
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Divulging the Meanings behind Being neither Human nor Animal in Haruki Murakami's "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey"

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| ABSTRACT

This paper divulges the different meanings of the seemingly meaningless surrealist *Haruki Murakami's* "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" (2020). The decision to use an anthropomorphic protagonist in the narrative is crucial and loaded with symbolism. It can be interpreted as an account of workplace abuse, racism and discrimination or as a story about identity conflict, with the monkey body representing otherness. The paper illuminates the connection between identity crisis and alienation as it is portrayed in "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey". In the event that Shinagawa Monkey feels rejected and alienated, this is when alienation occurs. The analysis is conducted within the scope of Postcolonialism and Marxism. The paper is significant as it is the first to explore such topics in Murakami's "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey." This paper's goal is to alter society's behavior to lessen discrimination that is currently on the rise. This paper embraces three main themes that appear in "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" (2020). The themes concern the biased attitudes towards different races, the theme of identity conflict, and alienation. This paper exemplifies a critical reading of a multidimensional short story and sets the path for further study along these lines.

| KEYWORDS

Dehumanization, Identity conflict, Other, Alienation, Discrimination.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

"Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" is a short story written by the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami and was published in 2020. "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" is a story about the night Murakami meeting a talking monkey. The monkey asks Murakami in a baritone voice, "Shall I scrub your back for you?" Murakami graciously agrees. The monkey, known as Shinagawa Monkey, tells his tale as Murakami takes a shower. Shinagawa Monkey describes the troubles of feeling neither monkey nor human and the ensuing heartbreaking of loneliness (Flores, 2021)

"Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" is a Surrealist short story. Surrealism in literature aims to blend the actual world with the fantastical. According to Susanne Bennett (2022.), the authors of this movement write odd or fantastical stories in an effort to resolve the conflicts between their conscious and unconscious notions. Accordingly, the meaning seems to be subtle and illusive in surrealist works. Surrealist art is, therefore, provocative and contentious. "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" fits the mold of Surrealism as its meaning and theme seem to be ambiguous and foggy. Surrealism enables the author to transcend the boundaries of our familiar world. This gives the reader the opportunity to explore the meaning behind the fantastical visions that warp reality. "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" presents a universe with random happenings. The narrative has an air of meaninglessness.

"Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" presents the monkey in such a way that the reader is invited to interpret it as a metaphor for larger concepts. The narrative highlights how the selection of an anthropomorphic character who is mistaken for being an animal—more especially, a monkey—can be understood within the "discourse of otherness" in which the "other" is perceived and

labeled as both inferior and different. The decision to use anthropomorphic protagonists in the narrative is crucial and loaded with symbolism. This narrative makes use of terminology and images that are traditionally associated with racism and prejudice. The story stirs up multiple interpretations, subtly enhancing the reading experience. The story offers readers new perspectives. The reader is caught off guard, pausing to think. The dialogue between the reader and the text itself is where this meaning is developed. The story would be meaningless without these interpretations.

This paper follows a critical /analytical approach to analyze Haruki Murakami's "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" (2020). The analytical approach draws on many theories, such as Postcolonialism and Marxism. The paper's goal is to promote social justice to advance a just and equitable society that values variety and offers equal opportunity to all of its members, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or class. All people are members of the same species and are descended from the same ancestors. Therefore, no colour, race, or class should result in any type of prejudice.

2. Results and Discussion

"Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" is a Surrealist short story that tackles the subjects of discrimination, alienation, emotional distance, and the apparent absurdity of the human situation. The idea that the world is cruel, that social conventions and happenings in the world are harsh, is the central premise of the story. Depending on which social and biological dimensions it relates to, inequality can take many different forms. Inequality of the first kind deals with ethnic and racial differences, and it is based on elements like skin tone or other factors that allude to a particular cultural or geographic origin. The second kind of inequality is primarily characterized by disparities in class, wealth, income, education, and occupation. "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" exemplifies the two kinds of inequality. "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" is a narrative of inequality by all means. "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" is forging new ground in the face of racial bias and the victories of strong capitalism as the social and economic cruelty of inequality increases. The story gives a human voice to the overlooked and voiceless who have been victims of all kinds of inequality.

