

## MAPPING THE MATRICENTRIC: METAPHOR, SPATIALITY, AND DISCOURSE IN COLOMBIAN LITERATURE, MUSIC, AND FILM

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**Abstract:** This study examines the paradox of Colombian matricentricity, a cultural system that is both revered and deeply entangled with violence. Employing an interdisciplinary cultural studies approach, it triangulates autoethnography, Colombian scholarship, and cultural artefacts to investigate the formation of this system. Through the lenses of metaphor, discourse, and spatiality, it considers three case studies: maternal archetypes in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the public discourse of musician Juanes, and feminine spatiality in Catalina Mesa's film *Jericó*. The analysis reveals how these artefacts collectively position the maternal as a central organising principle. Although further research is necessary, this study finds that matricentricity constitutes a pervasive force shaping Colombian identity, memory, and social relations, offering a vital framework for interpreting its complex lived realities.

**Keywords:** Colombia; Motherhood; One Hundred Years of Solitude; Juanes; Catalina Mesa; Decolonial Theory; Latin America

### 1. Introduction: The Cultural Work of Matricentricity

Paradoxically, domestic and sexual violence in Colombia has historically spiked around and on Mother's Day, as has the murder rate (Moloney).<sup>1</sup> This unsettling fact signals more than a crisis of gender-based violence; it reveals a fundamental tension in the very institution of motherhood. Moloney cites Ana Guezmes García, former head of UN-Colombia and now Chief of the Division for Gender Affairs of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, holiday sees a rise not only in violence against women but also in "violence among men," signalling a broader breakdown of the domestic sphere under pressure coexists with a spectrum of violence. The contradiction is rooted in a complex cultural system that both cultivates female fortitude and imposes intense constraints.

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<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon is well documented and consistently noted in public health and judicial reports. Recent data indicate that the trend continued into 2025, with authorities reporting a sharp rise in homicides and domestic violence incidents over the Mother's Day weekend (Gonzalez). Colombian authorities, including the Ombudsman's Office, have repeatedly acknowledged the pattern, issuing annual alerts to warn citizens and officials of the predictable surge in domestic violence during the holiday ('Noche de las velitas'). However, while the statistical pattern is clear and ongoing, there remains a significant gap in scholarly research that seeks to understand the specific cultural, sociological, and psychological mechanisms that link the celebration of Mother's Day directly to this surge in violence.

This paradox arises from a complex cultural system that fosters female resilience while simultaneously imposing significant constraints. As the Cultural Atlas notes, “Colombian women cannot be described as weak. They are generally taught to be independent and stand up for themselves, with many stories promoting assertiveness and capability in young girls”. This study contends that to comprehend the paradox, one must consider Colombian matricentricity not as a straightforward reality, but as an intricate and demanding cultural system that requires ongoing social and symbolic labour. It serves as a “powerful social glue” (Rheinbolt-Uribe, “Transforming Mutuality” 21) binding the private sphere, positioning the maternal as a central organising principle within the social imagination, yet one that can also produce considerable pressure and contradiction within the same sphere.

This system functions within a complex gendered dynamic that is frequently neglected. The influence of machismo and the prevailing matricentric culture are not simply opposing forces; instead, they exist as interconnected aspects of the same phenomenon. The present analysis focuses exclusively on one aspect: the matricentric perspective. The ideology of *marianismo*,<sup>2</sup> which venerates the semi-sacred, suffering mother, sanctifies women's authority within the private, domestic sphere but also sanctifies her suffering and sacrifice (Stevens). A potent script emerges that can trap women in a cycle of silent endurance, where seeking help or challenging their role is perceived as a betrayal of their sacred duty of mothering (care work). The pattern exists in a symbiotic, if often tense, relationship with public machismo, forming a system in which maternal power is both culturally revered and structurally contained (Brusco). Within this pressure cooker of expectation, interpersonal conflict, emotional manipulation, or the internalised violence of self-sacrifice often manifest. The cultural notion of *familismo* reflects this dynamic, where, as the Cultural Atlas notes, even women "relegated to the domestic sphere... often still have a lot of authority in decision making," an authority that carries the heavy weight of total responsibility for familial well-being.<sup>3</sup> Anthropologist Elizabeth E. Brusco observes that "an attitude or belief

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<sup>2</sup> Stevens clarifies that *marianismo* (*Mariology*) is not a religious practice but “a set of assumptions around which practitioners of *marianismo* (91-92) have erected a secular edifice of beliefs and practices related to the position of women in society”.

