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Confronting the Grand Narrative: 
Spatiality, Violence, and the Bio-Power in Haruki Murakami’s Fiction

Kazuhiko YAMAGUCHI*

Abstract

In this essay, I examine the thematics of violence of the modern nation-state and the concept of ethical responsibility in Haruki Murakami’s works of fiction. Murakami’s examination of the spatial and physical continuation of violence in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1995; hereafter WBC) is associated with Foucault’s idea of “heterotopology.” WBC reflects the discursiveness of spatiality/historicity of violence in which not only the temporal opposition between wartime and non-wartime but also the spatial opposition between the battlefield (Nomonhan) and the modern city (present day Tokyo) are nullified. Anti-mimetic, magical realist devices raise the ontological problem of the constitution of the “real” in our worlds, the relation between self and multiple layered worlds, and furthermore, the system of fictional representation itself.

The seemingly unreal and harmless violence described in Murakami’s fiction is tricky and analogous to Foucault’s idea of bio-power. The more the bio-power enhances the quality of an individual’s life (health, body, and life itself), the more effectively it functions. On the contrary, an example of violence such as the execution by skinning is represented as formidable violent practices based on the “power to spare or take a life.” In WBC, these two types of violence play complementary roles in that they “deprive them of the status of irreplaceable human beings.” The biggest dilemma presented in the representation of violence in WBC is when the protagonist becomes the subject of irrational violence; the closed system actualized by bio-power in the modern nation-state is paradoxically inherent in each individual.

In Murakami’s fiction, the story of the protagonist’s “self” rejects the grand narrative of Japanese history (including that of 1930s Manchuria), but considers it as a necessary condition for its standing. Underlying the paradox is the author’s commitment to keep narrating and questioning the self in relation to the violence during WWII. Murakami’s narrative strategy of magical realism reflects his decision to negotiate with the contradictory aspects of the modern nation-state—without externalizing the national narrative from the self as “Other.”

Key words: Haruki Murakami, violence, subjectivity, magical realism, bio-power

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要旨： 本稿では、村上春樹の小説において、近代民国家が存する暴力と倫理的応答責任の問題がどのように提起されているかを考察した。とりわけ、『ねじまき鳥クロニクル』における「暴力」表象を考察すると、ミシェル・フーコーの「混在郷」の概念に関連し、戦時（過去）と非戦時（物語現在）という時間的対立だけでなく、戦場（ノモンハン）と非戦場（物語現在の東京）といった空間的対立に突き当たる語りの戦略がみえてくる。村上の反ミームーシス的、魔術的リアリズムの語りの戦略とは、われわれの世界の「リアル」がどのように作り立っているのか、自己と他者との世界がどのような関係をもっているのか、表象システムそのものの条件とは何か、など存在論的な問いへとわれわれ読者を導いていく。

村上の小説において表象される「暴力」は二重性を孕む。皮肉講による処刑などは生殺与奪の権力に基づく圧倒

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Haruki Murakami has repeatedly described Japan’s experience of violence in the Chinese Continent since the publication of A Wild Sheep Chase (1983). In A Wild Sheep Chase, the sheep, with a “monumental plan to transform humanity and the human world” comes across the sea to Japan and takes command of “the whole underside of [Japan’s] postwar politics, economics, and information” (189-90). The sheep, who aims to “build up a supreme power base,” symbolizes the negative legacy of Japan’s colonial domination of the Chinese Continent and Asia (283). In Murakami’s latest novel 1Q84 (2009-10), the conflict between the protagonist—Tengo—and his father is shadowed by Tengo’s father’s severe experiences in the Chinese Continent during wartime. Tengo’s father had crossed over to Manchuria in order to survive the war, and he keeps repeating details of this agonizing experience to Tengo. There is no doubt that the formation of Tengo’s character is greatly influenced by his father’s memory exercised by the modern nation-state.

