

# THE RELATION BETWEEN CREATIVITY, IDENTITY AND POLITICAL EXPRESSION IN THE WRITINGS OF GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ AND SHAHNON AHMAD

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## **Abstract**

The presence of political elements within literary works is often seen as something provocative. Through a framework proposed by C. R. Rogers in his essay entitled “Towards a Theory of Creativity”, this article will demonstrate the close link between an author, his creativity and the political theme in the creation of his literary works. This framework enables the author’s personal attributes and personality to be linked to the political elements featured in his works. The creativity of a political novelist is found to be dependent on his surroundings, experience and political awareness. In relation to this, two authors of political novels are highlighted in this research. They are Shahnnon Ahmad (Malaysia) who produced *Tunggul-Tunggul Gerigis* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Latin America) famed for his work *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It is discovered through this research that the two political novelists did not write in a vacuum. The presence of political subjects specifically mentioned in their works clearly originates from their real-life surroundings which have consolidated into their identity, personality and authorship as political writers. In other words, politics is the authors’ flesh and blood and

this allows political subjects to be crafted and expressed in their creative works. Hence an author without a varied background in politics will never be able to create or produce effective political works or novels.

Keyword: political novel, creativity, myths, authorship, comparative literature

## INTRODUCTION

According to R.G. Collingwood (1958:15-17) in his book *The Principles of Art*, the process of creation and the product of creation are closely linked. Craft is a process that involves planning or thinking out to achieve an end. In this case, the craftsman knows, is aware of and plans to create something prior to creating it: “the craftsman knows what he wants to make before he makes it”. Craft, therefore, encompasses the process of creation as well as the product of creation.

Consequently, when the craft of novel-writing is mentioned, it is very closely related to the creativity of the novelist. Creativity is derived from the word “creative” and is a derivative to mean the ability to create imaginatively:

Having or showing imagination and artistic or intellectual inventiveness.

Creativity (noun): creative ability, artistic or intellectual inventiveness.

(Neufeldt and Guralnik, 1991:325)

Another definition is:

Creative: i. Having the ability or power to create. ii. Characterised by originality of thought or inventiveness; having or showing imagination: a creative mind. iii. Designed to or tending to stimulate the imagination or invention .

(Sinclair, 1994:373)

Both definitions above illustrate that creativity is the effort and ability to craft something new and different, it is something original and triggered by the imagination. The meaning above therefore also leads us to creativity as the capability to create or the art in the designing of works.

This article utilizes the framework suggested by C.R. Rogers (1970: 137-51), a psychotherapist, through his writing “Towards a Theory of Creativity”. This essay was first published in the journal *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, second volume in year 1954. This essay is republished in a book compilation by P.E. Vernon entitled *Creativity* in year 1970.

C.R. Rogers in his essay emphasizes among others that a creative individual has his own habits in his creative behaviour and there are also conditions that cause those habits to exist and occur:

I maintain that there is a desperate social need for the creative behaviour of creative individuals. It is this which justifies the setting forth of a tentative theory of creativity – the nature of the creative act, the conditions under which it occurs, and the manner in which it may constructively be fostered. Such a theory may serve as a stimulus and guide to research studies in this field.

According to C.R. Rogers (1970:139) also, in order to assess that a certain product is the outcome of a new creative product, the individual aspect of the creator must also be taken into consideration. For him, creativity emerges from certain qualities of an individual and are related to his experience.

These products must be novel constructions. This novelty grows out of the unique qualities of the individual in his interaction with the materials of experience. Creativity always has the stamp of the individual upon its product, but the product is not the individual, nor his materials, but partakes of the relationship between the two.

As such, a particular work, which is the end product of creativity, has a certain personal imprint from its author. In short, from here it can be understood that to assess a particular product, the initial process which it must undergo is the evaluation of the individuality of its creator, including his quality and uniqueness, apart from his interaction with other materials from his experience. This creative process, according to Rogers comes from an individual's uniqueness or distinction, backed by events, experience, influence from the people close to him and his life circumstances.

My definition, then, of the creative process is that it is the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other.

Rogers continues to emphasize that there are two types of creativity: the constructive and deconstructive types. Rogers (1970:143-44) writes that there are three methods to ensure that a creative product can be classified as constructive:

- (1) An individual's awareness and sensitivity towards life's experience frequently makes his works creative, giving benefit on a personal and social basis. Therefore, to measure a certain creative product, Rogers suggests that an individual's experience and materials used should be explored.
- (2) The creative product is also evaluated by observing how it represents the creator. For example, by looking at how the work represents the creator's thoughts and emotions. According to Rogers, for a creative individual, what is most important to him is how his product is able to translate his emotions, thoughts, pain or relief. As such, in the context of this article, to measure the creativity of the author, the views, ideology and emotions of the author must also be taken into consideration. All these must be based on what is found in the texts.
- (3) Further, according to Rogers, the beneficial nature of the outcome of a creative product must be judged by the ability of the creator to utilize existing materials and create anew. In this regard, the wisdom of the author to apply political material, for example, must be highlighted and analysed.

It is not difficult to understand here that a political novel is closely linked to current and local political issues, the history of a nation, or the author's self, apart from his artistic aspects. Thus to further understand why and how political elements are created into works of literature, it is important to inspect the aspect of the author himself, which is, what influences his writing style, his internal and external motivation, and certainly the political situation or the author's political beliefs because what is being examined is a political novel. This approach enables this article to delve further into whether the artist is able to produce a political novel or otherwise.

This article takes into consideration the concept of the political novel as presented by Michael Wilding (1980:2). Wilding stresses that a political novel brings about political contention or political confrontation as its main content, without having to sacrifice the aspects of emotion, ideas and aesthetics:

The formal choices and confrontations of political fictions represent life choices, political confrontations. The mixed mode is not unique to political fiction. But with political fiction it is easier to see the political choices behind the opposing modes.

