



## **Colony within the State and the State as a de facto Colony: The Colonial Question in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*One Hundred Years of Solitude, within the perimeter of magically real fiction, raises certain questions which are more historiographical than fictional, suggesting a strong fluidity in the terms like colony, state etc., more so, in the traditionally compartmentalized spaces: colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial with the result of dangerous floor-crossings of history. This paper will examine how the first settler Jose Arcadio Buendia, at the end of a typical diaspora, goes for founding Macondo, a prototype colony, and continues ruling it until the so far non-existent state intervenes to extend its territorial grip and unilateral power over Macondo through its civil and military outposts in the modus operandi a colonial center usually employs against its extended territory. The paper will further examine how the same state, presumably postcolonial, eventually turns into a de facto colony of a neocolonial center, thus thoroughly dismantling the fine myth of decolonization with the colonial question still unanswered and unburdened of.*

**Keywords:** Colony, de facto colony, Soledad, postcolonial, neocolonial

Though the parchments of Melquiades flamboyantly zero in on the diaspora, growth and demise of the six generations of the Buendias and their accompanying 'soledad', they in fact outstrip the coded saga to chronicle spaces beyond the mythographic Macondo, people beyond the Buendia variety and times beyond the horoscoped century. Under the rubric of an elastic magic(al) realism, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* quite comfortably reverts to real and nonfictional issues related to Latin American colonial, postcolonial, neo-colonial history and historiographical exercises. In this novel Garcia Marquez moves beyond the watertight compartments of fiction and history in locating the fluidity of the notions like colony, state, sovereignty, dependency etc. to show how colonialism and its pastness (post) and futurity (new) can stage dangerous floor-crossings. Melquiades's parchments that coded the passage of Macondo from pre-colonial to postcolonial through the pseudo colonial/ colonial and sovereign stages only offer a fictional praxis to engage the nebulous colonial question lost in what Jean Paul Sartre (2001) called "the infernal cycle" (p. 44). The enigmatic saga of the Burndias, once deciphered, retrospectively suggests a perpetuity of the ancient colonial reality, a concept that corroborates Sartre's theorization in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*: "The system exists, it functions; the infernal cycle of colonialism is a reality. But this reality is embodied in a million colonists, children and grandchildren of colonists, who have been shaped by colonialism and who think, speak and act according to the very principles of the colonial system"(p.44). Rather than treating the 'isms' as historians do, Garcia Marquez intersects and proliferates them in the space of this novel leaving around enough clues for the counter narrative he intends to invoke.

Postulated against the reminiscences of the Biblical Diaspora (Higgins, 2002, p. 38) or those of Columbus (Zabala, 2002, p.110) or of the historically silhouetted Spaniards (GM 1996, p.12), Jose Arcadio Buendia's exodus from the old center Riohacha to the new center Macondo has all the airs and graces of an early explorer's search for a would-be colony. The first Buendia couple – Jose Arcadio Buendia and Ursula Iguaran and their entourage of young adventurous friends "with their wives and children, animals and all kinds of domestic implements" (p. 10) launch into a twenty-month-long perilous expedition "toward the land that no one had promised them" (p. 23). At the end of "almost two years of crossing" the most difficult mountains and "several months of lost wandering through the swamps" an exasperated Jose Arcadio Buendia camps "on the banks of a stony river" with waters like "a torrent of frozen glass" (p. 24). That night, he dreams of "a noisy city with houses having mirror walls"—a city with a supernatural name: Macondo. He convinces, then orders his followers "to cut down the trees to make a clearing beside the river, at the coolest spot on the bank, and there he founded the village" (pp. 24-25).

Unlike his distant conquistadors, he conquers none and usurps none, only occupies an uninhabited space, a pseudo-utopia, and starts building and fathering it in the manner of a “youthful patriarch” (p. 9) which, in colonial discourse, may well approximate the role of a benevolent colonizer. He gives “instructions for planting and advice for the raising of children and animals” (p. 9) and joins hands in the physical work of community development in a “spirit of social initiative” (p. 10). In order to give his dream a down- to- earth reality he re-moulds the topography of Macondo and supplants it with a version borrowed from the inherited colonial experience. Imbued with an inspiration of equality, he goes to “set up the placement of the houses in such a way that from all of them one could reach the river and draw water with the same effort” (p. 9). But subconsciously, like a typical colonizer with ingrained class awareness, he builds his house first which “from the very first” has been “the best in the village”, and more importantly, the others have been built “in its image and likeness” (p. 9).