Any interpretations that we may form of Murakami’s earlier or later fiction need to reflect upon the theme of the Japanese wartime experience, as described in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1995, hereafter WBC) as I will elucidate later. WBC is his most esoteric fiction because of its chaotic and fragmentary structure. While the novel, with its disclosure of the hidden aspects of Japan’s modernity, is highly rated as Murakami’s masterpiece to date, readers find its logic hard to follow. Moreover, critics such as Haruo Yoshida have criticized WBC from an ethical viewpoint: “Murakami’s solution . . . to set violence against violence is very questionable” (Yoshida 182, translation mine).

Indeed, a number of critics have pointed out the lack of ethical substance in Murakami’s works of fiction, and compared this aspect to what Alexandre Kojève called the “disappearance of human Discourse (Logos)” and “Man’s return to animality” (160). Kojin Karatani discovers an embodiment of “Japanese snobbery” in Murakami’s fiction, which is contraposed with the modern Japanese novel, a basis for the nation-state and the autonomous modern self (kindaijiga). He juxtaposes Murakami’s fiction with such dominant markers of culture as “anime, computer games, and design,” that is, “more aesthetically refined forms of mass culture that had originated in the United States.” Karatani situates Murakami’s fiction as a representative of “empty games of formality,” which has nothing to do with “historical values that have social or political content.” (Karatani 67-68, translation mine).

In the same fashion, Minato Kawamura regards the Haruki Murakami’s fiction as an extreme case of “Japanese snobbery” of the post-Cold War/ post-History period, and, therefore, an “unethical” time in which everything is understood and solved in a solipsistic manner (16-17). Kawamura attributes the worldwide popularity of Murakami’s fiction to the lack of the “essential conflict and confrontation” in the post-Cold war era.
What remains after the end of the world and history is virtual desire of gaming amplified, expanded, and dispersed by the Internet, which is far from the essential human desires. This desire has, ultimately, originated from the empty “desire” of “I” who has no “Other.” At least, such an “I” can be contraposed against the globalized world. Since we have lost “enemies” or “evil” owing to globalization, we have escaped into the depth of our own “minds.” If the capitalization in the world is termed globalization, the expansion of the “ego” around the world is what Kojève called [Japanese] snobbery. . . . We may say that this has averted our eyes from actual violence by turning “evil,” “hostility,” and the battle against violence (terrorism and war) into language “games.” (26-29, translation mine)

This argument inevitably leads into another in which Kawamura says that Murakami’s fiction dissolves “the anxiety and fear of the people around the world, who cannot endure the void caused by the disappearance of the ‘other’ world in the big wave of globalization” (38). Kawamura then concludes that the phenomenon demonstrates the fact that “we cannot believe that the ‘Cold War’ has ended even in the post-Cold War era, and the end of conflict or confrontation (namely, the war) is not believed literally” (35).

Seemingly, Kawamura, through such an historical analysis, attempts to explain the frequent descriptions of violence in Murakami’s fiction, especially after WBC, and labels it “unethical,” when compared to the modern “ethical” self. However, as modern history has itself shown, this perspective ignores the fact that the modern self that advanced to perfect rationality had a complicit relationship with the numerous instances of cruelty and violence of the modern nation-states toward others.

If Murakami’s fiction, as Richard Powers analyzes, can be said to express “the spirit of our time itself” (46), we need to attempt to explain the potential of his fiction to reorganize our notions of the self in relation to the national violence in the past within an increasingly globalized world where “there is progressively less distinction between inside and outside” (Hardt and Negri 187). In this article, I examine the thematics of violence of the modern nation-state and the concept of the ethical responsibility in Murakami’s fiction, mainly focusing on WBC, referring to Michel Foucault’s concepts such as “heterotopia,” the “Panopticon,” and “bio-power”, etc.

* * *

In 1939, the Nomonhan war started as a consequence of a military clash over the national boundary between Manchuria and Outer Mongolia. By focusing on this bloody incident, WBC dramatizes the issue of the demarcation of national borders. Descriptions of the map-making process engaged in by the Imperial Japanese Army in Nomonhan reflects some key features of how a modern “nation-state” is formed. It shows how the colonialist and imperialist operation of the Japanese Empire was carried out by expanding its territory and “creating its people” by delineating the border.

