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Black Japanese Storytelling as Praxis

Anti-racist Digital Activism and Black Lives Matter in Japan

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"Racism Is Not a Trend"

Toward the end of my yearlong fieldwork in Tokyo, news hit Japan of the murder of George Floyd, a Black man, at the hands of white Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who knelt on Floyd's neck for nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds on May 25, 2020. As the Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations unfolded in the United States and worldwide during the summer of 2020, Grace, a Black Japanese woman in her mid-twenties who had relocated to Tokyo from a rural prefecture in northeastern Japan, began to share videos and images of the demonstrations on her Instagram. Her phone calls to me became more frequent as she wished to express her pain and frustration. While this frustration was directed toward the violence enacted against Black people globally, it was also directed toward acquaintances who responded to her posts with the claim that racism does not exist in Japan. Grace had also noticed that there was a perception among Japanese users of social networking services (SNS), the localized term for social media, that BLM was just another "trend." "Racism is not a trend!" Grace angrily exclaimed to me over the phone.

In previous conversations about my fieldwork on SNS and smartphone culture in contemporary Japan, Grace and I had bonded over our identities as "mixed" Black women (I am Black Dominican and white American; she is Black American and Japanese). We often exchanged stories of the frustrating questions that we receive about our identity. Although Grace often spoke of her experiences humorously, this was a coping mechanism for some of her more disturbing experiences: "I can't take things seriously . . . if I did, I wouldn't survive." Grace spoke of these experiences with me during in-person hangouts or over the phone—these narratives did not make their way into her Instagram. That is, until the summer of 2020. In one Instagram post, Grace featured ten screenshots of paragraphs that she had typed on the Notes application of her smartphone. These paragraphs constituted reflections on discrimination in Japan, including several stories of anti-Black racism that she had encountered. Grace recounted that one teacher in her junior high school, believing that her curly hair was a perm and thus against the school's hair code, forcibly dunked her head beneath a running faucet to "wash it out." Grace's hair stayed curly—it was *her natural hair*, after all. The teacher left without a word, leaving Grace dripping wet in front of the sink.

Grace's storytelling was her own contribution to anti-racist activism in Japan and anti-racist movements on a global, networked scale. In the digital age, SNS have increasingly played a role in highlighting social and political issues. This is due to the capabilities of SNS, as they facilitate the dissemination of information on a wide scale and at a near-instantaneous rate. The use of SNS in movements raises multiple questions. When and how do SNS become tools for movements? In what ways can SNS serve as sites of critical resistance through the sharing of personal stories of injustice? How can these stories educate audiences and confront long-standing misconceptions? I approach these questions by focusing on SNS usage in the context of Japan and the BLM demonstrations of 2020, suggesting that we—as scholars and observers—may consider the acts of storytelling by Black Japanese SNS users as a form of intervention and resistance.[1] In this context, this storytelling aims to contest racialized stereotypes, address misunderstandings of BLM in Japan, and raise awareness of the racism experienced by Black people in Japan. Ultimately, storytelling constitutes an intervention against the perception that racism does not exist in Japan.

Scholars have discussed the caveats of centering interpersonal aspects of racism at the expense of its structural or institutional components—and vice versa.[2] In this chapter, I strive to reach a balance by discussing racism in the context of the perpetuation of racialized stereotypes, violent and discriminatory acts and words directed toward perceived racial and ethnic "others," and the act of othering—all of which must be contextualized in a history of racialized stereotypes in Japan and narrative discourses of Japan as "homogeneous."[3] I also include Sterling's discussion

of structural racism as "racialized people's structurally facilitated inability to complexly represent themselves as full human beings."[4] By using storytelling to speak against racialized stereotypes, media misrepresentations of BLM, and the perception of Japan as devoid of racism, I suggest that Black Japanese users of SNS are seeking to *reclaim* agency in the representation of their identity and lived experience—and thus combat racism.

