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Of Shadows and Goldfish: Discovering Japanese Brazilian Dekasegi

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Abstract

Bernardo Carvalho's Brazilian novel, *O sol se põe em São Paulo* [The Sun Sets in São Paulo, 2007], alongside Shiozaki Shōhei's Japanese film, *Akaneiro no yakusoku: Sanba do kingyo* (Goldfish Go Home, 2012), create postmodern narratives that render Japanese Brazilian *dekasegi*, or migrant laborers, similar to their depictions in historical archives: invisible and unable to emerge from the shadows. Through scenarios of discovery, the texts reveal how present-day Japanese Brazilian *dekasegi* inherit their condition as disappointing failures from past generations of *dekasegi*. This article explores the intergenerational trauma of Japanese Brazilian *dekasegi* through an analysis that centers the failed neoliberalist fantasy of commodity fetishism. Postmodern hauntology is never resolved in the existing archives. Instead, the texts suggest that a new archive must emerge.

Keywords: Japanese Brazilian, Japan, Brazil, *dekasegi*, migrant laborers, postmodern, trauma, literature, film, narrative, hauntology, archive

Bernardo Carvalho's *O sol se põe em São Paulo* [The Sun Sets in São Paulo, 2007] begins, "Não vejo nenhuma metáfora no que eu digo. É como se tudo estivesse na sombra"¹ (9).² In Carvalho's novel, a nameless fourth-generation Japanese Brazilian narrator emerges from the labyrinthine, theatrical streets of São Paulo to hear and record the story of a first-generation Japanese Brazilian. In this retelling of the story, the reader confronts the character's past, sees its fractures, and shifts these onto the narrator's own life, drifting through the shadows of history. Shadows, metaphors, and the theatrical inform the texts that I will consider in this analysis, highlighting the relationships between past and present, visibility and invisibility, circuitry and directness, and performance and reality. More importantly, the shadows subsume the population that guides the narrative—Japanese Brazilians. In his postmodern novel, Carvalho examines what it means to be a Japanese Brazilian. Ten years after graduating from college, Carvalho's narrator is unemployed and with no real prospect of becoming the writer he once desired to become: ". . . vi o que já não queria ver, que a minha ilusão não ia acabar enquanto eu não escrevesse a primeira linha. . . No fundo, ainda achava que pudesse escever – e um dia me salvar não sabia bem do quê"³ (12). Thus, the postmodern text weaves through shadows of the

past and metaphors of the present to reveal the intergenerational trauma of its *dekasegi* (migrant laborer) characters: the disillusionment of a *dekasegi* fantasy that produces “circunstâncias históricas e sociais”²⁴ and render Japanese Brazilians invisible in the archives (Carvalho 10).

In this article, I will explore Carvalho’s Brazilian novel alongside another postmodernist text, Shiozaki Shōhei’s Japanese film *Akaneiro no yakusoku: Sanba do kingyo* (Goldfish Go Home, (2012). Through postmodern paradoxes and a performance of pastiche, both texts enact a scenario of discovery to reveal specters of the past that haunt the present through the figure of the *dekasegi*. Here, Japanese Brazilian *dekasegi*, despite a characterization as disappointing failures, pushes the plot forward and shift away from dominant historical archives that relegate them to minor roles. Their characterization, inherently linked to both the past and the present, emerges in both narratives as an unresolved neoliberalist crisis. The existence of this crisis persists on relegating *dekasegi* as minor characters in existing archives. Carvalho’s and Shiozaki’s texts suggest that in order to center Japanese Brazilians, a new archive must emerge that gives space for new types of Japanese Brazilian narratives—those that are not haunted by the *dekasegi* present and the past. This article will explore how these postmodernist Brazilian and Japanese texts and their unresolved endings represent the contemporary unstable status of Japanese Brazilians in Japan.

I consider Carvalho’s novel and Shiozaki’s film as postmodernist because they are “haunted by the memory of the erased past and anxious about the unrivied future,” as Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian write in *Postmodernism and Japan* (vii). In the novel, the narrator’s sister decides to work in a car manufacturing plant as a *dekasegi* in Japan after learning that she would earn more there than as a college professor in Brazil (29). The narrator and his sister, then, embody this “unrivied future” as fourth-generation Japanese Brazilians who are caught in an exchange-value cycle reminiscent to that of the first generation. This future emphasizes “the consumption of sheer commodification as process” (Jameson x) while “wallow[ing] in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change” (Harvey 44). Postmodernist literature, therefore, as Jean-François Lyotard describes in his seminal *The Postmodern Condition*, has “incredulity toward metanarratives” since the “narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal” (xxxiv). Indeed, while Carvalho’s novel features the nameless narrator, his story falls into the shadow when he immerses himself in the story of a first-generation Japanese Brazilian, Setsuko, whose story the narrator longs to uncover.

Similarly, Shiozaki’s film prominently features an ordinary Japanese Brazilian youth in Japan in a story about how he finds a mythical blue goldfish. While both texts are about Japanese Brazilians,

the dekasegi experience lurks in the shadow as an underlying narrative waiting to be told. This experience highlights the unresolved crisis that is the Japanese Brazilian dekasegi experience: a fantasy of financial success emerging from the economic pressures of the country of origin, which affects multiple generations. This unresolved crisis, therefore, is at the heart of postmodernism, which Frederic Jameson describes “as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place” (ix). Finally, because of its ties to capitalism, postmodernism depicts the fissures that surround the conflict of Japanese Brazilian immigration through its representations of labor, economics, and politics. Carvalho and Shiozaki recover the dekasegi population from the archives through their representations in these postmodernist texts and suggest that a new archive is required to release the Japanese Brazilians from the intergenerational trauma of dekasegi.