Murakami comments, “I realized that Japan’s society had remained the same after the war, although much had been restored. That is one of the reasons why I wanted to write about Nomonhan in Wind-Up Bird Chronicle” (Kawai 59, translation mine). In Underground (1997), his nonfiction work about the Tokyo Subway sarin attack, he argues as follows:

The more I delved into the records, the more aghast I became at the recklessness, the sheer lunacy of the Imperial Army’s system of command. . . . [R]esearching the Tokyo gas attack, I was struck by the fact that the closed, responsibility-evading ways of Japanese society were really not any different from how the Imperial Japanese Army operated at that time. (238-39)

Murakami observes two types of violence that are common to both the Imperial Army in pre-World-War-II Manchuria and the contemporary Aum Shinrikyo cult: a non-rational, pre-modern form of violence and the rational violence originating in the modern nation-state. In WBC, he emphasizes that these two types of violence manifest themselves both spatially and physically throughout modern Japanese history.

Murakami’s examination of the spatial and physical continuation of violence in WBC is associated with Michel Foucault’s idea of “heterotopology,” as formulated in his early essay “Of Other Spaces” (1984), namely, the “epochal foregrounding of space over time, spatiality over
historicality” (Soja 155). This concept is epitomized by Foucault’s description of heterogeneous space contraposed with utopia, that is, an idealized non-place.

The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 23)

What Foucault suggests here is that the notion of “space” is a kind of historical discourse of the Other within self, that is, the word “space” only signifies a physical entity but also a hybrid, discursive dimension that includes vectors both of dominance/control and of resistance/freedom. In this sense, the “heterogeneous space” foregrounds the problem of fictional representation and historiography written from a single perspective, from either that of the dominating/controlling or the dominated/controlled.

WBC, whether intentionally or unintentionally, reflects this discursiveness of spatiality/historicity of violence in which not only the temporal opposition between wartime and non-wartime but also the spatial opposition between the battlefield (Nomonhan) and the modern city (present day Tokyo) are nullified. As if crossing the epistemological world and moving down to a cognitively different world, the protagonist climbs down into the neighborhood well (ido), symbolizing his descent into the human psyche in a Freudian sense, as well as society’s collective unconscious in a Jungian sense. *Ido*, which means a “well” in Japanese, is a homonym of the Japanese pronunciation of id, that is, the Freudian “id.” Here, it is clear that Murakami is intentionally uses the well as a metaphor for the psychoanalytical concept. Without a full understanding of what happens around him, Murakami’s protagonist discovers a sort of collective unconscious, as represented by “Room 208,” which, in the metaphysical area, is the deepest part of the unconscious, which is primordial and undifferentiated. If a person digs to the bottom of the well (id as the deepest component of human psyche), he/she reaches the core of his/her consciousness, which is shared with others (collective unconscious). The neighborhood well recalls that in the Mongolian steppe, where Lieutenant Mamiya experiences a “marvelous sense of oneness, an overflowing sense of unity,” which he remembers later was at “the very core of his own consciousness” (WBC 166, 208).

Anti-mimetic, magical realist devices such as the well of the neighborhood mansion, the scar on the protagonist’s cheek, and the baseball bat he uses violently in “Room 208” are introduced into the narrative in order to emphasize the physical/spatial continuity of the Nomonhan War with the state of contemporary Japan. These “spatial” devices are represented awkwardly, as if they were being physically warped from the past into the present; as a result, they disturb the assumptions of “reality” and the epistemologically known “real” world. Moreover, they raise the ontological problem of the constitution of the “real” in our worlds, the relation between the individual self and multiple layered worlds, and furthermore, the system of fictional representation itself.

The spatially integrated present and history in the heterogeneous space form postmodernist “historiographic metafiction.” WBC, in part, “re-introduce[s] historical context into metafiction and problematize[s] the entire question of historical knowledge” (Hutcheon 54-55). Murakami’s text frames modern Japanese history into a single historical, fictional construction through the protagonist’s magical involvement in the complicated web of history. Past events are shown to be relativized to the present through the subjective experience of the individual; the representation is textually reconstructed and presented as historiographical metafiction.

