

# IN A WORLD WITHOUT LOVE: SOCIETY, RELIGION AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN HARUKI MURAKAMI'S 1Q84

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## ABSTRACT

Haruki Murakami's *1Q84* is a near-past novel set in Cold War Japan, where the system is run silently by a powerful religious group that can undermine individuals who go against it. As we delve into Murakami's Sakigake/Akebono cult, we delve also into the complexities of a postmodern Japan where neither good nor evil are clearly demarcated. To understand the role of religion that surfaces in the novel, this paper contextualizes organized religions in relation to the suppressed histories of modern Japan. It is the contention of this author that contemporary organized religions in Japan provide a venue for the liberation of suppressed ideals and histories. As mainstream society turns away from such issues, Murakami suggests that religious groups (as in the case of his fictional Sakigake/Akebono) address it.

## Introduction

It was back in October 1995 that I first set foot in Tokyo as an exchange student in the University of Tokyo's AIKOM (Abroad in Komaba) program. When I arrived, it was already six months past the ill-fated day of March 20, 1995—a singular day in contemporary Japanese history on which the Japanese witnessed terror in their own homeland. It was six months past the Aum tragedy and I saw how there still hung an unbearable sense of anxiety in Tokyo, hidden under a layer of frosty calm.<sup>1</sup> Wanted posters of the perpetrators hung in all public areas, their photographs showing faces of young men and women, most of them looking as if they were only in their twenties or thirties. These “wanted terrorists” did not at all match the stereotype I had at that time of what terrorists were like. Back then, my image of the “bad guys” was tainted by my exposure to cinema and its portrayals of depth-less villains, mostly middle-aged males, with their token voluptuous vixens, who committed acts of evil “just because.” Today, global cinema, as a response to social realities, is slowly breaking free from the portrayal of the stock James Bond villain. A case in point is found in the multi-awarded 1998 film *The Terrorist*, directed by Santosh Sivan; here a young woman, the central character, volunteers to be a suicide bomber. Then there is Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006), where four seemingly disparate narratives are unmasked as enmeshed. In

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<sup>1</sup> 1995 was also the year when Japan experienced the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, or Kobe earthquake. The January 17 earthquake had a magnitude of 6.9 and killed approximately 5,502 to 6,434 individuals according to the U.S. Geological Survey (2009).

*Babel*, the dispossessed from two sides of the world experience parallel realities. In the process of connecting the narratives, viewers are left to question what and who truly are the terrorists. Stepping out of the audio-visual fiction of cinema today, one is confronted with mainstream media reports of the varied backgrounds, profiles and reasons of those who are deemed terrorists. During my stay in Tokyo, I saw how the photographs of the wanted perpetrators of terror were crossed-out one by one, assuring the public that the long arm of the law was in full force. Japan did its best to prove to its people and the world that the country still ranks high globally among the safest nations. However, even with the arrests of the perpetrators, two questions still loomed heavily: is Japan truly as safe as it would like to present itself to the world? Or, would other groups soon also create chaos following the Tokyo attack?

In the Spring of 2015, in a Global Attitudes Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, it was divulged that from among nine Asian countries, the five nations of Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Australia and Indonesia viewed Japan positively or favorably.<sup>2</sup> A less favorable view of Japan was held by Pakistan, India, South Korea and China.<sup>3</sup> Japan's role in Asia has changed considerably over a hundred years. From being an imperialist nation that participated in and then initiated war during the two World Wars across the Asian continent, to its present embodiment as a parliamentary government with a constitutional monarchy, a staunch ally of the U.S., and a global economic giant, Japan has transformed itself from an enemy to a popular ally of most current Asian states. And yet, at the turn of the millennium, Japan as a nation must once again re-invent itself and this time look inwardly at its society, for the myths it has created to propel growth and unity as a nation have clearly begun to develop deep cracks. In the face of the double disasters of 1995, Matsudo Yukio writes:

In the face of these apocalyptic scenes the Japanese are experiencing the breakdown of their modern myths: the myths of economic development and permanent employment based on a work ethic of loyalty towards one's company, the myth of a secure environment guaranteed by modern technology and government administration, and the myth of a harmonious society based on national ethnic homogeneity. (Yukio 2001, 163)

The goal of this paper is to engage in the critique of contemporary Japanese society through the lens of literature, particularly that of the novel *1Q84* by the Japanese, best-selling and multi-awarded author, Haruki Murakami. Murakami's novel *1Q84* not only fulfills the author's desire to write a long, comprehensive novel in the manner of his literary influence, Fyodor Dostoevsky, or a dystopian novel in the manner of George Orwell, but more importantly, just as it was with both those literary greats, it also allows him to use his fiction as a vehicle for social commentary. In this case Murakami turns his lens on the entangled interests of nation, religion and the individual in Japan.

## Japan's Global Writer

Murakami was born on January 12, 1949, into a generation that, by a hair, missed the horror of the Second World War. His generation is the one that helped transform the defeated, economically ravished Japan into Asia's economic giant between the late 1960s up to the late

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<sup>2</sup> Countries that view Japan favorably in the 2015 Pew Research Center's Asians Views of Each Other Survey: Malaysia (84 percent), Vietnam (82 percent), Philippines (81 percent), Australia (80 percent) and Indonesia 71 percent (Pew Research Center 2015, 4).