Performance Studies emphasize the various methods through which knowledge is transmitted to readers and audiences. Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire* locates two key places where acts of transfer occur: archives, which consist of “supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones),” and repertoire, which is an “embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (19). Archives are places of power whose meaning may change over time due to interpretation or missing texts (19). The repertoire, on the other hand, “allows for an alternative perspective of transnational contact and invites a remapping of the Americas” (20). Japanese Brazilian dekasegi movement to and from Japan and Brazil found in the repertoire emphasizes that the presence of the population is often overlooked in both countries’ established archives. Instead, Carvalho’s and Shiozaki’s texts position the reader and spectator in a scenario that allows them to discover that which “has been largely hidden in plain sight,” the dekasegi (Hu-DeHart and López 10).

Carvalho’s and Shiozaki’s dekasegi become bodies, then, that must be discovered in order to transmit knowledge about their very condition. They do not simply serve “as proof of alterity, but merely as the space on which the battles for truth, value, and power are fought” (Taylor 63). Here, the dekasegi are both absent and present, visible and invisible, and necessary and disposable in the hauntology described by Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, which is a “dimension of performative interpretation, that is, of an interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets” (63). Hauntology, for Derrida, is “neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes” (63). Carvalho’s and Shiozaki’s texts transform the dekasegi experience by retrieving dekasegi representations from the shadows of the archive, from being absent, and making visible how an unresolved crisis of intergenerational trauma haunts them.

This unresolved crisis disappears and reappears in Carvalho's and Shiozaki's texts, embodied in the dekasegi, who are neither present nor absent from the narratives. Instead, in the hauntology of these texts, the dekasegi characters become specters who, by the very definition of their label, are marked in a capitalistic system as embodying use-value. Although today the word dekasegi signals Latin Americans who arrived in Japan as foreign laborers, in the early twentieth century, dekasegi referred to Japanese who traveled abroad in search of a better financial future. Etymologically, the word comes from two Japanese words: *deru* (to leave) and *kasegu* (to earn money). Thus, through the very label of dekasegi, this population is "pre-occupied, inhabited, haunted by its other . . . the commodity-form, and its ghost dance" (Derrida 201). This commodity-form will "affect[s] and bereave[s]" use-value "in advance, like the ghost it will become, but this is precisely where the haunting begins," states Derrida (201). In Carvalho's text, the reader encounters fourth-generation Japanese Brazilians, the narrator, and his sister, who are haunted by the failure of capitalism. Similarly, in Shiozaki's film, the protagonist's mother is a dekasegi who has just lost her job and feels she must return to Brazil. For them, Japanese immigration to Brazil, beginning with the first group of immigrants in 1908, is based on a neoliberalist fantasy, an extension of the early 20th-century capitalist transformations that triggered indentured laborers. In 1908, immigration companies told immigrants that they would work in Brazil for three years and be able to have enough money to return to Japan with savings. The coffee prices quoted for the immigrants, however, were based on previous years. Moreover, Brazilian coffee prices peaked before the first official immigrant ship from Japan arrived in Brazil in 1908 and, after that, steadily declined (Abreu and Fernandes 9). Thus, first-generation immigrants confronted firsthand the illusive promise of immigration. After experiencing a rupture of the fantasy, they remained in Brazil, trying to achieve the 1908 dream that the immigration companies had sold them in Japan (Lesser 155). Generations later, Japanese Brazilians "returned" to Japan as dekasegi themselves.

The wave of dekasegi from Brazil began to arrive in the 1980s. Mostly third-generation Nikkei, these dekasegi responded to the economic havoc brought upon by the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985). The influx of Brazilians and other Latin Americans dekasegi, as well as Japan's increased need for unskilled labor, caused Japanese lawmakers to reexamine their laws and, subsequently, pass the 1989 Revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law. This law revision created new categories of residents that allowed Nikkei to live and work in Japan under three-year visas. The Brazilian population in Japan increased annually until 2007 when it peaked at a total population of 316,967 (Kokuseki [shushshinchi] betsu—dai ichi hyō, dai ichi zu). Before the COVID-19 pandemic,

the population was once again increasing; in 2021, Japan's total Brazilian population was 204,879 (Zairyū gaikokujin tōkei: 2021-nen 12-gatsu matsu). The continual Brazilian labor force arriving in Japan responds to the economic needs of both the laborer and the nation, demonstrating capitalism at work in today's globalized society. These dekasegi work in the service industry performing *kitsui*, *kiken*, and *kitanai* (difficulty, dangerous, and dirty) jobs that value "the products of their labor" above "relations between people," through commodity fetishism (Hudson and Hudson 413). Carvalho's novel and Shiozaki's film use the Japanese Brazilian experience to critique the neoliberalist fantasy of dekasegi success by depicting the failure of commodity fetishism.

Ghosts in Cities: Bernardo Carvalho's *O sol se põe em São Paulo*

Since he began publishing, Bernardo Carvalho has used his articles, essays, short stories, and novels to enter into contemporary debates on capitalism, economics, politics, globalization, and other current affairs. An influential Brazilian novelist, his works have won numerous awards, including the 56th Jabuti Prize for best Brazilian novel in 2014 (*Reprodução*, or *Reproduction*). He also contributes arts and culture articles to *Folha de São Paulo*, a Brazilian newspaper. While covering diverse topics, Carvalho's literature typically "creates discontinuity in his plot, form, and themes" (Beal 135). In particular, his eighth novel, *O sol se põe em São Paulo*, also develops a disjointed plot through a postmodernist bricolage by using the anonymity of large cities and the economic center that they represent, such as São Paulo, Tokyo, and Osaka, as grounds for hiding, sharing, reinventing, and retelling stories of the past and present.

