

Political Ecology in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

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Abstract

The roots of ecology prolong profoundly within earlier phases of history, when the naturalistic fabric was first evinced. Bringing out his *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, Darwin not merely engendered a biological culmination but also heralded the revolutionary critical canon of naturalism that was virtually a stone thrown in the vast stagnant lake of traditional literature. Via the naturalistic lens, the whole bulk of man's behavioral attributes are being expounded in terms of milieu and heredity. The mid-1990s witnessed the publication of *The Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell in 1995, and *The Ecocriticism Reader* edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in 1996, which palpably underpinned ecocriticism as revolving around the inextricable liaison between literature and the physical environment. The political ecology term was coined to further scrutinize relations among people that pertain to nature. The present paper is an endeavor to pursue the ecological tenor of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's landmark novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and how it was admirably exploited to address precarious postcolonial issues.

Keywords: Political ecology, Marquez, naturalism, ecocriticism, post-colonialism.

1. Introduction

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can (Wordsworth, 1888, 145).

First and foremost, though ecocriticism as a critical canon seems to date back to the mid-1990s with the publication of *The Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell in 1995 and *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in 1996, its roots do virtually prolong within remote phases of history. Ecology used to filter mildly through diverse literary genres: the pastoral, fairy-tales, myths, the agrarian, romantic poetry; in addition to molding the fabric of prominent critical approaches as naturalism. The term political ecology evolved palpably from the ecological dogma. The intent of this paper is to lay the theoretical foundation for such ecology-oriented fabrics, together with scrutinizing the resonances of political ecology in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Eventually, the principal out finding is upholding Marquez's salvation formula, disseminated via all his literary output, in which he propelled the human race to strive to engender more egalitarian communities, capable of shielding the surrounding ecological system.

2. Naturalism, Ecocriticism, and Political Ecology, the Inseparably Entwined Canons

Thanks to Darwin's scientific breakthrough, *On the Origin of Species* (1859), that the evolutionary theory emerged; thereupon, leaving its imprints on the literary arena. The main stream of naturalism was undoubtedly a stone thrown in the vast stagnant lake of traditional literary ramifications. Put under scrutiny, the evolutionary theory postulated that man evolved from lower forms of life, and that in the perpetual fierce fight for existence only the fittest and strongest is able to survive in an eternal process of natural selection. According to naturalists, hegemony over man's behavioral attributes is for biological determinism (heredity), social determinism (milieu), or by historic moment, which are all three predetermining factors of man's fate. Thereupon, the human being is rather approached as a pathetic creature, thoroughly stripped of free will; no longer supreme, but rather equal to other creatures, even as degenerate as a humble insect.

In contrast to a realist, a naturalist believes that man is fundamentally an animal without free will. To a naturalist man can be explained in terms of the forces, usually heredity and environment, which operate on him (Ahnebrink, 1973, p.2).

It is broadly acknowledged that our life on the planet is inextricably linked to its ecological health. The modernist legacy endeavored for successive decades to corroborate the dominance of nature in such relationships. Such an ecological tenet ostensibly evokes the naturalistic tenor, forged several centuries ago, with its overt emphasis on environment as an overruling power of human destiny. Conversely, social ecologists have recently expounded the ecological crisis as one of "societal relationships with nature" (Jahn, 1996, p. 58). Thus, they are bringing into the loop the undeniable societal liaisons with the natural milieu as a patent element predetermining the welfare, or on the reversal the wreck, of both human and eco-life. Social ecologists are recurrently emphasizing such reciprocal relationship between both poles, the planet and the inhabitants of the planet.

Across the successive epochs of history, literature proved to be the faithful mirror of the booming mainstreams emerging within its era. Therefore, ecocriticism was the critical fabric created to address via literature the escalating ecological issues. Cheryl Glotfelty, a precursor of the ecocritical movement in the United States affirmed:

Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth centered approach to literary studies (Glotfelty, 1996, xix).

The incessant evolution of the ecological doctrine brought about the term political ecology, which was coined to refer generally to the social, economic, and political conditions grounding causes, experiences, and management of environmental problems (Blaikie, 1987, Byrant, 1992, Park, 1994, Zimmerer, 2000). Nonetheless, the debate among a vast array of critics about a decisive definition of the term is yet to be resolved.

First, according to Blaiki and Brookfield, the phrase "political ecology" is melding together ecology and a broadly defined political economy. Furthermore, this embraces the constantly mutable dialects between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself (Blaiki, 1987).

Second, political ecology may be approached as one form of political activism in favor of Deep Green Environmentalism and the inexorable critique of repressive modernity and capitalism. Atkinson pointed out: "political ecology is both a set of the cortical propositions and ideas on the one hand and on the other a social movement referred to as the 'ecology movement' or, latterly, the Green movement" (Atkinson, 1991, p. 18).

Third, ecology as a metaphor for the interconnectedness of political relations. This metaphor emerged in the first book with "political ecology" in its title, *International Regions and International Systems*.

