TOKYO GHOUL:

CONTEXTUALIZING SOCIAL POLLUTION THROUGH IDENTITY

by

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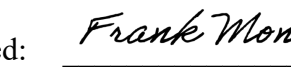
Approved: 

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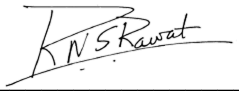
Approved: 

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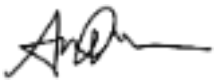
Approved: 

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the concept of social pollution within Sui Ishida's manga series *Tokyo Ghoul,* investigating how the narrative critiques societal anxieties surrounding purity, identity, and exclusion in a Japanese cultural context. Social pollution is defined as the perceived contamination of normative social structures, which is explored through themes of ethnonationalism, xenophobia, class, and gender identity. By employing a close reading of the full *Tokyo Ghoul* and *Tokyo Ghoul:re* series in their English translations, this research contextualizes the portrayal of ghouls and marginalized identities in relation to real world Japanese constructs. This includes ideas of *Nihonjinron,* the historical discrimination of Burakumin, and expectations of gender conformity. Through this analysis, the thesis argues that ghouls serve as metaphorical representations of those socially excluded, revealing the persistent societal tension between inclusion and the fear of the "other."

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Entertainment media such as films, music, and literature are intrinsic to understanding current and historical social perceptions. Whether directly drawing from an artist's personal experiences or more general societal trends, art is bound to culture. The artistic medium of graphic novels combines the usage of drawn and literary art. Japanese graphic novels-*manga*-like other literary media draws upon and expands on themes that relate to their readers' experiences and backgrounds. Series such as *Attack on Titan* have tackled themes of fascism and war, while others such as *Demon Slayer,* directly set themselves in a historic period. The manga series *Tokyo Ghoul* by author and illustrator Sui Ishida, similarly, expands on contemporary social issues such gender presentation, class dynamics, and ethnocentrism. What distinguishes *Tokyo Ghoul* from its counterparts is the overarching theme of what I call social pollution. I define social pollution as the tainting of recognized social norms that when altered may seem unnatural and or contaminated.

Within the boundaries of this research, I refer to social pollution as a theme of *Tokyo Ghoul* that deals with ethnocentrism, social caste or class, xenophobia, and transgender or gender identity. Through these subjects, social pollution more deeply encompasses general societal anxieties surrounding purity, contamination, and the "other," that commonly appear in Japanese social contexts. *Tokyo Ghoul* itself is about

its main character's own struggle with new circumstances that place him outside of the social norms he had previously been accustomed to. The manga is set-in modern-day Japan, in a world where humans live amongst other anthropomorphic beings known as ghouls. Ghouls appear and behave as humans would but require human flesh for sustenance. Outcasted and hunted by humans, ghouls are forced to hide their identity, ultimately creating conflicts both amongst themselves and with humans. Ideas of identity and class are incorporated to the dual human-ghoul narratives presented in the text. Thus, within the narrative of *Tokyo Ghoul*, the theme of social pollution acts as a lens through which the complex interplay of gender, identity, nationalism, and class is examined. Revealing how societal anxieties about purity and contamination intersect to create a climate of fear and exclusion, particularly as experienced by those who deviate from perceived social norms.

Using the metaphorical framework of social pollution allows for a nuanced exploration of ideas such as gender performance. Expanding upon the concept of gender as a fluid and externally influenced construct, by applying social pollution, it can be otherwise understood through the purity of traditional femininity and masculinity versus androgenous presentations. Transgender experiences similarly will be analyzed by their perceived connotations to cis-gender purity and potential feelings of contamination through gender-dysphoria. Other concepts such as the Japanese-nationalist ideal of *Nihonjinron*, expanded upon further in later chapters, speaks to the notion of a contaminated society that may not be of "pure' ethnic Japanese descent. Socioeconomic status, interpolated with Japanese caste dynamics, explores the

correlations between social pollution and lower social statuses, thus impacting an individual's access to education, financial resources, and acceptance within their larger community base. Through the lens of social pollution, the selected aspects of focus all have the common themes of "otherness" and metaphorical contamination, versus that which is deemed "natural", pure, or principal.

The choice of using the term "social pollution" as the lens through which I read the narrative of *Tokyo Ghoul* stems from the relevancy of pollution in the Japanese context. During the Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa eras, environmental pollution became increasingly more prevalent as a result of growing industrial industries. The four major copper mines of the Meiji era began the trend of atmospheric pollutants from smoke and general emissions, but the Taishō periods' broadening manufacturing industries began to diversify forms of environmental pollutants, particularly in chemical industries.[1] Prioritization of growing domestic chemical industries caused safety processes to be ignored, thus accelerating the output of chemical pollutants.[2] After World War II, effects of environmental pollution on Japanese citizens appeared through outbreaks of diseases such as Minamata and Itai Itai caused by foods contaminated by industrial waste in primary water sources.[3] Environmental pollution of these periods can be associated with the emphasis of national improvements overtaking the care of the state's people. Pollution in its environmental form is thus an issue that centers not only around the physical consequences observed, but also the implication that those in higher social positions are polluting the environmental landscape in exchange for nationalistic and financial gains.

Environmental pollution and its consequences are a considerably modern iteration of pollution in the Japanese context as the Shintō religion is heavily centered around the notion of purity versus pollution. Shintō emphasizes the importance of purity, thus condemning acts or qualities that would be considered pollutants such as: disease, death, blood from wounds, menstruation, among other like acts.[4] Those who are polluted must go through the rites of purification, thus directly placing pollution as the opposing force to purity. Yet, it is not only the acts of an individual that contribute to metaphorical pollution, but also the community's solidarity in maintaining the rights of purification, as argued by Robert J. J. Wargo.[5] Both forms of pollution, physical and metaphorical, are not necessarily the fault of a single individual, rather they are group efforts, whether done by the elite governing body or religiously focused communities. Pollution in the Japanese context thus can be argued to be group oriented, as also present in my usage of social pollution within the context of *Tokyo Ghoul*. While characters face individual struggles contributing to otherness, it is their association with groups viewed as social pollutants that ultimately allow them to overlap and relate to one-another.

This project aims to analyze specific aspects of the *Tokyo Ghoul* manga series, including its various main and side characters that express atypical identities. Further using plot driving and background conversations provides an understanding of the characters place within the world of *Tokyo Ghoul*. In tandem with character and narrative dialogue, the vital thematic elements of primary analysis will be identity and social injustice. Concepts of identity will be primarily focused on character's internal

struggles that are central to furthering the main plot. Other sources of identity discourse within the manga will be seen through specific queer-coded characters, as well as an explicitly transgender character. Themes of social injustice will focus on both multi-chapter arcs and side plot lines that focus on the systemic and personal injustices experienced by the ghoul characters in *Tokyo Ghoul*. As manga are graphic novels, it is essential that both visual and literary elements will be dually analyzed throughout this project.

The methodology implemented for this project included a thorough close reading of the entire thirty volume *Tokyo Ghoul* series in its official Viz media North American English translation. Included within the thirty-volume count is the original fourteen volume series, *Tokyo Ghoul.* As well as the sixteen-volume sequel, *Tokyo Ghoul:re* that directly follows and continues the plot of *Tokyo Ghoul*. Conclusions drawn from the source material will be further supported by scholarly materials relating to evidence of social pollution within Japan. Due to limitations provided by using an English translation as source material, Japanese language-based nuances within the text will not be included within this project. Future further research may be done to highlight examples of social pollution through native language nuances.

