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Nowhere and everywhere: Navigating gendered urban spaces in Haruki Murakami's *After Dark*[1]

Tak di sana dan di mana pun: Menavigasi ruang kota bergender pada novel *After Dark* karya Haruki Murakami

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urban space, spatiality, women, self-identity, marginalization

ABSTRACT

Urban space has been one of the most underexplored elements analyzed in literary works. However, as urban space gradually emerges as a culturally influencing element, a casual perusal of any text that employs urban space might result in an oversimplified analysis. This study examines the urban space of *After Dark* (2004), authored by Japanese writer Haruki Murakami (b. 1949). Accounting for the ways urban space is interwoven with the socio-cultural context, this study establishes a spatial reading of Murakami's *After Dark* through the description of the city. With a poststructuralist approach, this study discusses how urban space is utilized and how it serves as an important part of the text instead of a mere backdrop; it reinforces the possibilities of setting as a thematic approach to major issues such as self-identity and the marginalization of women. As it is concluded, the urban space the novel presents have succeeded to show that they form, to some extent, women's behaviours both directly and indirectly. Hence, the setting may present the main theme further analysed.

KATA KUNCI

ruang urban, spatialitas, perempuan, identitas-diri, marjinalisasi,

ABSTRAK

Selama ini ruang urban masih menjadi unsur yang paling kurang digali dalam menganalisis karya sastra. Namun demikian, seiring dengan kenyataan bahwa ruang urban lambat-laun hadir sebagai unsur yang secara kultural berpengaruh, kajian kasual mengenai suatu teks yang memanfaatkan ruang urban mungkin justru menghasilkan analisis yang terlalu sederhana. Kajian ini menelisik ruang urban *After Dark* (2004), hasil karya pengarang Jepang, Haruki Murakami (lahir 1949). Dengan berpusat pada cara-cara ruang urban berjalin berkelindan dengan kontek sosio-budaya, kajian ini menghadirkan pembacaan ruang terhadap karya Murakami yang berjudul *After Dark* melalui deskripsi tentang kota yang digunakan sebagai latar. Dengan pendekatan pascastruktural, kajian ini membahas bagaimana ruang urban dimanfaatkan serta bagaimana hal tersebut menjadi bagian penting dari teks dan bukan hanya sekadar latar belakang; hal ini mendorong hadirnya kemungkinan latar sebagai subjek tematik untuk membahas isu-isu besar seperti identitas diri dan marjinalisasi perempuan. Sebagaimana yang diperoleh di kesimpulan, ruang urban yang ditampilkan dalam novel ini telah berhasil menunjukkan kemampuannya untuk membentuk perilaku tokoh-tokoh wanitanya baik secara langsung maupun tidak langsung. Dengan demikian, latar tempat dapat menunjukkan tema utama sebuah karya yang layak diteliti lebih lanjut.

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Introduction

Research of urban space in literature started to gain ground in the twentieth century (Löffler, 2017). In the early stage, people take urban space as physical and natural entities comprising roads, houses, public facilities with no further discussion on its importance to the individuals. However, as urban space constantly undergoes a process of change and development, this understanding of space has also developed and extended. Harvey (1989) explains the multifaceted nature of urban space as a place that enables opportunities, repressions, violence, and innovation. As a place of contradiction, the approach to studying its multifaceted nature has also shifted over the years: cities that we perceive cannot be understood merely as a written manifestation of physical building; they are always imbued with social, political, and cultural context, hence the possibility that literary representations of cities serve as a crucial and fundamental part of the text instead of a mere backdrop.

According to Levy (in McKeown, 2004), common interpretation of urban space is that it is a dynamically changing character; this relates to the notion of space as interdisciplinary: it is continually and culturally produced, lived, and represented in various ways. If literary works can be perceived in various ways, the urban spaces are also open to interpretation. Treating it as a text, therefore, throws a new light onto understanding literary works, particularly of those that feature complex cityscape such as one employed by Japanese writer Haruki Murakami (b. 1949) in his 2004 novel entitled *After Dark*.

