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Am I Ghoul, Or Man?

Tokyo Ghoul, a series by Sui Ishida that is steadily growing in popularity, tells the fictional tale of Ken Kaneki. He is born a normal human boy in a world ravaged by beings known as *ghouls*—creatures that appear human, but in actuality rely on the consumption of human flesh to survive. As a young freshman college student, he falls for a voluptuous young woman named Rize, who is actually a ghoul. She attacks him at a construction site, only to “accidentally” be crushed to death by a pile of steel bars. In a complex (and later revealed to be experimental) surgery, Rize’s organs are transferred into Kaneki’s body. He becomes an artificial half-ghoul, with only one eye bearing the red iris and black sclera that accompanies ghoul hunger. The plot is centered on Kaneki struggling to find a balance between his two conflicting identities. As it unravels, I took it upon myself to deeply explore its progression. At first glance, *Tokyo Ghoul* has the potential to be considered post-racial, meaning the characters are not primarily defined by their continent of origin or skin color. On the other hand, the concept of race in that context is replaced with a broader scope of the human race versus the ghoul race. I intend on dissecting this relationship prior to ultimately deciding whether or not the series can be classified as post-racial. My general understanding would be to assume that it is not, but proper conclusions require observations from all perspectives.

The dynamics between humans and ghouls are akin to the likes of Tom and Jerry. It is a never-ending struggle between the hunter and its prey. From the perspective of humans, ghouls are a menace to their well-being. To put this into more understandable terms, the humans are the

aboriginals of Okinawa or Taiwan during the period of imperial domination. For a time they lived in their own form of harmony, with conflicts only existing among other humans. However, when the ghouls develop and their population becomes a more relevant presence, humanity realizes it must band together to prevent their extermination. In the series, an organization known as the Commission of Counter Ghoul (CCG) handles cases that involve eliminating their predator. The CCG act as humanity's soldiers, raising orphans or recruiting people with strong vendettas to fight against ghouls.

During the brief amount of time where Kaneki is shown to be fully human, the general public appears to be desensitized to ghouls. He and his best friend Hide can be seen casually conversing and eating lunch while the overhead television streams news coverage of an investigation about a gluttonous ghouls' latest kill. Rather than respond with fear, Hide pokes lightly at the situation. In the very first chapter of the series spin-off known as *Tokyo Ghoul: Jack*, the deuteragonist Taishi Fura is extremely under-informed about the existence of ghouls, and is nearly killed due to his ignorance. This reflects upon the modern white side of the United States, where some people tend to ignore the news and block out anything negative. However, when the coverage is held in regard to a crime committed by a person of color (PoC; a mirror of a ghouls in this case), they act as though it was something to be expected and treat it with scorn versus an analogous atrocity committed by a white person, with which they have the capacity to believe in their innocence. This is typically the same group that is unaware of the ongoing issue of racism, believing that equality had already been achieved in the 1960s when laws were signed in to desegregate the country.

On the other hand, simply because this happens in reality does not mean the discrimination towards ghouls is unjustified in this alternate universe. Secondary (yet important)

character, Koutarou Amon, was raised in an orphanage under the priest known as Father Donato Porpora. In chapter 106, it was revealed Porpora was a ghoul with a taste for young children when Amon had walked into the chapel. At once his eyes were locked onto the priest, who had finished eating one of the newer arrivals. The “man” could only smile, inquiring as to who gave Amon permission to enter. Reminiscent to the relationship of the Chinese with the Japanese after the Rape of Nanking, the humans were confused as to how such a horrific tragedy could happen when they had felt so safe before. The mention of ghouls brings a mixture of disgust and fear to a human’s face, whether or not they or anyone they knew have had any awful run-ins with them. The association between the words ghoul and evil are deeply ingrained into their minds, to the point where sometimes the humans cannot come up with any other excuse to hate them (except for the fact the ghouls are at the top of the food chain, of course). This can be juxtaposed to Sino-Japanese relations, in which someone of an older generation of Chinese lineage will use Nanking as a reason to despise a person of Japanese origin they happen to see, even though that person had not directly done anything.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, the ghoul species can be classified into two groups. The first is the smallest assembly of ghouls known by the name of the innocent coffee shop they run, the Anteiku. Their objective is to live peacefully among the humans. In order to sustain their hunger, they only eat the flesh of suicide victims, citing that these people willingly chose to end their life and that consuming them would not clash with their morals. Through a more understandable outlook, their ideals match those of Honorary Britannians like Suzaku Kururugi in *Code Geass*, or Major Miles in *Full Metal Alchemist*. The Anteiku believe that by blending into normal human society, they can steadily improve their relationship and aim to prevent senseless bloodshed. Nevertheless, their efforts are met with little improvement, compliments of

the CCG who possess no tolerance whatsoever. This brings about rage in Kaneki's superior, Touka. After a young ghoul's parents are slain in chapter 15, Touka seeks revenge and kills most of the group that had contributed to the murder. In chapter 25's final showdown with famed CCG investigator Kureo Mado, he questions why ghouls continue to exist. Touka cries whilst proclaiming to him, "I think it's because we want to live. Is there something wrong about that? We were all given life and raised. If the only thing we can do is eat people...how can we ever live correctly with a body like this? Even ghouls...even I want to live just like you guys!"

