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Queery of Complicity in 1970s Japan

Abstract:

This thesis examines the intersections of queerness, race, militarism, and neocolonialism in the novella *Almost Transparent Blue* by Murakami Ryu alongside a critical comparative analysis between the novel and the literary movement of the 1940s and 50s post-war Japan, *Nikutai Bungaku*, or Literature of the Flesh. Engagement with previous work by Japanese and non-Japanese scholars and theorists surrounding these discussion areas to build upon and a critique of prior engagement with these intersections is fundamental. This thesis asks a "queery" of how the queer representations in *Almost Transparent Blue* generate a critical perspective on U.S. neocolonialism and militarism's role in Japan but also still engage with and promote these ideologies. One of the key foci of this thesis is the novel's attention and representation of the politics and social movements of the 1960s and 70s in Japan, which not only reacted to the continued establishment of U.S. military bases and presence in Japan but also the complicity of the Japanese government with the U.S. extraterritoriality. Language and variations of power dynamics between occupying U.S. soldiers and Japanese/Okinawa citizens offer a further perspective on non-heteronormative perspectives in Japan and outside of Japan and present a derealization with neocolonialism in contemporary Japan.

Introduction

Murakami Ryu's *Almost Transparent Blue (*限りなく透明に近いブルー *Kagirinaku tōmei ni chikai burū),* published in 1976, follows a queer Japanese youth, Ryu, through a week-long experience where he and his friends engage in drugs, group sex, and rock and roll. The story is set outside Tokyo in a neighboring town close to the Yokota American military base in the early 1970s. Through Ryu's perspective, the novel explores concepts of identity, sexuality, and purpose in the context of U.S. military presence in postwar Japan and the differing power dynamics at play between the U.S., Japanese youth, and Black soldiers. The protagonist, Ryu, witnesses, experiences, and engages with explicit descriptions of racism, sexuality, prostitution, and drug abuse. Within this representation of the queer and youth cultures that emerge in the context of U.S. military presence in Japan, the book also serves as a strong commentary on the relationship between the United States and the Japanese in the 1970s.

Critiques of U.S. military presence and occupation in Japan were not unfamiliar in literature in 1970s Japan. Following the end of World War II, the United States military formally occupied Japan between 1945 and 1952. During that time, the office of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Forces enforced heavy censorship on media that criticized the occupation. As a response to the occupation, a major literary movement of the 1940s and 50s called *nikutai bungaku,* or literature of the flesh, recognized the body in a national and individual context by emphasizing themes of sexual liberation. It utilized sexuality as a site of recuperation following post-WWII. For writers of this movement, which included Tamura Taijirō and Sakaguchi Ango, the body and sex were seen as a means of liberating the Japanese people from the repressive regimes of both pre-defeat Japan and the U.S. Occupation. Works associated with *nikutai*

bungaku relied heavily on hetero-masculinist views on sexuality, where the role of women served only to further this goal of recuperating a hetero-patriarchal Japan by criticizing the role of the U.S. military in Japan. *Almost Transparent Blue*, while not directly connected to this literary movement and writers, comes from this legacy of post-war literature in Japan.

Following the formal conclusion to the U.S. Occupation, the Japanese government signed the ANPO Treaty, or the "Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan" (*Nihon koku to Amerika gasshūkoku to no Aida no Sōgo Kyōryoku oyobi Anzen Hoshō Jōyaku*) in 1960 to maintain the already established U.S. presence in Japan by allowing U.S. military bases on Japanese soil as a "mutual benefit" to both nations. The treaty was very controversial. It rendered Japan still under U.S. control and criticism of the treaty in Japan eventually erupted into a series of ANPO protests that followed its signing and renewal in subsequent years. (Sasaki-Uemura 15-17).

Almost Transparent Blue responds to the legacies of *nikutai bungaku* and the protest culture of post-ANPO politics and explores the dynamics of U.S.-Japan relations by complicating the predisposed concepts of sexuality and identity. While drawing on early tropes that politicize the notion of sexual liberation, Murakami's novel leans far less into masculinist ideologies of *nikutai bungaku* by exploring sexuality beyond the heteronormative and centers instead on queer subjects. Throughout the novel, queer subjects, sexuality, and lifestyles serve to pinpoint the flaws and fallacies that heteronormative ideologies tend to ignore when it comes to critique of the U.S. military and Japan. This exploration brings the reader to examine how queer lifestyles are deemed immoral to the nation under U.S. military presence and the Japanese government's complicity with the U.S. soldiers doing the same. While the Japanese characters of *Almost Transparent Blue* experience disdain and mockery from Japanese authority and

objectification by the U.S. soldiers. American soldiers do not suffer similar discriminatory treatment or criminalization. Instead, they seem to fully enjoy the privilege that comes with the U.S. military's extraterritorial sovereign power in Japan. Extraterritoriality is an exemption from local laws of a country on a foreign person typically as a result of diplomatic negotiations. For example, U.S. extraterritoriality in Japan exempts American soldiers from receiving consequences and punishment for not adhering to Japanese law. The U.S. soldiers in *Almost Transparent Blue* actively partake in drugs, commit violent actions, practice unsafe sex, and the novel poses the GIs as boistourous and carefree. While this true for the Japanese characters as well, they do not live in this carefree lifestyle. They constantly are struggling to grasp the reality they all face alongside the judgment, the law enforcement and their own futurity. Drugs and sex are an escape from the reality they face, while the U.S. soldiers don't share this need for an escape. Through queer representation, the novel offers a provocative rendering of U.S. extraterritoriality as well as Japan's complicity within the U.S. military-industrial complex in exerting a narrative of not only control but also compulsory heteronormativity. Murakami's narrative, set in the 1970s, explores the growing dissent among youth to showcase a lifestyle that is one of its time, a life of drugs, rock, and sex. Still, as the characters receive their drugs and music from U.S. soldiers, a critique becomes clear of how U.S. military presence continues to complicate ideas of Japanese national identity. The novel explores how the body becomes a site for discussing and critiquing the heteropatriarchal politics of national identity, formulating and deconstructing dominant ideologies regarding sexuality, gender, and race.

The queer body, meanwhile, emerges as a highly political subject as it not only goes against the governing systems but also represents an alternative lifestyle to the existing status quo and the potential for dismantling these oppressive systems. Unlike its literary antecedents,

Almost Transparent Blue is also attentive to the *racial* dynamics that emerge in the fraught culture that emerges around the U.S. miltiary base. Anti-Blackness is prominent throughout most of *Almost Transparent Blue.* Black characters become devalued, subjected to stereotyping and dehumanization. I argue, therefore, that while *Almost Transparent Blue* uses queerness to expose Japan's complicity in U.S. militarism, it also participates in repeating the rhetorical tropes of U.S. anti-Black racism. *Almost Transparent Blue* generates a complex critique of the Japanese government's complicity with the U.S. military presence, utilizing queerness as a site of this criticism to provoke the reader, but the difficulty arises as the novel's writer engages with confrontational imagery. Throughout *Almost Transparent Blue*, Ryu engages with Black culture through a distant lens, music, film, and his limited interactions with Black soldiers. Ryu utilizes the Black characters for drugs in exchange for setting up sex parties with his friends who are women. During group sex parties, he makes a note of sexualizing the Black characters, referring to them only by their body parts, making their names become less prevalent. *Almost Transparent Blue* and its engagement with Black characters present racist caricatures to highlight a distorted world via the U.S. presence. The Black characters are highly sexualized and abusive of the Japanese characters, mainly the women. In paying attention to the intersections of racism with heteropatriarchy, I will examine how *Almost Transparent Blue* deploys racialized queerness as a means to criticize the Japanese government's complicity with the U.S. military, neocolonialism, and extraterritoriality.