<sup>3</sup> Cultural Atlas defines *familismo* in the Colombian context as the family providing “a sense of identity, community and support” and forming “the basis for many people’s social circles”, with a strong cultural expectation of loyalty and prioritising family interests. Intergenerational financial dependence lies within kin groups (*familia*) rather than on the nation-state (Brusco; Gudeman, Rivera), with the younger generation assuming care and financial responsibility for the older generation, many times in kin coresidence. Kin coresidence is when extended family households function as vital systems of support, shaped by both cultural practices and survival strategies, commonly intergenerational.

characteristic among Colombian women is that the conjugal unit should cooperate to promote the well-being of 'the family'" (144).<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the present discussion addresses the stark contradiction, with the specific tension located within the broader context of systemic and armed violence. As the Diplomatic Forum observes, deep-rooted discrimination and the country's decades of armed conflict have "historically affected women, girls and people with diverse sexual orientations, identities, and gender expressions". In this context, mothers frequently assume the role of primary shield against external turmoil, a responsibility that exacts a significant personal cost. Accordingly, this analysis examines the contradiction between cultural reverence and the complex forms of violence that can arise from the very expectations underpinning that reverence.

Guided by Benjamin Woo's conception of cultural studies as a "theoretically and methodologically catholic science of experience" (311), the project adopts an interdisciplinary approach. It draws together personal experience, scholarly work, and cultural artefacts to answer the central research question: How do Colombian literature, music, and film construct and maintain matricentricity through **metaphor, spatiality, and discourse**?

To address this question, the study first establishes a theoretical framework grounded in lived experience and foundational scholarship. It then analyses three key case studies: Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a source of foundational metaphor; the music and public persona of Juanes as a form of public discourse; and Catalina Mesa's documentary *Jericó, el Infinito Vuelo de los Días* as an exploration of spatiality. Subsequently, empirical data from my PhD dissertation is brought into dialogue with these perspectives (Rheinbolt-Uribe, "Transforming Mutuality"). The paper concludes by weaving together these various strands, asserting that mapping this "matricentric logic" is crucial for understanding the complexities of Colombian identity, social relations, and lived experience.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a theoretical framework that combines a reflexive authorial position, following Woo's (312) assertion that cultural studies should remain "grounded in the analysis

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<sup>4</sup> Following Sara Ruddick, this research defines 'mothering' as the practice of responding to children's demands for preservation, growth, and social acceptability, regardless of the caregiver's gender or biological status. Empirical research in similar Latin American contexts (Brazil and Peru) confirms that kin coresidence creates distributed mothering networks that support maternal employment through shared childcare responsibilities (Aragao, Villanueva). Colombian matricentricity therefore encompasses both biological mothers and extended family networks engaged in collective mothering practices, linked to *familismo*.

<sup>5</sup> The argument presented in this work is an expansion of Chapter 5 of my dissertation.

of real people's real experiences of culture". It then extends to engage with foundational scholarship on Colombian culture.

## 2.1. The Researcher's Positionality: A Lived Starting Point

In accordance with the methodologies of contemporary cultural studies, this research adopts the researcher's positionality not as a bias to be eliminated, but as a vital analytical perspective. Consequently, I am not claiming to assert universal truths, but rather presenting the evidence observed from my own particular locus of enunciation.<sup>6</sup> The study explicitly adopts the concept of the researcher-as-instrument (Wa-Mbaleka), recognising that the researcher's own journey of understanding constitutes a legitimate and essential source of data. This methodology incorporates Pillow's "reflexivity of discomfort", a process in which the complexities of one's past assumptions are confronted to facilitate more meaningful and authentic analysis. Consequently, the author's personal transformation is not simply background context but serves as a principal site where the cultural and epistemological tensions central to this discussion are manifested.

My initial impression upon moving to Bogotá, Colombia, was that the mothers intimidated me. This had not been my experience in Mexico City. This perception prompted my exploration into what distinguished Colombian mothers from those I had encountered in Mexico, Guatemala, and the United States (my birth country). This inquiry has resulted in a personal transformation, best captured through an autoethnographic account of engaging with the Colombian postpartum custom of *la cuarentena* – a forty-day period of rest during which a new mother is ideally cared for by her own mother. This practice encompasses not only care work but also the intergenerational transmission of knowledge through oral tradition. My academic background, grounded in a Western epistemology that privileges analytical and often solitary inquiry, initially conflicted with the embodied, communal wisdom intrinsic to this practice. At first, I dismissed *la cuarentena* as an unscientific "old wives' tale" and interpreted a woman's adherence to it as a sign of weakness, a judgement shaped by my own cultural assumptions. However, such a view directly contrasts with endarkened feminist epistemology, which offers a methodology of healing (Chilisa 308), and is one I now appreciate (Rheinbolt-Uribe, "Maternal-Thinking" 17-18)

This perspective was profoundly challenged by a personal crisis: the premature birth of my twins, following my marriage to a Colombian man and subsequent settlement in Bogotá. This period of acute vulnerability prompted a "painful paradigm shift". Circumstances compelled me to finally recognise

