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## **Review of Cultural Studies; The Main Character from Murakami's Novel *Shikisai wo Motanai Tsukuru Tazaki***

**Zuli Laili Isnaini, Dini Budiani, Noni Aulia**

Japanese Education Program, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education (FKIP)

Universitas Riau

Email: zuli.laili@lecturer.unri.ac.id

**Abstract:** Cultural studies explores not only various concepts of cultures, tagging, representation, pop cultural, but also ideology, hegemony, text, active audience, subjectivity, discuss issues of subjectivity, identity, ethnicity, and subcultural. This article shows that ijime is a process for Japanese teenagers to become survive for their struggle and pain. Tsukuru is a main character in Murakami's novel stumbling into her meaningless existence as a human and social community. The social construction of the "uchi and soto" in community system of Japan are not able to eradicate ijime, more ever practice of ijime is thought to be a processes of independence or maturity for a person.

**Keywords:** cultural studies, ijime, "uchi and soto system", and social construction.

### **1. Introduction**

Undoubtedly, literary works are created as ideas and experience of their authors written in the forms of fiction. However, literary works can also be created as the reflection of society in their epoch, or as a telescope to see the history and the future of society. There are many kinds of literary works written in the form of novel, poems, poetry, rhymes, romances, and short stories. All of them are manifestation of experience in the form of description of events, description of psychological state, and the source of inspiration for the readers. Conflicts and tragedies portrayed within literary works lead the readers to realize that it may take place in the real life and may be experienced by the readers.

Novel is written various genres such as comedy, family, romance, friendship, hostility, and etc. Furthermore, novel also has constructing elements within it. Those elements are intrinsic elements. One of those elements recount about the behaviour of the characters. The personality of the main character is related to the plot and setting. The presence of characters who interact one another within a novel also invokes conflict in the relationship of characters and groups of characters. This factor invokes conflict which influences inner conflict of a character or between characters.

Inner conflict is caused by the difference of faith, desire, choice, hope, and thought within a character. The similar thing is stated by Nurgiantoro (2009:119) who states that it is a conflict emerging in the heart and soul of characters of a story. Wellek and Warren in Nurgiantoro (2009:122) states that conflict could be dramatic and then it manifests itself as a strategic point in delivering the message from the author to the readers (2009:167).

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Literary works written by Harumi Murakami (born in 1949) always reflect psychological burden of a character who is urged or meets contradiction from the outside. Some of his works are phenomenal and have a mixture of global culture, although he does not leave his own culture. Furthermore, his works also show how the characters within those works search for their identity. From his 13 novels and dozens of short stories which has been published, all of them are realist, and Norwegian wood or *Norwei no Mori* (1987) made him famous as a well-known novelist in his own country. His 13 novel which is entitled *Shikisai o Motonai Tazaki Tsukuru to, Kare no Junrei no Toshi* (2013) has been translated into English with the title: *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* and in 2018 it was published in Bahasa Indonesia by Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia (KPG). This paper will contain my research which applies *cultural studies* approach on this novel – whose title will be abbreviated to SMT.

In SMT, the time setting is modern era which portrays life of the middle class in Japan. It depicts the life of a character who is busy with his routine in a big city in Japan. A rat race full of rigid schedules and life in big city with various hard demands lead the character to long for his past. However, the longing of the main character for his past is something that affects his own personal life. Psychologically, the main character whose name is Tsukuru always remembers his friendship with his 4 friends in highschool. It was a very close and intimate friendship, but suddenly without any clear reason his friend stayed away from him and excommunicated him. A long-time fostered friendship faded after he met one of his best friend named Yuzuki Shirane, a female among 4 males in that friendship circle. That meeting happened when he worked as an engineer in a subway company. Since then the friendship of those 5 people was not as beautiful as before. A few years after that, Tsukuru is shunned by his 3 male friends and Yuzuki is found dead. Ever since, this main character faces various psychological burdens in his life which affect his personal life, feels like death.

