

**Other Ways to Be: Decolonization in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Namwali Serpell's *The Old Drift***

by

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In this BPhil thesis, I propose that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Gabriel García Márquez 1967) and *The Old Drift* (Namwali Serpell 2019) are decolonial novels in the sense that they call for the dismantling of the cultural, political, and economic inequalities created by colonialism, which continue to relegate the Global South to a subordinate position in the modern world, even after the formal end of colonial rule. I especially focus on cultural decolonization, which, within the context of these two novels, I define as a practice of 1) rejecting Eurocentric and racist readings of Global South history; 2) countering the claim that the Global South is best served by emulating the Global North; and 3) promoting alternatives to dominant social, economic, and political models. I analyze how both authors reject and satirize Eurocentric discourses and how they challenge the efficacy of the postcolonial nation-state, which they frame as unable to deal with the injustices and inequalities created by colonialism. Then I investigate whether the novels frame violence as an acceptable means of decolonization and what they suggest an equitable, decolonized world might look like.

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## Preface

In her acknowledgements for *The Old Drift*, Namwali Serpell says that “[a] novel this long in the making draws around it a veritable swarm of souls” (566). This thesis does not reach the scale of her more than 500 page novel, but for me it was, nonetheless, a mammoth undertaking, one which I could not have accomplished without the help of many wonderful people. I would like to extend a very special thank you to Professor Daniel Balderston who has been my research mentor for nearly two years, and who has not only met my ideas with incredible kindness and patience and immeasurably deepened my understanding of modern and contemporary Latin American literature, but who also, while I was studying abroad, provided introductions to some of the living Chilean writers and scholars he works with. I also want to thank my amazing committee members, Dr. Geoffrey Glover, Dr. Uma Satyavolu, and Professor Arturo Chang. Dr. Horia Dijmarescu gave me an invaluable political science perspective on decolonization and the other subjects that most interest me and helped me believe in my ability to understand and talk about political theory. Professor Emeritus Susan Andrade first sparked my love of postcolonial literature during my very first semester at Pitt. Elaine Linn, my global studies advisor, offered me advice and support that helped me enormously on my journey to the BPhil and the Certificate in Global Studies. Leslie Ann Smedley first directed me to the Middlebury Schools Abroad Program through which I was able to study abroad at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, an experience which majorly shaped this thesis, and supported me throughout the study abroad application process. Dr. Lori Campbell helped win me over to the English Literature major. She and Dr. Teresa Clifton were my advisors for my Literature major and Spanish minor respectively and helped me plan a trajectory through them that allowed me to pursue my interests. I am immensely grateful to

the Honors College for awarding me the Chancellor's Undergraduate Research Fellowship to work on this project. Finally, I want to thank my friends and family who have kept me tied to reality and prevented me from disappearing down research rabbit holes and who have given me so much love and support during this entire process.

## Introduction

How did the modern world come to be? How could it have been different? These are not mere thought-experiments. Depending on the context in which they are asked, these questions can challenge global power dynamics and the narratives which legitimize them. For example, they raise the question of whether Europe and North America's apparent paramountcy over the rest of the world was inevitable. To this question, Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and Namwali Serpell's *The Old Drift* (2019) answer with a resounding "no." They are but two of many examples of literary works from the Global South that locate the source of the Global North's political, economic, and cultural hegemony in past and present violence towards the peoples of the Global South. I find them to be especially interesting examples because their substantial size and the long timeframe of their stories (approximately a century in each novel) allow them to address a wide variety of forms of colonial, neocolonial and racist injustice and oppression while showing how these have and have not changed over time.

In this paper, I propose that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Old Drift* are decolonial novels not in the sense that they call for the dismantling of the political institution of colonialism, but of the cultural, political and economic inequalities it created which continue to relegate the Global South to a subordinate position in the modern world. I especially focus on cultural decolonization, though I devote some time to economic and political decolonization in Chapter 3.0. In this introduction, I review the ideas of several major theorists of cultural



decolonization, which I draw on to put forward my own definition, which I will use throughout this paper.<sup>1</sup>

According to Aníbal Quijano, while colonialism as a system of political domination of one society by another has largely ceased to exist, the unequal power relations created by European colonialism continue to structure global relations, among other things through the continued cultural domination of the colonized which consists not only of a subordination of their cultures to Europe's but a colonization of their cultural imaginary, which attacked and to varying degrees destroyed their forms of knowledge production, intellectual and visual expression, and ways of understanding the world. He shows how European colonialism grew parallel to and was mutually constituted with modernity and rationality, producing a Eurocentric vision of the world in which Europeans alone were subjects while other people and cultures were objects to be known and/or dominated by them. One of the most important ways in which I argue *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Old Drift* are decolonial is that they seek to dismantle the various discourses which spring from this conception of the relation between the Global North and the rest of the world. Quijano argues that as colonialism, modernity, and rationality interwove, the Global North came to see itself as the highest stage of civilization to which all other cultures should aspire, an idea which was inculcated in practically all the cultures colonized by Europeans. To put an end to the processes described above, which he terms coloniality and its deleterious effects including global inequality, economic exploitation of the peoples of the Global South, continued racial discrimination, and the invalidation and destruction of non-European cultural and intellectual

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term decolonization throughout this paper as opposed to its predecessor anti-imperialism. On the occasions when I reference imperialism or anti-imperialism, it is because they are the terms used by my source. Similarly, I use the term Global North throughout but some of my sources refer to the "West."

production, Quijano calls for decolonization which for him entails separating rationality and modernity from coloniality and liberating communication and the production of knowledge from Eurocentric prescriptions of what they must be.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's description of what he calls a "cultural bomb," which he considers the most powerful weapon available to both colonial and neocolonial imperialism, resembles Quijano's colonization of the cultural imaginary. He argues that it is designed to destroy a people's belief in the value of their cultural heritage driving them to distance themselves from it and identify themselves with what is furthest removed from them. Having thus damaged the colonized culture, imperialism then presents itself as the solution to the problems of the allegedly innately impoverished colonized people, allowing it to seize their wealth, which includes both their material and intellectual resources. For Ngugi, this mental domination is essential for effective political and economic domination. He argues that to resist it the peoples of the Global South must draw on the very traditions that the "cultural bomb" seeks to destroy.

Crucially, for Ngugi and Quijano decolonization means decentering not rejecting the Global North. For example, Ngugi argues that instead of treating European and North American literatures as central and approaching the rest of the world in relation to them, Africans (and by extension others in the Global South) should read literature from all over the world but from the position of their specific culture. Similarly, for Quijano, successful decolonization would allow for a new kind of intercultural communication based on a more genuinely universal rationality, one that is not based on the hegemonic power of any culture's belief system.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that other postcolonial scholars such as Sandra Harding have questioned whether a universal rationality can exist.

One of the important sites of contestation in cultural decolonization is the history of the Global South (Booker 145; Gagliano 36). Eurocentrism and racism have long colored and even dominated Global North perceptions of the Global South and its history and still exert destructive influences in the present. Among the Eurocentric and racist narratives García Márquez and Serpell write against are those which frame Latin America as a failed or distorted copy of Europe whose inhabitants are lazy, fanatical, and / or savage (e.g., Martin, *Journeys* 224; Knight, *What Price* 2-8) and Africans as people without a history (also savages) who had to be rescued from themselves through colonization (e.g., Booker 144; Ngugi 3). Narratives like these are used to justify the continued subordination of the Global South to the Global North within the international order. I am not the first to argue that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Old Drift* contribute to this rewriting of the Global South's history by challenging narratives in which its peoples are framed as passive, ahistorical figures or in which their subordinate relation to the Global North is framed as an inevitable result of their racial or cultural vices. Gerald Martin interprets *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as “a deconstructionist reading of [Latin American] history” (*Journeys* 233) which locates the origins of Latin America's problems not in the faults of its people but in the legacy of Iberian colonialism and the global capitalism and neocolonialism of the present.<sup>3</sup> Annie Gagliano argues that *The Old Drift* successfully challenges Eurocentric histories which ascribe “passivity and victimhood” (37) to Africans by portraying characters who have agency and structure historical events and insisting that African histories are as significant to humanity as their better-known counterparts from the Global North. I expand on these earlier interpretations to argue that

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<sup>3</sup> Gerald Martin's interpretation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in his *Journeys Through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century* was the starting point for my own and I draw on it frequently throughout this thesis.

both novels constitute critical and even satirical readings of Eurocentric histories of the Global South, which encourage their readers to challenge the alleged superiority of the Global North and value the devalued cultures of the Global South.

Eurocentric discourses have not only harmed the Global South in that they have influenced outsiders' perceptions of it, but also in that they have shaped how its people see themselves and how they have structured their political and social institutions in the wake of formal decolonization. Partha Chatterjee argues that the postcolonial nation-state was constructed within the European conception of Reason and in so doing accepted the logic of global capitalism that accompanied it to the detriment of its people. In a similar vein, many other decolonial intellectuals (Ngugi, Fanon) assert that power in much of the Global South is held by a culturally colonized postcolonial elite with Eurocentric worldviews who allow continued domination by the Global North in the form of neocolonialism. Thus, the creation of the postcolonial nation-state did not complete the process of decolonization. Because it retains elements of Eurocentric worldviews which are harmful to the peoples of the Global South, the two novels direct their decolonial critiques not only against discourses from the Global North but against those of the postcolonial nation-state. They associate themselves with another tradition of Global South thought which "reject[s] emulation of Europe and the European model honed by its former colony, the United States" (Armillas-Tiseyra 168), early proponents of which included Frantz Fanon.

Decolonization is not only cultural but political and economic, and in these areas even more so than in the field of culture, it cannot be achieved only through challenging Eurocentric discourses. In 1961, as former colonies across the Global South became nations, Fanon argued that true decolonization could only be achieved through violence, and that where the violent phase of the independence movement did not last for long enough a Europeanized, neocolonial elite would

take power at the expense of the people. In his analysis of Ngugi's novel *Matigari*, which shares Fanon's condemnatory assessment of the neocolonial elite, novelist and literary scholar Abdulrazak Gurnah challenges its repudiation of "any route to 'liberation' that falls short of an armed uprising" (169) against the neocolonial elite and the Global North interests they serve because it "reduces complexities and differences ... [by claiming that] there are only two types of people in the land – patriots and traitors" (171-2). In light of this debate, I consider the stances both novels take towards decolonial violence particularly when faced with neocolonialism rather than colonialism.

Finally, in addition to rejecting Eurocentric models and ending the unequal power relations that subordinate the Global South to the Global North, decolonization also entails imagining alternative, equitable societies. It is in this vein that Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra provides an account of the history of the Global South and its predecessor, the "Third World," not only as locations but as "emancipatory political projects" (Armillas-Tiseyra 169). She explains that these were cast in utopian terms, though she makes a distinction between the concretely defined utopian aspirations of the 1960s through the 1980s and a new kind of utopian thinking which per Alfred J. López emerged in the 1990s "from the failure of "world-utopias" (of the Third World project as much as of globalization) reflecting a skepticism of master narratives" (Armillas-Tiseyra 170-1). This new approach emphasizes a "utopian *impulse* ... [which reimagines] utopianism as a way of grappling with the realities of the present and, in so doing, of imagining possible futures ... [where] utopia is not so much an end as a method ... Another world is possible, but what exactly that world might be must remain an open question" (Armillas-Tiseyra 171, original emphasis). I argue that this approach to utopia informs the conclusions of both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Old*

*Drift*, even though the former belongs to an earlier period in the history of Global South utopian thinking.

Drawing on the work of other scholars described above, I put forward the following definition of cultural decolonization as I see it operating in these novels. For García Márquez and Serpell, cultural decolonization means rejecting Eurocentric and racist readings of Global South history which blame its inhabitants for their suffering, countering the claim that the Global South is best served by emulating the Global North, and promoting alternatives to dominant social, economic and political models, which can either stem from precolonial traditions or be newly created.

In my first chapter I analyze how both novels challenge and satirize Eurocentric discourses. García Márquez uses the motif of inaccurate prophecies to show the failure of Eurocentric accounts of Latin American history and culture to truly explain these and argue that they obfuscate the true causes of Latin America's problems. Serpell uses her novel to reject Eurocentric readings of African history by showing that they portray chains of causality which were the result of chance and accident as though they were inevitable and ignore the histories of non-European societies as well as the alternative political projects which could have risen to prominence instead of their more Global North-influenced counterparts such as the nation-state. In the second chapter, I argue that both authors challenge the efficacy of the postcolonial nation-state primarily through their subversion of what Doris Sommer calls the "national romance," which she argues is a literary genre originating in 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin America in which romantic unions between the principal characters are used to allude to a positive nationalist project. In contrast both García Márquez and Serpell, portray romances which fracture under the pressures of colonialism and its legacies, neocolonialism, global capitalism, and racism which the postcolonial nation-state is unable to deal

with. In the third chapter, I parse the stances the two novels take towards decolonial violence. I argue that while *Solitude* may seem to endorse decolonial violence by showing the failure of nonviolent attempts at decolonization, it does not go so far as to become a manifesto for violence as García Márquez's primary goal is to get his readers to read Latin American history critically allowing them to achieve cultural decolonization. Serpell addresses decolonial violence directly but neither wholly endorses nor condemns it, framing it as an ethically complex issue her readers must carefully reflect on. In the fourth and final chapter, I explain why I consider the novels' conclusions utopic in terms of the "utopian impulse" defined by Armillas-Tiseyra and argue that both novels are designed to provide their readers with the necessary tools to decolonize their minds allowing them to imagine utopian social, political, and economic alternatives to modern hegemonic society.

## 1.0 Against Colonialist Discourses

According to Aníbal Quijano and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, one of the essential components of decolonization is the need to liberate the minds of the colonized from the discourses which variously justified their subjugation to the colonizing cultures and subsequent relation of dependence to the Global North, devalued and/or destroyed their culture, art and knowledge, and erased and distorted their histories. Both García Márquez and Serpell take on this project in their novels as they seek to disprove and denaturalize the claims these discourses make, showing that they originated in specific historical circumstances and were designed to serve the needs of the colonizing culture. In this chapter, I investigate how both novels take on Eurocentric discourses that, as Quijano says, were produced in relation to colonial expansion, in order to denaturalize them or reject them entirely. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez sends up deterministic accounts of Latin American history by prominently featuring prophecies in his narration which the characters take seriously even though they are frequently wrong. Similarly, in *The Old Drift*, Serpell works to destabilize discourses by showing that historical and political phenomena such as colonialism and the nation-state which have been made to seem inevitable are really the result of chance and even error.

