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Restaging Violence: Kim Hiro Incident and the Cultural Citizenship of Imagination

It is now widely recognized that citizenship is entangled with the transnational flows of images and words. Acts of violence, in particular, mediated by various types of media, affect the process of how the practical meaning of “being a citizen” is reproduced and reconstructed with emotional intensity.

This presentation examines the Kim Hiro[Kin Kirö] Incident with regard to cultural citizenship in post-postwar Japan and its transnational affect. In 1968, Kim Hiro, after killing gangsters(yakuzas) and holding hostages, accused Japanese society of ethnic discrimination against Koreans. As his 88-hour standoff with police was subjected to an intensive media spotlight, the long-forgotten problem of Zainichi Koreans(the descendants of colonized Korea staying in Japan), gained a larger audience than ever before. Kim’s “crime as performance” sensationally questioned the self-image of postwar Japan as a homogenous nation in a peaceful transition toward a “universal democratic-welfare-capitalism society.”

By tracing how the mediated imagination of Kim’s violent acts and media performances evoked a series of outcomes within and outside Japan thereafter, this presentation will reconsider the cultural transformation initiated in Japan’s postwar trajectory of citizenship.