The Capitalocene and Slow Violence in Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

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**Abstract**

The term Global South originates in the social sciences, where it invokes the notion of a global North-South divide to organize nations according to socioeconomic and political status. In a literary context, the Global South signifies an ongoing endeavor to engage with the current global disposition by identifying its externalities and providing the framework in which wide-ranging and cross-regional resistance might be imagined. Drawing on this point of view, the Global South can be regarded as a resilient political imagination originating from the marginalized peoples’ mutual recognition of analogous circumstances under contemporary capitalism. Recognition is, therefore, the critical point for the construction of Global South consciousness, which will enable those people to activate solidarities that can be put into action toward the goal of liberation. In this context, this paper intends to investigate Gabriel García Márquez’s portrayal of an environmental apocalypse in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), which offers rich possibilities for thinking about García Márquez in relation to the Global South. Paying particular attention to the geographical vulnerability of the Global South and Márquez’s representation of the transnational banana company’s ecocidal practices in Macondo, this paper establishes an analogous connection between capitalism’s externalities and its impact on the environmental degradation and the living conditions of local communities. Drawing heavily on Jason W. Moore’s notion of “the Capitalocene” and Rob Nixon’s theory of “slow violence,” this paper indicates that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* highlights the intersections between the analogous deterioration of the poor people’s living conditions and the environment in Macondo, offering multiple entry points from which socio-ecological connections are embodied and conveyed to the readers.

**Keywords:** Anthropocene, Capitalocene, slow violence, Global South, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude.
Introduction

Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) is received as “a literary earthquake” in literary circles (Swanson, 2010, p. 57). Literariness is a delicate concept in Global South literary criticism as it is frequently overshadowed by concerns about the political influence of literary works. However, it is neither desirable nor wise to avoid discussing the literary aspects of García Márquez’s outstanding work. Literary critics argue that the rise of Global South literature roughly between the 1940s and 1960s challenged traditional realism, reacting against the idea that reality could be observed, understood, and conveyed by literary works. As *One Hundred Years of Solitude* opens with José Arcadio Buendía’s invitation to his offspring to imagine “the wonders of the world” in a room filled with fantastical maps and illustrations (Márquez, 1971, p. 14), the readers may be invited to treat the novel as an imaginary work of adventurous fiction. The emphasis on imagination clearly explains why the novel is often characterized as having a magical realist style. Nevertheless, magical realism also involves reconsidering reality rather than purely reacting against it. García Márquez himself magically treats reality, combining it with his own life experience in Colombia’s Caribbean region. In the course of his Nobel speech, García Márquez addresses improbable facts about the region, stating that “in the past eleven years, twenty million Latin American children have died before their second birthday. Nearly one hundred and twenty thousand have disappeared as a consequence of repression” (as cited in Conniff, 2002, p. 139). Thus, García Márquez opens spaces in which the readers are encouraged to use their imagination to reconsider the region in a different reality, creating and constructing the readers’ thoughts and behaviors in a manner that makes it tempting to imagine alternative forms of being.

García Márquez employs magical realism to open up its expression as a framework for comparison, sensitive to unspoken links or parallels between *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the regional circumstances. His method is consistent with “relational comparison,” inspired by global history and he considers *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a representation of the network, linked by a multitude of shared histories (Armillas-Tiseyra, 2021, p. 53). To put it in slightly different terms, García Márquez allows for imaginary spaces, which are connected by historical ties to transnational labor and capitalist extractive systems. These connections provide the foundation for comparative interpretations of the novel that emerges from the region. Therefore, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* serves as a framework for both interacting with the Global South and comprehending the region’s socio-economic structure. Moreover, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* provides a wealth of opportunities for considering García Márquez in connection to the Global South, looking beyond the evocative aspects of his biography and political activities. García Márquez’s writing style is rich with allusions to the broader networks in which the imagined and real worlds are interconnected. The fiction evokes attention to the global dynamics of the capitalist systems, including representations of the advent of the transnational banana company, the initial economic boom, and the following strike and massacre instances. Thus, this imaginary narrative offers an illustrative representation of the natural resource exploitation in the region and its irreversible effects that are consistent with anthropocentrism. In this way, the narrative provides direct exposure to eco-injustice, some possible effects on local communities, and the portrayal of an environmental apocalypse.