Shinagawa Monkey is a metaphor for the experience of minorities. "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" is a magical realism-infused allegory about discrimination. The monkey, a deportee from human culture, could be compared to individuals who are marginalized due to their race. The Shinagawa Monkey is a leper. He is described as the sole talking monkey in this universe. He seems unusual to people. The Shinagawa Monkey has found himself short of opportunities to pursue because people don't like to interact with him or hire him. Shinagawa Monkey's continued description of his life as an outcast provides more evidence that he could be seen as a symbol of discrimination, intolerance, and binarism. The reality of exclusion/repudiation due to one's identity is often the experience of underrepresented minorities: "Honestly, it felt odd to be seated next to a monkey, sharing a beer, but I guess you get used to it" (Murakami.,2020: 7). As a result of his little deviation from his fellow monkeys' behavior, he is also discriminated against by them. So, he suffers from double discrimination: "The female monkeys would giggle when they looked at me. Monkeys are extremely sensitive to the most minute differences. They found the way I acted comical, and it annoyed them, irritated them sometimes"(Murakami.,2020: 8).

The writer brings to light the racial bias present in modern culture and society. He shows how Shinagawa Monkey's racial and cultural othering by the dominant culture affects him and drives him to feel severed between two beings. He is never regarded equally as a member of society and is always made to feel like an alien. In this circumstance, his hard work, sophisticated and outstanding manners, talent, and potential are irrelevant and unimportant. He exemplifies how some races are discriminated against by other races. The writer denounces some races' haughtiness and insistence on viewing other different races as "others" with different identities. Shinagawa Monkey stands out as an "other" because of his race.

The inclusion of the problem of identity into the fabric of the story gives a new introduction to the concept of the ego and the other. So who is this ego, and who is this other? According to Staszak (2009), the ego is always linked to the strong, who has a superior view, while the other is that weak and always in need of the presence of the ego. This attitude carries a discourse that legitimizes cultural superiority based on the inferiority of all human cultures. The distinction between oneself and the other, or between us and them, is the foundation upon which discrimination is based. It's critical to acknowledge that the other does not wish to be perceived as the other. The Other wants to be taken seriously as a whole person rather than constantly being compared to others. Shinagawa Monkey portrays the Other. "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey " illustrates how " Us" perceives the "Other" as distinct from the "Self" in order to keep control over it. (Staszak, 2009: 43).

The writer makes use of the dehumanization of Shinagawa into a monkey to emphasize his topic of dehumanizing other races. In the paper "Not Yet Human: Implicit Knowledge, Historical Dehumanization and Contemporary Consequences," the researchers continually found a connection between black people and apes. Despite these findings that were race-specific, the researchers emphasize that dehumanization and animal imagery have long been used to excuse violence against other disadvantaged groups. Although there are no longer many historical images in the United States that clearly depict Blacks as ape-like, the mental link between Blacks and apes persists. Here, the authors show how Americans instinctively link black people to monkeys (Goff et al., 2008: 1).

Shinagawa Monkey can be explained as a metaphor for identity conflict. Shinagawa Monkey is in a state of transition, but it's not because he has lost his identity. He does, in fact, have an identity, but due to duality, he is in a state of in between. His dual nature—that of an animal who yearns to coexist with humans—is the source of the dilemma. Although he has a monkey body, he still has human feelings and mental capabilities, but on the side of other people, he has an unrecognizable identity. The story conveys the idea that identity is not a set and permanent state; identity is not a fixed condition that exists from the moment of birth. Its consistency and stability originate from identification. Murakami's early works frequently portray identity as being not fixed.

Alienation is one of the main themes in Murakami's "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey". A feeling of alienation is brought on by discriminatory actions. A person could experience alienation as a result of his/her race, socioeconomic standing, or even just the carelessness of others (Oishi, 1983:1) . The paper concludes that racism is the primary factor contributing to the alienation experience. Repression, persecution, ethnic discrimination, and violent treatment based on the superiority of one race over other races are only a few examples of the numerous forms of coercion that result in alienation.

"Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" explores the subject of alienation as a result of loneliness. An intricate and typically unpleasant emotional reaction to isolation is loneliness. A person experiences alienation because he/she feels emotionally or physically cut off from their loved ones. Shinagawa Monkey suffers from what is called social pain: "Indeed it was. Nobody protected me, and I had to scrounge for food on my own and somehow survive. But the worst thing was not having anyone to communicate with. I couldn't talk with monkeys or with humans. Isolation like that is heartrending"(Murakami.,2020: 9)."Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" extensively explores the issue of alienation and uses it as a means of illustrating how modern man is to blame. Because of how quickly social and economic conditions are changing in the current world, loneliness in man is becoming more and more common. Despite the fact that technology makes our life more comfortable, there is a downside; it has decreased our social interaction, making us a more independent society, but it may also make us less sympathetic and lonely. We still have a tendency to seek human interaction despite the fact that dehumanization may be on the rise. Pursuing this yearning for connection is the only way to stop dehumanization.