Murakami's spaces have prompted some studies (see e.g., Akins, 2012; Gladding, 2005; Oda, 2017); some others have read it from various perspectives: related to linguistics, for example, is presented by Prasetyo and Tawami (2018); meanwhile, Fauziyati and Sulistyaningsih (2020) see the text from stylistic perspective, a very close relation with linguistics. Asfahani (2009) assesses it for magic realism; while Sera (2014) criticizes it using psychological view point. Like Asfahani (2009), Abulencia (2015) also sheds a light on it using psychology but from a different perspective: the personal isolation of the main character; Amanda et al. (2019) present somewhat a close issue to personal isolation, but from a view point of focalization, i.e., loneliness, when they analyze this text. Of the three criticisms afore mentioned, however, none has attempted to read *After Dark* from a gendered, spatial perspective. Correlating with Michael Foucault and Henri Lefebvre's spatial approach, this study offers a reading of the urban setting of *After Dark*. To prove that *After Dark* can be understood better through a spatial reading of its setting, this study discusses how this urban space is constructed. Thus, it attempts to bring all these matters together in a way that not only relates the importance of urban spaces to literary texts but also suggests that the urban space is as much influenced by the socio-cultural context and the historical changes.

The setting of place of *After Dark* is split into two categories; each one has a different significance. In fact, each category addresses different images that relegate women to a state of alienation and, in some ways, heighten the notion of women's passiveness in the patriarchal society. The study proceeds to follow the characters in exploring the many parts of the city, in which many of them experience the false sense of security and are devoid of intimacy that are best displayed in the juxtaposition of the crowd of

the city and the silence of the bedroom. The contrasting spaces that co-exist in a heterotopia suggests a new point of view in seeing space and women in a literary work.

Discussion

The City

In the beginning of *After Dark*, Murakami illustrates the cityscape of Tokyo just before midnight as if it were a living organism, if not uncannily similar to that of human body, and the discomfort stemming from the city is apparent:

> *Eyes mark the shape of the city. Through the eyes of a high-flying night bird, we take in the scene from midair. In our broad sweep, the city looks like a single gigantic creature—or more like a single collective entity created by many intertwining organisms. Countless arteries stretch to the ends of its elusive body, circulating a continuous supply of fresh blood cells, sending out new data and collecting the old, sending out new consumables and collecting the old, sending out new contradictions and collecting the old. To the rhythm of its pulsing, all parts of the body flicker and flare up and squirm. Midnight is approaching, and while the peak of activity has passed, the basal metabolism that maintains life continues undiminished, producing the basso continuo of the city's moan, a monotonous sound that neither rises nor falls but is pregnant with foreboding* (Murakami, 2007, p. 3).

Following the passage above, we descend from the midair point of view to the eye-level viewpoint with our focus shifts to a more detailed urban "amusement districts" that is filled with bright giant digital screens and loudspeakers that keep blasting hip-hop bass lines, forming what Murakami dubs a sea of neon colors. Murakami then describes the city's lively nightlife as something that owns its rules (Murakami, 2007, p. 4). The narrative progresses to inside a round-the-clock family fast-food restaurant. In contrast to the previously bright and lively setting, what we see inside the restaurant is pretty mundane, seen from the unremarkable but adequate lighting to the expressionless décor and tableware. Everything is made rather characterless so that it contradicts the "amusement districts". Consequently, we lose our sense of place. Like a camera TV, we scan the whole restaurant and spot Mari Asai, a bespectacled, black-haired with small face girl who sits by the front window. Appearance-wise, Murakami writes that Mari is ordinary, but we are still attracted to her naturally that we come closer to observe her better. We learn that she is the only female customer in the restaurant.

Many of Murakami's stories feature the chronicles of self-discovery of an alienated, lack of obsession, and average man, so *After Dark*'s Mari Asai individualistic nature is unusual. Mari seeks for sanctuary inside of the restaurant. She just sits there, spending the night reading while smoking and drinking coffee she barely enjoys, waiting for the morning to come so she does not have to sleep under the same roof with her pretty older sister, Eri Asai, who, later in the following chapter, is told to be in deep slumber in her room for the past two months. Not long after, Mari crosses paths with Takahashi, a tall and long-haired young man who is having a final all-night jamming session with his band before finally quitting trombone. Despite her reluctance and annoyance at first, Mari slowly and gradually finds it comfortable talking to Takahashi; their meeting, in fact, becomes a turning point for Mari.