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<sup>6</sup> Decolonial thinker and philosopher of liberation Enrique Dussel argues that the modern European ego conceals its own locus of enunciation, presenting its particular worldview as a universal truth.

the tacit, transgenerational wisdom of *la cuarentena*, reinterpreting it not as isolation but as a source of resilience for both mother and child. Through this process, my self-understanding was fundamentally altered. This was not merely a personal experience; it was also a methodological turning point. In the aftermath, I discovered a renewed sense of connection with a community of women whose knowledge I came to appreciate and integrate, leading to a significant broadening of my intellectual perspective through this profound, spiritual relationship. This movement from an individualistic quest for knowledge to an appreciation of intergenerational knowledge within the motherline directly shapes the analysis that follows, anchoring the study of matricentricity in an embodied awareness of its significance. This aligns with Pillow's assertion that reflectivity of discomfort yields more robust data (Rheinbolt-Uribe, "Transforming Mutuality" 68).

Over three decades, lived experience with Colombian matricentricity has arisen from everyday social interactions. While spending time with friends, I observed that their mothers were frequently incorporated as an essential part of social gatherings or excursions. In this context, friendship seldom remained limited to peer relationships; forming a close bond with someone often meant that their mother became part of the relational "package". This subtle yet pervasive inclusion of mothers across all relational domains further demonstrates how profoundly the maternal is woven into Colombian social structures.

Furthermore, I have witnessed instances of "forced feeding", where adult friends felt obliged to eat until full or consume unwanted food solely at their mother's insistence. In these situations, it appeared that refusing was not a viable option. This dynamic demonstrates the intricate nature of matricentric authority, which, over my three decades of observation, has revealed itself not only as a source of care and ancestral legacy but also as a possible channel for intergenerational trauma. Alongside numerous uplifting narratives of the motherline,<sup>7</sup> I have also encountered a multitude of distressing accounts in which this powerful maternal bond has been associated with significant emotional pain.

The dynamics I observed ultimately prompted me to engage with Colombian scholars and research conducted within Colombia, in pursuit of a more profound understanding – a topic addressed in the following section.

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<sup>7</sup> The motherline provides a life-cycle perspective as well as knowledge of ancestors who shared the same struggles in different historical times (Lowinsky).

## 2.2. Foundations of Colombian Matricentricity

### 2.2.1 Decolonial Roots

To understand Colombia's matricentricity, it is vital to apply a decolonial lens to reveal its deep historical roots.<sup>8</sup> Foundational anthropological work by Virginia Gutiérrez de Pineda shows that prior to the arrival of Europeans (1500), many Indigenous groups in the region were matrilineal or organised around a strong maternal centre (matricentric). Her research methodology itself reflected the very phenomenon she studied; she conducted extensive fieldwork across Colombia alongside her husband and their two young children, integrating her family into the communities to gain deeper ethnographic understanding. This approach clearly influenced her groundbreaking conclusions, which historian Enrique Serrano has further developed. He observes that before 1500, centralised empires (such as the Inca Empire) did not extend to most of Colombia, and that area of South America instead consisted of networks of smaller, self-sufficient communities. This political landscape enabled the continuation of local matricentric patterns of life and social organisation.<sup>9</sup> As Gutiérrez de Pineda observes, the Spanish colonial system achieved the legal erosion of matrilineal societies and the establishment of a patrilineal order only gradually. This shift is apparent in two significant legal developments: the requirement that the father's surname appear first and the enforcement of patrilineal inheritance of property. Although more recent research depicts the manner in which the matrilineal Indigenous communities were used by the colonial authorities for their own benefit (Godfrey).

Furthermore, a decolonial perspective reveals that many of the Spanish settlers who arrived in Colombia were, on the one hand, fleeing Spain, as Muslims and then Jews were expelled. On the other hand, due to the pressure and even violence to convert to the official religion of the Iberian Peninsula, Catholicism, those who had recently converted from Judaism and Islam faced discrimination and came to Colombia seeking freedom and new opportunities. Serrano notes that many early Spanish settlers originated from Al-Andalus, which has deep roots in Muslim cultural history. As Musk observes, cultures influenced by Islam often exhibit a powerful private, domestic sphere governed by women. Additionally, the Jewish converts to Christianity who immigrated to Colombia brought their Jewish culture, which is not fully

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<sup>8</sup> For Escobar, **decolonial thought** is a political and epistemic project that seeks to delink from the pervasive, oppressive structures of Western modernity in order to create space for the existence and flourishing of multiple interconnected worlds which he describes as a **pluriverse**.

<sup>9</sup> The 2018 DANE census records 1.9 million people self-identifying as Indigenous, representing 4.4% of the population.

matricentric as a social system, but is matrilineal and possesses strong matricentric elements in the domestic and identity-transmitting spheres, where mothers play a leading role in sustaining Jewish life across generations (Rheinbolt-Uribe, “Transforming Mutuality” 132).