Like the plots in the other Murakami's works, the plot in this novel can be seen in the real life, it is something that happens around us. A mysterious yet easy-to-guess plot can be found all over the story. Tsukuru, just like the other members of society in Japan, is portrayed as a rigid character, though having his dream career, his loneliness and his empty life in the midst of big city life can not be covered by his experience in his past; that a warm friendship in the past is different from the life of middle class worker in Japan.

The despair within Tsukuru's life makes him trying to end his life for 6 months, one of the causes is loneliness and a feeling of being isolated that is triggered by his past experience and he can not explain. The main character's problem with his inner conflict is related with the psychological aspect of the main character. However, the cultural and social factors covering the plot become the background of decision taken by the main character in his every step. Instead of relating to the character's psychology, this research is related to study of its cultural background. Social space related to the saturation resulted from the external culture is able to affect the main character's life, so that the trace of isolation or bullying affects the main character's life.

## 2. Methodology

Known as a multidisciplinary study, this realm never questions the method applied in the research, but it refers to use qualitative methods focusing on extracting and studying cultural meaning. Generally, it has 3 types of methods as follow.

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- a. Ethnography is used to study experience and practices in everyday life related to culture. Ethnography can also be apprehended as re-describing the world by providing new initiative which enriches our culture through creative ideas (Barker, 2004:65). Ethnography is applied by using observation, deep interview, and lived-in. in that category, a field research is usually used in order to obtain data from the perspective of the researcher and the subject being studied as the complement of the qualitative data.
  - b. Textual approach through analytical framework and understanding of semiotics, post-structuralism, and deconstruction. Within this approach, post-structuralism gives the widest influence, one of them is a concept called defference; identity is a constructed discourse. It means that identity is not a static and natural reflection of reality of life but as a process of “being” (Barker, 1999; 28). In this case, cultural studies perceives identity as an entity full of conflicts or dislocation.
  - c. Hermeneutics to study the audience’s reception or the meaning intended by the author. In hermeneutics, the textual meaning is able to keep the meaning constructed by the readers but suppresses the interactive relationship between a text and its readers. A text is able to construct meaning and able to guide the readers, but it cannot fix the meaning as a result of oscillation between text and the readers’ imagination.

In this article will be analyzed by textual approach in hermeneutics study framework.

### **2.1. Theoretical Framework**

It is not easy to define cultural studies, but Storey (1996) defines it as a set of method or theory which has not yet been fully defined because there have not yet been specific theories and methods in this realm. In line with the previous opinion, Barker (2002) remarks that cultural studies has not had the limitation of study yet inasmuch as cultural studies is multidisciplinary. Furthermore, Stuart Hall in his book *Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies* (2001) perceives that this study has various discourses whose backgrounds are the roots of different histories which have many paths. Nevertheless, cultural studies is important in apprehending theories and their frames. Those theories and comprehension could be a combination of Marxism, Post-Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Structuralism, Positivism, Post-Colonialism, Structural Functionalism, Deconstruction, and Post-Modernism such as Lyotard, Baudrillard, and James (Barker, 2004; Storey, 2008; in Pujo Sakti, 2014).

### **2.2. Basic Assumption**

Within cultural studies, culture has a very important role as a political object rather than as an aesthetic object. Culture is not something limited, but it is a development of spirituality and intellectuality, and it is apprehended as a text. In this realm, text does not merely refer to writing, but it also refers to cultural products. According to Richard Johnson (1996), in the realm of cultural studies, text is studied for the sake of the text itself, yet the main objective of cultural studies is not the text itself but the social purpose of objective forms in every moment of the articulation of a text. John Frow and Morris in Puji (20014) remark that text is not a place where meaning is constructed in one layer of inscription like writing, speech, movie, clothes, and etc. However, text works in several layers.

Placing culture within the theory of production and social reproduction, cultural studies is able to explain that cultural forms have a role in extending social domination or fighting against domination. It is can be conceived that cultural studies analyzes society as a series of antagonistic and hierarchical social relation marked by oppression towards subordinate class, gender, race, ethnic, and nation (Kellner, 2000:396 in Puji, 2014:23).