<sup>3</sup> Countries that view Japan less favorably in the same Pew Research Center Survey are: Pakistan (48 percent), India (46 percent), South Korea (25 percent) and China (12 percent) (ibid.).

1980s—known as the age of the bubble economy. Murakami's generation introduced what no other generation prior had brought to Japan—economic affluence. During the 1980s, Japan became the second largest economy in the world. With this, the Japanese acquired enough economic capital (economic assets held, i.e. property owned, and earning ability) to make their overseas presence significant. For instance, during the peak of the bubble economy, the Sony Company purchased Hollywood's Columbia Pictures, while the Mitsubishi Company purchased the Rockefeller Center for US\$846 million (Wile 2013). With its newly acquired purchasing power, this is the generation of affluence that Murakami and some of his own generation later would find to be suffering from an emptiness brought about by a culture of hyper-consumption. As a reaction to such a condition in Japan's history, Murakami's fiction has themes of emptiness, loneliness and isolation. These themes appear in his early works, which are mostly set in this period of the bubble economy in Japanese history.

When necessary, Murakami is not afraid to use the most popular technology today, the Internet, to engage his readers in a conversation, and in effect, to engage with his literary works (e.g. as an online agony uncle, and in other online promotions). As a writer who began to use the Internet to communicate with his readers as early as 1997, we can say that Murakami is one of the earliest novelists to effectively use this medium to make himself and his works appealing and relevant to an increasingly younger readership, not only in Japan, but overseas as well.

Over the decades, Murakami has been instrumental in introducing contemporary Japanese literature overseas, a feat that earlier Japanese writers found difficult to accomplish. For instance, in South Korea, Noriko Kayanuma, a professor of Japanese literature at Choong Euk National University in South Korea, wrote that “[r]eaders develop empathy for the Japanese of their age through Murakami's books. They realize that Japanese young people have similar sentiments, worries and problems” (Kattoulas 2002). Similarly, reception of Murakami's work in other countries overseas has been positive and that is why Murakami himself “feels that he can go overseas and represent Japan, give Japan a face for many foreigners who will never come to Japan or have not come to Japan” (Kelts, 2009). For Inuhiko Yomota, Murakami's fiction, along with Japanese animation or anime, and Japanese-made computer games, give Japan the international cultural power that it lacked until the 1980s (Yomota 2008, 33).

Written materials that form the foundation of this article are primarily Murakami's novel *1Q84*, public interviews given by Murakami himself, his speeches, some book reviews, and academic journal articles. Unfortunately, this researcher has limited knowledge of the Japanese language, which means that data for the article are limited to those materials available in English. If there is any silver lining in this, it is that the richness of the English-language materials solidifies Murakami's impact in the English-speaking world, which in turn points to his privileged position in global literature today, where English remains the strongest *lingua franca*. Moreover, examining Murakami from the vantage point of English language sources might be more effective, because as Masaki Mori states, he “seems to be more inclined to speak publicly while abroad and to grant interviews to Western publications” (Mori 2012, 220).

### Notes on the Publication and Reception of *1Q84*

Murakami was already a professional fiction writer at the top of the global literary game when he embarked on the three-volume, 925-page (in English translation) behemoth of a novel, *1Q84* (ichi-kew-hachi-yon), published in Japan in May 2009 (Books 1 and 2), and in April 2010 (Book 3). That he was already in a position of dominance in the global literary field cannot be emphasized enough. It must be borne in mind that no new writer in the literary field should ideally start with a project of such ambitious length, for no new writer will find it easy to enter the field of literature and receive support from the literary establishment, most importantly, from a publisher, to release a multi-volume work such as this. Yet in this age of digital connectivity and plunging book sales,

and due to the literary/cultural capital that Murakami had amassed over his years of writing, New York-based publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, gave a nod of approval to this work, and in a further illustration of faith in its author, allowed the translation in English to be unabridged.

It should also be emphasized that translation of the volumes that comprise *IQ84* began from their native Japanese to English as soon as they were released by local publisher, Shinchosha. The demand by foreign readers for the novel's translation was so high that Murakami's translators worked non-stop to meet publishers' deadlines coast to coast. Eventually the first translation by the Korean, Yun Ok Yang, was released by the publisher Munhakdongne on August 1, 2009. It was the first piece to transform Book 1 of Murakami's *IQ84* into a different language and it did so less than three months after the novel's release.

Murakami's novel was written and developed over three years. According to multiple sources, the title is a play on the Japanese pronunciation of the year 1984, and a reference to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The letter Q and the Japanese number 9 (typically romanized as "kyū", but as "kew" on the book's Japanese cover) are homophones, and are often used in Japanese wordplay.

### **The Burden of Reading Murakami**

“Even without knowing anything about the book, I decided to buy and read [IQ84] anyway because I trust Mr. Murakami. Any book of his would be fun.”

Kanae Miyazu, Tokyo photographer, and long-time reader of Murakami (quoted in Thangham 2009)

By the time Murakami wrote *IQ84*, he had already carved out a literary space for himself in two fields, the local/national and the global. His work at this point was able to combine his concerns in both areas through his fantastic style of the 1980s, which developed into what is referred to as “Murakamiesque,” and which became his ticket to global fame. Later with his novels, especially *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (1995-1997) and *IQ84* there is a more conscious political slant to his writing.

