

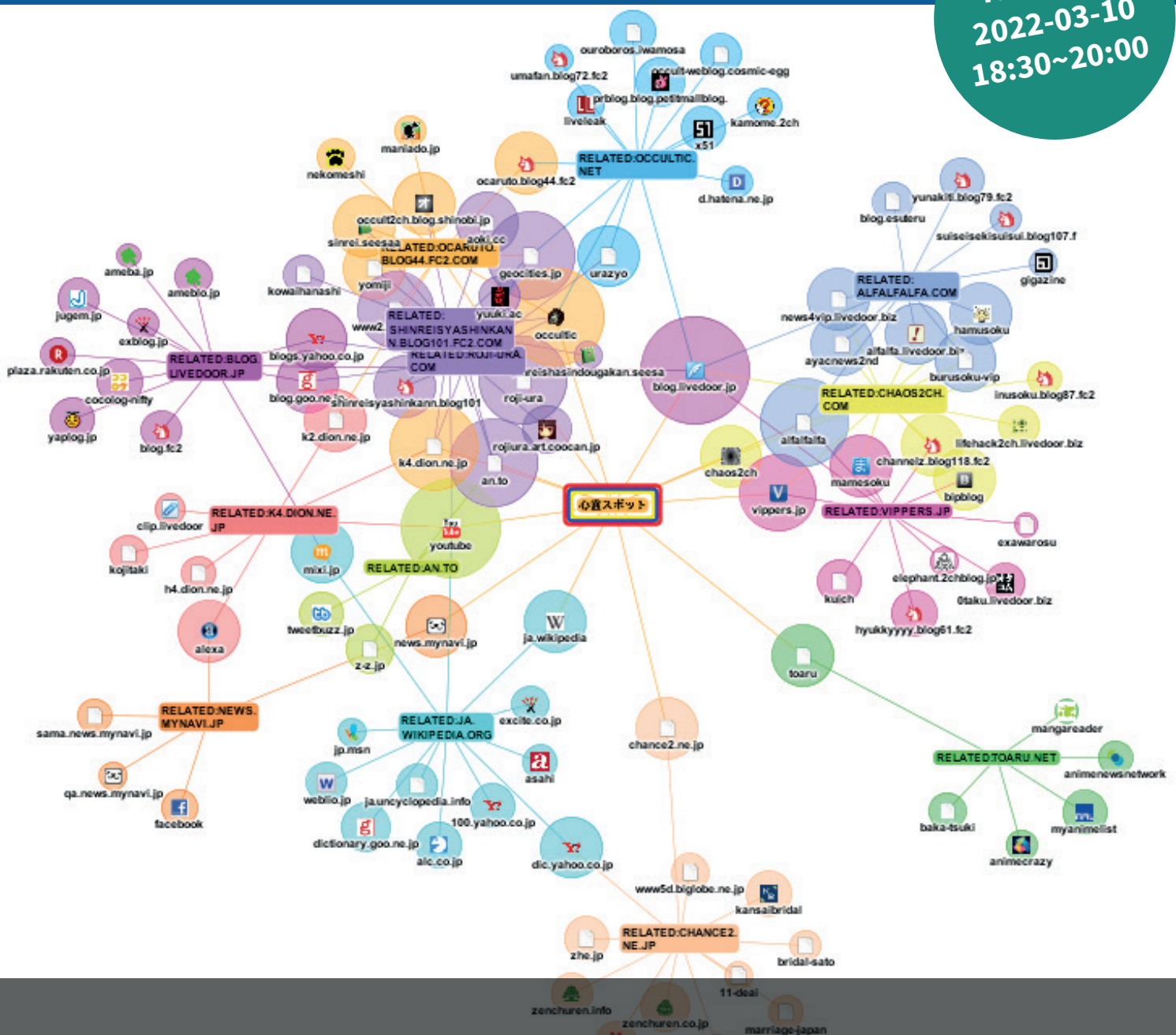


They Heard it Through the Grapevine

Rumour Spreading, Poisonous Knowledge and the Political Ecology of Hauntings in Contemporary Japan

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Andrea De Antoni

Thursday
2022-03-10
18:30~20:00





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Anthropological research on rumours and gossip has pointed out their relation with formations of identity, politics and resistance. Recent studies have argued that a focus on gossip allows an understanding of politics “from below,” especially from the viewpoint of the people whose voices are rarely heard in the public sphere. Rumours are also entangled with the re-creation of social memory, especially in relation to what anthropologist Veena Das (2007) termed “poisonous knowledge”, i.e. knowledge that emerges after ways of being with others have been brutally damaged, and that is not openly talked about. Similarly, anthropological studies of hauntings have focused on rumours as ways of re-creating memories related to perceived injustice. Such studies, however, tend to provide a comparatively “flat” representation of rumours.

While relying on ethnographic data gathered through fieldwork in Kyoto and Mutsu (Aomori Prefecture), in this presentation I will propose a more situated and relational approach for a political ecology of rumours. I will show that, while rumours about ghosts in contemporary Japan share generalized connections with “poisonous knowledge” such as memories of unsettled deaths or discrimination, the “poisonous-ness” of such knowledge varies greatly according to the networks through which rumours spread. I will argue that rumours partake in processes of formation and othering of neighbourhoods and localities, for their agency relies not only on acts of telling, but also on the material aspects of the environment.



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Andrea De Antoni (Ph.D.) is an Italian socio-cultural anthropologist with a main interest in religion and spirituality, and currently associate professor at Kyoto University. His main research area is contemporary Japan, but he has carried out ethnographic research also in Italy and Austria. His fields of inquiry include experiences with spirits and social suffering, especially in relation to the perception of space and place (particularly places related to death and the afterlife, as well as haunted places), rumors and discrimination, construction of social memory and “tradition”, tourism and commodification, spirit/demonic possession, exorcism and religious/spiritual healing. From a theoretical perspective, he focuses on the anthropology of the body, the perception of the environment, affect and emotions. He published extensively on these topics in English and Japanese. He authored *Going to Hell in Contemporary Japan: Feeling Landscapes of the Afterlife, Othering, Memory and Materiality* (Routledge, forthcoming 2022), and co-edited several books and special issues of academic journals. He is also the coordinator of the international networks “Skills of Feeling with the World: Anthropological Research on the Senses, Affect and Materiality,” and of a research group on affect and religious/spiritual healing based at Kyoto University.

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