A well-established body of scholarship in Afro-Colombian studies, anthropology, and Black feminist thought traces matricentric structures to the conditions of slavery.<sup>10</sup> Enslaved men were routinely sold away or killed, systematically disrupting imposed patrilineal models. Women of African descent became primary caregivers and heads of households, necessitating a social reorganisation centred on women’s roles. Thus, matricentrism is not merely a cultural preference but a vital framework for survival, resistance, and cultural preservation—a theme central to Arturo Escobar’s decolonial work on women-led Pacific coast communities.

From my research, I conclude that the convergence of Indigenous matrilineality; the matricentric culture of Arab-descended communities from Al-Andalus and Jewish peoples from Iberia; and the matricentric Afro-Colombian culture, created a distinctive historical synergy, embedding the matricentric deeply within Colombian culture to this day.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2.2 Religious Roots

Indigenous cosmovisions in Colombia encompass a wide range of beliefs and rituals; however, reverence for Pachamama, or Mother Earth (Escobar), is a recurring theme. The following creation myth of the Emberá Katío people<sup>12</sup>, displayed in the main lobby of the world-renowned Gold Museum in Bogotá, poetically illustrates the matricentric orientation:

La Madre de todo lo creado fue la primera en existir. Ella era el agua, el agua era la madre. El agua era la sangre de la tierra y por eso le daba vida a todo (The Mother of all that was created was the first to exist. She was water, water was the mother. Water was the blood of the earth and that is why it gave life to everything).

Roman Catholicism, the religion of the Spanish *conquistadors* and settlers, with time replaced the Indigenous religious beliefs in many of the Indigenous Peoples, and immediately became the official religion of the area by law. Colombia’s relationship with the Vatican until 1991 made it difficult

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<sup>10</sup> Positioned as a central and significant part of the African diaspora in the Americas, Colombia records a population of 4.67 million, or 9.34% of the national total, according to the DANE census.

<sup>11</sup> The DANE census records the mestizo and white population at 38.5 million, representing 84.6% of the national total.

<sup>12</sup> The DANE reports 102 officially recognised Indigenous peoples, who speak 65 distinct Indigenous languages.

for other religions and Christian traditions to flourish.<sup>13</sup> In recent decades, new religious movements linked to Protestantism have expanded. Some of these traditions have established religious spaces where aspects of maternal authority are expressed. In the Roman Catholic tradition, which gained renewed momentum following Vatican II, home Bible studies developed into base ecclesial communities (BECs), described by the historian Lilian Calles Barger (76) and Brusco as vital expressions of grassroots faith. Within this setting, Marian devotion served as a theological focal point for sacralising motherhood, presenting the Virgin Mary as the exemplary maternal figure, moral model, and liberator. This Marian perspective not only sacralised maternal identity but also enabled women and mothers to become central figures in the vitality and growth of the BEC movement during the era of the Liberation Theology Movement.

Brusco's anthropological research on Protestant traditions in Colombia shows that home-based gatherings often place mothers at the centre as spiritual gatekeepers and hosts, confirming Eugene Nida's observation that "in Latin American society the mother is the emotional centre of the family" (128). Pentecostal movements have expanded women's roles beyond domestic religious life, enabling them to serve as pastors and leaders of congregations. While men continue to predominate as senior pastors, many women now lead small neighbourhood churches as well as large urban megachurches. One notable example is Pastor Claudia Castellanos, who leads one of Latin America's most influential megachurches and is also a political figure and public personality.

These practices demonstrate how matricentricity generates spiritual meaning, transforming both domestic and institutional spaces into sites of maternal and feminine spiritual leadership. Future research could further develop this analysis to examine religion more deeply as a key dimension of Colombian matricentric cultural systems.

### **2.2.3 Mothers in Politics and Policies**

Colombian women's increasing political presence reflects shifting gender dynamics within the broader matricentric cultural system (United Nations Security Council). The election of Francia Márquez as Vice President in 2022 – an Afro-Colombian woman, mother of two, from a rural community and a prominent environmental activist – demonstrates the growing prominence of women's leadership in public life. Such developments challenge traditional

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<sup>13</sup> Until 1991, Colombia's relationship with the Vatican was governed by a Concordat, an agreement that established Catholicism as the official state religion and granted the Church extensive authority over law, education, and society. This confessional state model was dissolved by the secular 1991 Constitution and replaced with a new, modern concordat reflecting principles of religious equality.

limitations imposed on women, while also illustrating how maternal authority and caregiving roles continue to influence public perceptions of female leaders. This indicates both continuity and change within Colombian matricentricity.

