DECOLONIZATION AND DEMYSTIFICATION: ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE AND NATIONHOOD

Suradech Chotiudompant*

Abstract

This essay aims to explore how the interconnected issues of nationhood and national identity are treated in Gabriel García Márquez's novel *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*). Through a discussion of the two basic yet complex themes of reality and history set against the exclusive backdrop of Colombian history, it is also intended to show how the author reinscribes the myth of nationhood by decentering what Jean-François Lyotard terms the metanarratives of the West, while simultaneously demystifying the monolithic concept of national identity in this work.

Introduction

What is a nation? As early as the late nineteenth century, Ernest Renan suggested that the idea of 'nation' might not be as old as had been expected. For Renan (1882:19), the concept of nationhood has nothing to do with the homogeneity of race, language, religious tendencies, geography, or material interest; on the contrary, what we know as nation is dependent upon two fundamental issues: the recognition of a collective memory and present-day consent. Following Renan's line of thought, the concept of nationhood hinges more on the subject's imagination, rather than on any materialistic aspect. This is in line with Benedict Anderson's argument (1991:6-7) that what we nowadays perceive as a nation is nothing but an imagined community, something that emerges out of public consent and a shared memory. To a certain degree, it can be construed that both Renan and Anderson challenge crude concepts of nationhood often exploited in colonial discourse, especially those which dwell on such materialistic ideas as the purity of race and the definiteness of geographical borders; their redefinitions of nationhood allow scholars to share a view that nationhood is a fluid, dynamic concept, a human construct whose development depends as much on historical contingencies and public imagination as on military impositions (see also Anderson, 1991:42-43).

These ideas proposed by Renan and Anderson are bound to have repercussions. If what we mean by nationhood relies much on our imagination, the idea of static national identity which does not change through time also comes under scrutiny. Also realizing this, Frantz Fanon (1967:41) urges native intellectuals who wish to create cultural works to celebrate their nationhood to consider carefully what the nation really is; otherwise, they may produce works which make use of exotic particularisms, thereby being at risk of alienating themselves even more from their compatriots. For Fanon, what characterizes nationhood is not an zittha (AD 1084-1112), where, in giving

*Ph.D.candidate, Department of Comparative literature, Warwick University, England.

objective entity, awaiting the artist's usurpation:

> That extremely obvious objectivity which seems to characterize a people is in fact only the inert, already forsaken result of frequent, and not always very coherent, adaptations of a much more fundamental substance which itself is continually renewed (Fanon, 1967:41).

Like Renan and Anderson, Fanon acknowledges the dynamic concept of nationhood, arguing that the concept is more fluid than it seems. Fanon also suggests that what we know as the nation is also more 'international', given modern techniques of information transfer, which renders the world smaller. The traffics of cultural transfer, be they language or dress, play a part in dialectically reorganizing the public imagination and, consequently, their cultural manifestations, which in turn affect the sense of nationhood (Fanon, 1967:42). In other words, what Fanon defines as the nation is anything but monolithic and stagnant.

This essay aims to link these theoretical positions to Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in an attempt to show how the Colombian writer explores the myth of nationhood in his novel through the establishment of the Buendía family in the imaginary town of Macondo. García Márquez himself said in an interview that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* can be read as an account of Latin American history (Mendoza, 1983:73). Gerald Martin (1987:97) also suggests that 'the story of the Buendía family is obviously a metaphor for the history of the continent since Independence, that is, for the neocolonial period'. This essay aims to further explore these views to investigate how García Márquez makes sense of nationhood and national identity in the context of Latin American post-independence through a discussion of the two main issues of reality and history.

Colombia, Latin America, and Macondo

It is worthwhile at this stage to look back at the Latin America continent to see how Colombia has emerged. To discuss Colombia by discarding the picture of Latin America as a whole would be a rash, if not erratic, decision, since a country now labelled as *La República de Colombia* only formed itself in the late nineteenth century. Like other countries in Latin America, Colombia gained its post-colonial independence in the early nineteenth century; yet, their sense of collective nationhood has still not been properly formed. According to Jean Franco (1989:205), this can be attributed to the rise of oligarchic control in many Latin American countries after Spanish domination:

> the stabilization of the nation state (often built on old colonial bureaucratic infrastructures) occurred for the most part without grass-roots participation or any form of democratic and was often vehiculated by autocratic or populist/authoritarian regimes.

In addition, its vague territorial aspect and political instabilities, resulting in its ambiguous spatial borders, complicate Colombia's rapport with the Continent.

