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Understanding Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*:
An Analysis with a Lens for History and Anthropology

by Jack Norcross

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a work of fiction. The Buendías—the family whose history it chronicles—are an elaborate imagination. Macondo—the utopic town, which serves as the backdrop—is, in reality, nothing more than the name of a fruit company in Aracataca, Colombia. The geographical location—fourteen months of hiking westward from Riohuaca, next to a river, amongst thick forest, on the western slope of a mountain—can be found on a map of Colombia, but there is no town that both exists there and directly follows the happenings and history of Garcia Marquez's Macondo. The only undiluted history in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* comes in its references to distant colonial figures and more contemporary authors.¹

One Hundred Years of Solitude is a work of fiction, but the happenings of this novel directly parallel the regional history of the Caribbean coast of Colombia along with its interactions with Bogotá (the capitol of Colombia) and the surrounding nation. In an area of the world where any post-colonial history is remarkably fluid and an accurate pre-colonial history is almost non-existent, Garcia Marquez's account of historical happenings within the realm of fiction is remarkably significant.² In post-colonial Colombia, there is precedence for this sort

¹ 'Undiluted' here means: 'uninfluenced by the fictional surroundings.'

² In any anthropological analysis/discussion, it is important for the anthropologist/opinion-maker to practice reflexivity. Of course, reflexivity in the sense of literary analysis doesn't capture the fullness of reflexivity in the field. I do not have to be concerned how my history and bias will influence the subject of my analysis, as this subject has been written for decades before I was born. I do have to be critical of how my unique position in life might influence how I perceive the text and what data I find significant. Therefore—while announcing the significance of Garcia Marquez's history, it feels appropriate for me to mention the ways in which my life and political views may be more sympathetic to the Liberal cause and Garcia Marquez's own Liberal leanings.

I am a young man who lives in radical communities that serve the marginalized and homeless in our country. I already have a propensity for relatively extreme liberal leanings (relative to the center) and a general distrust of those in power. Add to this that I was raised in a religious family, which I rebelled against, and you will find that I am very much predisposed to be sympathetic to Garcia Marquez's Liberal sympathies. Conservatives in this novel represent the big government, militaristic, semi-tyrannical protectors of the Catholic faith. None of these things are things I'm on board with.

of historical manipulation³. Throughout decades of internal strife, political parties attempted to shape the prevailing history through campaigns of misinformation, biased reporting, and exaggerations published in various Conservative and Liberal newspapers. By writing a novel that quietly tells a history of Colombia, Garcia Marquez has canonized a record that is largely sympathetic to Liberal ideology and accounts of history.⁴

Garcia Marquez's Macondo is inspired by the city where he spent the first eight years of his life, Aracataca. In Aracataca, Garcia Marquez

³ In her book, *Muddied Waters: Race, Region, and Local History in Colombia: 1846-1948*, Nancy P. Appelbaum discusses some of the reasons for and importance of this remarkably fluid history. Since power in post-colonial Colombia was largely contested, written records were often destroyed. Each party had a specific interest in containing and shaping the public dialogue through manipulation of news media. Because of this, several competing histories were written and destroyed and written again. This fluid history gave room for much manipulation. In attempting to define a racial hierarchy and justify the process of 'whitening' the population, many histories adopted clearly racist ideology in attempting to define the pre-Columbian history of indigenous populations. In the noise, most indigenous histories became difficult to decipher.

While deferring a factually accurate chronology of occurrences from these competing histories may be nearly impossible, Appelbaum maintains that understanding these histories is of importance when trying to understand the cultural values of Colombian societies. She focuses on Riosucio, a city in the Cauca coffee region. To stress the importance of artificial local histories, she tells the likely mythological Riosucio origin story. She focuses on the believed founding date of August 7th, 1819 (The day of a famous battle in the war for independence). Appelbaum contends that it is unlikely that Riosucio was actually founded on this day. Even more unlikely was the Riosucio was founded by the merger between two villages and has, since its founding, encapsulated the perfect harmony between the different races (razas) of these two settlements. Appelbaum suspects that the first mention of this story, in the Liberal publication—*La Opinion*, was actually the fabrication of this story. It has since pervaded the culture to the point that it is now acceptable fact. Appelbaum asserts that, by understanding this story and its origin, we can better understand the thoughts and dreams of the Colombian people. A fluid history can (and does) serve as a canvas for the people to share their cultural values and aspirations. (In this case: Riosucio was born of harmony in independence.)