Early in the book, a scene unfolds in which these criticisms become strikingly transparent. Vivid descriptions of penises, bodies, and the various sexual actions that they are taking part in fill the pages. As Ryu shoots up heroin, he begins to hallucinate and examine his surroundings:

> In less than thirty seconds I was completely stoned. I felt as if my insides were oozing out through every pore, and other people's sweat and breath were flowing in… I wanted my skin peeled off. I wanted to take in the greased, shiny bodies of the black men and rock them inside of me. (Murakami 37)

The opening portion of this scene delivers a driving tone for the rest of the novel. Group sex alongside drug abuse, cause Ryu to begin to ponder the meaning of life, his existence, and what the purpose of everything in his life is for. These thoughts break apart conversations Ryu or other characters have, building on the confusion and disarray of the week that Ryu endures:

> There was a moth on the pillar. At first I thought it was just a spot, but as I stared at it, it changed its position slightly. There was a faint down on the ash-gray wings. After everyone had left, the room seemed darker than usual. It wasn't that the light was weaker… I seemed to have moved far away from the source of light.
> (Murakami 109).

Ryu's description of his experience delivers a surreal tone to his existence through the analysis of sweat, insides, and skin taking in the breaths of all those around him. The passage carries an experience of derealization throughout the rest of the book. It illustrates how he feels out of place within the town and among the U.S. military presence.

The sexualized description of the Black men by Ryu not only emphasizes Ryu's non-heteronormative existence but also conflates itself with the dialogue that is happening between the U.S. military and the status of Japanese men and women:

> Jackson straddled my face. Hey baby, he said, lightly swatting my cheek. I thought his swollen asshole was like a strawberry. Sweat from his thick chest dripped onto my face, the smell strengthened the stimulus from the Black woman's hips… (Murakami 55)

How Ryu views the Black men within the passage as nothing more than their bodies reflects how the U.S. soldiers view Ryu later in the novel as nothing more than a body. A loss of solidarity is witnessed in this early scene as the sexualization of the body disregards any source of humanity.

Through the framework of a "Queery," I seek to explore how the representation of queerness in *Almost Transparent Blue* not only critiques U.S. militarism in Japan but also the arguments that earlier work in post-war literature had made regarding male sexuality through this representation as it diverges from previous concepts of sexuality and its relation to U.S. militarism. U.S. militarism in Japan promotes heteronormativity, and its role in Japan has served as a site of suppression of political critiques and overall control of Japanese autonomy. The Civil Censorship Detachment from 1945 to 1951 controlled the media that Japan would be able to produce as a prevention of anti-U.S. rhetoric. The CCD was to promote pro-Western values of democracy and reconstruct Japan in the image that the U.S. wants it to be. The CCD would limit criticisms of U.S. occupation during this period and would force the Japanese to adhere to pro-Western values, limiting their autonomy. (Rubin 71-72). Queer representations in *Almost Transparent Blue* not only puts into question the role of the U.S. military presence and the Japanese government's complicity but also the dynamics of gender and its correlation to sexuality under U.S. military occupation. Queer representations take what previous works had

done regarding male sexuality as a site of liberation and bring the argument further as it examines the complex nature between identity, sexuality, and U.S. occupation in Japan and presents these queer representations as a representative of liberation to unfold or provoke this status quo.

"Queery" and Scholarly Critique

Queery is a questioning of queer representations, their purpose, and what they expose in and outside of a text. In this case, I pose a queery of what *Almost Transparent Blue* does with the queer representation of Ryu in regards to U.S. military presence and occupation and Japanese complicity with U.S. neocolonialism during the novel's conception. *Almost Transparent Blue* and a thorough discussion of its queer representation and its intersections with questions of feminization, race, gender, and sexuality have not taken an approach beyond concepts of drug abuse and dissension among youth in Japan. In post-war literature before *Almost Transparent Blue,* the writers of *nikutai bungaku* explored the theme of emasculation as a consequence of Japan's loss in the Second World War and turned to the theme of sexual liberation a means to recuperate that loss and to provide critiques of the U.S. occupation and its effects within postwar Japanese society. These works set a foreground of what has come before and the legacy that *Almost Transparent Blue* is following after, along with how the novel differs from these earlier critiques and topics to how dissent within youth in Japan has shifted compared to years prior.

While I turn to the work of scholars such as Shinjo Ikuo and Douglas Slaymaker in this thesis to consider how previous scholarship on sexuality and literature in Japan and Okinawa, my framework of "queery" extends to areas of the discussion on sexuality previously overlooked. Shinjo Ikuo's "Male Sexuality in the Colony: On Toyokawa Zen'ichi's Searchlight" applies an

understanding of Toyokawa Zen'ichi's work during 1956 U.S. occupied Okinawa and its suppression following its publication due to topics involving non-heteronormative sexuality between an African American Soldier and an Okinawan man. Ikuo explores topics in *Searchlight* that share similar intersections as *Almost Transparent Blue* regarding sexuality and race. The critiques extend to other post-war literature in Japan and similarities between the U.S. occupation in Okinawa and what is occurring in *Almost Transparent Blue's* Japan. Shinjo draws on Frantz Fanon's work, *Black Skin, White Masks,* to address Black non-heteronormativity within *Searchlight*. Shinjo remarks on Fanon's discussion of homosexuality in Martinique in which Fanon states, "let us mention in passing that we have never observed the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique…. There are, nevertheless, what they call 'men dressed as women' or makoume. They mainly wear a jacket and a skirt. But we are convinced they lead a normal sexual life." (Fanon 157). As Shinjo writes, the quote is used to emphasize gay existence being in a gendered circuit of feminization. Shinjo follows later on with "...the historical existence of gay Black people has been beset by waves of denial… African American men such as James Baldwin… Bayard Rustin… Nor must we forget Fanon's distorted denial of the existence of Black gay men" (Shinjo 104). Still, this critique limits Shinjo's more extensive critique regarding sexuality in Okinawa and how the U.S. military complicates it by undermining Fanon's examination of the effects of whiteness on Blackness, physically and psychologically, by focusing solely on claims that Fanon makes regarding Black homosexuality.

In *The Body in Postwar Japanese Fiction*, Douglas Slaymaker examines the literary movement of *nikutai bungaku* and the masculinist dialogue that the writers of the movement explored to critique U.S. occupation and the war during its existence. *The Body in Postwar Japanese Fiction* brings together a history of the U.S. occupation, the Japanese government, and

its combined suppression of Japanese individualism and identity. In a majority of works associated with this literary movement, masculinity and the hypersexualization of women become a catapult to imagine the recuperation of Japanese national identity in the context of the United States' military Occupation between 1946 and 1952. *Nikutai bungaku* and its relation to *Almost Transparent Blue* is crucial as the book departs from earlier understandings of the body and its context to the nation of Japan with a lack of consideration of queer subjects in the literature. Slaymaker's work, however, lends itself only to the cis-heteronormative: focusing on literary representations of the U.S. military occupation in Japan through the lenses of cis-heterosexuality. Despite its many similarities to the rhetoric and politics of *nikutai bungaku, Almost Transparent Blue* requires us to complicate and go beyond binary and the heteronormative understandings of gender and sexuality by focusing on subjects whose identities and actions do not correspond to heterosexual norms.