On the most general level, Latin America was one of the last continents to be discovered. Its plethora of resources had continued to lure people from other continents for centuries. Brought to the awareness of the Western world by Christopher Columbus, the continent subsequently underwent surges of European people who came in search of fortune. Given such interventions, the earlier kingdoms established by the natives, such as the Incas and the Mayas, went through changes in their cultural and power structures. During the seventeenth century, certain towns in present-day Colombia, such as Bogotá and Cartagena, were already centres of intercontinental commerce and cultural transfer. In the eighteenth century, at the cusp of colonial domination, Colombia was part of the Viceroyalty of New Granada.

The processes of colonization by the Spanish were carried out with relative ease, as the assimilation between the two cultures was not as difficult as could be expected. In fact, they shared comparable ideas of political sovereignty: both the Iberian and the native Latin American kingdoms believed that leadership and its legitimacy had a divine source, as exemplified in the system of monarchy. Furthermore, both societies were seigneurial: the power structure existed in hierarchical levels, with nobles heading their subjects and owning large estates worked by tribute-paying peasants. Apart from that, the colonial domination was also facilitated by the *mestizaje* (injudiciously translated as *miscegenation*) among the three main races, i.e., the Spaniards, the Indians, and the Africans. Colonial power, however, lasted until 1810, when juntas of local nobles expelled royal governors as they tried to establish their own local governments. After the colonial period, *La Repúblicade Colombia*, or Colombia as we know it today, was not materialised until 1886, as the area had experienced a large scale of political instability (see also Raymond Leslie Williams, 1991:5-12).

Born in the early twentieth century, García Márquez experienced the political turmoil that lasted until the time when he was writing *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. These immediate political uncertainties, more often than not taking place owing to ideological clashes mainly inspired by strong yet conflicting senses of patriotism, naturally lead García Márquez to contemplate the essence of post-colonial national identity. His novels can be analysed in terms of this reflection of national consciousness, since the novel and nationhood are deeply related, as Timothy Brennan (1990:50) argues:

> the novel [...] directed itself to an 'open-ended present'. In its hands, 'tradition' became what [Eric] Hobsbawm calls a 'useable past', and the evocation of deep, sacred origins — instead of furthering unquestioning, ritualistic reaffirmations of a people [...] — becomes a contemporary, practical means of *creating* a people.

Following Brennan's logic, analysing a novel, therefore, can be an enriching experience in the sense that it can give a perceptive reader an insight into how nationhood is brought into existence and developed. In this light, an analysis of

Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* can be seen as an investigation into, and an affirmation of, what, for the Colombian writer, constitutes nationhood and a sense of national consciousness. Macondo's growth and its constant contacts with external sources of influence can be seen in parallel to the history of Colombia itself.

At the beginning of the novel when Macondo is established, the founding people are full of hope and optimism. They leave their original homeland with a view to founding a town by the sea. However, after months of failure they decide to stop travelling and simply establish a new city in the middle of nowhere:

> [...] José Arcadio Buendía and his men, with wives and children, animals and all kinds of domestic implements, had crossed the mountains in search of an outlet to the sea, and after twenty-six months they gave up the expedition and founded Macondo, so they would not have to go back. It was, therefore, a route that did not interest him, for it could lead only to the past (*OHS*, 14).[1]

In fact, the founding couple, José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula Iguarán, are relatives and their marriage in their homeland is scandalized, as people believe that their offspring will be cursed and born with a pig's tail. This unfortunate situation is rendered more tragic when José Arcadio Buendía kills Prudencio Aguilar to defend his honour. Even though the killing is later legitimized as a duel of honour, the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar continues to haunt him. Thus, José Arcadio Buendía thinks that it is time he and his wife left the town and founded a new one, where people can live free of their past. To analyse Macondo as a nation in this light can thus be compared to a journey back through time, to the time when a nation first comes to exist, develop, and encounter extraneous influence, both benign and malign, not unlike the emergence of Colombia which has started with hope after a long period of colonization and has withstood years of post-colonial conflicts and violence.