In his analysis of the use of humor in *Solitude*, Clive Griffin shows that predictions of different kinds proliferate throughout the novel. Some of its characters like Colonel Aureliano Buendía and Pilar Ternera are allegedly clairvoyant, while the narration itself “is built upon predictions of what will happen to the characters in the future ... the phrase *había de* ([they were] to) is one of the most frequent in the book” (Griffin 63). Yet the predictions of both the characters



and the narrator are frequently wrong. For Griffin, this is evidence that *Solitude* is a comedic novel which ultimately lacks a deeper meaning and that its suggestion of one is one of its jokes. However, once read through the interpretation of Gerald Martin these inaccurate prophecies which the narrator and the characters nonetheless take seriously take on a political meaning. According to him,

García Márquez presents most aspects of reality from the standpoint of his characters, while he ... as narrator, adopts a perspective based – largely but not entirely ironically – on the mainly metaphysical views of the *pensadores*, those ‘thinkers’ or ideologists who dominated Latin America’s interpretation of its own history until after the Second World War. Sarmiento’s struggle between civilization and barbarism, ... Hector Murena’s original-sin thesis [and others] ... find themselves circumscribed, at the last, by a conception which coincides closely with ... Octavio Paz’s assertion that Latin Americans were now the contemporaries of all men and Leopoldo Zea’s thesis that it was time ... to break out of the labyrinth of solitude and assimilate the history of the continent (*Journeys* 222-3)

The interpretations of the *pensadores* have had a destructive psychological impact on Latin Americans:

[I]t is at least plausible that what the novel is saying is that Latin American life is a dream – not just the ‘unreality’ and ‘inauthenticity’ spontaneously imposed by alienation under capitalism, but also shaped by five hundred years of colonialism – and that when a dream becomes a permanent living nightmare (example: we have plundered you for centuries and now you owe us billions of dollars) it is probably time to wake up. The official history which the ‘Triumph of the West’ has ordained for itself is that of rationalism, progressive

development and linear chronology ... it is, for the typical Latin American, organic and coherent by definition; whereas his (sic) own history is fragmented, discontinuous, absurd ... It is his (sic) fate actually to be one of the despised inhabitants of a 'banana republic', victim of a 'comic-opera regime' ... He is a 'mimic man' (sic). Or so 'we' would have him (sic) think (Martin, *Journeys* 224, original emphasis)

To use Ngugi's terms, Latin Americans have been subjected to a 'cultural bomb,' in that Global North ideological hegemony has devalued their history and culture and has pushed them to see the solutions to their problems in subordinating themselves to Europe and the United States, from where García Márquez and Ngugi would argue these problems originally came.<sup>4</sup> The theories of the *pensadores* are the result of their adoption of a Eurocentric perspective which causes them to see Latin American history as a story of failure because they measure it against standards derived from the European Enlightenment while blinding them to the real causes of Latin America's problems. Seen from this perspective the purpose of the inaccurate prophecies is to show the disconnect between these theories and Latin America's real history. By highlighting this disconnect for his readers, García Márquez aims to liberate them from the destructive influence of this Eurocentric perspective – in other words, his goal is to help them decolonize their minds.

I will analyze several passages about prophecies to show how García Márquez covertly reveals their absurdity to his readers, before showing how the novel links the prophecies with the discourses of the *pensadores*. Some of these passages are almost transparent about the

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<sup>4</sup> The colonization of the mind in Latin America is not entirely like the one Ngugi describes in Africa, as not all Latin American populations are devalued in the same way. While the histories of the indigenous peoples of the Americas are indeed erased, Latin Americans of European descent are portrayed as trying and failing to emulate the virtues of European and North American civilization.

fallaciousness of the prophecies, yet because everything in the novel is “recounted in that same tone of calm and absolute certainty” (Martin, *Journeys* 220) they are less likely to stand out as such. Colonel Buendía, a character claimed early on to be clairvoyant, is aware that his predictions are at best inconsistent:

Eran inútiles sus esfuerzos por sistematizar los presagios. Se presentaban de pronto, en una ráfaga de lucidez sobrenatural, como una convicción absoluta y momentánea, pero inasible. En ocasiones eran tan naturales, que no los identificaba como presagios sino cuando se cumplían. Otras veces eran terminantes y no se cumplían. Con frecuencia no eran más que golpes vulgares de superstición (García Márquez, *Cien años* 155-6)

His efforts to systematize his predictions were useless. They presented themselves suddenly in flashes of supernatural lucidity, like a momentary, absolute but intangible conviction. Sometimes they were so natural that he did not identify them until they came true. Other times they were incontrovertible but did not come true. Frequently, they were no more than vulgar pangs of superstition.

Sometimes the Colonel’s predictions seem so natural that he does not recognize them as predictions. At other times, they are incontrovertible and yet do not come true. They strike with a supernatural lucidity which is like an absolute conviction (this also contradicts the subsequent sentences: how can something which strikes with supernatural lucidity not be recognized as a prediction?) but which crucially is not absolute conviction but rather something *like* it. The paragraph foregrounds a series of inconsistencies which raise the question of whether predictions which are inconsistent and which sometimes do not come true are really predictions at all. The idea that the predictions are at odds with reality and may indeed be obscuring it is further developed in the scene involving the death of Aureliano José. Here the narrator lists various predictions

making contrary claims and indeed suggests that Aureliano José has died as a result of a prediction gone awry as though there is nothing unusual or self-contradictory about what they are saying. Aureliano José's fortune-telling mother Pilar Ternera sees that "ya estaba marcado por el signo de la muerte. Ella lo vio en los naipes" 'he was already marked by the sign of death. She saw it in the cards' (García Márquez, *Cien años* 188), which is strange since on the previous page it was claimed that she "renunció a la ilusión estéril de las barajas" 'renounced the sterile illusion of the cards' (García Márquez, *Cien años* 187). At the moment of his death, the narrator states that

Aureliano José estaba destinado a conocer con [Carmelita Montiel] la felicidad ... y a morirse de viejo en sus brazos, pero la bala de fusil que le entró por la espalda y le despedazó el pecho estaba dirigida por una mala interpretación de las barajas. El capitán Aquiles Ricardo, que era en realidad quien estaba destinado a morir esa noche, murió en efecto cuatro horas antes que Aureliano José (García Márquez, *Cien años* 189)

Aureliano José was destined to find happiness with [Carmelita Montiel] ... and to die of old age in her arms, but the bullet which entered through his back and ruptured his chest was directed by a bad interpretation of the cards. Captain Aquiles Ricardo, who was really the one destined to die that night, did indeed die four hours before Aureliano José

The phrasing is astonishing: Aureliano José was killed because of a wrong interpretation of the cards which said that Aquiles Ricardo was supposed to die that night. The only way in which this claim could make sense is if it was reality itself which had misread the prediction. More and more García Márquez suggests that the predictions are attempting to force a meaning onto the lives of the characters which is contradicted by fact. In the same way, Eurocentric interpretations of Latin American history and society attempt to force a restrictive meaning onto the lives of Latin Americans, which not only fails to represent reality but obfuscates it.

The placement of Colonel Buendía's assessment of his predictions is significant in showing how their fallaciousness relates to the theories of the *pensadores*. It happens as he is imprisoned waiting for his execution. It would be possible to link the predictions with "local superstition" and thus raise the "enlightened" discourses of the *pensadores* as an alternative to them, but through his placement of this passage, García Márquez makes this interpretation difficult as he links the faulty predictions to the novel's narration which, as per Martin, speaks in the voice of the *pensadores*. That narration itself opens with an implicit prediction: "Muchos años después, frente al pelotón de fusilamiento, el coronel Aureliano Buendía había de recordar aquella tarde remota en que su padre lo llevó a conocer el hielo" 'Many years later in front of the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that remote afternoon when his father took him to see what ice was' (García Márquez, *Cien años* 9). According to Griffin, the conventions of novel writing imply that *Solitude* "is ... going to be the life story of this character, beginning in early childhood and ending with his execution" (61). Yet none of the above is true as Colonel Buendía survives the firing squad, and the novel ends many years after his death (Griffin 61). Thus, the moment in which the novel indicates that the characters' predictions may be inaccurate is followed by the Colonel's attempted execution, the moment which indicates that the narrator's predictions may be inaccurate.

According to Martin, the two dominant theories which structured much of Latin American social thought post-independence were the "religious concept of original sin ... [and] biological determinism," the latter of which was given "as an explanation of Latin America's continuing backwardness and a positivist justification of the rule of Europeanized minorities" (*Journeys* 228). García Márquez shows that both theories are absurd not by having anyone in the novel acknowledge them as such - "The secret last analysis of every situation reverts to racial or metaphysical explanations ... Problems of underdevelopment, dependency or imperialism never

occur to these characters” (ibid.) - but by showing how they cannot explain what is happening in the novel and by extension in Latin American history<sup>5</sup> even as they are presented as though they can. It is here that I must acknowledge a flaw in Martin’s analysis, as the narrator states that the character Colonel Aureliano Buendía develops some understanding of neocolonialism. When the banana company takes power in Macondo, establishing a rule of repressive violence amid the apparent prosperity, which culminates in the murder of his 17 illegitimate children, the Colonel calls for “promover una conflagración mortal que arrasara con todo vestigio de un régimen de corrupción y de escándalo sostenido por el invasor extranjero” ‘promoting a mortal conflagration which would obliterate every trace of a regime of corruption and scandal maintained by the foreign invader’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 294). The Colonel grasps at least the basic mechanism of neocolonialism in that he understands that it is the United States which keeps Colombia’s government in power and that is the banana company which now holds power in Macondo. I suspect that part of why this passage is generally overlooked and why I argue that Martin’s claim that neocolonialism is an oblique presence in the novel is mostly true, is that it is introduced very quickly and then forgotten about almost as quickly.

What the *pensadores* and Global North elites would dismiss as local superstition or ignorance – the rumors and apparently unfounded fears circulating among the people of Macondo – can be more perceptive than the statements made based on Eurocentric versions of religious or scientific authority. García Márquez brings this out in the contrast between Macondo’s working class and the local elite represented by the Buendía family. It is thus the fortune teller Pilar Ternera

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<sup>5</sup> García Márquez himself considers the novel a microcosm of Latin American history: “Everything I wrote are experiences drawn from the peoples of Latin America; ... and thus my novel may seem like a poetic transposition of the history of Latin America” (qtd. in Santana-Acuña 204).

who comes to best understand the nature of the Buendías' hopeless, repetitive behavior: “un siglo de naipes y de experiencias le había enseñado que la historia de la familia era un engranaje de repeticiones irreparables, una rueda giratoria que hubiera seguido dando vueltas hasta la eternidad, de no haber sido por el desgaste progresivo e irremediable del eje” ‘a century of cards and experiences had shown her that the family’s history was a gear of irreparable repetitions, a spinning wheel that would have gone on turning until eternity, were it not for the progressive and irremediable wearing away of the axle’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 471). Her perception is more lucid and differs from that of the Buendías in that it describes a “spiral,” something which gradually changes and will eventually come to an end rather than the “cycles of futility” which they see (Martin, *Journeys* 232). Two explanations are presented to the reader as to how she came to this conclusion – predictions based on her cards and her experiences. Since the novel has shown that predictions are unreliable as described above, it is her experience which is the true source of her understanding.

*Solitude* also argues for the importance of oral transmission as a means of recording history. In contrast to García Márquez’s *The Autumn of the Patriarch* where the preservation and parsing of history and politics through (oral) popular culture is clearly associated with the working class (Ortega 429-34), the connection is less obvious in *Solitude* as the oral preservation of the Banana Massacre is primarily undertaken by two of the Buendías, José Arcadio Segundo and Aureliano

Babilonia;<sup>6</sup> however, it is “proletarian history” that is in danger of being “erased” (Martin, *Journeys* 230), and which is preserved by their re-telling of what really happened in the massacre.<sup>7</sup>

Through their “superstitions,” Macondo’s working class remember and understand the past more accurately than the Buendía family and certainly than the Colombian government, which attempts to make unflattering episodes like the Banana Massacre disappear. It is they who without realizing it identify the phenomenon of neocolonialism in the novel, link it to colonialism and neocolonialism outside of Latin America, and in so doing suggest a framework for pan-Global South resistance. To explain this, I use the mechanism of “relation” for theorizing the Global South as a space within literature as defined by Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra drawing on the work of Shumei Shih. According to Armillas-Tiseyra, relation “activate[s] the Global South as a framework for transregional comparison, emphasizing shared or analogous experiences of marginalization, dispossession, or oppression, thereby allowing for more capacious forms of association ... This model takes relation as given, illuminating existing connections rather than requiring mutual or even self-recognition of shared circumstances within the particular sites explored” (171). Crucially, the characters in a novel using relation do not have to understand these connections but their existence is shown to the readers (*ibid.*). This is what happens in *Solitude* when the Belgian Gaston arrives in Macondo as husband of one of the last Buendías and plans to set up an air mail service there:

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<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 3.0, I will explain that they are the two Buendías who come to understand the true causes of Macondo’s exploitation and who act as agents of decolonization in the novel.

<sup>7</sup> I discuss the Banana Massacre in more detail in Chapter 3.0.