Although set decades after the end of the U.S. Occupation of Japan, *Almost Transparent Blue* engages directly with the power dynamics that manifest through the continuing informal occupation of the United States in Japan through the presence of U.S. military bases such as the American air force base that is the setting of the novel. Unlike *nikutai bungaku,* however, *Almost Transparent Blue* invites readers to consider the complicity that the Japanese government shares in enforcing U.S. neocolonial and extraterritorial powers within these militarized spaces. It does so in various ways; in one scene in which three police officers arrive at the home that Ryu and his friends occupy:

> Well, we don't have a warrant, but you're not going to make any fuss about that, are you?..' He seized my arm and checked it for needle marks… I asked, 'Has there been

> some trouble?' The three looked at each other and laughed loudly. 'You kids got families? They don't say anything about the way you carry on? They don't care huh? We know how you swap each other around… (Murakami 72)

Ryu's interaction with the police officers shows that the police know about the activities that Ryu and his friends engage in. It further reveals the authorities' understanding of life in the military-occupied town. The Japanese police don't help or support these young Japanese characters but merely laugh at their circumstances and treat them as parasites to society. They understand where their exposure to drugs and unsafe sex practices comes from but don't do anything to fix it. The police recognize what the young Japanese characters do with the GIs involving drugs and sex, but only engage with a pursuit and taunting of the queer lifestyles of the younger Japanese characters. This representation of complicity continues throughout; in this interaction with the police, among Ryu's friends, and even with Ryu himself.

The complicity with the U.S. military is to watch and do nothing, to continue to waste away or adhere to what the U.S. presence brings. The government and, in the novel's case, the police, understand what the U.S. brings and the effects it has on Japanese people but choose to allow it to continue. *Almost Transparent Blue* blends together these power dynamics between the Japanese government, the U.S. military, and Japanese citizens and the complicity that the Japanese government has with the U.S. extraterritoriality, being able to escape from any sort of impunity to be imposed onto the U.S. GIs having the ability to be free to carry the life that Ryu and his friends are ridiculed for.

To examine the gendered and racial power dynamics among the Japanese and American characters in *Almost Transparent Blue*, I want to turn to the concepts of Orientalism,

Ornamentalism, and the feminization of Asian men provided in postcolonial and Asian American critiques of anti-Asian racism in cultural representations. The ongoing occupation and control via the CCD and the ANPO treaty creates a context in which certain identities are suppressed while new ones are enforced; the U.S. occupation is thus contradictive.

Edward Said's critique of Orientalism draws attention to how depictions of the East are historically defined as feminine, while the West's portrayal as paradigmatically masculine. David Eng's *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* opens the door to begin exploring how the sexual and racial *Almost Transparent Blue* play out a similar dynamic. Eng explores the problematization of Asian men being seen as feminine under the Western gaze with applications from Freud such as "Fetishism." Eng examines how this occurs and its meaning for U.S. subjects and their positionality under the U.S. Eng engages with the play *M. Butterfly*, which utilizes the Italian opera *Madame Butterfly* to parallel its story to deliver a narrative of this imprinting of femininity onto Asian men. Eng explores the intertwining of sexuality and race in the gaze of the white West and problematizes how Asian men and Asians are feminized within popular Western representations, which entails a long history of Orientalism. Alongside pinpointing *Almost Transparent Blue's* representation of the way that Asian men's feminization under the context of U.S. neo-colonialism, I also turn to Anne Anlin Cheng's *Ornamentalism* to examine how the novel engages the removal of masculinity as a matter of sexual and racial objectification for occupied subjects. Japanese men in the novel are not merely feminized but treated as objects, or ornaments, that the American G.I.s manipulate and control at their desire. Throughout, Japanese subjects are continuously referred to as being doll-like and lacking bodily agency in the novel. Therefore, I argue, the loss of autonomy for Japanese people in the novel

occurs beyond the registers of gendered violence as it intersects with other modes of dehumanization, including racism and queerphobia.

In my construction of the framework of "Queery" I look to previous queer theorists such as Sara Ahmed and her work in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* in which she utilizes orientation to examine queer phenomenology. Ahmed examines how bodies take shape as they move through the world directing themselves toward or away from objects and others. She combines aspects of "orientation" in "sexual orientation" and the "orient" in "orientalism" to examine how being orientated means feeling at home and having objects within reach. Ahmed's work lends itself to "queery" through her text's relation to *Almost Transparent Blue* through its exploration of sexual orientation and representations of orientalism as a way of directing our reading of neocolonial relations. Queer theorists such as José Esteban Muñoz and his work, *Cruising Utopia*, influences my framework of "queery" as through his work he examines the queer futurity, short-sighted assimilationist mentalities of LGBT politics, and calls for a revivification of the queer political imagination. Alongside *Almost Transparent Blue* the concept of queer futurity is one that consistently comes to alarm as the characters in the novella experience a nihilistic mode of life. The characters recognize their own faults being Japanese citizens that are in complicity with the U.S. military and their extraterritoriality, yet continue in their complicity with the actions of the servicemen.

Beyond *Nikutai Bungaku*: The Politics of the "Body" in Japanese Literature

An early 19th century Japanese scholar, Aizawa Seishisai, imagined the national body as shintai or a physical and material object. Aizawa imagined the Japanese archipelago's national body or *kokutai* parallel to the body's five limbs: the head as heaven, the middle as earth, the neck as the east, and the feet as the west. As this concept developed over time, the idea of the nation as a family developed individuals in wartime Japan became confined under the national body, which the postwar writers opposed. The feminization of Ryu in the face of U.S. masculinity within *Almost Transparent Blue* is not unfamiliar to Japanese literature as a critique of the U.S. military presence in Japan. Following World War II, *nikutai bungaku* promoted hetero-masculinist ideologies that existed during 1940s and 50's Japan. For instance, Ango Sakaguchi's *One Woman and the War* and Tamura Taijiro's *Gate of Flesh* used the trope of sexual liberation to criticize the Japanese government and U.S. occupation and advance the recuperation of male sexuality to reconstruct Japan after its defeat in WWII. For example, utilizing tropes of gendered roles for men and women with women in a subservient role alongside men exhibiting hyper-masculinity in their pieces as a site for the recuperation of the national masculine identity. Tamura and Sakaguchi populated their texts with pan-pan girls or "street girls." The term pan-pan girls emerged in the postwar period to refer to younger women, mainly teenagers and young adults, who would date the American GI and perform sex work as a means for survival. (Takeuchi 78-79). In Tamura and Sakaguchi's works, pan-pan girls always inevitably end up denouncing their choice of work and relationships to seek the pursuit of a Japanese man who embodied the masculine narrative that *nikutai bungaku* emphasized.

While the two male writers I have listed above are two notable writers of this literary movement, which utilize a hetero-masculinist approach to liberation and masculinist gendered assumptions, there were female contemporaries, such as Sono Ayako and Shibaki Yoshiko, of this movement who, in their writing had signaled the problematization of the writings that their male counterparts had produced. The flesh writers would become a representation of postwar writing due to their emphasis on the body, which would become a central component of the intellectual and literary tradition of Japan which influenced themes of *Almost Transparent Blue* by Murakami Ryu that would expand upon and tie together to an issue surrounding the deviation from masculinity and the subjugation of Japanese subjects.