The sense of being one with the others but not exactly their equal is essentially a colonial syndrome that divides the non-Buendias from the Buendias and makes Macondo a transplanted colony where the Buendias alone are privileged to rule and the non-Buendias to grow as peripheral citizens. The exodus from a geographically real Riohacha to its fictional prototype Macondo entails a typical colonial pattern of exploration, discovery, settlement, segregation, empowerment of a particular class and ‘othering’ of the rest (in absence of the natives). Thus much against his anti-center mindset Jose Arcadio Buendia goes to found a place of dream in subconscious imitation of a colony retrieved from the memories of a not-too-distant Spanish rule. His militant generations reinforce this notion intermittently at least until the days of the Banana Massacre.

The transition of Macondo from “a solitary colony” (Zavala, 2002, p. 118) to a “center colonized by pilgrims” (Zavala, 2002, p. 116), that is, to a state of de facto sovereignty is characterized by a fluidity of identity and notions. The transition takes place in such a swift spontaneity that the moment Macondo is born as a colony, the same moment it begins to exercise a full-scale autonomy a colony can hardly think of possessing and exercising. Such autonomy, which can be safely passed for sovereignty, has been safeguarded by Macondo’s out-of-the-planet location and also by its being outside of the grip of a so far non-existent government. Moreover, it has been galvanized by the conquistador-like temperament of the unyielding Macondians when their facade of sovereignty is threatened. In the postulated century of solitude, Macondo happens to enjoy uninterrupted sovereignty for at least a span of twenty-five years until Aureliano Buendia, born in Macondo, grows big enough to marry the magistrate’s daughter, Remedios. Quite beyond “the proofs of the notaries” (p. 28), as Carlos Fuentes (2002) remarked, the formulation made above shows a diminutive Spanish

America's fictional passage from the status of "colony" to "sovereignty", whatever temporary the transition might eventually prove.

The sovereignty of Jose Arcadio Buendia's young colony suffers a terrible jolt with the arrival of the magistrate Don Apolinar Moscote. He, by claiming to be "an authority sent by the government" (p. 33), officially puts the state's claim of territorial rights over Macondo and the consequent right to rule over her people. The extension of the centre's rule over a forgotten periphery dispels the notion of a free, sovereign Macondo—a notion that has been allowed to grow in the long uninterrupted years since its foundation, unclaimed by the state and the government. The notion has been reinforced by Macondo's being "a place on the map", and "more a direction than a location" with its "prehistoric atmosphere" reminiscent of the Genesis (Senna, 1984, p. 26). So when the magistrate arrives at Macondo and dispatches his first order to Jose Arcadio Buendia to paint his house (and all houses for that matter) in blue (the color of the conservative party) "in celebration of the anniversary of national independence" (p. 57), Jose Arcadio Buendia erupts like a volcano. He meets him, challenges the newcomer's right, informing him how they have founded Macondo, distributed the land and introduced improvements "without having bothered the government and without anyone having bothered them" (p. 58), and finally tells him pointblank that he either stays there "like any ordinary citizen" (p. 58) or quits with his junk.

Jose Arcadio Buendia thus strongly confirms the birth and functionality of a pro-people colony, his role being that of a principal colonizer and his companions as co-colonizers. The narrative of colonization then unfolds a sudden twist with the appearance of Don Apolinar—the representative of a new claimant of the colony—the state itself. It is suggestive of the typical conflict between the early settlers and new usurper on the question of ownership for reasons not unearthed so long. While Jose Arcadio Buendia grabs the magistrate by the lapels and lifts him up in reply to the latter's threat: "I am armed" (p.58), the other founders appear more intimidating. They dub the magistrate and his ragged soldiers as "invaders", resolve to expel them and put themselves once again along with their elder sons at the disposal of the patriarch for a fight back. It might be a piece of irony that beneath this spectacular show of anger and jingoism, Jose Arcadio Buendia tacitly acknowledges the existence of a distant government (by not "having bothered" it). Eventually, he allows its titular head Don Apolinar to operate on from Macondo thereby subverting the very notion of sovereignty he has so long attached to his founded colony.

