyond geopolitical problems. It is also about the people like Elvia Alvarado, who have to struggle to put food on the table. The country is also about the influence that machismo culture had on to Honduras thus far. As time passes by, one hopes that the negative influences will come to be part of the past, and the negative newspaper stories will talk about the people who make up the Central American nation. Honduras has many obstacles to overcome, but one hopes that if the country is anywhere nearly as resourceful as Elvia Alvarado's personality, it will overcome. People like Elvia Alvarado make up the population of Honduras, and their voices bring hope for the nation.

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