Mulai. The plurality of the urban space is portrayed as a giant living organism that contains many other individuals. Its body mechanism, described as the "countless arteries stretch to the ends of its elusive body, circulating a continuous supply of fresh blood cells, sending out new data and collecting the old, sending out new consumables and collecting the old" (Murakami, 2007, p. 3), works systematically as if it were a machine. Individuals are what constitute this system, but at the same time an individual is rendered insignificant on their own. The city has the power to keep the characters inside the body or the container as they struggle with day-to-day life. This everyday life issue has also been discussed by Soja (2010), who explains that Lefebvre's writing on urban space and everyday life is very apt and appeals strongly to Marxist. In his work, Lefebvre substitutes everyday life for the workplace to get a more broad-reaching analysis. When everyday life is presented as a place where alienation, exploitation, domination, and struggle are visible, urban spaces become less economistic, and therefore the socio-cultural context is relevantly sought after to help one understand. The everyday life is the domain of exploitation and struggle of the individuals best exemplified by Murakami's depiction of the city in *After Dark* that reeks of sense of control, emerging from the large urban space that never sleeps.

Moreover, Akins (2012) believes that such overwhelming power and control of the city force the characters into a space that emotionally disconnects them from each other. On the same wavelength, Carter (2007) writes that the feelings of disconnectedness and hopelessness are experienced by many Japanese post the Second World War, and this much is also reflected on Mari and Eri's individualistic nature and their failure in restoring their relationship. The fragmentation of society and the difficulty in connecting with the society, accordingly, results in the loneliness of Murakami's characters.

Murakami keeps making connection to the urban space as confining space that is constructed by power and consumerism. Amidst millions of city dwellers who try to become assimilated into the society, the anonymity of the city streets is strongly shown in the description of the people and the landscapes as follows:

> *The game center crammed with young people, a group of college students spilling out from a bar; teenage girls with brilliant bleached hair, healthy legs thrusting out from micro miniskirts; dark-suited men racing across diagonal crossings for the last trains to the suburbs* (Murakami, 2007, p. 4).

For women in *After Dark*, finding their place in a city inhabited by millions of people is rather problematic. Despite the fact that Tokyo is a metropolitan city that never sleeps, Murakami juxtaposes the elements of the city like the blinding light of neon box, billboard, blasting noise from every corner with narrow and the dark space in which Mari spends her time. Mari tries to find a place in the urban landscapes of Tokyo, but the social system and the place fail to give her the sense of closure. Murakami loosely associates the feeling of disconnectedness and isolation with the picture of nameless people who, likewise, seek comfort in the embrace of the city:

> *From this second-storey window she can look down on the busy street. Even at a time like this, the street is bright enough and filled with people coming and going—people with places to go and people with no place to go; people with a purpose and people with no purpose; people trying to hold time back and people trying to urge it forward* (Murakami, 2007, p. 6).

Self-identity and self-acceptance have always been an important issue in Murakami's works. As Gladding (2005) discusses in his study, many of Murakami's characters seek for self-identity and struggle with the issues of acceptance by pushing their boundaries to natural landscapes, but this rarely happens in the cityscape. Unlike the natural landscape, Gladding notes, the cityscape holds power that constrains individuals, causing the feeling of disconnectedness from the society. In other words, urban space has never been a form of escape, but more of a confining space.

The issue of the individual identity also recalls the Japanese concept of interior-exterior or *uchi-soto*, subsequently meaning "home" and "not-home". This concept is prominent in the upbringing of most Japanese and a common practice in Japan. Young children grow up in a household (*uchi*), develop a shared identity with other children in the same group, and live as a part of the insider in the society. However, those who venture outside the family's interior, are exposed to strong foreign influences or showcase different characteristics than the rest are ousted as *soto*, the outsiders (Lebra, 1992).