In São Paulo's Liberdade, the neighborhood most associated with Japanese immigration, Setsuko begins to share her story with an unnamed fourth-generation Japanese Brazilian narrator. She soon disappears, however, leaving the narrator, haunted by her presence, to untangle history from reality by following her story to Japan and back to Brazil. The story's main characters include Michiyo (Setsuko's friend), Jokichi (Michiyo's husband), and Masukichi (Michiyo's lover). Setsuko, who worked for Michiyo and Jokichi, was asked to deliver letters from Masukichi to both, although she did not know why. When Setsuko vanishes from the narrative, the unnamed narrator meets others who help him unravel parts of Setsuko's story, such as his dekasegi sister, Jokichi's family in Brazil (who knew him as Teruo), and an unnamed, cleft-lipped man. A story within a story, the novel switches back and forth between time, place, and narrative form, absorbing the reader in a hauntology that pushes them to read more.

Once the narrator agrees to write down Setsuko's story, he is subsumed in a scenario of discovery. The use of this scenario to understand the novel allows the narrator and readers to discover new "meaning-making paradigms" that structure the characters' representations (Taylor 28). Scenarios, through their incomplete sketches of plot and narrative, also "demand[s] that we . . . pay attention to milieux and corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones" (Taylor 28). They "make visible, yet again, what is already there" and reveal "potential outcomes" that are often hidden in postmodern narratives, such as Carvalho's novel (28). The title of the novel is the first aspect of the scenario of discovery that readers encounter. Although the title emphasizes São Paulo as a setting, the plot also centers on Osaka and Tokyo, highlighting the rise of cities and the movement of people to these cities. In her article "Espaços urbanos contemporâneos em *O Sol se Põe em São Paulo*, de Bernardo Carvalho," Candice Martins Alves emphasizes that São Paulo, "Como toda metrópole. . . é uma cidade atravessada por sujeitos anônimos e dispersos que se movimentam num espaço urbano retraído e opressor, marcado pela despersonalização e violência"⁵ (5). Moreover, these cities are expressly tied to capitalism because subjects move to them to find better financial opportunities. In the novel, the Osaka setting allows for three of the major plot points to intersect. First, Masukichi's profession as a kyogen actor emphasizes the scenario of fantasy that frames the novel. Setsuko's employment under Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (a Japanese historical writer) underscores the portrayal of fact and fiction that sets the narrator out to discover the truth. And, finally, the contemporary plight of dekasegi, typically centered in Nagoya, shifts to Osaka to reveal a truth hidden in shadows. And yet, what the narrator finds in these Japanese cities is universal and applicable to São Paulo: a "profound restlessness due to the necessity of finding the truth to know and be known in a city conditioned by publicity, disorientation, dissimulation, illusion, and disorientation" (Nielson 211). These cities, therefore, become a reflection of the postmodern failure of dekasegi that Carvalho evokes in his novel, one that the readers uncover in a scenario of discovery.

Carvalho's use of discovery in his novel introduces numerous postmodern moments where there is deliberate occlusion of the plot through the character of Masukichi. Masukichi is a kyogen actor who Michiyo met in 1940 and reencounters after marrying Jokichi. Fantasy is where Masukichi resides and his scenarios emphasize an intentionality to prevent Setsuko and the narrator from discovering the truth. He is elusive, consistently dodging Michiyo, who is in love with him. Although Setsuko knows about Michiyo's lover, Michiyo does not mention his name. Carvalho writes that it is "Como se aludisse a uma fantasia em que não havia pessoas reais"⁶ (55). Masukichi's repertoire of fantasy is one that he tries to enact with Michiyo, Jokichi, and Setsuko. One day, Setsuko delivers a

letter to Masukichi from Michiyo. Carvalho writes, “E já ali, no silêncio, a observá-lo dissimuladamente, Setsuko começava a entender que não podia resistir. Teria que contracenar com ele. A simples proximidade do ator de kyogen também a transformava numa espécie de atriz”⁷ (58). Masukichi’s repertoire, then, reproduces itself through proximity and manipulation, creating a new role for Setsuko that she must discover.

Setsuko, caught in this manipulation, finds herself lost between stage performances and everyday performances. One day, Setsuko arrives to the theater and finds Masukichi on stage. Waiting, she watches the performance: “O entrecho, mais apropriado ao kabuki, se resumia à decadência de um samurai apaixonado por um pajem que viu passar pelas montanhas na comitiva de um senhor”⁸, Setsuko observes (65). When finished with the performance, Masukichi boasts that he wrote the play based on Ihara Saikaku’s *Nanshoku okagami* (The Great Mirror of Male Love, 1687). He explains to her aspects of his performance, saying, “Se você não percebeu a graça, é porque já faz parte da comédia. Não vê o cômico, porque se satisfaz em vivê-lo. O ator de kyogen deve agir na vida como se atuasse num teatro kyogen”⁹ (67). This repertoire sparks Setsuko’s imagination when Masukichi chooses not to respond to Michiyo’s letter and, instead, begins a correspondence with her husband, Jokichi. Setsuko imagines that Masukichi is romantically pursuing Jokichi because of his performance in a play based on Saikaku’s *Nanshoku okagami*. Setsuko cannot see the comical in the situation because she, too, has become a part of the performance.