(Wilding, 1980:11)

There are many political-themed literary works which can be used as a model or reference. This article however focuses on *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a work by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1973), and a novel by Shahnnon Ahmad (1988) entitled *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis*. However, the political aspects of both works will not be examined. Instead, the author's identity and surroundings that may possibly have caused the emergence of the political subject in these works will be explored.

The selection of these texts, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez from Colombia, and *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* the work of Shahnnon Ahmad from Malaysia, rests on the reputation that both works are considered political novels.

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* is commonly recognized by critics as a good political novel. Gene H. Bell Villada (1990:13) for example, in his research on Gabriel Garcia Marquez, writes *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a novel where everything is "politics":

For *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is among other things a great novel about politics, dealing as it does with such subjects as civil wars, labor strikes, and military repression, all of it reimagined by a man who, along with Orwell and Sartre, qualifies as one of our century's great political writers – political in the broadest sense of the word.

Meanwhile, Shahnnon Ahmad's *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* has been analysed by Abdul Wahab Ali (1990:59), who considered it to be a political novel set against a backdrop of rural surroundings. Abdul Wahab states that Shahnnon uses the setting of Poseng village in *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* "*sebagai belon besar yang menampakkan masalah orang Melayu di negara ini*" (as a big balloon that reveals the problems of the Malays in this country). Abdul Wahab further writes, "*latar cerita tidak lari dari latar Melayu Malaysia yang sedang membangun; pembukaan hutan balak, politik wang untuk menutup kekejaman dan politik benci-membenci*" (the setting of the plot does not deviate from the scene of the developing Malaysian Malays; forest clearing for timber, and money politics to conceal injustice and hate-politics).

Clearly, based on the arguments above, the novels *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* have been analysed by literary scholars and considered as political novels using the nations, cultures and the individual authors themselves as their background. In other words, because these novels are well-accepted as political works, the aspect of authorship that has made their creation possible may well be measured too.

It must be mentioned here, as an article within the framework of comparative literature, that a strong genetic link must be suggested to justify making such comparisons. The novels selected for this case study are *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* by Shahnon Ahmad and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Both possess a similarity even though they are from two different worlds. There is one meaningful genetic link between these two works. The genetic link meant here is that both creative works are categorized as post-colonial works. This also means that both authors are bound by post-colonialism.

According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989:1) post-colonial works are works that encompass all cultures affected by foreign colonialization since the beginning of colonization up to this day. In other words, the post-colonial novels refer to works during and after the colonialization era of the European powers. An interesting aspect in the debate on post-colonial literature is how independence from colonialization has made an impact on contemporary literature. Their views do not differ much from the views of Jeremy Hawthorn (1997:65), a researcher of post-colonial novels. He defines post-colonial works as “fiction written by citizens of lands which have recently thrown off colonial rule”. In the context of this essay on political novels, the similarity is that no matter where it comes from, post-colonial literature emerges from a colonial experience, from whose grip it has distanced itself upon reaching independence, thus shaping a different, own identity.

This evaluation that is bound by “time” can be further supported by the interpretation of Bart Moore Gilbert, Gareth Stanton and Willy Maley (1997:3) in their introduction to *Post-Colonial Criticism*, a book that includes essays by top post-colonial thinkers like Edward W. Said, Gayatri C. Spivak, Frantz Fanon and Aime Cesaire. They conclude, based on writings of these thinkers; post-colonialism is “a site of radical contestation and contestatory radicalism”. They further add that post-colonial works are “the return of those repressed, or the return of the native” to perform a radical change. This means, expression in post-colonial literature is usually very provocative in nature and authors try to detach their works from the colonized form or the Western framework in order to prove their own identity.

Abdul Rahman Embong (1998: 15) in his paper entitled “Persoalan Pascakolonialisme” (The Question of Post-Colonialism) in a colloquium at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka includes as post-colonial literary works those by minority groups from countries dominated by European migrants. The

minorities in this sense include the Native Americans of North America, the Aborigines of Australia, the Maori people of New Zealand, of which to him, “*mengalami peminggiran, diskriminasi dan ketaksamaan di tangan pihak berkuasa kulit putih*” (experience marginalization, discrimination and inequality at the hands of the white people’s authority).

In this case, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez from Colombia comes from a region (Latin America) colonized by Spain. *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis*, the work by Shahnnon Ahmad, on the other hand, represents the Malay literature of Malaysia, with the experience of being colonized by the British. These two novels and, more significantly in the context of this article, their authors are what will be taken as examples in looking into how a political novel is created. As literary works that have freed themselves from the shackles of colonialism or struggled to free themselves from oppression, they are more inclined towards having their own identity. In other words, these works can be presented as being creative or “new” whilst they strive to use their own values for their nations that can be creatively absorbed into their novels.

## **IDENTITY AND PERSONALITY OF THE AUTHOR**

As emphasized earlier, this article intends to establish how a political novelist is able to produce works said to be political in nature. To understand this aspect, a more significant issue which should be expressed is the relation of identity with the creativity of the literary work itself. According to Shahnnon Ahmad (1996: 21), identity is an internal aspect of an author which then surfaces in his creative work:

*Jati diri pengarang terutama aspek rohaniannya yang mencakupi kalbu, nafsu, akal dan segala daya yang lain yang telah disebut lebih awal, memang mempunyai kesebatian yang amat intim dengan karya kreatif yang dihasilkan. Seluruh jiwa raga, pemikiran, kerahsiaan dan pengalaman dirinya, sama ada disedari atau tidak, terkompos dalam salinan dan urat saraf karyanya itu. Sama seperti jati diri aspek rohaniannya, karya kreatif lebih bersifat personal dan bukan impersonal.*

(An author’s identity especially the spiritual aspect encompassing the heart, desire, intellect and all other capacities mentioned earlier, certainly weaves within extreme closeness into the creative works he produces. All his heart and soul, thinking, secrets and self-experience, whether consciously or unconsciously, are composted into every copy and every fibre of his work.