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### 2.3. Object of the Research

The object of the research in cultural studies explores a variety of concepts such as culture, structuration, representation, political culture, positionality, cultural materialism, non-reductionism, social formation, articulation, power, identity, and discourse formation (Barker, 2003). The main focus consists of various meanings and representation constructed by the mechanism of structuration within the context of human activity, construction and consequence, and problems related to structure since structuration is constructed by structure and virtual institution (Barker, 2002).

Stuart Hall has different opinion. He states that not only is cultural studies an actual arena and practice, representation, language, and custom of the whole society, but it is also related to practice, institution, and system of classification, values of belief, and the routines of life, and also the habit of society. The central theme and object of cultural studies (Baker, 2009) are issues of subjectivity, identity, ethnicity, race, nation, gender, television, text, audience, cultural space, urban space, life style, subculture, and cultural policy.

### 3. Result And Discussion

Before discussing this novel from the perspective of cultural studies, its synopsis will be presented first. When he was in senior high school Tsukuru Tazaki had best friends consists of two males: Akamatsu (red pine) and Oumi (blue sea) and two females: Shirane (white root) and Kurono (black field). On the other hand, Tsukuru Tazaki's name has no meaning related to color. During high school until graduation day, Tsukuru never had problems and conflict with his four friends. At the time when he was in university in Tokyo, he had conflict with his best friends and four of them did not want to be his best friend just like before. His four best friends attended university in Nagoya, the city where four of them were born and it was only Tsukuru who left Nagoya in order to continue his study.

Every time he came back to Nagoya during holiday, Tsukuru always asked his friends to meet up, and so did his friends who always waited for him to come back and asked him to have reunion or just to meet up and to have conversation. With unknown reason, since the third semester, Tsukuru's friends stayed away from him and did not want to meet him until Tsukuru graduated from university and worked in a railway company in Tokyo.

#### 3.1. Concept of *Uchi and Soto* in Japanese Society as a form of Cultural Materialism

The meaning of *uchi* in Japanese language is close, deep, closed, in heart, and personal home. In line with what is found in Kokujiten (1993:144) it is *mono no naka* (something inside), *kokoro no naka* (something in heart), in this light it can be defined as someone belonging to a family or a group who is governed by a social structure and within the family or the group to which this someone belongs to there is a leader governing that group and it is approved based on the social structure within it. In this context, it means that a wife is a part of *uchi* of a family who lives under one roof. Furthermore, an employee is also *uchi* of a company. Needless to say, *soto* in Japanese language is *hoka*, *hazusu*, and *seito dehanai mono* which mean outside, strange, far, and not belong to the same part. In the context of Japanese culture, wife's sister is not a part wife's *uchi*. It is because of the context of patriarchal society which believes that wife's sister is an outsider of his married sister's household. In this light, the social construction of Japanese society does not accept strangers in certain contexts though they have genealogical relationship.

Japanese groups themselves with the people around them based on certain criteria such as educational level, occupation, and etc. because of those factors, being acknowledged by certain group in the society becomes the main priority for an individual in order to get his or her identity. When someone is acknowledged by a group in the society, at that time he or she becomes fully human. Since childhood, Japanese has been taught a social principle called *shuudan ishiki* (集団意識) or in other words a consciousness to live within group (Nakane Chie, 1984: 8).

In this novel, the author described about the sadness and life problems faced by the main character, Tsukuru. Tsukuru is a single with an established career coming from a reputable family, but he is merely busy with his job. As the result, other than his working environment, he has no relationship with other social cultures. Just like the life of Japanese society in general, routines with job in one of big cities in Japan, Tokyo, scheduled life, rat race, and individual life outside working hours. Tazaki is an *uchi* (part of group) of the Railway Company, but he becomes *soto* for his high school friends, without knowing the reason. Beautiful relationships that he has built up have ended and as the result it really affects his life now. He often wakes up from his nightmares and finds himself in a big hole, ready to fall. This condition makes him wishing to end his life by committing suicide. His life is empty, meaningless and hopeless. Here are some quotes that show Tsukuru despair.

