Japanese Dichotomies and the Individual Identity in Haruki Murakami's *Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki*

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ABSTRACT

Japanese indigenous terms such as *uchi*/*soto* (inside/outside) and *omote*/*ura* (front/back) are common dichotomies employed to understand the differences between expected behaviours associated with group dynamics such as promoting collective harmony rather than individual uniqueness. Haruki Murakami advocates that the Japanese need to move away from these dichotomies in order to embrace the true self and assert an individual voice. This dictum comes after he concluded his observations on the tragic 1995 sarin gas attacks in Japan and noted that individuals should be more assertive in forming their own voice rather than conforming to the collective voice. In his latest novel, *Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2014), he presents a new narrative on individual negotiations with group consciousness. This article seeks to reveal the sense of individuality presented through the frame of the Japanese dichotomies and the psychological response of the main character, Tsukuru. The character will be analysed in relation to the group that he belongs to: in the context of the Japanese *uchi* (inside) or *soto* (outside) and within each context, representations of his *omote* (front) or *ura* (back) is examined. The findings expose that both *uchi* and *soto* are significant in developing individuality. More importantly, how the individual responds while in these contexts determines his ability to construct his identity. This reading suggests that Murakami fulfills his agenda by empowering the individual to explore various ways in being independent. The novel also indicates that the Japanese society is gradually manifesting a growing sense of individuality by departing from its codes of group consciousness.

Keywords: identity; Japanese dichotomies; group consciousness; *uchi*/*soto*; Haruki Murakami

INTRODUCTION

The Japanese society is orientated towards double codes that dictate many facets of Japanese life. Sugimoto (2014) explains that for the Japanese, there is a distinction between regimented behaviour that is portrayed on the outside which also abides to the norms of society, versus real or actual behaviour that may be improper in public but accepted privately. These concepts were practiced in the past and strengthened during the Meiji period of 1868-1912. The roots of this practice can be traced to the ancient system of *ie* which is patriarchal in nature, where the male dominated the family and individual members were required to ensure

harmony, thus rendering individual opinions as void (Davies & Ikeno, 2011). There are several sets of paired terms which are commonly expressed in the Japanese language. Among these are *uchi*/*soto* (inside/outside) and *omote*/*ura* (front/back). These paired terms are used to signify appropriate behaviour in a given context (Kuwayama, 1992).

The Dentsu Institute for Human Studies conducted a survey in 2000 in several countries to compare the Japanese orientation towards values (Kamijo et al., 2001). The study reports that the Japanese people embody peculiar behavioural aspects not found in people in other parts of the world. They explain that the Japanese would rather maintain harmony than assert their own opinion to avoid conflict, evade criticism, and prefer to blend in a group than be conspicuous. These behaviours were similarly identified by expatriate teachers in Japanese universities who observed that interactions in the classroom were inhibited as students feared being opinionated (Zawiah, 2015). The Dentsu have been consistent since 1996. However, they postulate that changes may occur in future as the younger generation indicated a desire to exert individuality.

The Dentsu report was published six years after Japan was shaken by two tragedies in 1995: the Kobe earthquake and the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack that compromised the trust between people and disrupted harmony in the society. Haruki Murakami ventured to understand Japan more extensively through the latter tragedy by interviewing people involved in it. The attack was masterminded by Shoko Asahara, the leader of a religious cult named AUM Shinrikyo. Murakami (2003) observed that "there was a marked change in the Japanese consciousness "before" and "after" these events" (p. 206). He claims that the events revealed the gaps in the Japanese structure of common values, as society became aware of their own limitations compounded by the lack of a supportive system. Murakami urges for a change in mind-set moving from the dichotomy of "us" versus "them", to embracing the tragedy as a part of "our" misdoing. Murakami advocates that the Japanese need to move away from the indigenous dichotomies employed by culture to more diverse pathways in understanding behaviour. By doing so, careful introspection is required by each individual to understand the self and the role played by the self in advocating these catastrophes, in particular the sarin gas attacks. He explains that the lessons learnt are two-fold; firstly, through Asahara's action, it is evident that individuals can be easily manipulated to become voiceless when their sole purpose is to obey the group codes without question. This raises the concern of losing individual will. Secondly, rather than being judgemental of these voiceless individuals, the unacceptable representations seen in others need to be acknowledged as "a distorted image of ourselves in a manner none of us could have foreseen" (p. 198). Murakami suggests that there is a need to confront the "dark elements from the face [in the mirror] that we want to see" (p. 199). His focus is to show how a new narrative can be created by the individual in facing these realities and empowering the self to be independent.