Even though in the novel García Márquez does not touch directly upon Colombia during the colonial period, its consequences are still clearly perceiveable. For instance, the presence of Spanish Catholicism is symbolized in the character of Father Nicanor Reyna, whom Don Apolinar Mascote brings to Macondo to preside over the wedding between his daughter and Colonel Aureliano Buendía. However, as the narrative is set during the so-called War of the Thousand Days during the turn of the twentieth century, the presence of colonial culture is more like lingering remnants, a bundle of traces that outstay their welcome. This is metaphorically perceptible in the figure of the priest himself: 'His skin was sad, with the bones almost exposed, and he had a pronounced round stomach and the expression of an old angel [...]' (*OHS*, 86). Another manifestation of colonialism can be seen in the figure of Fernanda del Carpio, the wife of

[1] All textual references of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, henceforth *OHS*, are to the translation by Gregory Rebassa in the Everyman's Library edition (1995).

Aureliano Segundo, who comes from an old historic town, presumably Bogotá itself, where the domination of colonial culture has made itself strongly felt. According to the narrator:

> Fernanda was a woman who was lost in the world. She had been born and raised in a city six hundred miles away, a gloomy city where on ghostly nights the coaches of the viceroys still rattled through the cobbled streets. Thirty-two belfries tolled a dirge at six in the afternoon. In the manor house, which was paved with tomblike slabs, the sun was never seen (*OHS*, 207).

The symbols of the colonial period, such as the coaches of the viceroys and the thirty-two belfries, still remain in the city where Fernanda comes from. It is a sad city where people are subjected to oppressive tradition of colonial heritage. It is thus not surprising that, when Fernanda arrives in Macondo, the relative ease and freedom from rules pester her. She needs to set down rules and conform to them in her daily activities. When she is married and moves to live in the Buendía house, she tries to impose regulations and protocols in everyday routines. For instance:

> She put an end to the custom of eating in the kitchen and whenever anyone was hungry, and she imposed the obligation of doing it at regular hours at the large table in the dining-room, covered with a linen cloth and with silver candlesticks and table service (*OHS*, 213).

Even though the rest of the family members tolerate her idiosyncrasy, they do not understand her. This is because, before Fernanda's arrival, Macondo was still a relatively new town, founded by José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula Iguarán in an attempt to free themselves from the constraints of the town where they had been living.

In this aspect, what happens in Macondo or, to be exact, in the Buendía family, is a replaying of what happens at the macro-cosmic level: Macondo is a microcosmos, in which various sources of interventions and forces all play their roles in determining the course of the town, not unlike the birth and evolution of a nation like Colombia itself, especially when taking into account colonial and neo-colonial impositions upon its establishment at large. This interplay between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic is also suggested by Homi K. Bhabha (1994:11), who argues for:

> redrawing the domestic space as the space of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police: the personal-*is*-the political; the world-*in*-the home.

The Buendía family and their hometown Macondo become a stage whereby García Márquez directs the drama of his nation. The name Macondo itself appears in José Arcadio Buendía's dream on the night that he and other founders decide to choose the location of their town. A vivid image of a town looms large in this dream:

> José Arcadio Buendía dreamed that night that right

> there a noisy city with houses having mirror walls rose up. He asked what city it was and they answered him with a name that he had never heard, that had no meaning at all, but that had a supernatural echo in his dream: Macondo (*OHS*, 28).

The fact that the town he dreams of consists of houses with mirror walls is symbolically revealing, as it can be interpreted that Macondo itself serves as a mirror, its emergence reflecting that of the real nation of Colombia.

Magical Realism: Reality Re-imagined

Colombia is aware of the cultural and racial mixture that makes up its nationhood. The reality of the Spanish is not the only reality that the Colombians know. This is especially the case with García Márquez. As he was born in Aracataca, a small town near the Caribbean coast of Colombia, he has perceived a wide range of cultural manifestations, entirely different from the inland culture of Bogotá (as evidenced in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in the aforementioned distinctions between Macondo and the city where Fernanda comes from). The coastal area has absorbed not only the dominant culture of the colonial Spanish, but also the alternative cultures of the native Indians and the Afro-Caribbeans. It is in this space of cultural heterogeneity that García Márquez learns a distinct, hybrid reality. In an interview, he claims:

> The Caribbean taught me to look at reality in a different way, to accept the supernatural as part of our everyday life. [...] The history of the Caribbean is full of magic — a magic brought by black slaves from Africa but also by Swedish, Dutch and English pirates who thought nothing of setting up an Opera House in New Orleans or filling women's teeth with diamonds. Nowhere in the world do you find the racial mixture and the contrasts which you find in the Caribbean. [...] Not only is it the world which taught me to write, it's the only place where I really feel at home (Mendoza, 1983: 55).

