

IDENTITY CRISIS SEEN ON TORU WATANABE: A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate identity crisis and provide a broader understanding of such matter. The design of this study is a descriptive qualitative research method using Existentialism theory. The findings of this study indicate that Toru Watanabe is having an identity crisis during his college years, he struggled to keep up with his daily life, and his establishment is not strong enough. The implication of this study is identity crisis could be experienced by everyone, this could occur when there is a major stress trigger that makes a significant change in one's life, and understand that identity crisis is an issue that must be noticed in today's era.

Keywords: *Existence, Existentialism, Identity Crisis*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a useful tool to express things. It can be a medium for people to pour out their thoughts, ideas, interests, concerns, and many others. Literary means not only what is written, but what is voiced, what is expressed, what is invented, in whatever forms (Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors, 2009). As a human form of expression, literature comes in various types such as fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama, prose, and others. Literature can be seen from many perspectives, one of which is from a philosophical point of view. Philosophy speaks of truth, and literature usually speaks of the language of metaphor. However, after all, literature and philosophy are closely intertwined with each other. We find philosophy in literature and also literature in philosophy. (Khataniar, 2020)

One of the philosophical movements is existentialism. Existentialism focuses on human existence, where each individual must be responsible for giving meaning to their existence. The location of the highest value of existentialist thought lies in authenticity or originality. An individual begins to have a feeling of disorientation or confusion in the world that is described as meaningless and disorganized. Existence is a typical human way of making themselves exist. Existentialism assumes that every individual who exists has the awareness to do something and be themselves. However, humans can also experience a condition of decreased awareness of their own existence which is their

identity, this condition is called an identity crisis. Jean-Paul Sartre put forward the concept of existence precedes essence, human is in charge of giving meaning to their life. So, humans have absolute freedom in interpreting and choosing, but there comes a big responsibility that makes humans feel anxious and burdened in determining the steps in their lives. An identity crisis refers to a state when people feel confused and uncertain about their role, purpose, and meaning in life.

Through Haruki Murakami's work, a novel titled *Norwegian Wood*, the main character, Toru Watanabe experiences an identity crisis. There is the main trigger in his life during his developmental period as a teenager which is full of the suicides of those close to him. Toru's life continues until the time he becomes a college student when his life becomes freer and he begins to lose his identity. He does not have a strong reason for making important decisions and tends to be indifferent to his surroundings because he cannot position himself. Therefore, the identity crisis experienced by Toru Watanabe is based on events that occur in his life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study used one main theory to analyze the data. The theory used is existentialism from the philosophical approach. The main theory belongs to Jean-Paul Sartre (1946). Any other supporting theory from philosophers who support existentialism theory is added, due to its importance to give deeper analysis and further explanation in data discussed. Supporting theories used are Jaspers (1952). Existentialism is the theoretical basis for studying the identity crisis issue.

a. *Existentialism*

Existentialism emphasizes the existence of each individual and the absolute freedom they have. According to Sartre, humans exist with consciousness as themselves so that such things cannot be exchanged. The existence of humans is different from the existence of other objects that do not have the awareness such as humans should be aware of their own existence. Therefore, for humans, existence precedes essence. "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism." (Sartre et al., 2007). This means an affirmation that humans are the creators of their own existence.

"Man is nothing else but his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfils himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life." (Sartre et al., 2007). This means that humans are fully responsible for giving meaning to their existence and capable of choosing what is good for themselves.

Man must also be aware of his ability to determine his future direction. In projecting choices for the future, there are also factors that are taken into consideration. "Man must know what he was, to realize what he can be. His historic past is an inevitable basic factor of his future." (Jaspers, 1952)

b. *Identity Crisis*

An identity crisis generally occurs because of major changes or pressures in life that cause a person to experience stress, depression, life disorientation, and more. Factors that can cause this are such as loss, academic problems, or social pressure. Adolescents who experience an identity crisis often experience inner conflicts with themselves. Then, there is a big change that also affects feelings and life itself. In daily life, there may always be things to think about and confusion about making decisions. An identity crisis can hit anyone from the age range of teenagers to adults, but adolescence is a crucial period for a person to form his identity, so identity crises often occur during adolescence.

METHODOLOGY

This study conducts descriptive qualitative methods, approach from existentialism theory. The data is in the form of novel quotations, and the source of the data will be taken from Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*. The collection of the data technique will use observation, it is a way of collecting data by observing behavior, events, or noticing physical characteristics in their natural setting. In qualitative research, the data collection approach applied a document analysis because the source of the data is a novel, it will be easier to collect data needed to support analysis by inserting quotations from the document which is novel itself.