Through the novel, *Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2014), hereafter *Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki*, Murakami portrays the workings of the inner mind which is eventually translated into exerting individuality at the expense of disrupting group consciousness. The responsibility is shifted from the group to the individual in challenging the self to question the role of group consciousness and what the individual does to negotiate it. In this way, Murakami seeks to erase the boundary that separates "us" from "them" in order to empower the individual to find his own identity.

Critics have established that Murakami's works have consistently focused on the soul of the individual, depicted through internal interrogations with the self. However, to what extent these works are dedicated to the Japanese society in building shared values to address contemporary challenges, remains questionable. Dil (2010), using *Kafka on the Shore* as an example, argues for the value of the therapeutic approach reflected in Murakami's works, by delineating its significance in relation to the Japanese history and context. The novel, he

suggests, represents the angst of youth in a society beset by competitive education and work systems and therefore it works to offer alternative ways to deal with it. He also states that the novel, although not fully committed to shaping the moral vision, is part of a larger framework that Murakami is constructing in addressing his commitment to the Japanese society.

Yamada (2009) in his readings of *Sputnik Sweetheart, Kafka on the Shore* and *After Dark* postulates that Murakami more evidently portrays the workings of society with the intention of creating awareness of the threats it faces from institutionalised systems such as politics, society and religion. He does this by appropriating the behaviour of Asahara, the infamous cult leader, to reflect the abandonment of identity. He draws parallels between Asahara and the narrator in the novel by discussing the narrator's motive for offering shared perspectives. He postulates that Murakami does this to prove that others have the ability to curb one's independence. As an example, in *Sputnik Sweetheart*, Sumire's story is told by K, therefore what is known about Sumire is through K's voice. Yamada however suggests that Murakami does "give a voice" (p. 22) to individuals to show them how their stories can be heard. He does so by enabling Sumire to share her experiences through the documents she leaves behind.

Strecher (2014) traces the level of commitment that Murakami's protagonists display in understanding the self by indicating that the characters present in current works have moved from vague engagements in self-discovery to individuals who find their own voice in a confident and independent manner. He establishes this argument in his analysis of *Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki* through discussions of Murakami's major motifs, one being the metaphysical realm and its contribution towards the protagonists that "press forward with the process of redefining themselves independently of established convention" (p. 229).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are two main dichotomies that the Japanese society subscribe to and which Japanese children transfer to their adult life. The first pair of duality is *uchi* and *soto*. *Uchi* means inside or home while *soto* means outside or not-home (Wetzel, 1994). A child is brought up in the *uchi* setting of the home and recognises the family as part of the group. In the context of human relationships, the child develops shared identity and a common purpose with members of the same group. When the child ventures into the outside world or society, others who do not belong to the group are labelled as *soto* or outsiders. A clear demarcation is made between those who belong to the group, referred to as "us" and those who are outside, referred to as "them". Groups can be developed in any setting, through structured organisations or common interests. Within the *uchi*, more candid behaviour is prevalent as compared to *soto* settings which will require restrictions (Sato & Cameron, 1999).

The next pair is *omote* and *ura* meaning front and rear, which may be illustrated through a needlework piece. What is seen in the front is an organised image, pleasing to the eye. However what is seen at the back is disorganised patterns. Sugimoto (2014) suggests that *omote* represents the acceptable face, or façade, the patterns one would show others, while *ura,* meaning the mind, signifies the private and intimate thoughts, which are hidden from others. *Omote* and *ura* are complementary, not opposing as a person may shift between both (Doi, 1986). The duality represents the double-consciousness of the Japanese, meaning a person may choose which appearance to show while restraining what not to reveal depending on the situation and context.