Through *A study in Political Ecology* by Bruce M. Russett in 1967, he asserted:

I have termed this volume *A Study in Political Ecology*. As ecology is defined as the relation of organisms or groups of organisms to their environment, I have attempted to explore some of the relations between political systems and their social and physical environment (Russett, 1967: vii).

Fourth, political ecology was assumed to sustain the Marxist ideology. Political ecology, like the Marxist-inspired workers' movement, is based on a critique and thus an analysis, a theorized understanding-of the "order of existing things." More specifically, Marx and the greens focus on a very precise sector of the real world: the humanity-nature relationship, and, even more precisely, relations among people that pertain to nature, (or what Marxists call the productive "forces") (Lipietz, 2000, p. 70).

3. Political Ecology in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*:

In his 1982 Nobel Prize lecture, the colossal fictional icon Gabriel Garcia Marquez asserted " But we must first accept books like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Bound to Violence* on their own terms, as mirrors of the solitude of post-colonial societies (Ortega, 1988, p. 90).

Marquez was born March 1928, amongst unbending political turbulence, associated with the Banana Strike massacre, in Aracataca, Columbia, a small town in the Santa Marta Banana zone. The whole territory of Northern Columbia was colonized throughout the first decades of the 20th century by the American United Fruit Company, which was par excellence a conspicuous embodiment of the evils of the oppressive imperialist capitalism, resolving to incessantly exploit the human and natural resources of the target country, that is frequently a so-called third world developing country. Via his felicitous magical realism, Marquez endeavored to implement a process of unraveling the post-colonial world, giving voice to the dispossessed, and endowing them with a second opportunity on earth, through transcending the solitude they were deliberately doomed to for centuries.

In order to magnify the manifest atrocities mankind undertakes to devastate their life and the eco-sphere around them, the author attempted to open his novel by pondering over the innocence that predates such assaults. Ostensibly, the beginning of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is akin to a Genesis-like story, embracing images drawn from the Latin American milieu, the Garden of Eden and the apocalypse. The Buendias found Macondo in an edenic setting which predates the Bible; Marquez describes the rocks along the rivers as "prehistoric eggs" in order; thus, validating the primal existence of the Buendias, the main founders of Macondo.

Marquez portrayed Macondo as a paradise-like locale, wrapped with serenity, idyll, and magnificent natural beauty, an image that will be thoroughly reversed when the book comes to an end, and consequently exacerbating the traumatic realizations rendered then. Not evincing the country in which Macondo exists, Marquez allowed the Macondo experience to transcend all boundaries of place and time; representing a microcosm not merely of Latin American countries but of all post-colonial communities.

Having founded Macondo, Buendia resolved to set out for a wild expedition in order to traverse the fatal solitude of Macondo, aspiring to erect bridges of contact with the civilization and modernity around. Yet, his incessant explorations dragged him to the re-memory area of the conquistadors. Akin to them, Buendia committed devastating evil acts throughout the hazardous expeditions:

The men on the expeditions felt overwhelmed by their most ancient memories in that paradise of dampness and silence, going back to before original sin, as their boots sank into pools of steaming oil and their machetes destroyed bloody lilies and golden salamanders. For a week, almost without speaking, they went ahead like sleepwalkers through a universe of grief, lighted only by the tenuous reflection of luminous insects, and their lungs were overwhelmed by a suffocating smell of blood (11-12).

Astonishingly, while striving to flee his own past, Buendia found himself immersed into the collective past of his ancestors, the settlers of the New World. He came across an old Spanish galleon, resting on a bed of rock amidst the wild forest. Pondering over the scene, he grasped how preposterous it is to find a new route out of Macondo:

Before them, surrounded by ferns and palm trees, white and powdery in the silent morning light, was an enormous Spanish galleon. Titled slightly to the starboard, it had hanging from its intact masts the dirty rags of its sails in the midst of its rigging, which was adorned with orchids. The hull, covered with an armor of petrified barnacles and soft moss, was firmly fastened into a surface of stones. The whole structure seemed to occupy its own space, one of solitude and oblivion, protected from the vices of time and the habits of the birds(12).

Albeit Objects of the past are quite ravaged, the bulk emotions which history is capable of eliciting are not.

Nonetheless, the tranquility of the Macondo mundane life was disrupted by the arrival of the Banana company, representing the United Fruit Corporate Company, that colonized the northern territory of Colombia till the mid-fifties. Such stark frame of the callous American Capitalism was an anticipated consequence in the aftermath of the decolonization of the country. The company has excelled in performing its prominent role as a robust imperialistic fringe of the United States, executing the target of the first world to foster their economy via the impoverishment of the third world countries, seizing the totality of their natural resources.

Promptly upon treading the territory, the Banana Company inaugurated sweeping changes in the primitive life of the indigenous: constructing irrigation network, establishing their own railroad, telegraph network, retail stores, enormous fleet to carry bananas to the United States (Regina, 1984, pp. 93-94). Subsequently, palpable flux of prosperity overwhelmed the Banana zone up to the 1930s. Nonetheless, the surrounding natural milieu, together with the Macondo proletariat, were equally devastated by the inhumane and atrocious policies of the Banana company, the rubbish of which bridged over the river and changed the picturesque scenery of Macondo.