RESULT

The result of the data collection will be provided in a table.

Table 1: *Toru Watanabe's Crisis Identity Analysis*

Analysis	Quotation
This happened in a future plot, this novel has the plot written backward. A 37-year-old Toru Watanabe was inside an airplane in Hamburg. The plane played "Norwegian Wood" by The Beatles, one song he remembered about his past. All of sudden, he was overwhelmed by the feeling of loss and nostalgia. He began to	"There is no way around it: my memory is growing ever more distant from the spot where Naoko used to stand - where my old self used to stand. And nothing but scenery, that view of the meadow in October, returns again and again to me like a symbolic scene in a film." [page 7]

thought about his past. There was a girl he loved, their relationship was complicated and did not have happy ending. At that time, Naoko, the girl, had walked with Toru in a meadow. She asked Toru not to forget her, and to remember that she lived and existed that time. But, the adult Toru felt like his memory of her was fading away.	
Toru did not really put into consideration the place to stay for his college year. He went on with the place his parents chose for him.	"For my part, I would have preferred to rent a flat and live in comfortable solitude, but knowing what my parents had to spend on enrolment fees and tuition at the private university I was attending, I was in no position to insist. And besides, I really didn't care where I lived." [page 14]
Turns out, the place was full of its political smell. But, Toru was not in a place to give care about right-wing or left-wing political matters.	"I can't really say. In terms of everyday life, it made no practical difference to me whether the place was right wing or left wing or anything else." [page 15]
Storm Trooper, the nickname of a guy who became Toru's roommate had asked Toru about the subject Toru studied in college. Toru answered it easily, without giving exact reason why he had chosen that subject.	"You like plays?" he asked. "Not especially." This confused him, and when he was confused, his stuttering got worse. I felt sorry I had done that to him. "I could have picked anything," I said. "Ethnology, Asian history. I just happened to pick drama, that's all," which was not the most convincing explanation I could have come up with. [page 20]
The plot was going backward again. The suicide of Kizuki had been told, and Toru was devastated about that matter. He was unable to find himself a place in the world around him.	"In the ten months between Kizuki's death and my exams, I was unable to find a place for myself in the world around me. I started sleeping with one of the girls at school, but that didn't last six months. Nothing about her really got to me. I

	applied to a private university in Tokyo, the kind of place with an entrance exam for which I wouldn't have to study much, and I passed without exhilaration.” [page 30]
Toru described how it felt that night when his best friend, Kizuki died. There was a thought about death.	“The night Kizuki died, however, I lost the ability to see death (and life) in such simple terms. Death was not the opposite of life. It was already here, within my being, it had always been here, and no struggle would permit me to forget that. When it took the 17-year-old Kizuki that night in May, death took me as well.” [page 31]
He encountered his way with Naoko. The girlfriend of his dead best friend. He and Naoko never got along really well when Kizuki was still around, but then their relationship had gotten better. They started talking and going out. Toru had described his college life and how the situation around him at that time. He did not have any picture of his future life, and he could not talk about his feeling to anyone including Naoko.	“For my courses I would read Claudel and Racine and Eisenstein, but they meant almost nothing to me. I made no friends at the lectures, and hardly knew anyone in the dorm. The others in the dorm thought I wanted to be a writer because I was always alone with a book, but I had no such ambition. There was nothing I wanted to be. I tried to talk about this feeling with Naoko. She, at least, would be able to understand what I was feeling with some degree of precision, I thought. But I could never find the words to express myself.” [page 36]
Later on, he had gotten himself a new friend named Nagasawa. They had lived in the same dorm. Nagasawa was an intelligent student, he was smooth with talking, slick, charming, and a womanizer. With Nagasawa, Toru started to sleeping around with girls.	“We went to some kind of bar in Shibuya or Shinjuku (he had his favourites), found a pair of girls (the world was full of pairs of girls), talked to them, drank, went to a hotel, and had sex with them.” [pg41]