Context Matters: Digital Activism in Post-3.11 Japan

When and how do SNS become tools for movements? The use of SNS as tools for activism can be attributed to the affordances of these platforms, or "how, for whom, and under what circumstances" these platforms "enable and constrain."[5] danah boyd characterizes persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability as the major affordances of SNS.[6] Hashtags (#) and livestreaming have played significant roles in digital activism. Hashtags denote a particular topic or message that can easily be attached to posts, shared, and searched. They can be characterized as an "indexing system."[7] Hashtags and their corresponding algorithms also "suggest" potential shared connections, though they do not necessarily force the user to engage.[8] Yet when users do engage, social and political movements may result. It is thus unsurprising that the term "hashtag activism" has been adopted into vernacular usage.[9] Livestreaming—often paired with hashtags—embodies unscheduled reporting at the hands of the user, and its nature as an "unfiltered" form of documentation produces a visceral air.[10] Such documentation may highlight an act of injustice occurring instantaneously near the user or an event in which the user is participating.

Since digital technologies are localized differently, despite their seemingly "universal" nature, examinations of digital activism must consider historical and societal context.[11] In examining digital activism and the digital circulation of personal narratives in Japan, we must begin with the Triple Disaster of March 11, 2011, also known as 3.11. The disaster involved the catastrophic trifecta of a magnitude 9.0 earthquake, a tsunami, and the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant. 3.11 was also fully covered on SNS; shortly after the disaster, cell phone transmitters became inundated with calls, leading to massive call failures. SNS thus served as key tools in confirming the safety of loved ones, exchanging accounts of the disaster, and crowdsourcing information in the wake of media distrust. SNS were also used to critique the government's response to the disaster and mobilize antinuclear demonstrations.[12] Slater, Nishimura, and Kindstrand suggest that this political engagement can be attributed to the ability of SNS to recruit individuals around "explicitly oppositional and political causes" and establish "connections among already organized groups in common causes."[13] This also held true for the BLM demonstrations of 2020, which constitute a significant moment within the genealogy of digital activism in post-3.11 Japan.

The message of the BLM movement—namely, the necessity to protect Black lives against police brutality, violence, and racism—was pertinent long before the creation of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. This hashtag came into existence after the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager, by George Zimmerman. In response to Zimmerman's later acquittal, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi created #BlackLivesMatter.[14] #BlackLivesMatter has since become a rallying hashtag in activism against anti-Black racism and violence. The continuity of this digital movement was highlighted in the resurgence of BLM demonstrations following the 2020 murder of George Floyd. A video recorded by witness Darnella Frazier was circulated on SNS, showing Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck—Floyd's cries and pleas could be heard vividly, yet Chauvin continued to kneel. Floyd's murder and the murder of countless other Black Americans triggered nationwide and global demonstrations. News of the murder and demonstrations eventually reached Japan.

As I watched broadcasts of the demonstrations on Japanese media, I noticed that the images and the narrations by newscasters focused on the destruction of property rather than systemic racism and the murder of Black people. I would later learn that this was not unlike the coverage taking place *within* the United States. Nevertheless, such coverage impacted impressions of the demonstrations in Japan. On June 7, 2020, the *Nippon Hōsō Kyokai* (NHK), a leading broadcaster, aired a segment on the BLM demonstrations as part of *Kore de Wakatta! Sekai no Ima* (*Now I Understand! The World Today*), an international affairs program directed toward a younger audience. I was exposed to the segment via the circulation of its controversial animated clip on Twitter. In the clip, a muscular Black man with cornrows strangles a coin purse as he angrily speaks of economic inequity disadvantaging Black Americans, especially against the backdrop of COVID-19.[15] The clip, which heavily relied on caricatures and stereotypes of Blackness, was a shock to my system. The *Sekai no Ima* broadcast and the ensuing criticism serve as one case study of localized representations of the BLM demonstrations. There were moments in which BLM was highlighted on SNS, such as the marches that took place in Tokyo and Osaka on June 14 and June 7, respectively.[16] While these marches brought attention to anti-Black racism, the marches also faced backlash, including assertions that BLM was "an American issue"—that racism does not exist in Japan.[17] Here, it is necessary to explore several moments and themes in Japan's encounters with Blackness.