Murakami's salient consciousness as a political agent was emphasized in his speech when he received the Jerusalem prize in 2009 (“The Novelist in Wartime”). Here he labels himself as a fiction writer who is a “professional spinner of lies.” He explained in his speech that the role of the fictionist-liar is to someone who:

by telling skillful lies—which is to say, by making up fictions that appear to be true—can bring a truth out to a new location and shine a new light on it. In most cases, it is virtually impossible to grasp a truth in its original form and depict it accurately. This is why [the novelist tries] to grab its tail by luring the truth from its hiding place, transferring it to a fictional location, and replacing it with a fictional form.

In his more vocal political stance Murakami states what his readers already know from his fiction—that he is a writer championing the individual, a rare breed in modern societies, and especially in his native Japan where a combination of conservatism and the drive to modernize have made the rise of the individual difficult, almost impossible. In the same speech, Murakami states:

I have only one reason to write novels, and that is to bring the dignity of the individual soul to the surface and shine a light upon it. The purpose of a story is to sound an alarm, to keep a light trained on The System in order to prevent it from tangling our souls in its web and demeaning them. I fully believe it is the novelist's job to keep trying to clarify the uniqueness of each individual soul by writing stories—stories of life and death, stories of love, stories that make people cry and quake with fear and shake with

laughter. This is why we [fiction writers] go on, day after day, concocting fictions with utter seriousness. (Murakami 2009b)

Murakami's readers, especially his East Asian readers, are very supportive of his consistent advocacy of the individual. Murakami has become a symbol for the region in providing a voice for the generation of post-World War II disenfranchised youth. This is the generation of those who experienced firsthand the need for student protest in the 1960s, an experience that was something closely shared by Japan and other Asian countries during that time in the Cold War. This 1960s generation of Japan also experienced a strong feeling of alienation in the face of the rapid and soulless modernization that continued into the 1970s and 1980s.

Murakami's works provide an inspiration to writers, especially in East Asia, to reach out across generations to try to bring back a human face to modernity.

## **1Q84 as Counter Memory**

At the very heart of the novel 1Q84 is a love story. If in earlier Murakami works the mystery of the plot is tied up to something amorphous—The System—in this, more than any other Murakami novel, the mystery is connected with the power of love. It is a love that defies The System, defies time, and defies reality (to paraphrase the description on the novel's dust jacket). The main plot of the novel revolves around the seemingly impossible reunion of thirty-year-old Aomame with her twenty-nine-year-old childhood sweetheart, Tengo. Although they have not seen each other for twenty years, the affection they felt for each other grows as they mature into adults. Although both lead highly individualistic, independent lives, it is that childhood connection they want to return to. It is the impossibility of crossing paths again, after decades of not seeing each other and of seemingly having little in common as adults, that creates an air of mystery in the novel. Will fate allow them to meet and carry on the love they felt for each other as children? It is quite unlikely, given the situations they find themselves in. And yet a longing inside of them cannot be silenced.

As children, they are not even friends. The girl, Aomame, is too different from her classmates. Her parents are active members of a religious group, the Society of Witnesses (which is described quite like a mixture of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses, although Murakami never confirms this in any interview). Her religion makes her stand out from her classmates, which is not an easy situation for young people in Japan. The Japanese educational system even today maintains a uniform way of doing things. Japanese society still reveres tradition; in Japan, communal identity is favored over that of the individual. As a member of the Society, Aomame has to pray in a loud voice before she takes her meals. This, coupled with her introversion, later makes her a target for bullying. Further, Aomame has to accompany her parents on Sundays to proselytize. It is during some of those Sundays that she and Tengo cross paths.

Tengo loses his mother at an early age and is raised by an indifferent father who insists that he join him on Sundays to collect subscribers' fees for the government-run television channel, NHK. His father uses Tengo's presence as a strategy to collect the fees; for adults usually do not refuse to pay in the presence of a child. Tengo detests those Sundays. He would rather study his lessons than be with his indifferent father. Tengo is both a math and a martial arts (Judo) prodigy. His future as a student has promise and yet his father insists that he do this Sunday chore, which embarrasses Tengo tremendously. Similarly, during that period, Aomame feels a yearning to break free from the shackles of her religion. It is with this loneliness and helplessness that they look at each other during those instances that their paths cross as children.

Then, one time at school when Aomame is being bullied, Tengo steps in and prevents the other students from attacking her. It is the first time that someone from school stands up to protect Aomame. It is soon after this incident that Aomame musters the courage to come up to Tengo, not to say something, but just to hold his hand. Aomame holding Tengo's hand as a girl is significant,

for in that moment two lonely children, two lonely individuals, find a human connection; they find a love that is pure and not yet corrupted by life in an indifferent world. It is this connection, this pure love, that motivates the two, even as adults who have lost contact with each other over the years, to find each other. Intuitively they knew that meeting again is something that they must make happen.

So it is around this impossible love story between Aomame and Tengo that *1Q84*'s revolves. They are bound to meet and do so after a long period of hoping and trying. They meet in an alternate reality that they enter, the reality of *1Q84* that is the alternate 1984 that they find themselves caught in. The entire novel runs for nine months. The separate titles of each book in the trilogy show this: Book 1 April-June, Book 2 July-September and Book 3 October-December.