Jose Arcadio Buendia's encounter with the magistrate and the temporary truce reached by both can be interpreted as an implicit recognition of the new reality: Macondo cannot maintain its status quo as a sovereign or autonomous town in the fashion of the past nor can the magistrate impose outright the distant

government's rule on the Macondians without initially conceding to some of their apolitical demands. The novel gradually unveils how Don Apolinar shrewdly steers towards a smooth transition of power from the founders to the government, thus transfiguring him from an ornamental "figurehead" (p. 63) to a deceitful administrator. The text adequately addresses how the magistrate brings politics and the national Liberal-Conservative divide in Macondo. He switches ballots and works as a mastermind in rigging elections in favor of the conservative government (p. 99). He invents a perverse logic to scandalize the Liberals calling them: "Freemasons, bad people, wanting to hang priests, to institute civil marriage and divorce, to recognize the rights of illegitimate children as equal to those of legitimate ones,..."(p.98). To Aureliano, this political polemic sounds new and puzzling, a hint on the part of Garcia Marquez, to initiate Macondo's political baptism.

Employing an equally irrational logic the magistrate eulogizes the Conservatives as ones "who had received their power directly from God, proposed the establishment of public order and family morality. They were the defenders of the faith of Christ, of the principle of authority, and were not prepared to permit the country to be broken down into autonomous entities" (p. 98). He brings forth the Manichean divide, an old colonial syndrome and a 19th century practice (accentuated by the civil wars), to an apolitical Macondo. The shift can well be called a preamble to a neo-political dynamic to be initiated and then proliferated in Macondo. Basak (2014) observes in this context , "The magistrate, in his paradigmatic loyalty to the conservatives in power, and in his equally paradigmatic hatred for the Liberals, re-employs the colonial doctrine of division in Macondo" (p.17). Through Don Apolinar's political rhetoric Garcia Marquez reminds us that politics is an ideological construct made by politicians and their administrative machinery, which requires to be validated by people either in obeisance or invalidated by defiance. In Macondo's case, it turns out to be a symbiosis of obeisance and defiance—obeisance, on the part of Jose Arcadio Buendia and his fellow Macondians, in agreeing to accommodate the state machinery to operate from its soil, that is, to accept both the reality of a government and the magistrate Don Apolinar as its representative, and – defiance by disagreeing to surrender all the prerogatives of the early colonizers that they enjoyed so far. The latter is a last-ditch effort to cling to a façade of past glory. The complexity of the shifting positions from (ex/neo) colonizer to (ex/neo) colonized and vice versa undergoes a Fanonian twist; Macondo witnesses a change in mask, not essentially in skin.

Against the diminishing status of Macondo as a Buendian sovereign colony, the incognito state now engages itself to make its presence felt. But its role beyond mere representation is yet to be seen. Garcia Marquez meticulously registers the state's infiltration into Macondo as a disguised colonial force. The subsequent

polarization of bipartisan politics, elections, and election rigging, manipulated victory of the conservatives, popular discontent and preparation for armed resistances by forces antagonistic to the government provide ample clues regarding the colonialist nature of the state. What is more shocking is the later role of the state when it assumes the new role of a colonialist aide to the neo-colonialist United Fruit Company of America. The company's arrival at Macondo and its saga of deceit and exploitation in connivance with the government at center offer a swift change of status of Macondo, state, and UFC. Macondo has already lost its primordial status of a sovereign colony. The state has also consolidated its power over Macondo in a stereotype colonizer-colonized and center-periphery fashion. The United Fruit Company, as the novel poignantly suggests, is historically placed in a new role America wants it to play in Colombia or Latin American countries as a whole – role of an envoy of American neocolonial aspirations. Their triangular presence makes Macondo a colonial / postcolonial test case. Macondo is poised to combat the old colonial and recently surfaced neocolonial trajectories like occupation, representation, repression, exploitation, “thingification” (Cesaire, 2001, p. 42), resistance and massacre. The arrival of the United Fruit Company and its apparatus of exploitation of land, resources and labor, and collaboration of the state machinery with UFO and its distant mentors -- all bring about a process of recolonization, reducing the Macondians to what Aime Cesaire calls a ‘thing’ , a mere commodity, the whole process being what he termed as 'thingification'. That prepares the stage for the subsequent episodes of resistance, protest and massacre of the Macedonians.