What the discursive history of the "body" across pre- and post-war literary and intellectual histories reveals is that the body will always remain political, in a physical and a national manner. The body physically makes up the state and has a stake in national matters. The body represents what the nation stands for and stands against. The body has the potential to subvert the nation as well. This is a concept that *nikutai bungaku* was not unfamiliar with, as Slaymaker writes in *The Body in Postwar Japanese Fiction,* conflating the national body with the physical with imagery has a long lineage in Japan. *The Body in Postwar Japanese Fiction* continues with Inoue Hideaki and his consideration of the word *kokutai*. He then develops the argument that the extended patriarchal family system is a part of the wartime ideology that Japan envelops, making it so insular. The national body becomes far less of a sociological political structure and more of a body that resembles a biological organic space. There is an extension of this as a coding of Japan as feminine through this imagining. Slaymaker states, "The postwar flesh writers rework the tradition in response to new situations. For one they felt much more keenly the uses to which the body had been put by governmental agencies; they wished to posit

the means to attain individual autonomy and freedom. Their emphasis on the body was part of reestablishing that freedom." (Slaymaker 13). Addressing these issues became crucial for the Nikutai writers, and there was an urge from these male writers to reclaim their individuality by establishing these masculinist writings that position these male writers and masculinity in Japan at the threat of U.S. occupation, a foreign body in this biological system of Japan. *Almost Transparent Blue* diverts from this concept of postwar writers and literature opposing this concept of the national body's conflation with the individual. *Almost Transparent Blue* presents the individual's relation to the national body through the overt theme of Japanese complicity with U.S. neocolonialism and direct manipulation and control over Japanese citizens.

Male-centric works in *nikutai bungaku* thus focus heavily on the carnality and physical demands of the occupied heteropatriarchal body as they play out onto the figuration of sexualized woman as Other. In other words, for *nikutai bungaku* writers, liberation and identity are in the body of a woman. For example, Sakaguchi's work *One Woman and the War* centers on the perspective of WII and her experiences during air raids/firebombing, alongside depictions of men in variable positions of power. The story completely negates any aspect of a woman's struggle during this period, denoting how she would survive because she is a woman, and reinforces this belief that masculinity in Japan requires recuperation through a fetishistic version of women's sexuality. Although the work repeatedly presents the woman as vulnerable during firebombings, she pleads with the men to put them out for *their* sake, reinforcing this belief that the men's struggles are far greater than the women's, "Please put out the flames!" I screamed at Nomura, as if throwing myself on him. "Please don't let your house burn. Your house, my house. I don't want this house to burn" (Ango 6). The men in this work are not immune to criticism from Ango either, with deeply sickening depictions of depravity that these men engage with in

their pursuit of the woman, but simultaneously generates a discussion of the struggles that these men face are far grander than those that the woman faces:

> I'm aware that men in general, from the age of forty or so, change completely in their attitude toward women. They can't help but think that tender feeling doesn't exist outside the smell of salt rice bran paste and diapers. So they become infatuated with the woman's body. It's from this time on that men really go overboard on women (Ango 2)

In comparison, this text differs immensely from *Almost Transparent Blue*'s approach to the intersections of gender, sexuality, and U.S. militarism. In *One Woman and the War,* the eponymous "Woman" is stripped of the life she knew as a woman of the night through the end of the war and a kindles a romantic connection with Nomura, a Japanese man. While she serves as the protagonist, she merely takes a backseat to serve a larger picture that Sakaguchi seeks to employ, which, through the body of women, can be found liberation for masculinity under U.S. occupation. Meanwhile, *Almost Transparent Blue*'s approach takes a shift with the queer protagonist of Ryu and a departure from this masculinist tone that the Flesh writers had taken via seeking liberation through the body from the "doll-like" conflation that men and women in the novel experience and the "queery" ing of Japanese complicity with the U.S. military presence. *Almost Transparent Blue* emphasizes the aspect of the loss of identity over the broader Japanese subject from this U.S. military presence, where characters are merely puppets of the U.S. military and are adrift, seeking themselves in a world that prevents them from doing so.

Similar to Sakaguchi's short story, Suzuki Seijun's 1964 film adaptation of Tamura Taijiro's 1947 novel *Gate of Flesh* (*Nikutai no mon)*, follows the immediate aftermath of WWII,

in which food is scarce and the U.S. occupation is entirely underway in Tokyo. In the film, a band of pan-pan girls and a Japanese soldier, Shintaro or Shin must find various ways to survive, be that sex work or, in Shin's case, theft and assault. The narrative focuses on a young woman named Maya, who has just joined the gang-like pan-pan girls. Maya's age is unknown, but she is younger than her fellow pan-pan girls. At the beginning of the film, Maya is found by a Black Christian priest after being raped and abandoned in a farm by U.S. soldiers. When the nameless Black priest confronts them, the U.S. soldiers state that it's none of their concern. The Black priest was not included in the book's original publication; his only appearance is in the film. The Black Priest is important to note as his representation recalls and draws on the American Blaxploitation films of the 1960s and 70s that the film is playing off of. Blaxploitation films featured stereotypes of Black men and women through the hypersexualization of Black men, drug dealing, violence, and easy sex, along with a lack of Black cultural aesthetic. (Wlodarz 1). In *Gate of Flesh,* however, the nameless Black priest is not an agent of hypersexuality, but a victim. Throughout the film, the Black priest pleads with Maya to return to the church and pursue religion again. Eventually, she revolts against his pleas by sexually assaulting him. The Black priest, distraught and waning from his faith, commits suicide and is left unmentioned for the remainder of the film.The Black priest's inclusion in the film creates a distanced and tone-deaf response to the Black American experience as it shows a desire to exploit and utilize the Black priest as a character progression for Maya.

Maya's turn away from morality and abuse of the Black priest coincides with her desire for Shin, as her feelings for him become complicated, shifting between seeing him as her brother to craving him sexually. Maya's desire for Shin and her treatment of the Black priest generates a hypersexualization of the Black priest to use for Maya's gain to spite Shin and the other women.

Maya's pushback against the priest's wishes for her to come back to church and ultimately utilize his body for her gain highlights the desire for hyper-masculinity that the film is pushing through the character of Shin. Meanwhile, Shin disregards the women's well-being for his gain through their prostitution and treats them like cattle, which is found desirable in contrast to the priest seeking to save Maya through a foreign religion; a nationalist tone becomes apparent through this. The Black priest essentially serves no purpose and is merely used as an object within this film. However, this objectification of the priest illuminates an aspect of how racialized subjects under U.S. militarism/occupation are not subjects but objects under the white patriarchy that the U.S. represents through their sexualization and become no longer people but just bodies. Other than finding Maya, he is represents a narrative emphasis that through the death of the Black character, the non-Black lead can live on. There's a positionality that is present here in which the labor and exploitation of the woman serves the Japanese man, but the labor and exploitation of the Black man serves the Japanese woman. The Black priest's inclusion in the film emphasizes how the crumbling ruins of Tokyo under the U.S. occupation have generated a level of depravity that faith can't save or surpass.

Shin's trajectory is therefore premised on the confluences of anti-Blackness and heterosexist violence. In earlier scenes of the film, we witness Shin take a background role as a mysterious figure that only becomes vital to the plot once he stabs a U.S. soldier and is on the run. The pan-pan girls take Shin in and quickly become enamored with his masculinity, which is violent, crude, and loud. Shin manipulates, extorts, and belittles the women in every scene that he shares with one of the girls. Concepts of women's roles and marriage are heavily pushed through this narrative, emphasizing the pan-pan girls not being real women. The "real" women seek marriage to a character such as Shin, who embodies these masculine traits the film

emphasizes as crucial in recuperating Japan after WWII. Therein lies the irony of Shin and the traditional masculinity he represents requires the labor and capital of sex workers for survival as he demands food and money from the pan-pan girls. After Shin's introduction to the Pan-Pan girls, the tough girl exterior nearly crumbles to a subservient aid to Shin and whatever he demands, with each woman attempting to please him in some facet. The masculinity in the *Gate of Flesh* fits with the flesh writing following a post-war Japan. Shin's cruelty shows a strength men should have, and the lust and craving that each of the pan-pan girls has for him validates this idea the narrative presents. Women are the central focus of the narrative that the Flesh writers are pushing and are presented again as tools to serve as a means to recuperate Japanese masculinity. The plot emphasizes the effects of war on the Japanese man, Shin, and the women's issues take a backseat once again, as in Sakaguchi's story. The narrative dismisses issues surrounding the role of women and sex work during the U.S. occupation by presenting each scene with women engaging in sex work with a comedic tone. At the same time, Shin's PTSD and interactions with U.S. soldiers feature a much more dramatic tone and score. In this way, the narrative conveys that through the labor of women, a hyper aggressive and masculine man in Japan can undo the damages done through the U.S. occupation.