Furthermore, Colombia has enacted some of the most comprehensive maternity protection laws in Latin America, including paid parental leave and legal safeguards for pregnant and postpartum women in employment settings (Angulo et al.). These policies not only reflect but also formalise the cultural prominence of motherhood, establishing maternal care as a national concern. (Rheinbolt-Uribe, “Maternal-Thinking” 16).

#### **2.2.4 Orality in Colombia**

Another significant aspect of Colombia’s matricentric cultural system is its profoundly oral character, as demonstrated by philologist Diana Carolina Toro Henao’s research. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), oral traditions comprise “living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, including oral histories, proverbs, and storytelling”. In Colombia, the transmission of knowledge remains deeply rooted in the motherline. Orality serves as the primary medium, with wisdom, moral guidance, and collective memory conveyed through the embodied knowledge of mothers and grandmothers.

This oral transmission consolidates matricentric values by anchoring collective memory within maternal figures, who serve as custodians and narrators of communal identity. The influence of the maternal as an organising principle is sustained not only through social structures but also through daily acts of orality, which integrate individuals into networks of kinship and historical affiliation. In this way, orality functions as both medium and mechanism for the persistence of matricentric logics in Colombian society.

This foundation now permits a more detailed analysis of the cultural artefacts through three key analytical tools from cultural studies.

#### **2.3. Analytical Tools: Metaphor, Spatiality, and Discourse**

This study employs three analytical tools rooted in the interdisciplinary heritage of cultural studies:

- Metaphor: Extending beyond a mere literary device, metaphor constitutes a fundamental structure of thought that shapes perceptions of reality and reveals the deep, often unspoken, assumptions within a culture (Schreiter 66-70).

- Discourse: As Foucault and Hall note, discourse refers to the systems of representation through which meanings are constructed and power relations negotiated in society.
- Spatiality: Drawing on Massey, spatiality investigates how physical and social spaces are produced and invested with gendered and emotional significance.

Together, these tools elucidate how the maternal is constructed, disseminated, and experienced as social reality within the selected cultural artefacts.

### **3. The Matricentric Map: An Analysis of Colombian Cultural Expression**

This section examines three distinct, yet interconnected, forms of cultural expression. Each is introduced with a concise contextual summary to orient the reader.

#### ***3.1. Foundational Metaphor: The Metaphysical Logic of One Hundred Years of Solitude***

Novelist García Márquez creates drama and suspense in his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by recounting the saga of the Buendía family in Macondo. He utilises magical realism, merging Colombian history with myth. The novel's depiction of solitude, destiny, and intergenerational family ties has become integral to Colombian cultural identity.

Salman Rushdie (1) marvellously illustrates:

As soon as José Arcadio closed the bedroom door the sound of a pistol shot echoed through the house. A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued on in a straight line across the uneven terraces, went down steps and climbed over curbs, passed along the Street of the Turks, turned a corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle at the Buendía house, went in under the closed door, crossed through the parlor, hugging the walls so as not to stain the rugs . . . and came out in the kitchen, where Úrsula was getting ready to crack 36 eggs to make bread. ““Holy Mother of God!” Úrsula shouted.”

Something utterly fantastic is happening here. A dead man's blood acquires a purpose, almost a life of its own, and moves methodically through the streets of Macondo until it comes to rest at his mother's feet. The blood's behavior is “impossible,” yet the passage reads as truthful, the journey of the blood like the journey of the news of his death from the room where he shot himself to his mother's kitchen, and its arrival at the feet of the matriarch Úrsula Igúarán reads as high tragedy: A mother learns that her son is dead. José Arcadio's lifeblood can and must go on living until it can bring Úrsula the sad news. The real, by the addition of the magical, actually gains in dramatic and emotional force. It becomes more real, not less.

García Márquez introduces the foundational metaphor through which Colombian matricentricity acquires cultural meaning. Moving beyond a mere literary device, the novel's metaphorical system operates as a cognitive framework that shapes perception of reality and discloses the deep, often unspoken, assumptions regarding maternal authority within Colombian culture. As a foundational metaphor, it does not simply depict matricentric relationships – it establishes the very terms through which those relationships are comprehended, experienced, and perpetuated.

This is vividly illustrated in what critics such as Rushdie identify as the novel's central image: José Arcadio's blood tracing its path back to Úrsula, signifying a primordial, metaphysical connection between mother and son. This blood metaphor functions as precisely the sort of foundational cognitive structure that renders a cultural construct as natural. By portraying José Arcadio's blood as inevitably returning to Úrsula, García Márquez embeds the idea that the return to the maternal is a cosmic inevitability rather than a matter of choice. This conceptualisation subsequently shapes Colombian understandings of family relationships, personal autonomy, and belonging in society – presenting maternal authority as an inherent aspect of life, rather than a product of cultural creation.