Touka's statement conveys a deep desire that connects to the current mindset of PoC in America. Regardless of how a person looks physically or acts in contrast to the majority population, what is craved the most is acceptance of their difference. In place of being called a monster, which carries the negative connotation of a creature with only evil intentions, Touka prefers to be known as a ghoul with no hostility to the title. One could even dare to say that if granted the option, Touka would abandon her supernatural abilities to become human in a heartbeat. It is evident when she first discovers Kaneki's unusual circumstances in chapter 3, scolding him for his refusal to eat flesh and asking what it feels like to enjoy regular food. This happens to emulate some PoC, who are willing to abandon the culture of their ancestors in favor of adopting one they have no direct blood relation to, all for the sake of fitting into society.

If Anteiku equals the passive Civil Rights activists behind Martin Luther King Jr, then the second group of ghouls are a more extreme version of Malcolm X. Given that there is no formal structure in ghoul society, a prominent and radical coalition that stands out is the Aogiri Tree. They have no desire in achieving equality with humans, but instead wish to wipe out the CCG and establish firm dominance. Parallel to Japan's invasion of China, the Aogiri Tree holds no qualms when it comes to using violent force to assert superiority. Touka's younger brother

Ayato, one of the higher-ups, spits at his sister's way of life in chapter 51 when he says "I'm different from a peaceful idiot like you. I'm not a human, I'm a ghoul." He does not find fault in the race he was born into. In lieu of the sneers he may gain in public, Ayato completely embraces his identity as a ghoul and is absolutely repulsed at the prospect of living as a human—finding the life of a ghoul to be far more remarkable.

This draws back to one of the main struggles lying within the plot, Kaneki versus himself. Upon realization of his new status as an artificial half-ghoul, he is abhorred and held in an extreme case of denial. The severity extends from as far as Kaneki purposely starving himself (consciously unwilling to eat human flesh) to (poorly) attempting to rip the ghoul organ out of his body. In chapter 5 when he screams at Touka, "I'm not like you monsters!" she glares at him in contempt. "It's true though, you're no ghoul. But...you're not human either. As someone who can't be called one or the other, there's nowhere you belong," she points out. This scene evokes a reminder of another population on the rise in modern time, bi/multiracial children. These are people whose parental origins are from contrasting nationalities, such as African and Asian, or European and African. At a young age the child might believe that because they are a mix of two different races, they would genuinely be accepted by both. Unfortunately that is not the case, as the child is subsequently shunned from either side due to the "impurity" of their blood.

It ties into the setting of the story itself, Japan. Last year a documentary titled *Hafu* (Half; a Japanese slang term for biracial children) was released in the country, following the lives of several people of half-Japanese blood and entailing the struggles they face for not being 100% Japanese. Some people apply for work using their Japanese surname, only to be discriminated against at their interview for not physically looking Japanese. There are even many children who are the butt of jokes and subject of bullying in schools, teased about the origin of their non-

Japanese parent (although it is arguable that those of white lineage are somewhat more easily accepted). In short, the existence of someone not fully Japanese or overall foreign is frowned upon in the country's eugenic population. Kaneki is a literal symbolization of this ongoing strife, longing to fit in with the safer human crowd in comparison to the dangerous lives ghouls lead. However, humans who discover that he can only live off of their flesh will clearly shove him away. Meanwhile, the other ghouls, like Touka, will also shun him out of jealousy for having been able to experience living normally without fear (as seen in chapter 5).

Trapped in a world where from a third person view there is high uncertainty of which species is the true villain of civilization, *Tokyo Ghoul* through my eyes is not a post-racial work. Rather than saying there is a lack of characters identified as people of color, the reality of it is quite the opposite. Since everyone's origins are rooted to Japan, they are in fact considered PoCs and white people are visually absent, but the distinction separating the human race and the ghoul race can be defined as the true substitute that replaces actual "races." After all, some people argue that man is solely a part of the human race and no other. So what exactly happens when a form other than *Homo sapiens* are introduced? The way the characters are portrayed allude to struggles felt by various nationalities to this day, the only difference is that everyone is from Japan.

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