Just like the spiritual aspect of his identity, the creative work is more personal in nature and not impersonal.)

This point is mentioned here to understand how the author's thinking, beliefs and political beliefs can be related to literary works. Moreover, the authorial aspect alone does not fully determine the aspect of creation of a particular work such as a novel. It also depends much on the surroundings or external elements such as education, societal influences and socialization. Shanon (1996:22) adds "*kreativiti tidak dapat lari daripada masyarakat*" (creativity cannot escape from society) whereby it is perceived as an external element. This external element also contributes to the author's creativity because it is a "social element".

Due to this, prior to reviewing the creativity aspect of the novels *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the identity, surroundings or external elements that have helped shape the character of the authors of these works must firstly be touched on. This approach is also suitable with the framework as suggested by C.R. Rogers, which is to explore the experience of the author to understand the creativity of their product.

## **UNDERSTANDING GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ**

The author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is Gabriel Jose Garcia Marquez. He is the son of Gabriel Eligio Garcia and Luisa Santiaga and was born on 6 March 1928 (Minta, 1987:33). He is from the town of Aracataca in Magdalena province, Colombia. This town is not far from Santa Marta, with the Caribbean 50 km to its north; to its east lie the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta highlands. Santa Marta is a significant town given its status as the oldest city in Colombia, founded on 29 July 1525. Aracataca, Colombia, contributes to the identity of Marquez. This geographical location is significant because it has an impact on Marquez's development as a creative writer.

In the 15th century, the Spanish and Portuguese powers extended their dominance over Latin America. This region was considered "the new world". Latin America was divided into two, the first being the farm colonies or the fertile areas for livestock and agriculture, specifically the areas with a temperate climate, which among others included Chile, Argentina and Southern Brazil. The second area was what was called the "exploitation colonies" that had a tropical climate. Here, agriculture was also the base but these areas were also rich in many types of minerals; this enabled exploitation of its economic produce. It involved areas such as Peru, Mexico and the West Indies. The



economic development of this region was also quite rapid, enabling the capitalist system to develop well. Because of this, cheap labour had to be brought in to cater for work in the industry. Slaves, especially from Africa, were brought in, creating a composite culture (Sohaimi, 1997a:67).

In the early 19th century, the Spanish and Portuguese powers in Latin America suffered a decline due to wars and turmoils in Europe. Latin provinces began to free themselves from the shackles of colonialism. When the two European powers abruptly left Latin America, it left a void because the previous monarchy-based political, economic and social systems were destroyed. Efforts from the native communities to create an identity caused the emergence of two groups which were known as “Liberals” and “Conservatives”. Further explanation on these two groups shall be put forth later.

It must be reminded that the South American world had also witnessed the existence of old ancient civilization before the coming of Spain and Portuguese. The Mesoamerican civilization, the ancient Mayan civilization and the Aztec civilization for example had already been founded. According to Sohaimi Abdul Aziz (1997b:33) “*tamadun-tamadun ini merupakan sumber bagi unsur-unsur indigenus seperti kepercayaan agama, mitos dan legenda yang mampu memperkayakan Kesusasteraan Amerika Latin dan seterusnya memberi identiti kepada realisme magis yang menjadi hallmark sesetengah pengarang Amerika Latin*” (these civilizations are the source of indigenous elements such as religious beliefs, myths and legends that are capable of enriching Latin American Literature and consequently provide an identity to magic realism which is the hallmark of some Latin American authors’).

The presence of the Indian, African and Spanish communities enriches the culture in this area, making it an area of diverse cultures, beliefs, and religions, and leaving an imprint on the tradition of story-telling, such as myths, legends, fantasy and history.

The cultural wealth in this region is recognized by Marquez. In one interview with his friend, Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza (1991: 70) which is recorded in a book titled *The Fragrance of Guava*, he describes this geographical influence as the most significant in shaping himself. A small yet significant fragment of this interview is cited by Harley D. Oberhelman in his book *Gabriel Garcia Marquez: A Study of the Short Fiction*. In the interview, Marquez responds to how the socio-geographic identity of a birthplace helps to shape the identity of an author, specifically himself. Marquez portrays the everyday life of the society in the Caribbean has having been set against the backdrop of the supernatural and magic so much so that it has become part of the society’s life:

The Caribbean taught me to look at reality in a different way, to accept the supernatural as part of our everyday life...

...the history of Caribbean is full of magic – a magic brought by black slaves from Africa but also by Swedish, Dutch and English pirates who thought nothing of setting up an Opera House in New Orleans or filling women teeth with diamonds. No where in the world do you find the racial mixture and the contrasts which you find in the Caribbean.

In another interview with *Playboy* magazine, Marquez once again emphasized the influence of the Caribbean in his works.

...in the Caribbean, we are capable of believing anything, because we have the influences of all those different cultures, mixed in with Catholicism and our own local beliefs. I think that gives us an open mindedness to look beyond apparent reality. As a child growing up in the Caribbean village of Aracataca, I heard wonderful stories of people who were able to move chairs by simply looking at them...

(Dreifus, 1991:73)

The excerpt above shows that the Caribbean is recognized by Marquez as a place that sustains myriads of influences in culture, belief and myth. It is clear that Colombia, which is divided into the Caribbean zone and the Andean highlands zone, has left a serious impact on the life of the author. The experience of exiting the Caribbean area for example, left a strong impression on Marquez. When he went to Bogota for the first time in January 1943 at the age of 14, Marquez described Bogota as a pitiful city of mourning (Minta, 1987:37).

Marquez's notes on Bogota reveal his uneasiness for non-Caribbean areas. This experience more or less affected his creative writing, in fact, the setting of Bogota is seen in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* through the eyes of the character Fernanda, relating Marquez's feelings towards the district.