In Chapter 1 of Book 1, the character of Aomame is introduced while she is in a taxi on her way to meet a client in the Shibuya district of Tokyo. The taxi driver, quite unusually, plays classical music in his vehicle. Aomame, being fond of history, identifies the piece as Janacek's "Sinfonietta." The music is composed in 1926, which incidentally is a significant year in Japanese history as it is the year when the era of the Taishō emperor ends and the era of Shōwa starts. The latter is the age that yields rapid modernization and economic growth in Japan. The insertion of the Sinfonietta here in a Japanese setting in 1984 is clearly an allusion by Murakami to the historical context of the novel. 1984 is still within the era of Showa and it is a year that still enjoys the rewards of Japan's bubble economy.

As the heavy traffic forces the vehicles to move at crawling pace, the taxi driver (an enigmatic character who never resurfaces in the novel) suggests to Aomame she use an emergency stairway off the elevated highway. This stairway will help her access the subway and get her to her meeting on time. Interestingly the driver, who does not listen to the news on his radio, is confident about the flow of the traffic. He even tells Aomame that the news reports cannot be trusted: "If you really want to know what's happening here and now, you've got to use your own eyes and your own judgment" (Murakami 2011, 6). Before leaving the vehicle, the driver gives her a warning that: "things are not always what they seem" (9), and the warning from the driver is the key to unlocking the worldview of *1Q84*. Through the driver's advice to Aomame to use her intuition and look beneath the surface of what is there in reality, readers are also prepared to sharpen their interpretive abilities. Holding on to this advice will carry one through the entirety of the rabbit hole of the novel. When she asks the taxi driver what he means, he says: "after you do something like that [using the emergency stairway], the everyday look of things might seem to change a little. Things may look different to you than they did before...But don't let appearances fool you. There's always only one reality" (9).

As noted, the warning given by the taxi driver is the motif in this novel. Interestingly, Aomame herself at this early point in the book is not what she seems. Dressed as an office lady on her way to a meeting with a client, Aomame is not in the least connected with any professional registered business. The meeting is with a highly secretive leader of a religious cult. There she is welcomed as a masseuse. Although Aomame does have background in massage therapy, her real business with the leader is to carry out a directive to kill him, vigilante style.

When Aomame follows the driver's advice to take the emergency staircase, she does indeed enter a time which is not quite the 1984 (the year in which the novel is set) she knows. In Book 1, Chapter 3, for instance, Aomame notices that a policeman's uniform and service firearm are different. For someone who pays close attention to police uniforms, she finds it odd that there appears a seemingly abrupt change. In Chapter 7, Aomame then asks Tamaru, the bodyguard who works for her own employer, when the police got new uniforms and guns, to which he replies:

That big shootout near Lake Motosu between the Yamanashi Prefectural/Police and the radical group took place in mid-October of 1981, and the police had their major reorganization the following year. Two years ago...It was really bloody. Old-fashioned six shooters against five Kalashnikov AK-47s. They look as if they'd been

stitched on a sewing machine. The Self-Defense force got involved right away, sending in their paratroopers. The cops totally lost face. Prime Minister Nakasone immediately got serious about strengthening police power. There was an overall restructuring, a special weapon force was instituted, and ordinary patrolmen were given ordinary high-powered automatic pistols to carry—Beretta Model 92s. (85-86)

Historically there was no actual shoot-out as described in the novel. What is worth noting is that such an incident is quite believable if one looks at the political context of Japan in 1984. The Japan of 1984 is a Japan of economic prosperity, but this economic prosperity occurs in the era of the Cold War where Japan has become a staunch U.S. ally and views all opposition groups as infiltrators coming from the communist bloc. Thus there is urgency in Japan (as well as in most U.S. allied nations in Asia) to annihilate dissident groups out of fear that the democratic states will be victimized by communist scheming. Aomame, upon hearing about the shooting from Tamaru, already feels that something strange is occurring. To understand these surprising social changes, she heads to a ward library close to her home to read newspapers from September to November 1981. While reading the old papers she realizes that there are many events she does not know about. She concludes that this is quite impossible since she always keeps up to date with current events. She then reasons that:

It's not me but the world that's deranged. Yes, that settles it. At some point in time, the world I knew either vanished or withdrew, and another world came to take its place. Like the switching of a track. In other words, my mind here and now, belongs to the world that was, but the world itself has already changed into something else.....Parallel worlds. (106-107)

Upon accepting that indeed she has “switched to a different track” or reality Aomame decides: “1Q84—that’s what I’ll call this new world...Q is for ‘question mark.’ A world that bears a question...Like it or not, I’m here now, in the year 1Q84. The 1984 that I knew no longer exists. It’s 1Q84 now” (110).

### **Exit “Big Brother,” Enter “Little People”**

1Q84’s title, as mentioned, is a clear reference to George Orwell’s novel of dystopia, *1984*, but Murakami does this with a twist. If Orwell wrote about a grim future under the watchful eye of a Big Brother, Murakami writes a near-past novel in *1Q84* where the System is carried out by “Little People.” One of the characters, Professor Ebisuno, explains to Tengo the shift from Big Brother to the Little People:

George Orwell introduced the dictator Big Brother in his novel *1984*, as I’m sure you know. The book was an allegorical treatment of Stalinism, of course. And ever since then, the term “Big Brother” has functioned as a social icon. That was Orwell’s great accomplishment. But now, in the real year 1984, Big Brother is all too famous, and all too obvious. If Big Brother were to appear before us now, we’d point to him and say, “Watch out! He’s Big Brother!” There’s no longer any place for a Big Brother in this real world of ours. Instead, these so-called Little People have come on the scene.... The Little People are an invisible presence. We can’t tell whether they are good or evil, or whether they have any substance or not. But they seem to be steadily undermining us. (236)

*1Q84* then, is a near-past novel set in Cold War Japan, where the system is run silently by a powerful group that has the power to undermine individuals who go against them. The question of whether the Little People are good or evil depends on an individual’s stance. In short, one’s

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perspective determines whether to view the Little People as friend or foe. This brings to mind what the taxi driver told Aomame: “things are not what they seem” and that one must use one’s own judgment to know what is true.