No era un proyecto nuevo. En realidad lo tenía bastante avanzado cuando conoció a Amaranta Úrsula, sólo que no era para Macondo sino para el Congo Belga, donde su familia tenía inversiones en aceite de palma ... volvió a establecer contacto con sus olvidados socios de Bruselas, pensando que para ser pionero daba lo mismo el Caribe que el África. Mientras progresaban las gestiones, preparó un campo de aterrizaje en la antigua región encantada ... sin saber que su diligencia, tan parecida a la de Mr. Herbert, estaba infundiendo en el pueblo la peligrosa sospecha de que su propósito no era planear itinerarios sino sembrar banano. (García Márquez, *Cien años* 455-6)

It was not a new project. In reality, he had it quite far along when he Amaranta Úrsula, only that is wasn't for Macondo but for the Belgian Congo, where his family had investments in palm oil ... he reestablished contact with his forgotten associates in Brussels, thinking that it made no difference whether he was a pioneer in the Caribbean or in Africa. While the process progressed, he prepared a landing strip in the old enchanted region ... without realizing that his diligence, so similar to that of Mr. Herbert, was instilling the people with the dangerous fear that his purpose was not to plan flight routes but to plant bananas.

This sequence links Belgian colonialism in the Congo with US neocolonialism in Latin America in the form of the banana company, García Márquez's fictional equivalent of the United Fruit Company. The ease with which Gaston can move his project from one location to the other shows that they are similarly marginalized and "underdeveloped." As his idea that it doesn't matter if he is a pioneer in Africa or the Caribbean reveals and despite his marriage to a Colombian woman and his having "gone native" to an extent (García Márquez, *Cien años* 454), Gaston still views

both Africa and the Americas from a colonial perspective.<sup>8</sup> While the inhabitants of Macondo do not grasp the nature of the globalized capitalist system in which their natural resources are exploited primarily for the benefit of the Global North, they are able to perceive commonalities between Gaston's project and that of the banana company which devastated Macondo, as when they notice that his calculations in preparation for the construction of a landing strip resemble the calculations made by Mr. Herbert who first scoped out Macondo for the banana company, and that he plans to build the landing strip in the same 'enchanted region' where the banana plantations used to be.

While relation is the way in which the Global South is theorized in *Solitude*, Armillas-Tiseyra's other approach to theorizing the Global South, recognition, also forms part of the novel's project. Armillas-Tiseyra quotes Alfred J. López to define recognition as a process by which "the world's subalterns" become conscious "of their shared condition at the margins of the brave new neoliberal world of globalization" (López qtd. in Armillas-Tiseyra 170), and adds to his ideas that "Global South consciousness is here understood as the act of coming to awareness of, articulating, and thereby activating solidarities that can then be put into action toward the goal of liberation" (Armillas-Tiseyra 170). While this process does not take place in the novel, it is one which the novel is designed to facilitate in the real world. By employing relation to highlight the similarities between European colonialism and US neocolonialism, García Márquez intends to bring about recognition among his readers. It may, therefore, be worth questioning the extent to which the distinction between relation and recognition is absolute. While relation may rely on "comparisons

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<sup>8</sup> To emphasize the point, the novel says that he has a "higado colonial" 'colonial liver' (García Márquez, *Cien años* 454). His airplane is also accidentally sent to the Makonde people in Tanzania (*Makondos* in Spanish) instead of to Macondo (ibid 482-3).

– made in passing, without the aim to produce immediate or measurable outcomes” (Armillas-Tiseyra 172), Armillas-Tiseyra argues that novels employing relation “establish ... the conditions of possibility for a recognition-to-come” (ibid.). This is the process which I argue is at work in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Like García Márquez, Serpell writes against Eurocentric narratives about a part of Global South, in her case Africa and specifically Zambia. However, her approach is different. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* makes only a few clear references to historical events, but in *The Old Drift* names, dates and events from Zambian as well as African and global history are a major presence and form a crucial part of Serpell’s decolonial argument. She chooses and uses her events and figures in a way that emphasizes either the role of chance in the historical developments that led both to colonialism and the postcolonial nation-state or the existence of alternative political projects to those that made themselves dominant.<sup>9</sup> The swarm of mosquitoes, who serve as a chorus for the novel, and who at times provide a kind of thematic guide to reading it, articulate this first of her two uses of history near its beginning: “*Men never believe chance can wreak great consequence. Yet the story of this place is full of such slips ... For instance, the bazungu [white people] who carved this territory into a colony, then a protectorate, then a federation, then a country came here only because Livingstone did. They ... drew arbitrary lines in the sand ... Neither Oriental nor Occidental but accidental is this nation*” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 2, original

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<sup>9</sup> My decision to read *The Old Drift* through its interest in decolonial alternatives owes much to Adom Getachew’s *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-determination*. I later read Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra’s analysis of Laila Lalami’s novel *The Moor’s Account*, which she calls “a novel about how the present came to be and, from there, how that present might have been different” (Armillas-Tiseyra 167). This resembles my interpretations of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Old Drift*.

emphasis). Neither the colonization of Africa nor the nation-states formed during formal decolonization, much less their borders which they inherited from the arbitrarily demarcated colonies, were inevitable. Serpell traces the founding of Zambia and the colony of Northern Rhodesia which preceded it to David Livingstone's search for the source of the Nile, which inspired European interest in the area. Yet Livingstone had no intention of creating a colony let alone a nation. While there may be a chain of causality between Livingstone, the colony, and the Zambian nation, Serpell shows that this causality was neither intended by either of the earlier stages nor was it inevitable. Rather the earlier historical events were retrospectively recruited to justify the later political institutions. Benedict Anderson describes this process in the following terms:

Nations ... have no clearly identifiable births ... Because there is no Originator, the nation's biography cannot be written ... through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it 'up time' – towards Peking Man, Java Man ... wherever the lamp of archaeology casts its fitful gleam. This fashioning, however, is marked by deaths, which, in a curious inversion of conventional genealogy, start from an originary present (205)

Because Livingstone died in what would become Zambia, he was turned into its founding figure. The fact that he, rather than any of the Africans who had lived and died there for millennia, was chosen as this originary dead person shows the Eurocentrism of this narrative of Zambia's national history. For Serpell this backwards way of establishing a nation's origin means that we should be deeply suspicious of the idea that the creation of nations or colonies is inevitable. One of her goals in *Drift* is to tell a history of Zambia alternative to the Eurocentric one beginning with Livingstone's death.

Still in the opening passage, she links the way the outcomes of the history of chance and accident beginning with Livingstone have been treated as natural and inevitable to Eurocentrism: “*This is the story of a nation – not a kingdom or a people – so it begins, of course, with a white man*” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 1). Because the nation is the form of political organization most favored in the Global North, it is assumed that human history is the history of nations or the events leading up to their creation, which makes it the history of Europeans or those who have at least partially assimilated to European culture.<sup>10</sup> The Eurocentric nature of this conception of history and the devaluation of histories not fitting this mold, in this case precolonial African history, is made even clearer when Agnes, an Englishwoman recently arrived in what is then still Northern Rhodesia, asks her African fiancée to tell her the history of the place they are about to visit:

During his time at university, Ronald had learned that ‘history’ was the word the English used for the record of every time a white man encountered something he had never seen and promptly claimed it as his own, often renaming it for good measure ... So [he] skipped the real story: the southern migration of the Bemba tribe from the north in the seventeenth century, the battles with other tribes and the bargains with Arab slave traders that had left only a straggling group of warriors wandering the great plateau ... until ... they came across a sapphire lake, *shiwa*, with a dead crocodile, *ng’andu*, on its shores – a sign that they should settle there. Instead Ronald began the story with a white man (Serpell, *Old Drift* 97-8)

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<sup>10</sup> For an explanation of how anticolonial and postcolonial nationalism were shaped by the European conception of Reason see Chatterjee.

The white man is none other than Livingstone, whom Agnes promptly refers to as the “most famous man who ever lived in Africa” (ibid.). While precolonial African history is still preserved in the memories of black Africans, it is a history they are discouraged from discussing with white people / Europeans. This conception of history is shown to be enforced by Global North institutions<sup>11</sup> as Ronald first learned it while he was at university in England. The relationship between Livingstone and the Eurocentric conception of history that Serpell defines through Ronald is further enforced by the fact that as Livingstone traveled through Southern Africa, he already began erasing African cultures such as when he renamed *Mosi-oa-Tunya* as Victoria Falls (Serpell, *Old Drift* 1-2).

By showing the accidents and arbitrariness of Livingstone's journey and the establishment of the colony, Serpell highlights the absurdity of treating them as precursors to the modern nation. She destabilizes the Eurocentrism of this genealogy in yet another way by pointing out that everything has more than one origin:<sup>12</sup>

*As it turns out, there are two Niles – one Blue, one White – which means two sources, and neither one of them is anywhere near here. This sort of thing happens with nations, and tales, and humans, and signs. You go hunting for a source, some ur-word or symbol and suddenly the path splits, cleaved by apostrophe or dash. The tongue forks, speaks in two ways, which in turn fork and fork into a chaos of capillarity. Where you sought an origin, you find a vast babble which is also a silence: a chasm of smoke, thundering. Blind mouth!* (Serpell, *Old Drift* 2, original emphasis).

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<sup>11</sup> For the insitutionalization of Eurocentrism in academia and elsewhere, see Harding 13.

<sup>12</sup> Later she proposes Edward Mukuka Nkoloso as an alternate founding figure, something which I will return to later.

This is Serpell's vision of history and her advice to her readers on how to read the novel. She wishes to draw their attention to moments when things could have gone differently, and to see origins as composite, assuming they can be found at all. This is reflected in the uncertain parentage of some of the characters. The novel repeatedly suggests that Jacob might be Lee Banda's son, but never confirms or denies this. To highlight this ambiguity, the family tree which precedes it connects them through a dotted line rather than a solid line of the kind that connects most other characters.<sup>13</sup>

Serpell conceives of the lives of her three central families in the same way in which she sees history – as sequences of chance and accident, in which things could easily have gone another way. The trio of characters who bring about the destruction of Zambia and the creation of the subsequent Lusaka city-state stem from these three families. Thus, their existence is the result of a long sequence of coincidences and decisions made by the previous generations, who could easily have acted differently. The novel highlights this when Thandiwe breaks up with Lee and considers beginning a relationship with Scholey. A reader who has seen the family tree knows that she and Lee must end up together again in some way, since it shows that they will have a son called Joseph and Thandiwe is not yet pregnant. Yet, though the readers know the course her 'history' will ultimately take, the possibility of an alternative is suggested, one which could have had huge consequences for the history of Zambia. If Thandiwe had not gotten back together with Lee, Joseph

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<sup>13</sup> The English translation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* contains a family tree even though the Spanish original does not. Josefina Ludmer has extensively analyzed the family tree and the Buendía family's repetition of names in that novel. For another interpretation of the family tree in *The Old Drift*, see Monaco 95-6.

would not have been born and could not have played his role in the cataclysmic destruction of the nation-state, potentially preventing it from happening.

To further establish the nature of Serpell's interest in historical alternatives, particularly alternative political projects, I refer to the acknowledgments section of her novel. The acknowledgments may seem irrelevant to the analysis of a novel, but I warrant their inclusion here on the grounds that they are what Gerard Genette calls a paratext. Paratexts are "accompanying productions [that] ... surround ... and extend [the text], precisely in order to *present* it ... to ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author's purpose" (Genette qtd. in Bushell 37, original emphasis). In addition to acknowledgments, examples of paratexts include things like prefaces, maps, and family trees like the one discussed above. In her acknowledgements (Serpell, *Old Drift* 565-7), Serpell includes a list of scholarly and journalistic sources she consulted as research while writing her novel. Integral to my argument is her choice of a history of Zambia, *One Zambia, Many Histories: Towards a History of Post-colonial Zambia*, which rests on the assumption that "a fuller and more honest account of the country's recent past must place at the centre of the analysis the counter-hegemonic political and religious histories and projects that stubbornly refused to be silenced in the name of national unity" (Gewald, Hinfelaar, and Macola 9). In the same vein, the editors cite John Lonsdale's claim that Kenyan nationalism "like all nationalism, was the work of many wills, with many visions of the future. It is an impoverished nationhood that fails to recognize them" (ibid., 9-10). By choosing this history and ensuring that her readers know that she did, Serpell instructs them to read her novel as similarly valuing counter-hegemonic forces in history. She is, in Genette's words, working to ensure that the text fulfills its intended purpose, that of getting her readers to challenge the hegemony of dominant histories and the institutions they claim inevitably came to power.



Serpell's novel not only shows alternative conceptions of the nation but alternatives to nationalism itself, as does her non-fiction source. For example, David M. Gordon analyzes the conflict between the United National Independence Party (UNIP), Zambia's dominant nationalist party led by Kenneth Kaunda, and the Lumpa Church which "offered an alternative corporate framework and even identity to Bemba ethnicity and Zambian nationalism" (Gordon 47). *The Old Drift* prominently features the Lumpa Church specifically paralleling the massacre of its followers by UNIP with the independence celebrations a few months later. Ronald, one of the main characters, is absent from the celebrations because he has gone to check on his parents who have joined the Church. In her description of the Church, one of the things Serpell states is that it "show[ed] allegiance to neither the colonial government nor Kaunda's party" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 124). Her goal is not to endorse the vision of the Lumpa Church but to show that even when it ascended to full political power and was at the zenith of its popularity (Phiri 133) UNIP did not enjoy absolute support among or authority over Zambians.

