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Analyzing Eco-imperial and Dystopian Concerns in Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: A Postmodern Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Postmodern literature demonstrates serious concerns through reflexive conditions of modernity and their impacts on the life in present time's world. In this regard, postmodern fiction dismantles all established narratives by unveiling the hazards and risks resulted in the course of unchecked race of scientific and industrial progress. In other words, human's obsession for scientific and technological advancement has resulted into a number of uncontrollable global terrors among which ecological crisis is the most serious debate in postmodern fiction. Ecological crisis seems a global predicament which, on one hand, has attracted the attention of environmentalists, biologists and other scientists, on the other hand, it has also appealed to some of the literary authors. Ecological catastrophes have often been addressed through post-apocalyptic eco-fiction by literary authors. The present research discusses Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in relation to eco-imperial and post-apocalyptic concerns from postmodern perspective. In the select text, Macondo, a utopian place is interrupted by the arrival of gypsies, technologists and capitalists, who transform the town structurally, ecologically and leave it as a ruined dystopian place. The study reflects the concept of reflexive modernity in relation to ecological degradation. The present study has used Alfred Crosby's theory of eco-imperialism for the analysis of the select text. Moreover, the study has employed Andreas Malm's the Capitalocene and Timothy Morton's notions of Hyperobjects and Dark Ecology. The study reveals imperial intervention and capitalist practices as a major cause behind the emergence of ecological crisis leading to apocalypse in the selected texts.

Keywords: Eco-imperialism, capitalist practices, post-apocalypse, environment, dystopia

Background of the Study

Modern world is characterized by a complex and a paradoxical structure of progress and risk (Beck, U. 2009). In the context of globalization, the modernity exhibits various facets of life, including technological, economic, political-religious, socio-cultural, and industrial dimensions. The transition from tradition to modernity has fostered human a sense of global citizenship, enabling individuals to feel a connection to the world at large, largely due to advancements in technology, cultural exchanges, and rapid industrial development (Duara, P. (2015). However, it is important to recognize that globalization and modernization are not inherently positive phenomena. The emergence of modernity has introduced significant risks that affect people globally, leading to adverse outcomes such as a lack of control, media-induced technological anxiety, and environmental crises. Against the body of modern literature, there has emerged postmodernism which much serves as a critique and reaction against modernism.

Postmodern literature being an interesting genre within the discipline of literature seems dismantling all the grand narratives constructed and followed for the past decades. In this regard, postmodern fiction challenges human's blind submission to all socio-economic and techno-scientific grand narratives. Postmodernists argue that nothing is absolute and almost everything is constructed. Different narratives including science, religion and political ideologies are constructed to fix the semantic of things (Van Dijk, T. A. (1995). Postmodern fiction is highly influenced by postmodernism and post-structuralism which help readers to understand the nature of power and discourse implied in writing (Callinicos, A. 1985). Foucault and Derrida have key role in shaping postmodern and post structural stance and their work has deep significance in deconstructing the work of literature from postmodern and post structural perspectives (Denzin, N. K. (2015). Over the period of last few years postmodern Fiction, specifically, has depicted various global risks and terrors as a result of practices of technologists, scientists, industrialists and capitalists. In this regard, ecological concern has been included in debate as a most threatening issue of the present times world. For that postmodern literary authors seem criticizing human's uncurbed ambition for techno-scientific and material advancement. This critique on modernization has often been implied though the use of different techniques such as magical realism, irony

fragmentation and other dystopian narrative techniques to visualize such risks to create awareness and make reader conscious about the notion that what it means to be as a part of modern world.

Eco-fiction and Post/Apocalyptic Dystopian Fiction in Postmodern Literature

The rise of eco-fiction in the 1970s, in tandem with the emergence of various environmental movements, gave birth to a novel field of literary inquiry that forged a connection between the humanities and the natural world. Washington Press released Editor John Stadler's anthology *Eco-fiction* in 1971. This collection of environmental science fiction featured renowned authors such as Ray Bradbury, John Steinbeck, Edgar Allen Poe, A.E. Coppard, James Agee, Robert M. Coates, Daphne du Maurier, Robley Wilson Jr., E.B. White, J.F. Powers, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Sarah Orne Jewett, Frank Herbert, H.H. Munro, J.G. Ballard, Steven Scharder, Isaac Asimov, and William Saroyan. The chapter titled "Contemporary ecofiction" in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* defines ecofiction as a broad word that encompasses many fictional works exploring the interplay between natural environments and the human societies inhabiting them. The word arose shortly after ecology gained prominence as a widely accepted scientific framework and a pervasive cultural mindset in the 1960s and 1970s. Eco-fiction, also known as environmentally focused fiction, encompasses subjects such as the influence of humans on the environment, such as climate change, and literature centered on nature. The book "Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to EcoFiction" by Jim Dwyer states that eco-fiction encompasses various artistic forms, including film, art, and poetry. However, this website mostly emphasizes novels and short stories.