⁴ I was reluctant to use the word 'canonized' here, recognizing that modern anthropologists are rightfully suspicious of any canonical history, as these are typically the histories written by imperial oppressors at the expense of the culture of a subjugated population. In the case of Colombian history, however, this is a bit different. See above footnote.

lived with his maternal grandparents. His grandfather, Colonel Nicolás Ricardo Márquez Mejía, was a retired Liberal general who had fought during Colombia's One-thousand Day War. His grandmother, Doña Tranquilina Iguarán, told stories which share the fluidity between the mythical and the real that would later become the basis for his greatest contribution to literature, a style used in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Magic Realism. The origin story of Macondo, aside from the utopic ideals necessary to create a world in which mythology is believable, is largely reflective of the geographic history of the land in Colombia that is just inland of the Caribbean coast.

Towns settled throughout much of Colombia remained largely autonomous for decades after the rest of Latin America was quickly being connected by large-scale infrastructure. This is partially because of the difficulty of navigating the terrain. Colombian geography is a mix of mountains, swamps, and thick forests with only a small portion of the land that is relatively flat and easier to traverse.⁵ Aracataca is settled in a thick forest, just west of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and east of swampland

⁵ Any analysis of Colombian history, including this analysis of historically significant context in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, would be anthropologically insignificant without acknowledging the impact of Colombian geography on the formation of regions and development of a racially heated dialogue within the context of these regions. In *Muddied Waters*, Appelbaum discusses the manner in which the difficult to traverse terrain in Columbia and the extreme variety of climates gave rise to relatively insular communities. In early attempts to make sense of these communities, many anthropologists and sociologists would attribute what may have been environmentally created/sustained traits to differences in race. For example, in the Andean highlands, an industrious white and mestizo population built prosperous communities. Meanwhile, miles down the mountain, in the tropical lowlands, darker skinned indigenous peoples were content to live off the land (as agriculture was less of a possibility and the land did provide sufficient sustenance). Here you can see how geographic differences influenced culturally different regions. In turn, these regional differences were associated with race and used to justify a racially charged dialogue that glorified the hard-working, white ethos over the slothly indigenous.

Obviously, this geographic separation also influenced regional political differences and the overall propensity for civil war within Colombia. As large, geographically autonomous cities emerged, they formed strong polities that operated almost as republics. Many times, towns and cities in an immediate geographical region felt more responsible to their neighbors than they did to their country. It is easy to see how, given this dynamic, any variety of opinion or competing discourse could (and did) propel the nation into civil war.

that extends out towards the coast. Garcia Marquez's Macondo shares this geography. Historically, towns in this region were slow growing and late to arrive at the party of Colombian national politics. It is no surprise that Macondo also shares the fate of real settlements in this area.

Macondo's first interaction with the outside world comes from a group of travelling gypsies. Because of its accessibility to seafaring travellers, the Caribbean coast of Colombia evolved in a manner that stands in stark contrast to the rest of Colombia. While many of the regions of Colombia experienced decades of relatively insular growth after being settled, the Caribbean coast was immediately exposed to the peoples and cultures of the world. Garcia Marquez's choice to have Macondo's first contact with travelers from far away is an important tribute to a region that evolved very much separate of the capitol. Of course, in Garcia Marquez's utopia, this contact was representative of the inevitability of damaging colonial influence. It seems important that his first protagonist, Jose Buendía, actively sought the knowledge and influence of the gypsies. In reality, much of the mestizo population of Colombia did desire and welcome outside influence. While Garcia Marquez's 'influence of outsiders' did eventually lead to Macondo's fall from glory (ending with its complete destruction), it is important to note that initial contact drove Jose Buendía's curiosity and resulted in a wellspring of ideas that would drive the town toward further prosperity.

