

# Magical Realism, Social Protest and Anti-Colonial Sentiments in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: An Instance of Historiographic Metafiction

Mustanir Ahmad\*  
Hazara University, Pakistan

Ayaz Afsar  
International Islamic University, Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

This article highlights Gabriel García Márquez's use of magical realism in connection to his portrayal of anti-colonial sentiments in his epic novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*, 1967/1970). To study the novel, we define García Márquez's response to the political condition of Latin America in the backdrop of the postcolonial paradigm. Highlighting that magical realism enables a writer to challenge the authenticity of the so-called objective reality and at the same time attempts to "write back to the Centre" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989, ix), we draw attention to the technique of magical realism as an important tool employed to register social protest against the lingering effects of the process of colonialism. We also address the question as to how the moments of magical realism in the novel overlap with various historical dimensions of Latin America, especially Colombia's ability to raise constructs of protest of varying degrees.

**Key Words:** magical realism, postcolonialism, social protest, historiographic metafiction, Latin America

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\* Mustanir Ahmad is assistant professor of English language and literature at Hazara University, Pakistan. Ayaz Afsar is associate professor of English at the International Islamic University, Pakistan. Direct correspondence to Mustanir Ahmad (Email: mustanir@msn.com).

## INTRODUCTION

A close examination of his work reveals that García Márquez treats colonialism as the most significant form of exploitation. Considering it a contributory factor towards colonialism, he is openly hostile to his country's politics and is critical of the power game going on between the Conservatives and the Liberals, as it is this power game that leads to exploitation and ultimately causes anarchy. Its after-effects (or Postcoloniality) have been one of his major concerns. More precisely, he has been very critical of the colonial forces' act of subjugating a nation in order to exploit/(mis)use its social, political, economic, material and intellectual resources. Deeply embedded in the situation arising from the colonial excursions of Spain and North/English America in the South/Latin America, Márquez's work cannot be fully understood without reading it in the context of the (post-)colonial experience of the people of this region. From the exploitation of the Black community in the form of 17<sup>th</sup> century slave-trade to the infamous Banana Plantation Massacre in 1928 and the miserable condition of the postcolonial Colombia, Márquez's fiction is "a form and product of violence" (Aizenberg 1992, 1293) and is replete with instances of protest against exploitation at the hands of colonists. He attributes the arrival of the rail road and the modern technology to be a curse and a source of corruption for the indigenous people not because he did not want them to become modern, but for the very reason that the colonial masters used technological revolution more to exploit the resources of the so-called non-civilized people than to revolutionize the lives of the indigenous population.

Magical realism allows metafictional self-reflexivity work in an equilibrium with literature and history. It is this state of equilibrium that brings forth "ironic inversions of parody" (Hutcheon 1988, 140) that lead to establish the crucial and fundamental relation between art and the world of discourse, ultimately reaching the point where society and politics intermingle and affect each other. According to Hutcheon (1989, 3), postmodernism in fiction describes "fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past". She held that historiographic metafiction is a body of the popular novels which are "both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (1988, 5). In other words, it is a quintessentially postmodern art form, with a reliance upon textual play, parody and historical re-conceptualization. García Márquez's recourse in magical realism has a definite and visible political edge and his work not only does make

the reader question the absolute nature of reality and makes him re-evaluate and ultimately question the authenticity of a politically motivated philosophy that makes an ordinary individual think in a certain way. On the basis of the close reading of his work, it would be appropriate to hold that he was able to raise such strong protest against colonialism only because he chose to write in the tradition of magical realism. García Márquez's multi-layered writings smack of his firm belief in magical realism and can be interpreted on several levels of meanings. An evaluation and analysis of his work on the level of criticism of the process of colonization and its effects on the indigenous land and people makes it interesting and yet useful in terms of a positive contribution to the society; particularly, when the Latin American region constitutes a major as well as representative part of the Third World (Jameson 1986b). According to Swanson (2010), García Márquez, by presenting the bizarre as normal and vice versa, was allowed for "a political reading in which a 'developing world' perspective is privileged from within the implicitly 'First World' form of the novel and in which the reader is being invited to exercise his or her imagination in order to invent an alternate and more just reality for the continent" (58). It is this newly invented/reached alternate and just reality that helps the reader to attempt a politically motivated interpretation of a magical realist text. In other words, a magical realist text is able to hold a political debate from the perspective of the Third World. A journalist turned fiction writer, Márquez's writings reflect a journalistic bent of mind in that he highlights the instances of social injustice in a highly plain manner. His disapproval of the colonial practices can be taken as a prime example of it.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The door of García Márquez's magical-real world of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Solitude*) opens in the newly established village of twenty adobe houses. The village is called Macondo. It is a place far off from rest of the civilization, as the people living here are quite ignorant of their surroundings; they have no knowledge of a rout that may connect them to the outer world. The isolation of the community becomes focus of attention has been emphasized by the author when José Arcadio Buendía, the leader of the 'prehistoric' Macondian community, "was completely ignorant of the geography of the region" (Márquez 1967/1970, 10). If one side of the village laid un-crossable great swamps, the other was

invisible north. In fact, for a considerable period of time he keeps on trying to discover any routs that could connect them to the rest of the world, but the expeditions prove to be fruitless. Magical realism plays its role in highlighting the graveness of the situation in the (post)colonial context right from the beginning. Macondo's geographical location and the failed expeditions of José Arcadio Buendía to connect the village to the outside world hint at that fact that the village is removed from the Centre and forms what is called as periphery. Because the setting is plain and realistic, the magical events occurring without any prior make-up of the readers do not let the latter challenge their authenticity. In the first place, Márquez raises a voice of protest against the Spanish incursions aimed to colonize Latin America, whereas, in the second, he condemns the North American advances in the South to capture and subsequently make use of the resources of the latter. There are mentions of Sir Francis Drake, the 16<sup>th</sup> Century English sea captain, who is known as 'the pirate Sir Francis Drake' (Ibid., 19) in Latin America on account of his expeditions to exploit the Spanish American world in number of ways. According to Bennezet (n.d., 48-49), Francis Drake and John Hawkins, carried out the third English slave-trading expeditions to make fortunes through the abduction and transportation of West African people, and then exchanging them for high-value goods. As a result of the brutalities of the colonisers in the region, people suffered from certain physical as well as mental diseases. Both kinds of trauma can be observed in Ursula Iguarin's great-great-grandmother's sufferings when the reader learns that when the Pirate Sir Francis Drake attacked Riohacha in the sixteenth century.