These compelling metaphorical representations illustrate how García Márquez draws upon what Carl Jung identified as archetypal structures (the maternal as nurturing and its shadow as devouring). More significantly, they demonstrate how metaphor operates as a form of cultural production. Úrsula's role as the one who 'remembers the past, warns against its repetitions, and holds the family together through her stories and wisdom' exemplifies how García Márquez's metaphorical framework renders Jung's archetypal patterns culturally specific. The maternal archetype becomes accessible to Colombian consciousness through García Márquez's distinctive use of metaphor, which does not simply mirror Jung's universal patterns but actively shapes the particular ways in which Colombians experience and interpret matricentric authority.

My initial apprehension towards Colombian mothers now seems to reflect an awareness of this archetypal pattern of maternal control, evident in situations where adults consume more food than they desire simply because their mother insists, in circumstances where 'saying no was not an option'. Much like Úrsula's authority over the Buendía family, this form of everyday maternal power functions as both care and limitation.

Thus, García Márquez's metaphorical system demonstrates how foundational metaphors operate as cultural mechanisms – they do not merely reflect existing matricentric patterns but actively contribute to constructing and sustaining them as social reality. This metaphorical framework serves as a lens through which many Colombians interpret the 'deep, often unstated

assumptions' about maternal centrality that structure their social imagination, illustrating how literature functions as one of the three analytical tools – metaphor, discourse, and spatiality – that reveal how 'the maternal is constructed, circulated, and lived as social reality'.

### **3.2. Public Discourse: Juanes and the Circulation of the Maternal Anchor**

Juanes is a renowned Colombian singer-songwriter known for fusing rock, pop, and Latin rhythms with socially engaged lyrics. His work explores themes such as love, peace, family, and national identity.

Juanes's status as a globally recognised cultural ambassador is shaped by his use of powerful symbols of Colombian identity. His discourse, expressed through music and public reflections on his mother and wife (see Hernández), consistently invokes the maternal figure, a strategy that resonates profoundly within the country's matricentric social structure. This is evident in the metaphorical equivalence he constructs in "La Tierra": "*Ama la tierra en que naciste, / Ámala es una y nada más, / A la mujer que te parió, / Ámala es una y nada más*" (***Love the land where you were born, / Love her, she is the one and only, / The woman who gave birth to you, / Love her, she is the one and only***). The parallel imperatives merge the concepts of homeland and mother through a classic nationalist motif, presenting the mother as the primary, singular source of identity.

Yet, Juanes complicates this traditional symbolism through his incisive social commentary. His seminal anti-war anthem, "Fíjate Bien," presents a more radical perspective. In lamenting the victims of Colombia's armed conflict, he utilises a striking synecdoche: "*Son los niños, son los viejos. / Son las madres, somos todos caminando*" (*It's the children, the elderly. / It's the mothers, it is all of us walking*). By listing "*las madres*" as the final vulnerable group before expanding to "all of us," Juanes not only includes mothers, but also positions them as emblematic of the entire displaced and suffering nation.<sup>14</sup> They are not merely victims among others but the very embodiment of collective trauma and resilience.

This framing goes beyond domestic boundaries, presenting mothers as key figures in the public and political realms of conflict and peacebuilding. While Juanes's discourse draws on familiar familial imagery, it also seeks to broaden the mother's symbolic role. He draws upon her cultural legitimacy to

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<sup>14</sup> According to Ibáñez et al., in 2020, Colombia had the largest population of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the world, estimated at 8.2 million people, equivalent to 16% of the Colombian population and 17% of IDPs worldwide.

convey a vision in which her strength is not only emotional but also deeply social and political, subtly questioning the limitations of even a matricentric framework by placing her suffering, endurance and resilience at the heart of the national narrative.

Juanes' prayer-song "*A Dios Le Pido*" reveals perhaps the most intimate dimension of his matricentric discourse, where the vulnerability of the maternal figure becomes a central anxiety within the context of Colombian violence. In this deeply personal petition to God, the singer's hierarchy of concerns demonstrates the cultural primacy of maternal preservation: among his fundamental requests – for spiritual awakening, for paternal memory – the plea "*que mi madre no se muera*" (*that my mother not die*) serves as a stark recognition of mortality's threat to the matricentric foundation. This direct engagement with the prospect of maternal death mirrors the broader Colombian reality, in which violence persistently endangers those who function as emotional and social anchors. Unlike the more abstract nationalist symbolism of "*La Tierra*" or the collective representation found in "*Fijate Bien*", Juanes here renders the matricentric discourse intensely personal, converting public cultural work into private prayer.