The most prominent figure elevated as an alternative to UNIP's form of postcolonial nationalism, is Edward Mukuka Nkoloso, whom the mosquitoes propose as an alternative founding figure for Zambia: "*If Livingstone was our white father, Nkoloso was our black prince ... Equally smart, just as possessed, abrim with the will to explore*" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 200, original emphasis). Nkoloso had been a revolutionary member of the Zambian independence movement, who after independence created a space program which he claimed would land Zambians on the moon before either the United States or the USSR. His program could not really have sent people to space, and reactions to it, both at the time (the 1960s) and later, were divided as to whether he took it seriously or whether it was a work of (decolonial) satire. The mosquitoes, fascinated by Nkoloso, wonder aloud: "*Had the revolutionary lost his mind? Was he just playing games or was he just playing*

*tricks? Was he a conman or a madman or a visionary seer?*” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 200, original emphasis). In her *New Yorker* article on Nkoloso, Serpell asks herself the same questions, remaining uncertain but making an argument for why a satirical reading could make sense and what it would mean. She explains how if Nkoloso’s space program was satirical, it could have functioned decolonially: “Nkoloso wrote an Op-Ed about his space program that read to me like a parody of British colonialism in Africa, refracted through a paranoid Cold War sensibility” (Serpell, Afronaut). In the Op-Ed he says that “We have been studying the planet ... and are now certain Mars is populated by primitive natives ... a missionary will be launched in our first rocket. But I have warned [him] he must not force Christianity on the people if they do not want it” (Nkoloso qtd. in Serpell, Afronaut). He also called for “[d]etention without trial for all [Soviet and American] spies” (ibid.). She considers that Nkoloso might have been comparing himself with the figure of Kalulu, a trickster character and rough Zambian equivalent to the African American Br’er Rabbit, who is “constantly devising elaborate trouble for elephant and lion, the two mighty beasts competing for King of the Jungle” (Serpell, Afronaut). In the Cold War context, elephant and lion would be the US and the USSR. By taking swipes at both colonialism and the Cold War, framed in the Global North as an existential struggle, Nkoloso would have been unsettling two of the Global North’s master narratives which relegated Africa to a subordinate position: colonialism in which it had to be rescued from itself by conquest and the Cold War in which both sides strove to bring African nations into their sphere of influence.

Serpell uses Nkoloso as a character to subvert still other Eurocentric discourses. Thus, it is crucial that his cadet Matha describes him as blending “science and fable, African technology and Western philosophy” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 167). The second combination is an important subversion of Eurocentric ideas. According to Partha Chatterjee, many anti-colonial (but not decolonial)

nationalists who operated, like the *pensadores*, within a largely Eurocentric framework staked their claims for the value of their colonized cultures in the following terms: “The superiority of the West was in the materiality of its culture ... The distinctive culture of the West was its science, its technology and its love of progress. But ... There was the spiritual aspect too, and here ... the East was superior” (66). In contrast, Serpell’s Nkoloso draws on Western philosophy, proving that Africans have no difficulty making use of that intellectual tradition, and African technology, showing that Africa is a site of technological innovation capable of progress on its own terms and not merely by emulating Global North achievements. Serpell also uses Nkoloso as an example of the roles that art and humor can play in decolonization and calls on her readers to consider them as alternatives to the more widely considered approaches of negotiation and violence. The potential of this approach is raised again in her last generation of characters: “Joseph ... believed in incremental change through existent structures ... Jacob[‘s] ... grandparents’ revolutionary past had inspired him ... To Naila ... this sounded just like another of those debates among men about how to defeat other men. She wanted to make protest art” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 519).

Yet Nkoloso’s project was dismantled not by any entity from the Global North but by the postcolonial nation-state: “*After his comrades finally gained independence, they too tied his hands with red tape*” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 200, original emphasis). The Zambian government’s restrictions on Nkoloso can be read as their unwillingness to consider projects alternative to the traditions of diplomacy and violence privileged in Eurocentric discourse. For the sake of respectability in an international political sphere dominated by the Global North or because they have accepted the Eurocentric logics of what constitutes legitimate political expression, they limit his attempt at decolonization. Through the example of Nkoloso, Serpell alludes to a decolonial project centered on humorous and creative subversion and a rejection of the binary which makes the Global North

the site of rational, technological knowledge and the Global South the site of spiritual knowledge, while showing how as a result of its acceptance of certain Eurocentric dictates the postcolonial nation-state hampered that decolonial project.

Serpell uses her novel to make colonial discourses laughable, just as she suspects Nkoloso might have done. One example of this is when two Italians, Colonel Corsale and his nephew Federico argue about the collapse of Europe's colonial empires, each of them employing a different kind of racism towards Africans. For Colonel Corsale they are violent savages, while Federico sees them as perpetual children who require European tutelage even as they run the risk of being corrupted by Europeans should the latter set a bad example. Throughout this exchange, they are interrupted by *Paolucci*, a parrot belonging to their hostess, which repeats words and expressions used by the two men utterly free of context: "They're already bloody cannibals! Curse of Ham. Ham! Ham!" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 60, original emphasis). The parrot's interruptions render both men's positions ridiculous. Its decontextualized repetition of words and phrases reveals that their racist discourses are no more than the rote repetition of clichés divorced from reality. This is a process akin to how García Márquez used incorrect prophecies to skewer the discourses of the *pensadores*, but just as she includes historical figures and events more overtly, Serpell more clearly identifies and rejects these Eurocentric discourses.

If García Márquez aspired to bring about recognition among his readers without his characters reaching it, several of Serpell's characters do see themselves as sharing their subalternity with other marginalized peoples around the world. Not only do some like Naila see these commonalities, but they also identify themselves with a pan-Global South struggle for liberation. It is in this vein that Naila takes inspiration from a protest campaign against the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile when she first comes up with the motif for the SOTP protest movement.

Serpell emphasizes the pan-Global South nature of this inspiration by mentioning that Naila had learned about it in “an art history course called ‘Tricontinental: Art in the Third World’” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 526).<sup>14</sup> Yet Naila’s approach to recognition is also challenged. I argue that this is because she attempts to ignore one of the important aspects of Global South projects as defined by Armillas-Tiseyra, which is that they “do not necessarily insist on identity between the constituencies brought together” (169). Her understanding of pan-Global South solidarity is confronted with the reality of divisions in terms of race and class among people from the Global South. This becomes apparent during her trip to India to bring her father’s ashes to the Temple of Tirupati:

Naila wrapped her arms around her rucksack and saw the driver’s eyes harden in the rearview mirror. No, she wanted to explain, the precious cargo she clutched was not money. She put on her chattiest face and asked him questions to even the scales: You, me. Brown, brown. But the questions he returned – about her family, her education – unbalanced them again. Her discomfort at answering him disturbed her. (Serpell, *Old Drift* 495).

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<sup>14</sup> Anne Garland Mahler has traced the history of the Tricontinental movement which formed from an (at times conflictive) collaboration between the Cuban revolutionary government and black internationalist intellectuals, and “articulated its critique of global capitalism precisely through a focus on racial violence and inequality” (3), which, it expressed among other things through artistic production such as posters and films. It framed the world in terms of “white” oppressors and “colored” oppressed but used these racial terms metonymically including “white people who share[d] the movement’s views” (4) among the “colored.” Its internationalist vision has inspired both anti-globalization and anti-racist movements, though these have not linked global capitalism and racism in the same way, and the concept of the Global South itself. I argue that Naila’s political beliefs are heavily influenced by these modern successors to the Tricontinental, but an analysis of that falls outside the scope of this thesis.

She also suspects the driver of resenting her for being “rich and female and African” (ibid.) and that he will charge her “an unreasonably high fare” (ibid.) and is confronted with her own prejudice when he doesn’t. Serpell shows that a framework assuming inherent, uncomplicated solidarity between all inhabitants of the Global South is an unrealistic idealization since it ignores the nature of internal divides such as class, and the fact that different people from the Global South can have prejudices towards one another.

Serpell decenters the nation-state in favor of larger networks of association through the geographical range of her novel. As stated previously, while her novel is intimately connected to Zambian national history, large parts of it take place in other countries such as Italy, England, India, and Zimbabwe.<sup>15</sup> Thus, its scope extends not only beyond the limits of the nation, but of Africa and even the Global South.

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<sup>15</sup> Serpell was committed to representing the various cultures included in her novel as accurately as possible and asked her friends from countries such as Italy and India to proofread the sections representing their cultures for accuracy (Serpell, “When They Blur”).

## 2.0 Against the Postcolonial Nation-state

The nation-state which emerged as the dominant form of government after decolonization has been challenged by postcolonial scholars like Partha Chatterjee as having retained elements of a Eurocentric understanding of the world. Other postcolonial scholars have posited that by means of neocolonialism, postcolonial elites affiliated with the governments of these nation-states have contributed to the continued exploitation of the Global South (e.g., Ngugi, Fanon). It is on these grounds that García Márquez and Serpell set out to critique the postcolonial nation-state. In this chapter, I argue that one of the primary mechanisms by which they do this is through their subversions of what Doris Sommer calls the national romance, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin American literary genre, which she describes as novels which combine a love story between two characters belonging to different and frequently oppositional groups set against the backdrop of a nation's recent historical events, in which the union of the lovers symbolizes a national project built on an alliance between the two groups.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, the romantic unions in García Márquez's and Serpell's novels, which also frequently unite members of different or oppositional classes, races, and regional identities almost invariably end in frustration. These failed romances symbolize the

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<sup>16</sup> More recent scholarship has shown Sommer's model of the national romance to be an oversimplification. A recent dissertation by Becky Klink points to its heteronormativity as it ignores the centrality of male-male relationships to nation-building and the way women are reduced to serving as mediators in these relationships in many of the novels Sommer analyzes (Klink 83-92). However, for the purposes of my analysis, the national romance serves as a general model of the link between personal and political unions which García Márquez and some of his Latin American contemporaries subverted.

failures of various political projects with which the couples are affiliated, as both succumb to a society distorted by a colonial past and a neocolonial present.

According to Sommer, national romances were intended to stimulate political support for the national project by emotionally investing their readers in the lovers who require its success to be happily united. She contrasts this with the novels of the so-called Latin American literary Boom such as *Solitude* which retain some elements of the national romances even as they reject their optimism, though I will show that in the case of *Solitude* the novel rejects the projects its predecessors were optimistic about not optimism *per se*:

Where nation-builders projected an unformed history on a beckoning empty continent, new novelists trace the historical density on a map full of mangled projects ... [*Solitude*] is no less driven by history than were the earlier novels. It recounts the long century of Colombia's vexed history staged as a series of erotic alliances among principal families. But these are families that fight one another, mistake foreign interest for mere curiosity, and resist the talented outsiders whom romance should have invited in. The great Boom novels rewrite, or un-write, foundational fiction as the failure of romance, the misguided political erotics that could never really bind national fathers to mothers, much less the *gente decente* [post-independence elites] to emerging middle and popular sectors. (Sommer 27-8).

The foundation of Macondo, the fictional town where the novel is set, is itself the result of a pairing which looks like it has the potential for being a national romance before the illusion is stripped away. The couple, José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula Iguarán, are the great-grandchildren



of, respectively, a creole tobacco planter and an Aragonese<sup>17</sup> merchant, who started an incredibly profitable business together. A national romance union seems to have almost already taken place as an economic transaction. The first indication that José Arcadio and Úrsula's story cannot be a national romance is that their families have already partnered in biological terms: they are cousins. Their family members warn them against getting married as a previous incestuous marriage between a Buendía and an Iguarán had produced a child with a pig's tail (García Márquez, *Cien años* 31). Thus, it becomes difficult to say that their union or the union of any of their descendants could symbolize a hopeful national project as the fear of such a union engendering something conceived of as a monster, realized at the end of the novel, hangs over every marriage involving a Buendía. A union which produces a monster does not represent something the nation should aspire to. Given that José Arcadio and Úrsula found Macondo which functions as an analogue for Colombia (and Latin America), just as Europe-oriented Latin American elites founded the postcolonial nation-state, the fear of the monstrous birth suggests rather that the nation cast in a Eurocentric mold that they aspired to was monstrous to begin with.<sup>18</sup>

Other couples in the novel undermine the potential for a national romance as well. The pairing of Aureliano Segundo and Fernanda del Carpio shows, just as Sommer claims, a failure of

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<sup>17</sup> From the region of Aragon in Spain. Their eventual descendants can thus represent an alliance between the *criollos*, descendants of earlier European colonizers born in the Americas, and the *peninsulares*, people from the Iberian colonial center.

<sup>18</sup> Not all anti-colonial projects in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin America were elite or Eurocentric. For example, the Anáhuac movement in 1810s México drew heavily on “Indigenous genealogies” (Chang 1) and “transformed core principles of republican thought by mobilizing around religious, plebian, and hemispheric identities” (ibid 12). However, it is the elite projects that García Márquez is writing against.

romance to unite oppositional groups, in this case the inhabitants of Colombia's Caribbean coast and those of its capital Bogotá and the Andean region where it is located, derisively called *cachacos*. In national romance terms, the beginning of their relationship is promising – she is sent to compete with his sister in a beauty contest and he declares them both winners, and then later rescues her when the carnival at which the contest took place turns into a massacre resulting from renewed tensions between the Liberal party, with which the Buendía family is associated, and the Conservative party, who sent Fernanda to the carnival. Despite her connection to those the people of Macondo believe to have been responsible for the massacre, “[e]l pueblo, en lugar de poner en duda su inocencia, se compadeció de su candidez” ‘the town instead of doubting her innocence, pitied her candor’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 245). Thus, even though their union is born amidst violence and possible treachery, it looks as though it could heal the wounds caused by those very things. Yet, this does not happen. Not only does Aureliano Segundo continue his relationship with his mistress Petra Cotés, which he eventually gets Fernanda to accept, but she remains an outsider to the family and the cultural and political differences between them are integral to that. The other Buendías take issue with her – Amaranta is infuriated by her dialect and habit of using euphemisms for everything and makes fun of her because of it, and José Arcadio Segundo rebels against her efforts to transform meals into exercises in pomp and (religious) ceremony. Both these behaviors originate in her Bogota upbringing. The role her status as a regional outsider plays in the family's hostility to her is made undoubtedly clear in her outburst against them during the four years of rain:

[N]o había podido soportar más cuando el malvado de José Arcadio Segundo dijo que la perdición de la familia había sido abrirle las puertas a una cachaca ... de la misma índole

de los cachacos que mandó el gobierno a matar trabajadores (García Márquez, *Cien años* 385-6)

She could stand it anymore when that wicked José Arcadio Segundo said that it had been the family's doom to open its doors to a *cachaca* ... of the same sort as the *cachacos* the government sent to kill the workers.