<p>This part described when Toru celebrated Naoko's 20 birthday on her apartment. They had been drinking, and Naoko would not stop talking until it was late, then she was crying with such intensity that made Toru confused. Toru decided to sleep with Naoko to help release her tension. He did not know whether it was the right thing to do or not.</p>	<p>"In that position, I waited for Naoko to stop crying. And I went on waiting. But Naoko's crying never stopped. I slept with Naoko that night. Was it the right thing to do? I can't tell." [page 48]</p>
<p>Since that day when Toru slept with Naoko, she became distant and Toru was unable to reach her. Then, he found out that Naoko was already left his apartment. She was gone. Toru tried to send out letters but the answer was never coming.</p>	<p>"Something inside me had dropped away, and nothing came in to fill the empty cavern." [page 51]</p>
<p>The story goes on, Toru had met one girl from his class named Midori. She was outgoing, energetic, expressive, confident, and eccentric. They had been friends, spending time with each other, until Midori confessed that she loves Toru. Toru told that he loved her the same, but in the same time, he still yearns for Naoko.</p>	<p>"I love you," I said to her. "From the bottom of my heart. I don't ever want to let you go again. But there's nothing I can do. I can't make a move." "Because of her?" I nodded. [page 314]</p>
<p>This is where Toru found out about Naoko's suicide in the forest near the sanatorium where she spent her time all these times. Naoko chose her way due to her mental illnesses and the feeling she had carried throughout the years. Toru thought of Kizuki who had committed suicide at 17 years old, and now Naoko does the same. Toru felt that Naoko chose to be with Kizuki than be with him. Toru had left his dorm, his college, and the city. He traveled from place to place, and</p>	<p>"...I travelled from place to place. I would move from town to town by train or bus or hitching a lift in a lorry, spreading out my sleeping bag in empty car parks or stations or parks or on river banks or the seashore. I once persuaded them to let me sleep in the corner of a local police station, and another time slept alongside a graveyard. I didn't care where I slept..." [page 324]</p>

choose to live that way due to Naoko's death.	
Toru had already recovered from his grief, so he called Midori after left her for a long time. He felt as if he needed Midori so much. Then, Midori had asked where was Toru and he could not answer the question. It can be interfered that Toru did not know where the point of his live at that moment, he had been disconnected with the world since Naoko's death and it was just strange for him to came back.	"At last, Midori's quiet voice broke the silence: "Where are you now?" Where was I now? Gripping the receiver, I raised my head and turned to see what lay beyond the phone box. Where was I now? I had no idea. No idea at all. Where was this place? All that flashed into my eyes were the countless shapes of people walking by to nowhere. Again and again I called out for Midori from the dead centre of this place that was no place." [page 351]

Source: (Murakami, 2001)

DISCUSSION

The novel Norwegian Wood was written by Haruki Murakami, it told a story about a young guy named Toru Watanabe. He had one best friend, named Kizuki, who later committed suicide at 17 years old. Kizuki did not left any note or any clue why he did what he did. Kizuki had a girlfriend at that time, her name was Naoko. The three of them always hanging out together, even though Toru did not get really along well with Naoko. When Kizuki died, it affected both Toru and Naoko. Toru moved from Kobe to Tokyo.

The first analysis was about when Toru was already 37 years old, on a plane at Hamburg. He heard "Norwegian Wood" by The Beatles was playing. It brought a lot of nostalgia from his past. First memory that went through his mind was when he and Naoko walked along the meadow, Naoko had asked him to promise not to forget her. But adult Toru realized, that the memory of Naoko was fading away and it means that he could not keep his promise. If it's brought again to the theory of existentialism, Toru was having an identity crisis because there was a word from him that said "...where my old self used to stand." and it could be interpreted that Toru felt himself changing, there was a new Toru.

Back to Toru's college years, he did not really put into consideration the place to stay for his college year. Turns out, the dorm where he lived is full of political matters where the students could support left-wing or right-wing. Identity crisis could be noticed through the act of ignorance, it had proved by Toru's attitude who did not care about those things.

Toru was placed in a room with a weird guy with Storm Trooper as his nickname, and he had asked Toru about the subject Toru studied at college. Toru picked Drama as his subject, but he did not have any reason why he picked it. It has just happened he picked Drama.

There was a time when Kizuki's death was still fresh and when Toru had exams coming up, he feels that he was unable to find himself a place in the world around him, so started sleeping with one of the girls at his school. In the part where his life seems confusing, he chose to go sleeping around with the hope that he feels comfortable or at least could find himself a settled place, but apparently that did not help. So, Toru thought that he needed to get away from Kobe, his house, to a private university in Tokyo where nobody knows him. Toru also described the feeling when Kizuki died, he mentioned that he lost the ability to see death and life in such simple terms. "...Death was not the opposite of life. It was already here, within my being, it had always been here, and no struggle would permit me to forget that. When it took the 17-year-old Kizuki that night in May, death took me as well' it could be interpret that part of him died with Kizuki that night, the suicide of his best friend affected him that deep, and it resulted of his identity crisis. He no longer feels he has a place, and no longer views death as a fate, and the fact that he could not forget that moment.