In the middle of the story, a mark suddenly appears on the protagonist’s cheek. This mark symbolizes the layer of the past events accumulated in the ‘present’ heterogeneous space, which, in turn, suggests the inevitable connection between the individual who is alive and past events.

Cinnamon’s grandfather (Nutmeg’s father) and I were also joined by the mark on my cheek. Cinnamon’s grandfather and Lieutenant Mamiya were joined by the city of Hsin-ching. Lieutenant Mamiya and the clairvoyant Mr. Honda were joined by their special duties on the Manchurian-
With the mark of accumulated history that he bears on his cheek, the protagonist hovers in the space of the past as well as the present. Thus, past events are recapitulated in the protagonist’s adventure in the discursive space of the present. Every past event crystallizes all at once in the same moment as the protagonist’s self, and it is this internal experience that, in turn, composes the heterogeneous space of the text.

The main plot of *WBC* deals with the protagonist’s search for the reason why he and his wife Kumiko, who has supposedly been kidnapped, “should have been drawn into [the] historical chain of cause and effect” (*WBC* 498). This plot depends on spatial thinking (where the event happened) as well as on temporal/historical thinking (when it happened). This leads to a complex web of events that reflects the hidden history of violence in the modern nation-state. Thus, the protagonist inevitably enters the heterogeneous space within which he attempts to retrieve his wife, foregrounding the thematics of violence dominating the collective unconscious of the people and of the ethical subject that confronts it.

* * *

In the modern nation-state, the violence committed by an individual is legitimized only when the state authorizes it. Thus, violence used in war, the police force, militias, and legal self-defense may be officially sanctioned (although this does not mean the nation-state can necessarily dispense absolute justice). From this perspective, the nation-state seeks to maintain a superior position over all individuals and to regulate and control any violence committed by them. The state, however, does not exercise its power merely because it provides the people with the right of violence from its higher position. As Foucault remarks, “the state relies on the institutional integration of power relationships” (*History of Sexuality* 96). The invisible, intangible power of the nation-state is created when individual violence is codified in a certain “power relationship.” As Foucault emphasizes, “the strictly relational character of power relations” is realized through the collective violence of individuals (95). This, in turn, supports the very notion of the nation-state. Deleuze and Guattari also find the essence of the notion of the nation-state as “enact[ing] the war machine” (Deleuze and Guattari 425).

Thus, to interpret the descriptions of the violence in *WBC* with regard to the binary opposition between the violence of the state and that of individuals turns out to be a mistake. An example of such a view might be that Japan’s military state exploited and misused its people’s capacity for individual violence. Murakami’s text rejects the idea that the violence of the state exists predominantly as a way of controlling its people. *WBC*, however, does not depend on a constructionist view of the nation-state as fiction either. As Toshihito Kayano says, “the devices of the state, such as the police, military forces, judicial administration, etc., embody its physical movement in exercising and ordering violence” (150, translation mine).

In *WBC*, Murakami depicts the condition in which depersonalized individuals support the violence of the state. This situation of “relational character of power relations” is conducted through the “disciplinary apparatus,” which is most fully exemplified by the device of what Foucault calls the “Panopticon.” The Panopticon, the institutional form of architecture used for hospitals and jails in the eighteenth century, designates a space for the interaction of power and knowledge. As Foucault explains, in the central tower of such a building, one unseen observer sees everything and everyone inside the prison cells in the surrounding buildings. This structure causes the overall power structure to be interiorized within individuals in a way that assures their complicity.

The Panopticon subordinates individuals to the state not by physical violence, but by making the mechanism of subordination invisible and unverifiable. In other words, individuals unconsciously interiorize the mechanism of
violence. George Orwell’s “Big Brother,” for example, does not actually exist as an overwhelming power holder, but it is constituted internally as such by each individual within the system. Such an internalized system of violence thus manifests itself as an integrated, collective power relationship.