This is but one of many instances she lists in which the Buendías invoked her regional origin as a vice. Further, José Arcadio Segundo claims that by opening their doors to Fernanda— literally inviting her in – the family has brought doom on itself. This phrasing is particularly relevant to Sommer's point as she argues that national romance should invite talented outsiders into the national project.<sup>19</sup> Here, however, a character argues that inviting an outsider in has harmed the family. Fernanda, in turn, prevents further national romances from occurring as she closes the doors to the Buendía home, which until then had remained open all day (García Márquez, *Cien años* 256). Read through Sommer's interpretation, Fernanda's shutting the doors symbolizes a process by which future outsiders who could benefit the nation are denied entry. Indeed, this is what happens when Fernanda interferes in the romance between her daughter, Meme, and the traveling mechanic Mauricio Babilonia, who represents a potentially beneficial “internationalist consciousness” (Martin, *Journeys* 229).

Yet it is not Fernanda the Buendías should not have invited in, but the banana company, which as Martin argues is the real doom of Macondo. He highlights the passage in which the

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<sup>19</sup> A Colombian example of this is Jorge Isaacs' *Maria* (1867) about English Jews who have converted to Christianity and entered the rural landowning class in the Cauca Valley, though Sommer considers it to be an unusually frustrated, pessimistic example of the national romance.

narrator states that “Los acontecimientos que habían de darle el golpe mortal a Macondo empezaban a vislumbrarse cuando llevaron a la casa al hijo de Meme Buendía” “The events which were to deal Macondo its mortal blow were beginning to take shape when they brought Meme Buendía’s son to the house’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 350). The events which are taking shape at this time are the strike of the banana workers which leads to them being massacred and the withdrawal of the banana company from Macondo accompanied by its decree that it will rain there for four years, eleven months, and two days. As Martin describes it, it is not the inherent characteristics of the characters which jeopardize their relationships, but the psychological effects of their location on the global periphery where they are subject to the full effects of neocolonialism and global capitalism, and the lingering impact of Spanish colonialism. He argues that “they fail to become agents of history for themselves; rather they are the echoes of someone else’s history, the last link in the centre-periphery chain ... The only explanation possible is that they are living out their lives in the name of someone else’s values” (*Journeys* 227) and that it is “the general effect of a colonial history upon individual relationships” that leads to “the [novel’s] themes of circularity, irrationality, fatalism, isolation, superstition, fanaticism, corruption and violence” (ibid., 228-9). By returning to Martin’s description of the damage done by the cultural bomb in Latin America at the beginning of Chapter 1.0, I can now rephrase his argument to say that García Márquez argues that the nation-state has failed in Latin America because it has been assembled entirely from Eurocentric discourses. The potential national romances of *Solitude* fail for the same reason. The characters are so enmeshed in alien values that they cannot understand themselves and cannot recognize potentially positive influences such as Mauricio Babilonia from negative ones such as the banana company.

Like the so-called Latin American Boom novels, *The Old Drift* is what Sommer would call a “map full of mangled projects” (27) or at least unsatisfactory ones. This refers both to the political projects of Zambia, which fall short of the hopes placed in them, and of the romantic relationships between the characters which fall short of the national romance’s ideal as described by Sommer in which the characters are typically astonishingly virtuous and entirely lacking in internal friction as their only real desire is to be with one another. In *Old Drift*, there is not a single primary couple which isn’t challenged by internal friction often arising from betrayal, alienation, or the very divides national romance tried to paper over. Thus, each romance in the first generation begins optimistically but sours over time, revealing the failure of an affiliated political project as it does so. Sibilla grows alienated from her husband Federico after realizing both that his idealization of her is a form of predatory objectification, which is indifferent to her as a person, and that his supposedly liberal views towards non-white people are at odds with the racist way in which he treats them. Federico’s hypocrisy here points to the failure of achieving racial equality within colonialism. Agnes and Ronald’s romance appears to transcend racial barriers, yet the couple ultimately become alienated from one another precisely because of the psychological impact newly postcolonial Zambia’s racial and cultural tensions have on them. Their difficulties can be seen as analogous to Zambia’s struggle to achieve the multiracial vision put forward by its first president Kenneth Kaunda.<sup>20</sup> Matha and Godfrey meet and fall in love as they both work in the independence movement and Nkoloso’s space program, suggesting that they are collaborating in the creation of both a new nation and a new family (she becomes pregnant by him), but Godfrey abandons Matha

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<sup>20</sup> For historical context, see Sishuwa.

shortly after the collapse of the space program. Both her hopes and the nation's are dashed at the same moment.

Agnes and Ronald's relationship is the clearest example of how Serpell subverts the national romance and links it to unsuccessful political projects. As I will show, this subversion is more complicated than simply a parody of the national romance. However, I will first address how its more parodic elements are used to puncture the rhetoric of the postcolonial nation-state.

One sequence in Agnes's storyline, which is representative of this challenge to the postcolonial nation-state, involves Zambia's independence day celebrations. This sequence provides an example of a straightforward send-up of the national romance: "Fireworks stunned the sky smoky behind the two new Zambians as [Agnes and Grace] walked, chatting back and forth, working at about the same level of ignorance, but with a near equal measure of interest. They had walked almost two miles before they remembered to flag down a car" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 125). Some of the elements here point in the direction of national romance – the scene is a moment of emotional proximity between two characters who have recently begun to see themselves as Zambians, representing two antagonistic groups (Agnes is white and Grace is black) during a nationalist celebration – but others subvert it. The two Zambians are not lovers but employer and servant. Their relationship which does become closer on independence day is one "more like family than friendship, forged through proximity and dependence rather than affinity" (ibid.) and coincides with a growing distance between Agnes and Ronald, who is absent from the independence day celebrations because his parents are involved in a decolonial project which opposes UNIP (the Lumpa Church, discussed above). Agnes and Grace do not understand the politics of the moment they have witnessed, and their new relationship is partially founded on their mutual non-comprehension.

The celebrations are used to challenge UNIP's nationalist project in other ways too. When she hears about the preparations for them, Agnes can't help thinking that "[o]ut of context, it all sounded ... like superficial minutiae, as if this were just an unusually lively meeting of a planning committee for a bridge party" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 121). The independence celebrations are more decorative than anything else. They do not constitute and may even get in the way of meaningful decolonial change. One of the highlights of the celebrations is when the new president arrives "in a Chrysler Copper Car, on loan from America to celebrate Zambia's lucrative mining industry" (ibid.). Even as the British colonial administration leaves, a neocolonial future is highlighted through this reference to a US transparently interested in Zambia's national resources. The fact that the Zambian government agrees to incorporate US economic interests in their independence celebration indicates their complicity in this future exploitation, while the fact that the car is on loan alludes to Zambia's and other African countries' burgeoning relationship of dependence to the Global North.

National independence has not truly put an end to colonial relations. As the Italian Colonel Corsale says of the Kariba hydroelectric dam being built as the colonial empires in Africa begin to come to an end: "the empire isn't really dead. Even as we speak, it is rising from the ashes" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 61). His choice of the unspecific "the empire" is significant. In the preceding exchange, he and Federico had discussed the collapse of the Italian empire, yet the Kariba Dam is being built in what is at this time a British colony. The implication is that "the empire" does not refer to a particular European empire but a relation of dominance, in which the role of dominator could be fulfilled by the elites of any power (the boundaries between a nation and its corporations are slippery here). As European colonial domination formally ends, the slot of empire is shown to be increasingly filled by the United States (as evidenced by their role in the Zambian independence

celebrations) and the People's Republic of China. The two countries seemingly collaborate in the Sino-American consortium which becomes a major neocolonial presence in the last third of the novel.

Agnes and Ronald's unsuccessful union and its parallel to the difficulties of multiracialism in Southern African countries is spelled out by their son Lee, named after Lionel, a white man Agnes had fallen for though never had a romantic relationship with, when their family goes on a tour of the ruins of Great Zimbabwe during the early years of Robert Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe: "their guide [was] ... so full of rage at the failed politics of his country that he had forgotten he was talking to a mixed-race family. But maybe this family was a kind of failed politics, too" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 330).

Yet while Agnes and Ronald's relationship is primarily a story of fracture it is not exclusively so, even in its later stages. There is a moment of genuine tenderness between them after Lee dies of AIDS, which Serpell describes from the perspective of their grandson Joseph: "Gran came in and stood in the middle of the kitchen, stricken and silent. Grandpa went over and put his arms around her. Joseph realised he had never seen them like this. He almost laughed at the incongruous sight – the short black man and the tall white woman, gently rocking" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 384). Serpell suggests that while their relationship was severely damaged if not completely undone by a multitude of different factors, primarily the various forms of racism that were dominant in England and Southern Africa at different times, there is still value to it, possibly because of the initial irrelevance of race to their interracial union.

The real problem for García Márquez's and Serpell's couples are the legacies of colonialism such as neocolonialism, global capitalism, and racism. Both authors use their subversion of the national romance to show that the postcolonial nation-state has not been able to



deal with or, at least in García Márquez, even acknowledge these problems. Because these societies remain limited by these forms of injustice, inequality and exploitation, their inhabitants constantly encounter them as barriers as they try to form relationships with each other. Since the romances and the political projects collapse under pressure from the same forces, the collapse of the former is used to symbolize that of the latter. The two authors differ in that Serpell sees potential in the unsuccessful romances and their analogous political projects that is worth saving and using for the construction of future projects, whereas García Márquez presents a society completely at the mercy of inadequate, alien values.

### 3.0 Decolonial Violence

A significant number of decolonial theorists have argued that violence is a necessary component of decolonization. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon claimed that “decolonization is always a violent event” (1) which “cannot be accomplished by the wave of a magic wand, a natural cataclysm, or a gentleman’s agreement” (2). The conclusions to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Old Drift*, the destruction of Macondo and the flooding of Zambia, are certainly natural cataclysms and it is possible to attribute a magical quality to them, especially to the former. They are not, however, the only means by which the novels’ authors suggest decolonization can be achieved. In this chapter I will show that characters in both novels argue for political action including violence with decolonial goals. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* does not call decolonization by name; however, García Márquez reveals that two of its primary characters, José Arcadio Segundo and Aureliano Babilonia, are engaged in political, economic, and cultural decolonization. Through their actions and through his portrayal of the banana workers’ strike, he advances a partial philosophy of how decolonization should be achieved, which if it does not fully argue in favor of violence at least shows the failure of nonviolent means. This philosophy of violence is potentially problematic because of how García Márquez deviates from the facts of the historical events he uses to make his argument. In *The Old Drift*, characters like Naila and Jacob identify themselves as engaged in different decolonial endeavors. Serpell outlines their various positions/approaches without endorsing a single vision of decolonization and calls on her readers to critically reflect on the ethics of decolonial violence, pointing to ways it can harm the very people it is intended to help. Simultaneously, she does not permit an easy condemnation of

decolonial violence on the grounds that violence is exclusive to the marginalized, as she points to the forms of violence rendered invisible or acceptable in Global North centered hegemonic society.

The main, although far from unconditional, proponent of political violence in *Solitude* is Colonel Aureliano Buendía; however, García Márquez does not represent him as model to be emulated. Rather, he expresses his philosophy of the ethics of (decolonial) violence through the differences between Colonel Buendía and José Arcadio Segundo and Aureliano Babilonia whom he sets up as preferable alternatives. Other characters recognize or believe they recognize attributes of the Colonel in the latter two,<sup>21</sup> but García Márquez shows that they are substantially different from him. Indeed, the narrator reveals that some of their behaviors which are attributed to the Colonel's influence come from other members of the family. For example, Fernanda hears the young Aureliano Babilonia argue that Macondo did not fall into ruin when the banana company left, but that it was the company's presence which destroyed it and “[ella] se escandalizó con la idea de que el niño había heredado los instintos anarquistas del coronel Aureliano Buendía ... Aureliano Segundo, en cambio, reconoció la versión de su hermano gemelo” “[she] was scandalized by the idea that the boy had inherited Colonel Aureliano Buendía's anarchist instincts ... but Aureliano Segundo recognized the version of his twin brother’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 415). José Arcadio Segundo, not the Colonel, who died before Aureliano Babilonia was born, is the decisive influence on his political views.

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<sup>21</sup> When José Arcadio Segundo is in hiding during the strike, Úrsula thinks it is “Lo mismo que Aureliano” ‘The same as Aureliano’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 356), while Pilar Ternera feels that “Estaba viendo otra vez al coronel Aureliano Buendía” ‘She was once again seeing Colonel Aureliano Buendía when she first sees Aureliano Babilonia’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 470).

The narrator, other characters, and the Colonel himself challenge the integrity of his political convictions. The Colonel shows his disillusionment with himself in an exchange with his friend and second in command Gerineldo Márquez:

– Dime una cosa, compadre: ¿por qué estás peleando?

– Por qué ha de ser, compadre –contestó el coronel Gerineldo Márquez–: por el gran partido liberal.

– Dichoso tú que lo sabes –contestó el—. Yo ... apenas ahora me doy cuenta que estoy peleando por orgullo.

–Eso es malo –dijo el coronel Gerineldo Márquez,

Al coronel Aureliano Buendía le divirtió su alarma. <<Naturalmente>>, dijo. <<Pero en todo caso, es mejor eso que no saber por qué se pelea.>> Lo miró a los ojos, y agregó sonriendo:

–O que pelear como tú por algo que no significa nada para nadie. (García Márquez, *Cien años 167-8*)

“Tell me something, friend: what are you fighting for?”

“For what else, friend,” Colonel Gerineldo Márquez answered, “for the great Liberal Party.”

“Good for you that you know,” he answered, “I’ve ... just now realized that I’m fighting for pride.”

“That’s bad,” said Colonel Gerineldo Márquez.

Colonel Aureliano Buendía was amused by his alarm. “Naturally,” he said, “but in any case, it’s better than not knowing what you’re fighting for.” He looked into his eyes and added smiling: “Or, like you, fighting for something that doesn’t mean anything to anyone.””

A few scholars have challenged this interpretation. According to Michael Wood, the Colonel is initially uninterested in politics but is deeply moral. He is dragged into war not because of abstract principles but because he witnesses concrete violence when conservative party soldiers kill a woman who was bitten by a rabid dog. His “position is ... a moral response to a political world” (Wood 82), which for Wood falls under William Empson’s definition of the pastoral, a “simplification [which] itself seems to glance at what it leaves out” (ibid). Thus, he rejects the Colonel’s self-description as someone who went to war for the sake of his pride and Úrsula’s later assessment that he is incapable of love (García Márquez, *Cien años* 299), while acknowledging that he takes a solitary and arrogant path towards political and social transformation: “Power for [him] ... is everything he feels called upon to do singlehanded, his lonely mission against the world’s wrongs: an expression of his altruism but also of his arrogance” (Wood 84).