Now that once-upon-a-time center of the novel Macondo is turned into a periphery of the state, and the center, on its own turn, turns into a periphery of a distant neocolonial center (USA), there develops a subversive myth of sovereignty and the rise of a de facto colony under the official nomenclature of a postcolonial state. That is to say, prior to the state's swooping claim over it, Macondo had all the airs of an innocent-looking primordial human colony in a utopia-like uninhabited, nameless swampy land. The founders of Macondo had no perceptible colonial agenda like usurpation, subjugation, deracination, exploitation, religious-cultural-linguistic domination etc. except reliving certain outmoded Spanish colonial vestiges. In the stretch of one hundred years Macondo, more so the Buendians, swayed between feudalism and uncluttered democracy, between apolitical elegance and anti-neo-imperialistic entanglements.

It is interesting to observe the transformation of Macondo. The place which was a mere human colony in its founding days without a colony's textbook insignia, took a classic connotation with the arrival of Magistrate Don Apolinar (p. 57). With him, appeared the state, the ruling apparatus, notion of parties, and divides. Then there arrived the instruments of neocolonial mercantilism -- the

gringos and the Banana Company. It was followed by episodes of ruthless exploitation, labor discontent, strike (p. 302), martial law (p. 103), deployment of the army to contain discontent and to act in favor of the American company against the re-colonized (UFC itself being a colonizers' miniature citadel) Macondian plantation workers. It ended in the historical-fictional Banana Massacre (pp. 308-11). The unholy alliance between the state and over-privileged multinational UFC as well as the subsequent chain of events, strongly suggests two prominent developments: firstly, it strips Macondo of its all-too-modest epithet "colony" transforming it into neo-colony of the state and foreign mercantile enterprises; secondly, more significantly, the state itself gets transformed into a banana republic, a de facto postcolonial colony. The political underpinning of the novel obliquely refers to the conservative government of Miguel Abadía Méndez's collaboration with the US government and UFC against its own people that, beyond the magically real realm of Macondo, helped it earn the notoriety of a banana republic.

In his 'Nobel Lecture 1982' Gabriel García Márquez (1990) stressed on the Latin Americans' need to engage in historiographical exercises, to un-write and rewrite the Western construct of Latin American history:

[...] it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth. (pp. 90-91)

This is an act of recasting and re-viewing history through a kind of fiction which is simultaneously utopian and dystopian, therefore, subversive in intent. By subverting the assumed utopian Macondian model with the contemporary dystopian one, García Márquez creates an "ironic apogee" (Palencia-Roth, 1990, p. 41) and points out the extent of a dysfunctional state. On a broader base, the novel critiques the de facto syndrome not only of Macondo or of Colombia alone but also that of all Latin American countries. Robin Fiddian (1995) in his 'Introduction' to García Márquez endorses this conceptualization:

Notwithstanding the numerical exactitude of the novel's title, the broad historical coordinates of the story of Macondo extend over some four and a half centuries, and synthesize the experience of Latin American nations, generally, through almost 300 years of colonial rule, down to the formal proclamation of independence in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, and the nations' subsequent relapse into neo-colonial dependence in the first half of the twentieth. (p. 14)

We can, therefore, deduce, the Banana Massacre is not a fiction with any magic about it but a bleak chapter of Colombia's postcolonial, more precisely

neocolonial history—a kind of history that the conservative government tried to mute, erase, and then to replace with an innocent-looking diminutive version.