Many historians attribute Colombia's difficulty competing in the world economy to its technological backwardness. This is only partially the responsibility of its geography. Early in its exposure to the world economy, Colombia allowed most of its gold to be mined and exported without investing in advances in infrastructure. This was possible because of the gold's location in the mountains to the west of the Magdalena River. Minimal infrastructure was necessary to transport gold to the river. Aside from the path to the river and the path to the capitol, there was not value in taming the rough terrain. Unfortunately, when the gold reserves were no longer sufficient to sustain the stagnate Colombian economy, the infrastructure to transport any commercially viable crop was not in place. By this time, the capitol lacked the resources and the know-how to

successfully build the roads and railroads necessary to provide low cost transport of freight. Colombian commodities could not be sold at a price that would compete in the world market. As of 1850, it cost roughly the same to transport goods from the capitol in Bogotá to the port at the mouth of the Magdalena as it did to cross the Atlantic from England.

Jose Buendía's frustrated attempts to connect Macondo echo the frustration of Colombia's national economy. First, he wants to relocate Macondo to be on the sea. This would have worked as far as exposure goes. The towns on the Caribbean coast were able to grow and connect to the world in ways in which the rest of Colombia was not. To be fair to Garcia Marquez, in this instance the fear of colonial influence is well founded. Coastal cities were quickly exploited, and slaves were shipped to the coast in abundance, in order to grow tropical crops.

Later, Buendía has difficulty connecting the town to the road to the capitol. The lack of interconnecting roads in rural Colombia had a significant impact on the shape of national politics. Out of the distinct separation between Bogotá and the rest of the nation, sparsely dotting the landscape in the form of inaccessible villages, raised two competing political ideologies which would serve as the primary platforms of warring parties for decades of civil unrest in Colombia including the three years at the beginning of the twentieth century known as the One-thousand Day War. While Jose Buendía was busy trying to connect Macondo to the rest of Colombia, the capitol that he sought was establishing an elite enclave that would become the center of the Conservative politics. Underlying almost all the conflicts in post-independence Colombia was an ideological battle between those who wanted to centralize power in the capitol and those who wanted to federalize, thereby taking power from the capital and distributing it to autonomous states. Aside from brief periods during which both the Conservatives and Liberals were pro-federalization, centralization primarily fell to Conservatives, while Liberals perpetuated federalism in the rural municipalities. These ideological encampments are similarly attributed in Garcia Marquez's novel. Another similarity between Garcia Marquez's Liberal and Conservative parties and the real Liberal and Conservative parties is their religious affiliation. As in the history of Colombia, Garcia

Marquez's Conservatives were closely aligned with the Catholic Church. In contrast, Liberals in Colombia have, historically, been antichurch. Several times, Liberal leaders exiled Jesuit orders from operating and sought to significantly restrict the power and influence of the church.⁶

⁶ Anthropologists attempt to understand different cultures by practicing cultural relativism. Cultural relativism is the idea that each culture's practices and beliefs should be understood through the specific lens of that own culture. This stands in contrast to centuries of ethnocentrism during which imperial societies defined different cultures relative to their own. One perspective the sprung from cultural relativism is functionalism. In studying the functional perspective, anthropologists seek to understand in what ways institutions and practices serve a vital function within the society in which they're practiced. While the history of Catholicism in Latin America is anything but culturally relativistic, understanding the function of Catholicism in Latin America is crucial to understanding the structures and conflicts of Colombia.

Since the advent of Christianity, the church has served an important role in establishing and facilitating hierarchical power structures in western society and its colonies. Used as a justification for colonizing a continent of infidels, Catholicism quickly went about setting up the structure that would enable governing this world of vastly different cultures. By converting (often forcibly) indigenous peoples, the Catholic Church laid the groundwork for the hierarchical structure necessary to govern such a large space (one god equals one law). After colonies had achieved independence, Catholicism had been so firmly ingrained that new leaders perpetuated its influence by invoking religious legitimacy and encouraging the further promulgation of Christian ideologies.

Garcia Marquez's Buendías are, on the whole, suspicious of the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, when Father Ignacio arrives in town the immediate integration and expanding influence of the church is apparent. He is able to begin construction of a chapel, in the square, with the support of the townspeople. However, as the novel plays out, Garcia Marquez aptly identifies religion as a source of subjugation. While some people of Macondo (including Jose Buendía's wife, Ursula) accept the tenants of religion, overall skepticism wins out. Father Ignacio is demonstrated as having declining influence over the town, unable to wield the spiritual authority that he and the church sought.