[...] she became so frightened with the ringing of alarm bells and the firing of cannons that she lost control of her nerves and sat down on a lighted stove. The burns changed her into a useless wife for the rest of her days. She could only sit on one side, cushioned by pillows, and something strange must have happened to her way of walking, for she never walked again in public. She gave up all kinds of activity, obsessed with the notion that her body gave off a singed odor (Márquez 1967/1970, 19).

Márquez makes the description of the terrified lady even gruesome by mentioning that "she did not dare fall asleep lest she dream of the English and their ferocious attack dogs as they came through the windows of her bedroom to submit her to shameful tortures with their red-hot irons" (19-20). Apparently humorous detail of the effects of the attack on one of the prominent inhabitants of the place, as Ursula Iguarin, leads to think what would have been happened to the ordinary men

and women of the village.

As a magical realist, García Márquez deliberately omits certain events and descriptions to be addressed by the reader. One of the defining factors of magical realism, this omission is called authorial reticence. The author withholds certain information to be worked at by the reader's mind. These gaps and pauses play an important role in the context of García Márquez's social protest. Certain moments in history inspire the writers of the coming generations. They comment on these moments and by doing so endeavour to re-establish truth/reality from their particular perspective. The significance of such writings is two-pronged. On the one hand, such writings remind the present generation with long-forgotten events, and on the other, the re-construction of historical events give the author an opportunity to pass his (and his generation and culture's) judgement on it. Fiction has been the most significant of all genres in this context, as it allows the author to give descriptions of certain events in such detail that is the emblem of fiction only. Like rest of the clans of writers, e.g. realists, naturalists, or surrealists, reconstruction of history has been an important subject of the writers of the boom movement, who found magical realism, as a narrative technique, well-suited to give their particular views on past events. These writers especially challenged the official readings of certain historical moments in the course of time. Hegerfeldt (2005, 63) acknowledged that "a considerable number of magic realist works may also be categorized as 'historiographic metafiction' or 'fantastic histories'" that effectively challenge the Western epistemology. A re-writing of the official versions of history offers substitute accounts that sometimes are altogether different from the real ones. By telling the story from the perspective of the oppressed, they reveal the extent to which history never consists of purely factual and impartial accounts, but serves the interests of those who write it.

An abstract and, thus, unperceivable entity, reality is a mere question of perspective. As a general observation, something belonging to the past and having its roots deep in the memory seems to be more reliable as compared to something which belongs either to contemporary times or the near-past. Latin American history, and in fact the history of the whole world, can be challenged on the basis of the abovementioned assumption. Especially, when a little fact is mingled with a lot of fiction, or some ordinary incident is narrated with a deliberate incorporation of myth, or the incident placed and set in the past, the whole juxtaposition seems to have an air of authenticity around it; and the fictitious seems to be reliable, plausible and true. When the entity of the real is upset

within the realm of narrative, it becomes questionable outside the boundaries of fiction as well.

As compared to the other boom writers, e.g. Cortazar and Vargas Llosa, García Márquez has chronicled the history of violence in Latin America much eloquently throughout his literary career (Vela 2006). With a subtle use of the technique of magical realism, he is able to re-create Colombian history to protest against the policies of the colonial masters and the way capitalism told upon the socio-political and economic structure of the region. His epic novel *Solitude* presents synthesis of historical events in symbolic episodes of exploitation of the natives at the hands of the American banana planters. The capitalist exploitation has been exposed by the author in such episodes. The reader finds most of his fiction set in an imaginary town of Macondo that stands allegorical for the Colombian history in specific and Latin American in general. The way Márquez used Macondo as a place where most of his fiction originates attaches extraordinary importance to this place and urges the reader/researcher to explore this in detail.

Being postcolonial in nature, *Solitude* is an embodiment of a shortened version of history. The non-linear time format of the novel stands allegorical for the lengthy process of colonization and how it affected public and private lives of people. The way colonizers established a distorted version of history and used it as a weapon to damage the identity of the local population and to affect the general perception regarding the way the former adopted to overcome or suppress the latter. This has been most strongly abhorred by the author throughout his writings. Just as Ursula becomes heavily disturbed because of the concert of so many different birds that she “would plug her ears with bee wax so as not to lose her sense of reality” (Márquez 1967/1970, 10), the author and his countrymen are deeply concerned to preserve their history lest the reality gets lost in the noise of the colonists and the conservative government. The colonisers’ attempts to achieve the aforementioned objectives include the erasure of certain events from the history and the projection of a fabricated version of ‘truth’, imposed on the indigenous people in the form of books taught at school, college and university level. As the result, the young minds began to accept a forged version of history. García Márquez’s fictional work is an effort to neutralize such attempts of the colonisers to use history to safeguard their vested interests.

It would not be wrong to say that García Márquez’s fiction reveals that a deliberate attempt on his part has been made to re-tell the modern history of Colombia. One of the prime examples of his use of magical

realism as an aide to challenge the official/colonial versions of history is the insomnia plague episode and the incident of banana plantation massacre in the epic novel *Solitude*. The troubled history of the region has been synthesized through the characters' overwhelming struggle against an unfriendly and unsympathetic environment establishes an amalgamation of politico-social and economic tribulations. It is these evils to tell upon the general environment of the continent and ultimately connect the novel to the Latin American condition.

