

Alienation in Murakami's *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*

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ABSTRACT

This study explores alienation in Haruki Murakami's *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*. It studies the aspects of alienation in three selected short stories from *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*: "A Folklore for My Generation: A Pre-History of Late-Stage Capitalism," "Tony Takitani," and "Firefly," and how these aspects manifest in the lives of the people in the selected stories. To achieve the objectives, the study was conducted under postmodernist approach and employs Seeman's theory on alienation known as Seeman's *Aspects of Alienation* (1959) as the theoretical framework of the study. The findings divulge that there are four alienation aspects palpable in the selected short stories: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation. They also disclose that the alienation aspects found manifest through four key points i.e. the unknown origins of alienation, the problem of choices overload, the fragmentation of life aspects, and disconnected relational self. Viewed from postmodern perspective, Murakami's *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* can be interpreted as a representation of contemporary Japan as it portrays contemporary alienation issues, which are the effects of the breaking down of the Japanese traditional norms establishment, the grand narrative, in at least two occasions in Japanese history, Japan's involvement and defeat in World War II and the student movement in the sixties.

Keywords: *Alienation, Postmodernism, Blind Willow Sleeping Woman*

INTRODUCTION

According to Tally Jr (2009, p. 2), “the term alienation has its simple meaning—a condition of being estranged from someone or something...” This present study strives to find and analyze this condition in Murakami’s *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* (2006). In the three short stories selected from the book, the writer found that the characters in respective stories show similar behaviors which potentially can be classified into one or more of four out of five alienation aspects proposed by Seeman (as cited in Senekal, 2010, p. 23) namely powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation.

According to Yuill (2011, p. 104) since 1980 onwards, new alienation studies decreased in number. At least three reasons are identified the waning of 1960s radicalism, the wider failings of the Marxist project in the 1980s, or a relocation and reordering of where and how work was studied by sociologists... replaced by more a` la mode postmodernist concerns.

However, starting from 1990s there was an upsurge in alienation studies. Research Committee on Alienation of the International Sociological Association (ISA), kept alienation studies alive until then (Geyer, 1996, p. xii). According to Senekal (2010, p. 22) there are three developments which trigger this ascend: “the fall of the Soviet Union, globalization, the increasing awareness of ethnic conflicts, and post-modernism.” In arguing that the rise of postmodernism only propagates alienation, Geyer (1996, p. xiii) asserts that, the world of simulacra and virtual reality (two aspects which belong to postmodern paradigm) tends to be an alienated world, for reasons that Marx and Freud could not possibly have foreseen.

It results in trend towards alienation. In conclusion, in spite of the multitude of changes that have taken place in the time gap between Marx’s or Seeman’s lifetime to ours, an analysis on alienation is still relevant to be conducted in the contemporary condition.

Murakami's works are chosen because they are widely read contemporary literary works. His popularity as a literary star is hugely increased since the release of his novel *Norwegian Wood*. Furthermore, his protagonists have a tendency of showing alienation issues by being isolated from their surroundings. They are rather individualistic, leading a solitary life, and having values which are uncommon. Being popular and contemporary, his works are suitable to be the object of this study, which aims to reveal alienation in contemporary condition.

To investigate the issue, this study employs alienation theory proposed by Seeman (1959). Unlike Marx who specifically analyzes alienation in the working class economic situation, Seeman reformulates his theory based on Marx's and comes up with a more practical methodological framework for a wider aspect of psycho-sociological and literary studies, i.e. his five aspects of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and

self-estrangement. As cited in Senekal (2008, p. 8), Seeman "identifies powerlessness and self-estrangement with Marxian notions of alienation", and "clearly relates self-estrangement to Marx's 'false consciousness'." Seeman, thus building on Marx's insights, provides a methodological framework more suitable to the analysis of alienation in contemporary literature, as Neal & Collas (2000), Wexler (1998), and others have found when discussing sociological trends.