Why does Murakami use the form of a near-past novel in this work instead of following Orwell’s lead in writing about the future? Murakami has undergone a change in his worldview after tragedies of personal, national and international nature. The first tragedy is that his friends and parents have died. Murakami is in his sixties, after all. Second, his native Japan suffered natural catastrophes in the form of the Kobe earthquake or the Great Hanshin Earthquake on January 17, 1995. And third, Japan was attacked through the bioterrorist act of the religious cult Aum Shinrikyo on March 20, 1995. In 2001, the 9/11 attack happened in the United States and was viewed as a global act of terror.<sup>4</sup> During this almost decade of unrest, Murakami underwent a serious form of reflection and change. He had to position himself politically; his days of being apolitically “cool” were over.

The two disasters in Japan struck a chord in Murakami, who in the past was unable to identify his connection to his country. Murakami was in the U.S. when these disasters struck, but he soon found himself back in his home country. Moreover, he started his work on his non-fiction essay/interview collection on the Aum Shinrikyo survivors and even interviewed some of the perpetrators. He made two works from these: *Underground* and *The Place that was Promised*. In the *Yomiuri Shimbun* interview with Mariko Ozaki, he states:

The series of incidents involving Aum followers made us seriously question just what the definition of “ethical” should be in contemporary society. I started following Aum matters so I could reassess the current situation from the viewpoints of both good and evil. We live in an era in which it is extremely difficult to have a one-sided socio-ethical judgment on what is an absolutely right opinion or action. The wall separating people who would commit crime from those who wouldn’t is flimsier than you might think. Reality exists in the hypothetical and vice versa.

There is anti-establishment within establishment and vice versa. I wanted to write a novel encompassing this contemporary social system in its entirety. That’s why I gave names to almost every person in the novel and fleshed out their characters in detail, so that it couldn’t be unnatural for any of us to be one of them.<sup>5</sup> (Ozaki, 2009)

Murakami wanted to use his novel *1Q84*, a novel of the distant past set in Japan, to enable himself and people of this age to come to terms with what is called “the present” and with all the socio-ethical changes that people of today need to confront. Clearly the point of the novel is to come to grips with this world, which has become scarred by big and small acts of terror and questioning. The novel functions as a beacon of hope to the demoralized to continue to live as individuals, despite the restrictions and acts of terror.

Thus it comes as no surprise that one of the sub-plots of this novel focuses on a religious cult. Murakami uses the novel to show why such religious groups are unstoppable institutions, no matter how modern a country is. Academician, government official and former president of the Tokyo Foundation, Hideki Kato, states that “most people expect religion to fill the gap that [he refers] to existing between man and other forms.” He explains further: “It is my conviction that the Japanese people inherently have very strong religious feelings but that this is being rapidly lost in modern society, especially in urban areas.”

<sup>4</sup> Murakami considered the 9/11 attack surreal, and it appears that his recent fiction had focused on making sense of the upsurge of global terrorist attacks. In an interview, he states: “To me 9/11 does not feel like an incident that took place in the real world. Somewhere, there must be a world in which this didn’t happen (Kubota 2009).”

<sup>5</sup> The novel Murakami refers to would become his *1Q84*.



It is the link that holds together the Little People, the religious groups, the modern world, and the love story of two highly individualistic characters, all set in modern Japan, that Murakami presents us in *1Q84*.

Trying to make sense of his political position in the contemporary age and seeking to use the novel as a form for addressing socio-political issues, Murakami wrote *1Q84* as a means of re-examining our perspective about what is deemed history, and of re-examining our notion of what is real. *1Q84* is a novel that challenges individual, national (Japanese), and global representations of reality or history. This is clear when Murakami uses the character Tengo as his mouthpiece. When Tengo comments about the Orwell novel in his conversation with Fuka-Eri, he states:

In his novel, George Orwell depicted the future as a dark society dominated by totalitarianism. People are rigidly controlled by a dictator named Big Brother. Information is restricted, and *history is constantly being rewritten*. The protagonist works in a government office, and I'm pretty sure his job is to rewrite words. *Whenever a new history is written, the old histories all have to be thrown out. In the process words are remade, and the meanings of current words are changed. What with history being rewritten so often, nobody knows what is true anymore. They lose track of who is an enemy and who is an ally. It's that kind of story...Robbing people of their actual history is the same as robbing them of part of themselves. It's a crime.* (257, italics mine)

Tengo's discussion with Fuka-Eri clearly shows what the novel attempts to do as it creates a worldview—that is, it re-assesses what is passed on as history, examines what factors challenge this history, and accepts the necessity to re-write history for the people of today. The novel tells us what to suspect in old and new histories, what they contain, and what they dismiss or marginalize.