Japan's Encounters with Blackness

Scholars have noted the arrival of enslaved Black people with Portuguese traders in the mid-1500s as perhaps Japan's first encounter with Blackness.[18] While the enslaved were initially viewed with marvel, Leupp explains that by the late eighteenth century, dark skin carried negative connotations. Exposure to

Western depictions of Black people as subhuman—evident in the minstrel show enacted for Japanese officials by white sailors in blackface aboard Commodore Matthew Perry's ship in 1854—especially impacted Japanese views on race.[19] Later encounters with Blackness encompassed various exchanges and representations. There is the engagement of Black American intellectual-activists such as W. E. B. Du Bois with Japan; the consumption of Black culture, ranging from hip-hop to Rastafarianism; and the fetishization of the Black body and racist portrayals of Blackness, evident in literature such as *Chibikuro Sambo* (*Little Black Sambo*).[20]

With regards to mixed-race identity in Japan relevant to this study on the anti-racist digital activism of Black Japanese users of SNS, scholars take the interracial relationships between European traders and Japanese women as a starting point.[21] Historical discourse on Black Japanese identity focuses on the context of World War II and the U.S. occupation of Japan. In this discourse, Black Japanese children born from Black American GIs and Japanese women are often painted in a tragic light as "mixed-blood" orphans.[22] Contemporary discussions of Black Japanese identity have taken on more nuanced forms. Carter, for example, has discussed how mixed Black Okinawans are "interpellated into militarized spaces in ways Black Japanese mainland people are not."[23] A common theme in examinations of mixed-race identity in Japan is marginalization through othering. This othering takes place in the context of ideologies such as *nihonjinron*: the theory of "Japaneseness" that centers on the "cultural, racial, and ethnic homogeneity of Japan."[24] Shaitan and McEntee-Atalianis explain that such a discourse impacts identity construction—mixed-race Japanese individuals who live in Japan are sometimes treated as "foreigners" and must navigate "self" and "other" ascriptions.[25]

Recent amplified coverage of Black Japanese public figures has brought issues of identity and othering to the public eye. Ariana Miyamoto, who is Black American and Japanese, received the title of Miss Universe Japan 2015. Miyamoto faced backlash for her victory, including assertions that Miss Universe Japan should "have a real Japanese face."[26] Nevertheless, Miyamoto expressed a resolve to represent mixed-race and Black Japanese identity and "challenge the definition of being Japanese."[27] Black Japanese athletes have also captured attention—notably, tennis champion Naomi Osaka, who is of Haitian and Japanese heritage. Razack and Joseph have discussed how Osaka's status as representing Japan sometimes results in the erasure of her Haitian heritage; at the same time, her Japanese heritage is frequently questioned, and she is the target of racist comments regarding her Blackness.[28]

Concurrent with these experiences is the attempted erasure of Osaka's activism. She has utilized Twitter as a platform to share her own thoughts regarding anti-Black racism and to amplify BLM in the wake of the 2020 global demonstrations. In particular, her messages have centered on accountability, as

she critiques inaction and silence. “Just because it isn’t happening to you doesn’t mean it isn’t happening at all,” Osaka posted on May 29, 2020.[29] Osaka’s digital activism was met with criticism from Twitter users—within and beyond Japan—who asserted that sports should not be entangled with “politics.” However, these assertions did not deter Osaka. During the US Open in September 2020, which took place in the midst of the COVID pandemic, the tennis star wore seven black masks bearing the names of Black Americans killed by the police and/or white racists: Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, Philando Castile, and Tamir Rice.[30]

We see that Black Japanese public figures have used their visibility in the media to challenge discourse on so-called “Japaneseness” and spread awareness about anti-Black racism. But what about those who do not bear celebrity status?