In his nonfiction work, García Márquez has argued that, under certain circumstances, it is acceptable for political leaders to take violent, authoritarian action. According to Martin, he would repeatedly “take up ... a pragmatic position in the face of authoritarian policies he might have been expected to condemn on principle .... [he] believe[d] that there are “right” and “wrong” men for particular situations, and ... put ... politics before morality” (*Life* 244-5). The last part of Martin’s quote would be better phrased as García Márquez putting what he saw as necessary if brutal political decisions over his ethical convictions. Thus, it would be possible for him to see the Colonel as a good political leader or at least one whose violent actions, such as executing the

Conservative general Moncada, whom he liked, for strategic reasons (he tells Moncada “Sabes ... que todo consejo de guerra es una farsa, y que en verdad tienes que pagar los crímenes de otros, porque esta vez vamos a ganar la guerra a cualquier precio” ‘You know that ... every court martial is a farce, and that in reality you have to pay for the crimes of others, because this time we are going to win the war at any price’ [García Márquez, *Cien años* 195]) are necessary under the circumstances. However, I reject this conclusion and uphold the Colonel’s assessment of himself, because of the differences between him and the two major drivers of decolonization in the novel. One of the most fundamental of these is in their attitudes towards violence which José Arcadio Segundo realizes in the aftermath of the Banana Massacre:

[E]l coronel Aureliano Buendía le había hablado de la fascinación de la guerra y había tratado de demostrarla con ejemplos incontables sacados de su propia experiencia. Él le había creído. Pero ... mientras pensaba en la tensión de los últimos meses, en la miseria de la cárcel, en el pánico de la estación y en el tren cargado de muertos, José Arcadio Segundo llegó a la conclusión de que el coronel Aureliano Buendía no fue más que un farsante o un imbécil. No entendía que hubiera necesitado tantas palabras para explicar lo que se sentía en la guerra, si con una sola bastaba: miedo. (García Márquez, *Cien años* 373)

Colonel Aureliano Buendía had told him about the fascination of war and had tried to demonstrate it with uncountable examples from his own experience. He had believed him. But ... as he thought of tension of the last months, the misery of prison, the panic in the station, and the train loaded with dead bodies, he came to the conclusion that Colonel Aureliano Buendía was no more than a charlatan or an imbecile. He did not understand how he could have needed so many words to explain what one feels during a war, if one word was enough: fear.

Here, José Arcadio Segundo becomes disillusioned with the Colonel's attitude towards violence. On some level his great-uncle enjoyed war. This outlook fits with his self-assessment that he went to war out of pride and not because he believed in what he was fighting for. García Márquez intends this as a larger commentary on the War of the 1000 Days between the Liberals and the Conservatives, a conflict which as represented in the novel brought death and destruction but not meaningful change to Colombia as it did not address the country's fundamental internal and external problems (Martin, *Journeys* 234). José Arcadio Segundo, in contrast, fears war and derives no pleasure or benefit from it. He is the one who understands what is truly at stake in a violent struggle and is fighting for something worthwhile. Through this opposition, García Márquez argues that while violence may be necessary, it should never be pleasurable.<sup>22</sup>

According to Martin, José Arcadio Segundo “is one of the few characters who has struggled in any way sincerely against injustice ... [he] leads the strike ... [and] begins to decipher the parchments, or ‘true history’ of the Buendía family” (*Journeys* 231). With these two actions he is a driver of both economic and cultural decolonization in the novel. Opposing the banana company constitutes an attempt to end the economic exploitation of Latin Americans, and deciphering the history of the Buendías functions as a synecdoche for deciphering the histories of Macondo and Latin America,<sup>23</sup> revealing that the causes of Latin America's subordination to the Global North

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<sup>22</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that the strikers are portrayed primarily though not exclusively as the victims not the perpetrators of violence.

<sup>23</sup> “Aureliano [Babilonia] is the character who eventually deciphers the parchments (the novel, his own life, Latin American history)” (Martin, *Journeys* 232).

are not an inherent racial and cultural inferiority but the legacy of colonialism and the neocolonialism of the present as both Martin and I have argued.

As Martin has highlighted, José Arcadio Segundo passes his worldview on to Aureliano Babilonia who ultimately interprets Melquiades' parchments. He too is shown to both resemble and differ from the Colonel in important ways. In contrast, to the Colonel who becomes increasingly isolated from those around him, Aureliano Babilonia forms emotional connections even with people who were initially unsympathetic or hostile to him. When he first meets his uncle, José Arcadio (5<sup>th</sup> generation), the latter calls him a bastard and banishes him to his room (García Márquez, *Cien años* 435). Yet as they live together, they form a kind of connection and when José Arcadio is murdered Aureliano Babilonia “comprendió cuánto había empezado a quererlo” ‘realized how much he had come to care for him’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 447).

The Colonel's distance from those around him, made literal by the chalk circle he draws around himself, limits his ability to participate in a decolonial struggle. Frantz Fanon emphasizes that there is no place for self-centeredness in an anti-colonial revolution, rather decolonization must be a communal, collaborative effort (11-12). When the Colonel recognizes the reality and the violence of neocolonialism, he falls back on his old approach of trying to start a rebellion against the Colombian government, attempting to recruit Gerineldo Márquez and his other former officers. His attempt to recruit Márquez reveals his total lack of consideration towards his former allies: “mientras el coronel Aureliano Buendía se refugiaba en el exilio de sus pescaditos de oro, [Gerineldo Márquez] se mantuvo en contacto con los oficiales rebeldes que le fueron fieles hasta la derrota. Hizo con ellos la guerra triste de la humillación cotidiana ... contra los ... servidores que debían asignar y no asignaron nunca las pensiones vitalicias” ‘while Colonel Aureliano Buendía took refuge in the exile of his gold-plated fishes, [Gerineldo Márquez] stayed in contact



with the rebel officers who had remained faithful to him, until their final defeat. With them, he fought the sad war of quotidian humiliation ... against the ... civil servants who should have given them and never gave them their pensions' (García Márquez, *Cien años* 293). Because of his family's affluence, the Colonel could withdraw from society after the war. He was oblivious to the struggles of his fellow officers as they were driven into poverty. His fight against injustice is not only arrogant, as Wood suggests, he carries it out without considering or understanding the people he sometimes believes himself to be fighting for.<sup>24</sup>

Having established José Arcadio Segundo and Aureliano Babilonia as the agents of cultural decolonization in the novel, I now turn to the banana workers' strike, the principal attempt at political and economic decolonization to which both are closely connected, and what it says about the necessity of violence in the decolonial struggle. While *Solitude* does not say that violence is the only answer, it does show the failure of nonviolent ways of attempting to improve the lives of the oppressed in the Global South.<sup>25</sup> The attempts to secure better conditions for the banana company's Colombian workers are continually thwarted by the company's duplicity, in which it is aided by Colombian lawyers. When the workers go on strike, the Colombian government declares martial law. The army is given authority to arbitrate between the workers and the company, but they entirely take the side of the latter as they begin doing the work the strikers would have done. In response to this, the workers begin "sabotear el sabotaje. Incendiaron fincas y comisariatos, destruyeron los rieles para impedir el tránsito de los trenes que empezaban a abrirse

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<sup>24</sup> As stated above, at other times he knows that he is really fighting for his own pride.

<sup>25</sup> Abdulrazak Gurnah critiqued Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari* on the grounds that it frames violence as the only appropriate response to neocolonialism. His argument has helped me think about the role of violence in *Solitude* though engaging with it directly falls outside the scope of this thesis.

paso con fuego de ametralladoras ... Las acequias se tiñeron de sangre ... La situación amenazaba con evolucionar hacia una guerra civil desigual y sangrienta” ‘sabotaging the sabotage. They burned farms and warehouses, destroyed the train tracks to prevent the movement of the trains which began to open passage for themselves with machine gun fire ... The irrigation canals became tinted with blood ... The situation threatened to evolve into a bloody and unequal civil war’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 362). Finally, Carlos Cortés Vargas, the civil and military leader of the province announces that he will arrive in Macondo to arbitrate in the conflict. The workers assemble in the train station square. Cortés Vargas does not arrive but instead the military read a decree declaring the strikers criminals and giving them five minutes to disperse before the army opens fire on them. None of the over 3000 people assembled in the square, including women and children, leave and they are nearly all massacred. Subsequently, the government declares that the massacre never happened. I describe this sequence of events in detail to show that throughout García Márquez frames the actions of the strikers as reasonable and those of the US American company and its Colombian collaborators as cruel, duplicitous and indefensible. The workers only resort to violence after peaceful alternatives from negotiation to legal action and a general strike are thwarted, and the event which triggers that violence is an illegal act by the army. The workers are “sabotaging the sabotage,” a phrasing which states that the army are the original and real saboteurs since they are sabotaging the workers in their legitimate act of going on strike.

According to Martin and other scholars before him, “the strike against the Banana Company and the ensuing massacre [are] the central shaping episode of the entire novel” (Martin, *Journeys* 229). They expose the reality of neocolonialism by showing the destructive power Global North companies have in the Global South and the complicity of Global South elites in the companies’ exploitation of its people. García Márquez’s portrayal of these events functions as a

call for economic and political decolonization, one that is all the more powerful because of its connection to Colombia's real history. The massacre is based on a real event which happened in 1928 in the town of Ciénaga.<sup>26</sup> Carlos Cortés Vargas, the general who orders the massacre in the novel even has the same name as his historical counterpart. However, this invocation of real history potentially problematizes the novel's application to decolonial projects outside of the text. As Eduardo Posada-Carbó has shown, its representation of the Banana Massacre significantly deviates from the historical event it is based on. The number of people killed in the novel is greater than any estimate from the time and rather than all records of the massacre being repressed, it resulted in public debates, demotions for Cortés Vargas and the minister of war, and the end of the Conservative Party's hegemony. These deviations are problematic since literary scholars, some historians (to varying degrees), a large percentage of the Colombian public, and frequently the author himself<sup>27</sup> treat the version of events described in the novel as historical fact. As Posada-Carbó argues this "raise[s] serious questions about the extent to which the novel can be used as a piece of historical evidence – as a source, in particular, to interpret the complex events of the 1928 strike and its aftermath" (414). If the strike is indeed the novel's central shaping episode and integral to its decolonial argument, then the inaccuracies in its account potentially render it ineffective for real world decolonization.

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<sup>26</sup> The massacre would have been very relevant to the Colombian public at the time of publication as it had only recently emerged from the civil war known as *La Violencia* triggered by the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, who had risen to prominence as the lawyer who defended the banana workers in court after the massacre.

<sup>27</sup> There are also interviews in which García Márquez acknowledges that the number of 3000 was his invention (Posada-Carbó 395-7).

It is because of these concerns that I argue that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has value as a work of cultural decolonization that it does not match in terms of political and economic decolonization. This interpretation of the book does not necessarily run counter to García Márquez's purpose in writing it. His primary goal is to liberate the consciousness of Latin Americans from the effects of the Eurocentric cultural bomb.<sup>28</sup> In the novel he is vague in his description of the processes by which the characters attempt to bring about political and economic decolonization. For example, he does not reveal much about how the striking workers organized or formulated their demands. This vagueness may be because the novel is written from a perspective which does not understand these political processes,<sup>29</sup> but it also means that it is not advising its readers on how to take political action.

Although he understands it very differently, Posada-Carbó also locates *Solitude's* value in the realm of culture. Despite his critique of using the novel as a historical source, he “does not mean that literature and history should be fully disassociated ... [or] that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* cannot convey a sense of the Colombian past” (Posada-Carbó 414). As I have shown in the preceding chapters, *Solitude* is relevant to Colombian history and the history of the Global South overall in that it calls on its readers to interrogate hegemonic narratives and value sources of information usually discarded by mainstream historiography such as oral testimony and popular history.<sup>30</sup> To establish that ethos does not require the novel to be historically accurate, as it above

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<sup>28</sup> In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he argues for the importance of critically reading Latin American history.

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 1.0.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Knight, an important historian critical of applying magical realism to history (Knight, *What Price* 32), has nonetheless, defended the importance of oral testimony “from below” as a source of historical information (Knight, *What*

all argues for a way of reading history, which includes previously excluded voices, challenges Eurocentric narratives, and values the contributions of non-Global North traditions, all of which allows Latin Americans to turn away from Global North models and imagine alternatives in the present.

Whereas decolonization is represented subtly in *Solitude*, it is represented much more explicitly in *Drift*. Serpell further distinguishes herself from García Márquez in the level of agency and political awareness she ascribes to her characters. According to Martin, the characters of *Solitude* are largely victims of historical forces beyond their control or even understanding. In contrast, Annie Gagiano argues that *The Old Drift* and the other recent novels by East African women she analyzes “demonstrat[e] wickedness and weakness ... hard work, passionate commitments, and heroic moments in the lives of their predominantly African actors, participants, and agents, replacing ascriptions of passivity and victimhood to those too often misrepresented as merely acted upon” (37). While they are certainly subalterns, Serpell’s Zambians are aware of the global inequality they are subject to and attempt to end it. Serpell uses some of her characters to articulate various approaches to decolonization and subjects these to a rigorous investigation.