García Márquez highlights the underlying historical relationships between the imaginary Macondo and the global economy. Then, it is possible to argue that he conjures
up the magical realist narrative to personify the capitalist global structures symbolized by the banana company and the socio-environmental transformation in Macondo. In both, its form and content, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* presents images of spatially remote Macondo as a framework through which the readers envision beyond the delights of commodities and comprehend how their consumption habits affect remote geographies as well as the living conditions and well-being of the inhabitants. In light of those preliminary observations, this paper draws mainly upon Jason W. Moore’s notion of ‘the Capitalocene’ and Rob Nixon’s ‘slow violence’ theory to analyze García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In this way, this paper advances the conversation about how the Global South literature portrays global economics and ecologies and, in particular, how imaginary literary worlds might reverse the “failure of geographical imagination” (Nixon, 2011, p. 240), posing challenges to the apprehension and representation of remote geographies. In a vision that conjoins the Capitalocene and slow violence, this paper draws on both of these conceptual foundations to create fresh and potent frameworks for delving into environmental justice in literature. This paper, in this context, first illustrates the concepts of ‘the Capitalocene’ and ‘slow violence’ and then indicates that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* allows for highlighting the intersections between these conceptual foundations.

**The Intersections between the ‘Capitalocene’ and ‘Slow Violence’: Theoretical Background**

As the world has reached the beginning of the twenty-first century, atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen and limnologist Eugene F. Stoermer proposed that the Earth has undergone a new geological era, which they refer to as the Anthropocene, “emphasiz[ing] the central role of mankind in geology and ecology” (2000, p. 17). The idea of the Anthropocene, which is a worthy point of departure for this paper, highlights the decisive human role in the planet Earth’s ecology and geology, which rivals the great forces of nature, transforming the Earth rapidly and irreversibly. Drawing upon the connections between the anthropogenic effects that are truly planetary in scale and the accelerating degradation of ecosystems, the Anthropocene can be characterized as “the daunting, indeed horrifying, coincidence of human history and terrestrial geology” (Morton, 2013, p. 9). The Anthropocene and its attendant disaster, climate change, are upon humanity. In other words, the climate crisis and the Anthropocene are not interchangeable; however, they both encapsulate the problems humanity faces today (Bracke, 2017, p. 16). Anthropogenic climate change has long been disregarded as it “tethers us to a perspective that oscillates between the impossible and the inevitable, already and not yet, everywhere but not here” (Dean, 2016, p. 1). Timothy Morton defines it as a “hyperobject [that is] massively distributed in time and space relative to humans, and which def[ies] overview and resist[s] understanding” (Morton, 2013, p. 1). As the Anthropocene or climate crisis defies the boundaries of human comprehension, it has been widely disregarded and denied. Nevertheless, the Anthropocene or its attendant disaster climate crisis is inescapably tied to human life on Earth and poses a threat to humanity’s existing social, cultural, and ethical notions, entailing the reconsideration of the present prevailing policies. The Anthropocene invites us to search out and imagine alternatives to the either/or stance that continues to prevail in contemporary society, resonating with environmentalist attentiveness.

Environmental historian Jason W. Moore proposes that the term Capitalocene can be used rather than the Anthropocene to encompass the era since naming the contemporary ecological crisis after the *Anthropos* would disregard the long history of exploitation of
humans and nonhuman nature. In Dipesh Chakrabarty’s terms, “the story of capital, the contingent history of our falling into the Anthropocene, cannot be denied by recourse to the idea of species, for the Anthropocene would not have been possible [...] without the history of industrialization” (2009, p. 222). Friedrich Engels designated the dynamics of human domination over nature and argued, “mastery over nature began with the development of the hand, with labour, and widened man’s horizon at every new advance. He was continually discovering new, hitherto unknown, properties of natural objects” (1950, p. 10; emphasis is mine). Forging an association between human capitalist practices and environmental crisis, Moore builds on the Cartesian culture/nature binary and argues that capitalist structures impose a persistent pattern of violence on human and nonhuman nature (Moore, 2016, p. 5). The culture/nature dichotomy forces extremist policies on extra-human nature that are also fundamental to capitalism. According to Moore, “an epochal shift in the scale, speed, and scope of landscape transformation” enabled the growth of capitalism (Moore, 2014, n.p.). To put it more clearly, the idea of capitalism constructed nature as external, which enabled the capitalists “to construct global webs of exploitation and appropriation, calculation and credit, property and profit, on an unprecedented scale” (Moore, 2014, pp. 20–21). The capitalist strategy that renders nature’s resources cheap in price and inferior in value is inextricably linked to capitalist development. In ecocritical circles, attention turns toward the relational interaction between culture and nature, challenging humanity’s separation from nature and highlighting how human culture shapes and is shaped by nature. Within this frame, Moore employs oikeois to characterize “the creative, historical, and dialectical relation between, and also always within, human and extra-human natures,” a notion that demands challenging Cartesian dichotomous categorizations in favor of a view of nature as the field in which human activity develops and historical agency operates (Moore, 2013, p. 3). To paraphrase Moore, the notion of oikeois allows for a framework in which the concept of ecology can be reinterpreted, promoting the worldview that capitalism does not act upon nature but through nature. Moore further contends that the capitalist world-system should be categorized as a world-ecology, a “world-historical matrix of human and extra-human nature premised on endless commodification and expansion” (Moore, 2011, p. 108). Moore makes the following remarks on the phenomenon:

Capitalism is a way of organizing nature as a whole[...] a nature in which human organizations (classes, empires, markets, etc.) not only make environments but are simultaneously made by the historical flux and flow of the web of life. In this perspective, capitalism is a world-ecology that joins the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power, and the co-production of nature in successive historical configurations. (2016, p. 7)

The world-ecological viewpoint of the Capitalocene, which reinforces the interconnectedness between human and extra-human nature, allows environmentalist criticism to be extended beyond its conventional constraints to include the whole historical continuum of structures that shape capitalist oikeois. In this regard, the world-ecology perspective of the Capitalocene has particular cogency for environmental studies of the Global South, as this paper explores. The Global South, predominantly understood as “underdeveloped,” functions as the opposite of the North’s economic, social, and political development. In the aftermath of the dismantling of the Third World as a political project, the Global South emerges as “a resistant political imaginary arising from the mutual recognition of shared or analogous circumstances by marginalised or dispossessed groups under contemporary capitalism” (Armillas-Tiseyra, 2021, p. 52). In Russell West-Pavlov’s
terms, “[the Global South] opens up spaces in which speech can be invented. It does not reveal or recover; rather, it triggers processes of creative renewal” (2018, p. 8). It is pertinent and important to note that the Global South, “detrimental geography of capitalism’s externalities,” (Mahler, 2017, p. 1), is historically related to global labor and capital extraction systems, and the voices from the Global South aim to create critical reflections on those systems. The analysis outlined in this paper relies on the reflections Gabriel García Márquez provides in One Hundred Years of Solitude, which allows for possibilities for thinking about García Márquez in relation to the Global South and its ecology. That said, his reflections on the intensified competition for resources shine a light on marginalized people’s experiences in Latin America, which has become a hot zone for resource extraction and imperialism, and the effects of the Capitalocene on ecology. While the issue of whether the Anthropocene age started with the effects of human activity or with the Industrial Revolution permeates the ecocritical agenda, this paper contends Moore’s Capitalocene is more appropriate to reflect Latin American reality and the demise of its people.

García Márquez’s fiction invokes attention to global capitalist dynamics and emphasizes the capitalogenic effects on ecosystems derived from extractive practices. In particular, Rob Nixon delineates this intersection and conceptualizes this process as “slow violence [...] a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2011, p. 2). Nixon’s conceptualization of slow violence refers to a kind of structural violence that occurs over extended periods of time and is scattered across national borders, ecosystems, and materials. Thus, “it remain[s] outside our flickering attention spans—and outside the purview of a spectacle-driven corporate media” (Nixon, 2011, p. 6). Drawing mainly upon the connection between capitalist dynamics and the ecological crisis, Nixon argues that the people of “violent geographies of fast capitalism” are more vulnerable to slow violence. Nixon further writes, “the environmentalism of the poor is frequently catalyzed by resource imperialism inflicted on the global South to maintain the unsustainable consumer appetites of rich-country citizens and, increasingly, of the urban middle classes in the global South itself” (2011, p. 22). Thus, Nixon demonstrates the importance of broadening the concept of violence from its immediate and tangible manifestations to include accumulative ones that transcend national boundaries and human imagination. From this standpoint, understanding this specific form of violence and looking beyond its ecocidal unfolding allows for uncovering the capitalist dynamics that have been victimizing the current livelihoods and futures of millions of people and ecozones in the Global South. To put it in slightly different terms, capitalism’s underlying ecological and cultural contradictions hinder envisioning a sustainable future for the people of the Global South, as their geography has historically been the source of cheap labor and natural resources for the Global North. It is pertinent to note, from an ecological standpoint, that the capitalist tendency for unrelenting expansion and production poses a more alarming threat to the environmental sustainability of “those people lacking resources” across the so-called Global South (Nixon, 2011, p. 4).