As a consequence of colonialism, political violence and repression affected the ordinary life in Latin America. Embedded in the innumerable civil wars, colonial incursions, and the stagnant political condition of the region, the turbulent history of Colombia has been made the central theme of his novels, e.g. *No One Writes to the Colonel* (1968/1974), *Of Love and Other Demons* (1996/2008), etc. It is pertinent to note that being a Latin American product, the technique of magical realism corresponds to the region's violent history and reflects as people's political as well as daily lives. The modern Colombian history reflects a mixture of the catastrophes such as Spanish colonisation, dictatorial rule, and violence brought to the nation and a substantial quantity of folklore about the way the local population established a resistance against them. A propensity to mythologize such real events of struggle by mingling these with fantastic stories enabled them to create a new kind of truth that is appropriate to the very situation they breathe in; a fantastic-real truth. As a magical realist, Márquez tried to portray the version of reality from the perspective of the 'other' by mingling history and Literature, truth and lies in an inseparable way. The intersecting boundaries of lies and truth make the magical real world of fiction more confusing and uncertain. It is this uncertainty that makes it attractive enough to lead the readers to believe in this amalgamation.

The manifestation of disapproval of colonialism has been found in instances reported in the novel: the introduction of the modern ways as compared to the traditional ones, episodes of violence, comments upon the dichotomy of class, the consequences of moral degeneration, etc. Magical realism plays a pivotal role in highlighting such instances of social protest, sometimes in the form of exaggeration, hyperbole and the carnivalesque language juxtaposed with happenings of serious nature; and sometimes by portraying the serious incidents in a highly plain and simple language. Throughout *Solitude*, colonial excursions have been protested against and it has been highlighted that it was colonialism that caused not only the endless civil wars, military repression, labour strikes and

the ensuing massacres in the Macondian society, but it has been badly affecting the psychological condition of the people to the extent that they forgot everything and lost their sleep. The author makes the readers realize that science, which is thought to be of miraculous nature, has been used as a tool to subjugate nations. The overwhelming biblical tone of the work is an example of the use of magical realism that operates at the narrative level to enhance the idea that everything is possible and plausible in the world. The biblical land of Macondo is violated by the reaches of external world. The magical modern, scientific, and technological inventions have been taken as a source of defilement of the purity of the unadulterated land of Macondo. Not unlike other Spanish settlements, Macondo is founded on a river bank, a place where there were so many new things, birds, trees are to be discovered that they had to name them in order to avoid confusion. “Science had eliminated distance” (Márquez 1967/1970, 3), but had created that of another kind, horrible and crude. The code of the primitive society of Macondo “unity and an acute social consciousness” was broken now. The revelation that the “earth is round like an orange” (5) and not flat like a loaf, is symbolic for the propensity towards a life full of isolation from each other. They were happy that through influence of the external world, “man will be able to see what is happening in anyplace in the world without leaving his own house” (3), but they did not know that it would be fatal for their social life. The way García Márquez explains various scientific inventions and revelations is important in the context of the use of magical realism. He uses extremely plain language to explain the modern devices. For example, the way two metal ingots attracted ordinary things towards them; and the telescope and the magnifying glass (2-3).

The indigenous ways were to be kept safe and secure as compared to the modern ones. For example, José Arcadio Buendía finds nothing significant despite his desperate attempts to discover something of value; instead of finding some treasure of gold with the help of Melquiades’ aforementioned magical ingots, “the only thing he succeeded in doing was to unearth a suit of fifteenth-century armour” (2); and that too eaten up by rust. With the help of the latest discovery of the Jews of Amsterdam, the telescope, they could only amuse themselves by watching a gypsy woman on an arm’s length away. The magnifying glass not only burnt José Arcadio Buendía, but brought him disgrace in front of the authorities, as his experiment of showing its effects on the enemy troops got failed. All such episodes and incidents manifest a negative effect of technological revolution as compared to the primordial and biblical Macondian society.



Latin American writers have responded in their own manner to the numerous ways of interpreting the world and events they are immediately exposed to. One of the examples of such responses is the insomnia plague episode in García Márquez's *Solitude*, which serves as a metaphor to comment upon the imposed version of reality by the colonists or the governmental authorities under their influence. It is of importance that the plague invades the Macondians, ultimately leaving them without any history. From a tribulation of the people of Macando, the insomnia plague emerges as a metaphor to manifest the disgust of the colonized regarding the distortion of historical facts by the colonists. In the broader sense, through the metaphor of this disease, the author challenges the (so-called) absolute reality and efforts to emphasize the very subjectivity of what is supposed to be the real. Considered to be "a powerful form of indirect political resistance" (Bowers 2004, 39), magical realism plays an important role in building a paradigm of protest in form of insomnia plague episode, as well.

Albeit in olden days, plagues used to destroy human lives on large scale; the reason behind García Márquez's naming and treating this disease as a (magical) plague is extraordinary. The very word 'plague' establishes an entity directly derived from the distant human past and has its roots deep in the oral/folklore tradition. Had the author given it some modern name, e.g. some kind of viral infection, etc., most probably he would not have been able to create so powerful a magical impact of his protest upon his readers; the plague is clearly attributed to have magical causes and effects, but the Macondians always keep to find medicinal cures to it. The voice of protest becomes even louder if the whole episode is seen in the backdrop of the traditional Greek or Sophoclean conception of plague, i.e. the whole society has to suffer because of a single sinner, even if the sin is committed unconsciously. In a society where people are already forgetting the centuries old traditions of Chivalry and honour to transcend into a world that is new and modern in all respects and where people are suffering from injustice, one can easily anticipate a plague to come and sweep away the entire population. Here, the plague's magical causes and effects can be directly referred to the guilty conscience of the society at large and that of an individual, i.e. José Arcadio Buendía. The way Prudencio Aguilar is killed on a petty issue of so-called honour tells a great deal about the general perception regarding honour, which is not found in tolerating each other, but in killing the one accused of hurting it. By killing his Prudencio Aguilar, José Arcadio Buendía was able to silence one voice only; the idea of his impotence remained there

in other people. Having realized it, but only after killing his enemy, the latter dared to consummate his marriage with Ursula Iguarin. The sudden disconnection from their past left people startled and identity-less in a whole new world, where there is so much that has yet to be done. But the plague has other implications, as well. The Guajiro Indian woman and her brother are part of Macondo because they had to flee from their home in search of refuge from the disastrous effects of plague. The plague of modernity acts like a viral infection to kill the past of a tribe, rich in tradition and culture, so rapidly that they are left without any memory or identity. It is the extraordinarily factual approach of the townspeople which makes them believe that the plague is a kind of contagious disease for which no cure has been discovered and that can only be escaped by the avoidance of an infected individual or his/her things.