What is even more telling, perhaps, is the interaction between Father Ignacio and the Conservative Army. Conservatives purport to fight on the behalf of the moral integrity of the church and its importance as a national institution. However when the Conservative Army arrives in Macondo, Father Ignacio is diminished to the role of a clown-like fool. He is not offered the respect his office might expect from a party that claims to fight on behalf of the church. Here, Garcia Marquez seems to be insinuating that—functionally—religion has again been coopted. The lack of respect given by the conservative army to Macondo's representative of Catholic authority, suggests that Conservatives are using support for the Catholic Church as a means of perpetuating conflict and galvanizing support for the Conservative regime. People may be likely to act contrary to their own interests if they believe it to be in service of an almighty god.

So, when Ursula finally does succeed in connecting Macondo with a town that is connected to the capitol and the capitol sends a representative to perform as magistrate of this newly discovered settlement, Jose Buendía's reaction is actually very telling. Buendía asserts himself and the autonomy of the town saying, "...we don't need any judges here because there is nothing that needs judging." He eventually allows the magistrate to stay on the conditions that the citizens retain their right to paint their houses whatever color they would like and the soldiers must leave at once. Even as he is allowing the magistrate to stay, Buendía makes certain the magistrate knows that they "are still enemies."

The conflict between Jose Buendía and the magistrate very much encapsulates the conflict of Liberals and Conservatives. When Macondo is finally connected to the outside world, they become subject to centralized government Conservatives who feel it is their right and duty to govern the outlying provinces. Jose Buendía would almost certainly say that he is not a politician. However, his actions are a perfect example of early Liberal provincial leaders. He could not deny his charge. It seems to be a moral imperative. He had led these people to establish the settlement. He was responsible, in some way, to protect them from any perceived tyranny. The conditions under which Jose Buendía allows the magistrate to stay are representative of Liberal complaints with the Conservative regime. The magistrate's attempt to make the citizens of Macondo paint their houses blue in celebration of the anniversary of national independence is clearly an example of the capitol drastically over reaching its purview. The armed guards sent to enforce the magistrate's law are representative of a national army. To Conservatives, a national army was seen as crucial for protecting the different territories of Colombia from outside invasion. Also, it was seen as a necessary deterrent to local dissent. To Liberals, the army was perceived as a puppet of politicians who sought to centralize that national government at the expense of voices outside the capital. Recognizing the need for some sort of military force, liberals opted to support the establishment of local militias or even provincial armies, which may be more likely to serve the people of their immediate area.

Because of Macondo's isolation to this point, Jose Buendía is not in a position to be a revolutionary leader. As of yet, the town is not aware of the growth of the conservative hegemony. They are unaware of any liberal dissent or the possibility of an insurrection. They were interested in finding the capitol; they had, and now they were learning how to live with the consequences. However, Jose Buendía's decision to make these two demands of the magistrate did establish precedence for Macondo's future conversion to an outpost of Liberal resistance.

Macondo does not emerge as a Liberal stronghold until years later. When Jose Buendía retreats to his solitude under the chestnut tree and his second son, Aureliano Buendía, is mourning the loss of his betrothed (the magistrate's youngest daughter), things begin to unfold. At this time, Aureliano is spending his evenings with the magistrate, playing dominoes and talking politics. When the national election comes around and the magistrate is in charge of facilitating voting in Macondo, the magistrate imparts on Aureliano the importance of voting for the Conservative party. At the same time, a liberal group solicits Aureliano for his support in a planned rebellion. When it comes time to count the votes, Aureliano witnesses the magistrate throw out many votes for the Liberal candidate and replace them with votes for the Conservative candidate. This is enough to convince Aureliano to become a Liberal "...because the Conservatives are tricky." As the months unfold and Aureliano becomes more aware of the anger and ambition of the Liberal strategizers in Macondo, he is unwilling to join them in what he considers a sort of bloodlust. It isn't until word reaches the town that war has begun throughout the country and the town is occupied by an army of Conservative soldiers sent from the capitol that Aureliano changes his mind.

