

Female Resistance to Patriarchy in Gabriel Garcia Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude


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Abstract: Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014), a Nobel Prize-winning Colombian writer, is internationally renowned as one of the foremost practitioners of magical realism. Márquez's masterpiece, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), established him as a central figure of the Latin American Boom and remains a seminal text in world literature for its blending of myth, history, and everyday reality. While this novel is celebrated for its multigenerational narrative and magical realism, the nuanced way that Márquez has adopted to portray women's roles in a patriarchal society is still underexplored. The present paper examines how Márquez constructs female characters who resist patriarchal structures by exercising resilience, economic participation, and ethical authority. Úrsula Iguarán, the central character of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, emerges as the moral and structural backbone of the Buendía family. At a time when male characters in the novel are consumed by obsession, war, and fantasy, Úrsula keeps herself firmly grounded in reality, ensuring the family's survival across generations.

Keywords: War, Solitude, Buendía Family, Endurance, Moral Strength, Sexuality, Feminism.

Introduction: García Márquez describes the matriarch of the Buendía family amidst the chaos of Macondo in the opening chapter of the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as follows: "Úrsula's capacity for work was the same as that of her husband. Active, small, severe, that woman of unbreakable nerves who at no moment in her life had been heard to sing seemed to be everywhere, from dawn until quite late at night, always pursued by the soft whispering of her stiff, starched petticoats. Thanks to her the floors of tamped earth, the unwhitewashed mud walls, the rustic, wooden furniture they had built themselves were always clean, and the old chests where they kept their clothes exhaled the warm smell of basil."

One Hundred Years of Solitude tells the story of the Buendía family over seven generations in the fictional town of Macondo. The novel starts with the founding of the town; then it follows the lineage as it grows, faces love and loss, repeats the same mistakes, and slowly moves towards its decline. The novel blends day-to-day life with magical or unbelievable events, making the plot feel both real and mythical. On the surface, the men seem to be at the centre of the novel, and women seem to be playing a subordinate role that can be overlooked. However, a deeper study suggests that Márquez has portrayed strong female characters such as Úrsula Iguarán, Amaranta Buendía, and Rebeca Buendía.

Main Text: The novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a profound exploration of gender dynamics; in it, the "solitude" of the male characters is the consequence of their own destructive obsessions, while the "solitude" of the women is the result of their strategic resistance. Through the portrayal of the female characters- Úrsula Iguarán, Amaranta, and Rebeca- Gabriel García Márquez subverts the orthodox patriarchal hierarchy of the 19th and early 20th centuries. These women are the architects of the family's survival and the moral compass of Macondo.

First let's know about these three women and how they are connected. Úrsula Iguarán, the wife of José Arcadio Buendía is the matriarch of the Buendía family. Amaranta Buendía is Úrsula and José Arcadio Buendía's daughter, making her a second-generation member of the family. Rebeca Buendía is not Úrsula's biological daughter, but an adopted child who is raised in the Buendía household. She is treated as part of the family and grows up alongside Amaranta, making her Amaranta's adopted sister.

These women make their own choices and do not hesitate to take decisions against the prevalent conventional norms of society. Each resists patriarchy and male dominance in her own way: Úrsula Iguarán does so through authority, Amaranta Buendía through self-denial, and Rebeca Buendía through defiance and choice. Márquez demonstrates that these women, with their quiet presence, steer a course of female strength, identity, passion, and purpose in contrast to their male counterparts. He successfully displays the resilient power of women through their control over his male characters—sexually, financially, and morally.

The female lead of the novel, Úrsula Iguarán, is an epitome of woman empowerment. She is the matriarch of the Buendía family who exercises power not by rebelling against the men of the family, but by understanding and assuming responsibility and decision-making within the family. While her husband and sons are influenced by obsession, including war and fantasy, she remains practical and grounded. She leaves no stone unturned to manage the family's finances, expand the house, raise multiple generations, and intervene during political turmoil in Macondo. She earns this authority not by staging a revolt, but through her experience, endurance, and moral strength; in this way, she becomes the true center of power in the family. In a patriarchal society where the male is considered the "whole and sole" of the family, Úrsula sustains control over domestic, economic, and moral matters.

Sometimes, we see Úrsula as a quiet and supportive wife. Other times, she emerges before us as a fierce protector of her children. She tries to be a good wife by following her husband's big but unrealistic dreams, but she is also a very caring mother. Many events in the novel show how strong she really is. Úrsula becomes very angry because her husband, ignoring the children and his duties at home, spends all his time in his laboratory doing experiments. Finally, Úrsula lost her patience and shouted in anger:

Úrsula lost her patience. "If you have to go crazy, please go crazy all by yourself!" she shouted. "But don't try to put your gypsy ideas into the heads of the children."

Amaranta's resistance is a bit different from that of Úrsula's. It is internal and psychological rather than external. She rejects marriage and motherhood, going against the roles traditionally assigned to women in

a male-dominated society. She instead chooses a life of solitude. Even when love is available to her, she denies it, as she wants to assert control over her own body and emotions. This deliberate decision to embrace virginity can be regarded as an act of defiance against societal expectations that define women as entities of procreation and reproduction. Amaranta's most famous act of resistance is seen in her refusal to marry Pietro Crespi in the following words:

Don't get your hopes up. Even if they send me to the ends of the earth, I'll find some way of stopping you from getting married, even if I have to kill you." ... "Don't be simple, Crespi." ... "I wouldn't marry you even if I were dead.

