



Elucidating the Elements of Displacement and Identity Crisis in Norwegian Wood by Haruki Murakami

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT:
Displacement, Identity, Selfhood, Sense of belongingness, Loss, Alienation	This paper aims to examine the displacement and identity clash in Haruki Murakami's novel <i>Norwegian Wood</i> . The article portrays the novel through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's identity theory. Murakami is known for utilizing alienation, lack of sense of belongingness, and loss of identity in his novels throughout. The novel's protagonist, Toru undergoes a quest to find meaning for his existence and also to overcome identity crisis in the era of 1960s Japan. Through the concept of identity from Paul's perspectives, this piece of research examines how Murakami structured his novel with regards to themes like displacement, lack of belongingness, and sense of interdependence among people. Thus, the study argues the persistent search for identity and how selfcare and love go hand in hand with each other in the life of an individual.

1. Introduction

Norwegian Wood is an awakening narrative set in 1960s of Tokyo by Haruki Murakami. This poignant tale of Toru Watanabe, a young man who undergoes multiple emotional turmoil in his life throughout. He survived and experienced the complexities of love, hatred, and excruciating trauma and loss in his past. Through Toru's life, Murakami explores on the aspects of displacement and identity clashes between individuals and their societies. Paul Ricoeur's identity theory reflects on the ideas of selfhood and belongingness and through those aspects are examined through Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*. Paul Ricoeur's theory posits that personal identity is not a concrete quality, and it is a dynamic structure that regulates the same. He portrays his perspectives in his work *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another*, where he identifies the notion of sameness which refers to consistent quality possessed by an individual's habits, characters, and behaviors that enable people to identify their identity. On the other hand, he also talks about self-hood where individuals care for their maintenance and commitment towards their moral ethics. This approach determines the experiences of Toru and other characters in the novel, and this paper aims to identify how displacement and identity crisis affects simultaneously in an individual's life.

About the Author: Haruki Murakami

A renowned novelist, short story writer, and translator of Japan who is a contemporary author, Haruki Murakami pens this novel *Norwegian wood*. He is specifically known for his extensive use of magical realism with raw reality of the world. He also talks about loneliness, feeling of losing something, identity crisis, and complicated relationships among people. His writing style deals with concepts like surrealism, dreamlike narratives, and philosophical plots. He also explores areas like alienation, empathy, and sense of belongingness. Murakami associates magical realism with psychology and portrays a unique world and captures audience on a global scale. He is known for his simple, yet prosaic style of writing and his stories tend to blur the line between reality and fantasy.

About the Novel: *Norwegian Wood*

The narrative takes back to 1960s Tokyo about a college student, Toru Watanabe who is entangled into a complex relationship with difficult and confusing emotions. It is believed that his life is completely changed when he meets an introspective yet beautiful young girl, Naoko. She, on the other hand, struggles to cope with the death of her boyfriend. In the course of the novel, Naoko and Toru fall in love with each other and



bond over their interest towards literature and music which both have similar taste. Following that, Toru falls hard for Naoko for her enigmatic nature, however, he is ultimately drawn towards her extrovert friend, Midori. Though Naoko and Midori have different personalities, they're best friends. Toru, while searching for his identity in order to find the place he belongs to, falls in love with Midori and gets torn between these two girls with the question of whom he chooses.

Through a series of multiple encounters, letters, and interactions, Toru undergoes excruciating emotions like longing for love, life, and friendship. He is left alone in the darkness to confront his life and his life decisions. To move forward with his life, he is alienated among others, and he confronts his life with extreme scars. Though he is scarred, later he made himself wiser by his actions. Furthermore, the novel explores themes like loss of love, self-identification, and overall human experiences.

2. Literature Review

Memories, Loss, and Alienation in Haruki Murakami's Norwegian Wood by Anum Mirza in *Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal* (2017) This paper deals with the elements in the novel that deals with memory, loss and alienation or loneliness in the novel through character analysis.

Haruki Murakami and His Realistic Style: The Japanese Aesthetic Taste in Norwegian Wood by Yingcheng Huang in *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* (2022) This article deals with the Japanese traditional aesthetic concepts and expressions in the conception of this novel. It collaborates with the concept of Murakami's magical realism with the traditional aesthetic Japanese concepts in literature.

Fate as Deus Ex Machina in Murakami's Norwegian Wood by Kasturi Rebatiraman Sinha in *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts* (2023) this article deals with the literary devices employed in the novel especially Fate plays a vital role in the characters of the novel which has been deeply studied through the lens of Deus Ex Machina.

Memories and Mindscapes: An Intertextual Study of Haruki Murakami's Norwegian Wood by C. Cruz Edilberto in *The International Academic Forum of Research* (2019) This paper talks about the

intertextualities that enhance readers' encounter with text. Psychoanalytic study of the characters in the novel answers the questions of readers aroused from this novel is studied in this paper.

Getting To The Pulp of Haruki Murakami's Norwegian Wood: Translatability and the Role of Popular Culture by Jacquelyn Zuromski in *Electronic Theses and Dissertations* (2004) This thesis deals with the novel's reference to the popular culture of the 1960s which combines the protagonist to establish an identity for himself as well as his place within the universal community.