Almost Transparent Blue and *Nikutai no mon* share similar narrative tones in the representation of women alongside men with varying degrees. *Almost Transparent Blue*'s women face abuse not only from the U.S. soldiers but also from their relationships with Japanese men in the novel as well. While women in *Nikutai no Mon* serve the struggles of Japanese men alongside a critique of U.S. occupation and Japanese masculinity, *Almost Transparent Blue* escapes from this separation between the two sexes in terms of how the U.S. military affects them. *Almost Transparent Blue* shows that the characters present are facing a derealization or an

abjection from humanity in the face of the U.S. presence. Characters in *Almost Transparent Blue* are unable to grapple with the reality they exist in and seek a means of escape.

Women in *Almost Transparent Blue* don't lend themselves to Japanese masculinity but essentially serve as a voice to the critique of U.S. militarism's effect on the mental state and positionality of Japanese citizens. Throughout the novel, heterosociality and heteronormativity are perpetually in disrepair, allowing for systems of oppression and violence to continue to take shape and inevitably lead to a far detached world. For example, while women in the book are used to critique U.S. militarism by being coerced into prostitution for the soldiers, the men in the book remain cold and uncaring to dilemmas that the women in the story face. The only exception to the nihilism in heterosexuality is the relationship/friendship that Ryu has with Lily, a young sex worker who is Ryu's only confidant. Ryu and Lily's relationship only crumbles once Ryu's complete derealization manifests, and he realizes the true enemy of his identity and friends is the town and the military presence. Throughout the novel there is an emphasis on the impact of the heteronormativity and heterosociality as comments of "straights" and "straight life-style" are highlighted alongside the abjection from Japanese society itself within Ryu and his friends. Ryu's queer lifestyle is not that of one that Japan alongside U.S. neocolonialism desires and through Ryu's derealization this message manifests loud and clear of what the town and military base represent.

The characters in *Almost Transparent Blue*, in particular, Ryu, as he begins to recognize his and his friends' complicity in allowing the U.S. military to continue to avoid repercussions for the actions of its servicemen. This realization eventually leads to an identity crisis encompassing more than himself and a lack of compassion. The lack of compassion becomes most evident when Ryu accompanies another friend, Moko, as she leaves the home after growing

tired of witnessing their friend Yoshiyama arguing with his girlfriend, Kei, about her sleeping with the servicemen in which Moko pleads with Ryu: “Hey, Ryu, it’s about Yoshiyama, keep an eye on him, because he beats up Kei a lot. When he gets drunk he’s really mean, kicking her and stuff. Talk to him about it, O.K.?” (Murakami 90). This is a request that Ryu chooses to ignore due to his continued lingering on past experiences and the time spent reflecting on his existence. His detachment from his friends and the world grows as he lingers on every word and moment he experiences throughout his week. Ryu finds Moko’s bra she left, and his thoughts depart,

> “There was something poking my back; it was the bra Moko had forgotten… I tossed it in the closet. The silver negligee was hanging there. I remembered the taste of Jackson’s warm come and felt sick… there must be a little bit left somewhere in my mouth… I saw a woman walking a German shepard in the garden of the hospital… The dog strained forward and whined loudly.” (Murakami 93-94).

Ryu’s thoughts continue to reflect on his past sexual experience, constantly finding the taste of come in his mouth. Ryu also becomes distracted in these moments, where he begins to people-watch, a distraction from the thoughts he finds himself stuck on. Ryu’s apathy to his friends and the world expands through these moments. An escape from the problems that surround him inevitably leads him to become growingly distant, which allows him to remove himself from the world he resides in. He overlooks the violence perpetuated, not only onto him but to the women around him. He yearns for an escape, not only from himself or his friends but the town itself. These thoughts take him away from his ongoing surroundings and fail to protect Kei or speak to Yoshiyama about his abuse, showing this complicity with not only the U.S.

through the continued drug abuse but also this complicity of domestic violence in which Yoshiyama grabs Kei's hair and kicks her in the stomach repeatedly.

Almost Transparent Blue recognizes that the individual will make up the national body regardless, as individual actions and complacency reinforce this detachment from the national identity and allow a U.S. influence to take root. The novel recalls on the previous concept of the *kokutai* and distorts it. *Almost Transparent Blue* detaches itself from concepts of *kokutai* surrounding hetero-patriarchal family structures and shifts the discussion toward individuals that do not align with those structures. As a queer character, Ryu lies in between the concepts of masculinity and femininity in the eyes of the hetero-patriarchal system. Through the lens of paradigmatic, heteronormative masculinity, Ryu defies the notion of cis manhood through his sexuality. He engages with masculinity through his male gender, but his time spent with Lily suggests a departure from this concept of hyper-masculinity that *nikutai bungaku* writers establish. Ryu does not hold any of these hyper-masculine traits that *nikutai bungaku* writers establish, but witnesses other Japanese characters who do and their interactions with women. It begins to complicate his intimacy with Lily as the novel progresses when he recalls on other Japanese men and how they speak about, view, and treat women. The early moments in the novel he spends with her are moments of freedom, not only for him, but for her. Lily as a sex worker and Ryu as a man break apart from what *nikutai bungaku* suggests regarding the relationship between men and women. Through early moments of their relationship, there is a queering of previous conceptions of hetero-normative dynamics. Ryu's engagement with makeup and a silver negligee disregard traditional notions of masculinity. "Jackson said I should wear makeup again, like I'd done before… I put on a silver negligee Saburo said he'd got from a pro stripper." (Murakami 51). Ryu thus negates previous understandings of the national body but also

represents how the individual/physical body is always tied to the national body. And by subverting heteropatriarchy, Ryu's character development exposes the U.S. and the Japanese government's complicity in supporting U.S. extraterritoriality.

Race & Feminization under U.S. Occupation

In a later group sex scene, Ryu is once again presented in an objectified manner by the Black U.S. Military soldiers and becomes their plaything for the night. The language of the text urges the reader to recognize the power dynamics happening in this scene, consider the role of the U.S. presence in Japan in Japanese subjects, and emphasize the feminization of Asian men, in this case, Japanese men:

> As I breathed I forgot who I was. I thought that many things gradually flowed from my body, I became a doll…The feeling that I was a doll became stronger and stronger. All I had to do was just move as they wanted, I was the happiest possible slave… Hey Ryu you're just a doll, you're just our little yellow doll, we could stop winding you up and finish you off, y'know, Jackson crooned… (Murakami 51-52, 54)

While not entirely sober Ryu still recognizes his position among the soldiers he dances for, understanding at the end of the day, they have control over him, that the U.S. military itself remains the dominant aspect in this town of lost youth who yearn for escape.