The word "apocalypse" has its roots in religious contexts, particularly in the Bible. The "Apocalypse of John" in the *Book of Revelation* (King James Version) refers to the end of the world. The term comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, which means "to reveal" or "to uncover." In ancient literature, an apocalypse typically refers to writings that contain prophetic or symbolic visions, often describing the destruction of the world and the eventual salvation of the righteous. It can also denote total or widespread devastation (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2000). Scholars such as Ambroży (2015), Hicks (2016), and Määttä (2015) have explored the development of [post-]apocalyptic fiction, working towards a unified definition of the genre. Apocalyptic literature is characterized by its focus on revealing hidden truths, often through supernatural means such as dreams, visions, or mystical intermediaries like angels. These

works typically center on periods of profound societal collapse, where established worldviews disintegrate, and authors depict various ways in which the world may come to an end. Lewis (1965) stands first among the modern critics of apocalyptic literature who terms the secular version of apocalypse as ‘Ludicrous Catastrophe’ (p. 184). Moreover, apocalyptic science fiction is concerned with the end of civilization through nuclear war, plague, or some other general disaster. It also focuses on ecological terrors caused by environmental issues as Adam Trexler’s (2015) *Anthropocene Fiction*, for example, shows how climate change has had an impact on fiction genres, e.g., the suspense novel, science fiction, or chiller fiction. Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* as the first great piece of science fiction. Post-apocalyptic science fiction is written after pandemics and disasters. It includes texts such as Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven*, Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* Ling Ma’s *Severance*, Albert Camus’s *The Plague*, Stephen King’s *The Stand*, William Maxwell’s *They Came Like Swallows* and Marquez’s *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

Most of the previous studies demonstrate ecological concerns as a result of overall practice of industrial and scientific progress, however, the present study deals with Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and it focuses on a new dimension i.e. eco-imperial and capitalist practices as a major cause of ecological crisis in the select text.

Statement of Problem

On a close examination, Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* seems demonstrating eco-imperial and capitalist practices which lead to a dystopian version of modern world. In this regard, the study proposes that the select text reveals transition from tradition (utopian version of Morando) with the arrival of gypsies who metaphorically represents tech-scientific figures, to a modern version of life leading to dystopian version of life. The study is focused on ecological risks as one of the uncontrollable terrors resulted by eco-imperial and capitalist practices in the novel.

Research Objectives

To analyze eco-imperial and capitalist concerns in Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

To discuss post-apocalyptic dystopian elements in the select text

Research Methods

The present research has used Alfred Crosby's theory of Eco-imperialism. Ecological Imperialism posits that colonialism encompassed not only cultural and political subjugation, but also constituted a manifestation of environmental terrorism. It asserts that environment of the colonized lands has faced prolonged oppression and seemed grappled with by the practices of outsiders who are chiefly techno-scientific figures. Moreover, the study has used the concepts such as Andreas Malm's the Capitalocene and Timothy Morton's notions of Hyperobjects and Dark Ecology. By employing the chosen concepts along with the major theory of eco-imperialism, the select text has been analyzed. In this regard, the arrival of gypsies in the novel and the establishment of capitalism serve focal points for the analysis.

Analysis and Discussion

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a multigenerational story. During the course of action in the novel, life in Macondo transforms from a utopian and natural version into a dystopian and uncontrollable mode. On a close reading, the author, Marquez, seems making critique on different grand narratives such as science, capitalism and so-called perceived knowledge adopted by human as great token of success which consequently bring apocalyptic consequences for the people of Macondo.

Utopian Macondo invaded by Colonial Technologists and Capitalists

In the beginning of the story, life in Macondo is depicted very natural and uncorrupted. The author depicts the town, Macondo, as an ideal place in terms of population, atmosphere and ecology as it is cited in the text, "At that time Macondo was a 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." (P. 1). This kind of ideal representation metaphorically signals to Eden or Paradise. In the context of postmodernism, the author by using such intertextual allusion, relates its significance to Adam and Eve who were the first humans, parents of mankind, "The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point," (P. 1). Macondo has been projected as the initial version of the world; quite natural and a paradise like place.