The way plague arrives in the town has enormous significance in the context of social protest. A Guajiro Indian woman, “who had arrived in the town with a brother in flight from a plague of insomnia that had been scourging their tribe for several years” (Márquez 1967/1970, 38), is the carrier of this viral infection. Magical Realism comes into play when the reader is told that the insomnia plague is the result of a viral infection. The connection the author established between the realistic and the fantastic makes the reader believe in the truth of the amalgam. It is significant that the plague first affected some other people of some other nation, i.e. the Indians, and then reached Macondo, which was a place so innocent and prehistoric that even it lacked the names of the things. The moment the Visitacion, the Indian woman, learns that the plague has already affected young Rebecca, she becomes “terrified and exhausted by her fate” (44) and desperately tries to warn José Arcadio Buendía about the disease “whose threat had obliged her and her brother to exile themselves forever from an age-old kingdom where they had been prince and princess” (44-45). But, José Arcadio Buendía’s response was disappointing to her, as it was totally against the ferocious nature of the disease.

“If we don’t ever sleep again, so much the better”, José Arcadio Buendía said in good humor. “That way we can get more out of life”. But the Indian woman explained the most fearsome part of the sickness of insomnia was not the impossibility of sleeping, for the body did not feel any fatigue at all, but its inexorable evolution toward a more critical manifestation: a loss of memory (45).

The inability to realize the devastating nature of the plague on part

of José Arcadio Buendía is similar to the response of the colonized throughout the world towards the colonial incursions (e.g. Latin America, Sub-continent, and Africa). At first, the technological revolution is celebrated and the colonizers are recognised as saviours, but later, when the noise of revolution and modernity sweep away the indigenous culture, language, resources, etc., the latter realize the severity of the situation. There are voices to warn people regarding the graveness of the state of affairs, such as the warnings of the Indian woman in *Solitude*. As Robinson (2006, 250) put it,

The Indian woman connects the plague to herself and her people. This plague is apparently no indiscriminate bug, but a specifically targeted virus attacking her tribe. She warns the town of the symptoms but José Arcadio Buendía reacts with characteristic self-assurance: he concludes that it is just a superstition and not to be taken seriously. However, several weeks later, the family notices that they cannot fall asleep.

On the one hand, the indigenous culture disappears in the noise of drums and kettles of modernism brought by the gringos; and on the other, the erasure of certain historical events and the distortion of history, at the hands of the colonial masters, has been highlighted in the form of incidents like that of Banana Plantation Massacre. Insomnia plague episode is the author's way of protest against the colonial version of the so-called historical reality (i.e. the region is uncivilized and inferior in culture and is dependent upon the Centre to become educated and thus economically/culturally developed) imposed on the Latin American world. Visitation, Cataure and Rebeca represent the real inhabitants of the region, who have been deprived of their past and subsequently their true identity. The Spanish conquerors not only invaded their lands, but imposed their language, culture, religion and tradition on them. The invasion was so intense that the original inhabitants of Latin America fell prey to a state of utter confusion and depravity. The concept of mulatto is important in this respect. The Europeanization of a whole race became the chief goal of the colonizers. García Márquez's use of magical realism is not unlike dramatic irony. According to Hegerfeldt (2005, 214), when

[...] the characters' rejection of events as fantastic is contradicted by the reader's knowledge that they are true, the resulting tension underscoring the events' outrageousness. Though rejection and rationalization differ from dramatic irony in that the characters are not necessarily ignorant of what is going on, but may merely be dissembling, the strategies resemble dramatic irony in that the text sets up two contradictory perspectives to make its

horrible point.

When the plague fully takes the inhabitants of Macondo in its clutches and they forget the names of even ordinary things of everyday use, they paste name-signs onto almost every object they have. While establishing that reality is not absolute, as is generally thought, but may have a number of perspectives, García Márquez takes a firm position on the attempted cultural invasion by the outsiders. It was Aureliano Buendía who conceives the formula of how to protect his people from getting completely mad. “With an inked brush, he marked everything with its name: *table, chair, clock, door, wall, bed, pan* [...] *cow, goat, pig, hen, cassava, caladium, banana*” (Márquez 1967/1970, 48). By mixing magical beliefs (e.g. belief in extraordinary concepts and happenings like spirits and ghosts, flying carpets, angels landing in the courtyard, a presence of myth and magic in the daily affairs, etc.) and postmodern ideas regarding language (e.g. the ideas regarding language, knowledge and power; and the uncertainty of the relation of sign to the signified and signifier), the author emphasized the notion of poststructuralist theory –of the place and power of language in creation– by depicting incidents to propagate language as a source of bringing forth reality. García Márquez seems to be relating that it is language that makes our abstract beliefs and ideas to form a concrete world-view.

The arrival of insomnia plague in the House of Buendía stands symbolic for the deliberate attempts of the governmental authorities to erase the local culture and ways from the collective memory of the Colombian nation. Through the insomnia plague episode, the author registered his protest against the manipulated version of history. The massacre of the workers of banana plantation ultimately made to sink into the sea of oblivion denotes to a corrupt government’s deliberate attempt to manipulate reality to form a shield of complete ignorance. The whole episode, as portrayed by García Márquez in *Solitude*, becomes a means to reflect a directed or manipulated reality by a corrupt government, until there remains not even a single believable version of events, but just what can be called an amalgamation of some conflicting self-contradictory accounts. It is such accounts without any evidence that the people of Macondo are left with. The notion of jumbled time equally contributes to the central idea behind the insomnia plague episode. Every single character had had a unique experience of time that is extraordinarily of no-linear nature. Disruptions of linear time on so large a scale is of peculiar significance, as when looked at in the backdrop of the self-repeating genealogy of

the Buendía family, insomnia plague, the vanishing of the town itself from the history, and the attempts –on part of Aureliano Buendía the first– to invent a memory machine is a direct attempt on part of the author to attach a higher level of importance to be attached to history.