The passage allows for a critique of the orientalism that occurs within this scene as well.Ryu is nothing more than a doll in these soldiers' eyes, particularly a yellow doll, a heavily

racialized and feminized object. The racial politics within this scene through Jackson's character are difficult to ignore. Before this group sex scene, there was a build-up of continued slurs against these Black soldiers among Ryu and his friends as they spoke amongst themselves. Jackson, being a Black U.S. soldier, referring to Ryu as a yellow doll represents a betrayal of solidarity that can form. Considering how not soon before this book's setting, Black soldiers were still segregated from white soldiers until the Vietnam War and the long history of anti-Black rhetoric in the U.S. and positionality of Black people in the U.S, the potential for solidarity is apparent, but U.S. militarism, power dynamics, and Japanese subjugation complicate this.

In addition, in the conversation with Jackson, Ryu is referred to as being nothing but a plaything for these U.S. soldiers. Jackson suggests they will eventually get bored and toss Ryu aside, broken and alone. This is not only representative of Ryu, but on a larger scale of the Japanese characters as a whole, who are represented as mere playthings for the U.S. military to manipulate, contort, and control. Japanese male characters, in particular, Ryu, are stripped of their masculinity and feminized through this scene that emphasizes the position of Japanese people, particularly men, under U.S. neocolonialism. The feminization of Ryu in this scene also emphasizes this "queery" ing of the heteronormative Orientalism at play between the United States, which is seen as masculine, and Japan, seen as feminine under the gaze that the U.S. military produces. An emphasis of the masculine identity as the U.S. and the feminine identity as Japan between the two characters and provokes the reader to consider how the Japanese complicity with U.S. neocolonialism produces a loss of autonomy for Japanese citizens. Ryu is stripped of his identity as a man under the gaze of Jackson in this scene, but also as a human being viewed only as an object.

In *Racial Castration* Eng begins his argument about the feminization of Asian men through the play *M. Butterfly* by David H. Hwang. In the play, Rene Gallimard, a French diplomat serving a prison sentence for treason, and the narrative recounts his experience of love with Song Liling. Gallimard views Song performing the final scene from Giacomo Puccini's Madame Butterfly, playing the title heroine as she commits suicide after the white man she adores abandons her. As the play continues, a reveal that Song is a man working in correspondence with the Chinese government. Gallimard refutes this notion and continues the affair only to be discovered for his leaking of intel and relationship. The play finishes with Gallimard serving his sentence, visited by Song, who confronts Gallimard on the truth, which ends with Gallimard in Madame Butterfly's costume committing suicide after Song abandons him as Song watches smoking a cigarette. *Racial Castration* uses Sigmund Freud's work to emphasize this racialized castration:

> In his 1927 essay ''Fetishism,'' Freud states that the man, traumatized by the sight of female difference—of castration—creates a fetish—a surrogate penis—and projects it onto the female body in the guise of a substitute object: a plait of hair, an undergarment, a shoe. From a slightly different perspective, fetishism describes a psychic process whereby the man attempts to obviate the trauma of sexual difference by seeing at the site of the female body a penis that is not there to see. (Eng 2).

Eng argues through this play and in the greater context of racism that white men cast upon Asian men, this concept is antithetical. The Asian male body's site of a penis is unseen to Gallimard in M. Butterfly as Eng notes, but this connects to the larger historical context of Asian masculinity seen as bound to the limits of race, nationality, sexuality, and gender. In other words, through the

loss of a fetishized view Asian men as feminized objects, white subject of *M. Butterfly* loses access to Western masculinity.

The feminization of the Asian American male in the U.S. cultural landscape results in a figure of feminized, emasculated, or homosexualized, and there must be an active pursuit of the connections between queer and women studies to Asian American male subjectivity. This concept and what is occurring within *Almost Transparent Blue* are connected*,* wherein white patriarchy premises the feminization, and emasculation of Japanese subjects, while Ryu, who subverts the preconceived concept of a masculine subject, allows an engagement for something beyond as the queer representation of the character and actions fit not that of an archetypical masculine character. Ryu's character doesn't fit entirely into the confines of a typical man. Ryu has long hair, a slender build, and is generally soft-spoken throughout the novel. The other men in the novel resemble archetypical masculine characters: muscular, loud, and crude. Ryu's character shifts this concept of the masculine subject and blends himself alongside the feminine archetype.

We can draw on Cheng's *Ornamentalism* to provide further reading on racialized dehumanization in *Almost Transparent Blue*. In her elaboration of Said's critique of Orientalism, Cheng recognizes that Black bodies are backgrounded or, in turn, formulated as nonhuman or parahuman subjects under white patriarchy while diasporic Asian women are often viewed as unanimated objects.

> I am interested in thinking about the yellow woman as a comparable form of interstitial life, but in intimate relation more to objects than to animal life, and with a body that is not so much disaggregated as thickly encrusted. If Black parahumanity by way of Allewaert offers us a way to consider the potential of ' a condition of fragmentation

> between the human and the animal,' then seeing the perihumanity of yellow womanhood enables us to theorize an ontological condition produced out of synthetic accretions that challenge the very division between the living and the nonliving. (Cheng 3).

According to Cheng, the figure of the Asian woman, while closely linked to ancient civilizational values, is far removed from Western humanist considerations; she circles but is excluded from humanity, and she represents feminine values but is not considered a woman at all. (Cheng 2-3). *Ornamentalism* recognizes the linking between the ornament or decorative closely tied to the Orient and this objectification that Asian women encompass from the Western world; a doll, for example, would fall under this subjection, a representation of femininity, but still inhuman.

Almost Transparent Blue circulates this concept of Japanese subjects and their relation to dolls, not only through Ryu but also as Ryu enters what appears to be a substance-induced psychosis; the group sex scene with Jackson and the other Black American soldiers and its relation to femininity and abjection from humanity through a comparison of a doll rings in Ryu's mind till the novel's conclusion as he observes and refuses to see his friends and himself as anything more than a doll. Ryu's ponderance of this abjection from humanity and being seen as a doll generates a deconstruction of the Ornamentalist/Orientalist logic presented by American soldiers by witnessing and understanding the dynamics unfolding between the U.S. military and the Japanese government's complicity. Ryu recognizes how this continued complicity only perpetuates this logic from the U.S. military. In the novel's ending, we see this realization occur with Ryu in a panicked state, exclaiming that the town they live in, which is connected to the military base, needs to be killed/destroyed to understand himself.

A connection between this U.S. military presence and the projection done from the Western world onto Asian subjects, formulating them into a confine of a feminized toy or an object that can be contorted and disposed of; this dominance is closely tied not only to politics, but it becomes racialized and gendered. *Almost Transparent Blue* examines this relationship between the U.S. and Japan and Japanese subjects in a subversive manner. The book utilizes queer youth and a search for identity to emphasize how U.S. presence and Japanese complicity with U.S. military crimes and social control blur this process of searching for identity. It also generates a mode of understanding how through this loss of masculinity occurring via this transaction between the U.S. military and Japanese subjects and formulation of the Japanese man as a woman or feminine or not male, this, in turn, follows the theory developed by Cheng of Ornamentalism, the objectification and limitation of autonomy and agency for feminized subjects.

Almost Transparent Blue directly speaks to these issues that U.S. neocolonialism in Japan enforces: feminization and objectification and the ornamentalization of Japanese people. The book emphasizes an understanding that these U.S. soldiers recognize what they are doing and boast and laugh about it. They understand the impunity they have from what they do and share with the Japanese characters, the drugs and violent sex where an emphasis on the power dynamic takes place, and their doll-like position in the face of the U.S. military's extralegal and extraterritorial neocolonial status. The book seeks to address the extraterritorial rights that the U.S. soldiers have as a trope of racialized violence on the Japanese subject. While the book argues against the U.S. presence in Japan and this blurring of Japanese identity and masculinity, it actively engages with racist and misogynistic ideologies that align with the U.S.