## Literature and History

At this point, one may do well to reflect on the relationship between literature and history. Earlier I quoted from Murakami's Jerusalem speech, where he describes his job as a fiction writer as being that of "a professional spinner of lies." Fiction writers, unlike other members of society (i.e. politicians, blue collar workers, etc.) are *encouraged* by the public to tell "bigger" lies in their work. From Murakami's Jerusalem speech, we can clearly see that literature functions as an extension of writing history, especially the history that has been omitted from a people's official history. In Japan for instance, the history of the Ainu, and Japan's war atrocities, are not widely known. Literature serves to balance views of what is deemed as reality, which is very problematic for truth "is virtually impossible to grasp...in its original form," and the telling of historical truth cannot be done "accurately" (Murakami 2009b). Yet the fiction writer's job is always to draw attention to the malaise in what Murakami refers to as "the System"—which encompasses the government or any ruling institution. The lies of fiction do attempt to contain the elusive truth that is dismissed in popular or mainstream history. Murakami then is calling for a historical "revisionism" and he is using his fiction as his tool. What does it mean to be a historical revisionist? Giovanni C. Cattini discusses this:

Today we take to be revisionist all the interpretations that, whether coming from university chairs or cultural pundits, try to dismantle the "truths," at times mythologized, of traditional historiography. Even so, it should be said that in the universities all the historical views that try to question some of the crucial developments in modern and contemporary history are also understood as revisionism—from the French Revolution (1789-1799) to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), from communism to fascism and Nazism, and even the Holocaust—with

the idea of reinterpreting certain historical events in the light of new facts, elements, and from a scientifically neutral perspective. (Cattini 2011, 31)

To further understand the importance of literature in re-shaping history, let us now turn to a recent development in the study of literature and history. Today the study of history has become the study of memory. Astrid Erll, in her introduction to the book *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (2008), argues that people have

*different modes of remembering in culture.* This approach proceeds from the basic insight that the past is not given, but instead is continually reconstructed and re-presented. Thus, our memories (individual and collective) of past events can vary to a great degree. This holds true not only for what is remembered (facts, data), but also for how it is remembered, that is, for the quality and meaning the past assumes. *As a result there are different modes of remembering identical past events.* (7, italics mine)

Literature is one of the most utilized receptacles containing the history/memory of the individual and collective society. Japan, with its long history from a classical civilization, to a closed nation, to an imperial nation, then a capitalist leader, and now its current state of recession and aging population, needs to re-connect and perhaps re-imagine its past, in order to understand the meaning of Japan for itself and the world.<sup>6</sup>

It must be understood though, that a literary work, much like the reader who consumes it, cannot stand on its own. It is the paradox of human being (and text!) that we value our individuality, but we need our community to provide purpose to that individuality. Both human and text need other human beings and texts to have meaning. As Renate Lachmann writes:

Literature is culture's memory, not as a simple recording device but as a body of commemorative actions. Literature inscribes itself in a memory space into which earlier texts have inscribed themselves. It does not leave these earlier texts as it finds them but transforms them in absorbing them. The memory of a text is its intertextuality. Intertextuality, as the term is conceived in literary scholarship, is the semantic interchange, the contact between texts—literary and non-literary. (Lachmann 2004, 172-173)

A text is intertextual with other texts. Knowledge can then be perceived as a product of all these interconnections formed by human beings and their cultural products, texts. Murakami's fiction, as represented here by the comprehensive novel *1Q84*, is a work that aims to make the suppressed histories of modern Japan apparent.

Issues surrounding the imperialist practice of the Japanese forces in Asia during the second world war, the internal colonization that modern Japan experienced, the breakdown of Japan's economy and the psychological effects that the Japanese suffered because of it, as well as the changing role of Japanese women in their society, are but some of the suppressed issues in Japan that Murakami depicts in his works, particularly in *1Q84*. Moreover, *1Q84* is a work that envisions a healing of past wounds for those who created those wounds in the first place—the Japanese, and everyone else. We, regardless of our national affinity, are connected to Japan's history; it is our history as global citizens also.

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<sup>6</sup> Grimes and Schaede describe Japan's economy in the twenty-first century as changed. "In contrast to most of the postwar era, which had been a period of growing opportunities, the 1990s and early twenty-first century were characterized by growing constraints. Legal, political, and economic changes both within and outside Japan had narrowed the possibilities for policy makers and corporations seeking to protect firms and sectors from the challenges of an ever more competitive marketplace" (2003, 17).

**1Q84's****General Themes**

I now move into a close reading of the novel. I have identified six general issues or themes that emerge from a close-reading of *1Q84*. First, is the use of Tengo Kawana's character to discuss the issue of history as a form of counter-memory. Second, is the politics of the publishing world in relation to authorship and book publication as seen in the publication of Fuka-Eri's *Air Chrysalis*. Third is the use of the three characters, Fuka-Eri, Aomame and the Dowager as the three faces of women in the novel (the maiden, the mother-warrior and the crone), which is important when considering the changing role of Japanese women today. Fourth is the issue of gender and the issue of citizenship as exemplified by the character of Tamaru, a homosexual character whose citizenship is caught in an unresolved historical issue. Fifth is the rise of religious groups in the face of modernity, as represented by Sakigake and its splinter group, Akebono. The sixth and last theme is the representation of a social outcast in a group-think society like Japan, personified by the spy, Ushikawa. For this paper I focus on the fifth theme, which intersects society, religion and the individual.