In this literary context, the Global South signifies an ongoing endeavor to engage with this current global disposition by identifying its externalities and providing the framework in which wide-ranging and cross-regional resistance might be imagined and apprehended. To investigate slow violence “apprehensionis [...] a crossover term that draws together the domains of perception, emotion and action” (Nixon, 2011, p. 14). It is, therefore, no coincidence that García Márquez’s fiction potentially disrupts the notion of
environmental degradation as inevitable, allowing for new spaces for alternative social and environmental visions. In other words, García Márquez’s fiction imaginatively exposes some of the faulty frameworks and erroneous capitalist assumptions. In doing so, his narrative offers up multiple entry points from which to open new spaces, rendering the imperceptible ecological threats apprehensible. If the Global South is taken as the space of “the resistant imaginary of a transnational political subject that results from a shared experience of subjugation under contemporary global capitalism” (Mahler, 2017, p. 1), the concept can provide a lens for understanding environmental degradation as a consequence of the capitalist domination of disposable geographies. Drawing on this point of view, the Global South can be regarded as a resilient ecological imagination originating from disposable peoples’ mutual recognition of analogous circumstances under contemporary capitalism. In light of those preliminary observations, this paper intends to investigate Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), which offers rich possibilities for thinking about García Márquez in relation to the Global South. Paying particular attention to the geographical vulnerability of the Global South, this paper establishes an analogous connection between capitalism’s externalities and environmental degradation in Macondo.

**Tracing the ‘Capitalocene’ and ‘Slow Violence’ in *One Hundred Years of Solitude***

Garcia Márquez says in his Nobel Prize lecture, “But we must first accept books like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Bound to Violence* on their own terms, as mirrors of the solitude of postcolonial societies” (as cited in Ortega, 1988, p. 90). In this vein, the publication of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is regarded as a “literary earthquake,” inviting the readers to force the limits of their imagination through its magical realist style (Swanson, 2010, p. 57). The author was born in Aracataca, Columbia, a small town in the Santa Marta banana zone, where the American United Fruit Company exerted oppressive capitalist dominance during the 20th century. Relying mainly on the intersections between capitalism’s externalities and ecological degradation in Macondo, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* allows for new spaces for alternative environmental visions in Global South societies. In the novel, García Márquez foregrounds the concepts of the ‘Capitalocene’ and ‘slow violence’ and the effectiveness of his chosen strategy will be considered. The novel opens in Macondo, the imaginary town, which is closely tied to imperial capitalism. Thus, an investigation of the possible externalities of capitalism in environmental studies sets up an appropriate point of departure. At the beginning of the novel, Macondo is described as a paradise-like setting, shrouded in tranquility and stunning natural beauty. This imaginary setting is attributed to no nation, space, or time, transcending all those kinds of limitations and serving as a microcosm of all oppressed societies.

Macondo is described as “a [happy] village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs” (Márquez, 1971, p. 6). José Arcadio Buendía, the founder of Macondo, portrays the serenity, terrain, flora, and fauna of the region. Then, it is possible to argue that Macondo is presented as a natural paradise where its inhabitants respect nature and live in harmony with their environment. Then, he urges the inhabitants to establish connections with other remote communities. Having founded Macondo, Buendía decides to go on a perilous expedition to cross the island’s dreadful isolation and attempts to build bridges of communication with the modernity nearby. The narrator mixes memory and prophecy, illusion and reality, illustrating that the inhabitants of Macondo do live their own
way. Buendía’s decision to “guid[e] his men toward the invisible north so that they would be able to get out of that enchanted region” shows that Macondo “seemed to occupy its own space, one of solitude and oblivion, protected from the vices of time” (Márquez, 1971, p. 16). Arcadio Buendía establishes a clear-cut connection between scientific progress and the north, aiming at communicating Macondo with the outer world, and he laments to Úrsula, “We’re going to rot our lives away here without receiving the benefits of science” (Márquez, 1971, p. 17). Arcadio Buendía’s lamentation of Macondo’s seclusion from the rest of the world may be regarded as his desire for ‘modernity;’ however, modernity arrives in Macondo in the form of capitalism. For instance, transportation, in Colombia, has an inescapable connection to Arcadio Buendía’s desire for progress “link[ing] the town with the rest of the world” (Márquez, 1971, p. 214). The transportation industry fuels the brutal capitalist practices of the banana company. Thus, the author treats Macondo’s “civilization” and progress process, embellishing his narrative with magical realist styles and presenting that progress is finally assured in Macondo “if not with ‘proper’ manners and gold chamberpots, then with guns” (Conniff, 2002, p. 148).