Participating in the spectacle of the performance, Setsuko conjures up a scenario where Matsukichi and Jōkichi become lovers, distancing herself from Michiyo. Soon after, Michiyo fires her. Left without a job, Setsuko finds herself seeking employment, temporarily becoming a personal secretary for an old writer who “ficava em Shimogamo, nos arredores do templo homônimo e do bosque Tadasu-no-Mori. . . O nome do bosque “onde as mentiras se revelam” estava envolto numa aura mágica”¹⁰ (77). Setsuko is enchanted with this forest, and here reveals to the old writer the details of Michiyo’s, Masukichi’s, and Jokichi’s performances. This conversation develops into one of the novel’s catalysts, while also drawing in another performer. This performer, like the narrator of the novel, is unnamed; instead, Setsuko refers to him only as “the old writer.” It is only when the narrator digs deeper into Setsuko’s story that his friend identifies the writer: Tanizaki Jun’ichirō. Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (1886-1965) jumps out of the pages of Carvalho’s novel for a reader familiar with Japanese literature because he was an accomplished writer during the early Shōwa period (1926-1989) and is not a fictional character. Tanizaki’s performance in the novel, therefore, invokes a postmodern hauntology in which the narrator draws in the reader into yet another mystery that he tries to unravel.

Tanizaki's apparition reveals key aspects of hauntology by consistently being at a cultural impasse, something that Carvalho's novel emphasizes. Tanizaki's early literary career was marked with an admiration of the West and helped to develop modernism at a time when Japan was slowly transitioning away from being a predominantly rural nation. While this literary movement looked to the future, it was also grounded in an urban, industrialized Japan that believed capitalism would bring about Japan's growth. In 1923, however, after the devastation of the Great Kantō Earthquake, Tanizaki retreated from Tokyo and the future it promised, finding solace in Japan's past and moving to the Kansai cities of Osaka and Kyoto. Haunted by the destruction of Tokyo and a perceived "failure of the future" that characterizes hauntology, his literature shifted away from modernist experiments. Instead, he began to guide his literature toward a *koten kaiki*, or a return to classical Japanese literature, which included a translation of *Genji monogatari* (*Tale of Genji*, circa 1002) into modern Japanese (Fisher 16). Tanizaki's return to classical Japan was part of a larger 1930s shift from cosmopolitanism to "culturalism," which "struggled to balance the perceived evenness of tradition with the unevenness of global capitalism" (Long 432). This return to Japan, however, emphasized a fictive vision of a "Japanese uniqueness" that haunts Tanizaki's writing, the formation of Japanese immigration laws, and, ultimately, allows the reader to discover the stories hidden within the shadows in Carvalho's novel.

While Carvalho's novel introduces three of Tanizaki's novels, he only quotes from Tanizaki's 1933-1934 essay on aesthetics "In'ei raisan" (陰翳礼讃, In Praise of Shadows). In this seminal essay, Tanizaki juxtaposes Japan with the West, using examples ranging from architecture to lighting and theater. He writes, "the West has never been disposed to delight in shadows . . . pitch darkness has always occupied our fantasies" (Harper and Seidensticker 30). It is in this darkness and shadow that Carvalho's second part of the text emerges. Similar to the layering that Tanizaki lauds in his essay, the text also renders many aspects of the plot more accessible to the reader by adding layers of information to reveal the postmodernist narrative structure. Most importantly, however, the text, through its use of Tanizaki's essay, renders visible the state of Japanese Brazilian *dekasegi*, who have been invisible yet present throughout the text, depicting their contradictions in a scenario of discovery.

The narrator, as a Japanese Brazilian, introduces *dekasegi* early in the novel. He declares that he could never become a *dekasegi* by saying, "Voltar para o Japão como operário (apesar de nunca ter posto os pés lá antes) seria perpetuar o fracasso e o erro, a função apenas nos afundava ainda mais no inferno"¹¹ (20). Thus, even though he may feel unfulfilled in Brazil, he believes that returning to Japan would be a purgatory that sustains the hauntology he already embodies as the great-grandson of *dekasegi*. And yet, when Setsuko vanishes from São Paulo and the narrative, after seven chapters, he

chooses, like Tanizaki, to return to the past by traveling to Japan. The only person he knows in Japan, however, is his sister, a *dekasegi* in a Japanese factory. The narrator shares, “Minha irmã só podia me encontrar à noite. Fez questão de que eu não visitasse em Nagóia. Não queria que eu visse como vivia – que confirmasse o meu pesadelo e a minha prognose de que viver no Japão, para nós dois pelo menos, seria pôr em marcha a engrenagem da qual fugiram os bisavós ao emigrar para o Brasil”¹² (108). While he is happy to see his sister, he laments what she has become, tracing her present to her past and their family’s past, her use-value quantified in monetary terms, herself phantasmagorically haunted by generations of *dekasegi* ghosts.

The narrator’s sister, a minor character who herself haunts while also being haunted, emerges from the “shadow-space” of the narrative to guide the reader in their discovery of *dekasegi* (Woloch 40). Previous to this, she is “an implied human who gets constricted into a delimited role, but who has enough resonance *with* a human being to make us aware of this constricted position *as* delimited” (40). While only physically present in the narrative for two pages, she shifts the representation of *dekasegi* in the novel. She appears one night at an Osaka Internet café. Inside the Internet café, the narrator marvels at the convenience of the café with its showers, food options, and individual booths where patrons could sleep or use the computer. He also acknowledges, however, that the convenience of the café supports the inconvenience of Japan’s work culture. The narrator explains that the cafés exist because “muitos não conseguiam voltar para casa depois do trabalho (porque ficaram no escritório até tarde ou perderam o trem depois de tomar um porre num bar qualquer)”¹³ (112). Similarly, the narrator’s sister meets him at the café because she cannot switch shifts with anyone and must return to work after her evening with him. Thus, their family reunion occurs in this non-personal postmodern space, which, Jameson would argue, “does not even feel the need to subvert or deconstruct familial values any longer” (166). Indeed, the narrator recalls, “Lá pelas tantas, fui buscar comida nas máquinas. Dois potes de plástico com macarrão. Aquele era o nosso jantar em família”¹⁴ (113). This one evening, then, highlights the failure of capitalism to support families in a globalized world. Carvalho’s novel also depicts this failure. While they are both physically present in the café, the restoration of the family unit remains unattainable; she can only spend a night with him, a night that “Não conseguia mantê-los abertos”¹⁵ (113), relegating the time to a momentary familial specter.