This alternative sense of reality that García Márquez derives from his childhood. it can be argued, play an influential role in the emergence of magical realism in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Macondo is marked by extraordinary events that cannot be explained by dint of rationalism. Father Nicanor Reyna rises six inches above the ground after drinking a cup of hot chocolate (*OHS*, 87). The blood of José Arcadio's murdered body finds its way from his home back to the kitchen of the Buendía's house where his mother is preparing food (*OHS*, 136). The rain of yellow flowers takes place in Macondo, covering roofs and blocking doors, when the patriarch José Arcadio Buendía dies (*OHS*, 144). Remedios the Beauty rises into the sky, along with Fernanda's expensive sheets (*OHS*, 238). Macondo becomes at once a real yet uncanny town, where fantastic events are normalized. For Macondo's population, these fantastic events are banal and

happen every day. However, normal events, or at least 'normal' events in our own view, are strange and fabulous for them. They are, for instance, surprised at the ice, magnets, and magnifying glasses brought in by the gypsies. These contradictions between our world and Macondo raise questions about truth and reality and how we define them. This distinctive literary style is often labelled as 'magical realism', since it blends what we perceive as the rational and the magical together. In defining magical realism, Jean-Pierre Durix (1998:146) argues that:

> the magic realist aims at a basis of mimetic illusion while destroying it regularly with a strange treatment of time, space, characters, or what many people [...] take as the basic rules of the physical world. Magic realists usually have a definite idea of their social role and pose political problems, which beset the (post-colonial) country described.

Not only does Durix define magical realism in terms of its literary style, he also claims that it is deeply politicized, carrying an ideological position of describing the otherness of the post-colonial world.

García Márquez himself (Mendoza, 1983:35) seems to enjoy this politicized view of magical realism, saying that European readers might not understand the reality behind the magical elements in his stories because 'their rationalism prevents them seeing that reality isn't limited to the price of tomatoes and eggs. Everyday life in Latin America proves that reality is full of the most extraordinary things.' In saying this, García Márquez, whether he likes it or not, commits himself to the argument made earlier by Alejo Carpentier, a major Cuban novelist, that magical realism (or what Carpentier terms 'lo real maravilloso') should be used to represent true Latin American reality. According to Carpentier (1967:88):

> Because of the virginity of the land, our upbringing, our ontology, the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man, the revelation constituted by its recent discovery, its fecund racial mixing [*mestizaje*], America is far from using up its wealth of mythologies. After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvellous real?

The politics behind Carpentier's use of the marvellous real is clear; his version of magical realism should be used as a dominant literary mode in Latin American literature as it truly represents the consciousness of the continent, which has long been subjected to the domination of Europe, in this respect objectified by its sense of rationalism.

Even though Carpentier's idea of magical realism as a unique representation of the Latin American consciousness and identity has found many supporters (see Flores, 1955; María-Elena Angulo, 1995), it should be noted that the idea that the real and the marvellous cohabiting on one narrative plane does not occur only in Latin America. In 'Marvellous Real in America', Carpentier (1955:82) admits

that in Franz Kafka's works and earlier texts such as *Don Quijote*, this reactionary literary concept was already exploited. In another essay, 'Baroque and the Marvellous Real', Carpentier (1981:103) does not deny the influence of surrealism that lies behind his thinking, as both his 'lo real maravilloso' and surrealism attempt to play down the boundaries between the rational and the irrational, the real and the fantasy. However, he argues that, while the marvellous in surrealism is premeditated, the counterpart in his 'lo real maravilloso' is more spontaneous:

> the marvellous real that I defend and that is our own marvellous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin America. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace (Carpen tier, 1981: 104).

While Carpentier expresses his debts to Kafka and surrealism in constructing his concept of 'lo real maravilloso', Luis Leal (1967:120) shows that the term 'magical realism' was in fact originally coined by a European art critic, Franz Roh, in his attempt to theorize post-expressionist German paintings. In using the word 'magical' to precede 'realism', Roh (1925:16) wishes to indicate that 'the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it.'

One might argue at this stage that the roots of mystery as theorized by Roh and Carpentier are inherently different, but one should not be blind to the fact that the blurring of the rational/irrational borders is equally fostered by both scholars. Yet, magical realism *à la* Carpentier is politicized to the extent that they are somehow synonymous with Latin American literature during the 'Boom' period,[2] with writers claiming that the reality of Latin America is different and needs an alternative way to recapture it. In his Nobel address, García Márquez (1982:209) himself asserts that:

> To interpret our reality through schemas which are alien to us only has the effect of making us even more unknown, even less free, even more solitary.