Previous academic work has been done on the series, regarding various aspects of the written material. Scholars such as Chang Hsin-Chi, approached *Tokyo Ghoul* through the lens of medical humanities, analyzing the main character's ghoulification process, focusing primarily on the challenges surrounding organ transplantation, medical technology, and power dynamics as they are interplayed with the broader

question of medical malpractice within the context of *Tokyo Ghoul*.[6] Author Lieve Meulenbeld takes a comparative approach in their analysis of *Tokyo Ghoul.* Comparing the *Tokyo Ghoul* manga to *Super Frog Saves Tokyo,* Meulenbeld performed a close reading on both texts, exploring how emotion, sound, and embodiment are depicted throughout both texts in their respective medium.[7] Other scholars such as Tony Milligan center arguments around the primary theme of cannibalism throughout the narrative. Through an analysis of Sui Ishida's ghouls as monstrous cannibals who are othered by society, Milligan relates the series to other literary monsters while drawing from real-life examples of cannibalism.[8] Scholarly work directly concentrating on the *Tokyo Ghoul* manga text has thus been widely spread throughout various facets of both its literary and narrative structures.

Similarly, scholars of psychology and human nature have utilized *Tokyo Ghoul* as source material for other area studies. Akira Takeda, like Milligan, analyzed the prevalent theme of cannibalism that the series embodies. Takeda uses *Tokyo Ghoul* as well as other series such as *Attack on Titan* as examples of cannibalism in contemporary Japanese media. However, *Tokyo Ghoul* is only mentioned when exploring his overarching ethnographical research on consumerization and examples of cannibalism in contemporary Japan.[9] Scholar Alex Thomas, also uses *Tokyo Ghoul* as example material without explicitly examining the work as a literary text.[10] Much like Takeda, Thomas only references *Tokyo Ghoul* to speak on cosplaying practices of a Black female fan. Thomas' argument does not surround *Tokyo Ghoul,* rather it is cited to support the overall topic of Black women within the cosplay community.

Contemporary scholarship explores *Tokyo Ghoul* through various methodological and academic disciplines. However, I am expanding more broadly, as this research seeks to examine *Tokyo Ghoul* through the unique lens of my definition of social pollution and its effect on human identities within the context of the manga series. Unlike previous scholarly work, I am exploring themes of social ostracization present within the *Tokyo Ghoul* series and placing the text in a grander historical context through which the work could be interpreted as drawing from. The scope of this project allows for the critical analysis of popular Japanese fiction within the manga genre. Historically contextualizing a series such as *Tokyo Ghoul* will provide insight into the ways historical events and cultural norms can shape media and literature. In turn, allowing for a broader analysis of how real-world instances of social pollution in the Japanese context may become interwoven in domestic entertainment media.

This thesis will provide a close reading analysis of the manga series *Tokyo Ghoul,* taking into consideration the fictional context conflict of ghouls versus humans, as well as Japanese historical and sociological backgrounds. I will begin by providing an overview of the series, detailing overarching plot points relevant to my argument. I argue that *Tokyo Ghoul*'s world can be read as a commentary on Japanese ethnic nationalism, or Nihonjinron. I additionally argue that implicit and explicit examples of complex relationships with gender and identity push a narrative of otherness and isolation. I further argue that present class dynamics and socioeconomic discrepancies contribute to the narrative struggles between ghouls and humans, while

also relating to the comparable historical discrimination faced by the Japanese Burakumin caste. Through the sub-themes highlighted in this research, I argue that the concept of social pollution comprehensively connects the sub-themes through the shared experiences of otherness, generalized discrimination, and contamination.

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Chapter 2

NIHONJINRON

Tokyo Ghoul is a Japanese language graphic novel series by author and illustrator Sui Ishida. First published in 2011 through weekly serialization in the magazine *Weekly Young Jump*; the series concluded in 2014, with its sequel, *Tokyo Ghoul:re,* beginning serialization within the same year until 2018. The series was eventually licensed by Viz Media for a North American English translation release, compiled into fourteen and sixteen bound volumes respectively. In 2014, *Tokyo Ghoul* became adapted into an animated television series with localized English subtitles, contributing to wider recognition by international audiences.

Japanese graphic novels, or manga, are categorized by various sub-genres such as Shōnen, Shojō, Josei, and Seinen to name a few. Sub-genres allow for diversification of target audiences, as seen between the Shōnen and Seinen genres. Shōnen primarily targets young boys of middle to high school age, whereas Seinen is aimed for adult men over the age of 18. *Tokyo Ghoul* as a series falls into the latter category as a Seinen manga, allowing for a narrative that tackles complex adult themes, dialogues and illustrated scenes. This project's primary goal is not to conduct a focused analysis of *Tokyo Ghoul* through the lens of the graphic novel genre. However, it is vital to understand key differences between non-illustrated literary structures versus the additional elements used in manga. Compared to non-illustrated texts, certain scenes and narrative aspects are presented to audiences strictly through dialogue free illustrated pages or "panels". As such, this research aims to utilize all

aspects of the manga media structure to examine how social pollution is represented beyond strict character dialogue.

The original series of *Tokyo Ghoul* takes place during the 21st century. It begins its focus on Ken Kaneki, a young human college student who gets ghoul organs transplanted into his body after being attacked by the female binge eating ghoul Rize. Kaneki then faces the internal battle of wanting to identify as a human while becoming newly exposed to ghoul society after his nonconsensual transformation. Ghouls within the story are human-like beings that are biologically different through their need to consume humans for survival, since they are unable to naturally eat human food. As they are seen as human killers, they are feared by humans and hunted by those known as ghoul investigators who are associated with the federal agency, Commission of Counter Ghoul (CCG). Throughout the first fourteen volumes of the series, Kaneki experiences a series of transformations, both physically and emotionally as he grapples with his new identity as someone who is a half-ghoul.

Tokyo Ghoul:re, the sequel and second half of the series, presents the story from a new perspective. Now following a transformed Kaneki, who is known as Haise Sasaki, a ghoul investigator who is himself a half ghoul. Having forgotten his past as Ken Kaneki, Sasaki becomes a leader and mentor to human CCG investigators that undergo experimental surgery to gain the physical strength abilities of ghouls. Compared to the original series where ghouls are the primary narrative center, *:re* focuses on the multifaceted nature of its ghoul-human society. As the narrative progresses the identity of Kaneki/Sasaki becomes increasingly complex, as he initially

struggles with the idea of possessing dual identities. The sequel further introduces us to additional side characters who tackle self-identity themselves, such as transman Tooru Mutsuki. Throughout the entirety of the full *Tokyo Ghoul* series, ghouls and humans are put at odds with each other, often creating power struggles in economic, educational, and public sectors. As such, the role of homogeneity within the worlds of ghouls and humans plays into the social discrimination between the two groups. By using the setting of Tokyo, Japan, the theory of *Nihonjinron* can act as a real-life counterpart to the discrimination depicted in *Tokyo Ghoul*.