As mentioned earlier, Colombia is politically divided into two ideologies. These Liberal and Conservative ideologies are connected to particular districts, respectively, within the country. For example, Marquez's father was from the town of Sucre, in the south of Colombia where the Conservatives were most dominant, while Aracataca, in the Caribbean area, the birthplace of Marquez, was a Liberal area at the time.

Both Liberal and Conservatives can be said to be responsible for much of the political violence in Colombia. The political mentality of the Colombian

people is that the people will choose one party and will support it obsessively to their death. A Colombian intellectual, Eduardo Santa, describes it as if every baby in Colombia is born with a political identity, either Conservative or Liberal, that it will never change. Supporting another party is regarded as betrayal to the grave (Minta, 1987:8). Partisan fanatics such as these, among other things, led to the outbreak of The War of a Thousand Days. This significant episode in the history of Colombia and its connection to Marquez shall be explained later.

The Conservative group are frequently landlords and tycoons, and supporters of the idea of a centralized government. This group also has a strong connection with the church and government. On the other hand, the Liberal strain gains better support from the peasants, businessmen and lawyers who value reform by emphasizing on freedom business, civil marriage, secular education, and who oppose the absolute power of the church. Since 1850, the Liberals dominated Colombia, before the Conservatives took over from 1885 until 1930. The Liberals regained power thereon up until 1946, before power fell back into the hands of the Conservatives due to internal conflicts within the Liberal party.

Marquez's grandfather had served in the army under the command of General Rafael Uribe Uribe, a Liberal military commander famed for his involvement in the civil war known throughout the history of Colombia as The War of a Thousand Days. In fact, his grandfather Colonel Nicolas Marquez, had fought alongside the notable Rafael Uribe Uribe (Janes, 1991: 61). According to Marquez, his grandfather had often, and with pride, shared stories of his experiences battling alongside this prominent figure, who until today is regarded as a legend in Colombia. Rafael Uribe Uribe became a soldier from the age of 17 and battled against the Conservative rebellion in 1876. He was arrested several times and moved to Bogota to be actively involved in the Liberal party. In 1896, he was appointed to the House of Representatives, and was one of the two Liberal figures who successfully made it into the Senate. In 1897, which was when the Liberal and Conservatives were at the verge of war, Uribe Uribe went to Central America to gain support from the Liberal governments of Nicaragua and Guatemala. This episode is highlighted in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, at the part when the character Colonel Aureliano attempts to get help from Central America to defeat the Conservative regime. In 1899, friction between both parties worsened and Uribe Uribe was arrested once again. In October 1899, what was called The War of a Thousand Days commenced.

Uribe Uribe was later released and joined the battle. In the beginning, the Liberals were victorious in several battles but after May 1900, the Liberal military leader was expelled from the country in a search for external support. Uribe Uribe, however, maintained a good relationship with several military Conservative leaders especially General Pedro Nel Ospina. This is similar to the friendship of the character Aureliano Buendia with his Conservative rival, depicted as Jose Raquel Moncada in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Uribe Uribe returned to Colombia and continued to battle on until the town of Cienaga, where, 26 years later, in the year Marquez was born, workers working at a banana company were massacred. This massacre becomes a significant part of the plot in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This Cienaga massacre will be touched on later.

Uribe Uribe was, however, defeated and was forced to sign the Treaty of Neerlandia on 24 October 1902. Uribe Uribe resided in Brazil from then on. The War of a Thousand Days officially ended on 21 November 1902. In 1914, Uribe Uribe was mysteriously murdered and was given a state funeral. The War of a Thousand Days had seen the sacrifice of many Liberalist soldiers who were mainly peasants. Uribe Uribe had failed in all battles, similar to the character Aureliano who had fought in 32 battles all in vain (Minta, 1987:14-19). It was at the end of this civil war that Marquez's grandfather had moved to Aracataca in Magdalena province. Undoubtedly, Rafael Uribe Uribe is the model for the character Colonel Aureliano Buendia who goes out to fight for the Liberals. Marquez, in fact, mentions his grandfather:

When I was eight he described episodes of all the wars he'd fought in to me. There's a lot of him in all my most important masculine characters.

(Oberhelman, 1991:69)

Apart from The War of a Thousand Days incident, the Cienaga massacre also adds colours to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Banana plantations had become significant in the Caribbean province especially in Cienaga around the 1880s, and this situation developed further with the construction of the Santa Marta train railways. The United Fruit Company from the United States of America dominated banana planting. When Marquez's father arrived in Aracataca, the rapid economic growth of the banana industry in this province had attracted many labourers from outside of the Caribbean. The town name Macondo in his works is derived from one of the names of the many banana companies that cropped up (Oberhelman, 1991:74). In

October 1928, workers from the banana companies who all the while had been ill-treated had submitted nine claims to compensate for their salary, housing benefits, health, insurance etc. Their rights were earlier denied with the claim that the labourers were mere contract workers with temporary status. A strike broke out and there was a rally at the Cienaga train station which the government's armed forces then raided, resulting in a massacre because the labourers had refused to disperse. The number of deaths is kept secret by the government and people in the community refuse to talk about the dark incident fearing threats by the authority.

The victory of the Conservatives in the 1948 election caused several disturbances and soon after, a young Liberal lawyer named Gaitan passed a memorandum of protest against violence in 56 cities at 11 provinces. In a journey to the office of the Liberal newspaper *El Tiempo* to meet with Fidel Castro, who later became a close friend to Marquez, he was shot dead (Gott, 1973:277). Gaitan's death abruptly ignited what was known as bogotazo or the three-day riot in 1948, where all shops were burnt and the American Embassy was broken-into, burnt and employees harmed. The incident towards the United States Embassy occurred due to the general hatred of the Colombian people towards the United States, and the same hatred is also portrayed by Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* where the operators of a banana company from America are referred to as "shitty gringos" (Janes, 1991:71-75).