The estrangement becomes even more apparent in the preferred use of pronouns "us" and "them" to refer to those belonging to interior and exterior. This distinction attributes on the marginality of people who do not share the same values and purposes. In fact, Japanese have no fixed term for one self, and therefore do not use the pronoun "I" in social interactions (Lebra, 1992). In professional workplace, Lebra explains that communication is carried out by referring themselves by their jobs or relationship terms. The term *jibun ga nai*, meaning "there is no self" or "non-self", conceptually represents collective individuals. Bachnik (1992) observes that this collective identity may influence the behavior and lead to the detachment and distance between individuals, physical and emotional.

The shared concept of identity explains how the Japanese would rather maintain harmony than assert their own opinion to avoid conflict and criticism, forcing everyone to blend. However, Mari's desire to exert individuality by being herself and not conforming to her assigned role in her family or typical women of her age reflects the gradual change in the younger generation, although it might be seen as a disruption to the harmony at first. Once an insider, Mari now resides in the outside, experiencing the exclusion and estrangement. Lebra (2004) notes that being an outsider attributes to the anxiety, loneliness, physically, socially, and culturally. This is apparent in the way Mari behaves and the spaces she frequently comes—the hotel room and the deserted street—that reflect the narrative that maintains the status quo and sees independent women and individual identities as a threat. Mari who has a sense of individuality but is stripped off of freedom due to the societal pressure to belong to a group seems uncharacteristically out of place at first, but she eventually learns to accept her status as the square peg in a round hole. She refuses to stay in the group for superficial reasons and, in her journey, she gradually gets the sense of closure and unrestricted emotions as an individual.

The urban spaces in *After Dark* are never exclusive; rather, there is always critique of capitalism included. In a modern society that is obsessed with comfort and consumption, people are experiencing disconnectedness from others despite the rapid

growth of technology and production. Mari's choice to exert individuality comes at the expense of disrupting the group' consciousness. Unlike natural landscapes that represent the ideal, the city presents harsh, cold truth. By describing the city as a place of both excitement and estrangement, Murakami devotes spaces that are inclusive of history and culture as a tool to show the struggle of his characters against conformity in order to find their sense of self. Without the duality of the city, the characters' wanderings through the streets, and their isolation in secluded places, his setting will only be reduced to arbitrary and fabricated setting instead of "lived space" that is constructed of layers of meanings.

The Street

While the city brings together a metaphor of large creature that encloses individuals, Murakami also presents another equally imposing space that co-exists within the city: the street. In the narrative, Mari is depicted to be constantly on the walk to move from one place to another:

> *The two keep walking. From the brightly lighted avenue they turn into a narrow lane and head uphill. Kaoru walks quickly and Mari hurries to keep pace with her. They climb a gloomy, deserted stairway and come out to a different street. The stairs seem to be a short cut between the two streets. Several snack bars on this street still have their signs lighted, but none of them suggests a human presence* (Murakami, 2007, p. 35).

The act of walking and the deserted backstreet frequently appears in the narrative as seen in the excerpt below:

> *Mari and Kaoru walk down a deserted backstreet. Kaoru is seeing Mari somewhere. Mari has her navy-blue Boston Red Sox cap pulled down low. In the cap, she looks like a boy—which is probably why she always has it with her* (Murakami, 2007, p. 54).

In *After Dark*, urban spaces are not inclusive. Through the public urban spaces like the street, the gendered nature of urban space is showcased. At a glance, walking down the street seems to be a mundane activity that holds no significance. However, Sinclair (in Löffler, 2017) describes that exploring the city on foot is the most personal and fundamental thing to do to experience a city firsthand; in other words, walking through the city establishes cultural normativity. As a means of moving about the city, the act of walking constructs the city and constitutes a large part of the mobility, which assumed the spatial practice. Walking in the city, for De Certeau (1984), can also be compared to an utterance within the system of language. One could say therefore that walking appropriates and expresses all possibilities within the imposed rules and norms of a city. The act of walking becomes a social and cultural activity that could lift the discourse of a city as a site that does not exist in a vacuum, through which could bridge the text with many viewpoints such as the issue of gender (O'Byrne in Löffler, 2017, p. 93). While the view from above as seen from the previously discussed cityscape reflects how space is perceived by those with power and control, the act of walking (hence the walker, Mari) experiences the city first-hand and can engage with the street individually. This event creates a direct physical and emotional interaction between Mari and the space around her. In the following excerpt, Mari experiences the deserted space herself:

> *They return to the centre of the neighbourhood. Hardly anyone is walking along the street, given the time. Four in the morning: slack time in the city. All kinds of stuff is scattered on the street: aluminium beer cans, a trampled evening newspaper, a crushed cardboard box, plastic bottles, tobacco butts. Fragments of a car's tail lamp. Some kind of discount coupon. Vomit, too. A big, dirty cat is sniffing at a garbage bag, intent on securing a share for the cats before the rats can mess things up or dawn brings the ferocious flocks of crows. Over half the neon lights are out, making the lights of an all-night convenience store that much more conspicuous. Advertising circulars have been stuffed under the windscreen wipers of cars parked along the street. An unbroken roar of huge trucks reverberates from the nearby arterial. This is the best time for the truckers to cover long distances, when the streets are empty* (Murakami, 2007, p. 143).

Mari has choices while walking through the city; she can walk or choose a better path, but why does she keep engaging with the narrow, empty, and deserted streets? This can better be understood as a nod to Rendell's statement that a woman's activity and presence in the city in ungodly hours violate boundaries imposed by society and is considered unacceptable, especially as depicted in the objectifying narratives of urban women written by male writers (Rendell, 2002). Following Lefebvre's idea that space is rooted in the history and culture of the society (1991), it is profitable to look back to the concept of *uchi-soto*.

As Japanese society is built upon double codes that shape the cultural codes (Mani, 2017), there is a difference between behaviors that are portrayed on the outside which conform to the norms of society and the unspoken rules that may be improper in public but accepted in private spheres (Sugimoto, 2014). The concept emanated from traditional and patriarchal system, in which men dominated the family and individual members were the breadwinners and expected to sustain the harmony. The idea that homogenous society where individual identity is considered useless (Mani, 2017) further stipulates the image female figure moving alone and confidently, which is against the nature, through the city as disruption to the male-dominated culture. It affects the way women operate in urban spaces. When the crowd of the city was replaced by the unsettling and intimidating night with unforeseeable events in the coming hours, Tokyo was developing into a metropolis that sees women walking and wandering at night as unordinary. As a consequence, on the street, Mari is constantly making herself smaller, less obtrusive, less confrontational, and more invisible—hence her walking through the deserted space and her attempt to look like a boy to avoid others' attention. The street provides reflection of the cityscape of Tokyo, and also Mari's ways to come to terms with the city—albeit compromised—and how much the city still rigidly grants less access to her.

The Hotel Room and the Office of Alphaville

Like the streets, the Alphaville hotel room and the office share the same qualities—deserted and neglected—that somehow befit the characters who reside in it:

> *The two keep walking. From the brightly lighted avenue they turn into a narrow lane and head uphill. Kaoru walks quickly and Mari hurries to keep pace with her. They climb a gloomy, deserted stairway and come out to a different street. The stairs seem to be a short cut between the two streets. Several snack bars on this street still have their signs lighted, but none of them suggests a human presence* (Murakami, 2007, p. 35).

Likewise, Mari, Kaoru, Komugi, and Korogi undergo the same process as Mari. While Mari's search of self-identity includes her moving from one place to another, the other three women are completely kept in the Alphaville:

> *The three women enter the hotel office. Cardboard cartons are piled along the walls. One steel desk and a simple reception area with couch and armchair. On the desk are a computer keyboard and a glowing liquid crystal monitor. On the walls hang a calendar, a framed piece of pop calligraphy by Mitsuo Aida, and an electric clock. There is a portable TV, and on top of a small refrigerator stands a microwave oven. The room feels cramped with three people in it* (Murakami, 2007, p. 40).