Considering the practicality, recent uses, and reinterpretations of Seeman's theory done by Neal and Collas (2000), Kalekin-Fishman (1996), Senekal (2008), and Geyer (1996), the writer selects it as the framework for this study.

To relate the alienation issues found in the analysis to contemporary condition, the writer considers postmodernism as an appropriate approach to read the object of the study.

Postmodernism is a term which is difficult to define from the viewpoint of postmodern paradigm itself. It is caused by the nature of

postmodernism which rejects centralization. According to Derrida (as cited in Mikulakova, 2011, p. 25), it is a result of meaning being ever moving among chains of signifiers: "Meaning is continually moving along on a chain of signifiers, and we cannot be precise about its exact 'location' because it is never tied to one particular sign." Consequently, meaning is unstable. Thus, understanding postmodernism is impossible from its very perspective. Nonetheless, there are shared expressions and moods acknowledged by postmodernist theorists, such as Lyotard and Jameson, as more of postmodernist experience.

Lyotard remarks that postmodernism is a mood resulting from incredulity toward grand narratives. Flynn (2014, p. 30) writes that grand narratives, so called by Lyotard, are no longer relevant in our contemporary society, as they have been broken down and deconstructed to aid the goals of postmodern capitalism.

Postmodern individuals do not believe in the modernist grand narratives. They do not believe in emancipatory goals proposed by religions, science, Marxism, etc. They do not believe in rationality and progress. In the western world, this view has been increasing in influence after World War II where science revealed its destructive nature in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Another aspect of postmodernism is its relation to late capitalism. The emergence of postmodernism is even synonymous with late capitalism according to Jameson. He (as cited in Felluga, 2011) writes that: "the economic preparation of postmodernism or late capitalism began in the 1950s, after the wartime shortages of consumer goods and spare parts had been made up, and new products and new technologies (not least those of the media) could be pioneered."

Hence by understanding Lyotard's notion on postmodernism and Jameson's notion concerning the emergence of postmodernism, we can conclude that postmodernism is a mood resulting from the breaking

down of grand narratives in the time since the emergence of late capitalism in 1950s which is an aftermath of wartime economic crisis. The broken down grand narratives are used to aid the mere goals of this capitalism.

Earlier, it is mentioned that this postmodern symptoms can be found in the western world since the World War II. Traced further, apparently this phenomenon is found as well in the development of Japan over the twentieth century. As Napier (1996, p. 5) writes that

“the changes in Japan over the twentieth century have both echoed and amended the development of the West (...) In the post-war period, Japan observers have seen the dawning and eventual triumph of a careerist, materialist consumer culture so widespread as to seem almost a parody of capitalism ultimate goal.”

From the passage above we can see that there are postmodern symptoms emerges after World War II in Japan as well. Thus it can be perceived that the postmodern

condition is not exclusively a western world phenomenon.

Flynn (2014, p. 59) remarks that at that time, Japan was forced to face modernity, in particular the invasion of outside cultures, and simultaneously facing the issues rising as a consequence of World War II, a time when its traditional conventions were being inquired. Thus it can be understood that this invasion of outside cultures and modernity break down the grand narrative, i.e. the traditional conventions. This breaking down leads to “postwar Japan [which is] always struggled with its external and internal image...there seemed to be a sense of Japan as being caught between these two ranges of images, there seems to be something lost” (Flynn, 2014, p. 62).

The struggle between these images can be seen for instance in the death of Yukio Mishima, a post-war Japanese writer. Fowler (1983, p. 466) writes that “he [Mishima] has become a legend after his suicide following an unsuccessful attempt to foment rebellion among the ranks of the country's Self Defense Force.”

His suicide is done by way of harakiri, a samurai ritual. This event can be comprehended as a struggle to restore the traditional Japanese value. The motive behind this incident is Mishima's belief that one way to restore Japan to its root is to restore the bushido, the spirit of samurai way. Before the suicide ritual, he stood in the balcony facing servicemen of the Self Defense Force, haranguing them to rise up against Japanese Constitution which forbids Japan from forming army and waging war.