In *WBC*, the relationship between Kumiko and her brother Noboru Wataya is homologous to the systematic violence of the Panopticon in that it has aspects of both protection and imprisonment. When Kumiko (who comes to recognize that this systematic violence exists within her) kills her brother, it is as if she is punishing herself at the same time.

Concerning the panoptic system in the modern city, Edward Soja argues that “Amidst its multiplicity of expressions, every city is to some degree a panopticon” (235). In *WBC*, Murakami describes the alleyway, the mansion, and the well in the very center of Tokyo as the gateway to such a disciplinary apparatus of internment and exclusion. Accordingly, the heterogeneous use of space for “resistance that makes a revolution possible” and “the integration of power relationships” necessarily becomes identified with a specific locale (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 96). It is for this reason that Noboru Wataya, the archenemy and mirror image of the protagonist, fears that this locale may become a discursive space of resistance that might disturb and overthrow his power structure.

The seemingly unreal and harmless violence described in *WBC* is, however, tricky and analogous to Foucault’s idea of “bio-power.” Foucault’s “bio-power,” which he defines as the technology of power centered on life, is not the kind of power that corrects rebellious individuals with violence or sentences them to death (the death penalty) (*History of Sexuality* 144). It lets individuals live. The more the bio-power enhances the quality of an individual’s life (health, body, and life itself), the more effectively it functions. One might cite the example of a city’s surveillance system that is intended to identify criminals but that functions at the cost of privacy. By using such a system, a welfare state runs the risk of becoming totalitarian. If the violence of the nation-state is carried out through both regulation and reinforcement of the value of individuals’ lives, “[w]ars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity” (137). What the nation-state confronts here is not an outside enemy, but a perceived domestic threat against the individuals’ lives. Thus, the rhetoric of excluding the risk against life *per se* makes the arrangements of violence completely invisible and abstract.

The violence described in *WBC* is twofold. On the one hand, examples of violence such as the execution of Yamamoto by skinning, the slaughter of the Chinese fugitive using a baseball bat, the lynching of Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia, and the shooting of the zoo animals in Shinkyo are represented as formidable violent practices based on the “power to spare or take a life.” This might be called the “death-power” which attempts to forcibly establish an order of dominance thorough the use of ritualistic executions in front of witnesses. On the other hand, the violence defiling Kumiko is based on the management of the individuals’ lives and bodies. When viewed from the perspective of a quality life and healthy bodies, this may not even be termed violence. However, these two types of violence play complementary roles, for they can be seen as two sides of the same coin in that they “forcibly homogenize individuals’ life and death, and thoroughly deprive them of the status of irreplaceable human beings” (Ueno 9, translation mine).

In the internment camp in Siberia, Lieutenant Mamiya again meets Boris the Manskinner, who once ordered the brutal execution of Yamamoto by skinning. Whereas Mamiya pretends to be the faithful secretary of this archenemy, he secretly commits his whole life to assassinating him. In due course, Mamiya is given a chance to kill Boris surprisingly by Boris himself.

“Take steady aim, now, Lieutenant Mamiya. It’s your last bullet.” Boris was still smiling . . .

Gripping the Walther in my right hand, I thrust it straight out, aimed for the middle of Boris’s contemptuous, confident smile, and coolly squeezed the trigger. The pistol kicked, but I held it steady. It was a perfectly executed shot. But again the bullet grazed Boris’s head, this time smashing the wall clock behind him into a million pieces. Boris never so much as twitched an eyebrow. Leaning back in his chair, he went on staring at me with his snakelike eyes. The pistol crashed to the floor . . .

“I told you you couldn’t kill me, didn’t I?” Boris said. He took a pack of Camels from his pocket, put
a cigarette between his lips, and lit it with his lighter. “There was nothing wrong with you shooting. It was just that you couldn’t kill me. Your aren’t qualified to kill me. That is the only reason you missed your chance.” (WBC 563)

Mamiya “simply” cannot carry the execution out, since what Boris represents is not violence by a specific personality, but the invisible, intangible, and omnipresent bio-power of which Mamiya himself is a part. In this sense, Mamiya’s attempt to assassinate Boris is doomed to fail from the start.