This anxiety regarding maternal loss acquires greater significance when considered within Colombia's relational frameworks, where mothers are fundamental to all social bonds. My observation that 'becoming close to someone frequently meant that their mother became part of the relational package' reveals why Juanes' prayer for maternal preservation resonates not only as a fear of personal loss, but also as a concern for the potential unravelling of social cohesion. The song therefore illustrates how the reverence for motherhood in Colombian culture is accompanied by a persistent sense of vulnerability and apprehension – the recognition that the "powerful social glue" of matricentricity remains at constant risk due to the violence that pervades the very society it sustains.

### **3.3. Lived Spatiality: The Female-Centric World of Jericó, el Infinito Vuelo de los Días**

Colombian director Catalina Mesa's poetic documentary, *Jericó, el Infinito Vuelo de los Días*, depicts the lives of women in the Andean town of Jericó, thoughtfully constructing a female-centred communal world grounded in matrilineal ties and maternal wisdom. Positioned at the intersection of documentary and fiction, the film serves as a kaleidoscope of intimate portraits, focusing particularly on the figures of women – many of them mothers – who serve as pillars of this community. Through a sensitive and musical itinerary, it weaves together their encounters and conversations, revealing their life stories, inner spaces, humour, and intergenerational wisdom. In doing so, it provides a profound cinematic portrayal of the

*marianismo* and *familiarismo* that support this social fabric. Beyond merely showing women inhabiting space, the documentary presents them as active agents who generate spatiality through orality, embodied knowledge, and subtle forms of resistance.

Mesa's camera dwells on moments where the production of space becomes apparent: the embroidery circle, where memory and narrative intertwine as fluidly as thread; the rooftop, where prayer transforms solitude into sacred ground; the kitchen, where humour and storytelling connect generations; and the tango performance, which reimages the living room as a stage. This dynamic reflects feminist geographer Doreen Massey's argument that space is not a neutral backdrop but is continually shaped through social relations. Each scene reveals how women, as cultural and spiritual anchors of Colombian society, transform domestic and communal environments into living geographies of resilience and belonging. In this way, *Jericó* visually conveys the matricentric foundation of Colombian culture, realised through women's agency and relational practices that shape both space and social continuity.

#### **4. The Triangulation of a Cultural System and its Empirical Implications**

To illustrate how this cultural mapping is expressed in lived experience, the analysis now turns to empirical data from Rheinbolt-Uribe's dissertation research interviews, focusing on seven Colombian participants who are grassroots congregants in the case study congregation. The triangulation of García Márquez's metaphor, Juanes's discourse, and Mesa's spatiality formed a vital analytical framework for interpreting these narratives, showing how the 'matricentric map' functions not only in cultural products but also in the everyday negotiation of identity, authority, and belonging.

This analytical lens proved instrumental in identifying the persistent "maternal thread" running through the interview data, a finding substantiated quantitatively by the fact that the words "mother", "mom", and "maternal" appeared over 270 times (Rheinbolt-Uribe, "Transforming Mutuality" 137). This quantitative result echoes García Márquez's characterisation of Úrsula as the 'structuring principle' of the novel; in the participants' narratives, maternal references likewise shaped their understanding of faith, identity, and social relationships. The frequency of these references parallels Juanes's strategy of elevating 'las madres' to symbolise the entire nation, as participants consistently referred to maternal figures as foundational to their experience. This pattern also aligns with Mesa's focus on women creating spaces for resilience and belonging, demonstrating its real-world relevance.

#### **4.1.1 From García Márquez's Metaphor to Mario's "Big Void"**

One participant, Mario, describes a “big void” in his maternal relationship (Rheinbolt-Uribe, “Transforming Mutuality” 138), a portrayal that powerfully echoes García Márquez’s metaphysical logic. In the same way that José Arcadio’s blood must retrace its route to Úrsula to fulfil a symbolic cycle, Mario’s narrative reveals the significant rupture that arises when the matricentric bond is broken. His mother’s position as a university professor in the 1960s, challenging gender stereotypes, may have paradoxically produced the very absence that García Márquez’s magical realism proposes is culturally unthinkable.<sup>15</sup>

#### **4.1.2 From Juanes's Discourse to Juan's Independence Paradox**

Another of the participants, Juan, disclosed that he felt compelled to inform his mother of his whereabouts, despite his financial independence (Rheinbolt-Uribe, “Transforming Mutuality” 138). This sentiment directly reflects the cultural logic expressed in Juanes’ “La Tierra”: ‘Love the land where you were born... [and] the woman who gave birth to you’. This participant’s lived experience illustrates how Juanes’s discourse functions not merely as artistic expression but as a cultural script that positions maternal accountability as central to identity, even when it may conflict with adult autonomy.

#### **4.1.3 From Jericó's Spatiality to Grandmother Narratives**

The central role of several grandmothers in the participants’ narratives demonstrates the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, a dynamic also depicted in Mesa’s Jericó. As cultural and spiritual anchors within their communities, these women reshape domestic and communal spaces, fostering resilience and a sense of belonging (Rheinbolt-Uribe, Fazel; Rheinbolt-Uribe, “Transforming Mutuality” 137-138).