The three-day riot marked the beginning of a tragic period of violence named la violencia between the years 1948 to 1966, and most of Marquez's works were written around this time. In fact, while writing *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, one of his friends, Torres, who had joined the guerrilla war, was killed. Stephen Minta (1987:10) a literature researcher who digs deep into Marquez's life, sees all these as having had an influence on Marquez as a writer. He writes:

The bankruptcy of Colombian politics in this respect, the apparent lack of any substantive ideological differences between the two parties, coupled with the ability of the party elites to mobilize large sections of the population in support of their struggles for power and their ability to limit the development of alternative sources of political expression, all these have been important factors in the formation of Garcia Marquez's own political view point.

Like his grandfather, Marquez's grandmother, Dona Tranquilina, played a role to prepare him as a writer, telling him myths, legends and fantasy

stories. His grandmother told him everything about the strange, the magical and the bizarre in such a casual manner as if it were reality and as if there were no difference between reality and the magical. It was here that the great author was exposed to what he understood to be magic realism (Ungku Maimunah, 1996:22).

Three statements made in three separate interviews with Marquez, compiled below by Harley D. Oberhelman, are extremely beneficial in explaining how his grandmother had prepared him with a significant identity:

My grandmother, first and foremost. She used to tell me about the most atrocious things without turning a hair, as if it was something she'd just seen. I realized that it was her impassive manner and her wealth of images that made her stories so credible. I wrote *One Hundred Years of Solitude* using my grandmother's method.

(Mendoza in Oberhelman, 1991:64)

I detest solemnness, and I am capable of saying the most atrocious things, the most fantastic things, with a completely straight face. This is talent I inherited from my grandmother—my mother's mother—Dona Tranquilina. She was a fabulous storyteller who told wild tales of the supernatural with a most solemn expression on her face. As I was growing up, I often wondered whether or not her stories were truthful. Usually, I tended to believe her because of her serious, deadpan facial expression. Now, as a writer, I do the same thing: I say extraordinary things in a serious tone. It's possible to get away with anything as long as you make it believable. That is something my grandmother taught me.

(Dreifus in Oberhelman, 1991:72-73)

The guardian angel of my infancy was an old man – my grandfather. My parents didn't bring me up, they left me in my grandparents' house. My grandmother used to tell me stories and my grandfather took me to see things. Those were the circumstances in which my world was constructed. And now I'm aware that I always see the image of my grandfather showing me things.

(Guibert in Oberhelman, 1991:76-77)

All of the above statements show the influence of Marquez's grandmother in telling tales of magic. Through these excerpts it can be said that he learnt storytelling of magic in many forms, the hilarious, the casual and the serious, under the care of his grandmother. Clearly, Marquez's grandparents,

indirectly shaped his identity in becoming a writer. In fact, what was most significant through his grandmother was that Marquez came to know what he later recognized to be magic realism. This approach is absorbed into all his works and the best example is in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

From the political viewpoint, it is important to note here that even though Marquez was largely involved in journalism and the Liberal party, he is actually known as a socialist. Marquez in the series of dialogues with his friend, Mendoza, cited by Oberhelman (1991:70), confesses “I want the world to be socialist and I believe that sooner or later it will be.” Meanwhile, Stephen Minta (1987:55) Marquez’s biographer, records that when he lived in Barranquilla, Marquez was involved with the Colombian Communist Party and had often communicated with party leaders while he resided in Bogota. It should be stated here that while working for *El Espectador* newspapers, Marquez was said to have been contributing monthly donations to the party apart from helping to collect funds for the party through his friends. The Colombian Communist Party was at the time banned by the government.

From 1950 to 1951, Marquez handled two newspapers, the first was *Cronica*, where he collaborated with Alfonso Fuenmayor and published six of his short-stories, and the second *Comprimido*, where Marquez became editor. After both publications were closed down, Marquez worked as a film commentator in yet another publication owned by the Liberals, “El-Espectador”. Marquez began to be known after the publication of his first novel *La hojarasca* (1979) which was translated into English as *Leaf Storm* and his reports on the Velasco scandal, which is a story of a sailor whose ship sinks but is later saved after drifting ashore. Marquez’s report was from a political dimension, investigating to the roots of the government’s involvement in the loading of illegal goods into the ship until it became heavily overloaded. This report humiliated the Colombian government under the leadership of Dictator Rojas Pinilla who had just seized power several years before with the excuse of putting an end to the disputes between the Liberals and the Conservatives, and supposedly end the era of la violencia.

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* was published in Buenos Aires in May 1967 and deemed “volcanic literature” by Latin American literary critics (Williams, 1984:11). The publication of this novel made Marquez famous overnight. Continuous recognitions were received from all corners of the world and when it was published in English in 1970, Marquez became even more famous. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* received various literary awards, among them the Chianchiano Prize from Italy. This novel is often

linked to magic realism, in fact this became the motivating factor as to why this novel received such an overwhelming response. According to Ungku Maimunah Mohd Tahir (1996: 23) magic realism is simply “*satu teknik yang mengkabur atau menghapuskan sama sekali perbezaan antara fantasi dengan realiti*” (a technique that makes obscure or completely erases the difference between fantasy and reality). Things that are magical, weird or bizzare are allowed to intermingle with things that are logical and realistic until a line of separation can no longer be drawn.

Marquez died on 17 April 2014 in Mexico city at the age of 87. He suffered from dementia after undergoing chemotherapy due to lymphatic cancer since 1999 (Lea and Tuckman, 2014).

As has been described, the creation of Marquez’s political novels are most notable, specifically *One Hundred Years of Solitude* which is enriched and coloured by the identity of his surroundings as a politics-savvy author and journalist .