Perhaps the most important factor which drove the colonial masters to colonize different lands and subjugate people was the economic one. The colonizers exploited the natural resources of colonies on so huge a scale that the colonies were literally drained of the raw materials they naturally produced. Due to the rapid process of industrialization, Europe, especially England, France, and America were in great need of raw materials like cocoa, palm oil, peanuts, cotton goods, tea, indigo, etc. In order to meet these needs, these powerful countries colonized a significant part of the world and made sure not to let go of any opportunity to exploit the natural resources of the colonized lands. Colombia, being a part of the world that is full of natural resources, was equally exploited by the colonists. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, North America exerted a powerful influence on Colombia, which reflects throughout its history. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century America started its interference in the affairs of Panama in the guise of assistance regarding the matters of succession of the latter. But the assistance was extended to the coming decades. Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the economic condition of Colombia depended upon the plantation of banana, which was considered as the country's chief export. Bananas however were replaced by other natural products like petroleum, minerals, coffee, cocoa, etc. On his way back to Aracataca, his native place, many years later, Márquez recalls that,

The Sierra Nevada de Santa María and its white peaks seemed to come right down to the Banana plantations on the other side of the river. From there you could see the Arawak Indians moving in lines like ants along the cliffs of the sierra, carrying sacks of ginger on their backs and chewing pellets of coca to make life bearable. As children we dreamed of parched, burning streets. For the heat was so implausible, in particular at siesta time, that the adults complained as if it were a daily surprise. From the day I was born I had heard it said, over and over again, that the rail lines and camps of the United Fruit Company had been built at night because during the day the sun made the tools too hot to pick up (Márquez 2002/2008, 5).

The passage is important as it carries a feeling of disapproval of the exploitation of the indigenous population and their resources. The Arawak Indians provided a much cheaper and problem-free replacement of labour,

as the indigenous labourers could be paid in the form of vouchers usable only at the Company's stores and they did not resist either (Márquez 1967/1970, 305-306).

Based in the United States, The United Fruit Company (UFC) invested huge sums of money in the business of bananas in Colombia. Not unlike the East India Company that entered India in the guise of traders only to occupy the whole Sub-Continent and remained in possession of the rule for more than two hundred years, the UFC gradually assumed full control of the Banana Zone – an area in Colombia specifically suitable for banana plantations. The UFC exploited the resources of the area as much as it could. It adopted a particular strategy for their purpose; the company would enter an area, build a company town, attract workers, and pay them in scrip redeemable only in the stores established by the company itself. On recognising that either the land is not that productive due to over-cultivation or the workers are being unionized, the UFC would leave the project and seek another place for banana plantations. The same episode would be repeated at the new banana plantation. It was this “false splendor of the banana company” (Márquez 2002/2008, 62) that made the deprived workers even poorer and gradually a strong sense of hatred got developed against the UFC's administration. It was October 1928, when a number of people working on the banana plantations of the UFC went on strike. They demanded proper sanitary facilities and cash salaries. At last the catastrophe occurred when a huge crowd gathered in the central plaza of Cienaga to protest against the atrocities of the company. While the workers were demonstrating for their rights, troops, who were being paid by the company in the form of cigarettes, beer and other commodities of daily use, opened fire on the crowd. As the result of the incident, more than 1500 people died on the spot whereas some 3,000 others were left injured. Ironically, the conservative government denied any such occurrence and, as a result the incident was not included in the history (text-)books.

La massacre de la bananeras [the massacre of banana workers] is considered as a significant episode of the denial of labour rights in the history of Colombia. Despite the fact that the conservative government made every effort to make people forget the terrible incident of the ruthless killing of innocent labourers, when the election held in 1930, the conservatives lost their rule over the country. According to Kristal (2005, 93), in Márquez's mind a “visceral anti-imperialist sentiment was implanted early, by his grandfather's descriptions of the striking United Fruit Company workers”. Much later, it was the same memory of censuring

the incident out of history books provoked Márquez to recreate history through his *Solitude*.

In the second chapter of his autobiography, García Márquez (2002/2008) recalled his memories regarding the massacre and what happened right after it was carried out. Some critics have doubted the number of those killed in the massacre and thus questioned the authenticity of the description García Márquez has placed before a vast readership in *Solitude*. It has also been alleged that by doing so he has made a mountain out of a mole. Admitting that he himself was troubled by a sense of frustration, he investigated the massacre incident and “spoke with survivors and witnesses and searched through newspaper archives and official documents [and reached the conclusion that] truth did not lie anywhere” (Márquez 2002/2008, 62). All the major stakeholders differed from one another;

Conformists said, in effect, that there had been no deaths. Those at the other extreme affirmed without a quaver in their voices that there had been more than a hundred, that they had been seen bleeding to death on the square, and that they were carried away in a freight train to be tossed into the ocean like rejected bananas (62).

García Márquez acknowledged how deeply he was affected by the banana plantation massacre:

It was there, my mother told me that day, where in 1928 the army had killed the undetermined number of banana workers. I knew the event as if I had lived it, having heard it recounted and repeated thousand times by my grandfather from the time I had memory: the soldier reading the decree by which the striking labourers were declared a gang lawbreakers; the three thousand men, women, and children motionless under the savage sun after the officer gave them five minutes to evacuate the square; the order to fire, the clattering machine guns spitting in white-hot bursts, the crowd trapped by panic as it was cut down, little by little, by methodical, insatiable scissors of shrapnel (14-15).