In Murakami's short story, the reader may consider Shinagawa's dehumanization and alienation as a result of functioning in a capitalist society. It may be claimed that racism is intermittently engaged with Marxism. According to Nancy Fraser (2016), capitalism is tied to racist oppression. Capitalism is inherently exploitative and creates a society that is sharply divided, trampling on the working classes in favor of lining the pockets of the wealthy. As a system that must be eliminated, capitalism is inhumane and fundamentally exploitative (55-72). The story demonstrates the extreme violence and misery that have been inflicted on the working classes, the merciless prioritization of profits above people, the rise of wage slavery, and social estrangement. Shingawa Monkey suffers from the repercussions of Capitalism:

I do. They've been kind enough to let me work here. The larger, more upscale inns would never hire a monkey. But they're always shorthanded around here, and if you can make yourself useful, they don't care if you're a monkey or whatever. For a monkey, the pay is minimal, and they let me work only where I can stay mostly out of sight (Murakami.,2020:6).

One of the most important yet confusing and divisive concepts in Marxist philosophy is alienation. Karl Marx (1844) argues that Capitalism will result in the devaluation and dehumanization of people (Marx, 1964: 106).

This short story exemplifies Marx's "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844" concept of alienation. Marx put forth the Theory of Alienation in his "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844." According to Marx, those who live in countries where capitalism is the dominant method of production lose touch with their humanity. In a nation with a capitalist economic structure, every worker is reduced to a simple good or a production tool and has no control over the work they do. According to Marx and his adherents, capitalism necessitates the objectification and commodification of workers' experiences and labor. (Kanungo,1982:19). Shinagawa Monkey's alienation in the Marxist sense can be seen as emerging from the commodification of his labor and its transformation into capital ((Marx, 1964:13). As described previously, Shinagawa Monkey is separated from the other characters because, racially, he is a monkey. However, in Marx's view, it is not simply because he is a monkey. The alienation that Shinagawa Monkey feels comes actually from the class division. In the eye of capitalism, Shinagawa's Monkey's class is the lowest in the clan. It is because, socially, he is separated from the other men. Sadly, Shinagawa Monkey here is made hostile and alien from the others; they keep him isolated in the attic. His alienation is shown by the place where he lives. While they all live in more appropriate bunk houses, he is depicted to live in the attic. This attic is full of mice. This indicates that he is alienated due to capitalism, which makes the higher class exploit, the lower one. Shingawa Monkey could be seen as a symbol of the capitalistic dehumanization of the working class: "Yes, there's a room, sort of an attic, where they let me sleep. There are mice from time to time, so it's hard to relax there, but I'm a monkey, so I have to be thankful to have a bed to sleep in and three square meals a day. Not that it's paradise or anything" (Murakami.,2020: p.8).

3. Conclusion

At nearly 20 pages, "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" acts as a microscope, illuminating a little portion of a much larger total. "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" is thought-provoking. Overall, the story has a lot of profound implications. Its format and style are not very difficult, and it is very engaging to a modern reader as most of the targets of its satire seem to be relevant. "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" is another one of Murakami's masterpieces where nothing is what it seems, and your mental faculties are stretched to the limit.

This paper explores the various interpretations of Haruki Murakami's "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey," a seemingly meaningless work of surrealism (2020). The usage of anthropomorphic protagonists in the story is a vital and highly symbolic choice. "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" can be read as a story about identity conflict or as a depiction of workplace abuse, racism, and discrimination. The paper explains how "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" depicts the relationship between alienation and identity crisis. Alienation happens when Shinagawa Monkey experiences rejection and alienation. The paper is done from a Post-colonialist and Marxist perspective. In order to minimize the discrimination that is currently on the rise, this study aims to change society's behavior. The issues at hand are prejudice against other races, identity conflict, and alienation.

Murakami illuminates a topic outside of what is addressed in this tale. He focuses on the loner experience and what it means to be rejected or ostracized by society. The monkey becomes a symbol of what it means to be different, a social pariah social outcast whose misery is amplified in a culture that rejects difference. One of a few recent and upcoming short stories that use satire and surrealism to dissect common presumptions about racial and cultural identity and examine what it means to cross those socially defined boundaries is "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey".

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