'Schemas which are alien to us' are in a sense analogous to the epistemological patterns which European colonialists or present-day US neocolonialists have used to comprehend Latin America, similarly distinguished in their firm basis of rationalism. Yet, for García Márquez, it is useless to adopt such schemas in Latin America because it is a continent full of wonders and marvels, those that cannot be explained by rationalism. If one follows this argument closely, magical realism then signals what Amaryll Chanady (1995:125-26) terms 'the territorialization of the imaginary',

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[2] According to John S. Brushwood (1987:13), the ill-named 'Boom' period possibly began in the early 1960s with the original publication of Julio Cortézar, *Hopscotch* (1963), reaching its peak in García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). Philip Swanson (1995:2) argues that the 'Boom' is 'an exemplification of the sense of 'break with tradition' that has come to be associated with the new novel.' In this sense, it is used to typify a kind of modern Latin American fiction that rejects the premises and structures of conventional realism.

especially in 'its insistence on the exceptional nature of New World geography and partly to the Latin American strategies of identity-construction that emphasize regional specificities.' In this light, one can see that García Márquez attempts to use magical realism in his novel as a way to represent the uniqueness of his own nation (or, to the same effect, his own continent). However, it should also be highlighted that magical realism is not a literary style native to Colombia, or to Latin America as a whole. It has transferred from Europe to the Latin American continent in a process of what might be called reverse colonization, whereby it is reappropriated and made to bear on Latin America's geographical and cultural specificities. If García Márquez wishes to purport that magical realism is a poetic mode unique to his continent, his claim is justified in the sense that it represents the Latin American consciousness in terms of its hybridity, i.e., the fact that its origins are highly multicultural and heterogeneous. Following this line of thought, the Colombian author manages to find the suitable identity of his post-colonial voice, while at the same time evincing that this voice is not at all monolithic, but already hybridized, as is the coastal area where he was born.

In Search of Lost Time

Like other countries in Latin America, after its independence in 1810, the area of what we now know as Colombia had been subjected to a series of political conflicts as the Conservatives and the Liberals struggled for absolute power in their never-ending tug of war.[3] This resulted in several civil wars, such as the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1903) and another period of endless bloodshed known simply as *La Violencia* (1948-1965). The significance of political uncertainties can be seen in Stephen Minta's claim (1987:5) that 'perhaps the single most important aspect of Colombian history since the country gained independence from Spain has been the nature and extent of the political violence it has experienced'. If the War of a Thousand Days caused an estimated 100,000 deaths (in a country whose total population then amounted to less than four million), *La Violencia* led to the tragic demise of roughly a quarter of a million people (see also Minta, 1987:6).

It was after *La Violencia* that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was first published. Thus it would not be too far-fetched to argue that the novel is, in part, steeped in immediate political concerns, as García Márquez attempts to make sense of what his country has experienced. This inevitably leads to his comtemplation of the nationhood of Colombia after its independence from Spanish domination. War and violence then become an integral part of the novel as they function as an integral part of the history of his country. In other words,if history plays an important part in constructing nationhood, war and violence certainly become part and parcel of Colombian history, with which the author needs to reckon in his reflections on nationhood. For him, war and violence seem to yield a disparate

[3] The Conservatives wished to restore Colombia its 'Hellenic/Catholic Arcadia', with its policy to support Spanish traditional legacy and Catholicism. The Liberals, on the other hand, sought to modernize the country which they considered as 'backward'.