Beyond Trending: Storytelling as Anti-racist Pedagogy

Can SNS serve as a site of critical resistance through the sharing of personal stories of injustice? If so, in what ways? Black Japanese storytelling is a testimony of dissent against historical racial narratives that are not only incorrect but also erase particular lived experiences. For example, the narrative of Japan as “homogeneous,” and thus devoid of racism, erases their experiences of anti-Black racism occurring throughout their lives. These acts of storytelling are also taking place in a post-3.11 moment characterized by media distrust, growing reliance on crowdsourced information, and the digital circulation of narratives. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital has become *the* medium for activism. We may consider how the individual, including their stories, becomes the message—a spin on Marshall McLuhan’s assertion of the medium as message.[31] Here, we turn to storytelling among Black Japanese users of SNS who are keenly aware that anti-Black racism is an issue relevant to Japan.

Grace

Grace was born to a Black American mother and Japanese father in a rural prefecture in northeastern Japan. For Grace, Instagram proved to be a helpful means of meeting fellow *hāfu*, or mixed-race individuals.[32] Grace often adds identity markers as hashtags in her posts, such as #blasian. She recalled multiple times when she met other *hāfu* by happenstance in Tokyo and they recognized her from her public posts. The BLM demonstrations in the summer of 2020 motivated Grace to use her Instagram as a platform to spread awareness about anti-Black racism and the BLM movement itself. Within her Instagram Stories, which often took the form of video narrations recorded in Japanese during her lunch break, Grace emphasized shared humanity and the importance of “spreading love, not hate.” In her first series of videos, she brings in her positionality:

> I'm half Asian, half Black. I'm a Japanese-American *hāfu*. So I have a lot of thoughts about this. And when you ask why, it's because the issue in America is that Black people are getting targeted and killed. I want to think "I don't live in America, I live in Japan so I'm safe!" But I can't. It hurts so much to see Black people getting beat, killed . . . looked at with harsh looks. It absolutely hurts.

"What's happening now is not 'somebody else's problem,'" Grace continues. She urges her viewers to imagine what they would do if they experienced such violence, or if their loved ones were killed. She concludes with a call for her viewers to carefully consider their words and actions and to speak and act with reciprocity in mind.

While Grace received positive responses after her first series of videos, she also received responses from followers that demonstrated a lack of understanding and empathy. In one of her near-daily narrations on Instagram, Grace spoke of the confusion she felt upon receiving a reply from a user that stated, "I don't think that there is discrimination in Japan." Grace postulated that the user reached this conclusion because they have not experienced discrimination, have not discriminated against others, and have not witnessed discrimination. In another video, Grace spoke of her frustration upon hearing a colleague state, "Whenever I open SNS, it's discrimination this, discrimination that. . . . I want this trend to be over soon." Grace recalled her internal thought process: "This is not a trend!" She wondered aloud how an individual could possibly see videos of police brutality and not feel *anything* in response.

Through her Instagram Stories, Grace resolved to amplify the movement through continuous posting while also encouraging her followers to do the same. In one video, Grace commented that her followers' acts of sharing her videos had resulted in strangers contacting her with words of gratitude for her insight and vulnerability. Grace then encouraged her followers to act: "If you have your own thoughts, I want you to put them into words and put them out there . . . if you don't say anything or do anything, I think that's the same as turning a blind eye to the issue." This statement highlights accountability in the age of SNS: a call to engagement following exposure to a message or issue.

Joel

Joel is a college student, born and raised in Tokyo. He made an interesting reference to his Japanese-Guyanese identity when first introducing himself to me during a video interview: "I'm from Japan, even though I don't look like I'm from Japan." Joel had experienced bullying as a child, along with incessant questions regarding his background. He explained that in kindergarten, he was called "gorilla" or

"Obama." While he joked that being called Obama made him feel presidential, he also explained the complexity of his childhood experiences:

> But as a kid I didn't really feel good, of course. In Japan, if you're *hāfu*, you don't have to be Black or white, the fact that you're *hāfu* is just being different from Japanese, so you're gonna get bullied. If you look different, you're gonna get bullied. As I grew up I felt kind of discriminated against just because I'm Black. But I got used to it.