つくるは死の胃袋に落ち、暗く淀んだ空洞の中で日付を持たぬ日々を送ったのだ。

“Tsukuru falls to the womb of death, lives his life within a dark and boring emptiness”. (Murakami, 2013:6).

The next quote

彼の前には暗い淵が大きな口を開け、地球の芯にまでまっすぐ通じていた。

“In front of him, a dark deepness opens its mouth widely, leading right to the core of the Earth.” (Murakami, 2013:7).

From those two quotes, it is obvious that Tsukuru is affected by the circumstance in which he is an outsider even though he has his *uchi* in his working place. It seems like he falls to the womb of the death and emptiness and it is proved by his attempt to commit suicide several times. For him, the emptiness in living his life without any friend and social relation outside his working environment feels like a doomsday and a dark world. By the same token, every time he has a dream, the only thing he feels is the darkness in the core of the Earth, giving him an image of death room. Death is a decision that is able to erase his pains and despair affecting his life.

The identity of the main character is described by Murakami as someone wasted and alienated by the social concept of Japanese society with the presence of *uchi* and *soto*. However, the deals between social relations in this novel show that social relation can distort the weak ones. Tsukuru is wasted and he feels himself is on the edge of the death and darkness when he cannot get those relationships back. For Japanese, relation is something that has values in the form of identity and entity. It will be acknowledged if it is owned by certain groups or owns certain group. It is just like when someone is asked about his identity, he or she will mention his or her family name first or the name of his institution, then his nickname. A lost identity means he or she is nobody, and even not exist, and death is the only best elixir to cure his or her wound.

The next quote

それはあなたという存在そんざい ころを殺すのと同じだから。おな

“It is the same with not acknowledging yourself.” (Murakami, 2013: 46)

That quote is expressed by Sarah to Tsukuru who becomes her boyfriend. It is narrated that Sarah perceived Tsukuru’s personal life which is affected by his past turns him to a lost figure, not admitting his own existence and killing his identity as a human who has a future. The past is indeed something that cannot be erased easily, but life must go on, and Tsukuru tries to kill his past because he does not like his life in the past that affects him until now.

### 3.2. *Ijime* (bullying)

*Ijime* or *ijimeru* is an action of scolding, disturbing, harassing, and cursing. However, in its development it turns to be a violent act towards somebody in the form of excommunicating to oppose somebody. Taki in Taki et al. (2008: 8) writes the definition of *ijime* (bullying) as follow:

“*Ijime* bullying is mean behavior or a negative attitude that has clear intention to embarrass of humiliate others who occupy weaker positions in a same group. It is assumed to be a dynamic used to keep or recover one's dignity by aggrieving others. Consequently, its main purpose is to inflict mental suffering on others, regardless of the form such as physical, verbal, psychological and social.”

In the context of Japanese society, *ijime* is not only physical oppression, but also psychological oppression which starts in the childhood and adolescent year like what happens for a long time at school, college, community, and neighborhood. It differs from violence in fight. Fights do not last long, but *ijime* is a form of intimidation that happens for a long time and the result is a long-time anxiety felt by the victim.

There are two context of *ijime* in Japanese society the first *ijime* refers to physical harassment to the victim, while the second *ijime* refers to a form of social alienation towards the victim. Rationally, *ijime* is a form of impairment towards the victim’s dignity done systematically by neglecting, alienating, excluding, and eschewing the victim. This behavior covers hidden attitudes such as aggressive gaze, sigh, shudder, mocking laugh, and rude body language.

Tsukuru undergoes a form of alienation that is similar to the meaning of *ijime*. His friends neglect him, his letters are never replied, his phone calls are never answered, and even the person who answers the phone is his friends’ families, it seems like they feel disgusted and respond in a cold manner. Undoubtedly, those things are not usual considering the families of his friends know about their friendship. For Tsukuru, it is really odd if his friends’ families also neglect him, it seems that he has gone to the bad from his happy adolescent years.