The theory of Nihonjinron stems from an idealized self-image of the individual and national identity of Japan as being ethnically unique. Built upon ethnic nationalism, Nihonjinron promotes the strengthening and preservation of the Japanese national identity while maintaining a strong and inherent distinction between those who are not ethnically Japanese. Thus, the differences between Japan and other foreign bodies are strongly demarcated and 'othered'.[1] These differences drive the idea that it was not militaristic nationalism of the pre-war era that propelled Japan into the global sphere, but rather the uniqueness of the Japanese people that allowed for the nation to economically recover in the years after the war. Much of the contemporary Nihonjinron argument developed in the post-war era, citing the dissolution of heavy nationalist symbols and the proposed correlation of economic improvements.[2] During this time, more literature was published on the topic of Nihonjinron, continuously spurring the theory on in academic fields.

Nihonjinron can be further understood as a theory that represents the desire to establish and give authority to a believed unique Japanese cultural identity. The central idea of Nihonjinron lies within its idea of shared 'blood' amongst Japanese people, creating ideas of ethnic homogeneity. It is further categorized by perceived cultural competence and the social participation by those who identify as Japanese.[3] Racial perceptions and the belief of ethnic uniqueness is not a modern Japanese concept. Rather, the idea of ethnic homogeneity in Japan can be derived from Shintō mythology, and the texts of the *Kojiki* that provides the Japanese creation myth and asserts the Japanese imperial line as sacred.[4] Nihonjinron is then later further developed within the context of race and racial relations. As new ideas of how race can differ began to develop in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, concepts such as Social Darwinism were introduced and spread. With the advent of Japanese westernization and subsequent imperialism, Japanese contemporary individuals argued that they were excluded from the overall 'yellow' race, and thus superior.[5] The theory itself is nationalistic in nature, but it originates from the background of sociological elitism and scientific racism.

The theory of Nihonjinron is especially relevant in the case of *Tokyo Ghoul* as the Japanese ethnic background of the characters is key to both the setting and the narrative at large. *Tokyo Ghoul*'s premise centers around two groups who are inherently biologically different, creating a similar sense of biological superiority in the narratives' humans. Very early into the original series, it is established that while ghouls and humans may appear to outwardly look the same, ghouls possess two key

biological differences: *Kagune* and high counts of RC cells. Kagune are an organ only found in ghouls that functions as a retractable bodily weapon. A Kagune is directly linked RC cells, which are fictional cells found in both humans and ghouls that appear like blood cells but harden into essentially muscle. Compared to humans, ghouls have significantly higher rates of RC cells, the main component to a Kagune. Within the canon of the series, the difference in RC cell levels is seen as the determinant to separating ghouls from humans.

From the very beginning of the series, it is established that the average human is afraid of the threat of ghouls in society. Within the first nine pages of *Tokyo Ghoul* volume 1, the main character Ken Kaneki and his best friend Hide are sitting in a café discussing the possibility that ghouls could be hiding amongst them disguised as humans. Kaneki goes on to say that "they're just human shaped," implying that regardless of their ability to pass as humans, they are not deemed as true humans. Unbeknownst to the pair, they were in a café that would later be revealed to be run by ghouls.[6] It is quickly established that ghouls are the outsider, those who are posing as humans but not fully a part of their world. After Kaneki gets attacked and forcibly transplanted ghoul organs, he watches a televised broadcast speaking on recent ghoul attacks. The scene shows a ghoul expert explaining the biological differences between ghouls and humans, reiterating the fact that ghouls must eat humans to survive.[7] Contrasts drawn between ghouls and humans in this scene are presented as horrifying facts of human death and consumption, yet it is offset by Kaneki's newfound

ghoulification. Kaneki, like all other ghouls who are biologically different from their counterparts, is an outsider in a world dominated by humans.

Volume one is not only introducing readers to Kaneki and his transformation into a half ghoul but is also an introduction to the direct discrimination against ghouls in this world. Contextually, all the characters introduced thus far are of Japanese ethnicity. The pattern of discrimination is instead focused on the biological differences between ghouls and humans that otherwise go unnoticed in everyday life. Ghouls are "human shaped" yet are internally strengthened by their kagune's and RC cell levels. There is therefore a lack of true homogeneity or blood connection, which further breeds discomfort and a sense of elitism in the humans. Narratively, they are seen as dangerous outsiders who cannot be seen as equals to humans.

The issue of blood relations in Japanese society and *Tokyo Ghoul*'s canon is further enhanced by the idea of 'mixed blood' or mixed races and ethnicities. As previously stated, the theory of Nihonjinron is ingrained as Japanese ethnic nationalism; therefore, those who are not of Japanese ethnicity would be seen as inferior. Conceptually the argument for Nihonjinron encompasses all of those who have paternal and maternal Japanese ethnicity, but it ultimately becomes more ambiguous for those who may be half or of mixed Japanese ethnicity. Japanese citizens who may be ethnically diverse can be discriminated against, often called *hāfu* or half. Hāfu have further connections to not only mixed ethnicities, but mixed race as well. Those who are visibly a different race may often become a target for discrimination as they are seen as outsiders to a homogenous racial and ethnic group.[8]

As a greater portion of Japan's population becomes ethnically diversified, the notion of what it means to be Japanese becomes complicated. Many mixed race and mixed ethnicity people who reside in Japan are citizens who fluently speak the language, participate in cultural practices, and often have physical Japanese traits, yet their 'Japaneseness' can still be called into question.

Perceptions of what it means to be foreign become further aligned with alienness, otherness, and unfamiliarity. Those who are othered by society are associated with inferiority as they do not conform to the expected notion of what it means to be Japanese.[9] While within the context of *Tokyo Ghoul*, the separation between foreign and familiar is not through ethnicity, there remains a distinct xenophobia for those who are not of the common folk, in this case ghouls. Ghouls who are half human-half ghoul face even greater scrutiny as they cannot fully identify as a ghoul or a human. Kaneki himself is half human-half ghoul, often denoted simply as a "half-ghoul". His identity as a half ghoul further showcases the implications of his status as someone who maintains two identities. Rather than being known as a half human, society delineates that he has instead been marred and overtaken by his newfound ghoul identity.[10] In that sense, his existence is foreign to society, and he no longer can be identified as pure human. On a macro sociological scale, the same can therefore be said for those who are identified by their status as hāfu rather than simply Japanese.

Differences in physical attributes further contribute to the perception of foreignness. For those who are not only of mixed ethnicity but also mixed race, a new

layer of nuance is added to their identity as hāfu. Those who are visibly multiracial are physically set apart from not only full-Japanese individuals but also from other hāfu who phenotypically appear East Asian yet still are multiethnic. The ghouls of *Tokyo Ghoul* are similarly distinguishable by the physical differences that distinguish them from humans. Most evidently, ghouls possess red eyes that appear due to the activation of their RC cells. The distinctive red eyes are instantly associated with ghouls, as when Kaneki first becomes a ghoul, he is unable to control the appearance of his singular ghoul eye. Kagune are also distinctive to the appearance of a ghoul who is choosing to not appear human. It is important to note, ghouls can hide their red eyes and Kagune, allowing them to blend into society relatively easily. Unlike multiracial individuals, who are generally unable to hide their physical marker of foreignness. However, those who are of mixed East Asian ethnicity may sometimes choose to pass as Japanese in response to the negative perceptions held towards other Asian ethnicities.[11] In both the context of some hāfu experiences and *Tokyo Ghoul*, despite the ability to effectively blend in with society, there remains an intrinsic boundary that separates supposed natives from perceived outsiders.