Through postmodern hauntology, the narrator experiences multiple intergenerational hauntings; his *dekasegi* sister haunts him, after the scenario of discovery provokes confusion in him and lures him in to participate in Setsuko’s story. He is motivated forward toward Japan while feeling stuck in the past because “the time is out of joint,” as Derrida explains (21). According to Derrida,

“out of joint” time also emphasizes “history [and] world” (21). The many meanings of this word suggests a multiplicity and inaccessibility that Carvalho’s representations of Japanese Brazilians capture. While waiting for his sister, he thinks about Setsuko’s story and her connection to Tanizaki, bringing up the following excerpt from Tanizaki’s “In Praise of Shadows”: “Were the Nō to be lit by modern floodlamps . . . this sense of beauty would vanish under the harsh glare. And thus . . . it is an essential condition of the Nō that the stage be left in the darkness in which it has stood since antiquity” (Harper and Seidentsticker 26). The narrator’s reunion with his sister, while occurring in the shadows, is illuminated by the harsh glare of a computer screen. Here, her features stand stark, and, like the modern lights in a Nō theater, “vanish under the harsh glare” of the computer screen. The narrator describes his sister as “magra, esquelida e pálida, como um fantasma”¹⁶ (112-13). Thus, just like how the beauty of Nō disappears under the harsh modern lights, the dekasegi’s condition becomes jarringly clear through the light of the computer screen, losing all its beauty. It is here, away from the shadows, that the narrator discovers that his sister is haunted by the failed promises of dekasegi life.

Many dekasegi arrived in Japan believing that adapting to life in Japan as a Nikkei would be easier. In reality, however, as Carvalho depicts, it means adapting to long work hours, living without your family, and oftentimes being haunted by the past. In remembering the past in Brazil, the narrator states,

Eu ainda lembrava dos dias que passamos juntos nos ônibus a caminho de Bastos e das cidades em miniature, recordações de gente que já não cabia em lugar nenhum, a condição que herdamos. Quando minha irmã era pequena, todos imaginavam a mulher que um dia ela seria. Todos esperavam o cumprimento de uma promessa. Eu também esperava. Compreendi que tudo tinha terminado no dia em que ela me ligou para dizer que estava decida, tinha conseguido um emprego no Japão, ia trabalhar numa fábrica de automóveis.¹⁷ (109)

Here, Carvalho explicitly links dekasegi hauntology to “a condition that we inherited”, making it an intergenerational haunting. He elaborates on this condition earlier in the novel, writing: “Podíamos ter perdido os costumes e a língua, mas as origens nos chamavam de volta, como uma miragem, para concluir a humilhação de imigrantes. . . a humilhação que estava à nossa espreita, para acabar com o sonho dos meus pais, os sanseis assimilados, para nos pôr de volta nosso lugar de decasségus analfabetos”¹⁸ (29). Thus, when the narrator and his sister were unable to find work in Brazil, their hope becomes a hopeless haunting of failed capitalism that Carvalho explicitly describes as a humiliation. This humiliation allows the reader to discover the cyclical nature of the familial trajectory:

his sister is no longer the promise of the future but has become, instead, a ghost of the past, a ghost that testifies to the unfulfilled logic of *dekasegi*. This logic is formed through the connotation of the word *dekasegi* itself; the *dekasegi*'s goal is to return home after having saved enough money. And yet, the archives reveal that generations of *dekasegi* often found themselves unable to return. The ghosts of *dekasegi* become characters whose repertoire invokes a postmodern hauntology, such as that depicted by Carvalho's *O sol se põe em São Paulo*.

Discovering Mythological Ghosts: *Akaneiro no yakusoku*

While Carvalho's novel depicts a postmodern hauntology whose shadows haunt the cityscapes of São Paulo and Osaka, the Japanese film *Akaneiro no yakusoku* also uses the scenario of discovery to quell mythological ghosts to offer a future of possibility for *dekasegi* in Japan, something that lacks in Carvalho's novel. Shiozaki features many existing characteristics of Yamatokōriyama in Nara, including its goldfish and the interaction between the Japanese and Japanese Brazilian communities, showcasing and "reaffirm[ing] the goodness of Yamatokōriyama" ("Shiozaki kantoku ga jimoto Yamotokōriyama-shi de megahon"). Released in 2012, the film contrasts with Carvalho's novel by offering the possibility of friendship and support between the Japanese and Japanese Brazilian community, while maintaining how Japanese Brazilians suffer in the neoliberalist fantasy of *dekasegi* life. The film tells the story of two children, Ricardo and Hanako, who find a mythological blue goldfish while their families are on the brink of financial failure. Ricardo's mother, a *dekasegi* who has been recently fired from her job, must figure out if they can stay in Japan or if they should return to Brazil. Hanako's father, on the other hand, owns a goldfish farm that, like the other goldfish farms around them, is increasingly finding it difficult to stay afloat financially. Through a scenario of discovery, the film transfers the characters from their droll lives to a mythological past that opens them up to future possibilities.