Mishima endeavours to restore Japan to its medieval samurai way because, as cited in Clurman (1974), he thinks that modern Japan is ugly because of the vanishing of the old spiritual tradition which is replaced by materialism. This right-winger attitude of him, however, is contrasted to westernized side of him, for instance, shown in his house interior design: "[Mishima's house] is a dream (or nightmare) of late Victorian, bourgeois opulence... Baroque and rococo objects are scattered on tablets and shelves" (Shabecoff, 1970).

In summary, postmodern Japan can be understood to emerge at least since after World War II because of the war impact, including economic crisis which gave birth to late-stage capitalism and the invasion of outside influence which dissolutes Japanese traditional convention leading to national identity crisis.

In conclusion, this study tries to offer a new interpretation in the field of alienation studies, specifically on Murakami's writings by employing Seeman's alienation theory to find out what kinds of alienation found in Murakami's short stories and how it manifests in the postmodern Japan.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was designed under postmodernism approach and employs textual analysis to analyse the text. The theory applied in the study is Seeman's aspects of alienation (1959) namely powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation. This theory is used as the framework to analyze the selected short stories from a collection of Haruki

Murakami's short stories *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* (*BWSW*): "A Folklore for My Generation: A Pre-History of Late-Stage Capitalism," "Tony Takitani," and "Firefly." The writer selected some part of the narration and some dialogues which are critically chosen in the short stories with the intention of showing what alienation aspects found in the selected stories and how they manifest.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study found that alienation aspects manifest in *BWSW*. The people in the selected short stories are apparent to be alienated in one aspect or more from four alienation aspects, namely powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation. Furthermore, it is also discovered that these four aspects are caused by four key factors, i.e. the unknown origins of alienation, the problem of choices overload, the fragmentation of life, and disconnected relational self. In addition, by relating these findings to contemporary Japan circumstances, it can be understood that alienation in

BWSW is a contemporary phenomenon, evident since at least two historical events, Japan's involvement in World War II and the anti-establishment student movement happening in the sixties.

Alienation Aspects in *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*

According to the classification of alienation offered by Seeman (1959), the analysis of alienation in *BWSW* reveals that there are four aspects of alienation manifested in the selected stories: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation.

Powerlessness

Powerlessness indicates individual's comprehension that, through his own behavior, he cannot control the circumstances of the results or supports he pursues (Seeman, 1959, p. 784). In *BWSW*, powerlessness manifests because of the influences of external rather than internal factors.

We were **merely observers**, getting totally **absorbed in exciting movie**, our palms all sweaty, only to find that, after the houselights came on and we exited the theater, the thrilling afterglow that coursed through us ultimately **meant**

nothing whatsoever. Maybe **something prevented us** from learning a valuable lesson from this? **I don't know** (p. 61).

The first short story narrator's comprehension which elaborates how he and the young in the sixties seem to be less an agent in their respective life indicates powerlessness. He uses an analogy comparing their roles are those of mere movie goers, lacking authority in the event they witness (i.e. the student movement). Thus, readers can understand that he does not possess control over the event, let alone the results of it.

In the second selected story, "Tony Takitani," this aspect of alienation framed in the woman's excessive desire to own a massive amount of clothes. The woman is powerless because of her inability to control that behavior. The woman has an abnormal urge to own as many luxurious clothes as she can lay her hands on to. Likewise in the last story, this aspect also found in the fragmented relationship between Toru and Naoko.

In summary, powerlessness is evident in the three selected short stories. All powerless aspects found

are propagated by external factors. All of these events reveal that they lack control or agency over the behaviors or the results of their behaviors.

Meaninglessness

Meaninglessness can be understood as a condition when an individual feels unsatisfactory and confused of what to believe in and what to do in his life among all its absurdity (Seeman, 1959, p. 786). In the selected short stories, the people are more conscious of this alienation aspect after they create a relationship with other people.