**The History of 1Q84's Sakigake and Akebono Groups**

When things are becoming very dangerous for the life of the then ten-year-old Fukuda Eriko (nicknamed, Fuka-Eri), she is given instructions by her father, who is also the leader of the religious group, to sneak out of the commune and find her way to the home of his trusted friend, Professor Ebisuno. The professor, as he is referred to, is a cultural-anthropologist of some repute before he leaves the university. The surname Ebisuno is quite fitting since it translates as "field of savages." The professor lives "in a rural area some distance from Tokyo in a place called Futamatao [trans. *Forked Tail*]. He is a thinly built man, probably no taller than five foot three, probably in his mid-sixties" (119).

The professor meets Fuka-Eri's father in the university where they work for the same department. It is said that "although they had different worldviews and personalities they got on well. They both married late, had daughters soon after the marriage and lived in the same faculty apartment building." When the riots over the United States-Japan Security Treaty escalate in 1970, resulting in deaths, the professor decides to leave the university. He does not want to be caught up in what he refers to as the "clash of organizations." He is not a believer in any form of social organization. Two years after the Professor quits the university, Fuka-Eri's father leaves it too, but he takes a different path from the professor.

During the 1960s, Fuka-Eri's father, Tamotsu Fukada, is a very idealistic young professor who is influenced by the pervasive communist ideology of the time. The professor says that Fukada organizes a group of students on campus into something like a Red Guard and this incident causes him to be dismissed from the university. After his dismissal, Fukada forms a commune he calls the Takashima Academy with the ten core students from his Red Guard unit. The professor says that what Fukada aims to create is a utopia. However, his utopian world ends up like the utopia in Orwell's novel (121).

The commune supposedly supports itself by farming. In 1974, the group purchases fields and houses in the mountains of the depopulated Yamanashi Prefecture. The professor knows that Fukada contributes some of his own money to the purchase of the land, but is unsure where the group's other sources of income originate, which leads to speculations that the group has rich benefactors with an ulterior motive. The newly established commune is renamed "Sakigake" (meaning "Forerunner"). It is the first ecological farming group of its time (123). The group begins attracting the attention of other idealistic young people, mostly professionals who turn away from city-life to live with them. The membership in the group increases. Yet there are also those who leave after not finding the satisfaction they are looking for in the communal lifestyle of the group.

For some years the commune enjoys a peaceful co-existence with the original dwellers of Yamanashi Prefecture. Their vegetable produce is sold or traded and becomes staples of households there. Sakigake, like all human organizations, also has political problems internally. The professor shares:

[E]ventually the commune split into two distinct factions...On one side was a militant faction, a revolutionary group based on the Red guard unit that Fukada had originally organized. For them, the farming commune was strictly preparatory for the revolution...On the other side was the moderate faction. As the majority, they shared the militant faction's opposition to capitalism, but they kept some distance from politics, instead preferring the creation of a self-sufficient communal life in nature...the two factions of the Sakigake commune parted ways [in 1976]...The moderate faction continued to call itself "Sakigake" and remained in the original village, while the militant faction [Akebono] moved to a different, abandoned village a few miles away and made it the base of their revolutionary movement. (125)

In 1979, the Sakigake faction is granted official recognition as a religion (146), which immunizes it from any criminal investigation by the police (147). Since they part ways at the university, Professor Ebisuno and Fukada lose contact with each other, so it comes as a surprise to the professor that Fuka-Eri ends up being sent to him. He understands the desperation of Fukada's action. He knows Fukada, who is now known as the leader, is in a difficult situation even in the group that he himself has created. For this reason, the professor thinks it a good move to have the story dictated by Fuka-Eri published and circulated. This story reaches Tengo in the form of a manuscript for revision. As the professor tells Tengo: "What I am hoping is that I can spread bait to guide the attention of the media toward Eri's parents. *Where are they now, and what are they doing?* In other words, I want the media to do for me what the police can't or won't do" (233).

The last time that the professor hears about Sakigake and Akebono is when the two stage a gun battle with the police in the mountains near Lake Motosu (126). This is the same incident that Aomame researches, and that later, according to her conversation with Tamaru, becomes the reason why the police are given new uniforms and guns. Akebono is a group that has no future in the Japan of the 1980s, which is already reaping the rewards of capitalism. The communist backbone of Akebono will not be enough to support itself in the coming age (269).

Consequently, due to the controversy surrounding Akebono and its link to Sakigake, the once very private communal group/religion begins attracting the curiosity of society. For this reason, a press conference is held to clear the group of further speculation. According to Sakigake's spokesperson:

We do not have any set, clear-cut doctrine...We perform theoretical research on early Buddhism and put into actual practice the ascetic disciplines that were engaged in back then, aiming for a more fluid religious awakening but rather than the individual awakenings come first...One after another, people who have sensed the emptiness of competitive society's materialism have entered our gates in search of a different and deeper spiritual axis. Many of them are highly educated professionals with social standing. (268)

When Aomame begins her own research into the group and asks for the aid of Ayumi, a policewoman-friend, Ayumi tell her that Sakigake is not a quasi-religion, it is a cult:

Sakigake calls itself a religion, and it even has official certification, but it's totally lacking any religious *substance*. Doctrine-wise, it's kind of deconstructionist or something, just a jumble of *images* of religion thrown together. They've added some new-age spiritualism, fashionable academism, a return to nature, anti-capitalism,

occultism, and stuff, but that's all: it has a bunch of flavors, but no substantial core. Or maybe that's what it's all about: this religion's substance is its lack of substance. In McLuhanesque terms, the medium is the message. Some people might find that cool. (289)

What the public does not know is that within the confines of Sakigake a new form of leadership has emerged where Fukada/Leader only functions as something symbolic, and the real power is emanating from the mysterious entities called Little People. Aomame learns about this the night she is tasked with killing the Leader.