Foregrounding such a utopian background, Marquez establishes a link of human's transition from traditional to a modern version of life which, in other words, demonstrates a journey from utopian way of life to a dystopian one. However, the innocence of Macondo and people is interrupted by the outsiders in the form of gypsies who are depicted in the following lines, "Every year during the month of March a family of ragged gypsies would set up their tents near the village, and with a great uproar of pipes and kettledrums they would display new inventions." (P.1) The author, perhaps here, reveals human curious nature towards mysteries which they want to resolve. The leader of gypsies known as Melquíades, is a very curious and persuasive character who appeals people through his interesting way of introducing different technological devices, the author introduce him by following lines, "A heavy gypsy with an untamed beard and sparrow hands, who introduced himself as Melquíades, put on a bold public demonstration of what he himself called the eighth wonder of the learned alchemists of Macedonia." (P.2).

Melquiades introduces different technological equipment such as magnet, telescopes and telegraph etc. appeals to all the villagers specifically to Jose Arcadio, the protagonist of the novel. Arcadio's curiosity and ambition about technology and innovation has been described in such a way, "José Arcadio Buendía, whose unbridled imagination always went beyond the genius of nature and even beyond miracles and magic, thought that it would be possible to make use of that useless invention to extract gold from the bowels of the earth" (P.2) He, even, seems more excited than the leader of gypsies, Melquiades at different points. Parallel to the character of Arcadio who has great ambition for such technological devices, the character of Ursula, the wife of Jose Arcadio, demonstrates sense of the dangers of such devices. She seems very concerned about family and children unlike her husband who in her view has gone crazy.

Now the life in Macondo stats changing from a natural mode to a humanly design with the arrival of gypsies who are generously supported by Jose Arcadio. The author here through the character of Melquíades satirizes on grand narrative of science which has long been adopted by human as a guarantee for human progress, though it did in different ways, but it also brought a number of terrors as well. The leader of gypsies proclaimed, "In a short time, man will be able to see what is happening in any place in the world without leaving his own house." (P.3)

Through gypsies, the author satirizes scientists and technologists. The gypsies, despite their reputation as soothsayers, that is, as being linked to premodern beliefs and practices are presented

as (failed) purveyors of modernity. It is not accidental that García Márquez describes the magnet as a “new invention.” All inventions imply a criticism of traditional modes of doing things and are, therefore, necessarily linked to modernity that is, to an attitude based on the rational analysis of all existing practices and values.

By foregrounding the story of the novel this way, the author has actually exhibited the interruption of technologists as colonizers in Macondo who with the course of time occupy everything in the town. The story proceeds with numerous advancements in the town among which governance system, “The magistrate,” Úrsula answered disconsolately. They say he’s an authority sent by the government.” (P. 33)

Similarly, there is the expansion of the railway, “The innocent yellow train that was to bring so many ambiguities and certainties, so many pleasant and unpleasant moments, so many changes, calamities, and feelings of nostalgia to Macondo.” (P. 111). Moreover, Daniel Erickson gives the same opinion, “The introduction of the railway is clearly a part of capitalist modernization and historical transformation, a progressive pattern that accordingly undermines Ursula’s impression of circularity” (148). Then there is the arrival of the capitalists in the form of the American Fruit Company, who have established a fruit company, hired local people and exploited them in terms of economy. This financial exploitation led to a Massacre which actually refers back to a violent event that took place in Colombia in 1928. The presence of the US-based banana company serves to represent the practices and abuses characteristic of imperial capital in Latin America.

Similarly, the boat of José Arcadio Segundo, which heralds the connection of Macondo with the sea, is followed by industries and train. José Arcadio Buendía’s reaction with a large block of ice, “This is the great invention of our time” (P. 28). Here the character of Jose Arcadio serves as a comprador for outsiders and helps him in the process of colonizing the town in the blind ambition of so-called technological innovations. In a short time, he had increased the production of ice to such a degree that it was too much for the local market and Aureliano Triste had to think about the possibility of expanding the business to other towns in the swamp. Aureliano Centeno creates an innovative product by combining ice and fruit juice, marking the rise of factories and the increasing demand for a broader market. Aureliano Triste becomes the first member of the bourgeois class in

Macondo, and the arrival of the train should be viewed within the broader context of the period's capitalistic economic growth and production. According to Gerald Martin, Aureliano Triste is described as "the man who transformed magical ice into a commodity," a development that reflects the influence of the nascent local bourgeoisie (222). It was then that he thought of the decisive step, not only for the modernization of his business but to link the town with the rest of the world. "We have to bring in the railroad," he said. (P. 226)