The film roots its mythological past in the figure of the blue goldfish. Ricardo first encounters the fish after a particularly rough day at school. Without Japanese language skills, Ricardo cannot follow along in classes. During a break, the other boys bully him by holding him down, pulling down his pants, and putting a live goldfish down his underwear. Ricardo runs out of the classroom, panicked, wearing only his underwear, and runs into Hanako. Horrified of seeing a boy in his underwear, Hanako calls him a pervert and runs away from him every time he tries to apologize. On the way home from school, Ricardo passes a *kofun* (a mound that served as a grave, popular from the 3rd to the 7th

centuries), where he sees a woman in historical clothing bathed in light. He follows her and comes to a stream where he discovers a glowing blue fish. Mesmerized, Ricardo decides to take the fish home.

Both Ricardo and Hanako are haunted in this film: Ricardo by his memories of Brazil and Hanako by her deceased mother and her father's present loss of the goldfish farm. While Ricardo and Hanako are not friends at the beginning of the film, Ricardo sees Hanako after finding the goldfish. It is at this moment that they both discover that the fish glows. The mythology of the blue fish grounds them by transferring onto them and those around them a discovery that shifts them from invisibility to visibility. The discovery is rooted in a story that Hanako's mother told her before she passed away:

Once upon a time, a beautiful Chinese Princess was sent to the distant country of Japan to marry a Japanese Prince. But soon after she arrived in Japan the Prince fell ill, and died, even though he was still very young. Now the princess was all alone. She spoke no Japanese, had no friends. She was bullied in the Palace. She became sadder and sadder. The only friend she could talk to was a shiny crimson goldfish that she had brought with her from China. She prayed to it every day. She prayed every day, because the Prince had made a promise to her just before he died. The prince told the princess not to worry if he died. He would come to her, changed into the form of the goldfish that she loved so much. So the princess prayed every single day after his death. And to this day, the princess is still there, waiting for the day she can meet him again.
(*Akaneiro no yakusoku*)

The audience, familiar with the kofun burial grounds, imagines that the blue goldfish is a reincarnation of this prince. Both the princess's ghost and the blue fish she helps Ricardo discover, then, become, like Diana Taylor's concept of ghosting, "a visualization that continues to act politically" (143). The blue goldfish, as a reincarnation of the myth, glows, making itself visible to the children. Hanako and Ricardo try to convince the unbelieving adults of its magic, many of whom are caught up in other politics, such as the loss of goldfish revenue and the invisibility of *dekasegi*.

The scenario of discovery in this film, then, is expressly linked to visibility/invisibility. The film captures a past that diminishes the invisible characters to ghosts, shadows, and specters. Here, the children struggle to protect the discovery of a mythological past while the adults seemingly endeavor to perform a discovery that will benefit them and move them forward in a present superficially separate from its past. The film's framework embodies Derrida's hauntology, "comprehending . . . [the Other], but incomprehensibly" (10). This hauntology ultimately seeks to

highlight the Japanese Brazilian dekasegi Other without ever fully coming to an understanding of the underlying conditions that suppress the dekasegi.

For example, when Ricardo first appears, the audience meets him through his dekasegi mother, Maria. Maria's supervisor has just given her notice that her contract at the factory has expired. She arrives home after working a night shift, only to be greeted by an eviction order. She removes the notice from her door, enters the apartment, and wakes up her son. Like most children, Ricardo does not want to go to school. He tries to negotiate with his mother in a way that is specific to children of dekasegi, saying, "Mom, if you promise we'll go back to Brazil, I'll go" (*Akaneiro no yakusoku*). Maria takes a deep breath, kisses him, and continues preparing him for school. Here, the audience sees the first moment in which hauntology envelops the mother and child. Ricardo is haunted by an imagined Brazil that promises to be better than his present in Japan. Maria, on the other hand, is haunted by an imagined Japan that promised to be better than her past in Brazil. The hauntology of the family, then, is inextricably tied to loss: the loss of a homeland and the security that a homeland promises. While Ricardo sees that loss tied to language, school, and friends, Maria recognizes how it goes further, tying it to job, housing, and immigration status security. Combined, all three factors exemplify the unraveling of the neoliberalist dekasegi fantasy that brought her to Japan.

Shiozaki's film further portrays the fantasy of dekasegi life by setting the film in Yamatokōriyama in Nara prefecture. The town largely bases its income on a declining goldfish industry that the mayor believes should be uprooted for a new theme park. Dismissing the existing farms, he says, "The goldfish farms around there aren't making any money anyway . . . It's only a matter of time before they go out of business" (*Akaneiro no yakusoku*). The failing farms (which also include Hanako's family farm) all have value to the mayor specifically because their fish have become ghosts of commodities without exchange-values. Thus, the farms are haunted by fish that once were commodities. Derrida expounds upon the haunting by saying that "[w]ithout it, one could not even form the concept either of use-value, or of value in general" (202). The lack of value of these commodities renders the farms and their families invisible because they cannot produce commodities. Indeed, the only visitors that the audience sees on the farms are the debt collectors and the City Hall employees that are trying to convince the families to sell until Ricardo arrives with his blue goldfish. With Ricardo's arrival, the scenario of discovery continues, one which "bridges past and future as well as here and there" (Taylor 58). In Yamatokōriyama, the discovery of the goldfish leads the characters to a discovery of visibility, one in which goldfish helps to render visible the farms and their families, especially those who are Japanese Brazilians.