Bell-Villada (2002) observes, “The historical record of the United Fruit Company’s operation in Colombia furnishes a textbook case of overseas imperialism and colonialism” (133). Migual Urrutia (1967) goes deeper into the truth: “United’s dominions in the northern coastal portions of Colombia expanded rapidly to become a state-within-a-state and the de facto power in that region” (p. 99). Textually, the first American to arrive at Macondo was Herbert (p. 231), then Jack Brown and the solemn lawyers in black (231-32). Within years the Banana plantation started functioning with the local labor force. The old colonial system of appropriation, exploitation, draining out of resources and overall “thingification” of the populace ( Cesaire, 2001, p. 42) led to a massive labor discontent, useless dialogues and the great strike of 32,000 workers on 5 and 6 December 1928. The United Fruit Company in league with the US government managed the Colombian civilian and military authority to deploy an army to “re-establish public order.” (p. 307)

Martial law was promulgated; the workers stopped working: “the soldiers put aside their rifles and cut and loaded the bananas and started the trains running” (p. 308). The army took over the town; fake dialogues failed, and the stage for massacre was thus made ready. The novel reveals the underlying intent of the call for gathering, “The authorities called upon the workers to gather in Macondo ” (p. 309). Machine guns were stationed on the rooftops for a planned mass slaughter. “[T]here thousand people, workers, women and children gathered” (p. 309). Garcia Marquez articulates the scene with the ease of a historiographer: Decree No. 4 was read out; the crowd was given five minutes to disperse with the warning that the civil and military leader of the province General Carlos Cortes Vargas “authorized the army to shoot to kill” (p. 310). We have from Garcia Marquez (1996) a Guernica painting on the Banana Massacre: “They were penned in, swirling about in a gigantic whirlwind that little by little was being reduced to its epicenter as the edges were systematically being cut off all around like an onion peeled by the insatiable and methodical shears of the machine guns” (p. 311). Fourteen machine guns roared in a chorus. What followed was a sinister scene of death and horror, “[...] a cry of death tore upon the enchantment: ‘Aaaagh, Mother.’ A seismic voice, a volcanic breath, the roar of a cataclysm broke out in the center of the crowd with a great potential of expansion” (p. 311).

Garcia Marquez leaves no doubt that nothing could be more gruesome and ironical than this planned massacre of an unimaginable magnitude. This remains true despite the concern that mythification, by its own strategy, may falsify history, which again by dint of an altogether different strategy may revise and reconstruct a misconstrued history. The massacre is thus posited as a colonial syndrome



which symptomatically manifests itself at a certain juncture of colonization and /or neocolonialism.

The Banana Massacre inadvertently puts history and fiction in a confrontational mode with the charge of adulteration of facts by the government, UFC and US. There are multiple versions of casualties, each validated or invalidated by the other, putting to question the veracity of recorded facts. According to Jose Arcadio Segundo, the death toll might be three thousand, that is, “all of the people who were at the station” (p. 313). The official version claimed: “there were no dead” (p. 315). The commander of the troops, General Cortes Vargas “took the responsibility for 47 casualties” (Posada-Carbo, 1998, pp. 395-414). US Embassy’s telegrams to the Secretary of State on December 7, 1928, reported fifty dead and wounded (note:2). On the other hand, Colombia’s conservative and Liberal newspapers reported contradictory figures of casualties. So, if the fictional version of history as presented in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is anything nearer hyperbole, the government’s version of the massacre and its casualties is a bleak dismissal of truth. It seems to act on behalf of UFC and indirectly, the US against its own people. The question, therefore, unavoidably presents itself: what is the true nature of Colombia’s sovereignty under the factual government of Miguel Abadia Mendez? Is it a postcolonial and/or neocolonial country? The colonial question still dangles without an answer. As we see in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the state of affairs hardly dispels the notion of a de facto colony under the rubric of an independent country which, by extension, indicates a trajectory of US neo-imperial proliferation in the region. Macondo stands for a colony within a larger colony with the old level ‘colony’ historically gone.

Through a process of demystification and aestheticization of Latin American history, specifically Colombia, Garcia Marquez posits the colonial modalities in a postcolonial conundrum threatened by dictatorship, hegemony, and neo-imperialism. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* categorically asserts the question of colonialism and the de facto colonial status of a state under a larger umbrella of global politics, with no less contribution from the homemade paracolonialists.

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