## UNDERSTANDING SHAHNON AHMAD

The author of *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* is Shahnnon Ahmad. He was born on 13 January 1933 in Banggul Derdap, Sik, Kedah. Banggul Derdap is a village located 2.4 kilometers from the small town of Sik, approximately 70 kilometers from the state capital, Alor Setar. Shahnnon’s father, Ahmad bin Abu Bakar was from Medan, Sumatera. Shahnnon’s father was Batak by ethnicity with the clan name Saragih. This means that Shahnnon Ahmad’s ancestor was Datuk Omar Saleh from the town of Sipoldas in Simalungun regency.<sup>1</sup> Shahnnon’s father was an open minded person and was influenced by the Kaum Muda movement. Additionally Shahnnon’s father was an emissary for the British during the time of the Second World War. This background, and his father’s attitude, enabled Shahnnon to be schooled in English-medium schools at a time when many Malay children were only educated at Malay schools (Mohd Yusof, 1990:1-8). Shahnnon Ahmad’s mother was Kelsum Mohd Saman who originated from Poseng, in the Pattani province of Thailand. A big portion of his mother’s life has been transformed into his creative work entitled *al-Syiqaq 1* (1983).

When the Japanese were defeated in the war, the British returned to Malaya. Shahnnon’s father was rewarded for his intelligence tasks. Such rewards came, among others, in the form of scholarships for Shahnnon and his brother, Mohd Noh. Shahnnon’s brother held the position of Head of Special Branch in the Royal Malaysian Police in the state of Kedah before



involving himself in politics. Mohd Noh Ahmad was also appointed Kedah State Assemblyman for Sik, representing the Barisan Nasional. In the year 1987, following discord in the UMNO party, Mohd Noh chose to join the Semangat 46<sup>2</sup> party.

Prior to obtaining his education in an English-medium school as earlier stated, Shahnnon Ahmad had received basic education at the Sik Malay School from 1939 until 1946. Between the years 1947 until 1953, Shahnnon Ahmad attended school at the Sultan Abdul Hamid College with English as its medium of instruction. Shahnnon was described as a weak student but still managed to obtain a Grade 3 in the Senior Cambridge examination. In 1954, Shahnnon held the position of English Teacher at the English Grammar School, Kuala Trengganu and taught English at the Gunung Malay School and Bukit Besar Malay School in Alor Setar between the years 1957 and 1962. He returned to his *alma mater* and served at Sultan Abdul Hamid College in 1968. While serving at Sultan Abdul Hamid College, Shahnnon also held the position as Head of Publicity for UMNO Kubang Pasu under Datuk Senu Abdul Rahman and established GATRA or Gabungan Sasterawan Sedar. His experience and background as an English Teacher were extremely valuable for it enabled Shahnnon to be accepted as Project Research Assistant in English-Malay Language Lexicography at the Department of Indonesian Languages and Literatures, Australian National University, Canberra between the years 1968-1970 under the supervision of Profesor A.H Johns. He attained a Bachelor's degree in Asian studies here. Upon his return from Australia, Shahnnon taught at Sultan Idris Teacher Training College, Tanjung Malim. Not long afterwards, he pursued post-graduate studies while holding the position of assistant lecturer at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia (Mohd Yusof, 1990:2-7). Shahnnon was appointed Professor Emeritus in 1993, and remained at Universiti Sains Malaysia until his retirement in the year 1998.

Throughout this period, Shahnnon actively wrote many literary works, specifically novels. He had won among others the Malaysian Literary Award (Hadiah Karya Sastera Malaysia) in the years 1971, 1972, 1973 and 1974. In fact, in 1973, his novel *Srengenge* was awarded the Hadiah Karya Sastera award in the category for novels. In 1976, Shahnnon was conferred the title "Pejuang Sastera" (Literature Champion) alongside Ishak Haji Muhammad, Kamaluddin Muhammad, Usman Awang, A. Samad Said and A. Samad Ismail. Shahnnon Ahmad was honoured with the title National Literature Laureate (Sasterawan Negara) in 1982.

His early writing works were already inclined towards political discussions, for example the novels *Rentong* (1965), *Terdedah* (1965), *Protes* (1967) and *Menteri* (1967) (Shahnon, 1995:35-37). Not too different from Marquez, Shahnon embarked on his creative writing journey as a writer while his nation was confronted with many political, economic and social predicaments. Among Malaysia's biggest challenges at the time was the transformation of the agriculture-based economy, efforts to preserve the sovereignty of the Malay language and national culture, racial conflicts and under development of the Malays. These problems caused identity confusion among the Malays as seen and described in *The Malay Dilemma* (1970) by Mahathir Mohamad, *Revolusi Mental* (1971) by Senu Abdul Rahman and *Siapa Yang Salah?* (1972) by Syed Hussein Alatas. Apart from uprisings by farmers in the 1970s, Malays residing in the cities were facing social and moral crisis.

According to David J. Banks (1987:114), the majority of Shahnon's novels which were written in the 1960s and 1970s explore the aspects mentioned above. Even though Shahnon often uses his hometown of Sik as the setting, the Malaysian political predicament at the time managed to be effectively expressed. Banks's view is presented here to support the suggested statement:

The novels about Sik were written during the economically difficult and politically tumultuous years between 1965 and 1978. This was a period of anti-Chinese riots in Georgetown, Penang in 1969 and peasant demonstrations in Sik and the neighboring district of Baling caused by food shortages in 1974. It is important to mention that during these years the representation for Sik in the state assembly passed from the ruling Alliance (later National Front) government and its Malay member party, UMNO, to the Pan Malayan Islamic Party (PAS). Shahnon's novels about Sik do not deal with these events directly, but they provide enough of the ambience and background for them to better understand the political climate in rural Kedah during those years. These novels are also significant because they deal with the moral choices and orientations of the peasantry. In order to do this, Shahnon presents materials that fall within the social science categories of culture and social structure. Village organization, interest groups, folk religion, and folk Islam all function as moral building blocks in his novels and are placed within their appropriate contexts.