Research Objectives

The following are the research objectives of this article:

1. To examine the themes of displacement and identity crisis in *Norwegian Wood*
2. To illustrate the elements of loss and trauma in the characters of *Norwegian Wood*

3. Research Methodology

Qualitative methodology is utilized in this research, as it is abstract research which focuses on the non-empirical data with descriptive context. Through this methodology, research is carried out to investigate the minds of characters of Murakami with regards to displacement and identity crisis.

Displacement & Search for Identity in *Norwegian Wood*

The novel's idea of displacement and search for identity can be implicitly seen in protagonist, Toru Watanabe's life. His journey begins with his struggle for coping his best friend's death. Similarly, Naoko is also seen with the struggle of coping with the loss of her boyfriend. During their period of grievance, both the characters bond deeply forming a new relationship. The relationship is questioned when Naoko's friend Midori comes in the scene. Toru's growing connection with Midori tore him with his loyalty to Naoko. Through his experiences in life, Murakami explores the disoriented effect of displacement. Here displacement deals with the psychological, emotional and existential dislocation by the protagonist Toru Watanabe and also by other characters. His emotional displacement happens with his relationship with Naoko and Midori who create



emotional turmoil for him which makes him disconnected from his own feelings and desires. Similarly, Naoko's struggle with mental health and her eventual institutionalization serves as a catalyst for Toru's introspection, highlighting his own sense of disconnection from himself. One such instance from Toru's narrative claims that, "it's a funny thing about life, once you begin to take the necessary tools to make it happen, they seem to appear right in front of you." (255) in this quote, Murakami describes that aimlessness and meaningless life occur to each and every individual, but they can overcome it by controlling themselves in order to get back in their life. Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another* also argues that selfhood is not a solitary, autonomous concept, but rather one that is deeply connected to our experiences of otherness. Ricoeur writes, "The self is not only oneself, but also another" (3). This idea challenges traditional notions of identity and encourages us to consider the complex, dialogical nature of selfhood.

Toru experiences an existential displacement because he questions his purpose, identity, and place in the world, leaving him feeling disconnected from his own existence. Through these forms of displacement, Murakami explores the human experience of feeling disconnected, lost, and uncertain, ultimately revealing the complexities of identity, belonging, and the search for meaning. Simultaneously, Paul also talks about the notion of selfhood in his work *Narrative Identity and Time*, where he claims, "the narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character." (152) which exhibits the quality of the narrative and how selfhood is not a fixated idea, rather a continuous and constantly analyzed plot of any individual. In many cases of questioning the self, people usually find themselves alone which Paul also talks about in his theoretical works, like he mentions a paradoxical statement, "I find myself only by losing myself" (512). Through this excerpt, it is understood that to find themselves, people at times lose themselves in the process which makes them question their existence.

The search for identity is also a pervasive theme in the novel, and it is analyzed through the characterization of Toru Watanabe. The protagonist questions his own beliefs, morals, priorities, trying to

define what matters most to him. Toru navigates his relationships, emotions within himself to understand himself better than before marks his quest for self-discovery. His concept of exploring values to make himself a better human deals with the way he wants to set his life and wants to control his own life. Eventually, he seeks to find his place in his relationships, social space and the world around him. The identity formation that happens in the novel can be seen where Toru grapples with shaping his identity by separating himself from other's expectations. He wants to be true to himself, like he wants to embrace his own self despite his flaws. Though his emotions are contradictory in a way, he still wants to control his conflicting emotions and desires to reconcile with the contradictions. At the end, he learns to accept the uncertainty and complexity of life, rather than seeking clear answers or definitions. Ultimately, through Toru's quest for identity, Murakami portrays the search for identity as an ongoing, iterative process like a universal human experience marked by exploration, self-reflection, and growth.

Paul Ricoeur's ideas on narrative identity, ipseity, and alterity can be applied to Toru Watanabe's journey in *Norwegian Wood*. Toru's experiences, relationships, and memories shape his sense of self, illustrating the dialogical nature of identity. The novel's exploration of identity, belonging, and alienation can be seen through the lens of Ricoeur's concepts, offering a deeper understanding of the complex, relational dynamics at play.

4. Conclusion

The novel, thus, highlights the effectiveness of displacement and search for identity through Toru Watanabe. The author poignantly captures the universal human experience of self-discovery, underscoring the notion that identity is a continuous, evolving construct. As Toru navigates the blurred lines between reality and fantasy, he inches closer to embracing his true self, imperfections and all. In short, *Norwegian Wood* presents a powerful exploration of the human condition, reminding us that identity is a journey, not a destination.

Thus, the paper concludes that through different forms of displacement, Toru experiences a profound sense of disconnection, forcing him to confront the complexities of his own identity. Through these dislocations, Toru begins to reconcile his past and present



selves, embracing the impermanence and uncertainty that define human existence. In other words, Murakami illustrates that displacement can be a transformative experience, propelling individuals toward a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

3. Works Cited

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