From birth Kaneki had been a human who was otherwise unfamiliar with the ghoul world. Thus, creating a liminal space between the identities of human and ghoul within himself. After his medical transition into a half ghoul, he became confused and unsure of his place within the world as someone who now belonged to two very different social groups. When Kaneki begins interacting with other ghouls he initially is not accepting of his new identity, often separating himself from the idea of being a

ghoul, refusing to eat human flesh because he too is a human.[12] Touka Kirishima, a ghoul that Kaneki meets from the café, does not take pity on his lack of self-acceptance, instead telling him, “Sure, you may not be a ghoul…but…you’re not human either”.[13] She continues by telling him that there was no place in the world for those who cannot decide between one or the other, in this case being human or ghoul.[14] The exchange between Touka and Kaneki highlights the lack of tolerance for those who do not fit into a normative accepted identity. Kaneki at this point still sees himself as a human but he no longer fully belongs in that society. Instead, he is somewhere in between two societies where he would now be seen as foreign to the group that he is still technically a part of.

Figure 1: *Tokyo Ghoul Volume 1, Chapter 9 "Hatch," Ken Kaneki pictured grappling with his newfound ghoul identity.*

Otherness is the intrinsic base of *Tokyo Ghoul* and its story. The world centers around humans and their society that is perceived to be just and correct compared to that of ghouls. Ghouls are thus socially polluting the world occupied by humans. The humans of *Tokyo Ghoul* maintain a sense of elitism through which they can justify their hatred and opposition to ghouls. Nihonjinron argues for the same mindset, where those who are of pure full Japanese descent are believed to be elite to their other East Asian counterparts. As present-day Japan continues to diversify, within the theory of Nihonjinron, Japanese society becomes more polluted through the blending of ethnicities and races. The resistance to modern day foreign integration through the

growing sector of non-native teachers stands as a testament to how Nihonjinron may be adapted to a changing Japanese landscape.[15] *Tokyo Ghoul* thus can act as a mirror to the theoretical social polluting of a homogenous society that holds the self-image of superiority.

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Chapter 3

CASTE AND CLASS

The correlation between blood, genetics, and ethnicity within the Japanese context goes beyond that of just Nihonjinron. Social influences based on historical class divides have continued to have their own implications regarding the treatment of individuals based on their derived social status. In the case of Japan, the historic caste-like systems of the feudal to Tokugawa eras continue to have social effects on modern day descendants, particularly those who were labeled as Burakumin. Those labeled as Burakumin have been historically ostracized, yet unlike those who are ostracized for their racial or ethnic differences, Burakumin are of full Japanese heritage. The term Burakumin refers to people living in a distinguishable subsection within a village, often also maintaining occupations that would be linked to the idea of death such as gravediggers or tanners.[1] Through their association with death, Burakumin were further believed to be associated with pollution and the idea that they were non-human compared to those who were not labeled as Burakumin.[2] Despite descending from ethnically "full" Japanese people, discrimination against Burakumin is often dehumanizing, another form of social pollution in which this portion of the population is outcasted from those who are deemed as "pure" or "clean" within the greater village society.

The ghouls of *Tokyo Ghoul* are similarly the same in their ethnicity as Japanese ghouls, but the social discrimination that they face is derived from the belief that they are purely human eating monsters. Throughout the entirety of the series, Ghouls are directly referred to as monsters. In volume three of the main series, the intense tensions between humans and ghouls are put on full display during a battle between ghouls Touka and Kaneki, and human CCG investigators, Amon and Mado. Towards the end of the battle sequence, Kaneki and Amon are directly facing off, causing Amon to exhibit his opinions on ghouls by saying, "This world is wrong and it's you monsters that are distorting it!"[3] It is not their appearance or direct actions that make ghouls akin to monsters, rather it is their relation to their own identities as ghouls in a human world. For many of the main human protagonists, ghouls are socially polluting their otherwise clean human world.

Within both real-world historical and series contexts, Burakumin and ghouls are relatively separated from the majority of society. During the 19th century Meiji era of Japan, newspapers were a primary tool for spreading a negative image of discriminated communities such as Burakumin. Referred to then as *Shinheimin*, literally "new commoners", rather than Burakumin after the systems legal abolishment, newspapers wrote about their alleged obstinacy and coarse customs that did not align with Meiji social standards.[4] In 1881 when economic recessions began to hit, those who could not support themselves financially were forced to move lower class primarily Buraku occupied communities. Large influxes of impoverished people in Buraku communities caused perceptions to become more negative, believing the

communities to be areas of contained problems, including infectious diseases, immorality, and corruption.[5] The physical separation of those viewed as beneath common folk, creates greater opportunity for further social discrimination.

The ghouls of *Tokyo Ghoul* are both secluded to the fringes of society and secretly integrated when posing as ordinary humans. Ghouls such as Nishio Nishiki is used an example of ghouls who are effectively orphaned and forced into homelessness. Pictured, living in a tent with his older sister, Nishio reflects on his circumstances as a ghoul, wishing to go to school and learn as a human would.[6] Others who are not unhoused or living under the guise of being human otherwise seem to be part of grouped ghoul communities. It is revealed that within the various wards of Tokyo there are ghoul collectives with individual hierarchical systems. Rize, the female ghoul whose organs are transplanted into the Kaneki's body had been seen as the leader of the 11th ward as their strongest ghoul.[7] These groups formed by ghouls are separate from ghouls who choose to otherwise mask their identities in exchange for livelihoods in the human world.

As with the Burakumin counterpart, before the start of *Tokyo Ghouls* narrative, groups of ghouls had been essentially forced to become completely separated from higher society, in this case to an underground labyrinth like fortress. Hinted at briefly in the main *Tokyo Ghoul* series, it is revealed that there are ghouls that have been forced to live beneath Tokyo.[8] Further in the series in *:re*, the 24th ward as it is called by humans and ghouls alike, is shown to be entirely isolated as they speak a different dialect and visibly look different compared to the ghouls and humans above ground.[9]

Ghouls of the 24th wards are effectively outcasted by both mainstream ghoul and human societies as they are socially and geographically separated from society.

Between the real-life case of Burakumin and lower class ostracization, and that of ghouls, there are fundamental differences such as the lack of religious association. Yet, narratively, *Tokyo Ghoul's* representation of its blood and class discrimination can draw comparisons between the two examples. Case in point, canonically the initial formation of the 24th ward occurred after its initial leader, the one-eyed king, led masses of ghouls after being pushed underground by opposing humans.[10] Pseudo similarly, during the Sengoku period state legislation displaced outcasts, including Burakumin, forcing them to live separately away from mainstream society.[11] While both cases maintain their nuanced differences, the similarity of social outcasting rings true. The circumstance by which they are othered and sent to the fringes of society is ultimately related to their status as beings who are of the lowest blood status, those who are believed to be polluting society with their presence.

The relation between blood and social value is also present in Burakumin discrimination, especially towards and during the 19th century. With the end of the feudal system, those who were identified as Burakumin were done so increasingly through ancestry. As seen within the theory of Nihonjinron, blood and ancestry were incredibly valuable to maintaining an elite society. The same approach is taken with Burakumin communities, as 19th century contemporary anthropologists believed there were genetic differences between Burakumin and 'normal' Japanese people.[12] Genetically, Burakumin are ethnically of the dominant Japanese Yamato ethnic group,

yet Buraku descendants were seen as having polluted blood. *Tokyo Ghoul* as a series explores similar dynamics by focusing on ghouls who are of Japanese ethnicity. Mentioned throughout both the main and sequel series, ghouls identify as Japanese regardless of their status as ghouls. The homogeneity of humans and ghouls as Japanese citizens is directly stated at the very end of the series through the Tsukiyama patriarch during the final battle as he says, "I'm Japanese too," in response to a human investigator as they join forces.[13] Despite intrinsically being of the same ethnicities, the greater focus is that of blood and its influence on society at large. It is ultimately the concern of polluted blood entering mainstream society that ties xenophobic beliefs in both the real-life Burakumin case and that of fictional ghouls.