The narrative's utilizes a queer character and imagery as a means to denounce the U.S presence yet chooses to engage with previous concepts that have permeated Japanese post-WWII literature. These previous surround women and their roles alongside depictions of Black characters that generate further divides in which commonality and solidarity could be found. The story grounds itself in the abuse and humiliation of women in the narrative to pose an argument for the larger issue surrounding U.S. extraterritoriality. This abuse and humiliation alongside racist depictions of Black men and women not only villainizes these people, but undermines larger issues that can be unifying. An emphasis on these actions grows as the novel progresses. Ryu consistently reflects on thoughts regarding his doll-like nature and how those surrounding him, his friends, and Lilly are nothing but dolls that will eventually fall apart. Ryu recognizes how his existence, his friends, and Lily are to be subservient to the positionality of the U.S. The control that the U.S. holds over Japan alongside Japanese government complicity is insurmountable to Ryu within the book and is what causes his mental breakdown in the end. The Japanese government witnesses these illegal actions that U.S. soldiers do and care to do nothing to prevent them, while Japanese citizens are held responsible for their actions. Japanese government's complicity extends to understanding the position that Japanese citizens are to U.S. soldiers who have the freedom to escape from any punishment and general treatment of the Japanese. *Almost Transparent Blue* lends itself to recognizing how queer representations are vital to understanding how these power structures suit the futurity of hetero-patriarchal existence.

Anti-Blackness

In *Almost Transparent Blue,* anti-Blackness and misogynoir are deeply rooted structures within the interactions among the U.S. servicemen and the Japanese and Okinawan characters in the novel. As the group sex scene involving non-white American soldiers unfolds, Jackson, a Black American GI, commits horrifying sexually abusive acts on the Japanese women Moko, Reiko, and Kei, and these women are left bleeding and bruised. Murakami does not stray from characterizing these Black military men as uncivilized or brutish:

> On the first turn her entire body convulsed and she panicked. Her eyes bulging and her hands over her ears, she began to shriek like the heroine of a horror movie. Saburo's laugh was like an African war cry, as Reiko twisted her face and clawed at her chest. (Murakami 38).

Here, Murakami presents the problem of Japan's complicity with the U.S. military extraterritoriality via a means of racist characterizations of Black military soldiers and Blackness itself (Saburo's "African war cry" in witnessing the moment of sexual violence). Within *Almost Transparent Blue*, there is a lack of white military soldiers committing these highly provocative crimes, which the U.S.'s position in Japan following WWII complicates persecution for these crimes. All soldiers who are involved in delivering drugs or engaging in violent group sex scenes are either mixed race or Black. Murakami's use of this violent language and characterization as a means of further victimizing the Japanese men in the novel delivers a message of a monoethnic Japan as well as concerns surrounding Japanese emasculation alongside the U.S. presence that had been prevalent in Japanese literature years prior.

As the group sex scene involving Ryu and the Black GIs quickly continues at an incredulous pace, a Black woman, Rudianna, who is named only once after the group sex scene,

joins to have sex with Ryu and Jackson. Unlike the Black men who are named before the sex scene, the naming of Rudianna following the group sex, along with her description as an Olympic player, her muscularity, and hip gyration generates a hypersexualization of Black women that differs from the hypersexualization of the Black men. Rudianna engages with the concept that *Almost Transparent Blue* consistently returns to the subjectivity of non-white people, in particular feminine people under U.S. neocolonialism. Her lack of a name during the sex scene highlights the unfamiliarity that Ryu engages with, as well as an objectification of her. Murakami presents the racist caricatures of these Black characters to show dismay with the U.S. military presence in Japan. An emphasis on a continual disconnect from humanity is present with these representations and interactions due to the U.S. military in Japan and the media representation that Ryu and other Japanese receive from the U.S. Murakami's decision to emphasize these depictions of Black characters as a means to further victimize the Japanese characters under the U.S. military presence leads to a further complication of what this implies in regards to not only the status of Japanese in the context of Japan. This leads to the extent of the U.S. military and the incorporation of Black soldiers who have not too long before been under a similar persecution by colonial powers and shared dynamics with themselves and the Japanese subjects under U.S. power.

There is a loss of solidarity through the position that the U.S. soldiers possess alongside the Japanese complicity for this power that the U.S. holds through their presence. Within this loss, in Ryu's eyes, the Black woman, Rudianna, becomes less represented as a woman and more so as a work of fiction herself:

> The Black woman sat on top of me. At the same time her hips began to swivel at tremendous speed. She turned her face to the ceiling and let out a Tarzan yell, panted like a Black javelin thrower I'd seen in an Olympic film…
> (Murakami 54).

Murakami Ryu creates this imagery of a difference between the Japanese and the Black soldiers represented in Almost Transparent Blue. It highlights Ryu's unfamiliarity with Black women and the representations he has been given thus far through film and other media. This difference punctuates the division between civil and uncivil created under the regime of U.S. neo-colonialism, which becomes distorted through the power structures of the U.S. military presence and the Japanese government's complicity. A lack of compassion or bonds to be forged under the U.S. military presence and Japanese government's desire for heteronormativity and heterosociality is evident in which these depictions of uncivil and civil can formulate. The actions taken by the U.S. military are evidently uncivil through the violence and drug abuse that is pushed onto the Japanese citizens.

While the U.S. soldiers have this dominance over the Japanese characters in the novel through drugs, money, and no repercussions for their actions, these sex scenes that showcase comparisons to characters such as Tarzan, a notable "uncivilized" character and terminology such as "African war cry" create this notion that the people in control are those that lack "civility." There is also a disconnect here, with Ryu's unfamiliarity with people outside of Japan only interacting with images of Black women from a film. Ryu's friends, two of which are of Okinawan descent before the group sex scene, use Japanese racist slurs to refer to the Black characters as Ryu quickly corrects them, stating that they are capable of understanding Japanese.

This scene is essential to reflect on as the representations of Black characters, primarily African-American characters throughout Japanese post-war literature, which have consistently been stereotyped to serve as a tool for conveying Japanese oppression under U.S. militarism.

In *Playing the Shadows: Fictions of Race and Blackness in Postwar Japanese Literature,* William H. Bridges examines the role of Blackness in Japanese Postwar literature and refers to John Russell's "Race and Reflexivity: The Black Other in Contemporary Japanese Mass Culture" in which Russell reveals a brief survey of literary and visual representation of Black people in contemporary Japan reveals persistence of eight stereotypes: infantilism, primitivism, hypersexuality, bestiality, natural athletic prowess or physical stamina, mental inferiority, psychological weakness, and emotional volatility. Stereotypes of hypersexuality, primitivism, and natural athletic prowess are evident in Ryu's reflection during these group sex scenes and the scene with Ryu and his friends. These stereotypes emphasize this complete disconnect from any form of possible solidarity that could be formulated between the Japanese citizens and Black soldiers. The Japanese characters are only familiar with Black people through the U.S. media, which during this time would feed into these racist depictions of Black people.