Compared to the depiction of busy urban space and its complexity in the beginning of the chapter, this description of Alphaville hotel office resembles a cell that limits the women's movement. This narrow room with simple and lack of details furniture feels suffocating and emotionally distances the trio further from any contact from the outside. Even when Korogi opens up to Mari about her past, they happen to talk about it in the guest room of Alphaville. This stark contrast between the places in which each event occurs implies that these women are confined in this space.

Violence is also portrayed frequently in the hotel room. Juxtaposed with the hotel office is the Room 404, where Guo Dongli, the Chinese prostitute, was beaten severely by her 'customer' Shirakawa. Shirakawa was enraged to learn that her period started unexpectedly. To Guo Dongli, the hotel room is a space that encloses her during the night. As a prostitute, she is exposed to the risk presented as both sexual advance and violence inflicted upon her body. It does showcase how to a certain degree, women's bodies are dehumanized and heavily subjected to sexual oppression. This is a prevailing issue in the visual and textual narrative of *After Dark*, which later can also be found in Eri's bedroom. Violence was used to Guo Dongli who, similarly, is stripped of her individuality, power, and control of herself, and she exists merely as a body in the actual danger zone, masqueraded in a safe space similar to a home.

While the comfort of the hotel rooms is accessible to other visitors, the women—Guo Dongli, Mari, Kaoru, Komugi, and Korogi—yet fully experience the sense of home. Despite being presented as an inhabitable space, the comfort provided by Hotel Alphaville is fabricated at best. In this sense, Hotel Alphaville effectively enacted heterotopia, to use Foucault's term (2000), where two contrasting spaces are juxtaposed.

The Bedroom and the Other Side

If the city is introduced as a bizarre living creature that encloses other organisms, the bedroom and the other side are spaces filled with uncertainty. Mari spends the whole night venturing between the places in the city, while Eri is sleeping in her room whose sole decoration is a series of photographs of herself. Her bookshelf that holds mostly fashion magazines suggests a self-centered attitude:

> *The camera draws back slowly to convey an image of the entire room. Then it begins observing details in search of clues. This is by no means a highly decorated room. Neither is it a room that suggests the tastes or individuality of its occupant. Without detailed observation, it would be hard to tell that this was the room of a young girl. There are no dolls, stuffed animals, or other accessories to be seen. No posters or calendars. On the side facing the window, one old wooden desk, and a swivel chair. The window itself is covered by a roll-down window blind. On the desk is a simple*

> *black lamp and a brand-new notebook computer (its top closed). A few ballpoint pens and pencils in a mug.*
>
> *By the wall stands a plain wood-framed single bed, and there sleeps Eri Asai. The bedclothes are solid white. On shelves attached to the opposite wall, a compact stereo and a small pile of CDs in their cases. Next to those, a phone. A dresser with mirror attached. The only things placed in front of the mirror are lip balm and a small, round hairbrush. On that wall is a walk-in closet. As the room's only decorative touch, five photographs in small frames are lined up on a shelf, all of them photos of Eri Asai. She is alone in all of them. None shows her with friends or family. They are professional photographs of her posing as a model, photos that might have appeared in magazines. There is a small bookcase, but it contains only a handful of books, mostly college textbooks. And a pile of large-size fashion magazines. It would be hard to conclude that she is a voracious reader* (Murakami, 2007, p. 27).

As the night passes, Eri realizes she has been moved unwillingly and trapped in an unknown room. She panics out and tries to search for help, only to find out that she has been trapped inside the television in her room all along.

> *Now we are on the other side, in the room we saw on the screen. We survey our surroundings. It smells like a room that has not been cleaned for a long time. The window is shut tight, and the air doesn't move. It's chilly and smells faintly of mould. The silence is so deep it hurts our ears. No one is here, nor do we sense the presence of something lurking in here. If there was such a thing here before, it has long since departed. We are the only ones here now—we and Eri Asai* (Murakami, 2007, p. 108).

What is strange is that she becomes acutely aware of everything: she knows that somebody is watching her and that she is in danger. The next thing we know, Eri is already back to her bedroom, sound asleep as she has always been. In the morning, Mari comes home in the hope she can reconcile with her older sister. Trying to wake Eri from her deep sleep and restore their relationship, Mari sneaks in Eri's bed and lies next to her but to no avail. However, as the sunshine falls across the land, we see them sleeping in peace next to each other.