Moreover, the prosperity phase was demolished by the Great Depression era, following the 1928 strike. The strike episode was initiated by jostling masses of workers at the Cienaga train station, asking for the improvement of their squander-like living conditions and deteriorated salaries; yet, they were ruthlessly repelled by incessant gunfire. Historical accounts differ as for the number of killed people, in addition to the countless others that disappeared in the aftermath of the event; that was the triggering point to boundless violence to prevail. Though not an eye-witness to the whole bulk of those incidents, Marquez leaned on re-memory as core for his novel, inspired by his grandmother's tales, on which he was raised as a child, and the firsthand accounts of his grandfather who took part in the Civil War. Altering his birth date to concur with the strike date 1928 unravels the perseverant attempt of Marquez to be the faithful voice of the agitated indigenous, not merely of Colombia but of all post-colonial peoples worldwide, against the unjust imperialistic capitalism, which proved to be devoid of any egalitarian import. In such endeavor, Marquez sparked the post-colonial literary boom of Latin America in the seventies.

The post-massacre politics in Macondo serve unveiling colonialist methods of effacing the past. The government implemented immediate measures after the massacre to ensure that merely their endorsed version of the event is being disseminated. Macondo people are allowed to know only what the totalitarian regime is willing to reveal. Noticeably, all dictatorial regimes were acting as mere puppets, the strings of which are in the hands of some imperialistic power, and are accordingly exploited to protect their illegitimate capitalistic ends. Hence, the government issued a national proclamation which stated that "the workers had left the station and had returned home in peaceful groups"(pp. 314-315). It extolled the virtue of the "union leaders" whose "great patriotic spirit had fostered compromise between Mr. Brown and the stickers"(p. 315). After the four year plague of rain, the government issued their report:

The official version, repeated a thousand times and mangled out all over the country by every means of communication the government found at hand, was finally accepted: there

were no dead, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families, and the banana company was suspending all activity until the rains stopped (p. 315).

The relentless four year plague of rain served to simultaneously perish all evidences of the inhumane massacre, and stand symbolic of the brainwashing which successfully muddled records of the massacre in received Latin American history. At this juncture, it is discernible that Marquez summoned the apocalyptic images of "magical realist" hurricanes to epitomize the vulture of capitalism represented via the Banana Company "precisely because it inaugurates an economic regime-the plantation monoculture-which is also ecological, and which will appropriate the 'good quality of [Macondo's] soil " as a commodity frontier" (Deckard, p. 18).

To define ecological regimes, Moore (2010) affirmed that they are the "relatively durable patterns of class structure, technological innovation and the development of productive forces.....that have sustained and propelled successive phases of world accumulation"(p. 405).Due to "The relative exhaustion of an ecological revolution" (Deckard, p. 19), the depleted ecosystem has waged a four year rebellious war against the corrosive ecological regime of the Banana monoculture in Macondo:

Macondo was in ruins. In the swampy streets were the remains of furniture, animal skeletons covered with red lilies, the last memories of the hordes of newcomers who had fled Macondo as wildly as they arrived. The houses that had been built with such haste during the banana fever had been abandoned. The banana company tore down its installations (330-31).

In lieu of the idyllic beauty that overruled Macondo setting at the novel's onset, merely wreck and skeletons prevailed the scene at the end of the novel. It is all propelled by the aggravated and perverted exploitation undergone by ecological regimes. Mildly stated, in a region evacuated of capital and drained of ecological nutrients and human "collective strength", reconstruction is preposterous(Deckard, p. 20).

The challenged status-quo in Macondo was eventually preserved by means of fraudulent chronicles of history, that brought about the apocalypse of the Buendias, who were compelled to retreat back into their perpetual solitude, the solitude that is palpably a curtain imposed on the territory to keep it aloof from the eyes of the world, for the incessant process of accumulation to endure, leaving it lagging beyond development (Arias, 2013).

As *One Hundred Years of Solitude* comes to a close, Aureliano Babilonia is deciphering Melquiades's parchments to find that "everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth"(p. 422).

In this connection, Marquez is proclaiming the demise of Macondo and thus of Latin America. The vicious circle is preserved and the past is reiterated as humans proved unwilling to collaborate to save the globe and the inhabitants of the globe.

4. Conclusion

Why didn't Marquez announce the proletariat triumphant? The answer is eloquently epitomized by Merry's assertion that:

What is basic is not 'human rights'.....but needs; the basic requirements for existence. Because we all share needs. We are all bound together in a network of duties. Where these are recognized[sic], then we can define our rights as humans and inhabitants of earth. (p. 29)

This seems to be the sole speck of light at the end of the intricate ecological dilemma we are muddled in. Depletion of both ecological and human systems by a ruthless monopolistic minority will bring about boundless desolation; no soul will be exempted. Per Marquez formula, an egalitarian human community worldwide is the sole vehicle towards salvation. This message is pertaining to the tenor of Marquez Nobel Prize lecture, in which he assumed that it is never a far-fetched prospect to embark on engendering:

A new and sweeping Utopia of life,
Where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth. (Ortega, 1988, p. 90)

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