As events unfold in the narrative, García Márquez portrays the devastating effects of the banana company, a representative of the pioneering multinational United Fruit Corporation. García Márquez portrays the foreign company as an irresistible intruder that confuses the inhabitants of Macondo, rendering them unable to forge their communities and assert their memories. This multinational company operates through the unnamed banana company in the Caribbean region with central government’s unconditional support. The representative of this company, Apolinar Moscote, is appointed as the mayor of the region without the consent of Macondo’s people. García Márquez depicts him as an intruder, “Don Apolinar Moscote, the magistrate, just arrived in Macondo very quietly [...]. His first order was for all the houses to be painted blue in celebration of the anniversary of national independence” (1971, p. 59). This passage shows the violation of Macondo and its people’s liberty and independence, referring to the oppressive power of the centralized governments over rural communities (Flores, 2021, p. 378). García Márquez highlights the fact that Macondo flourished without the intrusion of the central government by founding villages, distributing the land, and opening roads, with an emphasis on the “necessity required” (1971, p. 59). The emphasis refers to the rejection of abusive capitalist improvements that deny not only the rights of the people but also the rights of the natural environment. Relating this oppressive power to Moore’s notion of the Capitalocene, it is noteworthy to point out that “world hegemonies did not merely organize resource and food regimes; the hegemonies of historical capitalism were socio-ecological projects” (2011, p. 125). The company transformed the local environment, as James W. Martin articulates:

> The transformational capacities of the company found expression in this intensified effort to manage the appearance of residential zones. Living and working in company towns, American employees and their families inhabited a microcosmic version of the company’s tropical enterprise – nature made orderly and productive through the company’s transformation of the local environment [...]. (2018, p. 78)

The quotation is indicative of the transformation that Macondo goes through under capitalism. Thus, the harmony between the people and the natural environment of Macondo begins to deteriorate with the arrival of the banana company and their utilization of the natural environment (Flores, 2016, p. 90). Following the advent of the foreign company, it flourishes in playing its important function as a strong American capitalistic periphery,
carrying out the goal of fostering the American economy via the colonization of the poorer countries, and exploiting their natural resources. It is important to note that the capitalist-world system is fundamentally made up of ecological regimes and revolutions that reorganize and refresh the circumstances of accumulation throughout time to enable further appropriation of ecological surpluses. These regimes are based on the “dialectic of plunder and productivity,” which entails taking advantage of nature’s “free gifts” and transforming them into surplus-value via work (Moore, 2015, p. 138). The conditions for accumulation deteriorate until successive ecological regimes appear when the commodity borders in each succeeding ecological regime can no longer create surpluses. These regimes pursue new boundaries and generate new appropriation techniques while stepping up current exploitation. The advent of the foreign company in Macondo applies similar extractive regimes, exploiting nature’s bounty for the sake of surplus-value. Mr. Herbert, one of the representatives of the company, tastes the bananas as an expert:

[Mr. Herbert] kept on eating as he spoke, tasting, chewing, more with the distraction of a wise man than with the delight of a good eater [...] With the auspicious attention of a diamond merchant, he examined the banana meticulously, dissecting it with a special scalpel, weighing the pieces on a pharmacist’s scale, and calculating its breadth with a gunsmith’s calipers. Then he took a series of instruments out of the chest with which he measured the temperature, the level of humidity in the atmosphere, and the intensity of the light. It was such an intriguing ceremony that no one could eat in peace as everybody waited for Mr. Herbert to pass a final and revealing judgment, but he did not say anything that allowed anyone to guess his intentions. (Márquez, 1971, p. 218)

This lengthy quotation indicates that the natural “free gifts” are transformed into surplus-value under capitalism in Macondo. In other words, Mr. Herbert regards the bananas in terms of their use-value, focusing especially on their potential exchange value. Combining the strategies of exploitation and appropriation of nature, it is reconsidered as a free gift, a surplus that Mr. Herbert can appropriate and put to work without cost. As Moore observes, “abstract social labor,”—the development of various modes of exploitation of surplus human labor—is founded on “abstract social nature,”—the reconsideration of nature as a source of free surpluses that can be put to work in service to capitalist production (Moore, 2014, p. 5). Thus, nature’s free gifts are exploited and exported through capitalist networks and turned into commodities like bananas in the novel. To say the same differently, the advent of the banana company in Macondo has excelled in playing its vital function as a strong American capitalistic periphery, carrying out the goal of the first world to foster the American economy via the exploitation of natural resources and the poverty of Macondo. The banana company modifies the social and natural environment by building an irrigation system, its own train and telegraph system, retail establishments, and a huge fleet to transport bananas to America. The narrator articulates the transformation as follows:

There was not much time to think about it, however, because the suspicious inhabitants of Macondo barely began to wonder what the devil was going on when the town had already become transformed into an encampment of wooden houses with zinc roofs inhabited by foreigners who arrived on the train from halfway around the world, riding not only on the seats and platforms but even on the roof of the coaches. The gringos, who later on brought their languid wives in muslin dresses and large veiled hats, built a separate town across the railroad tracks with streets lined
with palm trees, [...] they changed the pattern of the rams, accelerated the cycle of harvest, and moved the river from where it had always been and put it with its white stones and icy currents on the other side of the town, behind the cemetery. (GarcíaMárquez, 1971, p. 219)

García Márquez portrays the utilization of nature for capitalist greed, even the relocation of the river to irrigate the banana plantations. In so doing, García Márquez refers to Macondo’s environmental apocalypse due to the alteration of the climatological cycle for the sake of surplus value. Here, the gradual deterioration and the accumulative capitalistic exploitation of Macondo’s natural environment can be linked to Nixon’s notion of “slow violence.” The use of widespread slow-motion exploitation to invade nations necessitates reconsidering our preconceived notions of violence to include slow violence. García Márquez’s portrayal creates a compelling narrative, that is appropriate to the ubiquitous yet elusive brutality of delayed effects, which is a significant representational issue in the novel. Crucially, slow violence may fuel long-lasting and recurring crises, especially for poor people struggling to survive. In other words, ‘the poor’ refers to a broad group that is divided along geography, race, and class. Impoverished communities are frequently subjected to coercive power by the capitalist world-system that tests their coherent perseverance due to the capitalist practices, to which Nixon refers as “superpower parochialism […] that is, a combination of American insularity and America’s power as the preeminent empire of the neoliberal age to rupture the lives and ecosystems of non-Americans, especially the poor, who may live at a geographical remove but who remain intimately vulnerable to the force fields of U.S. foreign policy” (2011, p. 34). In One Hundred Years of Solitude, when the banana company arrives, the Macondo people experience difficulty reconciling the conflicting meanings of their own poverty and long-term wealth. Those people are vulnerable in the face of this considerably superior corporation because their lack of commitment to environmental causes is intertwined with other social, political, and cultural causes. It is, therefore, no coincidence that they perceive the environmental threat as a collection of risks, some of which are immediately present and others that are obliquely long-term. In this vein, it is possible to state that capitalist power structures represented by the banana company disrupt the lives and ecosystems of Macondans, who live at a geographical distance but are intimately vulnerable to “superpower parochialism” (Nixon, 2011, p. 34).

Within a reference to Mr. Herbert’s banana taste ceremony, which inaugurates the transformation in Macondo, Colonel Aureliano Buendía says, “Look at the mess we’ve got ourselves into [...] just because we invited a gringo to eat some bananas” (Márquez, 1971, p. 220). Aureliano Buendía attributes Macondo’s environmental deterioration to the capitalist practices of the banana company and highlights their failure to maintain infrastructures, which makes the Macondans disproportionately vulnerable to a whole-scale deterioration. In other words, the banana company connects them in multiple ways to the larger coastal economy, and their lack of commitment to environmental causes is closely intertwined with other socio-economic causes. Once the banana economy gets underway, economic and cultural connections to the outside world multiply. By producing for foreign markets, the banana company opened up new business prospects for the local elites and smallholders, who all eagerly welcomed banana production (LeGrand, 1998, p. 340). As mentioned above, the banana company immediately starts making significant modifications to Macondo’s lifestyle by building an irrigation system, its own railway and communication system, and retail establishments. In the aftermath of those modifications, the banana zone is overwhelmed by a tangible flow of wealth. Nevertheless, the natural environment and the
poor people of Macondo are equally destroyed by the banana company’s practices, which
garbage over the river and alter the attractive Macondo landscape. The narrator remarks
transformation as follows:

The adobe houses of the founders had been replaced by brick buildings with wooden
blinds and cement floors which made the suffocating heat of two o’clock in the
afternoon more bearable. All that remained at that time of José Arcadio Buendía’s
ancient village were the dusty almond trees, destined to resist the most arduous of
circumstances, and the river of clear water whose prehistoric stones had been
pulverized by the frantic hammers of José Arcadio Segundo when he set about
opening the channel in order to establish a boat line. (Márquez, 1971, p. 188)