Social hierarchy is determined not only through genetic lineages, but also economic and financial standings. Those who are deemed as upper class typically are afforded access to education, material goods or services, and social prestige among their peers. Unlike the elites of society, those below the median for average living may find themselves struggling to provide adequate shelter, education or resources. The ghouls within *Tokyo Ghoul* are portrayed humanistically, allowing them to face the same class struggles that their human counterparts would. Ghouls are not all inherently unhoused or uneducated, yet the circumstances in which they are ostracized makes granting access into the wealthy spheres increasingly more difficult. In their portrayal as vehicles of discrimination, both sides of the class spectrum are widely portrayed, allowing further correlations to arise between more outward expressions of ghoul identity and lower-class experiences.

It is generally understood within *Tokyo Ghoul's* society that ghouls lack the same educational opportunities as humans. Characters such as Naki, a ghoul gang leader, is used to highlight how social disparities create gaps between the educated and uneducated through his verbal mistakes and general unsophisticated ignorance. The issue of social disparities is directly addressed through Dr. Kano who views Naki's ignorance as a product of the lack of educational opportunities afforded to ghouls.[14] Despite general social inequalities between ghouls and humans, ghouls who successfully conceal their identities in favor of posing as humans may become of equal or greater social status to humans.

As within human societies, ghouls may descend from families that have created generational upward social mobility. Seen most obviously with the Tsukiyama family, Shuu Tsukiyama is the son of Mirumo Tsukiyama who heads the Tsukiyama conglomerate.[15] Shuu Tsukiyama is first introduced to Kaneki through the other ghouls at the Anteiku café. He believes himself to be ostracized by other ghouls who view him as a "snob", yet he holds the opinion that ghouls of lower economic status are vulgar.[16] The Tsukiyama's are an outlier in both ghoul and human society, as their social status in either sphere is viewed as the most elite compared to those of middle- and upper-class status.

Although ghouls of higher social standing may benefit from the same or similar social advantages, their status remains determined by their ability to blend into human society. Ghouls who choose to live as humans run the constant risk being discovered and thus hunted by the CCG. Touka and her brother Ayato's character

backstory is used as an example of ghouls who must keep human identities to maintain an average lifestyle.[17] Touka and Ayato are of lower-class status, yet the reaction towards their ghoul status is the same as it is for the Tsukiyama family. In the sequel series, *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, it is revealed to CCG investigators that the Tsukiyama conglomerate is headed by ghouls. As the opulent estate is raided the ghouls associated with the family desire to be treated with dignity, saying, "We've lived as humans. So please. Let us stay that way until the end,".[18] The respect they had garnered thus far ultimately became irrelevant, as the investigators respond to their pleas with, "Whatever, ghoul,".[19] Whereas for humans' social class is the ultimate marker of respect, its standing for ghouls is only relevant depending on the contest in which it is viewed. A ghoul can thus be of higher standing within ghoul society while simultaneously being viewed as socially and genetically beneath any and every human.

ENDNOTES

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[2] Amos, *Embodying Difference*, 3.

[3] Ishida, "Epiphany," vol. 3, 105.

[4] Teraki Nobuaki, Kurokawa Midori, and Ian Neary, "Signs of Discrimination Invented," in *A History of Discriminated Buraku Communities in Japan* (Kent: Renaissance Books, 2019), 132.

[5] Nobuaki, Midori, and Neary, "A History of Discriminated Buraku," 132-3.

[6] Sui Ishida, "Scar," in *Tokyo Ghoul*, vol. 5 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2016), 60.

[7] Sui Ishida, "Rize," in *Tokyo Ghoul*, vol. 5 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2016), 141.

[8] Sui Ishida, "Promotion," in *Tokyo Ghoul*, vol. 9 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2016), 16.

[9] Sui Ishida, "Thinking Pig," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 12 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2019), 167.

[10] Sui Ishida, "Meal," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 12 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2019), 110.

[11] Amos, *Embodying Difference*, 3.

[12] Nobuaki, Midori, and Neary, "A History of Discriminated Buraku," 134.

[13] Sui Ishida, "God," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 14 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2019), 147.

[14] Sui Ishida, "#," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 5 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2018), 44.

[15] Sui Ishida, "°C," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 5 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2018), 83.

[16] Sui Ishida, "Cajolery," in *Tokyo Ghoul*, vol. 4 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2015), 69.

[17] Sui Ishida, “Sister and Brother,” in *Tokyo Ghoul*, vol. 8 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2016), 28.

[18] Ishida, “°C,” vol. 5, 83.

[19] Sui Ishida, “Retort,” in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 5 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2018), 8.

Chapter 4

GENDER, QUEERNESS, AND IDENTITY

Gender and the influence that it has on identity is one of the most prominent facets of *Tokyo Ghoul*'s social narrative. Several characters maintain an ambiguous relationship with their own gender identification, often generating a newfound layer of difficulty for characters who are not abiding to typical gender norms. Examples of both non-explicit and explicit transgender expressions are prevalent throughout the series, highlighted through both Kaneki and later Tooru Mutsuki in *:re*. Kaneki and Mutsuki both identify as men, with Kaneki processing his newly established place in the ghoul world, his psychological relationship with Rize, and the fact that there are female ghoul organs implanted in his body. Mutsuki, unlike Kaneki, explicitly identifies as a transgender man, an identity that becomes a pivotal aspect of his character as he struggles with the fact that others discover the truth about his gender. Gender as it is presented in the *Tokyo Ghoul* series is nuanced in the way that it is interwoven into the broader narrative of ghouls and humans' places in society. The personal and social identities of each queer and quasi-queer character is another addition to their overall experience as social pollutants, in a case where ghouls and humans each face their own set of identity transgressions.

I describe the idea of queerness as the concept of having a personal relationship with one's own sexuality or gender identity that does not fit established

social ideas of what sexuality and gender should look like. While those who identify as cis-gender or heterosexual may not identify as part of the queer community, the established social norms they inherently partake in contribute to the grander understanding of how queerness is othered by society. In the Japanese context, heteronormative masculinity, especially in the metaphorical sense, is still highly influential.[1] The emphasis on masculinity in relation to modern Japanese identity has been especially present since the Meiji era, as the drive for westernization was not only developed through industrialization but also through bureaucrats' political priorities to improve external perception of the new nation-state. There was a desire to transform the orientalist viewpoint of Japan as a feminine culture, into a new presentation of Japan as modern and masculine.[2] Thus, masculinity became fundamentally intertwined with Japaneseness, creating an image of strength and western acceptance.