Bachnik (1992) suggests that the dichotomies reflect two meanings, firstly they specify self and society and secondly they refer to directional coordinates such as inside/outside and front/back. She further clarifies that these double indicators which are fundamental to the Japanese society are used as organizational coordinates for language and

social life. The Japanese society practices the duality of *uchi/soto* beyond the family group as it is evident in social circles as well as educational and economic institutes. The concept of *omote/ura* is nurtured by this duality which regulates behaviour that is seen on the outside versus what is felt on the inside.

One distinctive behaviour pattern of the Japanese in comparison to the westerners is the emphasis given to group harmony rather than individuals (Davies & Ikeno, 2011). This aspect of Japanese culture is known as *shudan ishike*. Davies and Ikeno explain that when a group is formed, the members create social codes to keep them united. Some of these rules are unspoken as the group is required to understand the non-verbal cues. Loyalty to the group is paramount and members abide by the aims, codes and values dictated by the group to foster group identity. Individuals in the group display behaviour as a group and engage in activities that benefit the group. The sense of solidarity and protection that the group offers nurtures stability in the individual and assurance of acceptance (Yamagishi, 1986). As such, an individual while belonging to an *uchi* will eventually portray *omote* to ensure group harmony.

Tsukamoto et al. (2015), argue that the tendency for Japanese to switch between social contexts causes the individual to have contradictory perceptions of the self. However, the perception of the group they belong to remains constant. They explain that the Japanese individual's self-concept undergoes continuous adjustments which influences behaviours due to these quotidian experiences. The Japanese however, have a consistent perception of the group they belong to because the group is viewed as the foundational unit of social reality in the Japanese society and therefore, is required to be coherent. Triandis (1989) explains that when the group is stable and closely knit, they tend to influence social behaviour which views harmony as paramount. Hence, for the Japanese, constructing a group identity supersedes the need to form an individual identity.

The fact that the individual identity receives little attention is because of the ambiguous term used to refer to the self. Lebra (1992) stipulates that the Japanese have no fixed term for the self, and therefore do not use the pronoun "I" in social interactions. They refer to the self by profession or relationship terms when communicating with another person. A person therefore may refer to the self in various terms according to situations and as Lebra (1992) states, becomes a "non-self". The "non-self" in the Japanese context is interpreted as *jibun ga nai* meaning devoid of self. Due to this notion, the self is always in the act of finding the notion of a self. Since the self, existing in the outside world is in a state of volatility, the inner self volunteers a more accurate representation of the individual. Being aware of the two selves – outward and inward, has led the Japanese culture to acknowledge these duality and have long imbibed the concepts of *uchi/soto* and *omote/ura* to represent what is seen versus what is concealed. Bachnik (1992) explains that these concepts "all share the characteristics of relationality, such that each is defined in relation to the other" (p. 156). A person will need to experience both sides of the term in order to know when and where to execute the acceptable behaviour.

Rosenberger (1989) however points out that the various aspects of self is an on-going process, and due to this, transformations are continual. She suggests that these concepts should not be viewed as dichotomies but rather, as a representation of the religious beliefs centered on nature and the cycle of growth. The outer and inner self are merged to have a better understanding of the self. Bachnik (1992) concurs with this notion and explains that the Japanese self is unable to exist without the environment as it contributes to the presentation of the self. The Japanese mould their personal and social behaviour based on situations that require accepted and ordered behaviour.

The main aim of this study is to identify the influence of the dual concepts of *uchi/soto* and *omote/ura* in the development of the individual's identity. In this study, our

analysis will be designed to explicate the main character Tsukuru within the *uchi* and *soto* that he is situated in. We will explore the role of the in-group and the out-group in developing the individual identity. Within each of these contexts, the inner self (*ura*), represented through the character's thoughts, imaginations and dreams, and the overt actions deemed to reflect the outer self (*omote*) will be analysed.

DISCUSSION

Davies and Ikeno (2011) have established that the *uchi* or in-group creates group identity through common codes for the members to adhere to. While in a group, an individual functions as a self with both *omote* and *ura*. To ensure acceptance, an individual will most likely display *omote* to avoid breaking the code thus causing disharmony. The individual faces conflict when the inner self or *ura* is not in agreement with the group codes. Bachnik (1992) explains that "disciplining one's self for the greater good of the social "whole" does not destroy, but rather develops the self" (p. 166). This is a significant indicator for the individual to identify between the group's need and his own need. The decision on how to behave, while in or out of the group, shapes individual's identity.

   Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki is the story of a 36 year old engineer who after 16 years of rejection, decides to seek out the members of the *uchi* that he belonged to, in order to unveil the reason for his expulsion from the group. The discussion will be divided into three sections indicated through the position that Tsukuru is situated in, in relation to his group. The first stage is when he is situated in the in-group (*uchi*), the second when he is cast out and is situated in the out-group (*soto*) and the final stage when he is situated in the inter-section between the *soto* and the *uchi*. Within all three contexts, the inner workings of the mind (*ura*) and the outer behaviour (*omote*) of Tsukuru and relevant characters will be explicated.

BEING IN THE *UCHI*

Tsukuru grew up in Nagoya and attended a public high school. During his freshman year, he volunteered for a social studies project that involved tutoring young children, and met four schoolmates who had also done so. Due to the similarity in attributes such as age, school and preference in social activities, the five of them naturally formed an *uchi*. As a dynamic *uchi*, they continued to help the children throughout high school and their bond was further strengthened through recreational as well as academic activities. The five of them also came from the same socioeconomic background, with some having fathers who held professional jobs and mothers who were housewives. There were several unspoken codes in the *uchi* group that Tsukuru belonged to. First, the group fostered kinship by calling each other special names. Second, they always did things together as a group of five and third, sexual attraction between group members was forbidden.

   Tsukuru had seamlessly become a part of this *uchi* due to the societal expectations of belonging to a group. However, personally, he struggled to understand why he was accepted into this *uchi*. The *uchi* members were made up of three boys and two girls. All the other members' family names had a colour image unlike his and they soon began to call each other by their monikers; "the boys were called Aka (red) and Ao (blue); and the girls were Shiro (white) and Kuro (black)" (Murakami, 2014, p. 6). Tsukuru was the only one not given a nickname and remained affectionately as Tsukuru. This made him feel that he was the odd one out in the *uchi* and he was dejected and hurt by it. He thought that it would have been ideal if his surname too had a colour: "then everything would be perfect" (Murakami, 2014, p. 6). Tsukuru's *ura* reveals that he regarded the names as a point of commonality to feel a sense of belonging to the group. For him, the name was a more important and meaningful

symbol of connection with the group instead of a superficial indicator. Consequently, Tsukuru doubted his belonging to this group of people. Although the other four were not troubled by this difference, they did tease him about it. Tsukuru nurtured a sense of anxiety within himself, worrying that they would realize his oddity and would easily oust him from the group.

Considering the fact that Tsukuru belonged to a group of "colourful" people, he viewed his difference as an impediment. This is despite the fact that Tsukuru's name means "to make or build" (Murakami, 2014, p. 44). Endowed with a name that invites innovation and the empowerment to create something out of nothing had little significance to Tsukuru. The overt difference that festered in his mind, pushing him to further look into what other inadequacies he had from the others.

Tsukuru continued to dwell on the fact that he was an outcast as he was the "only one in the group without anything special about him" (Murakami, 2014, p. 9). The only thing that appealed to him was train stations but he could not explain the reason for this. Compared to Aka who excelled academically and Ao who was an outstanding sportsman, Tsukuru felt that he was mediocre. The girls, Shiro and Kuro were gifted in music and literature respectively – artistic skills that he did not possess. By constantly comparing himself to the others, Tsukuru could not form a normal perception of himself and wondered "if something wasn't exactly right with him" (Murakami, 2014, p. 11). He was constantly troubled by the thought that although he managed to stay within the boundaries of the mediocre, there was "something about him that wasn't exactly normal, something that set him apart" (Murakami, 2014, p. 11). The inability to solve this contradiction within himself caused him to be plagued by insecurities as he felt that the group did not need him to function as a unit. Tsukuru however did not reveal the struggles he had with his group, as he steadfastly projected his *omote* by showing support for the group.