Like most of his works, the setting of García Márquez’s *Solitude* revolves around a mythological village called Macondo. From the very beginning, it is presented as a place characterized by an extraordinarily peaceful environment, the idiosyncrasies of its inhabitants and an extraordinary process of evolution. The meaning of the word Macondo in Bantu language is ‘banana’, which is sufficient to prove the purpose behind Márquez’s writing *Solitude* and as to what extent he was affected by the incident of Banana Plantation Massacre. Equally important in this regard is that

Macondo is the setting of the most of his works. To be precise, it was the name of a banana plantation near Aracataca, his hometown. Márquez (2002/2008, 41) stated as how the UFC approached the native lands:

The gringo engineers navigated in rubber boats among drowned mattresses and dead cows. The United Fruit Company, whose artificial system of irrigation were responsible for the unrestrained waters [...].

The language the author used to narrate the arrival of the foreigners smacks of a sense of disappointment. The author reconstructed history and held a pen-protest against the official denial of so catastrophic an incident as the massacre of the poor workers of the banana plantations, when José Arcadio Segundo cannot convince anyone that the massacre of strikers he witnessed had actually occurred. García Márquez's skill lies in the fact that he "presents a supernatural occurrence and then immediately draws the reader's attention to a relatively banal detail" (Warnes 2005, 8).

The novel deals with the incidents related to the civil war and is autobiographical in many senses. According to Johnston,

The seemingly endless civil war portrayed in the novel one can see as directly based on the civil wars in Columbia from 1885 to 1902, and the character of Colonel Aureliano has many affinities with General Rafael Uribe Uribe, under whom the grandfather of the author fought (Public Lecture, March 28, 1995).

However, the struggles of General Uribe came to an end in 1902, when he signed the Treaty of Neerlandia, an event also portrayed in *Solitude*. The first three decades of the Nineteenth Century witnessed the notorious colonization of Colombia by the UFC, based in Boston, United States of America. On October 7, 1928, in a mass strike of 32,000 workers of the banana plantations, the authorities engaged its troops to stop the workers from holding anti-government demonstrations. The clashes resulted in the form of a massacre, which took place in Cienaga on December 5, 1928 (Cantor 1968; Darraj 2006; Márquez 2002/2008; Meade 2010). It would not be wrong to say that *Solitude* is the reconstruction of the history of the evolution of a human settlement, as it tells the story of the six generations of the Buendía family which plays the central role in the novel. Here, like any great epic, the reader comes across to a picture of how at a particular moment in human civilization a particular group of people organized its life. It deals with a particular nation's historical



reality; in this case, it is the development of the Latin American country of Colombia since its independence from Spain in the early decades of nineteenth century. The seemingly endless civil war portrayed in the novel directly corresponds to the civil wars in Columbia from 1885 to 1902. The character of Colonel Aureliano Buendía has great resemblance with General Rafael Uribe Uribe, under whom the grandfather of the author had fought. Uribe's struggles ended in 1902 with the Treaty of Neerlandia, an event in the novel.

García Márquez is quite ironical when he talks about Mr. Herbert and the ulterior motives behind his trip. The underlying ironical tone of the below-mentioned statement tells a great deal about the way the natives have been exploited by the colonisers throughout the globe. Not unlike Shakespeare's character Caliban, José Aureliano Segundo serves his guest with the highest degree of hospitality, but feels worst disappointment and the same sense of indignation towards Mr. Herbert (Márquez 1967/1970, 38) –once felt by Caliban for the colonisers of his inherited island– when he is paid back in the form of slavery (Shakespeare 1612/1995). Exploitation on the basis of race has been the very foundation of the modern-colonial world and, unfortunately, “the modern-postmodern political [system] has been blind to it” (Mignolo 2002, 87). He suggested that the problem of differences on the basis of race arise because of a colonial ‘double bind’ better known and termed as ‘border thinking’. According to Bernasconi (1997), the border thinking results from the fact that either the indigenous ways are so similar to the Western traditions that it is unable to make a substantially distinctive contribution to it and disappears or there is so much difference between the two that either one’s “credentials to be genuine philosophy will always be in doubt” (70).

Mr. Herbert had an air of friendliness around himself as he got mixed up with the townspeople and was enjoying the beauty of the countryside. With his net and a small basket, he was often found hunting butterflies on the outskirts of the town. Although everyone in the town waited for him “to pass a final and revealing judgment, [Mr. Herbert] did not say anything that allowed anyone to guess his intentions” (Márquez 1967/1970, 232). Just like the townspeople, it is equally disturbing for the readers when “On Wednesday a group of engineers, agronomists, hydrologists, topographers, and surveyors arrived who for several weeks explored the places where Mr. Herbert had hunted his butterflies” (Ibid.).

So evident is the proof that the reader at once relates the suspicious visits of Mr. Herbert and the entrance of Mr. Jack Brown after the arrival of a whole team of scientists, geographers, surveyors, etc. in apparently

so insignificant a place like Macondo. The dwellers of the town, however, were also struck with the notion that the visits had some connection with war. Things closed in on them so hurriedly that they could not do anything to check even criticise these visits, and were left only with a sense of wonder over the strange change that had marked their town:

There was not much time to think about it, however, because the suspicious inhabitants of Macondo barely began to wonder what the devil was going on when the town had already become transformed into an encampment of wooden houses with zinc roofs inhabited by foreigners who arrived on the train from halfway around the world, riding not only on the seats and platforms but even on the roof of the coaches (Ibid.).

Colonel Aureliano Buendía, comments on the barefoot policemen walking on the streets with their wooden clubs: “This is a regime of wretches” (244). His words could be interpreted in another way in the light of Colonel’s statement that, “We fought all those wars and all of it just so that we didn’t have to paint our houses blue” (Ibid.), which is certainly the colour of their opposite political force.