There are many suicide cases in Japan that are caused by *ijimeru*, from kids in elementary schools to adolescences in universities. The victims feel that they are excommunicated, verbally, physically, and mentally disturbed. Not only because they are not smart, disabled, or physically ugly but also because they are beautiful, brainy, and popular. In the end, the victims of *ijime* feel inferior and fee that they are nothing till a desire to disappear and die is their only weapon to escape. At this point, families and neighborhoods in universities seem having no significance to prevent suicide caused by *ijime*. Even they tolerate it as a part of social process.

In this novel, Murakami does not depict his family role in protecting him from his depression. In fact his family is a respectable family. It seems like *uchi* system here is out of the relational and correlational life of Tsukuru with his friends though his families live in the same city with his friends who excommunicate him. Once again, it seems that in social relation in Japan *ijime* does not get enough attention from family and the nearest neighborhood. It is similar with suicide cases in schools around Japan caused by *ijime*; the schools seem to be apathetic.

でもとにかく船は進み続け、僕は暗く冷たい水の中から、デッキの明かりがどんと  
とおん遠ながざかっていくのを眺めている

“but the ship keep on sailing forward, from the depth of dark and cold water, I see the light from the deck of moving away ship.” (Murakami, 2013: 330).

Within that quote, Tsukuru feels that his life is gloomy; there is nothing to hold to bring him to the bright world. His life has fallen far to the core of a black hole; there is nothing to hold to help him rise up. The moving-away ship signifies that his hope to continue his life has vanished along with the light from the deck that moves away from him.

Tsukuru’s indifferent family that neglects him is pictured within sentence: there is no one who knows that he has fallen from the ship. The ship signifies his life and this main character feels that his downfall within his depressed and hopeless life is not responded and realized by his family. His family even assumes that Tsukuru does not fall and need help, like what Tsukuru expects.

せんじょう船上せんきやくのだれもせんいん先客もせんいん船員も、僕が海に落ちたことを知らない。

“There is no one who knows that I fall from the ship, the only one that knows I fall is the ocean.” (Murakami, 2013: 330).

Once again it proves that in the social context of Japanese society, Murakami shows that the family’s role in *ijime* case is not significant. Socially, Japanese families teach their children to be independent and though emotionally, psychologically, and physically. Since they are in kindergarten or elementary school, children have been taught to obey social concession including public rules and respecting their parents.

Educational world seem like a place to educate them mentally to follow the social consequences of public rules, like queuing in supermarket and obeying the traffic rules. The question is: Are *uchi* and *soto* social constructions in Japanese society or is it only “pacifier” of certain group but are not applied to *ijime* cases in schools, even though the students are part of *uchi* system of the schools. In Tsukuru’s case, he feels that he is no longer a part of his family’s *uchi* system, and his family is no longer a safe place to lean back and take refuge from his adolescent friends’ *ijime*.

The assumption that *ijime* in the social intercourse among the Japanese adolescences is a form of maturation and a process to be mature and tough in order to face the tight and harsh life in Japan is not fabrication at all. If so, Murakami is successful in showing that *ijime* in Tsukuru’s case is a form of tolerance outside *uchi* system which is always glorified as one of the Japanese social constructions used as safety fort.

#### 4. Conclusion

*Uchi* and *soto* system cannot guarantee safety for the individual who becomes the victim of *ijime*. Cultural studies is able to show that independence for Japanese adolescence is not apart from the struggle to face pain and the feeling of being slumped. Murakami describes Tsukuru as

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someone who has no entity as a social being because of *ijime* in his life. Excommunication committed by a group of his friends affects Tsukuru's gloomy life until he is in his adulthood. Social construction and *uchi* system in Japanese society cannot wipe *ijime* out. It seems like *ijime* is indeed a part of life process in human life, in order to be strong to face the harsh life.

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