Murakami's female characters always encounter horrifying darkness in various places—the dingy alleyway, the corridor, the bedroom, the hotel room, and in the elevator connected to the other world. Called as *ma* in Japanese, the darkness is a tunnel or a transition phase that functions as an in-between space (Akins, 2012) between the-world-over-here (*kochiragawa*) and the world-over-there (*achiragawa*) (Otomo, 2009). The *ma*, which is akin to Lefebvre's lived space (Akins, 2012), sometimes can be a self-imposed solitude or an isolated and fearful space, but it can also be a deserted place that is totally harmless. These spaces are often associated with the feeling of nostalgia and some extreme mental states caused by the loss of loved ones, guilt, fear or trauma. When Mari and Eri were trapped in the elevator, it was also the darkness that surrounds them. We can also find the darkness at the beginning of Chapter Two when we see Eri's room for the first time. It is possible to say that half of Eri was transported to the other side when Mari did not respond to her calling in the accident, and Eri starts losing interest in Mari because of it.

The bedroom is also an example how Murakami's conception of the self-identity takes form in the contrasting spaces, as described by Jay Rubin in his 2002 article, *The Other World of Haruki Murakami* (Akins, 2012). The characters depart to a journey of self-

discovery through the two worlds that mirror two forms of selves: the metaphysical self and the physical self. To Murakami, one's identity consists of two primary elements: 1) the conscious self, the person we perceive ourselves to be, and 2) the unconscious "other," which works unconsciously at our disposal and is responsible for shaping our behaviors. As we journey through the spaces, the conscious becomes instrumental in helping us see, observe, and eventually understand new situations and respond accordingly; the unconscious "other" processed this experience and stored it. The unconscious manifests itself in repressed emotions, memories, desires, and shapes how the conscious behaves. In the novel, the duality of selves is mirrored into two worlds: the physical where Mari resides (the street, the hotel room, and the city) and metaphysical world (Eri's other side). Like the two selves, these two worlds are not completely separated as there is a link between them. When one is ruptured, the other veered off course. When the Eri and Mari are unable to cope with their feelings of disconnectedness and helplessness after traumatic events, Eri and Mari have to bear with the consequences that follow: they are growing apart.

Whereas darkness is similar to a tunnel or a transition phase, the other side is what waits at the end of the tunnel; it is the space that connects the past and the present. The elevator is one of the recurring spaces in Murakami's novels. Yu (2013) notes that the stainless-steel wall of the elevator is a symbol of confinement where the characters are sealed inside. Murakami uses this to represent the postwar new generation's lifestyle and the identity crisis they have been facing since the 1970s. The postwar generation lived in affluence and economic booming society; they did not experience the loss or grief during the war era. Instead, the issue of consumerism that has riddled the postwar generation culminates in Murakami's futuristic urban setting and the way the labor is contrasted with leisure within the industrial city. To many people, a system built upon capitalism rendered life aimless and meaningless (Yu, 2013, p. 17). The consumerism system creates a homogeneous standard that essentially stripping people off their individuality. Murakami represents the homogeneity in the form of a stationary elevator as a metaphor—unmoved and defenseless. Not only the walls isolate them, but also affect their human relations with the others in the future.

The Camera Movement as Panopticons

Throughout the story, we keep alternating between this side where Mari is, and the other side where Eri is. The same collective that narrates the story guides us during the transition. Like a camera, it lets us adapt to the darkness and freely see the bedroom where the sleeping Eri is. There is a single rule here: we can only observe but we do not intervene. We, as readers, are now situated as the primary viewpoint, using a collective voice that forcefully remove our autonomy. In a way, we joined as a complicit in the rather unsettling observation of Eri. The 'we' sound composed but also shows a cold demeanor. This voyeuristic viewpoint recalls the concept of panopticon proposed by Bentham and Božovič (1995) and Steadman (2012), which later is repurposed by Foucault (1975) in his book Discipline and Punish.