In "Tony Takitani" this alienation aspect is delineated when he meets the woman who later on becomes his wife. After a long time of being unaware of it, Tony becomes conscious of his meaningless life upon meeting his future wife.

"He went to see her and told her exactly how he felt. **How lonely his life had been until then.** How much he had lost over the years. **How she had made him realize all that**" (p. 193).

For Tony, meeting his future wife is a wakeup call. After running into her, he finally realizes how lonely his life

is and “how much he had lost over the years”. Consequently, this new-found realization leads him to apprehend that his *little* life is lacking or losing meaningful qualities.

This alienation aspect found in the first story when the protagonist tells about how he always tries his best to follow the route already laid out in front of him in order to secure the comfort in his life. This instance inclines to the state of being powerless. This powerlessness engenders meaninglessness since he loses agency over his own life, in an oblivious manner, which leads to dissatisfaction.

Toru in “Firefly” succumbs to this aspect of alienation since he is unable to control his action in his relationship with Naoko which ends up in the both of them feeling unable to grasp a deeper meaning of the relationship.

In summary, meaninglessness is evident in the selected short stories. In addition, this section found that mainly the people in the selected short stories become more conscious of their meaninglessness after they form relationships with others. For

instance, Toru’s confusion reaches its climax when one night he and Naoko sleep together.

Normlessness

Normlessness is defined as a high prospect that inappropriate behaviors are needed to accomplish assumed objectives (Seeman, 1959, p. 788). This aspect of alienation can be found in peculiar behaviors adopted by the people in the selected stories, which are not commonly held by their community in general.

For instance, this aspect can be seen in Yoshiko (the protagonist’s former girlfriend) from “A Folklore for My Generation: A Pre-History of Late-Stage Capitalism”:

“I love you so much,” she quietly explained, “but **I want to stay a virgin until I get married.**” (p. 70)

“... If you need me to promise you, I will. **I will sleep with you someday.** But not right now. **After I marry somebody else, I’ll sleep with you,** I promise” (p. 75).

From the passages above, we cannot say that Yoshiko’s adamant attitude in preserving her virginity until marriage is a sign that she is pure, religious, or conventional in nature. Yoshiko separates the sanctity

of virginity from sex. All that matters for her is her virginity. She does not mind having sexual intercourse with the protagonist once she is married to someone else. This isolation on the virginity alone makes her viewpoint ominously fragmented. That strangeness is related to normlessness. We cannot really say if Yoshiko is morally right or wrong by trying to preserve her virginity until marriage only to sleep with another man.

In “Tony Takitani,” this alienation aspect noticeable in the unconventional familial relation between Tony and his father, Shozaburo. They only meet where there are business needed to be taken care of. The dysfunctional relationship between father and son definitely does not conform to the widely accepted norm. Thus, this phenomenon is suitably collected under the label of normlessness.

In “Firefly,” Toru is aware that what he is doing, going out even to the point of sleeping with his dead friend’s girlfriend is not something that is widely accepted as a normal behavior.

In brief, normlessness manifests in *BWSW*, which is evident in adoption of inappropriate behaviors.

Social Isolation

Seeman (1959, p. 789) describes that a person is socially isolated if he attributes low reward value to regularly highly valued objectives or ideas in a certain society. In other words, social isolation is seen as a personal isolation from his surrounding because he is cut from the goals and beliefs which are seen highly by the society.

Since the beginning of “A Folklore for My Generation: A Pre-History of Late-Stage Capitalism,” the narrator has identified himself as an outsider of the social climate at the time. Apparently, the narrator’s disconnection with the social substance roots from his cynical viewpoint on the student movement—which he labels as a mere “boisterous slapstick.”

In the second short story “Tony Takitani,” Tony’s westernized physique and name do not fit in the

widely cherished value in his society, which make him socially excluded.

