

For Antifascist and Horizontal Community

Nami Nanami

2020

I was given the opportunity to speak as a member of the anarcha-feminist group Kouitten (“One Red Spot”) at “May Day for Freedom and Survival,” which took place on May 9, 2020 at the plaza in front of the Shinjuku Alta in Tokyo. These are issues I want to think about together with everyone else who rejects authority.

Hello, everyone. I am Nami Nanami of the anarcha-feminist group One Red Spot.

There are expressions like “there’s no left or right to the coronavirus” and “we’re all in this together” (meaning we all face the same risk together) circulating in this society and on social media, but I think this is wrong.

The turmoil of the coronavirus has made it clear that “this society has an order of priority for lives.”

For example, there are those without status who are locked up in immigration detention, including those whose visas simply expired. The “Three Cs” (closed spaces, crowds, and close contact) can’t be avoided in immigration detention centres where people are also left without any preventative measures or medical care.

The 100,000 yen benefit won’t be paid forever (and 100,000 is hardly enough to begin with!), and it is supposed to be sent to each household. It’s payable to the head of the household, which is to say the father of a family. Also, no money will be paid to non-status residents in Japan.

There were also stories of sex workers with children not receiving paid leave. (Although in this case things improved after those impacted complained.)

Customers have dwindled for those working nights such as for myself and my sex worker friends who now have no work at all.

In such dire straits, regardless of how bad conditions are and even if you fear catching the virus, you may have no choice but to go out. And if you are shut in at home there may be no escape from patriarchal violence.

There are no adequate preventative measures or compensation in areas of care work that are mostly done by women. Friends providing support work for people with disabilities say that “social distancing” is like a story from another world.

“Staying home” and “social distancing” are privileges.

The corona problem is a problem of class and of discrimination.

Things wouldn't have gotten this bad when the new frightening virus emerged it weren't for discrimination and poverty.

If medical expenses were free,

If anybody could be tested and treated,

If there was no poverty or precarious employment,

If there was no rent,

If there were no utility bills,

If there was no debt,

If there was no war and no Olympics,

And if there were no immigration detentions and prisons,

Society could have handled this virus much more effectively.

Why is it we can't we do this?

It's because of capitalism, the nation, patriarchy, and the classes they create: hierarchy. That's what's harming us.

Give everyone 300,000 yen every month starting right away! We agree with this slogan.

But I would like to go further and share some thoughts so we can all think more together about why we say "Give us 300,000 every month!"

I say give us 300,000 because I want to see a world without an order of priority for lives.

I am tired of living in a society like this. We are in danger now because we live in a society that prioritizes some lives over others in this way.

Until everyone has access to tests and treatments, whether they have property or not, Until workers aren't forced to pay rent when they get sick, Until social resources can be allocated to our medical care and housing instead of police, prisons, the Olympics, and wars, we are all truly at risk.

The coronavirus has made this clear to everyone.

We can't go back to the world as it was.

I want us all now to think together about a new world.

It was discussed earlier, but I would also like to consider the issues of fascism, the right wing, and discrimination in this movement.

About a year ago, we started a group called "One Red Spot" with the awareness that discrimination against women and minorities in the movement is a problem that divides us and weakens the whole of our community.

It is a mistake to try and build a movement on ideas like "Since there is neither right nor left in the coronavirus, let's listen to the opinion of the right wing without prejudice" or "Our positions may be different, but I can work with you on this issue, so let's do it together."

Without giving it much thought beyond just being grossed out by the right wing, before you know it self-proclaimed right wingers and self-proclaimed fascists show up in movement spaces. And when you talk to them you might start to think, "Hey, they're not such a bad guy" and then somehow just from that a human relationship starts to develop. We might start to say things like, "our positions are different, but deep down they are a good person." But really? Really?

Good human relations are hard to break. Humans can't compete with human relations.

I think it's suicide for this movement if somehow they can get close, somehow human relationships can be forged, and somehow the right wing gets in.

This is what it means to be “bonded” to human relationships. To bond (hodasu) is written with the character for “kizuna” (bond, ties, fetters, links, etc.)

They say the origin of the term fascism is bondedness or “bondage.” Prime Minister Abe has said that “respect, appreciation, and bonds” can defeat the coronavirus, but those are Prime Minister Abe’s favorite “bonds.”

For right-leaning people, such bonds are built on notions like “giri” and “ninjou” (moral obligation and sentiment) and boss-underling relations, and that can feel like empathy, and before you know it a human relation is in place. This must stop!

I wondered how this could happen, and suspect it’s related to how we haven’t enjoyed strong relations with some left wingers around us who are supposedly comrades and people who refuse authority.

Somehow getting along based on “giri” and “ninjou” or boss-underling dynamics creates a pseudo-family-like, patriarchal relationship that has this society tightly contained and shapes our very selves. Therefore, when it comes to trying to forge different kinds of relations out of these conditions we, myself included, don’t know where to start, what to do or how to do it.

So, when I meet a right winger who seems compassionate, I somehow get sucked in.

That’s why I think this is bigger than just a problem of the right or of repudiating the right wing; it’s also a problem of how weak our community is.

I think up until now we have overlooked the importance of deep, collective relationships of trust rather than the pattern of being “bonded by human relationships.”

I have met some people who behave like minions for the boss monkey even though they are in the movement. I want to point this out as a problem for us to think about.

Because fascism begins with the idea that a person isn’t a person, it doesn’t matter how much we think we can talk things through and that they will eventually understand as fellow humans. Our good faith will just get funnelled back into “the structure of human relations.” So, don’t fall for the right-wing fascist bond that aims to kill us, that abuses foreigners, and kills sex workers. I call on everyone not to be bound to the bonds that kill us.

So then, what kinds of relationships are possible that are not patriarchal – not boss-underling, not big brothers, not all the pseudo-family patriarchal “intimate hierarchical relationships”? How can we build friendships, collectives, and environments based on trust instead? This is what One Red Spot wants to think about now.

Let’s overcome our inner fascism.

We want “solidarity” and “comrades” to be real for us and not just empty calls and slogans.

I would like us all to talk about what horizontal intimacy is. How can those of us who should be in solidarity with one another talk through and overcome disagreements and create a strong community?

How can we get rid of right-wingers, fascists, and bigots from our community without getting stuck in the “if we just talk they’ll understand” trap? How can we distinguish between “people who disagree but who should be in solidarity” and “right-wingers, fascists, and bigots who should not be allowed to be here”?

Speaking for myself and also One Red Spot, I really want us all to start discussing this.

I’ll be at the back dressed all in black, and I’d love to talk about this with you all more. Thank you.

Notes:

“Anti-fascist” is used here as a translation for 反ファシズム, a compound neologism that could be translated more literally as “anti-bondism.” The concept of kizuna 絆 (social bonds, ties, or fetters) as a source of oppression and social control is important later in this speech.

“One Red Spot” is a literal translation of Kouitten (孤一人), an expression for describing the only woman or girl in a group of men or boys.

The “Three Cs” is a translation of sanmitsu 三昧, originally a Buddhist term for the “Three Mysteries” of body, speech, and mind that has been taken up as an official buzzword to describe the three things people should avoid so as not to catch the coronavirus.

“Good human relations” is a translation of 人間関係, which can be understood as favorable (as in to power) patterns of human relations.

Giri 義 refers to moral bonds of obligation, duty, and responsibility. Ninjou 人情 refers to empathy, sentiment, and human kindness.

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