For Joel, the positive feature of SNS was the prevalence of information. He explained that SNS such as Instagram and TikTok had been influential in spreading information about BLM among Japanese youths. Joel indicated that he wished to amplify BLM on SNS in a way that reiterated that this was not just a fleeting "moment":

> On SNS, one of my friends made this website for BLM and asked us to spread it. But I haven't done it yet, just because I don't want this to be just a "moment" thing. You know? So, I'm planning to post that when people start to forget it. So maybe a week later or two weeks later.

This assertion connected to a later point that Joel made about societal dynamics: the tendency to "forget about things and move onto the next fiery topic." Joel's decision to amplify his acquaintance's BLM website *after* it was trending hints at an intervention against performative, ephemeral engagement in digital activism.

Joel remarked that he was shocked that racism was so blatantly present in the United States, in contrast to racism in Japan, which he viewed as more discreet yet insidious. The stories told by Black Japanese individuals highlight othering encounters, both blatant and discreet, occurring throughout their lives in Japan. Such encounters can be so pervasive that they are accepted as an unfortunate yet unavoidable component of lived experience—or as Joel described them, something that one gets "used to." These encounters, combined with the myth that Japan is "homogeneous," and thus devoid of racism, are reminiscent of what Nixon characterizes as "slow violence." Nixon explains that while violence is frequently perceived as "immediate" and "explosive," slow violence "occurs gradually and out of sight."[33] The narratives of Joel and Grace constitute a form of resistance against racism in Japan, slow and otherwise. The act of ignoring the issue or treating the issue as a "trend" is a form of violence that, in the eyes of Joel and Grace, cannot continue.

@cocoalizzy

Instagram user @cocoalizzy, called Lizzy by her followers, has played a significant role in disseminating information on BLM in Japanese and spreading awareness of racism in Japan. On June 2, 2020, Lizzy posted a video on IGTV, Instagram's video platform, that has now been viewed over two million times.[34] In the video, Lizzy cries as she explains that Black people in the United States are killed just because of their skin color. She also discusses her experiences as a Black Japanese woman:

> I'm Japanese in terms of heart (*kokoro*) and citizenship, but since my skin color is Black I've been a target of discrimination. There are many people who think that I'm a villain just because of that, and there are people who have been killed because of that . . . people who are the same age as me, people who are younger than me . . . people have been killed while just going out shopping, or while just jogging.

Lizzy describes the discrimination she experienced in Japan, recalling how customers at one of her part-time jobs expressed that they did not wish to buy products from a Black person. Ultimately, Lizzy wishes for her Japanese viewers to realize that the issue is a *global* marginalization of Black individuals. "It does not matter if you are Black, white, or Japanese, what do *you* think of this situation?" she asks, emphasizing that anti-Black racism is not the concern of only one demographic. Lizzy urges her audience to think more deeply about the meaning of the demonstrations. For example, rather than hyperfixating on the destruction of property when viewing media coverage, she urges viewers to consider *why* this is taking place. Lizzy also prompts viewers to imagine if *their* friends were discriminated against—or worse, murdered. What is interesting is Lizzy's direct appeal toward Japanese individuals who consume Black culture. We may consider this to be a form of accountability toward those who enjoy Black culture but do not acknowledge the burdens of being Black.[35]

Lizzy's video is significant not only because of its raw emotion but also because of its acknowledgment of the power of SNS in sharing information. Lizzy encourages her audience to learn from her video and circulate it. She also suggests individual actions that her viewers can take, including searching for keywords such as "*kokujin sabetsu* (anti-Black racism)" and "America, George Floyd"; reading related content; and uploading this content onto their Instagram. By highlighting Black Japanese storytelling on Instagram, I wish to emphasize that Instagram should also receive attention as a site of activism. Twitter is often the object of studies on digital activism due to its centrality in movements such as the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011.[36] Instagram's popularity among youths in Japan, combined with the appeal of its visuality, mark the platform as an effective means of sharing stories and spreading awareness of injustice. Activists can record videos