Throughout his career as a fiction writer, Murakami has described this kind of psychologically defiled men, that is, “hollow men” such as the Rat in A Wild Sheep Chase, Miu in Sputnik Sweetheart (1999), and Nakata in Kafka on the Shore (2002). They are alike subject to some system by surrendering their selves to them, as George Orwell depicted in Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949): “Everything will be dead inside you. Never again will you be capable of love, or friendship, or joy of living, or laughter, or curiosity, or courage, or integrity. You will be hollow. We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves” (293, italics mine). In Murakami’s 1Q84, apparently titled as a homage to Orwell’s work, Sensei says to the protagonist:

What Takashima is doing, it appears to me, is making robots that do not think by themselves. This removes the circuits of thinking from human minds. It is a similar world to that George Orwell described in his fiction. But as you probably know, there are bunch of people in this society who want such a condition of brain death. (1:222, translation mine)

In Kafka on the Shore, Oshima says:

But what disgusts me even more are people who have no imagination. The kind T. S. Eliot calls hollow men. People who fill up that lack of imagination with heartless bits of straw, not even aware of what they’re doing. . . . Narrow minds devoid of imagination. Intolerance, theories cut off from reality, empty terminology, usurped ideals, inflexible systems. . . . [I]ntolerant, narrow minds with no imagination are like parasites that transform the host, change form, and continue to thrive. (167-68, italics mine)

Murakami’s employment of “hollow men” such as Mamiya in WBC is also reminiscent of the condition of Adolf Eichmann, who had difficulties in defining himself without merging himself with organizations and represented the “banality of evil,” as Hannah Arendt depicted in Eichmann in Jerusalem (1963).

In this sense, Murakami’s works of fiction have consistently problematized the power relationship that attempts to control external reality by forcing an individual to cease being one. The power relationship is, however, not to reduce multiple identities within each individual to a single, bigger (maybe totalitarian) identity, but “to establish ‘hegemony’ between affiliations or identities, and to, by transforming them, make out of them hierarchy under the hegemony. Each individual is socialized and mobilized under the dominant affiliation that the hegemony demonstrates, and lives the other identities” (Kayano 241-42, translation mine). Murakami has constantly questioning such a system’s continual production of “hollow men,” including militarism, imperialism, totalitarianism, religious cults, and even a misled capitalism and failed democracy. These “systems” represented in Murakami’s works of fiction seems to be uniformly associated with the concept of bio-power.

In this context, the biggest dilemma presented in the representation of violence in WBC is that the protagonist becomes the subject of irrational violence in order to fight Noboru Wataya, another prototype of bio-power. Although it is hard to compare the internment camp in Siberia with the modern city of Tokyo in the 1980’s, the battle between the protagonist and Noboru Wataya is homologous to the one between Lieutenant Mamiya and Boris the Manskinner. The protagonist’s beating and killing of Wataya Noboru (described as “it”) in the final battle in the heterogeneous space is presented as a mirror image of the violence of the Imperial Japanese Army in Nomonhan.

It was a perfect swing. I caught him somewhere high on the neck. There was a sickening sound of cracking bone. A third swing hit home—the skull—and sent him flying. He let out a weird sound and slumped to the floor. He lay there making little gasps, but those soon stopped. I closed my eyes and,
without thinking, aimed one final swing in the direction of the sound. I didn’t want to do it, but I had no choice. I had to finish him off: not out of hatred or even out of fear, but as something I simply had to do. I heard something crack open in the darkness like a piece of fruit. Like a watermelon. (WBC 586, italics mine)

The story thus implies that the protagonist inherits the historical violence spatially and physically, including not only the organized violence of bio-power but also its counter-violence. It is needless to cite Walter Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence” (1921) to be aware that the notion of violence as “something I simply had to do” does not legitimatize it. If so, we may safely say that “the most violent violence in WBC is the process of reasoning that ‘I,’ as a citizen, cannot fight the violence exercised by the ‘power’ only with violence” (Kazamaru 206, translation mine).