Eco-imperial Concerns in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Macondo, with the course of time doesn't only change in terms of infrastructure but also receives many ecological changes which lead to terrors of ecology in the novel. At this point, Ulrich Beck's theory of Risk Society is of great significance. Beck's theory demonstrates reflexivity of modernity in the wake of globalization and scientific advancement. One of the important elements of Beck's 'Risk Society' is bio-ecological risks and this is one of the great concerns in the Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The author has abundantly criticized scientific and technological unnecessary inventions and discoveries as they bring uncontrollable harms for the inhabitants of the town, Macondo. The arrival of technologies brought by gypsies as outsiders, who colonize the town gradually with the support of comprador, Jose Arcadio, led to the birth of capitalist system. Once capitalist system emerged, it divided people into bourgeoisie and proletariat classes. Moreover, in capitalist system state is used, ironically, as an instrument to benefit the bourgeoisie class on one hand and to suppress proletariat on the other hand. At this point, instrumental theory which is known as Marxist becomes highly applicable because the entire state system seems working in the favor of capitalist class in the novel. In other words, it is capitalist system which governs the system and not the state itself. Such capitalist practices in Macondo deteriorate the ecology of the place soon. The wastage of factories, fossil of machines used in Banana Fruit Company and other such practices would soon damage the natural environmental conditions of Macondo. Moreover, the locals hired for work were given due wages rather they were exploited which led to protest in which thousands of workers were killed brutally as the author writes, "the man corpses, woman corpses, child corpses who would be thrown into the sea like rejected bananas." (P. 312)

Moreover, Macondo is infested by the insomnia plague which signifies the vulnerability of island communities to foreign contact. Colonizers around the world have not only imported their cultural values, lifestyles, and manners into the colonized spaces but have also introduced the latter to diseases that might have been unknown to them until that point of time. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel García Márquez intricately weaves historical references throughout the narrative, creating a rich tapestry of allusions that enhance the novel's thematic depth. Macondo, the fictional town at the heart of the story, is initially depicted as an idyllic paradise, characterized by serenity, harmony, and an overwhelming natural beauty. However, as the novel progresses toward its conclusion, this depiction undergoes a stark reversal, amplifying the unsettling realizations and tragedies that unfold within the town. Moreover, Marquez writes, "The men on the expeditions felt overwhelmed by their most ancient memories in that paradise of dampness and silence, going back to before original sin, as their boots sank into pools of steaming oil and their machetes destroyed bloody lilies and golden salamanders. For a week, almost without speaking, they went ahead like sleepwalkers through a universe of grief, lighted only by the tenuous reflection of luminous insects, and their lungs were overwhelmed by a suffocating smell of blood" (P. 11-12).

The novel depicts a series of extreme natural events, beginning with a hurricane that "scattered roofs about, knocked down walls, and uprooted every last plant of the banana groves" (320), followed by a prolonged drought lasting ten years. Gabriel García Márquez employs these natural calamities in an allegorical manner, as Ariel Dorfman suggests, to impose upon his characters a representation of history. Dorfman argues that these events serve as "a deluge, an earthquake, or a hurricane," forces beyond the control of ordinary people, much like the overwhelming power of Rivera's jungle (82). This use of nature symbolizes the larger, uncontrollable forces of history and colonial oppression that shape characters' lives.

Conclusion

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* portrays a profound transformation of Macondo and its inhabitants. Life in Macondo transforms from a utopian and natural version into a dystopian and uncontrollable mode in the course of action. The novel exhibits specifically ecological crisis brought by imperial technologist and capitalists in Macondo. Being a postmodern text, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* satirizes on established grand narratives such as capitalism,

science and its perceived knowledge which bring along numerous disasters among which ecological catastrophe is the most focused theme of the novel. The study also exhibits dystopian nature of the select novel as it reveals global issue of ecology and envisions the uncontrollability of the issue in relation to the emergence of modernity and related conditions. The study concludes that though there is collective negligence which has manufactured ecological crisis across the globe yet the major contribution in the degradation of the global environment lies on the shoulders of imperial powers such as technologists, scientists and industrialists who in pursuit of colonial practices have polluted the ecology of the world. The study, indirectly, manifests dark ecology which implies a critique of both; an anthropocentric and biocentric view of the world. Moreover, it reveals Andreas Malm's notion of the Capitalocene where capitalism is working as a central force in the emergence of climate crisis. To cut short, the study questions the tech-scientific, capitalist and industrial practices often legalized as grand narrative for human progress.

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