The perceptions of femininity and masculinity in a Japanese historical context is not only through literal articulations of gender, but also now post the Meiji westernization era, through an ethnonationalist lens. With the self-presentation of Japan as burgeoning masculine people, new social distinctions are made that imply the inheritance of Japanese ethnicity is entirely distinct from that of other Asians and white "westerners".[3] As with Nihonjinron, ethnonationalism's blood relations, we now have the additional layer of metaphorical gender superiority, ultimately equating masculinity to strength and social influence. The importance of metaphorical masculinity then contributes to broader social ideas surrounding gender identity,

gender presentation, and gender fluidity, evident in the gender expressions of *Tokyo Ghoul*.

Gender as a normative social construct is present among ghouls as it is with the humans of *Tokyo Ghoul.* Male and female ghouls are treated the same by their peers relative to their gender presentation as they would be had they been human, showcasing a maintained patriarchal social hierarchy. Despite these gender binaries, the influence of gender on identity in ghoul society is more ambiguous, especially with Kaneki, a biologically a male human whose internal organs are replaced with that of Rize's, a female ghoul.[4] His relation to Rize's organs goes beyond that of standard human organ transplantation. It is during the nonconsensual transplantation that Kaneki becomes a half-ghoul, a domino effect that alienates him from the human world. More direct effects of the transplantation come from his presentation as a ghoul, being recognized by Rize's scent when he meets Banjo, a ghoul previously associated with Rize.[5]

Beyond the female internal organs that Kaneki has placed in his body, he is not portrayed to be overly masculine throughout the series. He is initially very scrawny, weak and naïve, serving him to being seen as easy prey by those who want to take advantage of him, such as Shuu Tsukiyama, early in the series.[6] While he does not display explicit traits of femininity, his character expression remains in a state of limbo until he has endured physical and psychological torture by the ghoul Yamori.[7] It is during the torture experience that the relevance of Rize's influence on Kaneki becomes most evident. Kaneki begins to hallucinate, seeing Rize berating him for

being a naïve fool who was deceived by both her and Doctor Kano only to be turned into a monster.[8] The hallucinations can be influenced by both his own knowledge of Rize's organs being part of his ghoul body, and the torture being inflicted on him. The climax of the scene between Kaneki and the Rize hallucination comes in Kaneki's decision to take a literal bite out of Rize. She encourages him to continue, telling him to eat her as they she and Kaneki fully become one.[9] Their joining not only is the turning point for Kaneki's characterization as a weak half-human unaccepting of his newfound faith, but also of the story entirely. Influenced by the knowledge that Rize is intrinsically part of his ghoul existence, Kaneki officially accepts his ghoul identity, ending the chapter with, "I am…a ghoul."[10] Thus, Kaneki now becomes intrinsically united with Rize after consuming her, simultaneously also gaining the self-awareness that through her alone he is a ghoul.

Accepting the ghoul nature of his body and mind in a way also accepts the influence that Rize has on Kaneki. Unlike the human counterpart of gender roles, many of the strongest ghouls are cis-gender women such as Rize and Touka who both highlight Kaneki's physical weakness before his self-acceptance of his ghoul identity. Despite their physical strength, their roles in ghoul society are still diminished by their status as female ghouls. Eto, a half-ghoul who is also a cis-gender woman, becomes one of the primary antagonists for the main *Tokyo Ghoul* series and into *:re*. Eto's identity however is shrouded in mystery, as the One-Eyed Owl's identity is unknown to both ghouls and humans. Her identity as the One-Eyed Owl is fully revealed in one of the final panels in the last volume of the main series, as a stereotypical outline of a

female figure is seen exiting the ghoul form of the One-Eyed Owl, highlighting the juxtaposition between the monstrous, domineering ghoul and a petite young woman.

Eto as the One-Eyed Owl and Rize the binge eating ghoul are two examples of female ghouls straying from otherwise established gender norms. Social patriarchy in *Tokyo Ghoul* is not exclusive to the series as the real world Japanese social equivalent also maintains male centrality. Conformity of men and women alike is preferred within the scope of heteronormativity, as seen by other Japanese media representations that punish men and women who do not conform to gender norms.[11] Expectations of how men and women should act upon traditional gender roles leads to creation of what is socially acceptable. Contemporary Japanese social issues such as the low birth rate thus become a product of seeming gendered imbalance, labeled as "herbivore men" and "carnivore women".[12] Herbivore men are understood as improper men who lack assertiveness and ambition, and women who are viewed by media as a predatory like social unknown female other.[13] The negative connotation associated with herbivore men and carnivore women is then a flip of what is typically expected of men and women; men who are masculine and socially dominant, while women are feminine and subservient to their male counterparts. Instead, carnivore women are a social unknown that is completely unaligned with the greater population's identities.

I argue that according to this definition of carnivore women, female ghouls of *Tokyo Ghoul* such as Eto and Rize can be labeled as carnivore women who are in a sense a social unknown as strong female ghouls. Unlike strong female human characters such as ghoul investigator Akira Mado, the perceived strangeness of female

ghouls by both societies is twofold due to the added nuance of being a ghoul. They are not only thus seen as a social pollutant for being a ghoul, but within their own ghoul spaces they are also breaking down social norms of gender. Whereas Kaneki lacked stereotypical masculinity, he is self-accepting of the connection between himself and Rize. Kaneki believes he lacks power without Rize; he is a ghoul through Rize and without her he is just a weak human.[14] Rize is a ghoul who is feared by those around her, but her relationship with Kaneki is what ultimately fuels his identity throughout the series. Eto the One-Eyed Owl, likewise, is a ghoul leader whose gender and identity is generally ambiguous to those who are not aware of her true identity. She, like Kaneki through Rize, does not fit into either the human or ghoul world, yet her gender presentation is a directly related to her place as a ghoul who is socially polluting both the human and ghoul worlds.

More overt representations of gender expression within Tokyo Ghoul come in the form of explicit androgynous and transgender characters such as Juuzou Suzuya and Tooru Mutsuki. As an illustrative medium, manga can establish nonconforming characters through both dialogue and visual details. Juuzou, a male identifying human ghoul investigator, maintains a character design throughout the main and sequel series that highlights his relationship with gender and its fluid nature. He is pictured as having long unruly hair, large eyes, and a thin short stature that otherwise seems disproportionate to his other fellow male investigators. Juuzou's character design goes hand in hand with his backstory and motivations as a human who has been traumatized by an abusive ghoul. Juuzou's backstory reveals that as a child he was

forced to wear girls' clothing by his ghoul captor, the Big Madame. To keep Juuzou young and prepubescent, the Big Madame crushes his testicles, involuntarily altering his gender identity.[15] The aftereffects of this forceful androgenization is his gender being labeled as "none" by the CCG after his initial rescue from the Big Madame.[16]