Macondo’s ecosystem is vulnerable to resource exploitation by the transnational banana
corporation, corporate elites, and insurgent groups. Environmental consciousness and
practices already exist in Macondo, but they are inextricably linked to the struggle for
survival, which renders the poor people of Macondo more vulnerable. Nixon’s emphasis on
the intersection between the vulnerability of poor people and the environment to capitalist
practices, which “make the poor and racial minorities disproportionately vulnerable to
catastrophe” (2011, p. 59), is highlighted by García Márquez’s portrayal of the Great
Depression era, following the 1928 strike. The workers, who demanded an improvement in
their living conditions, camp sanitation, health care, and deteriorating wages, were savagely
driven back by unrelenting gunfire. Tracing the interconnected relationships between
enormous transnational capitalist forces and the labor dynamics that discreetly alter local
life, One Hundred Years of Solitude is a potent illustration of how García Márquez
dramatizes the occluded links of international geography in addition to the occlusions of
time. The novel stands as a critical work, exposing extensive temporal and spatial networks
of violence in the wake of the disastrous 1928 strike in the region. The narrator remarks on
the phenomenon as follows:

There was no free space in the car except for an aisle in the middle. Several hours
must have passed since the massacre because the corpses had the same temperature
as a plaster in autumn and the same consistency of petrified foam that it had, and
those who had put them in the car had had time to pile them up in the same way in
which they transported bunches of bananas. Trying to flee from the nightmare, José
Arcadio Segundo dragged himself from one car to another in the direction in which
the train was heading, and in the flashes of light that broke through the wooden slats
as they went through sleeping towns he saw the man corpses, woman corpses, child
corpses who would be thrown into the sea like rejected bananas. (Márquez, 1971, p.
294)

Gene H. Bell Villada argues that in the aftermath of the strike in 1928, there persisted a reign
of terror in the region. Many people were jailed, wounded, and even dead, reflecting the
inordinate power of United Fruit, and witnesses reported that the bodies were thrown into
the trucks, which then headed towards the sea (2002, p. 134). As far as the novel is
considered in socio-economic and political contexts in the Capitalocene, which is marked
by the prioritization of surplus-value, One Hundred Years of Solitude depicts an extractive
system in which not only the environment but also the provision of basic needs for poor
people is disregarded. In the midst of a power imbalance, this local community is defenseless
against corporate and transnational dealings inflicted upon human and non-human innocent
victims. That said, the violent process of dominance shows similarity to the extractive tactics inscribed in the seizure of natural resources. The novel sheds light on the institutional violence exerted by the banana company on working-class people and poor neighborhoods, as well as on spatial injustices and their relationship to the Capitalocene. In so doing, the novel reveals the intersectionality between slow violence and environmental justice violations. The narrator depicts the ruined situation of Macondo, “struck by the banana company hurricane,” as follows:

Macondo was in ruins. In the swampy streets there were the remains of furniture, animal skeletons covered with red lilies, the last memories of the hordes of newcomers who had fled Macondo as wildly as they had arrived. The houses that had been built with such haste during the banana fever had been abandoned. The banana company tore down its installations. All that remained of the former wired-in city were the ruins. (GarcíaMárquez, 1971, p. 317)

In the wake of the disastrous strike of 1928, García Márquez’s approach delves into the slow violence inflicted upon the non-human environment that is both close and far away, unfolding over time and space on a range of scales from the local to the transnational. It is, therefore, important to note that in a structure where human institutions (companies, classes, markets, etc.) both create and are created by the historical flux of life, capitalism stands as a manner of organizing the environment. Linking the pursuit of power and the accumulation of wealth in Macondo, García Márquez allows for spaces in which the ill-doings of capitalist structures can be exposed. As Nixon argues, environmental degradation more frequently takes the form of non-spectacular occlusions that accumulate over a long period of time, which he refers to as “displacement without movement,” and destroy land and resources, leaving “communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable” (2011, p. 19).