In "Firefly," Toru is excluded from his surrounding by spending most of the time reading. **"I made hardly any friends at school, or at the dorm. I was always reading, so people thought I wanted to be a writer. But I didn't. I didn't want to be anything"** (p. 239). However, the act of reading does not mean that he has an aspiration to be a writer. To highlight on his aspiration, he says that he does not want to be anything. This nihilistic attitude portrays his meaningless view on himself above all and consequently influence his view on social interaction as well. His meaninglessness engenders social isolation. His nihilistic attitude implies that he does not really mind having no friends at all, since he does not want to be anything.

Thus this alienation aspect does manifest in *BWSW*. In the last selected story, Toru excludes himself from his surrounding by spending most of his time reading. This act of long reading is rooted in his apathetic view of the world that he does not view highly of the values widespread

in the society. It leads to him being unattached socially.

Traced Alienation Aspects Manifested in *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*

In order to trace of how these alienation aspects manifest in regard to the contemporary situation, this section applied the reinterpretations of Seeman's alienation theory from the latest alienation studies and its portrayal in *BWSW*. The analysis shows that the manifestation of alienation in *BWSW* involves four key points which are elaborated in the following.

The Obscure Source of Alienation

Based on earlier analysis, it can be concluded that a person who is powerless is a person who feels unable to achieve his goals and that he is aware of the gap between his goals and what he can do. The problem of the people who lives in the contemporary world is that they are susceptible to powerlessness by being directed by external power hence they become victims who are unable to control their own era. They feel

vulnerable to dangers they cannot trace its sources. They do not see themselves as agents who build their life and the world (Augusto & Helena, as cited in Senekal, 2008, pp. 22-23).

This inability to detect the source of the alien power which control one's life can be seen in the narrator's retrospection in "A Folklore for My Generation: A Pre-History of Late-Stage Capitalism":

We were merely observers, getting totally absorbed in exciting movie, our palms all sweaty, only to find that, after the houselights came on and we exited the theater, the thrilling afterglow that coursed through us ultimately meant nothing whatsoever. Maybe something prevented us from learning a valuable lesson from this? I don't know (p. 61).

The undetected source of this alienation is delineated in "Maybe something prevented us from learning a valuable lesson from this? I don't know." The narrator is unable to grasp any comprehension on the origins of the powerlessness he experiences. The narrator's narration which elaborates how he and the youngsters in the sixties seem to be less an agent in his respective life indicates powerlessness. He uses an analogy comparing their roles as those of mere

movie goers, lacking authority in the event they witness. Their lives are somehow controlled by an indiscernible external power which "plays the movie" they watch. This powerlessness results in them being unattached, rather uninvolved in the events, leading them to feel nothing whatsoever from the events.

From the viewpoint of structuralism, this obscure source of alienation can be interpreted as the product of arbitrary relationship between signifiers and signified, that there are no inherent meanings in the representations of things in life.

I can't marry you, she said. **I'm going to marry someone a few years older than me, and you're going to marry someone a few years younger. That's the way things are done.** Women mature faster than men, and age more quickly (p. 71).

The arbitrariness clearly manifests in her remarks, "That's the way things are done." There is no deeper reason behind it so that it lacks substance and meaning. This gender roles operate on a chain of dissimilarity. Since men are going to go far in their lives, such as getting into the Ministry of Finance, then women are not going to do that.

Women are married with older men so that men are married to younger women. This arbitrariness indicates powerlessness and meaninglessness.

The Problem of Choices Overload

Powerlessness may come together with meaninglessness. Previously described, meaninglessness is an inability to make meanings of behaviors and outcomes of them. In our time, this alienation aspect is a matter of whether or not people can create sufficient scanning mechanism in order to obtain information which are important for their objectives. As well as a question of developing a proficient assortment system to avoid being overburdened by irrelevant information in the information bombardment on daily basis (Geyer, 1996, p. xxiii).