The foreigners, who were dictatorial in their approach as compared to the local functionaries, lived in the ‘electrified chickenyard’ due to their security concerns. Another reason of their isolation may be to keep their motive hidden as far as it was possible. However, the ‘barefoot policemen’ were gradually replaced by “hired assassins with machetes” (Ibid.). The colonel’s decision to “shut up [himself] in his workshop” (Ibid.) and being disappointed over his “mistake not to have continued the war to its final conclusion” (Ibid.) tell a great deal about the graveness of the situation prevalent due to the colonization of Macondo by the America based United Fruit Company. Follows the catastrophic incident of the brutal killing of one of the brothers of Colonel Magnifico Visbal and his grandson; the child was cut into pieces by a policeman when the former happened to accidentally spill the drink on the uniform of the latter. The grandfather too was chopped by the sharp machetes of the officer.

The barbarian cut him to pieces with his machete, and with one stroke he cut off the head of the grandfather as he tried to stop him. The whole town saw the decapitated man pass by as a group of men carried him to his house, with a woman dragging the head along by its hair, and the bloody sack with the pieces of the child (Ibid.).

The abovementioned incident is also referred to as a real one by the author in his autobiography:

It began on a Saturday worse than the others when a respectable townsman whose identity did not pass into history went into a tavern to ask for a glass of water for a little boy whose hand he was holding. A stranger drinking alone at the bar wanted to force the boy to take a drink of rum instead of water. The father tried to stop him, but the stranger persisted until the frightened boy knocked over his drink without meaning to. Without hesitation, the stranger shot him dead (Márquez 2002/2008, 46).

It caused among the townspeople a revolt, which got its roots even more firm in their hearts. The feelings that were suppressed either by force or voluntarily, could no more be bottled up. “For Colonel Aureliano Buendía it meant the limits of atonement” (Márquez 1967/1970, 244) and he felt the same indignation which he had experienced once a long time ago, when people clubbed a woman to death because she had been bitten by a rabid dog (104). Being resolved now, the Colonel declared a rebellion against the colonisers: “One of these days [...] I’m going to arm my boys so we can get rid of these shitty gringos!” (245). But, “so many changes took place in such a short time that eight months after Mr. Herbert’s visit the old inhabitants had a hard time recognizing their own town” (234). In a place where people believed and talked about miracles and strange happenings like the rising of Remedios the Beauty to the heavens, the centre of attention had been now changed from such strange happenings to the atrocities of the government towards the Buendía family.

Perhaps there might have been talk of nothing else for a long time if the barbarous extermination of the Aurelianos had not replaced amazement with horror (243).

This, however, brought the worst disaster to the Buendía family, which one could have ever thought of. Seventeen sons of the Colonel were “hunted down like rabbits by invisible criminals who aimed at the center of their crosses of ash” (245). Not unlike most of the Third World countries, the president of the country expressed his grief over the tragedy that had befallen the Buendía family, as he “sent a telegram of condolence in which he promised an exhaustive investigation and paid homage to the dead men” (246). But the Colonel, knowing it very well that it was the government who had been responsible for the brutal killing of his

sons, refused to accept the funeral wreaths which were to be placed on the coffins by the mayor. He rather wrote a letter to the president in order to protest against the atrocities carried out against his family by the people backed by the authorities. On the basis of his experiences, Colonel Aureliano Buendía held that “The only difference today between Liberals and Conservatives that the Liberals go to mass at five o’clock and the Conservatives at eight” (248).

Gradually, the foreigners established themselves in the town; they built houses and colonies separate to those of the natives, and made a discrete identity. They brought their families and settled in. They had an air about them as if they are to do something very important. The presence of the foreigners in the town was not something the townspeople were alien to. They already knew the stories of far flung lands and the strange inventions from the gypsies. But this time, the arrival of foreigners was altogether different from the earlier ones; they had brought a heightened degree of disturbance with them. The episode of modernity that was started by the gypsies, who brought with them new things from the outside world, was now moving towards its climax.

No one knew yet what they were after, or whether they were actually nothing but philanthropists and they had already caused a colossal disturbance, much more than that of the old gypsies, but less transitory and understandable (233).

Rightly does Colonel Aureliano Buendía point out that the whole situation had been caused “just because [they] invited a gringo to eat some bananas” (234).

Similarly, magical realism can be seen working in the full in the description of the unfortunate incident in which José Arcadio shot himself and, despite the numerous corners and long distance, the blood went up and down all the way to ultimately reach the Buendía house, so that the blood relatives may know about the tragedy. The extraordinarily long sentence is a perfect blending of magical and the real; the reader voluntarily accepts what is magical. The element of protest manifests in the fact that the political upheaval causes the unnatural death of José Arcadio. It is to note that upon reaching the dead body, they found no wound on it; and the blood flowed only from the ear of the corpse.

A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued on it in a straight line across the uneven terraces, went down steps and climbed over curbs, passed along the Street

of the Turks, turned a corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle at the Buendía house, went in under the closed door, crossed through the parlor, hugging the walls so as not to stain the rugs, went on to the other living room, made a wide curve to avoid the dining-room table, went along the porch with the begonias, and passed without being seen under Amaranta's chair as she gave an arithmetic lesson to Aureliano José, and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Ursula was getting ready to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread (135).

The journey of the blood ended when it reached where it originally belonged. On its way, it did not stain the rugs of anything else. The episode is ostensible for the native tradition of a wish to be buried where they originally belonged, a desire seldom fulfilled in the colonial times and during the long civil wars fought due to colonialism.

The Company exploited the poor natives, even their own people, on so large a scale that their socio-economic condition became terrible by every coming day. The introduction of a special payment mode, which made the workers of all types being paid not in the form of currency notes, but in the way of coupons which could only be cashed in the shape of goods at stores set up by the company. The workers protested, as,

They were not being paid in real money but in scrip, which was good only to buy Virginia ham in the company commissaries. José Arcadio Segundo was put in jail because he revealed that the scrip system was a way for the company to finance its fruit ships, which without the commissary merchandise would have to return empty from New Orleans to the banana ports (305-306).

One of the other reasons behind the mass strikes of the banana plantation workers was that they were not provided with sufficient medical and sanitation facilities. The poor workers, who worked day and night for mere scrip, were even denied these basic facilities that were considered to be the right of the workers all over the world.