When the soldiers arrive, they execute the man who had organized Macondo's, thus far, quiet Liberal rebellion. They kill him in the street without due process of law. Next, they seize a woman who has been bitten by a rabid dog and beat her to death with the butts of their rifles. This is what it takes for Aureliano to assemble the Liberal plotters and storm the garrison. When Aureliano and his men had taken control of the town, they executed the general and the four soldiers who had killed that woman. The

left Arcadio, Aureliano's nephew, in charge of keeping order in the town. Aureliano took his new name, Coronel Aureliano Buendía, and his men and marched to war. When Coronel Aureliano Buendía joins the armed conflict against the Conservative regime and leaves Arcadio in charge, he effectively completes the town's transition into a place of Liberal resistance. Macondo becomes strongly independent township, not lacking the courage to fight for itself. This is in keeping with many of the towns that were inland of the Caribbean coast of Colombia.

The circumstances that led Coronel Aureliano Buendía to take up arms are direct references to Colombian history. There are many accounts of tampering with votes. On top of that, Conservative armies were known to use quasi-arbitrary violence to frighten the people into obedience. Both of these patterns are widely credited for inciting many of the rural rebellions against the Conservative regime. By choosing to represent this piece of history, Garcia Marquez advances Colombia's Liberal party in the battle for any moral high ground. In this account, Conservative violence can be easily villainized as semi-imperialistic.⁷ Because it is not integral to the story, this selection of historical representation disregards the fact that some from the Liberal party had used similar tactics when they had taken power in the capitol in the late 1840's. Granted, Liberals had always drawn their power from the peoples of the countryside. When trying to preserve their power in the capitol, Liberals resorted to public executions by firing squad along with tampering with votes and intimidating Conservative senators.

After years of waging unsuccessful campaigns against the Conservative regime, Coronel Aureliano Buendía is captured and sentenced to death by firing squad (this is a recurring theme in the book: memories the Coronel has while standing in front of the firing squad). His last wish is for the sentence to be carried out in his hometown, Macondo. Of course, not one of the soldiers given the charge to execute him is able to do so. In fact, they join his rebellion and begin to fight against the Conservatives alongside their new Coronel. What is of historical significance here is the importance

⁷That is: in this story, Conservatives of the capitol are indistinguishable from other imperial forces; they're trying to extend their power by asserting themselves on what should be more sovereign territories and exerting their authority through acts of violence and military might.

of firing squads. Firing squads certainly aren't unique to Colombian history. However, Colombian militants certainly did have a way of perfecting their use, and they've become a significant topic in much Latin American literature (not just *One Hundred Years of Solitude*).⁸ From the execution of prisoners in civil wars dating back to the 1830's to Liberal General Mosquero ordering the execution of political opponents in 1857 and far beyond, the firing squad was an integral part of Colombia's "culture of terror." While it was designed to instill fear in the people and facilitate order, the firing squad just as often hardened the hearts of dissidents and galvanized opposition to the powers that be. This can be seen throughout Garcia Marquez's novel. Firing squads are ordered to demonstrate power. However, as often as they're successful at showing the might of the capital, they are just as frequently used as justification for rebellion. Further, when they fail to happen as planned, they only show places where the regime has overplayed its hand and simply doesn't hold the power that it wants to exercise.

⁸ Along with the violence of the army seen earlier and the massacre at the end, the execution of dissidents by firing squad is integral in building what anthropologist Michael Taussig calls a 'culture of terror' in his study, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. This 'culture of terror' evolved, in Colombia, from the early workings of rubber companies in the area. With wanton disregard for the lives of the natives, these traders and companies would gruesomely murder thousands of indigenous people. They would allow the people to starve. They would work the indigenous to death. All of these early conditions lead to Taussig's 'culture of terror,' which was enshrouded in ambiguity.

The terror was effective because it was of near mythical proportions. The actions and results were so extreme that they seemed removed from the realm of human beings and became monstrous folklore, a threat of what might happen if you questioned the way things were or how they should be. The terror was also effective because it was largely kept secret. Europeans who heard-tell of atrocities would be reluctant to believe these stories because of the grandeur of the accounts and the lack of proof.

This sort of cover-up is later demonstrated immediately after the massacre at the banana company. As Jose Arcadio Segundo makes his way back into town after riding miles with the corpses of his fellow protesters, everyone he meets is certain that this massacre did not happen. Some acts of terror were effective so long as they were only threats to the general public, but largely remained covered up.

Others, like the firing squad, relied on the public's engagement in order...