or create informative visuals that are accessible for a broader audience. The ability to directly share Instagram Stories to acquaintances or to one's own feed facilitates the circulation of activist messages. Grace had shared Lizzy's video onto her own Instagram Stories with the caption, "She's *hāfu* just like me, so proud of her!" Although Grace does not personally know her, Lizzy's visibility as a Black Japanese woman, combined with her vulnerable storytelling, created an empathetic bond. These acts also coalesced with storytelling by Black Japanese figures such as Naomi Osaka—fostering opportunities for community-building and the development of a Black Japanese digital network.

Japan as Site of Inquiry: Counterpublics and Black Digital Networks

How can personal stories of injustice educate audiences and confront long-standing misconceptions in society? The past decade has seen an increase in works centering the intersections of Blackness and digital media. This literature has approached topics such as the racial biases of algorithms, #BlackLivesMatter, and "Black Twitter."[37] The current literature, however, focuses on Blackness from the perspective of the United States, along with hardware and software developed within this context. There is a need to expand this focus. As Sobande highlights, Black (digital) experiences cannot be reduced to a monolith—although the digital seems "borderless," one must not neglect the impact of "social constructions of the nation-state, citizenship, ethnicity, racial identity and borders."[38]

The stories shared by Black Japanese users of SNS demonstrate Japan's potential as a site of inquiry in transnational Black digital networks and counterpublics, or "the alternative networks of debate created by marginalized members of the public."[39] Users such as Lizzy and Grace speak against those who consume Black culture in Japan yet remain silent on the issue of anti-Blackness. It is also worth noting the invocation of empathy in their videos: a call for Japanese viewers to imagine *themselves* or their loved ones in the position of Black people who are endangered every day. Furthermore, it is worth noting users' manipulation of temporality, as evidenced by Joel's resolution to circulate his acquaintance's website at a later date.

The complicated reception of BLM in Japan and the action taken by Black Japanese SNS users offer multiple points for analysis. Of particular interest are the claims against which Black Japanese users are taking action: the perception of BLM as a "trend" and the perception that anti-Black racism is not relevant to Japan. It is possible that the perception of BLM as a "trend" results from the conflation of the hashtag with "trendy" participatory culture. Surface-level engagement with digital activism may also set the ground for confusion. Grace's discussion of her colleague who viewed BLM as a "trend" took place within the context of #BlackoutTuesday,

a media event that took place on June 2, 2020, in which SNS users posted a black box to draw attention to BLM.[40] This event harmed activism; when searching for essential information by typing "#BLM" in search functions, activists instead encountered rows of black boxes.[41]

It is also possible that concentrated coverage of demonstrations in the United States creates a sense of distance from the movement in Japan, paired with the idea that racism is a problem in the US and not in Japan, as evident within the *Sekai no Ima* clip. However, Lizzy's call for users to search "*kokujin sabetsu*" online suggests that perhaps it is no longer excusable to *not* know of the movement. Similarly, Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles assert that "not knowing where to look for alternative narratives is no longer an excuse for those in the mainstream."[42] Thus, while (mis)representations may have sowed the seeds of confusion, users can invest time in understanding anti-Blackness locally and globally. At the same time, there are nuances here regarding accessibility to information and media literacy.

Another dynamic that potentially impacts the reception of BLM among Japanese users of SNS is the imagination of Japan as "homogeneous." However, Japan is *not* homogeneous, as we see from the presence of, for example, *zainichi* (ethnic Korean) communities, which include Korean and Japanese *hāfu*. Black Japanese users are resisting dominant ideologies and racialized stereotypes that still have a hold in contemporary Japan. The establishment of a Black digital network in Japan via SNS can potentially weaken or eradicate this hold. We cannot know or prove if their storytelling truly changed each viewer's racial consciousness, and this is the challenge of digital activism. However, what we *do* know is that these narratives are out there, being watched and circulated—in Lizzy's case, over two million times.