To understand what Serpell is doing, it is worth looking at her academic text *Seven Modes of Uncertainty*, in which she articulates a philosophy of the relationship of ethics to reading fiction. At the base of her philosophy is her understanding that ethics “does not impart morality; it parses morality” (Serpell, *Seven* 7). The practice of parsing morality is her advice for reading novels ethically. I argue that parsing morality is her approach to writing fiction as well. She calls on her

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*Price* 10; Knight, “Éxito” 29). For a different argument on the relationship between memory and history, which also emphasizes the importance of the former in preserving the record of the marginalized, see Fabre and O’Meally.

readers to seriously consider the ethically complex topic of decolonial violence by presenting them with what she calls an *uncertain* reading experience. For Serpell, uncertainty, is an “agonistic, unsettling experience over time ... irreducible to a single encounter, moment, judgment, or tenet” (*Seven* 9-11) which is created by presenting contradictory or destabilizing information or perceptions to the reader over the course of a novel and which is central to the experience of ethical reading.<sup>31</sup>

Serpell is thorough in her critique of colonialism and neocolonialism; nonetheless, she creates a sense of unease around acts of decolonial violence by framing them from the perspective of characters who are consciously or unconsciously disturbed by that violence. The sequence in which Matha, Nkoloso, and the other members of the latter’s UNIP cadre frighten the guests at the all-white Ridgeway hotel with the body of a white woman stolen from the morgue is an example of this.<sup>32</sup> The passage does not condemn them for their actions, but it does not wholly endorse them either. I describe it in detail to show how Matha’s conflicted emotions and the details Serpell emphasizes create an ethically uncertain experience in the terms defined above. Nkoloso acquires the body through a combination of violence and bribery, pinning the mortuary assistant to the wall and then offering him money. When the cadets unveil the body, its humanity is downplayed through its description: “The woman’s skin was mapped with green veins. Her lips were pulled

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<sup>31</sup> For example, Serpell argues that in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* “[t]he palimpsest layering of adjacency as a process over time allows us to perceive distinctive viewpoints and their projected relations, even as the text maintains a cumulative circumspection” (Serpell, *Seven* 152).

<sup>32</sup> Like the Banana Massacre, the stunt at the Ridgeway is based on a historical event, and like García Márquez, Serpell takes some liberties in how she represents it. However, these liberties are smaller in scale, which is why, in analyzing this passage, I focus on how Serpell implements her definition of uncertainty rather than on her use of historical facts.

into a grimace” (*Old Drift*, 158). Then Nkoloso kills a goat and pours its blood over the body, which is what first disturbs Matha: “Something about the blood, its foreignness to the body it touched, made Matha sway weakly” (ibid.). The other cadets are on some level unsettled as well as they try to sit “as far from the corpse as possible” (ibid., 159). As they drive, a “sense of wrongness began to swell like a swarm of angered bees. Matha’s nostril hairs curled. The back of her neck tingled” (ibid.).<sup>33</sup> When Nkoloso parks the truck, the corpse’s head hits the metal siding and “[t]he cadets flinched away from it but Ba Nkoloso got out of the cab and slapped the side of the truck to make it gong again” (ibid.). When they arrive at the hotel, the narration reminds the reader of the racist injustice of Northern Rhodesian colonial society to which the cadre’s stunt is a response: “Matha had never been inside a hotel before, not only because she was poor, but also because she was black: the Ridgeway still had a strict colour bar” (ibid.). The description of the hotel’s guests frames them as inelegant, rejecting the idea that they represent the height of civilization. Their tables are “littered with candles and plates of half-eaten food, the meat undone into messy bones and flesh” and they speak “as if sucking their words through straws” (ibid., 160) while the Africans are associated with their repressed precolonial past as Serpell compares their sweat to “royal Bemba scarification” (ibid.). The cadre storms into the dining room after turning off the lights and Nkoloso tells the guests whose “faces [are] fixed in stark masks of fear and disgust” (ibid.) that the dead woman is the colonial governor’s wife whom they have killed and declares that they will attack them. The cadets do not kill anyone and never intended to, but they physically harass the guests (“jeering and shoving ..., poking them in the chest” [ibid.]). Matha’s internal response to this is conflicted: “Giggles roiled at the base of her spine, then rose up her

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<sup>33</sup> While the narration does not say who is experiencing the sense of wrongness, I argue it can only be confirmed to be Matha’s reaction since this part of the novel is told from her third person limited perspective.

body and spilled out of her mouth, with the faintest taste of bile. She felt the ground drop from beneath her feet” (ibid.). The physical discomfort she felt in the truck returns even as she enjoys herself. The last sentence, however, is designed to take the reader by surprise, as the ground does not drop from beneath her feet because of nausea or dizziness but because Godfrey, another cadet and her future lover, has picked her up. She describes him as her “rescuer” (ibid., 161) and their relationship, one of the failed national romances discussed in the previous chapter, begins that night.

The passage is designed to produce a complex response in the reader. On the one hand, it points to the injustices of colonialism and deflates the supposed superiority of the colonizers. On the other, it emphasizes the violence involved in the UNIP cadre’s act of subversion. Crucially, this is primarily expressed through the cadets’ own discomfort at their actions. While Serpell refers to the white guests’ fear, it receives relatively little attention. Through her choice of focus, Serpell creates uncertainty about decolonial violence while avoiding a Eurocentric perspective. Her attention to the cadets’ conflicted reactions preserves their humanity where a colonialist perspective could easily have framed them as unthinking violent maniacs,<sup>34</sup> even as it parses the morality of their actions.

If Serpell’s portrayal of the UNIP cadre’s stunt at the hotel is tinged with discomfort, her attitude towards SOTP’s attempt to block the Kariba Dam comes closer to condemnation. Once again, she frames the action from the perspective of someone who is uncomfortable with it but this time the character is not one of its protagonists but a bystander – Mai Makupa, the fisherwoman

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<sup>34</sup> For colonialist stereotypes of African resistance fighters, see the discussion of portrayals of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya in Booker 148.



from whose boat SOTP launches the drones to block the sluices<sup>35</sup>— and her discomfort is not mitigated in any way as Matha’s is. Mai raises the question of whether SOTP understand how they endanger the Zambian people: “You have warned the peepo? ... Am asking because that is what the *bazungu* did wrong the fest time with this same dam ... They did not give the peepo proppa warning” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 555, original emphasis). What she points out is that in their attempt at revolutionary decolonization, SOTP are in danger of repeating the injustices of the British colonizers. Prompted by her comment, Joseph, the least revolutionary of SOTP’s members, reminds the others that “direct action ... always just harms the people it’s supposed to help. We’re shutting down a dam that provides electricity for millions” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 555). Nonetheless, it may be Joseph who launches the drones that plug Kariba’s sluices to prove to Jacob that he is not afraid. Whatever his convictions are, he acts out of pride. While the destruction of the Kariba Dam leads to the creation of the potentially utopian Lusaka city-state, it first endangers much of Zambia’s population.<sup>36</sup> The fact that SOTP are blind to the risks involved in their attempt to take down the country’s authoritarian, neocolonial government shows that they are taking other people’s lives into their hands without properly understanding the situation or the needs of those on whose behalf they claim to be acting. Serpell uses Mai’s point of view to show that SOTP are out of their depth and that there is something disturbing about the degree to which they are comfortable with violence and danger. After the dam breaks, Mai is disturbed to see that “Naila was still practically haloed with sex but her eyes were switchblades glinting in the morning haze.

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<sup>35</sup> Mai is a Zambian woman with Chinese heritage – on her Zambian side she is implicitly related to the secretary of Naila’s grandfather Federico, who, in the novel, was the head engineer of the Kariba Dam.

<sup>36</sup> Serpell’s description of the floods does not specify whether people died in them (Serpell, *Old Drift* 563); however, it seems impossible that there would not have been any casualties.

No fear, this one” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 558). This is not a total condemnation of SOTP. As in the unsuccessful romances described in the previous chapter, Serpell acknowledges that there are elements of the philosophies of the various members that are worth preserving.<sup>37</sup> What she warns against is taking violent action on behalf of and a leadership role over people without obtaining their consent or even properly understanding their needs.

SOTP show an arrogance not unlike that of Colonel Buendía as they plan to lead a resistance movement against Zambia’s neocolonial government even though they are barely known to the Zambian people. Their plan is to “send a signal out to coordinate a resistance movement, and get everyone plugged into SOTP so [they] can operate outside government surveillance” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 555); however, they are only known to the Zambian people through their rally at which they did not put forward a clear political platform and Serpell is (intentionally) vague as to whether they have remained in the public consciousness since then. The mosquitoes highlight this almost authoritarian arrogance when they ask: “*Was it the dread royal we all along? And is that the meaning of SOTP?*” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 562, original emphasis). Like *Solitude*, irrespective of García Márquez’s own beliefs on the subject, *The Old Drift* argues that

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<sup>37</sup> It is worth mentioning that Serpell has said that Naila’s character was partially based on Shailja Patel, a Kenyan poet of Indian descent, whom she had met at the Storymoja Festival and is fond of: “Shailja is incredibly fierce in ways that remind me of Naila’s character. I felt like she had Naila’s spirit, and I put some nods to Shailja into the book as I wrote” (Serpell, “When They Blur”).

decolonization must be a communal, collaborative effort – it cannot be the work of a few individuals acting allegedly on behalf of people they are barely in contact with.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, Serpell makes the wholesale condemnation of decolonial violence difficult for her readers by drawing attention to other forms of violence which are considered acceptable in hegemonic society. One of the ways in which she highlights this legitimization of some forms of violence over others, is through the differences in the political positions of SOTP's members. Joseph's stance seems to distance him from the idea of violence as a legitimate means of bringing about change. He "believe[s] in incremental change through existent structures" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 519). However, his AIDS research involves endangering people's lives: "Joseph had started with the truth – he and Musadabwe had tested only animals so far. But the rest was a lie. Joseph knew human trials would have to come eventually. He felt sorry for the Lusaka Patient and the other women like her. But to say sorry to her son would be tantamount to a confession, and Joseph would not face that until the study was done" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 429). Later, precisely when SOTP are about block Kariba's sluices and Joseph expresses his concern about the harm they could do, Jacob reminds him that he too risked people's lives: "You did not seem to mind risking people's lives when it was for the Virus vaccine" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 556). While Joseph's AIDS vaccine and its appropriation by the Sino-American consortium are fictitious, Global North powers have repeatedly exploited the bodies of subalterns in the name of medical study, such as in the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment (Jones) or the trials for AZT, an anti-HIV drug, done in countries in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean in 1995 in which placebos were used, a practice which

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<sup>38</sup> Seen in this light, the actions of SOTP stand in pointed contrast to Sibilla (Naila's grandmother) who joined the Tonga in their protest against the dam's initial construction as "neither their captive nor their leader" (Serpell, *Old Drift* 77).

would not have been allowed if the tests had been done in the Global North (New York University). The point is not that Joseph's "invisible," internationally sanctioned violence is worse than Jacob and Naila's revolutionary violence but that both are ethically disturbing and that readers must confront the similarities between the two. In Serpell's attempt to unsettle the political convictions of her readers, Jacob provides a trenchant criticism of Joseph's beliefs and Joseph of Jacob and Naila's.

In brief, neither novel takes an unambiguous stance towards decolonial violence. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez shows the violent suppression of nonviolent attempts at decolonization but remains vague about what alternative methods should be used. In *The Old Drift*, Serpell subjects both decolonial violence and hegemonic violence to ethical interrogation. Fundamentally, both novels serve as launching points for their readers to develop and debate potential decolonial projects rather than arguing for a single approach to decolonization. This approach becomes clearest in the conclusions of the two novels, which hint at the societies that are created after decolonization, which I turn to in the next chapter.

## 4.0 Decolonial Utopias

It is the conclusions to both novels that contain suggestions, intentionally vaguely defined for reasons I will discuss below, of what a decolonized world might look like. I analyze these conclusions in terms of Armillas-Tiseyra's idea of the utopian impulse, an approach to theorizing alternatives to contemporary inequalities which instead of working towards a planned goal emphasizes utopia “not so much [as] an end as a method” (Armillas-Tiseyra 171) intentionally leaving the future world undefined and “insists on the work of imagination as a continual opening toward the future” (166). In this chapter, I explain why I consider the destruction of Macondo and the Lusaka city-state created by the flooding of Zambia to be utopias. Then I argue that both authors use their vaguely defined utopias as starting points to encourage their readers to imagine a decolonized world and that their novels are designed to provide their readers with the tools to liberate their minds from the limitations of the Eurocentric worldview allowing them to imagine these alternative societies.

Drawing on Alfred J. López, Armillas-Tiseyra associates the utopian impulse with the post-Cold War era as it resulted from disillusionment with both the Third World project and globalization (170-1). Despite being a product of an earlier time, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* defines its decolonial utopia in a similar way, albeit for different reasons. It formed part of a widespread euphoria among large sectors of Latin America's population in the wake of the Cuban Revolution.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Martin, *Journeys* 228, 233.

Before I analyze these conclusions, I must explain why I describe them as utopias, even though their cataclysmic nature suggests that they are closer to dystopias or apocalypses. In the case of *Solitude*, Martin has already interpreted the novel in these terms. According to him, it ends “with a revolution in consciousness – a dialectical transformation, a critical awareness of the self in history after a hundred years of self-absorption – even if what seems to be happening is death and disaster” (*Journeys* 221). In his interpretation, which I agree with, Macondo represents a way of life created by colonialism, neocolonialism and global capitalism which imprisons Latin America’s people. Through its destruction they are liberated.