Mohd Yusuf Hasan (1990: 41) is in agreement with David J. Banks in this regard, according to him political issues had already emerged in Shahnon

Ahmad's earlier works due to Shahnnon's own surroundings. Mohd Yusuf Hasan's view is displayed here to support this statement:

*Penghasilan novel-novel itu adalah akibat dari penglibatannya dalam perkembangan masyarakat Melayu. Shahnnon Ahmad yang dilahirkan dalam tahun 1933, membesar dalam suasana pergolakan politik termasuk kemelesetan ekonomi, kemunduran sosial dan keruntuhan moral yang amat jelas. Sebagai guru dan pemerhati politik, ia mencerminkan keadaan tersembunyi dalam karya-karya fiksiyennya, bermula dari tahun 1956, apabila berusia 23 tahun. Pada mula nada kritik sosial digarapkan dalam cerpen-cerpen tentang masalah manusia dalam kehidupan seks, politik, ekonomi dan kepercayaan. Kemudian diterapkan masalah-masalah ini sepenuhnya di dalam novel-novelnya dari tahun 1965 hingga 1985.*

(The creation of those novels is the outcome of his involvement in the development of the Malay community. Shahnnon Ahmad who was born in 1933, was raised amidst an atmosphere of political turmoil that included a recession, obvious social decline and moral decay. As a teacher and a political observer, these hidden situations are reflected in his creative writings, beginning from the year 1956, while he was 23 years of age. In the beginning, his social criticism is conceptualised into short stories about people's sex life, politics, economy and beliefs. Later, from the year 1965 until 1985, these problems completely permeate his novels.)

The two views above suggest that Shahnnon's political novels were well-conceptualized, as the main factor is Shahnnon's own surroundings that "make them grow" to be such. Shahnnon then extended these political themes into his novels, including *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* (1988), *Sutan Baginda* (1989), *Patriarch* (1991).

Shahnnon's directness and acerbity as a political novelist can be felt through the novels he wrote in the 1980s and 1990s. This article seeks to quote Shahnnon's view:

*Kepimpinan yang bobot dengan kepentingan diri, yang kehilangan kemanusiaan dan terhakis idealisme yang unggul. Banyak yang dikuasai oleh nafsu ingin spontan dalam serba hal terutama kaya spontan, masyhur spontan, berkuasa spontan. Ada yang baik pada awalnya tetapi bila menjadi pemimpin, cepat lupa daratan, rakus, salah guna kuasa dan selalu bercakap terlalu banyak sehingga banyak cakapan yang tidak berlapik. Ini sebahagian besarnya. Sebabnya kerana mereka ini tidak takutkan Allah dalam erti kata yang sebenar. Mereka rasa hubungan mereka dengan Allah itu tidak teguh.*

*Tetapi ada juga kepimpinan yang memperlihatkan watak dan arah yang suci dalam kancah kepimpinan yang bobrok yang wujud di sekeliling mereka. Di samping itu kita dapati banyak pemimpin yang baik campur yang tak baik dalam diri mereka. Ada unsur kebaikan tapi ada juga unsur keburukan. Ini memanglah sifat manusia; tapi sifat manusia seumpama ini usahlah menjadi pemimpin. Politik pula adalah politik belah buluh dan politik belon. Politik belah buluh adalah politik mengangkat satu golongan sedangkan golongan yang lain ditindas. Macam kita belah buluh jugalah. Yang sebelah kita pijak, yang sebelah lagi kita angkat. Politik belon ialah politik kembang bila ditiup angin masuk ke dalam. Orang politik yang kembang bila dipuji tapi kalau tak ditiup angin, mereka kempis saja. Satu lagi ialah politik telanjang – politik bogel – the naked politics. Politik telanjang ialah politik tanpa sopan santun, segan silu, tak hormat orang lain dan semuanya kasar dan hodoh. Macam orang bogel jugalah. Tak malu, tak ada maruah dan muka tokoh-tokoh ini tebal macam kulit... Inilah umumnya pandangan saya terhadap kepimpinan dan politik sekarang ini; baik dalam kerajaan mahupun di luar kerajaan.*

(A heavy-handed leadership of self-importance, one stripped of humanity and eroding excellence in idealism. Many things are controlled by the desire for everything to be instant: to have instant wealth, instant fame, instant power. There are those who are good at the beginning but upon becoming leaders, are quick to forget, greedy, misuse their power, and always talking too much until there is too much said. This is the bulk of it. The reason is because they do not fear Allah in the true manner. They feel that their relationship with Allah is not strong. But there are also leaders who portray good characteristics and an honest direction amidst the turmoil of the crumbling leadership that exists around them. In spite of it all, we find many leaders with a mixture of the good and not-so-good within themselves. There is an element of goodness but there is also an element of the bad. This is naturally a human trait; but with a human trait such as this, you should not be a leader. There is bamboo-cutting politics and balloon politics. Bamboo-cutting politics is the kind of politics that raises up a certain group while oppressing another. Just like when we cut bamboo. We step on one side while we lift another. Balloon politics is the type that is inflated when air is breathed into it. Such politicians become inflated when complimented but they deflate when not breathed air into. Another is nude politics – naked politics. Naked politics is politics without ethics, without shame, without respect for others and everything vulgar and hideous. Just like a naked person. No shame, no dignity and skin as thick as leather. This is my general view on the current leadership and politics; inside the government as well as outside it.)