On this journey of discovery, however, the children fight to protect the goldfish from adults who attempt to see it solely for its exchange-value. The first to see value in the goldfish is Hanako's father, who immediately runs to find lore about the goldfish. Here, he discovers the name of the goldfish variety, the Tensei (天青), in an archive that houses a handwritten manuscript that describes the goldfish's blue glow. After Hanako and Ricardo protect him, he appears the next day at the elementary school, insisting to Hanako that "Our entire future lies in the goldfish! . . . We have to find that goldfish. That's our future!" (*Akaneiro no yakusoku*). Similarly, Maria capitalizes on the goldfish when she realizes that the mayor sees a use-value in it, exchanging it for a place to live. She hopes that by having a place to live, she can reestablish her dekasegi fantasy. The adults' fascination with the goldfish is best captured a few scenes later in the mayor's office. Here, Nishida Mayuko, a City Hall employee stands next to a map of Yamatokōriyama, while the mayor stands on the table wearing a pink hat topped with a stuffed red goldfish, snapping pictures of the blue goldfish. When Nishida confesses to not understanding why the mayor wants the goldfish, he replies, "This goldfish will be the key to the whole plan. A symbol! Of the Goldfish Park! A BRAND, Mayuko. A brand!" (*Akaneiro no yakusoku*). In his discovery of the goldfish, then, he hopes that, while not a commodity, it bears a use-value that will entice others to visit Yamatokōriyama, the forthcoming goldfish theme park, and, ultimately, be profitable for him.

The discovery of the goldfish launches everyone to dream of the future. Maria's future, however, is a neoliberalist fantasy of dekasegi migrant workers. She quickly sees her fantasy dissolve when City Hall houses them in a reconstruction of an Edo period house, tucking them away in a place where they will no longer be a nuisance and where they can remain invisible. The juxtaposition of Maria's bright, Brazilian-style clothes alongside the Edo period kitchen suggests a retreat into a space that values shadows. Here, the shadows "allow for ambiguity, complexity . . . at the same time that they question simple borders" (De Medeiros 5). In these shadows, Maria questions the borders that do not exist in their new home. Instead, parkgoers visit the house, rendering her and Ricardo invisible. In other words, since Maria has worn out her use-value as a dekasegi laborer and exchanged the blue goldfish, the only commodity that the family had, the film demonstrates that dekasegi are dispensable. Moreover, by setting this scene in an Edo period home, when emigration from Japan began, the film places Maria and Ricardo into the historical past of their ancestors, further emphasizing the ghosts of the past and the hauntology in which dekasegi partake. Through this retreat into the past, Maria can finally accept that the dekasegi fantasy of migrant laborers is truly a neoliberalist fantasy.

Because migrant labor returns to its status as a neoliberalist fantasy, no one can help Maria to overcome the system that renders her invisible once she has no use-value. A City Hall employee tells Maria that the city cannot help her because she is not Japanese, saying, “Even Japanese are now experiencing hardship while living their lives. We’re offering homes to those residents so we don’t have any more homes to give to foreigners. What if you return to your country?” (*Akaneiro no yakusoku*). This emphasis on her citizenship reminds Maria that despite the ethnic affinity that gained her entry to Japan, the Japanese government categorizes her and other dekasegi as disposable. This categorization follows policies that the Japanese government enacted after the 2008 financial crisis. Here, the unemployment rate in Japan rose to 40 percent among Brazilian workers, causing many Brazilians to return to Brazil (Ikeuchi 23). The Japanese government paid for their airfare if the Brazilians signed away their rights to return to Japan on the Nikkei visa for a period of time (Ikeuchi 24). Considering Maria’s inability to pay rent at the beginning of the film, her sudden decision to return to Brazil after a few days, and the year of the film (2019), Shiozaki seems to suggest that there is a third party that would pay for her and Ricardo’s return flights. More than likely, this third party would be the Japanese government. Her acceptance of the deal would render her dekasegi status null and she would not be able to return Japan again under the Nikkei visa. Shiozaki depicts this invisibility in a moment where Maria and Ricardo ride the bus on the way to the airport.

The only place that Maria and Ricardo are visible and worthy is the Brazilian café, Samba no Pé, where they spend their first night after being evicted. Here, the Japanese owner exalts Brazil and samba. As one of the city employees, Nishida, complains about her day, he says, “You suck at your job and you don’t have a guy. You’re the one that said you wanted to change. Don’t underestimate the spirit of samba” (*Akaneiro no yakusoku*). According to him, samba can change anything. And, historically, the samba parade during *carnaval* temporarily abates quotidian realities for its participants. In his study on carnival, *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes*, Roberto DaMatta writes,

The members of the samba schools know they are black and poor, most of them belonging to the marginal labor market of Rio de Janeiro, but in their rehearsals and during Carnival they are fully aware of the fact that they are the “teachers” or “professors” of music and rapture (*alegria*). In this way they can invert their position in the social structure, compensating for their social and economic inferiority with an obvious and indisputable superiority during Carnival. (126)

It is through the performance of samba, a parade of illusion, escape, and temporary distraction that Shiozaki seeks to resolve the plot. He depicts the samba parade destroying the major conflict: the

mayor's announcement of a new theme park that would destroy the community. The parade gives the children the opportunity to steal back the blue goldfish, reunite it with the red goldfish in the kofun, and release themselves from the postmodern hauntology that centers the myth of the goldfish.

The visibility and prominence of the samba parade disrupts the existing use-value system in place in Yamatokōriyama. The samba parade creates an opportunity for Nishida, the city employee, to announce how the mayor collaborated with the local yakuza to build the theme park for personal profit. In this moment of samba, Nishida renders the mayor and his theme park plans useless and invisible, retrieving Maria from the shadows of invisibility and handing her a samba costume. By including her in the samba parade, Shiozaki returns her a use-value that reincorporates her as part of the community to offer a future of possibility for dekasegi in Japan. Shiozaki further concretizes this at the end of the film, which depicts the idyllic, rural community of Yamatokōriyama flourishing as the location of a goldfish-scooping contest. Here, the once floundering goldfish farms (including that of Hanako's father) are busily packing live goldfish. Shiozaki pauses to show Maria packing one of the boxes while smiling happily. She is, once again, visible as part of the Yamatokōriyama community, embracing the neoliberalist use-value system as a dekasegi.