The company physicians did not examine the sick but had them lined up behind one another in the dispensaries and a nurse would put a pill the color of copper sulphate on their tongues, whether they had malaria, gonorrhoea, or constipation (306).

It is of particular significance to note that the narrator is unable even to name the medicine. The only fact he is able to relate about the medicine is its colour of 'copper sulphate' and that the pill was used to cure all

kind of diseases, irrespective of their nature and severity. The magical realist language works to build a tone of protest throughout the episode. The description of plain reality about the way the patients were administered the pills and the sudden use of scientific terminology to explain the colour of the pills heighten the bitterness of the narrative in that the reader is made well aware that the patients were deceived by the company physicians. The patients, on the other hand, could not even tell between the tablets because these were of the same colour, i.e. copper sulphate.

About the poor condition of sanitary facilities, the narrator reveals that,

The company workers were crowded together in miserable barracks. The engineers, instead of putting in toilets, had a portable latrine for every fifty people brought to the campus at Christmas time and they held public demonstrations of how to use them so that they would last longer (Ibid.).

Despite a number of appeals to the authorities, when the workers could not succeed in getting their problems solved, they “turned away from the authorities in Macondo and brought their complaints to the higher courts” (307). But the high ups of the Banana Plantation Company were too influential to suppress the voice of the workers. The perverted system of justice only turned a deaf ear to the petitions of the workers, and some “sleight-of-hand lawyers proved that the demands lacked all validity” (Ibid.) and that the banana company could not entertain the demands of the workers, as “they were all hired on a temporary and occasional basis” (Ibid.). The workers got flared up on such an unjust attitude of the governmental authorities, higher courts and their employers. It was then the “great strike broke out” (Ibid.) and the cultivation stopped altogether. The situation got even worsened when the owners of the United Fruit Company saw their huge sum of capital invested in the banana business going wasted in the form of “the fruit rotted on the trees and the hundred-twenty-car trains remained on the sidings” (Ibid.).

[...] [The protests began and] the idle workers overflowed the towns. The street of the Turks echoed with a Saturday that lasted for several days and in the poolroom at the Hotel Jacob they had to arrange twenty-four-hour shifts (Ibid.).

The banana plantation company tried to curb the protests with the help of the force government provided them. One day, the authorities opened fire on the workers gathered to demonstrate against the company.

The captain gave order to fire and fourteen machine guns answered at once. [...] The people in front had already [got down], swept down by the wave of bullets. The survivors, instead of getting down, tried to go back to the small square, and the panic became a dragon's tail in the street across the way, where the machine guns were also firing without cease (311).

José Arcadio Segundo was the only survivor among a mob of more than three thousand people, who were now left dead by the brutal United Fruit Company.

He “dragged himself from one car to another in the direction in which the train was heading, and in the flashes of light that broke through the wooden slates as they went through the sleeping town he saw the man corpses, woman corpses, child corpses who would be thrown into the sea like rejected bananas” (312).

The curse set by Úrsula Iguarán on Colonel Aureliano Buendía when the latter declines the requests of the former regarding the death sentence awarded to Colonel Gerinaldo Márquez. The bitterness of Úrsula's curse characterizes the anger of the colonized;

I know that you're going to shoot Gerinaldo [...] and that I can't do anything to stop it. But I give you one warning: as soon as I see his body I swear to you by the bones of my father and mother, by the memory of José Arcadio Buendía, I swear to you before God that I will drag you out from wherever you're hiding and kill you with my own two hands (173).

She further declares it as “the same as if [Colonel Aureliano Buendía had] been born with the tail of a pig” (174). Úrsula's curse is the manifestation of indignation and resentment of the oppressed for the oppressor. The use of magical realism as a narrative device in his fiction, García Márquez makes it more relevant to the postcolonial debate. Not only do his writings manifest an expression of a subjective colonial experience, but also comment upon the prevalent socio-political conditions of Latin America. With a skilful use of magical realism, he challenges the official readings of history, the ones which were previously thought to be as absolute and, therefore, unchallengeable. In *Solitude*, García Márquez tells the story of a family and their village and in doing so, according to McMurray (1969) he describes much of Colombian history by analysing its successes and failures as an independent republic. Challenging the history of a country being ruled by dictators is literally impossible, but he does so by employing the device

of magical realism. He is able to do it on the basis of the idea that nothing is absolute and that everything can be called into question. The novel constitutes a realm of its own, proving that the Colombian history can also be challenged. In the backdrop of Postcolonial theories and writings, a number of writers have produced marvellous literatures, but those written by the magical realists prove to be an effective answer of the Empire to the Centre. By mingling subjective with the so-called objective, García Márquez and other magical realists call the thought-to-be-reality into question.

## CONCLUSION

The technique of magical realism is relevant to the postcolonial reality and the subsequent voice of protest raised against the ways in which (post)colonialism has told upon the socio-political and economic systems of the (previously-)colonized nations. A magical realist uses it to create parallel realities and makes the reader, on both individual and collective level, experience different dimensions of reality by writing about an incident with necessary level of conviction. Magical realism has been helpful to García Márquez in a number of ways to register protest against exploitation in terms of colonialism, a major form of social injustice, i.e. race and identity. From the portrayal of the indigenous inhabitants of the region to the mulatto and from civil wars to the banana plantation massacre, the novelist highlighted various constructs of injustice. It has been revealed that García Márquez's re-construction of Colombian history in *Solitude* with the help of the device of magical realism leads him to register a forceful protest regarding (in)direct physical/psychological/verbal/mental violence against the 'other' of the society. In short, *Solitude* demonstrates a successful employment of magical realism as a narrative technique to comment/protest on the way colonisation affected the socio-political, economic, and cultural dimensions of the Latin American, especially Colombian, society. As an instance of historiographic metafiction, *Solitude* gives the reader an opportunity to see certain individual past events, e.g. banana plantation massacre, civil wars, etc., while relying upon the novelist's use of paratextual conventions of historiography to suggest that the so-called objectivity and conviction behind the historical sources of such events can be called into question.



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