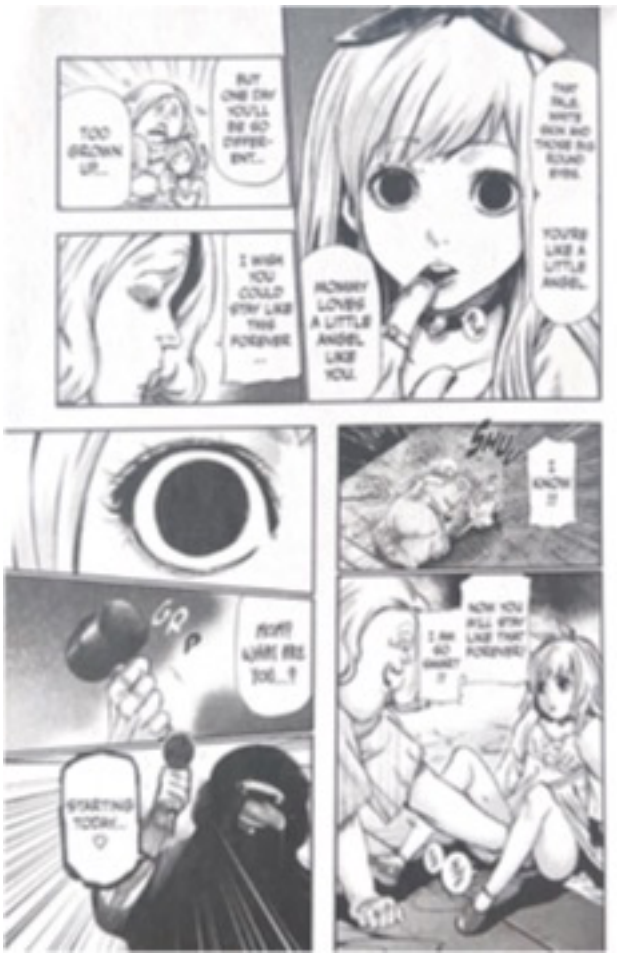

Figure 2: *Tokyo Ghoul Volume 13, Chapter 122 "Yellow Bell". Juuzou is feminized and implied to be physically assaulted by the Big Madame ghoul.*

Juuzou as androgenous representation is further complicated by his relationship with ghouls. Rather than having self-autonomy when choosing his gender

expression, a ghoul ultimately affected his identity. Juuzou then becomes in some ways a vehicle for the social and physical danger that ghouls can pose to humans. The relationship between gender and ghouls in Juuzou's case becomes reinforced with the knowledge that the ghoul Big Madame was a male ghoul who is crossdressing as a woman.[17] In this sense the nuanced nature of a ghoul's social pollution sharpens as they are not only seen as harming society with their mere existence, but their potential influence on gender and sexuality dynamics adds a new layer of fear.

Characters such as the Big Madame not only creates a greater fear of ghouls and their abuse towards humans, but they are also fulfilling the role of social pollutant themselves through both their nature as ghouls and as a queer individual. However, this trope of using LGBTQ+ characters to perpetuate canonical negative understandings of characters and the queer community is not exclusive to *Tokyo Ghoul*. Other shōnen manga series such as *YuYu Hakusho* also uses two LGBTQ+ characters, Shinobu Sensui and Itsuki, as villains who believe humanity should not function under the guise of remaining privileged creatures.[18] Tooru Mutsuki, a human ghoul investigator who willingly undergoes the ghoulification processes is the main explicit case of a transgender character within the *Tokyo Ghoul* canon. Mutsuki, as a Quinx or a manufactured half-ghoul, is also like the Big Madame a character directly involved in the ghoul world whose gender presentation is a direct factor in their corrupt behavior.

Mutsuki is one of the main added side characters in *Tokyo Ghoul:re* who begins their journey as a male presenting ghoul investigator who recently underwent

the medical procedure that implants human bodies with ghoul powers. It is very quickly revealed that Mutsuki's gender identity can functionally be labeled as transgender. For example, he is attacked by a ghoul who mistakenly calls him "miss," otherwise believing Mutsuki to be a woman.[19] Unlike the argued metaphorical nature of Kaneki's relationship with gender, or the androgyny of Juuzou, Mutsuki is explicitly trans through image and dialogue. During the initial ghoul attack, Mutsuki's shirt is ripped open to reveal bandaged wrapping around his chest, otherwise known as chest binding. This reveal prompts a narrative backstory for Mutsuki who like Juuzou was also rescued by the CCG, showing his choice to become transgender by saying, "I don't really know why, but…I don't want to be…a girl . . . From now on I'd like to be a guy."[20] It is at this point that the intersection of Mutsuki's gender identity and ghoulification become central to his role as a future antagonist in both ghoul and human social spheres.

Figure 3: *Tokyo Ghoul:re Volume 1, Chapter 4 "Remit to See, Limit to See," Tooru Mutsuki shown to wear chest binding material while being misgendered.*

Mutsuki's struggle with identity goes beyond self-understanding of one's gender. Rather, his internal conflict concerns traumatic suppressed memories and intimate feelings he begins to harbor for Haise Sasaki, the half-ghoul investigator alter-ego of Kaneki. Both emotional struggles have greatly influenced Mutsuki's relationship with his gender identity, as implied by the narrative. During his character

backstory it is heavily insinuated that as a young child Mutsuki was sexualized and thereafter sexually assaulted by his father who is later allegedly killed by a ghoul.[21] The lead up to the character backstory reveal began with Mutsuki's kidnapping by the Torso ghoul who is also implied to have sexually assaulted Mutsuki while misgendering him by dressing him in women's clothing and directly referring to him as a woman.[22] Thus, I argue that the misgendered sexual trauma Mutsuki experienced is a contributing factor to his strong feelings of social displacement, while also seeking to reclaim power by becoming a genetically modified ghoul.

Throughout the first half of *Tokyo Ghoul:re,* Mutsuki is regularly subtly misgendered by ghouls and humans he encounters as an investigator. Seen through comments regarding his body as appearing more feminine, establishing that despite presenting as a man, Mutsuki does not fit into the perceived mold of what a trans man should look like. The idealization of transness is in itself a negative aspect of living as a trans person in Japan. As to be wholly accepted by society one must conform to the heteronormative social standard of maintaining the appearance of what is traditionally expected of "biological" men and women while also adhering to heterosexuality.[23] If Mutsuki's gender identity were to be judged in accordance with that argued understanding of accepted transness in the Japanese context, he would not be seen as an ideal transman.

The experience of living as a transgender individual in Japan is to also live as someone who is labeled with a medical disorder, otherwise translated as "gender identity disorder".[24] By labeling trans identities as disorders, more validity can be

given to the heteronormative expectations of what trans individuals should look like, viewing reproductive gender-affirming surgeries as a cure to the disorder.[25] Mutsuki is suggested to have had no gender-affirming surgeries, proven by the initial reveal of his chest-binding. Despite that, it can be argued that the Quinx ghoulification surgery is in some ways gender affirming, providing Mutsuki with the physical strength that provides him with greater power and confidence. The line between his gender identity as a man and a half ghoul seeking greater strength becomes more blurred as he secretly tries to go beyond the standard for a Quinx half ghoul. This becomes obvious to readers with the confrontation by fellow Quinx, Yoneboyashi, who subtly asks Mutsuki if he's hiding something after smelling human blood on him, to which he casually responds by telling her he is "not really a guy."[26] Thus, Mutsuki's internal identity struggle regarding his gender is minimized as he becomes more of a ghoul.

As Mutsuki becomes more disillusioned with his newfound ghoul power, the crossroad between his gender identity, and romantic ideation of Haise Sasaki meet. Mutsuki's feelings for Haise are romantically possessive and sexual in nature as he imagines himself having sexual intercourse with Haise when defiling a dead ghoul's body whose face is mutilated.[27] Despite his lustful obsession of Haise he is clearly not socially accepting of ghouls, nor does he desire Kaneki, likely due to his nature as a half-ghoul who has increasingly aligned more with a ghoul identity rather than human. As a Quinx, Mutsuki is also not subjected to the same social barriers that natural half-ghouls or "full" ghouls would be, adding to the notion that the Quinx surgery is the exploitation of ghoul power in exchange for stronger, and in Mutsuki's case, more

affirmed humans. It is in this way that Mutsuki's social othering comes from his nature as a transgender man who has felt devalued throughout life, stating, "this must be my fate. To be taken by men…and there is nothing I can do about it."[28] However, he later takes greater control of his life by becoming increasingly violent as he pushes the boundaries of his half-ghoul status.