The story goes on, and Toru encountered his path with Naoko once again. The girl apparently looks thinner, but Toru still feels that she is prettier. The fact that he and Naoko never really talked, it seems change little by little. They had spent time together as friends, try to talk about their daily lives without mentioning Kizuki's name ever again. Once again, the identity crisis he struggled from made Toru feels like he could not picture his future, he had no such ambition on anything. At first, he thought that Naoko could understand him with some degree of precision, but Toru just could not express his feelings.

Toru must have felt his college year tiresome, he just went to classes without paying much attention. He would live his daily life without any passion, except when the day he and Naoko would meet every Sunday. But later then, he met Nagasawa. Nagasawa lived in the same dorm as Toru, he was slick, smooth, and charming. Besides that, Nagasawa was a popular student and a womanizer. He mentioned at least he had slept with 70 women. When Toru mentioned that he only slept with one girl, Nagasawa fixed that for him and took Toru to a bar, and ended up sleeping with girls. This leads to Toru's confusing sexual life, which he did not really enjoy but he kept going on to take care of his loneliness. He just followed Nagasawa around.

That time when Naoko reached 20, they celebrated it together in her apartment. Drinking wine, and talked to each other but then Toru realized that Naoko kept talking until it was midnight. Then, Naoko started crying so much, it leads to Toru sleeping with

Naoko. But, the problem is, that Toru did not know whether it was the right thing or not. After that, Naoko became distant and Toru was unable to reach her. He came back to her apartment and found that she was already moving without leaving him any note or message. Toru tried to reach her, but she never answers. Again, Toru feels empty and thought he lost her.

In the absence of Naoko, Toru encountered his way with another girl he knew from his class named Midori. She was outgoing, energetic, expressive, confident, and eccentric, unlike Naoko who was quiet, delicate, calm, and having trouble expressing her words. Toru and Midori started hanging out, they began to fill each other, and find a company in each existence. Midori started to fall for Toru, she confessed right away and Toru told her that he felt the same, but at the same time, he still yearns for Naoko. Then, he made his decision to be with Midori before the news that Naoko had committed suicide hit him. Toru lost it again, he was devastated, then he decided to left Tokyo and Midori without telling her. He traveled around with no place to stay, all he did was just drink beer. It was the lowest point for Toru, due to the death of the girl he loved, he lost Naoko and also himself. He left everything he had to just spend time alone to cope with his grief. Naoko's death broke him and changed him. But in the end, Toru had already recovered from his grief, so he called Midori after leaving her for a long time. He felt as if he needed Midori so much. Then, Midori asked where was Toru and he could not answer the question. It can interfere that Toru did not know where the point of his life was at that moment, he had been disconnected from the world since Naoko's death and it was just strange for him to come back.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the identity crisis struggled by Toru Watanabe, the main character from the Norwegian Wood novel by Haruki Murakami, can be approached from existentialism theory. Humans exist and their existence precedes essence. Humans are responsible for giving meaning to their life. Toru Watanabe had experienced the death of his best friend, Kizuki from a very young age, it affected him to the point he could not view death and life in simple terms. He felt that the night when Kizuki died, death took him as well. By the beginning of his college year, he did not have many activities that he likes, he spent time on his own before meeting Naoko, Nagasawa, and Midori. With Naoko, he felt calm, he enjoyed walking side by side with a pretty girl like Naoko, he loved her with whatever mental illness she struggled with, and he promised to take care of her for the rest of his life. With Nagasawa, he entered a confusing sexual life, he began to sleep around with random girls just to fill his loneliness. And with Midori, he felt alive because Midori was such a fun girl, she was eccentric and outgoing, Toru feels normal with Midori around him. His identity crisis state began when Kizuki died, it had not been

cured, and it gets worse when the death took Naoko as well. Naoko had given up on her treatment and chose to end her life by committing suicide. Toru was devastated, and it was the climax of his identity crisis. His grief was out of his control, he left everything he had built in Tokyo to run away and live carelessly without having care where to sleep or even take care of himself. In the end, he reached Midori again just to tell her that she was the one he needed. It can be assumed that during Toru's teenage years was struggling with an identity crisis, he had no picture of his future, and he was unable to give meaning to his own life.

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