Tsukuru's *ura,* while being in the *uchi* revealed that although he tried to comply with the pressure of belonging to a group, he could not find within himself a reason for doing so, and nurtured a sense of difference even from the beginning. Apart from the obvious reasons of going to the same school and being in the same social class, Tsukuru tried to look for other more meaningful reasons to belong but could only identify the dissimilarities between himself and the group. By being in this *uchi*, Tsukuru had to restrain his thoughts for the good of the group. This experience built him as it makes him realise that he is different although, at that point, he could not appreciate his own individuality. This is a precursor to other contradictions that Tsukuru faced with the group codes and indicates that Tsukuru was prepared to move from being mentally troubled by his inability to fit in to freely exercising his own desires.

As indicated, the second non-verbal code of the *uchi* that Tsukuru belonged to was to always do things together as a group of five. After high school, Tsukuru decided to study in Tokyo to pursue his ambition to be an engineer. When Tsukuru decides to move out of the perimeters of physical proximity to an unfamiliar place, he took the first step to exert his individuality as it signalled an overt act of breaking away from the group. Tsukuru, who had always doubted his membership in the group subconsciously allowed himself this leeway to think for himself, and prepared a path towards individuality. Although the other four supported his decision to move to Tokyo, they chose to remain in Nagoya. Tsukuru sensed that they did so because they did not want the group to dissolve. Tsukuru however, was determined in his resolve. He felt that the physical distance would not be a barrier to his relationship with the *uchi* as Tokyo was only slightly more than an hour away. Tsukuru's *ura* revealed that the mental connection between him and his friends was more important than the physical proximity. He was determined to keep the group harmony by always thinking about them and vowed to remain loyal to the group.

While he studied in Tokyo, the *uchi* remained intact as Tsukuru reconnected with them every time he returned for the holidays. Due to the assurance of the continuous friendship he had developed with the group, Tsukuru did not find the need to make friends with anyone in Tokyo. Moreover, being in Tokyo overwhelmed him as he could not adapt to the diversity and faster pace of life. He felt secure in the group friendship which was "an orderly, harmonious, intimate place, where time flowed by peacefully, where friends he could confide in eagerly waited for him" (Murakami, 2014, p. 22). Tsukuru by that time was assured that he had been truly accepted even though he had breached the *uchi* code of remaining united. This gave him the confidence to negotiate between exerting his own individuality while still being devoted to the *uchi*.

However, things took an unexpected turn when his best friends all ceased to speak to him during his second year at university. When he returned home during his semester break, he discovered that his four friends had ostracized him. They did not meet him or clarify why they did not want to see or talk to him ever again. Tsukuru, who had wholly depended on the group for security, suddenly felt aimless. When he finally received a call from Ao, he was not given a reason for the sudden rejection by the group. Instead, he was curtly told to "think about it, and you'll figure it out" (Murakami, 2014, p. 28). Tsukuru was left confused and in shock. He did not insist on an explanation but duly abided by the request from the group to stop contacting them. This reveals that his fear of being a cast out from the *uchi* had become a reality and he left Nagoya not wanting to know the truth as he was afraid to face it. By accepting this sentence, he also resigned to the fact that it was more convenient to blame him as he made the decision in wanting to construct his own identity away from the group. He felt guilty that he had acted selfishly while still expecting the group to support him and therefore respected their decision in rejecting him.

BEING IN THE *SOTO*

Tsukuru returned to Tokyo. Although he accepted his friends' decision to oust him from the *uchi* without argument, he was emotionally unprepared for it. Being in the *soto* caused his *ura* to dwell on unhealthy thoughts. He fell into depression and contemplated suicide. The sudden expulsion hurt him deeply as he felt he "had fallen into the bowels of death, one untold day after another, lost in a dark stagnant void" (Murakami, 2014, p. 2). He lost his focus as the group was the centre of his life and now, with no safe place to return to where he was accepted, he felt abandoned. Tsukuru who had trusted his group believed that as a member of the *uchi*, they would have been honest with him, but felt betrayed. Having no hope, his thoughts were constantly on death and, "when he wasn't thinking about death, his mind was blank" (Murakami, 2014, p. 3). Tsukuru stopped functioning productively, shifting between destruction and emptiness and contrary to his name which means to build, he began to destroy his own life because of the unbearable hurt that he bore.