Conclusion

The contradictions of visibility that emerges in postmodern hauntology in these texts, then, focuses on dekasegi. In *O sol se põe em São Paulo*, the dekasegi emerges not only as a physical laborer but also as a condition that has been passed down from generation to generation. Specters of the past color the present, causing the narrator to state, “Durante muito tempo, eu tentei fugir como o diabo da cruz de tudo o que fosse japonês. . . Eu podia nunca ter pisado no Japão, mas por muito tempo tentei acreditar que era onde ficava o inferno”¹⁹ (Carvalho 28-29). His hauntology centers the disappointing failure of dekasegi who left Japan only to labor in a country that they would never leave. His great grandparents were unable to fulfill the promise of return. It is a cyclical past replete with intergenerational trauma. The narrator, therefore, looks to discover another way to break away from the trauma and the specters. The narrator states, “Escrever em português era para mim uma forma de romper com a ilusão de imigrantes dos bisavós (que era possível escapar ou voltar atrás) e reconhecer de uma vez por todas que estamos todos amaldiçoados, onde quer que seja. Sempre. E que o Céu é aqui mesmo”²⁰ (Carvalho 20). If dekasegi are all cursed and haunted, then, the only chance they have for breaking from this trauma is to embrace their identity as Brazilian. This suggests that the ending of the novel, where the narrator produces a written story in Portuguese, redeems his great grandparents' journey and releases

him from the postmodern hauntology. Through the act of writing, the narrator has rendered himself visible in the Brazilian archive, much in the same way that the film returns Maria and Ricardo to the Yamatokōriyama community at the end.

The depictions of dekasegi in postmodern media, such as Carvalho's *O sol se põe em São Paulo* and Shiozaki's *Akaneiro no yakusoku*, demonstrate the haunted conditions of dekasegi immigrants in Japan, rendering them invisible. The dekasegi, as Jameson suggests in *Postmodernism*, "pursue a delirious vision of transubstantiation" (353). While Carvalho's novel suggests that this transubstantiation could be rooted in an embrace of a Brazilian identity, Shiozaki's film emphasizes that both the Japanese and the Brazilian (as represented by the two goldfish) must be reunited in order to release oneself from postmodern hauntology. Both texts suggest that it is possible to be released from the specters of the past. The release from postmodern hauntology, then, would break away from the "delirious vision" reflected in the narrative styles of the texts to reinsert the dekasegi not into past archives but into newly discovered ones that offer hope and reconciliation with the past.

Notes

¹ I don't see any metaphors in what I say. It's as if all was in the shadow.

² All translations of Carvalho's novel and quotes from the Nielson and Martins Alves are my own. I use the English-language subtitles for the *Akeneiro* quotes.

³ I saw what I didn't want to, that my illusion wouldn't end if I didn't write the first line . . . [d]eep inside, I still thought that I could write – and one day save myself without even knowing from what.

⁴ historical and social circumstances

⁵ [l]ike all metropolises . . . [is] a city traversed by anonymous and dispersed subjects that move themselves in a withdrawn and oppressive urban space, marked by depersonalization and violence.

⁶ as if it alluded to a fantasy in which there were no real people

⁷ And it was there now, in the silence, while observing him covertly, that Setsuko began to understand that she could not resist. She'd have to act alongside him. The simple proximity of the kyogen actor also transformed her into a kind of actor.

⁸ The plot, more appropriate to kabuki, could be summarized as the decline of a samurai infatuated with a page who he saw pass through the mountains in the retinue of a lord.

⁹ If you didn't see the humor, it's because you are already part of the comedy. You don't see the comical because you're satisfied in living it. The kyogen actor should act in life as if he were acting in a kyogen theater.

¹⁰ lived in Shimogamo, around the namesake temple and the forest Tadasu-no-Mori . . . The name of the forest "where lies are revealed" was wrapped in a magic aura.

¹¹ Returning to Japan as a factory worker (although I had never stepped foot in there before) would perpetuate the failure and the error, the escape would just drown us even more in hell.

¹² My sister could only meet me at night. She made a point that I not visit her in Nagoya. She didn't want me to see how she lived—which confirmed my nightmare and my prognosis that living in Japan, at least for both of us, would set into motion the gears that our great grandparents escaped when they immigrated to Brazil.

¹³ many can't return home after work (because they've stayed late at the office or they missed the train after getting drunk in any of the bars)

¹⁴ After a while, I went to find food in the machines. Two plastic bins with pasta. That was our family dinner.

¹⁵ I could barely keep my eyes open.

¹⁶ skinny, squalid, and pale, like a ghost

¹⁷ I still remember the days that we spent together on the buses back from Bastos and the miniature cities, recollections of people who no longer fit in any place, a condition that we inherited. When my sister was younger, everyone imagined the woman she would become. Everyone waited the fulfilment of a promise. I waited too. I understood that it had all ended on the day she called me to say that she was decided, that she'd found a job in Japan and was going to work in a car factory.

¹⁸ We could have lost the habits and the language, but our beginning called us back, like a mirage, to conclude the humiliation from which the great grandparents fled at the beginning of the 20th Century . . . the humiliation that was at our doorstep that would strip away the dreams of my parents, the assimilated Sansei, to return us to our place as illiterate dekasegi.

¹⁹ For a long time, I tried to escape like the devil from the cross of everything that was Japanese . . . I could have never stepped foot in Japan, but for a long time I tried to believe that it was where hell was.

²⁰ Writing in Portuguese for me was a way of breaking with the immigrant illusion of my great grandparents (which would be possible to escape or return back) and recognize for once that we are all cursed, where ever we were. Always. And that Heaven was right here.

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