The hypersexuality present in the novel is not unfamiliar to prior post-war Japanese literature. Shinjo Ikuo's essay *Beyond Imperial Aesthetics*, "Male Sexuality in the Colony: On Toyokawa Zen'ichi's *Searchlight*" explores the novella *Searchlight* by Toyokawa Zen'ichi, which follows a male Okinawan character who eventually becomes a prostitute after being raped by an African American soldier. The novella was quickly banned and removed from circulation due to the U.S. occupation's censoring of anti-U.S. literature. What concerns me is that, in his analysis, Shinjo mostly refrains from speaking in depth about the topic of race alongside the hyper-sexualization of the Black soldier within this reading of *Searchlight* and the connotations

of using a Black character as a stand-in for U.S. occupation in the novella. The use of such a character quickly brings to mind these stereotypes that were previously discussed to reinforce a narrative of not only racial othering of the Black person but also a disconnect of where solidarity can be found. Shinjo briefly touches on this aspect of how gay Black people have historically been swept aside from theorists such as Frantz Fanon but refrains from exploring this further to focus solely on the male sexuality pertaining under the umbrella of U.S. colonialism. Fanon defines the Black man's non-heteronormative sexual desires as contributing to white men's desires. What becomes "distorted" here, as Shinjo defines Fanon's language, is that Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* can be read as an emphasis that under this white narrative-dominated world where whiteness has always been the status quo, sexual exploration under European and American countries or colonies distorts identity and becomes in suit of white desire or acceptability/palatability under the white gaze. What is lost with this critique that Shinjo provides of Fanon's comments on non-white sexuality is that Fanon's material focuses on the aspect of Blackness and its relation to whiteness and how this distorts dynamics and how this dynamic generates a notion of white society and whiteness as the more desirable. Fanon's work can be utilized to extend the argument Shinjo makes of non-heteronormative practices in the colony of Okinawa, and his regard to Homi K. Bhaba's theory of mimicry as the colonized subject of the Black soldier now becomes a perpetuator of colonization. As *Searchlight* uses a Black character as a stand-in metaphor for the U.S. neocolonialism present in Okinawa, *Almost Transparent Blue* does something similar but complicates it. The Black soldiers in *Almost Transparent Blue* are less so a vague interpretation of U.S. neocolonialism but serve as a critique of the indoctrination that the U.S. has done during this period in Japan and outside of Japan and

continues to seek to do and what the novel argues as with Japan's complicity for U.S. extraterritoriality.

Therein lies the potential of the framework of queery. In *Almost Transparent Blue*, queer representation provokes these previous narratives/stereotypes that the novel draws on when depicting these Black characters. Ryu shares a form of friendship with the Black U.S. soldiers early in the book. It only becomes disturbed by the complexity of the U.S. military presence in Japan and the power dynamics that are created from it, such as viewing Ryu as a doll and Ryu's only understanding of Black people comes from media he has seen. Ryu's realization of how the Japanese government's complicity with the U.S. military is destroying not only himself but everyone around him stems from this socialization with the Black soldiers. This inevitably leads to Ryu's realization that the U.S. military base and neighboring town are the fault of his and other Japanese youths' struggle for identity. At the same time, the representations of Black characters in the novel are difficult to ignore as anything more than simply a legacy of anti-Blackness in Japan and the utilization of Black characters as a stand-in for the U.S. presence as a means of Japanese victimization. This simply can be seen as Japan's continued colonial history, being evident in the vilification of Black people and utilizing music created by Black people to tell a narrative of oppression now through an extension of U.S. military presence.

Conclusion

Almost Transparent Blue defines itself through the antiwar politics and social movements of the 1960s and 70s , a period of disillusion, drugs, music, and continued U.S. military presence alongside complicity from the Japanese government on U.S. extraterritoriality. *Almost Transparent Blue* comes from a place of derealization with the U.S. presence and takes the reader to examine the U.S. militarism from a different perspective than the Nikutai Bungaku literary movement's focus on sexual transgression as a mode of liberation. The novel leaves the reader to critique the more expansive aspect of neo-colonialism further through the U.S. military presence and questions of sexuality pertaining to autonomy and futurity. As the story goes on from an opening of sex and drug abuse with youth in Japan, it opens further doors for critique to be held in regards to Anti-Blackness, neo-colonialism in post-WWII Japan, and queer experience under the U.S. military in Japan. *Almost Transparent Blue* highlights this abjection from society and, more importantly, humanity through non-heteronormative lifestyles via the U.S. military presence and this Ornamentalism that grows throughout the novel to its end, resulting in a breakdown from the protagonist, Ryu. The queery of this hetero-patriarchal society that the U.S. military extraterritoriality and the Japanese government's complicity represent exposes that through these systems of power and oppression, the futurity of queer existence diminishes and that through the framework queery propels an understanding of how these power structures seek to limit non-white and non-heteronormative peoples in their connections and existence.

As the protagonist Ryu 's feminization emphasizes objectification within the power structure of U.S. military presence. In the context of the air force base, Ryu, along with the cast of Japanese characters, is no longer seen as human but rather objects, dolls, that can be contorted and refigured to fit the hetero-patriarchal fixture that the U.S. neocolonial structure entails. As

Jackson implies, those who do not are cast aside and forgotten. Ryu's breakdown at the end of the story makes this case much more apparent as he recognizes what the town represents and, through that, generates this inescapability from the U.S. presence and complicity, but also how, through this U.S. extraterritoriality and complicity, this degeneration through drug abuse and derealization with society within Ryu occurs in which ultimately causes him to explode with overwhelming fear. The power structure that U.S. militarism represents through its impunity to authority within Japan allows for American characters to escape from issues that Ryu and his friends face. While the Americans enjoy the privilege of extralegal rights, Ryu and his friends are held legally and morally accountable for their lifestyles and sexualities.

In the novel, the Japanese government's complicity in upholding U.S. military neocolonialism is also highlighted in the grand loss of solidarity or understanding to be formulated between the occupied Japanese and the Black GIs. While power dynamic between the two differs through the GI's authority and impunity to being held accountable for their actions, they share similar experiences with the Japanese subjects in their experiences with racism and white supremacy. Yet, Ryu and the other Japanese characters' understanding of Black people becomes limited, pushing this loss of solidarity further through how they view the once-named Black woman, Rudianna, Jackson, Saburo, and the other men. The Japanese characters share no disdain or hate, but the understanding comes from exposure to U.S. media that they have seen or heard. In other words, *Almost Transparent Blue*'s understanding of Blackness and Black people comes through the filter of a U.S. white patriarchy that only recently desegregated. A connection or solidarity is lost through the U.S. military presence and the history of the U.S. entirely shifts how this dynamic between the two operates.

Almost Transparent Blue fixes itself to a shift in literary discussion in Japanese post-war literature, which comes after early works of post-war literature in which writers sought how to regain masculinity through sexual transgression to a point in which queries of neo-colonialism and complicity and their impact on counter-culture and sexuality become the focus of discussion and critique. The novel conveys a message of an emerging dystopic mentality within the Japanese youth from the ongoing U.S. military presence in Japan during its conception. In this mentality, a collapse is imminent while the heteropatriarchal ideologies of both U.S. and Japanese governments suffocate the existence of connection and finding identity. Queery therefore exposes how the queer representations in *Almost Transparent Blue* reveal that the U.S. military presence and the Japanese government's complicity during the 1970s and prior suffocate this existence outside the hetero-normative. I have therefore followed Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* and Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* to illuminate how the questions of orientation and queer political imagination pervade the narrative of *Almost Transparent Blue* as a novel that insists on exposing the heterosexism of military neocolonialism.. A future suffocated by constraints of hetero-normativity and orientating one's self with complicity in power structures that deem queer life unsuitable. My proposed framework of queery, in recognizing how queer representations, gives specificity on not only queer navigation in a hetero-normative world becomes impassable alone, but how queer representations pinpoint the flaws and errs of these hetero-patriarchal systems in the world outside *Almost Transparent Blue.* .

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