(Shahnon in Ahmad Kamal, 1993:193)

Eventhough this was Shahnon's view in 1993, *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis*, as a political novel, had already uttered such criticism much earlier. *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* explores the scene of a village through the eyes of Su Usul, the oldest resident of the village. Centred around Poseng Mosque, *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* portrays two groups of mosque-goers who have varying ideologies and political beliefs, that of the PBB and PSS, which leads to a bloody confrontation. An excerpt from *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* portrays that incident:

*Dan di kala itulah seratus serdadu mengorak langkah menuju madrasah yang bakal menjadi sasaran. Tiba-tiba saja madrasah dikepung di empat-empat penahap. Meriam dan kereta perisai menghulurkan muncung menunggu detik untuk memuntahkan belerang. Semua siap siaga dengan bazuka, senapang, mesin-gan, bom tangan bagaikan benar-benar hendak meruntuhkan gunung-ganang; bukan menundukkan kuman-kuman yang kerdil-kerdil. Dan bila dinihari jauh merayap ke hujung dan kokok ayam mulai rancak bersahutan, madrasah dihujani peluru dan peluru.*

(And it was at that moment 100 soldiers marched towards the small mosque that was to become the target. Suddenly the small mosque was surrounded on all four corners. Missiles and tanks extended their nozzles awaiting the moment to spew their lead. All were prepared with bazookas, rifles, machine-guns, grenades, as if they were seriously going to flatten the mountains; instead of defeating minute worms. And when nightfall crept to its end and the roosters crowed intensely, they rained bullet upon bullet on the small mosque).

(Shahnon, 1990: 306-07)

As stated at the beginning of this article, Abdul Wahab Ali (1990: 59) compliments *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* as a novel that portrays a mini Malaysia, as well as Shahnon's ability to bring to life the scene in Poseng as "*belon besar segmen masalah orang-orang Melayu negara ini*" (the big segmented balloon of problems among the Malays in this country):

*Demikian pula, latar cerita tidak lari dari latar Melayu Malaysia yang sedang membangun; pembukaan hutan balak, politik wang untuk menutup kekejaman dan politik benci-membenci. Biar pun Poseng yang dijadikan latar, tetapi Poseng hanyalah merupakan abstraksi daripada contoh-contoh kampung-kampung Melayu yang penduduknya bersengketa yang dilanda putaran roda perubahan yang dahsyat.*

(And so it goes, the setting of the story does not run far from the setting of the developing Malaysian Malays; forest clearing for timber, money politics to cover-up injustice and hate-politics.

Eventhough the setting is Poseng, it is merely an abstraction of Malay villages, an example of bickering residents caught by the terrible rotating wheels of change.)

Shahnon's direct political criticism towards the administration at that time can be understood through the closing paragraph in *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis*:

*Semuanya berpunca daripada kekuasaan dan kesombongan. Kekuasaan dan kesombongan kuku besi dan gigi besi yang memegang teraju pusat negara sungguh-sungguh menggigit dan menokak. Mereka betul-betul tak ada tali perut dan tali hati kerana sengaja hendak mempamerkan kekuasaan yang ada*

(Everything stems from power and arrogance. Power and arrogance of the iron claws and iron fangs of those at the country's central command, biting and puncturing. They certainly have no guts and heart strings as they purposely want to display the power they possess.)

(Shahnon, 1990:307)

Shahnon Ahmad's criticism is sharper in his short-story "Piem" (1993) and the climax of Shahnon Ahmad's fury towards the administration is evident in his famous satire, *Shit*, published in 1999 (Faisal Musa, 1999). In the same year, he contested for the Sik parliamentary seat and was elected wakil rakyat of the district for one term.

It is very clear that political novels created by Shahnon Ahmad, specifically *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis*, are strengthened by Shahnon's identity and his surroundings as an author who is sensitive towards political issues or who is politically savvy. This is strong proof that for an author to write a political novel successfully, personal surrounding and creativity that are closely linked are very much needed.

## **CREATIVITY AND POLITICAL SUBJECTS**

Literary works, in this context, political-themed literary works, will not be crafted effectively should the author who craft it not be an expert, or lack experience, in current political issues befalling his people and nation. As

shown extensively and through the comparison made earlier, a creative work must have “personal flavour” based on the author who is creating it.

C.R. Rogers puts forth his idea that there is an extremely close tie between creativity, surrounding or identity with an artistic product. According to him, to evaluate a certain artistic products, the first process that it must undergo is to look into everything about the creator as an individual. This includes the author’s personal qualities and uniqueness, and how these can merge with other materials from experience. This creative process, according to Rogers again, comes from an individual’s distinctiveness, assisted by such material as incidents, experience, influence from close relations and life conditions. Clearly, Shahnnon and Marquez are capable of creating and composing quality political novels such as *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by returning to their own identity and indirect experience as both politicians and artists. Without the surroundings and identity inter-linked with the political aspects of their lives, it would be difficult for them to conceptualize the political themes in their creative works.

As artists and literary authors, both authors, Shahnnon Ahmad and Marquez are protected by Article 27, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was declared in 1948. Therefore, their political expressions, no matter how fiery and piercing towards those in power, is always defended by the international consensus. Shahnnon and Marquez, respectively, through their own political views, ideas and constructions, feel that their political expressions are a contribution for the community and are eligible to receive the immunity to write:

- (1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
- (2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author (UDHR, undated).

Based on Article 27 above, eventhough both authors vocally highlight their political ideas, the Colombian ruler, the place from which Marquez originated, or Mexico, where he resided, never took harsh action such as prohibiting him from publishing his works. The same situation can be observed for the works of Shahnnon Ahmad in Malaysia. Although consistent and harsh in his criticism , his works are still perceived as art, which is the basic right of an author or artist.

## CONCLUSION

The observation of the identity and personality of two authors, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Shahnnon Ahmad, shows that they were not directly involved in politics but the political surroundings that are ever-turbulent helps to shape each of their thinking and belief.

In Colombia, the political feud of two groups sowed never-ending political strife and violence. As shown earlier, Gabriel Garcia Marquez stood in the centre of the political crisis and benefited from the incident through his creative work, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

The differing political conflicts and confrontation can also be seen in Shahnnon Ahmad's life. It appears, for example, in *Tunggul-tunggul Gerigis*. Political issues or the competition to dominate between two factions becomes the political theme and subjects in the works of these authors.

## NOTES

1. Information from Shahnnon Ahmad himself. Interviewed on 8 October 1997 in Universiti Sains Malaysia.
2. Interviewed on 9 October 1997 at Minden Heights, Penang.

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