Black Japanese individuals are striving to reclaim their agency in their own representation, and this is significant. Indeed, in their examination of Naomi Osaka's use of social media in resisting "racial binary or fixed Japanese identity classifications," Razack and Joseph suggest that social media can provide athletes "with chances to re-write the racialized story of their success."[43] I suggest that Black digital networks in Japan are worth continued examination well beyond the temporal moment of 2020 because of their potential in fostering activism and community-building. These digital networks become especially crucial when "in-person" opportunities for connection become difficult or impossible—for example, during a global pandemic.[44]

Conclusion: "There Is No Racism in Japan"

Toward the end of my fieldwork, an acquaintance invites me to eat at a restaurant in my neighborhood. On the day of the dinner, I ultimately decide to leave my hair in an afro rather than take an extra twenty minutes to comb it down. Upon opening

the door to the restaurant, my acquaintance looks at me with widened eyes: "*Kin-chan!* Your hair!"[45] As I eat, I notice two children staring and smiling at me. I wave hello, and both children then yell: "So scary (*kowai*)!" Taken aback, I look around and notice that the surrounding individuals, including my acquaintance, are laughing. Before the children leave, they look back at me once more. I wave again, and they once again yell "*kowai!*" before leaving with their mother. I tell my acquaintance that the incident left me upset. "They probably have never seen a foreigner before," he shrugs. I have my doubts, given our location in Tokyo.

I have always been aware that my various intersecting identities—Dominican American, Black, "mixed," woman—impact my experiences in the field. This awareness sometimes leads to a numb acceptance of interactions that are responses to my identities. Yet, the incident at the restaurant leaves me with a sinking feeling in my stomach. Distressed, I message Grace. I have reservations about relying on interlocutors for emotional support, as this can result in the performance of emotional labor. However, Grace and I have developed a close connection, and I do not know to whom else I should turn. Grace responds quickly and thoughtfully in a mixture of English and Japanese:

> Honestly, I know that feeling, I have experienced that so many times or hella worse.
> Sometimes, kids can be too honest and innocent . . .
> Good parents will correct them on the spot but if not, oh well, it's the parents' fault.
> They have to educate and teach their kids what's 👍👍/👎👎.
> 80% of the time, if things like that happen I will just let it go.
> Although, case by case I will talk to them and teach them in a fun way maybe haha.
> I know in Japan, people will stare at us a lot. People say things that they shouldn't.
> If I were you, I would think of it like this:
> "This kid is the luckiest kid to see MY afro for the first time! I became his hair role model so I hope this kid will never forget me" haha
> But at the same time, I'm sorry that happened and it must hurt your feelings.
> But don't forget, no matter what people say, you're beautiful!
> And it's normal to look different, so be unique. We aren't the same. We are all different people. Looking similar isn't that fun.
> Always be yourself, there is only one *Kin-chan* in existence.
> No one can change you from being you!

In closing with this vignette, I include my own storytelling to open a conversation on positionality and fieldwork. I am now aware of the nuances of that

moment in the restaurant and I feel less of a visceral response. However, I wish that my training as an ethnographer—a method well-represented in Asian Studies—included a discussion of how to process these moments. These moments, while difficult, can also be opportunities for dialogue. Discussions of racism, including the racism experienced by Black scholars, are still approached with trepidation by scholars in Asian Studies. However, these conversations need to happen. Scholars must reflect on their positionality, their own potential complicity in systemic inequity, and their commitment to activism. Perhaps this should be incorporated into both Asian Studies and ethnographic training—how to confront racism, how to support interlocutors and mentees in times of distress, and how to intervene in the face of injustice.