She bought a shocking number of items during their travels... In the end, he had an entire room made over as a walk-in closet... He could not understand why she had to keep buying herself clothing like this, one piece after the other. She was busy buying them, she had no time to wear them (p. 195).

Owning a myriad of clothes symbolizes her inability to choose and settle down in an overload of choices.

This event only leads her to a sense of alienation, a powerless condition in the face of multitude of choices. The clothing can be understood as a confusion the woman has. She is unable to refrain from buying so many alternatives of clothes. Instead of selecting some of the clothes necessary for her, she buys all the alternatives she can find. However, owning clothes does not produce any more utilities or meanings since she has only one body.

The Fragmentation of Life

In "A Folklore for My Generation: A Pre-History of Late-Stage Capitalism," it can be seen that the social norms regulating sexual behaviors are broken down into smaller in scope and a more individualized rule of behaviors. Each individual has their own way of doing things.

Religious traditional norm which regulates sexual behaviors are broken down because, as Halman (in Senekal, 2008, p. 40) argues, that religion as the grand narrative which is responsible as the foundation of ethical concepts, visions, and deeds,

is no longer prominent. This is rooted in the shift of authority from religious and political institutions to individuals who then select and mix many values which are seen as the most suitable for their objectives.

This breaking down grand rules into smaller chunks of rules can be found in Yoshiko's viewpoint in treating her sexuality in the aforementioned short story. Yoshiko is described as a firm believer in keeping his virginity until marriage: "... **I want to stay a virgin until I get married**" (p.70). However, what seems to be a sacred conventional choice is not as sincere as it may seem since Yoshiko promises the protagonist to let him sleep with her once she gives her virginity to her husband: "... If you need me to promise you, I will. **I will sleep with you someday**. But not right now. **After I marry somebody else, I'll sleep with you**, I promise" (p. 75). The excerpt shows us that Yoshiko operates neither on traditional norms nor on liberal ones. She breaks down traditional and liberal norms and mixes some of its values to achieve her goals, which is preserving her

virginity while letting the protagonist sleep with her once she is married to another man. Consequently, Yoshiko can be understood as a normless person.

Psychological separation between intimacy and sex is evident in all of the selected short stories. This is rooted in the fragmentation of social norms which also affect the culture of courtship and the relationship between man and woman. Neal & Collas (2000, p. 53) assert that emotion of closeness and unity of body have become psychologically separated in contemporary dating culture.

In "Firefly," this separation of intimacy and sex can be seen in Naoko and Toru eventually having a sexual intercourse without a clear grasp of what their feelings and relationship are to one another. He sleeps with her only because he does not know of better things to do. "**That night we slept together**. That may be the best response to the situation, maybe not. **I don't know what else I should have done**" (p. 243).

This fragmentation of social order or human relations according to

Tönnies (in Pappenheim, 1959) is prevalent since the beginning of industrialization as a time of increasing mechanization and fragmentation of social life. He sees that since the renaissance and the growth of industrialization, the trend moves from *Gemeinschaft*, a genuine, spontaneous, and whole connection, to *Gesellschaft*, an artificial, mechanized, and fragmented connection experienced by man with the world in which man sees what the benefits he can get from compartmentalized relations.

Thus, because of fragmentation of life aspects which is caused by modern social order, people are prone to suffer from a sense of alienation.

Disconnected Relational Self

As discovered in earlier section of analysis, a person who is isolated socially is a person who attributes low value to objectives or ideas which are highly regarded, i.e. the system of meanings, the culture, in a particular society. Eventually, this belief makes him feel socially isolated, unable to connect himself with the events. The

self, however, cannot be isolated absolutely from the culture in which it exists. Instead, we can comprehend a socially isolated self as a “disconnected self.”