Mutsuki's choice to become more ghoul like as the narrative progresses also in a way diminishes his struggle with gender identity, instead focusing more on his likeness to stereotypical ghouls. He chooses to attack Touka who he believes is keeping him from Haise, murmuring, "I hate women," now no longer feeling ambiguous about his place as a person between man and woman.[29] The epilogue also continues his narrative as someone whose aversion to ghouls remains after social tensions between humans and ghouls are somewhat relieved. Mutsuki chooses to remain a ghoul investigator in a new cities branch, while his gender identity becomes more ambiguous than it previously was as his close friend in the Quinx group Urie, refers to him by female pronouns.[30] Mutsuki as well as Juuzou are in this sense are at the intersection of the human advantage while being still being othered by their gender identity. Whereas ghouls are social pollutants by nature of their existence as ghouls, the effect that ghouls have had on characters such as Mutsuki or Juuzou's own identities can in a way be seen as an act of social polluting, influencing or impacting a different kind of social abnormality within the acceptable human sphere of society.

ENDNOTES

[1] Sally McLaren, "Gender, Media, and Misogyny in Japan," in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, 1st ed., n.d., accessed October 19, 2024, 343.

[2] Jamie Coates, "Gender and Ethnicity in Urban Japan," in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture* (Routledge, 2019) 70.

[3] Coates, "Gender and Ethnicity in Urban Japan," 71.

[4] Ishida, "Tragedy," vol. 1, 45.

[5] Sui Ishida, "Banjo," in *Tokyo Ghoul*, vol. 6 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2016), 32.

[6] Ishida, "Cajolery," vol. 4, 69.

[7] Sui Ishida, "Glimmer," in *Tokyo Ghoul*, vol. 7 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2016), 55.

[8] Sui Ishida, "Ghoul," in *Tokyo Ghoul*, vol. 7 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2016), 93.

[9] Ishida, "Ghoul," vol. 7, 99-100.

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[12] McLaren, "Gender, Media, and Misogyny in Japan," 345.

[13] McLaren, "Gender, Media, and Misogyny in Japan," 345.

[14] Sui Ishida, "Reunion," in *Tokyo Ghoul*, vol. 12 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2017), 87.
[15] Sui Ishida, "Yellow Bell," in *Tokyo Ghoul*, vol. 13 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2017), 13.
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[18] Zachary Michael Lewis Dean, "See Him, See Her, See Xir LGBTQ Visibility in Shōnen Manga at the Turn of the Century," in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Sexuality in Comic Book Studies*, 1st ed., 2020, 435.

[19] Sui Ishida, "Remit to See, Limit to See," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2017), 111.

[20] Sui Ishida, "Resist," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2017), 113-4.

[21] Sui Ishida, "Flower," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 7 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2018), 190.

[22] Ishida, "Flower," vol. 7, 187.

[23] S. P. F. Dale, "Transgender, Non-Binary Genders, and Intersex in Japan," in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture* (Routledge, 2019) 63.

[24] Dale, "Transgender, Non-Binary Genders, and Intersex in Japan," 62.

[25] Dale, "Transgender, Non-Binary Genders, and Intersex in Japan," 62.

[26] Sui Ishida, "Red Hand's," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 10 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2019), 39-40.

[27] Sui Ishida, "Beloved," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 11 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2019), 66.

[28] Ishida, "Flower," vol. 7, 191.

[29] Sui Ishida, "Fail," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 12 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2019), 22.

[30] Sui Ishida, "Goat's Song," in *Tokyo Ghoul:re*, vol. 16 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2020), 301.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Social pollution as a social lens through which to explore ethnocentrism, class, and gender shows how each aspect of *Tokyo Ghoul*'s narrative builds upon itself to highlight the social disparity between ghouls and humans, which relates to real-world circumstances. I thus argue that the ghouls of Sui Ishida's *Tokyo Ghoul* are themselves the ultimate social pollutant in the canon universe. A ghoul's existence is the culmination of their physical, genetic, and social experiences that further ostracize them from the human society. This ultimately places them into a position for heightened discrimination that may be experienced by both ghouls and humans. As with the two case studies of humans Juuzou and Mutsuki with explicit gender identity difficulties, I argue that much of the narrative reasoning behind their subsequent othering is caused by ghouls who have affected and continue to affect their lives.

Intrinsically, the underlining sense of pollution attached to the ghouls of *Tokyo Ghoul* is directly related to the social intersections attached to their characters within the Japanese cultural context that the story takes place in. As a Japanese graphic novel series primarily about Japanese characters, the real-life parallels examined in this thesis contribute to a greater understanding of how fictional monsters can become completely devoid of social acceptance despite their intense similarities with the humans they are clashing with. This understanding, in turn, provides a basis for further

examining the real-life social context that undergirds the fictional world of the manga. Nihonjinron, and ethnocentrism, is especially relevant to the social displacement created and felt by ghouls, as regardless of their acceptance as Japanese citizens, ghouls are not accepted by society. Instead, they are essentialized to their base level existence as ghouls, as presented in the case study of the Burakumin caste. Yet, the additional layers of queer and trans identities add further othering by the fundamental differing experience of living outside of heteronormative social understandings. It is through this understanding that social pollution is most relevant, as I argue the fear of ghouls and their effects on human society is a main driver to support the total eradication of ghouls from Tokyo society.

The main reason the fear of ghouls exists is because they eat people. However, as shown through the actions of Touka and the other ghouls of the Anteiku Café, the option to eat humans who have committed suicide or passed through other nonviolent means is present.[1] Yet, regardless of the knowledge by humans regarding more non-violent forms of human consumption, the hatred and ostracization for ghouls remains, thus revealing that the hostility towards ghouls goes beyond the fact of their need to eat humans. Rather, it remains a contributing factor to the social polluting of ghouls both within ghoul and human society, most evident by binge eating ghouls and Quinx half-ghouls such as Mutsuki who choose to eat humans in exchange for greater physical strength. Ultimately, it is less about the violent effects they may have on humans, and more about their occupancy within a space dedicated first and foremost to humans.

Humans in this sense are then akin to the received ideas of a pure-of-blood, non-lower caste, and heteronormative Japanese counterpart. Pollution is therefore irregularities in what is known to be standard and accepted. This applies regardless of whether that be environmentally, genetically, economically, or socially through the presentation of identities outside of the hetero binaries. Social pollution, as I have argued, is the metaphorical and literal invasion of the unwanted into recognized, approved spheres of public society. The insight concerning various forms of social dissemination that entertainment media can provide to broad, global audiences can continue to contribute to greater social acceptance of human existences that do not mold to preconceived notions of what should be regarded as "correct" or "true." *Tokyo Ghoul*'s microcosmic approach to social ostracization and innate social differences allows for the deeper exploration of my theory of social pollution and its presence within the Japanese context.

ENDNOTES

[1] Sui Ishida, “White Dove,” in *Tokyo Ghoul*, vol. 2 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2015), 75.

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