Tsukuru struggled with these thoughts for five months until the emaciated image he saw of himself in the mirror, startled him. At that moment his *ura* is convicted and he realised that he had actually died internally and that the container, meaning his body, remained to give him a chance to be a new person. He also had a strange dream that night which aroused him with jealousy, an emotion that he had never experienced before and which further strengthens his *ura* to accept his situation and build his life again.

The dream was about a woman whom he cannot identify but for whom he "burned with desire" (Murakami, 2014, p. 38). She asked him to choose between her body and heart. He could only have one as she would give the other to another man. But Tsukuru "wanted all of her" (Murakami, 2014, p. 38) and was unwilling to share her. If that was not possible then he did not want any of her. Caught in a confused state, incapable of a decision, "unable to go

forward, unable to go back" (Murakami, 2014, p. 38) Tsukuru was suddenly overcome by an intense pain and rage at the thought of having to give "half of her to someone else" (Murakami, 2014, p. 38). When he woke up, Tsukuru recalled the dream and pondered upon it. The dream which is his *ura*, was the catalyst for him to make the decision to exert his individuality by overcoming rejection. Tsukuru understood that he had to make a choice. The dream had conjured up within him hidden thoughts and feelings that he suppressed during his depression, due to being discarded by his four friends. Tsukuru had been so close to his group of friends that he considered them "an extension of his own body" (Murakami, 2014, p. 30). He knew that he had to choose between the body, which is made up of various parts, symbolically representing the group or the heart, the singular organ which signifies himself. He chose the heart and thereafter, a new desire to live grew in him. This dream gave him the strength to overcome his hurt and he chose to live instead of to mourn the loss of his friends. Although being in the *soto* was initially difficult for Tsukuru to accept, it alters into a constructive situation where he resolved to build on his own identity.

The freedom endowed by being in the *soto* also allowed Tsukuru to explore unrestricted emotions as an individual. His *ura* was freed from the group's third unspoken code, which was avoidance of sexual attraction towards members in the group. While in the *uchi*, Tsukuru abided strictly to this code, ensuring that his *omote* excluded signs of desirability towards both the girls. However, his *ura* could not be controlled and he admits that both girls, Shiro and Kuro, "were appealing in their own way… [and that he was] attracted to them" (Murakami, 2014, p. 18). Tsukuru however, while in the *uchi*, kept his thoughts controlled but when he was unable to, he "always tried to think of them as a pair…like they were a fictitious being. Like a formless, abstract being" (Murakami, 2014, p. 18). Tsukuru, while in the *uchi* was committed to the group code and therefore, ensured that this resolve was stronger than his desire to think of them as separate entities with their own personalities and also because he did not want to favour one over the other.

The sexual desires that Tsukuru had for Shiro and Kuro, which were his true *ura*, becomes more vivid after he was rejected from the group. Tsukuru unconsciously began to exert his individuality by choosing to free himself from the *uchi* rule that forbade him from fantasising about these two girls. Although he vowed never to think about his group after the rejection, the two girls, Shiro and Kuro kept appearing as an inseparable pair and continued to haunt him in his imaginations, leaving him feeling dejected. The pair spontaneously appeared in his imagination every time he masturbated, and appeared regularly in his erotic dreams: Shiro and Kuro naked, entwined around him and arousing him. Tsukuru was incapable of thinking of any other women and this frustrated him into thinking that "something must be blocking the normal flow of emotions, warping my personality" (Murakami, 2014, p. 58). Although Tsukuru was in the *soto* he was still emotionally tied to the group and did not know how to avoid this. Tsukuru's erotic dream becomes more complicated after he met Haida (which means grey), a junior at college whom he bonded with. In the dream, apart from the girls, Haida was now involved in the sexual act. The two girls, black and white have combined to become grey in the form of Haida. The intrusion of an outsider into his intimate dream with the girls from his *uchi*, was a stark revelation to Tsukuru that the unspoken code of the *uchi* is a self-imposed restriction. As such, the dream propelled Tsukuru to muster courage to transfer his sexual desires from imagination and dreams into reality. He was thereafter determined to engage in an actual physical intimacy by having his first sexual relationship with a woman four years older than him to "prove to himself that he wasn't gay, that he was capable of having sex with a real woman, not just in his dreams" (Murakami, 2014, p. 108). Once Tsukuru was able to prove this to himself, "his erotic dreams disappeared" (Murakami, 2014, p. 108). By boldly taking the step to fulfil his desires and exert his sexuality, Tsukuru was able to create his sexual space and was not only

able to liberate himself from depending on the girls in his group but to also move from intangible to tangible sexual experience and to exercise his individual needs and his virility.