The ending of *Solitude* finally resolves the unsuccessful national romances that had plagued the Buendía family. Aureliano Babilonia and Amaranta Úrsula’s son is the “único [Buendía] en un siglo que había sido engendrado con amor” ‘only [Buendía] in a century to have been engendered with love’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 489). This is possible because he is conceived at the time when Macondo is finally freed from Eurocentric ideological influences. The last two Buendías have turned away from attempting to emulate any sort of European models, and in their self-sufficient way of life begin to or at least imagine themselves to resemble Latin America’s indigenous inhabitants. Amaranta Úrsula realizes “Quién hubiera pensado que de veras íbamos a terminar viviendo como antropófagos” ‘who would have thought that we really would end up living like anthropophages’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 487).<sup>40</sup> The term *antropófago* is first used to describe the three-year old Aureliano Babilonia who looks “como si no fuera una

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<sup>40</sup> The idea that Latin America’s indigenous inhabitants were cannibals is largely a racist myth - the likely exception being some of the Tupí peoples of Brazil, see Gareis. However, beginning in the 1920s some Latin Americans, such as Oswald de Andrade in his “Anthropophagic Manifesto,” (also translated as “Cannibalist Manifesto”) began to use the motif of cannibalism as a positive symbol of national identity.

criatura humana sino la definición enciclopédica de un antropófago” ‘as though he was not a human creature but the encyclopedia definition of an anthropophage’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 351) and becomes Amaranta Úrsula’s nickname for him (García Márquez, *Cien años* 449, 465). By the time Aureliano Babilonia and Amaranta Úrsula’s child is born, the term has lost any pejorative meaning it had, as Amaranta Úrsula happily responds to seeing her newborn child by saying “Es todo un antropófago” ‘He’s a real anthropophage’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 489). With the collapse of the Eurocentric influences, the non-European components of Latin American identity can at last be valued. While around the time of the Banana Massacre, the *antropófago* is still seen through Eurocentric eyes – he is dehumanized and resembles not any reality but a definition in an encyclopedia – by the end of the novel, he is the identity the Buendías choose to identify themselves with. Through this positive revaluation the characters begin to undo Colombia's erasure of indigenous history which was represented in the novel by the plague of insomnia.<sup>41</sup>

Aureliano Babilonia and Amaranta Úrsula’s child appears to them “un Buendía de los grandes, macizo y voluntarioso como los José Arcadios, con los ojos abiertos y clarividentes de los Aurelianos, y predispuesto para empezar la estirpe otra vez por el principio y purificarla de sus vicios perniciosos y su vocación solitaria” ‘a Buendía *par excellence*, robust and willful like the José Arcadios, with the open, clairvoyant eyes of the Aurelianos, and ready to restart the family line from the beginning and purify it of its pernicious vices and solitary disposition’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 489). The child unites the defining characteristics of the (male) family members and promises to become the best version of them, because he was the only Buendía

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<sup>41</sup> For references to how the plague of insomnia represents the erasure of Colombian indigenous history, see Martin, *Journeys* 230 and Brotherston 144-6.

conceived out of love. Yet rather than surviving the novel and hinting at the future to come, the child, born with the pig's tail the family had feared since the beginning, dies shortly after being born. This conclusion stems from the fact that within the realm of the novel it is not just their vices, but what the Buendías themselves represent that needs to end. As Martin says, “[t]he apocalypse of the Buendías is ... the end of primitive neocolonialism, [and] its conscious or unconscious collaborators” (*Journeys* 233). The Buendías cannot reform themselves because a Eurocentric worldview which enables neocolonialism is an integral part of what they represent. This is not to downplay the importance of the baby being born out of the family's first loving union, rather it means that love is important not because it can regenerate the family but because it destroys it<sup>42</sup> allowing a genuine rebirth to take place. While the novel's last chapter, which focusses on Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano Babilonia's relationship in the decaying remains of Macondo before ending with their deaths and the town's destruction, hints at the decolonial utopia to come, it can only come to fruition after the last trace of Macondo and of the Buendías has been destroyed.

The baby's death is necessary for decolonization in another sense. It is the catalyst for Aureliano Babilonia to fully decolonize his mind as the sight of the ants carrying it away is the clue he needs to interpret Melquiades' prophecies. As Aureliano reads the prophecies, the novel ceases to be a decolonial reading of Latin American history, “about the myths of history and their demystification” (Martin, *Journeys* 223) and becomes a direct address to its readers aimed at the present and the future, it “turns the reader ... back out into the history outside the text” (ibid.,

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<sup>42</sup> I owe this idea to the Spanish language Wikipedia article on *One Hundred Years of Solitude* which I read in 2019 before I was an undergraduate student, and which has changed since then to the point that I can no longer find the source it cited.



233).<sup>43</sup> The historical moment of the novel's conclusion is the same as that of its publication. When Aureliano Babilonia begins to “descifrar el instante que estaba viviendo, descifrándolo a medida que lo vivía” ‘decipher the moment he was living, deciphering it as he lived it’ (García Márquez, *Cien años* 495), he is doing what a reader who has picked up on García Márquez's decolonial argument will be doing. This decolonial reader is now able to view the moment of the book's publication through a decolonial lens and to use the tools the author has given them to decipher Latin America's realit(ies).

Like *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The Old Drift* ends with a destruction that is necessary for the creation of something new: the Lusaka city-state, which is created after SOTP accidentally destroys the Kariba dam, thereby flooding the country. Unlike in *Solitude*, where all the remaining inhabitants of Macondo perish, the description of Serpell's cataclysm focusses on the survivors – “*Electric grids failed, people fled from their homes ... Traffic slowed down, then stopped altogether. Passengers waded, then swam*” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 563, original emphasis) – and deaths, though implied, are not mentioned. The scenario is certainly disastrous, but the destruction is much more gradual than that of Macondo. However, the most significant difference between Serpell and García Márquez is that she provides a brief view of the new society that forms after the cataclysmic transformation: “*Lusaka survived, that dusty plateau, as its own city-state. Kalingalinga [one of its slums] became its capital. A small community, egalitarian, humble. People grow all of the food that they eat. There are a few clinics, and one or two schools. Beads*

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<sup>43</sup> Martin reads this passage quite similarly in a way that prefigures the decolonial reading that I pursue in this thesis (*Journeys* 232-3).

*are used for barter and voting*” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 563, original emphasis).<sup>44</sup> I will argue that this city-state can be considered a utopia.

Like Macondo, the Kariba Dam is a symbol of a flawed society still partially operating within a Eurocentric framework. In an article about the construction of the dam and its social and economic consequences for Zambia, Julia Tischler argues that it is a product of a colonial era vision of development which privileged the urban over the rural and which endured into the postcolonial era and that “[t]he fact that ... Kariba endured – not just physically, but also economically and ideologically – symbolises the incompleteness of decolonization” (Tischler 1064).<sup>45</sup> She adds that “[i]n terms of economic inequalities, the dam ... points to the intricate entanglements between the colonial and postcolonial periods” (ibid.).<sup>46</sup> Kariba stands for many of the Eurocentric values present in colonial and postcolonial discourses, which Serpell argues are destructive to Zambia. She shows that it still holds power over contemporary Zambia through its centrality to the country’s electrical grid (“The electrical grid isn’t just the cloud ... It’s people’s lives” [Serpell, *Old Drift* 550]). Because it in significant part dictates the lives of Zambians, the colonial worldview it derived from still shapes Zambia politically, economically, and socially even fifty years after colonial occupation ended. Its destruction thus symbolizes Zambia’s liberation from the worldview and priorities imposed on it under colonialism, which disrupted Zambian society and contributed to the country’s subordination within the international order.

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<sup>44</sup> Ironically, the Lusaka city-state may contain some of the European elements Chatterjee argued had been incorporated into the postcolonial nation-state, but an analysis of this falls outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>45</sup> Serpell does not list Tischler’s article among her sources, but her use of the Kariba dam throughout the novel, particularly the way Colonel Corzale links it to empire shows that she views it in a similar way.

<sup>46</sup> In a contrasting take, Angelo Monaco argues that the dam’s construction represents the birth of Zambia (93).

Returning to the idea of the national romance, like the destruction of Macondo, the Lusaka city-state is also associated with a romantic union. Naila has relationships with both Joseph and Jacob and her child is born in the city-state, possibly having been conceived when the dam broke. Either of the two men could be the father. The child “represents the symbolic unifying point of connection of the three characters and, consequently, of the three families” (Monaco 96) as well as being a symbol for the new political project. The uncertainty of its origins at first suggests that the Lusaka city-state is on the wrong track, yet they are actually proof that Zambia has finally been liberated. The unknown identity of the child’s father breaks down barriers of class which Serpell indicates are falling away in the Lusaka city-state, which the mosquitoes describe as “egalitarian” (Serpell, *Old Drift* 563) and where the city’s former slum has become its capital potentially fulfilling what Fanon considers decolonization’s primary goal: “that the last become the first” (Fanon 10). After more than a century of both colonial and postcolonial governments insisting on a single version of history in which each thing has only one origin, the uncertainty and heterogeneity through which Serpell defines history in the mosquitoes’ opening monologue has at last been cemented. While she used uncertainty to unsettle her readers in relation to violence, here it constitutes a democratic, decolonial gesture. The celebration of uncertain and heterogeneous origins is also present in the mosquitoes’ revelation that they do not know whether they are wild animals or Jacob’s *Moskeetoze* drones. This revelation breaks down the binary between nature and technology, and once again challenges the Northern philosophy-Southern technology association as the drones are Jacob’s creation, a technological innovation stemming from the Global South.

Finally, I call the Lusaka city-state a utopia because of how it resembles Raymond Williams’ description of the fictional planet Anarres in Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed*, which breaks from some of the characteristics associated with utopias but nonetheless retains

enough of their core elements. In its scenario, “the utopia, is bleak and arid; the prosperous vitality of the classical utopia is in the existing society that is being rejected” because that prosperity excludes most of the population (Williams 213-4).

It is a generous and open gateway, within the limited conditions of its wasteland destination ... mutuality is shown to be viable, in a way all the more so because there is no abundance to make it easy ... [it] is an open utopia: forced open, after the congealing of ideals, the degeneration of mutuality into conservatism; shifted, deliberately, from its achieved harmonious condition, the stasis in which the classical utopian mode culminates, to restless, open, risk-taking experiment (Williams 214)

While Williams’ description cannot be applied to *The Old Drift* 1:1, there are important similarities. The Lusaka city-state and its inhabitants are not rich, but the scarcity which they experience does not exist to serve other people’s prosperity. Indeed, the city-state seems to have withdrawn entirely from the international order, in which Zambia was relegated to a subordinate position, as its self-sustaining economy is only possible if it is largely isolated. Its mutuality does not degenerate into the conservatism of a single ideology as it could have, had SOTP taken up leadership of the new society.

Williams’ idea of a utopia which is open and predicated on continual experimentation not only dovetails with Serpell’s ideas but with Armillas-Tiseyra's as well. It is in that vein that Serpell suggests something which is more specifically defined than anything in Armillas-Tiseyra. This idea is less present in the Lusaka city-state than in something the mosquitoes articulate earlier in the novel:

*Your desire to conquer, to colonise others, is both too fixed and too free. Nothing escapes your dull dialectic: either it takes a village to live or to each his own to survive. Even your debate on the best way to be falls on either side of this blade. The social contract or individual free will; the walls of a commune must keep us close or capital must run rampant. That's how you froze your long Cold War, with this endless, mindless divide.*

*Our essence is somewhere between or besides. We flee but our flight is unruly and tangled, a haphazard hover, a swarm. We loiter a lot but we move over time, we do best when we choose to meander. Come and go, nor fast nor slow, but at a peripatetical pace. Be open to float over land and sea, beneath the communal sky, a throng, a flock, a sly murmuration – is this perhaps the solution? (Serpell, *Old Drift* 486, original emphasis)*

The mosquitoes' suggested approach retains the association between utopia and continual movement and the rejection of a fixed goal. It also rejects the binary worldview of the Cold War in favor of imagining new kinds of social relationships beyond the rhetoric of either of its sides. In so doing it may echo both the "skepticism of master narratives" that emerged from "the failure of "world-utopias" (of the Third World project as much as of globalization)" (Armillas-Tiseyra 170-1) and Serpell's interpretation of Nkoloso's space program as a satire of Cold War rhetoric. Like this interpretation of Nkoloso, who pursued decolonization through art and humor and rejected the binary which associated the Global North with technology and the Global South with spirituality, the mosquitoes remind the reader that there are other ways to be. Through them Serpell argues that the creation of an equitable, decolonized world requires us to look to alternatives to the political, social, cultural, and economic models which currently dominate our world. Like García Márquez, Serpell has given her readers the tools to imagine ways of life outside Eurocentric prescriptions of what society should be. The Lusaka city-state is a suggestion or a possibility, one

of many options available to the next generation of decolonial worldmakers or a catalyst for them to begin thinking about alternatives to contemporary society. In both novels, the end is also a beginning.

## Conclusion

Just over half a century separates the publication of *The Old Drift* from that of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In the 1960s, García Márquez and other writers throughout the Global South believed that liberation was at hand. While it is vague about what is to come, the conclusion of *Solitude* points to the immanence of social transformation. Fifty years later, the ending of *The Old Drift* also imagines a decolonized world, one which can and must be imagined, but which is not necessarily about to arrive. The fact that two novels written fifty years apart address many of the same problems and that it is the latter of the two which imagines the creation of an equitable world to be further in the future is disheartening. But as Adom Getachew stresses “we inhabit as our present the promises *and* ruins of anticolonial worldmaking” (181, my emphasis). Both novels contribute to the process of imagining an equitable, decolonized world and secondarily to devising the means to make it a reality.

In ways which I have only hinted at here, *The Old Drift* both builds on and challenges *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Serpell’s novel is much more overt in terms of its political content than García Márquez’s. It also avails itself of a somewhat different conceptual vocabulary. If *Solitude* was the product of the era of anti-imperialism and dependency theory, *Drift* belongs to a time when the concept of decolonization around which I structure this essay has come to replace the former.<sup>47</sup> Serpell pays greater attention to identity and intersectionality. *Solitude* focusses primarily on class and the inequality between the Global North and the Global South, though gender and racial

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<sup>47</sup> Along similar lines, the idea of the “Global South” has replaced that of the “Third World,” see Armillas-Tiseyra 168-9.

differences within the Global South are a significant veiled presence. In *The Old Drift*, Serpell addresses all these identities explicitly and outlines the complex interactions between them.

Serpell's vision of family is different as well. While *Solitude* follows a single family, the Buendías, whose traits and actions repeat themselves as much as their names do, *The Old Drift* is structured around three matrilineal families in which children are often the opposites of their parents.<sup>48</sup> This increased difference between characters is significant because it gives them a greater degree of agency suggesting that the control the Global North has over their lives is not as complete as it is in *Solitude*.

These differences are important, but they also highlight the similarities between the two novels. For me the most important constant between them is their critical reading of the history of the Global South and their argument that its future lies in social relations radically different from the dominant ones of the present. There are and always have been other ways to be.

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<sup>48</sup> See Serpell *Playing* 42.



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