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How to live with a nuclear disaster on one's farmland

A longitudinal narrative approach to Fukushima Farmers' life experiences

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Anna Wiemann

Thursday
2022-12-15
18³⁰~20⁰⁰



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Almost twelve years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in the little town of Ōkuma located at the coast-line of Fukushima prefecture in Northeastern Japan. Researchers today observe a trivialization of the Fukushima disaster queuing in a long line of previous nuclear disasters worldwide (e.g. Bensaude-Vincent

“fundamental disruption in the social system (of whatever size) [...] renders ineffective whatever patterns of social intercourse prevail” (Perry 2018: 14). Still, there are differing views on the role of the hazard agent in disaster definition, including phenomena as broad as earthquake, tsunami, flooding, environmental contamination, climate change, health threats, war etc. I take the view that within a particular social system, patterns of disruption and vulnerability are implicitly shaped by the characteristics of the hazard agent. As such, disasters are unique and often related to social change. On a micro-level, disaster survivors need to incorporate disruptive experiences into their life stories, creating personal and social disaster memory narratives. According to the founder of the concept of social memory, Maurice Halbwachs, individual and social memory are inextricably linked to each other as individual memory narratives refer to established social frames. Thus, the act of remembering and the communicative sharing of experiences of the past enfold their meaning in the present and are linked to a wished-for future.



Anna Wiemann is Assistant Professor at the Japan-Center at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany. She is the author of *Networks and Mobilization Processes: The Case of the Japanese Anti-Nuclear Movement after Fukushima* (2018, München: ludicium). Her research interests include social movements and civil society, social networks, and collective memory. She has published several peer-reviewed articles on social movements after 3.11 and currently conducts a research project on “collective memory and disaster”.

et al 2022). Yet, Fukushima Daiichi continues to emit radioactivity and people living in contaminated areas need to create and recreate their life narratives to deal with the consequences of the ongoing, invisible disaster (Creighton 2015).

Within disaster research, there is significant consensus that disaster should be primarily defined socially, in terms of sudden occasions when a

Against this background, I analyze qualitative interviews with farmers in Fukushima prefecture. I question how this group of people whose livelihoods depend on a contaminated environment understand the disaster and what kind of meaning they attach to it for their lives over the course of the past decade. I also explore possible social frames referred to by the farmers at the point in time when the interviews took place.

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