#### **4.1.4 The Shadow Side of the Maternal**

However, the empirical data also exposes the darker aspects of matricentric authority that the cultural texts merely allude to. As Rheinbolt-Uribe and Fazel demonstrate, another participant, Sara, recounts her grandmother’s physical abuse of her husband, while Esteban describes his own childhood sexual abuse by a female caregiver. These accounts reveal how the ‘feminine spatiality’ valorised by Mesa can serve as a locus of violence rather than refuge. Sara’s account further indicates that such patterns of harm may be perpetuated ‘from one pair of hands to another’ across generations. This unsettling dimension corresponds with the ‘profound social tensions’ evident on Mother’s Day, implying that the same cultural system responsible for producing García

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<sup>15</sup> Among the participants, Mario was a clear outlier. His description of a distant maternal relationship contrasted sharply with the intensely close bonds recounted by everyone else.

Márquez's metaphysical bonds and Juanes's unifying discourse can also give rise to the conditions for its transgression.

These narrative patterns are consistent with my earlier ethnographic observations of Colombian matricentric authority – from the 'forced feeding' scenarios illustrating maternal power within the domestic sphere, to the enduring presence of mothers within the social fabric observed over three decades. The empirical findings therefore affirm that Colombian cultural products do not simply depict matricentricity; they actively shape the frameworks through which Colombians perceive and navigate maternal relationships. The participants' accounts reveal how García Márquez's metaphorical use of magical realism, Juanes's public discourse, and Mesa's representations of feminine spatiality function as lived cultural scripts, influencing everything from adult autonomy to intergenerational trauma. This substantiates the paper's central argument that matricentricity operates as a 'powerful discursive engine' – one that generates both profound connection and significant constraint, fostering resilience as well as vulnerability.

## **5. Contributions to Cultural Studies**

This article illustrates the convergence of metaphor, discourse, and spatiality in constructing and sustaining Colombian matricentricity as a dynamic cultural system. It responds to Woo's (314) call for "theoretically and empirically engaged research grounded in actually existing culture", while also exemplifying Hall's vision of cultural studies as an interdisciplinary project that connects theory with lived experience.

By applying cultural analysis to empirical data, this study advances cultural studies by:

- Mapping a gendered social system embedded in everyday meaning-making,
- Demonstrating the ways in which cultural products both reflect and shape social realities,
- Providing a model for triangulation of autoethnography, historical scholarship, and cultural texts in analysis.

### **5.1. Nuance and Complexity**

While this discussion has examined the organising force of matricentricity in Colombian culture, it is essential to recognise its complex and ambivalent character. The veneration of maternal centrality may obscure potential drawbacks. The disturbing violence experienced on Mother's Day demonstrates how this reverence coexists with significant social tensions. In addition, the concentration of authority within the domestic sphere, although it can foster cohesion, may also facilitate oppressive dynamics – such as

emotional manipulation, coercive caregiving, or the restriction of autonomy for children and dependents. Therefore, while matricentricity provides important social cohesion and identity, it can also restrict individual agency and perpetuate hierarchy within the very space it seeks to empower.

### **5.2. Future Research**

Experiences of matricentricity are shaped by social locations such as class, race/ethnicity, and regional context. For Indigenous women, Afro-Colombian women, or women residing in urban informal settlements, the demands and expressions of maternal centrality interact with histories of racial marginalisation, economic precarity, and both national and international migration. Although this paper addresses dominant representations, future research should investigate how matricentric systems are variously experienced, contested, or reconfigured across different social locations.

I propose that future research examining the relationship between violence and matricentricity in Colombia can build upon the comprehensive theoretical and conceptual framework established here.

### **5.3. Limitations**

The present analysis examines three illustrative cases – a novel, a singer-songwriter, and a documentary film. These artefacts convey only certain aspects of the metaphorical, discursive, and spatial facets of Colombian matricentricity. Although these examples were chosen for their cultural significance and analytical depth, they do not represent the full spectrum of maternal expressions in Colombian cultural production. Further research should broaden this exploration to encompass a wider array of genres, regional distinctions, and embodied practices, thereby advancing comprehension of how matricentricity functions within and across social domains and in the context of globalisation.

## **6. Conclusion**

The paper therefore concludes that, within the Colombian context, matricentricity functions as a potent discursive mechanism shaping collective memory, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and national resilience, while also encompassing the inherent tensions and paradoxes – between veneration and constraint, power and violence – that define its complexity. By conceptualising matricentricity as a dynamic force, this analysis offers a vital framework for interpreting not only Colombia's past and present, but also the shifting contours of its social future.

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