BEING IN THE INTER-SECTION BETWEEN *UCHI* AND *SOTO*

After sixteen years of staying away from his *uchi*, Tsukuru, as advised by his girlfriend Sara, decided to seek them out. As a *soto*, the need for him to re-connect with his *uchi* was a crucial act as it was the final step for Tsukuru to fully establish his individuality. Through Sara's assistance, Tsukuru found out that the group had broken up and had gone their separate ways, and that Shiro had committed suicide. When Ao first saw Tsukuru, "his expression changed slightly…a slight doubt glinted in his eyes…" (Murakami, 2014, p. 126). Ao was unable to restrain his *ura* as revealed through his impervious expression towards Tsukuru, indicating hesitance in trusting him. However, he maintained his civility and explained to Tsukuru that the group decided to cut ties with him because Shiro accused him of raping her. The rape was an extreme violation of the *uchi* code which required non-sexual relationships between them and more importantly had caused harm to a group member. This time, Tsukuru, who was not obligated to keep the group harmony, expressed shock as he never had any intimate contact with Shiro. He also felt betrayed that they believed Shiro without verifying the facts with him.

Ao admitted their mistake and attempted to re-establish Tsukuru's membership in the group by telling him that he was the handsome and well-mannered one, "who made a good impression" (Murakami, 2014, p. 136) and was popular with their mothers. Tsukuru was pleasantly surprised by this revelation as he felt that his looks were plain. This new sense of worth dissipated the *ura* or perception that Tsukuru had about being unimportant. He realised that the group did welcome him and the fact that his name did not bear a colour was of little significance to them. It was Tsukuru himself who imposed this rule to find commonality with them.

Tsukuru, wanting to know if he was accepted only for his outward appearance, declared to Ao that he saw himself "as an empty person, lacking colour and identity" (Murakami, 2014, p. 137). He felt that he had no special role in the group compared to the others who had talents and gifts. However, Ao made him realise that he had been misguided by his *ura* which he alone indulged in, and that the group needed him because he created a sense of refuge in the group, which gave them the freedom to be themselves. Ao explains, "You didn't say much, but you had your feet solidly planted on the ground, and that gave the group a sense of security. Like an anchor" (Murakami, 2014, p. 137). Ao disclosed to Tsukuru that he played a crucial role in the group and that he was the one that kept them together. He was the colourless energy that bound that group with feelings of camaraderie and togetherness. After Tsukuru left, Ao explains that the group fell apart as they were not compelled to meet, since Tsukuru being the common factor that brought them together was absent. This significant information makes Tsukuru aware that he had the capability to build the harmony in the group, as his name signifies.

Tsukuru then met Aka to hear his explanation as to why he was ostracised from the group and why Shiro blamed him for raping her. Unlike Ao, Aka is pleased to see him. However, when Tsukuru told him that he wanted to speak about Shiro, Aka's "eyes narrowed behind his glasses" (Murakami, 2014, p. 155), an indication of his *ura*, that he was cautious and that he still distrusted Tsukuru. After Tsukuru explained that he is innocent of her accusations, Aka feeling guilty, assured him that he believed him. Aka then re-established Tsukuru's belonging to the group by telling him that he was "the toughest one, at least emotionally" (Murakami, 2014, p. 158). He revealed how Tsukuru's good natured qualities and bravery to leave the fold and move to Tokyo to pursue his studies had probably made

Shiro jealous as she did not have the courage to do so. He also revealed that perhaps Shiro was in love with him and was disappointed that he was leaving her. Tsukuru came to realise that his friends had actually secretly admired him for the determination that he had in pursuing his dreams and to not be overly dependent on the group. They justified cutting him off as they felt he had deserted them. For that reason, when Shiro accused him of the crime, they effortlessly took her side. Aka makes Tsukuru feel that he was a part of the group again when he told Tsukuru that he was a homosexual. As a *soto*, Tsukuru was able to neutralise the situation and activated his role in staying calm by telling Aka to be honest and true to his feelings. Tsukuru refrained from being judgemental, thus being true to his role of maintaining harmony to the group.