Aomame as an assassin is under the employ of the rich, mysterious Mrs. Ogata (the Crone representation in the text) (255-59). During the night that Aomame poses as a masseuse in order to carry out the Dowager's orders, she is surprised to find that the Leader, now a blind, weak man, is not what she expected from the description given him, that of a cult-leader who is also a child-rapist. What she sees is a calm, gentle man who inspires trust. He is also world-weary, and even before Aomame gets to ask him anything, he is already aware of what she is set to do and welcomes his own death. This amazes Aomame and makes her recognize that this Leader is no ordinary man. They have a conversation that illuminates many uncertain areas about Sakigake. According to the Leader, the Little People find their group through the aid of the child Fuka-Eri, his daughter. Little People is a name that Fuka-Eri gives them: "*They* have been called by many different names, but in most cases, have not been called anything at all. *They were simply there*" (445). These entities give the Leader special powers that allow him the gift of prophecy and healing. In return "they have impressed certain demands upon [him]. Their desires have become [his] desires—implacable desires that [he is] unable to defy" (445).

A controversial aspect of what the Little People demand from him is that he has to perform a taboo: "physical relations with girls who still had not reached maturity" (446). This is something that the Leader does not want to do, but the Little People overpower his body. The plot at this point turns philosophical. For the Leader, the act of copulation in this state is not a physical act, but something that is a spiritual or even philosophical. He mentions the division of the Self into *dohta* and *maza*. The *dohta* is also the Perceiver, the shadow of one's heart and mind. The *maza* is the physical body, the receiver. The discussion in the novel about this suggests that the principle behind the union between *dohta* and *maza*—the perceiver and receiver—is to restore balance in nature; the participants in the act have no emotion about it at all (see 462-83). Fuka-Eri, who becomes instrumental in bringing the Little People to the world is given the title of Perceiver and her father is the Receiver. The conceptual and impersonal or abstract union of the two creates the balance that the Little People want to maintain.

Therefore, at least in Aomame's mind, as difficult as it is to believe, she becomes sympathetic to the Leader. Further, she learns that the complexity of what transpires in Sakigake mirrors the complexity and mystery of the so-called Little People, who are neither good nor evil. As the Leader explains to her:

Where there is light, there must be shadow, where there is shadow, there must be light. There is no shadow without light and no light without shadow. . . . We do not know if the so-called Little People are good or evil. This is, in a sense, something that surpasses our understanding and our definitions. We have lived with them since long, long ago—from a time before good and evil even existed, when people's minds were still benighted. But the important thing is that, whether they are good or evil, light or shadow, whenever they begin to exert their power, a compensatory force comes into being. In my case, when I became an "agent" of the so-called Little People, my daughter became something like an agent for those forces opposed to the Little People. In this way, the balance was maintained. (465)

What the Leader points out here is that, within every group, even a religious one, factions necessarily emerge and these factions also create a sense of balance for the group. Aomame further asks, “Are God and the Little people opposites? Or two sides of the same thing?” To which the Leader answers, “Good and evil are not fixed, stable entities but are continually trading places. A good may be transformed into an evil in the next second. And vice versa....The most important thing is to maintain the balance between the constantly moving good and evil. If you lean too much in either direction, it becomes difficult to maintain actual morals. Indeed, *balance itself is the good...*” (447, italics mine).

Before the Leader succumbs to death by poisoning, he shares with Aomame the reality of 1984 and 1Q84. He tells her these are actually the same places, the same worlds, where the difference between the two is dependent on one’s interpretation: “1984 and 1Q84 are fundamentally the same in terms of how they work. If you don’t believe in the world, and if there is no love in it, then everything is phony. No matter which world we are talking about, no matter what *kind* of world we are talking about, the line separating fact from hypothesis is practically invisible to the eye. It can only be seen with the inner eye, the eye of the mind” (463). The key to solving the mystery of 1Q84 then, is love, the same type of selfless love that Aomame and Tengo believe they have for each other.

## Conclusion

While Murakami was writing his Western-influenced fiction overseas and accumulating literary capital through awards and book-sales, Japan as a nation had its own issues to contend with. On a national-level, the 1990s brought about Japan’s biggest economic recession; it also was a time of social unrest heightened by the religious cult, Aum Shinrikyo’s gas attack, which proved that Japan’s prosperity was not able to address issues pertaining to the psyche of the Japanese people. Postwar Japanese are perceived to lack a deeper purpose in their lives after reaching economic prosperity. The old community spirit has been abandoned in impersonal big cities such as Tokyo. Murakami was quick to sense this and used his fiction to unveil often hidden aspects of Japanese society and history. His recent fictional works, such as *1Q84*, signal a strengthening of social commitment in his writing. In this novel Murakami put forward his thoughts about historical revisionism with which he sought to inspire his Japanese readers into introspection about their society. Interestingly, the writing formula of his novels, including *1Q84*, work even when translated. Murakami’s global readers also take a deep interest in the themes of his more recent works. As proof, these latter novels have been given literary awards, while at the same time figuring in bestseller lists worldwide.

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