impact in Colombia: if they tend to signify a sense of progress in the Western world, marking a demise of oppressive regime and a recognition of the demand of the oppressed, its counterparts in Colombia appear to convey a sense of a vicious cycle, a manifestation of things coming back full circle and ready to start all over again. This view is supported by the endless, repetitious wars between the Conservatives and the Liberals, which lead to no absolute, clearly defined progress. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, these wars are also significant and become part of the historical backdrop against which the Buendía family and Macondo are set. It all begins with the arrival of Don Apolinar Moscote, a magistrate appointed from Bogotá to govern Macondo. As a unified embodiment of the Conservatives, representative of the current central government, he asks the locals to paint their houses blue (i.e., the colour of the Conservatives) to celebrate national independence. It can thus be argued that Don Apolinar Mascote brings national politics to the microcosmic scene of Macondo, where, before his arrival, the boundaries between the Conservatives and the Liberals, or the connotations of blue and red, had not been known. Colonel Aureliano Buendía, for instance, needs to ask Don Apolinar Mascote to tell him the differences between the two parties since for him the boundaries between the two are very vague (*OHS*, 100). García Márquez then plays up the fuzzy borders between the two parties throughout the novel. While Colonel Aureliano Buendía and his leftist supporters roam various regions of Colombia, trying to revolve against the oppressive regime, he asks his nephew Arcadio, who is also a champion of Liberal causes, to impose order upon Macondo. However, in doing so, Arcadio ironically becomes a harsh, cruel ruler who is drunk with power. At one point, he is tempted to give the order to kill Don Apolinar Mascote, whose daughter, Remedios Mascote, is Arcadio's own aunt (*OHS*, 109). Colonel Aureliano Buendía himself starts to feel the blurred boundaries between the Conservatives and the Liberals when he is captured and sent to Macondo to be executed. He perceives 'how the town has aged. The leaves of the almond tress were broken. The houses painted blue, then painted red, had ended up with an indefinable colouration' (*OHS*, 128). The fact that the houses end up with a mixture of blue and red paints attests to the fact that perhaps clear boundaries between the two parties do not exist. This leads to Colonel Aureliano Buendía's gradual recognition that the belief that people should fight for their ideologies is absurd as these ideologies cannot be defined in their own terms. In order to define their ideologies, both the Liberals and the Conservatives need to construct the image of the opposite party and base their dogmatic beliefs on such image formation. In a conversation with his friend Colonel Gerineldo Márquez, Colonel Aureliano Buendía asks:

> 'Tell me something, old friend: why are you fighting?'
> 'What other reason could there be? Colonel Gerineldo Márquez answered. 'For the great Liberal party.'
> 'You're lucky because you know why,' he answered. 'As far as I'm concerned, I've come to realize only just now that I'm fighting because of pride' (*OHS*, 139-40).

Colonel Aureliano Buendía perceives that the underlying force for both the Conservatives and the Liberals is pride, i.e., the belief that one's ideology is superior to the other and, therefore, the need to dominate the other. This leads to the Colonel's recognition that the wars between the two sides are futile and that they are not completely over until both of the parties cease taking arrogant pride in their ideologies.

For García Márquez, the never-ending warfare is related to the concept of cyclical time. The novel also highlights the fact that neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals manage to gain a firm foothold in Colombian politics, and it seems as if time does not yield any progress but support the belief that Colombia is locked in its own stagnant political whirlpool, sinking yet deeper into bouts of violence and bloodshed. This negative sense of unproductiveness despite the flow of time can be seen in a dialogue between Colonel Aureliano Buendía and his mother, Úrsula, after he perceives that the town of Macondo has considerably changed since he left to fight for the Liberal cause:

> 'What did you expect?' Úrsula sighed. 'Time passes.'
> 'That's how it goes,' Aureliano admitted, 'but not so much' (*OHS*, 128).

For Colonel Aureliano Buendía, even though the whole town has changed, it is still unclear which party is gaining the upperhand and the progress of his country is hanging by a thread. Years later, Úrsula is able to reach the same conclusion. When she sees José Arcadio Segundo locking himself up in Melquíades's room, she is surprised, not as much owing to his haggard looks as because she perceives that José Arcadio Segundo is repeating the pattern to which her husband José Arcadio Buendía and her son Colonel Aureliano Buendía have chosen to commit themselves. To her (and to our) surprise, the identical dialogue takes place:

> 'What did you expect?' he murmured. 'Time passes.'
> 'That's how it goes,' Úrsula said, 'but not so much' (*OHS*, 335).

If Colonel Aureliano Buendía's acute perception of cyclical time is generated by the nature of war and violence, Úrsula's route to such a recognition is different. As a central character of the novel literally trying to hold the family together, Úrsula lives long enough to see both the birth and death of her numerous children and grandchildren, as well as the prosperity and decline of her own town Macondo. Finding herself repeating the same dialogue that she had with Colonel Aureliano Buendía many years before, Úrsula comes to realize that 'time was not passing, [...] but that it was turning in a circle' (*OHS*, 335).