The final person Tsukuru met up with is Kuro who had married and moved to Norway. Kuro did not recognise Tsukuru at first, but when she did register his face, she called out his name. When Tsukuru affirms, Kuro instantaneously pulls "her daughter closer, as if protecting her from some threat" (Murakami, 2014, p. 227). Again, the *ura* of another member of the *uchi* revealed distrust and fear. Kuro also insisted on being called Eri, and Shiro to be addressed as Yuzuki. This is an overt act of erasing the past affinity that the group had in calling each other by their affectionate names and establishing distance by indicating that Tsukuru is now in the *soto* and therefore not privileged to address them in that manner.

Kuro like the other two men, felt a sense of guilt. However, Kuro confessed that in rejecting Tsukuru, she was also punishing herself in not being able to develop her feelings of love for him. Kuro also told him that she sensed that he was attracted to Shiro, as many others had, as she was more beautiful than her. At this point, Tsukuru realised that harmony is also internalised as pain, that hearts are "linked deeply through their wounds" (Murakami, 2014, p. 248) and that kept the group together rather than physical distance. These truths release Tsukuru from the guilt of breaking the unspoken code of the *uchi*, as he had nurtured sexual desires for them. Kuro eventually erased the physical distance that Tsukuru had created in the past by asking, "Could you hold me?" (Murakami, 2014, p. 249). They hug for some time, symbolically merging Tsukuru's position as a *soto* with the *uchi*. The experience finally liberates Tsukuru, as being in a *soto* had given him the courage to face his friends again. He strengthened his individual identity when he realised that he need not depend on his *uchi* anymore, as being in an *uchi* does not ensure harmony and stability. This experience taught him to be confident in his autonomous identity.

CONCLUSION

As many of his other novels, *Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki*, Murakami's most recent work published in English, centres on the soul. However, it moves away from a non-committal, lackadaisical approach to an engaged and involved view of the Japanese way of life. In *Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki*, he has chosen to write about a group of friends, which reflects a clear example of Japanese group consciousness and the preoccupation with relationships.

This reading exposes the readiness of the Japanese society in embracing independence in individuals and to change the colour of the lens through which they view the self. The focus was on the group dynamics of the *uchi* and *soto* and the inner thoughts or *ura* of the main character, Tsukuru, who from the beginning had a sense of individuality but conformed to societal pressure to belong to a group. He however, could not readily accept his position in the group for superficial reasons and desperately tried to find reasons for belonging. Convinced that his position in the group was ambiguous, Tsukuru nurtured a fear of being expelled while still engaging in the group activities. Tsukuru though, knew he had to achieve his own ambition and not be pressured by the group dynamics. He successfully negotiated between fulfilling his own needs while not losing his belonging in the group. When he was

eventually ousted, he was initially unprepared by the shock but recovered and soon strengthened his individuality. Eventually, he was able to test his need to belong to a group by re-visiting his friends and emerged as a man who was capable of surviving as an independent.

In the novel, as discussed in this paper, the unspoken *uchi* codes that bond them are identified as fondness, expressed through the monikers that they use to call each other, unity represented by doing everything as a group of five and abstinence expressed through the suppression of feelings of love for the opposite sex. Tsukuru broke all these rules and was cast to the *soto* or out-group. When the *uchi* members accepted him back, it can be inferred that they subconsciously redeemed him by erasing these codes. Evidently, Tsukuru did not easily accept the codes that gave the group identity. Rather, he internally challenged them to construct his individual identity. Being in both *uchi* and *soto* enabled him to merge his experiences to have a better understanding of his self.

Murakami, through the experiences of Tsukuru indicates that the individual need not depend on an *uchi* to find acceptance or to build his identity. The *uchi*'s narrative is not necessarily the ideal maxim that creates the individual's identity. He advocates that ultimately, the individual needs to create his own narrative and form decisions autonomously and be prepared for the consequences. He also shows how an individual is able to cope in various situations and be prepared to execute his will. In the end, Tsukuru did not need "a colour" to be special.

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