The more important point here, however, is that the protagonist’s violence is not imaginary or abstract at all. That is exactly why “a sickening smell hung in the air” after the protagonist’s exercise of violence, which is “the smell of brains and violence and death” in life (WBC 586). To borrow Giorgio Agamben’s words, the violence of the nation-state that WBC presents as problematic is seen to exist not only in the “state of exception” allowed during wartime, but also in the extended and normalized “state of exception” that exists in the present day. In the context of the present state of exception, the protagonist’s conflict presents the resistance of a man of “bare life,” who is alive but who may be killed at anytime. Regarding the fear he felt while reading numerous books on the Nomonhan war, Murakami writes:

Even today, I (or many of us) cannot escape the free-floating anxiety that we might be silently erased from social situations as nameless expendable objects. We believe that we are guaranteed basic human rights in a peaceful “democratic nation” called Japan. But is this true? If we look beneath the surface, we might see that the closed system of our nation or doctrine continues to exist. (Henkyo 139, translation mine)

Here, we notice that Yamamoto’s completely skinned “bare life” or “bare body” is not only a consequence of but also a simple metaphor for the “closed system” actualized by bio-power in the modern nation-state; such a closed system is paradoxically inherent in each individual.

* * *

In the context above, we can see how Noboru Wataya, as the prototype of “bio-power,” attempts to imprison the protagonist within the system while the protagonist, as a rebellious hero who rejects becoming another Lieutenant Mamiya functions as an “allegory of the human being who is let [left] alive” (Suzuki 224, translation mine). However, as each brings about unjustified violence, the protagonist and Noboru Wataya can be seen as mirror images of each other. This demonstrates the Freudian mental mechanism in which one attempts to reject the “other” inside oneself. Assuming that individuals may need to violently reject this “other” in order to discover their personal (or national) identity, WBC does not seem to give us any hint about how to deal with this recurrent “other.” However, Murakami, through examining the violence of the nation-state, pursues the theme of the hostile relationship between the “other” and the self.

In WBC, the story of the protagonist’s “self” rejects the grand-narrative of Japanese history (including that of 1930s Manchuria), but considers it as a necessary condition for its standing. Underlying the paradox is the author’s commitment to keep narrating and questioning the violence during WWII. This sense of history supports an ethical sense of the subject that does not entail representing Japanese history of violence as an objectified and isolated past. The author is aware of power-structure that conditions the national narrative of Japan. Murakami’s narrative strategy of magical realism reflects his decision to negotiate with the contradictory aspects of the modern nation-state—neither fantasizing an alternative history, nor externalizing the national narrative from the self as “other.”

Notes

◆ An early version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in New Orleans, LA, USA, on April 1, 2010. This essay includes revised portions from my early essay “Exploring the Other Space: Haruki Murakami’s Metaphysical Detective Story The Wind-Up Bird
Chronicle” in Miyagi Kyōiku Daigaku Gakushūkyoku Kenkyū Ronshū 3 (2003). This study is supported by Grants-in-Aid for Young Scientists (B), KAKENHI (No. 21720090).

1. See Kakutani.

2. See Soja’s comment on Foucault: “Foucault first notes that our lives are still governed by ‘sanctified’ (modernist?) oppositions (e.g. between private and public space, family and social space, cultural and useful space, leisure and work space) ‘nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred.’ . . . Much remains hidden in our lived spaces, buried in these (oppositions) that ‘our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down,’ that we continue to regard as ‘simple givens’” (156). See also Jameson’s: “[W]e cannot return to aesthetic practices elaborated on the basis of historical situations and dilemmas which are no longer ours. . . . [A] model of political culture appropriate our own situations will necessarily have to raise spatial issues as its fundamental organizing concern. . . . [O]ur daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time” (88-89).

3. Concerning the relation of the protagonist and Noboru Wataya, Foucault’s analysis of mirror function is suggestive: “[The mirror] makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (“Of Other Spaces” 24).

4. See Agamben.

Works Cited


