

Invites you to a discussion with **David H. Slater**, Sophia University and **Rosa Barbaran**, Filmmaker of refugee life and politics in Tokyo

# The Whole Block Goes Down: Refugee voices in Japan's detention centers during the pandemic

Date: Wednesday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021  
Time: 7pm-8pm (Tokyo time)  
Presentation will be followed by Q and A  
On Zoom. Open to all; Language English

Please register [HERE](#)



<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=p-YOaaVN3E-jFrtZnYKl0pSDtnsMuJVAtzRnSitkskJUMTBGVzRZOUFIUVgxRIVEUTEyTINGRjNHMy4u>

In the context of the global increase in displaced people, spiking to nearly 80 million in these corona times, Japan has also seen a dramatic increase in the number of applications for refugee asylum since 2010. Despite increasing numbers of applications, Japan has not increased its refugee recognition rate. Unable to return home to sure persecution when rejected, many refugees end up in Japanese detention centers once their visa expires. Like jails, hospitals and detention centers everywhere, detention centers in Japan are crowded and dangerous and unable to protect the detainees inside. Japan has been slower than many other countries to take precautions, including temporary release. This presentation will introduce you to some of the voices from those inside the detention center both before and after the covid crisis. And then, outline some of the policy shifts that have led to this dangerous situation, the conditions of anxiety inside the detention centers themselves in Tokyo and Ibaraki and the problematic situation of “provisional release” of some detainees into a corona-infested Japan without any safety net or protection. We hope to not only point out the immediate danger of infection under COVID-19, but also the larger dynamic of using detention to manage a refugee asylum system that has proven to be ineffective and unjust.

**David H. Slater** is professor of cultural anthropology at Sophia University. He has worked on youth and labor, capitalism, and urban space. Since 2011, he has been working on oral narrative, first of disaster and survival in [Voices from Tohoku](#), then of mothers displaced from Fukushima, of youth activists and of homeless men in Tokyo. Currently, he is working on a related oral narrative project, Voices from Japan, that is focusing on foreign refugees seeking asylum in Tokyo through the collection of oral narratives and support efforts through the [Sophia Refugee Support Group](#).

**Rosa Barbaran** graduated from Sophia University, a major in anthropology, where she led the research group on refugees and migrants. At that time, she presented research work on the role of religion in the detention center in Japan. She was a founding member of [Sophia Refugee Support Group](#) and after graduating, she worked in Melbourne as a curriculum designer for refugee children. Currently she is working as a filmmaker of refugee life and politics in Tokyo.

•David and Rosa will be discussing their recently published paper: [“The Whole Block Goes Down: Refugees in Japan’s detention centers during the pandemic”](#) from our collection in the [Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus](#)

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**Notes on the full series:** This discussion is the first in a series we will hold over the autumn on the causes, effects and current status of vulnerable populations in Japan during the Covid-19 pandemic. Each discussion will be moderated by David Slater and will give listeners a chance to meet the authors and others associated with the articles (advocates, activists, supporters, and participants). The authors will provide insight into the articles, as well as background to the conditions of data collection in the age of Corona, an update on the situation and a look forward asking if we are any better prepared for next time.

An introduction to the whole collection here: [Vulnerable Populations in Japan under Covid-19: A lull in the storm](#) by David H. Slater

**Abstract for the full collection of papers:** This is a collection of original articles on diverse vulnerable populations in Japan in the wake of the new coronavirus pandemic. The effects of COVID-19 are felt differently, with some among us at much greater risk of infection due to preexisting health and welfare conditions. For others, perhaps more than the risk of infection, it is the precautions taken to mitigate the risk

for the whole population, such as lockdowns and business closures, that have pulled away the already fragile safety net of state and civil society organization (CSO) support, leading to increased marginalization and social exclusion. The goal of this set of papers is to document the conditions of those that have been most directly affected by the virus and to provide background on the conditions that made them vulnerable in the first place, notably chronic conditions that are brought into more obvious relief in light of emergency measures. Each of the authors had a pre-established relationship with those affected populations and employed various ethnographic approaches, some face to face, others digitally via Zoom interviews and SNS exchanges. In this moment of what appears to be relative calm, we hope that our collection, quickly compiled in an attempt to capture the ever-changing situation, will give some insight into how those most vulnerable are faring in this time of crisis and provide information that will allow us to prepare better before the next wave comes our way.

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