At the end of the novel, the narrator informs the reader about “a plague” and extremely hot weather, “it was so hot that noon that the birds in their confusion were running into walls like day pigeons and breaking through screens to die in the bedrooms” (Márquez, 1971, p. 329). The strange deaths of the birds and the implications of the extremely hot weather refer to the destruction of the flora and fauna in Macondo. The Macondans traditionally organize their settlement in line with the natural environment rather than changing it to suit their purposes. However, the Americans abruptly changed the environment with their temporary ideal parameters for banana plantations. Thus, “In that Macondo, forgotten even by the birds, the dust and the heat had become so strong that it was difficult to breathe” (Márquez, 1971, p. 387). The quotation is indicative of the environmental degradation that often manifests in occluded forms such as climate change and is bound together with slow violence. One Hundred Years of Solitude is read not as merely a mimetic representation of environmental degradation in Macondo but as a method of understanding the nodal points of the deterioration of people’s living conditions and well-being in the aftermath of the banana company’s withdrawal from Macondo. García Márquez thus provides a portrayal of an eco-catastrophe and warns that if humans continue to manipulate the natural environment and accelerate the climatological alterations, they will end up with an environmental apocalypse. Affirming this position, García Márquez interrogates the extent to which the banana company destroys Macondo’s natural environment as follows, “The wooden houses, the cool terraces for breezy card-playing afternoons, seemed to have been blown away in an anticipation of the prophetic wind that
years later would wipe Macondo off the face of the earth” (1971, p. 317). The quotation is indicative of the tension between humans and the natural environment due to our abusive practices towards it. The increasing human interference with the natural environment transforms it into “a voracious phenomenon” (Flores, 2016, p. 93). At the end of the novel, the humans and nonhuman environment are portrayed in a distorted condition, “surrounded by the voracity of nature [...] building the last trenches in the age-old war between man and ant” (Márquez, 1971, p. 392). Márquez thus develops a critical mindset about the unlimited, even inevitable, human dominance over the natural world. In this sense, the exercise of bringing humans into contact with a direct reconsideration of their place in the environmental and geological realms characterizes the reading of One Hundred Years of Solitude. Thus, it provides a direct exposure to eco-injustice and the portrayal of an environmental apocalypse.

Conclusion

This paper strives to highlight the analogous forms of domination that result in the degradation of the lives of paid workers and the damage to the natural environment in One Hundred Years of Solitude. Drawing heavily upon the notions of the Capitalocene and slow violence, this paper applies a socio-ecological perspective to the novel, and, in this way, takes the lead in forging a space in which the literature of the Global South can be related to global labor, capital extraction systems, and environmental degradation in the region. Paying particular attention to the intersections between the deterioration of the living conditions of the poor people in the region and the damage to the environment, this paper evokes imaginary geographical maps to explore conceptual maps of representation and capitalist dominance. Considering the Global South’s resilient ecological imagination, originating from disposable people’s recognition of analogous circumstances under contemporary capitalism, this paper allows for new sensibilities for alternative socio-ecological visions in the Global South communities.

Márquez combines his own geographical realities in Colombia’s Caribbean region with his magical realist style, encouraging the readers to reconsider the Global South in a different ecological reality. In this way, Márquez allows for imaginary spaces, that are connected by historical ties to transnational labor and capitalist extractive systems, which are carefully represented by the advent of the transnational banana company, the initial economic boom, and the following strike and massacre in the novel. In this vein, affirming the position that the system of world ecology does not act upon nature but through nature, this paper develops a conversation about the interconnection between capitalism and ecology. Extending this position to the relationship between the capitalist tendency for unrelenting expansion and its impact on poor people across the Global South, Márquez turns attention, especially to the analogous deterioration of poor people’s living conditions and the local environment. In other words, Márquez artistically crafts the environmental transformation, the overwhelming flow of wealth in the region, and the equal destruction of the poor people and Macondo’s landscape, emphasizing the intersection between ecological justice and social justice. Paying special attention to the extensive temporal and spatial networks of violence in the wake of the disastrous 1928 strike in the region, Márquez highlights the vulnerability of Macondo to corporate and transnational dealings inflicted upon poor people and the environment. The crucial representational difficulty is how Márquez depicts the pervasive but elusive harshness of delayed consequences by constructing a captivating narrative. At the end of the novel, the emphasis on climate change, the extermination of the birds, and the torrent of carnivorous ants enrich the novel’s narrative
effect and manifest that the delayed aggression may ignite protracted, recurrent conflicts in situations where it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain life. As the concluding sentence illustrates, “races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth” (Márquez, 1971, p. 399). In this vein, this paper highlights that slow violence often increases in both attritional and exponential ways, posing a danger to everyone, but notably to the impoverished people split along racial, geographic, and socio-economic lines. Poor communities commonly experience coercive force from the capitalist global system, which puts their ability to persevere under strain because of the ways in which capitalism conducts its oppressive system. To conclude, One Hundred Years of Solitude sheds light on the banana company’s institutional violence against working-class people and poor neighborhoods as well as spatial ecological injustices and their relationship to the Capitalocene. Thus, One Hundred Years of Solitude gives the reader the chance to react and imagine an alternative future to the bleak future that awaits humanity if they do not learn to coexist with the natural environment.

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