(Continued from footnote ⁸) ...to intimidate dissenters. If outrageous acts of bloodlust and inhumanity were the threats, public execution by firing squad was the promise. While Taussig's investigation of the 'culture of terror' is focused on the act of forced colonization, I would argue that post-independence polities had learned from their colonial forefathers. The United Fruit Company and the Conservative regime understood the predisposition of their subjects, the propensity to jump down the rabbit hole of terror, the disconnectedness that would result from fear (and would squash any attempts at organizing rebellion). Not only did they understand this culture, they were—mostly—adept at utilizing its tools.

Of course, the other end of this culture of terror is strength in opposition. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as—I suspect—in real life, facing death is viewed as a transformative experience. Whether one is directly facing a firing squad or simply witness to the death of a friend, this culture's other end is a desensitized and enlightened resistance. Because of this, the firing squad is often offered a sort of reverence that other deaths may not be granted. In fiction, it is often memorialized as a moment of complete contemplation, when the world is suddenly allowed to become clear and absolution is, at last, achieved. This memorialization allows the frightened people of Colombia to romanticize death. This ability to romanticize allays feelings of terror. This vacation from terror enables resistance to organize and bravely fight.

When the fourth generation of Buendía's is born to José Arcadio's bastard son, Arcadio, Garcia Marquez continues his pattern of interspersing facts and themes that are historically accurate with the overall fiction. Arcadio has three children; more significant to the plot of the story are his twin sons Jose Arcadio Segundo and Aureliano Segundo⁹. Aureliano Segundo grows to become a rotund and luxurious individual. He is a successful cattle farmer and spends his days throwing parties with his mistress. The fertility of his cattle is attributed to the liveliness and fertility of his relationship with his mistress. It follows that when he goes home to his wife and it begins to rain, his cattle die. While Garcia Marquez makes this a very magical occurrence (his rain seems to go on forever), in reality these sorts of tropical storms were frequent happenings during the wet season in this part of Colombia. Further, for decades this geography was the only part of Colombia that could sustain raising livestock and wasn't valuable for agriculture. People in this area were primarily responsible for

⁹ I was really interested in discovering if indigenous mythology had anything to say about naming and genetic memory. I was unable. Since their birth, Ursula has insisted that the boys have the wrong names because of their personalities.

raising the nation's livestock. What Garcia Marquez makes a pseudo-magical event, was commonplace every year in Colombia. Aureliano Segundo's propensity for shirking his responsibility during this time had predictable consequences. His livestock died off, and he was left with nothing. He did not share the work ethic of actual Colombian herders who moved their livestock to high ground and procured stores of feed to sustain them through the wet season.

Jose Arcadio Segundo lived a similarly real life, and—in the novel—was responsible for precipitating an event that actually happened. Like his great uncle, Aureliano Segundo was drawn to action to support a people who were mistreated and left without a voice to improve their situation. He became an organizer of protests against the United Fruit Company in Macondo. After successfully organizing several demonstrations, being arrested, and spending months in jail to no avail, Aureliano Segundo finally organized a campaign of sabotage coupled with a nearly all-inclusive strike, which temporarily brought the company to its knees. When the company arranged for all the protesters to gather in the town square to negotiate, there was reason to believe that they may yet get the wages and working conditions they were demanding. Of course, when they met in the square by the railroad station at noon, this was not the case. The protesters were ordered to disperse at the threat of being shot. The square was surrounded by the national army armed with machine guns. When the protesters did not disperse, all 3,000 of them were shot and killed.

This actually happened! In Cienaga, Colombia; on December 6, 1928; nine months after Garcia Marquez's birth; between 800 and 3,000 workers of the United Fruit Company gathered in the square (surrounded by a government army), and the army opened fire on them. As in the book, the casualties were driven to the ocean and dumped. Also as in the book, the government successfully waged a campaign of misinformation that raised doubt as to the likelihood of the occurrence. In the novel, the doubt was sufficient for it to seem as though nothing had happened, as people opened their doors to Aureliano and assured him that he hadn't experienced what he was sharing. In real life, campaigns of misinformation and propaganda were so prevalent that the reaction of much of the country wasn't much

different. Many simply did not know what to believe. If it sounded unbelievable, it was often taken with a grain of salt at best, dismissed as propaganda at worst.

Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is more than a remarkable novel, responsible for winning the Nobel Prize. This novel is also a historical account of Colombian society. The story does not follow the chronology of Colombian history, so it can sometimes seem to be more of an abstraction. However, if you attempt to understand the geography and happenings of Macondo within the context of Colombia's history, you start to see another story. This work of fiction writes a history of a war torn country, of seclusion and solitude, of prohibitive geography, of the pride of men and armies, of the rise and fall of religion, of colonization and exploitation, of a lost country—immersed in an almost eternal sense of forgetfulness.¹⁰ *One Hundred Years of Solitude* offers a history, albeit a biased history, of Colombia that will not soon be forgotten.¹¹

¹⁰ Aside from the forgetfulness of the townspeople in the wake of the massacre in the square, forgetfulness is also demonstrated elsewhere in the book. During the plague of insomnia, the young town of Macondo was at risk of entirely losing its cultural identity. Examining the plague of insomnia may be of interest to a medical anthropologist.

To begin, Ursula's indigenous housekeeper first diagnosed the plague. While this person was not a healer, her ability to easily recognize and diagnose a problem that was not immediately clear to the rest of the family seems to suggest a value to the knowledge of indigenous medicine that cannot be overlooked. Unfortunately, moving forward, Garcia Marquez does not seem to value the prognostic side of indigenous healing rituals.

Petra Cotes, who has long told the future by casting bones for skeptics and those who are superstitious, has nothing to provide in the form of a cure. What she does, however, is begin to read people's pasts as their memory fades from them along with any identity it held. This seems to be an apt way to describe some aspects of indigenous medicine. That is: sometimes there is nothing to be done to cure a problem. In these times, it is best to go about doing whatever fixes the pain or consequence of the ailment. In this instance, though, there is a cure, and the worlds of indigenous medicine and western medicine collide. When Melquiades brings a tincture from the outside world, which immediately cures Jose Buendía, we begin to get a sense that western medicine is superior.

Actually, though, Garcia Marquez shies from such an endorsement. By having the indigenous lady be the first to diagnose the insomnia and having wild predictions made by Petra Cotes and her bones come to pass in the novel, Garcia Marquez seems to show the sort of measured acceptance we might expect from a medical anthropologist.

¹¹ Finding items of anthropological significance within Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not difficult. However, to take a look at themes and happenings of anthropological importance *within* the novel, without analyzing the novel as a distinct artifact, itself full of significance, would be a mistake. Because of the content and the literary voice, because of its cross-cultural success and adoration, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has served the indigenous and mestizo of Colombia along with the international community.

First, Garcia Marquez's invention of magic realism seems to create a world in which even the lost or forgotten indigenous cultures may survive. In reality, indigenous histories were, most often, obliterated during colonization. The indigenous populations across Latin America had to forge on, completely severed from most of what defined their unique cultural identity. Latin American literature has long been conscious of this painful disconnect and sought to remedy it as much as is possible. In this manner, Garcia Marquez, along with other Latin American authors, served the indigenous peoples by preserving their cultures.

After the 1967 publication of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Latin American authors would often focus short stories on lost tribes or disappearing mountain villages. These stories left indigenous peoples with the promise that somewhere their culture had escaped, unscathed by colonial influence, and was sequestered there, in tact, waiting for some grand re-emergence. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, this theme seems available in Melquíades and Jose Arcadio Segundo's realization that 'everything is known.' Though, in the novel, their revelations are often centered on arcane details of European history and present, the implication of this wellspring of knowledge, in which 'everything is known,' is clear. If everything is known, then everything is preserved. Garcia Marquez joins a literary tradition that is responsible for offering what little and poor grounds for reconciliation may be available to the indigenous peoples of Colombia.

It is also important to recognize this novel's importance in how it has informed other cultures. Due to its commercial success, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has definitely become a widely accessible standard for understanding Latin American cultures and societies. Since it also openly endorses a very liberally sympathetic history, it is effectively perpetuating the cause of the liberal party far beyond the borders of Colombia. The war is over. Centralization has occurred. The country of Colombia is streamlined and competing in the world economy. However, radicals everywhere can hold on to the revolution and rhetoric of Coronel Aureliano Buendía. Disenfranchised and subjugated populations can stand tall knowing that somewhere 'everything is known'—even their lost and forgotten culture. In this way, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* goes beyond highlighting anthropologically significant topics and history to become an anthropological artifact. Its meaningful interaction with the mestizo and indigenous cultures of Colombia, along with other societies across the world, justifies its analysis as an anthropological artifact.

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