Originating from a concept of prison architecture, panopticon allows a watchman to observe the prisoners without them knowing or noticing about the surveillance. Foucault (1975) extends this concept as a metaphor in the latter half of the 20th century to trace the surveillance tendencies of disciplinarian societies. He argued that the

principle was not limited only to application in the design of the prison. Foucault adopted it as a concept in which everyone is observed and analyzed, highlighting that those who hold the power are in control. The techniques of power and surveillance are deemed to be predominantly negative and oppressive.

In studying panopticon and urban space, Lefebvre (1991) postulates how the two elements are indivisible by nature. It is safe to assume, therefore, the surveillance of Eri that uses an all-observing point of view adopts the same concept. The camera-like movement allows readers to accumulate knowledge about Eri; in other words, Eri's life is monitored and scrutinized. By employing a camera's eye as a voyeuristic viewpoint that lurks in the supposedly safe environment of Eri's bedroom, the bedroom and the other side construct a personal panopticon for Eri. Murakami takes us to witness how the camera movement alongside the bedroom and the other side serve like a barrier that is observing and keeping Eri from connecting to the world where Mari is; it lets us see and judge the woman in of front of us, rendering Eri's privacy completely transparent and removing her from any position of power.

> *She returns to the bed and strokes the quilt. She gives the pillow a few light pats. They are just an ordinary quilt and an ordinary pillow. Not symbols, not concepts; one is a real quilt, and the other a real pillow. Neither gives her anything to go by. Eri runs her fingers over her face, touching every bit of skin. Through her pyjama top, she lays her hands on her breasts. She verifies that she is her usual self: a beautiful face and well-shaped breasts. I'm a lump of flesh, a commercial asset, her rambling thoughts tell her. Suddenly she is far less sure that she is herself* (Murakami, 2007, p. 114).

The space inside the TV and the gaze reduces Eri from a girl with human flesh and human form to nothing but a series of images that we consume and perceive as a sleeping beauty. "We" become the spectators. We observe at Eri with voyeuristic tone, inflicting an oppressive politics of gazing. Eri's unconscious state reproduces the space as a site with unequal power. The gendered spaces reaffirm the prevailing status distinctions that are frequently overlooked: women's position within society, whether measured by power and authority, is related to spatial segregation beyond existing physical arrangements.

Conclusion

The compartmentalization of the urban space in *After Dark* mirrors the society in which women's lives are scrutinized, the limitations are imposed on them, and the choices available are made limited to them. The fact that urban space also functions as a confining space is also worth mentioning. Unlike natural landscapes that present the ideal, the urban space presents the bitter truth and, in many ways, is also a means to seek for their self-identity. In this case, Murakami juxtaposes the elements of the city like the blinding light of neon box, billboard, blasting noise from every corner with the narrow and dark space in which Mari spends most of her time during the night.

Furthermore, finding a place in the world is a rough process for the women in *After Dark*. Murakami continues to highlight the paradox of isolated individuals with no interest in the relationships with other human beings amidst the city lived by millions of people. In *After Dark*, this is presented through the contrasting backgrounds of characters: Mari, who has chosen to alienate herself from her family and friends; and

Eri who is loved by her family but is still filled with emptiness inside and surrounded by fabricated, half-hearted relationships. Mari's seemingly aimless meanderings through the cityscape are not unreasonable; it is her way to negotiate her disconnectedness with people around her. Eri, on the other hand, deals with her own ways. She takes refuge and seeks solace in her bedroom, a medium for her solitary. Mari and Eri have been removed from the position of power throughout the story.

The cityscape may be presented as an inhabitable space. Within the walls, women are provided comfort, but at the same time are exposed to the danger and the false sense of safety. The Alphaville, for example, is a space of danger for Guo Dongli, but it turns into a shelter for Mari and Kaori-Komugi-Korogi trio. Private spaces become a self-isolated sphere where real comfort and access to real relationships cease to exist. The nighttime also reinforces the possibilities of setting as a thematic approach to Murakami's concerns of the society: the search for one's identity amidst the overbearing society.

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