Colonel Aureliano Buendía and his mother are not the only characters in the novel who are able to perceive that time does not always denote progress. José Arcadio Buendía, Úrsula's husband, also experiences time standing still. After he sees the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar, the man whom he killed before moving to settle in Macondo, he starts wondering about the progress of time. Talking with his son Aureliano, he asks:

> 'What day is today?'
> Aureliano told him that it was

> Tuesday. 'I was thinking the same thing,' José Arcadio Buendía said, 'but suddenly I realized that it's still Monday, like yesterday. Look at the sky, look at the walls, look at the begonias. Today is Monday too.' [...] On the next day, Wednesday, José Arcadio Buendía went back to the workshop. 'This is a disaster,' he said. 'Look at the air, listen to the buzzing of the sun, the same as yesterday and the day before. Today is Monday too' (*OHS*, 81-82).

Unlike the Colonel and Úrsula, who believe that time moves in a circle, José Arcadio Buendía does not believe that time passes at all. Instead, for him, time does not mean anything because nothing has changed. The return of Prudencio Aguilar triggers in him memories of his childhood and adolescence, which remain unchanged. These make him doubt whether time exists at all, as he still remembers everything that has happened to him. In other words, nostalgia and memory become obvious pieces of evidence that José Arcadio Buendía uses to defend the eternity of the present and to challenge the passage of time. However, this revelation costs him his sanity, as he becomes violent and tries to destroy his alchemy laboratory and daguerreotype room. Aureliano (his son) and his neighbours need to tie him to a chestnut tree in the house's courtyard, where he remains for the rest of his life.

If, via these characters' unconventional perceptions of time, García Márquez is attempting to convey that time does not always mean progress in Colombia, he understands its full irony, as in fact time does flow and the world needs to go on. When one says that history keeps repeating, it is a claim made in the framework of progressive time; if time had not passed, one would not have realized that history repeats itself. What García Márquez attempts to get across here, I believe, is the belief that Colombia needs to live with the paradox, acknowledging the quirkiness of time, yet simultaneously realizing that it does go on and that a better world can evolve. If people believe that time does not signal progress, they will live in complacent resignation and no longer believe in any technological advancements, as evidenced in José Arcadio Buendía's attempts to destroy Melquíades's and his own inventions, or in Colonel Aureliano Buendía's unproductive acts of making little gold fish, and, once finished, melting them and starting all over again (*OHS*, 266).

On a larger scale, this can also be interpreted as García Márquez's own criticism of his country's mythmaking. Like the popularization of magical realism, it is natural and understandable to learn that somehow the notion of time as signifying progress is not applicable in Colombia because the country has not experienced political progress for the past fifty years; however, it is another matter to claim that this should be a watershed that helps a country find its post-colonial identity by divorcing itself from the myths of its colonial past. This argument would lead to the realization that Colombian identity is marked by its circular time, that Colombian history seems to foster the view of circuitous history, as a strategic move away from the Hegelian concept of linear history, which is largely believed by European colonialists.[4] In this light, García Márquez shows not only how the myth

of a vicious circle, often used to mark the Colombian, if not Latin American, alternative reality, is based on political reality, but also how urgently one needs to demystify such a concept to be able to move on and make one's country a better place (see also Richard J. Walter, 1987:180).

The reason why one needs to demystify the myth of a vicious circle in such haste is because García Márquez is fully aware of how history is dependent on external reality as much as on human imagination. The role of human beings in the construction of history is clearly shown in the scene of the banana massacre in the novel, whereby no one, except José Arcadio Segundo, can remember what happened, as its records seem to have been completely expurgated (*OHS*, 308). For García Márquez, history is no longer an objective chronicling of events; as a form of narrative, it is not only written out of the writer's unavoidable subjectivity, but also influenced by the politics of the situation in which the writer is involved. Úrsula's attribution of her misfortune to Sir Francis Drake's attack of Riohacha, despite the remote distance in time between the two events (*OHS*, 23-24), is a good example of how,when one chronicles life events, one cannot rid oneself of prejudices. Not only does this example indicate post-colonial anger and rejustification, it also shows how powerful one's mind and imagination are, and how one cannot avoid this subjective interference in constructing a history of one's own.[5] In this sense, the history of Macondo itself is also subjected to this kind of interference: what is *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, if not the world of Macondo seen and interpreted through the magical eyes of Melquíades? If we take into account the role of our imaginative power in writing history, it should also be pointed that it thus remains in our powers to construct a positive or negative interpretation out of history. Recognizing this, García Márquez believes that it is possible to demystify the myth of circular time by understanding its roots in both our imagination and political reality.