Notes

[1] I wish to emphasize that the opinions and narratives within this chapter are not representative of all Black Japanese individuals. The interviews within this chapter were conducted as part of an ongoing project on digital sociality and smartphone culture in contemporary Japan. The project features thirty-five interviewees, many of whom were young women university students or postgrads in their early twenties. The study sample also features Japanese students who had returned to Japan after living abroad (*kikokushijo*) and mixed-race individuals. Grace and Joel had agreed to participate in the project to discuss their SNS and smartphone usage; since our interviews and conversations coincided with the BLM demonstrations, their responses centered on digital activism. Both consented to discuss their experiences and participate in another ongoing project that I am conducting on mixed-race identity in Japan. The comments made by Grace and Joel coalesced with the narratives of Black Japanese celebrities (such as Ariana Miyamoto), users with public SNS profiles, and influencers (such as @cocoalizzy). The similarities in these narratives demonstrate a need for further scholarship on the experiences of Black Japanese people in Japan—a population that is growing, although we do not know the exact number since the Japanese government does not maintain statistics related to race.

[2] Rosa and Díaz 2019; Sterling 2010.

[3] Befu 2001; Oguma 2002[1995]; Russell 2020; Shin 2010.

[4] Sterling 2010, 27.

[5] Davis 2020, 11.

[6] boyd 2014, 10–11.

[7] Bonilla and Rosa 2015, 5.

[8] Cotter 2019.

[9] Jackson, Bailey, Foucault Welles 2020, xxxii.

[10] Tufekci 2017, xxv.

[11] Ito 2005; Miller 2012; Miller et. al 2021.

[12] Petrovic 2019; Petrovic 2020; Slater, Nishimura, and Kindstrand 2012; Steinberg 2020.

[13] Slater, Nishimura, and Kindstrand 2012, 21-22.

[14] Florini 2019, 22.

[15] Russell 2020; Takeda 2020.

[16] While a discussion of the marches is beyond the scope of this chapter, the literature would benefit from an examination of the use of SNS by organizers and participants.

[17] Rich and Hida 2020.

[18] Leupp 1995; Russell 2020.

[19] Leupp 1995, 7.

[20] Onishi 2013; Cornyetz 1994; Condry 2006; Sterling 2010; Bridges 2016; Russell 1991; Russell 1998.

[21] Earns 2017; Leupp 2017.

[22] Hamilton 2017; Koshiro 1999; Roebuck 2016; Sawada 2001.

[23] Carter 2014, 649.

[24] Befu 2001, 68–69.

[25] Shaitan and McEntee-Atalianis 2017.

[26] Fackler 2015.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Razack and Joseph 2021.

[29] The original tweet may be found here: https://twitter.com/naomiosaka/status/1266514627934015489.

[30] Calow 2021; Mansoor 2020.

[31] McLuhan 1994[1964], 7.

[32] The term "*hāfu*" has been contested, due to its centering of a supposed "half" nature of identity. Some, including Grace, have accepted the term and use it only because it is so widely used in Japan. Throughout this chapter, I use *hāfu* because of its ubiquity and use by Black Japanese interlocutors, although I acknowledge the issues surrounding the term.

[33] Nixon 2011, 2.

[34] @cocoalizzy's video caught the attention of news outlets such as NHK World (2020) and scholars such as Alexis Dudden (2021).

[35] Tate 2003.

[36] Tufekci 2017.

[37] Benjamin 2019; Brock 2020; Florini 2019; Hamilton 2020; McIlwain 2019; Noble 2018; Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles 2020.

[38] Sobande 2020, 6.

[39] Florini 2019; Jackson, Bailey, Foucault Welles 2020, xxxiii.

[40] #BlackoutTuesday diverged from its original initiative, #TheShowMustBePaused, which was started by Jamila Thomas and Brianna Agyemang to protest anti-Black

racism in the music industry and "disrupt the work week" to motivate reflection. #TheShowMustBePaused's mission statement can be found here: https://www.theshowmustbepaused.com/about.

[41] Coscarelli 2020; Willingham 2020.

[42] Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles 2020, 198.

[43] Razack and Joseph 2021, 302.

[44] Hassel 2021.

[45] My nickname, derived from my name (*Kinbarī*). The "*-chan*" within my nickname is an endearing honorific that is typically used when addressing close friends, children, and/or girls.

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