Rebeca's resistance is more overt and rebellious in nature. She openly defies family and social norms by marrying José Arcadio (her adoptive brother/cousin). This was a scandal that defied the "moral purity" Úrsula tries to maintain. When Úrsula forbids the union and tries to shame her, Rebeca does not beg for forgiveness. Instead, she chooses passion over family. She is expelled from the house. Márquez writes that Rebeca leaves the house with a "*vicious pride*," moving into a small shack nearby. She prefers a life of poverty and social exile to a life of obedience under Úrsula's roof.

Besides these three main female characters, Márquez further discusses his concept of patriarchy through the portrayal of minor female character of the novel. Even in the limited space of narration, they significantly contribute to the social and emotional fabric of Macondo. Pilar Ternera, for example, represents a woman who exercises power through socially intuitive wisdom as well as sexuality. In spite of being a socially marginalized woman, she is emotionally central to the Buendia men. She offers them prophetic insight along with physical intimacy. Pilar Ternera keeps herself free from the kind of obsession and confusion the Buendia men suffer from. The role she plays in the novel, whether as a fortune teller or a confidante subverts patriarchal morality. She presents female sexuality not as something sinful but as something that nurtures and sustains.

Fernanda del Carpio is another minor female character who challenges patriarchy. Through the portrayal of Fernanda del Carpio, Márquez illustrates how a character can be a product of patriarchal oppression as well as an agent of its rigid enforcement. The challenge she presents to the existing patriarchy in Macondo is not one of liberation, but it is more a kind of displacement. Petra Cotes is also a minor female character in the novel. She emerges as an important figure who destabilizes male dominance through financial independence and strong sense of desire. The kind of relationship she maintains with Aureliano Segundo brings prosperity instead of moral decay. It suggests that the female desire, when accepted rather than controlled, can be positive and productive. During difficult times, how smartly she handles money proves that she is more steady and more responsible than the careless male folk of Macondo.

The minor women characters of the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* collectively reinforce Márquez's broader vision of woman's role as sustaining forces of society. Whether central or peripheral, women in the novel serve as emotional and moral anchors. The male characters in the novel are shown trapped in obsession and self-destruction; on the other hand, the women preserve continuity and survival. Through

them, Márquez subverts patriarchal hierarchy and reimagines history that was actually shaped by women rather than men.

Gabriel Garcia Márquez has presented a world where female strength is quiet, constructive and enduring. The women of the Buendia clan are not loud, violent and destructive. They have no desire to dominate through tyranny and cruelty that are often seen in men. In Macondo, cruelty is in fact a sign of frailty. This frailty is seen in the men of the clan when they find themselves incapable to control nature and time. But the female characters of the novel know that with resilience and patience they can survive and it is the power of their belief that Buendia clan survives for one hundred years. If the women of the clan had been tyrannical and impatient like the men, it would have collapsed many years before. So, the credit to sustain the clan's existence for these many years should go to Buendia women, not Buendia men.

Ursula Iguaran, the matriarch lives for over a century and she kept using her “hard-headed common sense” to preserve the clan. Whenever the family begins to fall apart, she, somehow or other, revitalizes it. In the *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Ursula has been shown as the foundation of the family while the other women too play their parts by showing various forms of resistance and survival, and are the characters who can bridge the gap between mundane and magical.

The women in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* work within household boundaries, still they serve as the economic pillars of the family. Ursula by selling candy animals establishes a good business and manages a big garden to ensure the sustainable existence of coming generations of the clan. The daughters of Don Apolinar Moscote also run a sewing shop for the livelihood of theirs and their families. Amaranta Ursula is also seen engaged in a fashion business. These women are blessed with a strong sense of economic independence right from the first generation to the final. Their capability to earn their livelihood proves that they are not less than men in any way and they deserve an equal status.

Another facet of female power that we notice in the novel is sexuality. Women's liberation, as Simonee de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex*, depends on two key factors “participation in production” and “freedom from reproductive slavery”. The women living in Macondo resist sexual subjugation and try to assert their own will. In the early phase of marriage, Ursula resists physical closeness with her life partner as she is driven by the old myth that an incestuous marriage would lead to the birth of a child with the tail of a pig. Márquez, through such ideas, examines sexual strength by focusing on virginity, solitude and personal freedom.

Pilar Ternera lives freely and uses her sexuality as a means of influence; her relationships with the men of the Buendía family present a quiet form of sexual authority. Amaranta, on the other hand, chooses isolation and virginity. She wants to have complete control over her body by refusing to offer it to any man.

Conclusion: Márquez demonstrates female political potential through the character of Ursula who takes control when the town undergoes the most turbulent time. When Arcadio becomes a cruel dictator, Úrsula puts an end to his tyranny. When Arcadio tries to execute Moscote, Úrsula stops the execution by whipping

Arcadio until he behaves “like a snail in its shell”. From that moment starts the reign of Úrsula. She cancels the absurd decrees, reestablishes the religious tradition, restores order in the clan. Driven by war and lust, the Buendia men act selfishly, but Úrsula by integrating empathy with discipline rules the town.

García Márquez once said:

"...in most cases, women are the practical sex. It's men who are romantics and who go off and do all kinds of crazy things; women know that life is hard. Úrsula is a prototype of that kind of practical, life-sustaining woman."

Throughout the novel, Márquez seems to be affirming that female consciousness, even when ignored by society, exerts itself in powerful ways. Those who appear powerless retaliate through "everyday resistances." By using direct, indirect, and quiet strategies, they ignore the established order. Márquez's portrayal of women successfully highlights their hidden potential to lead and serves to represent complex gender relations within the patriarchal edifice of Latin America.

In Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, we notice that solitude functions differently for women and men. The "solitude" of the male characters is often a result of their own destructive obsessions, while the "solitude" of the women is a site of strategic resistance.

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