According to Derrida (as cited in Senekal, 2008, p. 50), all texts attain their meaning through their connection to other texts. To expand this idea to human behaviors it means that one's words and actions are not meaningful by its connections with an internal psychology. Instead, their meaning is ascribed from their connections with other words and actions. Thus, a person's behaviors and words are all texts which connect with others' behaviors and words. Subsequently, this relational system constructs the person's self.

In “A Folklore for My Generation: A Pre-History of Late-Stage Capitalism,” the study found that the protagonist endeavors to “take a glimpse” of his self through a connection with other texts, i.e. Yoshiko Fujisawa. Anyhow, since he is rejected, thus he becomes disconnected from her, isolated socially:

I'd never once experienced that sense of oneness with a person. I'd always been alone, always feeling tense, stuck behind a wall. I was positive that once we were one, my wall would crumbling down, and I'd discover who I was, the self I'd only had a vague glimpse of (p. 71).

From the excerpt, readers can see that the protagonist tries to overcome his alienation, to “take a glimpse” of his self, by integrating himself with other text, Yoshiko, his girlfriend.

Analyzed further, the findings are related to postmodernism. As framed in Murakami's *BWSW*, contemporary Japan is in alignment with what by Jameson and Baudrillard (in Flynn, 2014, p. 57) dub as postmodernism. Firstly, it is related to an emergence of consumer multinational consumerism. From the selected short stories, it can be comprehended that this is apparent since after the sixties. Secondly, there is a diversification of culture evident since after World War II. All of these caused by dissolution of the grand narrative, which is symbolized in the anti-Japanese establishment in the sixties and Japan's defeat in the war in *BWSW*. Thus, as Flynn writes (2014, p. 18), with the dissolution of

grand narrative of modernity, Lyotard's notion of delegitimized meaning in society has become real. Consequently, this dissolution results in the fragmented society where the protagonist and Yoshiko becomes estranged from one another, in which Tony Takitani exists as the outsider from the majority of people surrounding him, and Toru's nihilistic, apathetic viewpoint is possible to exist.

In addition, this postmodern phenomenon in Japan discovered in *BWSW* suggests that postmodernism can happen anywhere globally, that it is not an exclusive western phenomenon. As Cioffi (in Flynn, 2014, pp. 56-57) remarks that “the postmodern has permeated, saturated—has become—our culture.” Thus disregarding time and place, postmodern culture can be found where there is a prevalence of late-stage capitalism and a dissolution of grand narratives.

In conclusion, Murakami's *BWSW* is a metaphor, a representation of contemporary Japan as it portrays contemporary alienation aspects which are propagated by obscure

origins, overload of choices, fragmentation of life aspects, and disconnected relational self, which are the effects of the breaking down of the Japanese traditional norms establishment, the grand narrative, in at least two occasions in Japanese history, its involvement and defeat in World War II and the student movement in the sixties.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to reveal what kinds of alienation and how they manifest in Haruki Murakami's *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* and to analyze the findings in its relation to contemporary Japan. The findings show that there are four alienation aspects evident in the novel: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation. It also shows that the alienation aspects manifest through obscure source, the problem resulted from choices overload, fragmentation of life, and disconnected relational self.

Seeing from the perspective of postmodern Japan, Murakami's *BWSW* portrays contemporary alienation which is caused by the

prevalence of consumer capitalism and the dissolution of Japan traditional norms, which have become more intense since at least after Japan's involvement in World War II and the student movement in the sixties. Hence Murakami's *BWSW* can be interpreted as a representation of contemporary Japan, specifically a picture of contemporary alienation.

In a bigger picture, the assumption that postmodernism happens in Japan can be viewed as a reminder for the people living outside the Western world to raise their awareness upon this phenomenon. For instance, speculatively, in connection to Indonesia's contemporary situation, the postmodern alienation phenomenon in Japan portrayed in Murakami's *BWSW* can be interpreted as a prophetic vision for Indonesian culture in the future. For in spite of the grand narrative's influence, such as religion and nationalism, in Indonesia is still dominant, there is no telling that it will dissolve to the extent which happened in Japan.

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