The End of Solitude

If the use of magical realism in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* marks a hybridized reappropriation of a literary

[4] In fact, like magical realism, the view of circular time has its supports in European scholarship. This can be traced back as far as Giambattista Vico, *Principles of a New Science of the Common Nature of Nations* (1744). Friedrich Nietzsche also develops this idea in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1892). The challenge to the flow of time in literature is also predominant in Europe during the modernist period. Writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf support the idea that the development of time depends on subjectivity, not on the movement of the clock. However, Morton P. Levitt (1986:80) argues that, while this view of subjective time sponsored by the modernists is 'a phenomenon of the individual psyche one (Woolf) or the community at large (Joyce)', in García Márquez this challenge 'seems still broader, more inclusive, more Jungian, that, than Freudian (or Bergsonian or Proustian), connected intimately to nature and to myth.

[5] Octavio Paz (1950:71) also shares this view, arguing that: 'Our living attitude — a factor we can never know completely, since change and indetermination are the only constants of our existence — is history also. This is to say that historical events are something more than events because they are coloured by humanity, which is always problematical.'

style to reflect the post-colonial conditions of Colombia and Latin America, its treatments of history and time signal the dangers if one takes for granted the simplistic subversion of Western conceptual frameworks (i.e. Lyotard's metanarratives) in an attempt to create local narratives of post-colonial nationhood. Both the issues of reality and history that we have discussed show how the processes of post-colonial search for national or continental identity are highly complex, as they are reliant upon, but not exclusive to, reappropriation, subversion, and demystification of Western conceptual frameworks. In fact, for García Márquez, the search for national or continental identity in the post-colonial light is no longer an innocent business of subverting the colonial heritage. It becomes a deconstructive enterprise which shows how colonialism is constructed and how the processes of ideological domination function.

This can be seen in the ending of the novel, when the Buendía family and Macondo are wiped out by the apocalyptic wind. The demise of the Buendía family, for García Márquez, signals how people who are obsessed with themselves and their own kin to the extent that they commit incest are not allowed to live. The incestuous solitude that marks the first generation of the Buendía family in Macondo in the marriage between José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula Iguarán comes back to haunt them again in a nuptial bond that holds Aureliano and Amaranta Úrsula together. While José Arcadio and Úrsula are lucky, since their children are not cursed with a pig's tail, Aureliano and his aunt are not so fortunate: their son, also named Aureliano, is born with a pig's tail and subsequently eaten by ants. By having the whole town destroyed at the end of novel, García Márquez seems to deplore the solitude to which the Buendía family is subject, as the last phrase of the novel runs as follows: 'races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth' (*OHS*, 416). In an interview, he (Mendoza, 1983:75) attributes this solitude to '[the Buendías'] lack of love [...]. The Buendías were incapable of loving and this is the key to their solitude and their frustration. Solitude, I believe, is the opposite of solidarity.' This can also give a second meaning to José Arcadio Buendía's dream of a city with mirrors when he founds the town of Macondo: the inhabitants in this town are too occupied and obsessed with themselves, as they choose to look inwards at themselves (as in mirrors), rather than looking outwards and learning to understand and love others.

In terms of nationhood, such a solitary attitude towards oneself is dangerous, as it distances one from the other, separating 'we' and 'them'. This becomes one of the main causes of colonialism, as one believes in one's superiority to another. If Macondo is marked by the irrational and by cyclical time, they also simultaneously point towards the insularity of the town, which makes such oddities possible. In bringing up the issues of unique reality and history of Macondo, García Márquez in turn demystifies those myths and shows that in fact magic and circular time are often preordained in a place that is secluded and solitary. If there is a need to find unique characters or traits to define a nation, there should also be a need to demystify these processes so that people understand the concept proposed by Benedict Anderson (1991:6) that a

nation is 'an imagined political community'. In bringing Macondo and the life of the Buendía family to a tragic end, García Márquez at the same time opens up new routes, new possibilities in which one can think of nationhood and national consciousness, not as a closed, solitary entity, but as a hybrid existence, spurred by an interaction of various sources of influence, both internal and external, and by a judicious recognition of other races and cultures. It is in this optimistic spirit that García Márquez (1982:211) ends his Nobel address:

> it is not yet too late to undertake the creation of a minor utopia: a new and limitless utopia for life wherein no one can decide for others how they are to die, where love really can be true and happiness possible [...]

For him, national identity cannot be found when one looks inwards at oneself; it is generated by an endeavour to understand oneself and the other and how the two sides are related. It is only through these deconstructive processes that the real sense of nationhood can be achieved.

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