Zeitschrift für junge Religionswissenschaft

16 | 2021
Jahresausgabe 2021

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Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/zjr/1578
DOI: 10.4000/zjr.1578
ISSN: 1862-5886

Publisher
Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft

Electronic reference
Dunja Sharbat Dar, „Surviving Disaster, Reviving Religion", *Zeitschrift für junge Religionswissenschaft* [Online], 16 | 2021, Online erschienen am: 09 März 2021, abgerufen am 11 März 2021. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/zjr/1578 ; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/zjr.1578

This text was automatically generated on 11 mars 2021.

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Dunja Sharbat Dar

In Waste and Wonder — Introduction

1 A decade ago, on March 11, 2011 an earthquake, tsunami, and a consequential accident at the Fukushima First Nuclear Power Plant (FFNPP) changed Japan forever. Thousands of people lost their lives, buildings were destroyed, families separated, towns were deserted due to these events often called 3.11. Particularly in Fukushima prefecture residents were also affected by the consequences of evacuation and relocation. A small part of the prefecture is radioactively contaminated and was declared as no return-area by the government (Fukushima Prefectural Government 2019, 1–4).

2 Among these local communities there are several religious communities.[1] In the immediate aftermath, they quickly connected with other residents by providing shelter or spiritual support.[2] Many local shrines and temples revived their festivals (see Michii 2011), traditional ritual dances (see Klien 2016), or teamed up with other institutions to design new festivities, e.g., the Tōhoku six souls festival (see Fukushima Minpo News 2013) — efforts to strengthen the social bonds of the affected region. Many studies show that in order to overcome tragedies, religion can help to regain strength and offer help in dealing with loss, existential meaning making, and communal revival after a catastrophe (see e.g. Nahlbom 2011; McGeehan 2017; McLaughlin 2013).

3 Although crucial agents in dealing with 3.11, the religious communities themselves are often overlooked in academia.[3] The aim of this article is to look at how religious communities were transformed by 3.11 and what kind of social and religious developments occurred. Studying local religious communities struck by disaster will benefit the study of religion in at least two ways: (1) Understanding the social role that religious communities occupy as agents that simultaneously deal and help to deal with

catastrophe in the process of recovery; (2) tracking the repercussions disasters can have on the religious communities and their self-identification.

4 To answer these questions, extensive fieldwork[4] was conducted and evaluated with the means of the Grounded Theory Method as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Before going into detail about the two case studies chosen as representative examples, the article starts with an introduction to the theoretical approaches towards the repercussions of disaster for communities and the role religion may play in this.

Theoretical Considerations

5 Religious coping and explanation can be ways of answering existential questions in the aftermath of disasters of all kinds. There are many studies that are concerned with the interrelation between religion and disasters. While some spring from psychology or the quantitative branch of social sciences (Schulenberg 2020; Aten et al. 2014; Sibley and Bulbulia 2012; Milstein 2019), there also are qualitative studies focusing on specific disasters or religious groups (Sohrabizadeh, Jahangiri, and Khani Jazani 2018; Paulson and Menjívar 2012; Schlehe 2010; Ha 2015; Adiyoso and Kanegae 2013). I will introduce two theories that illustrate (1) the changing relation between religion and disaster and (2) societal reactions to catastrophes. They will serve as a referential frame to embed my independently and inductively conducted research within the field of the study of religion and catastrophe.

6 In his book *The End of Heaven — Disaster and Suffering in a Scientific Age* (2017), scholar of safety systems and the 'human factor' Sidney Dekker investigates the tension that has risen between the enlightened world and the recent readings of disaster in the West. For most of human history, disasters were understood as uncontrollable events befalling humans as punishment, as a necessary intervention for wrong behaviour or as being part of a bigger plan. The capriciousness of the gods' will make humanity subject to their mood and dependent of divine mercy (see Dekker 2017, 4).

7 Nonetheless, with the theoretical replacement of religious ideas during the enlightenment, social scientists have noted that religious interpretations decreased in more secularised countries in Northern Europe. »Secularization, in that case, is a decline in religious beliefs, church attendance and involvement« (Dekker 2017, 17). Since interpretative patterns mostly tackle the uncontrollable, scientific progress constructed a foundation upon which the explanation of disasters would not go further than citing and analysing the facts, implying that there is no further meaning behind suffering and loss than technology (see ibid, 16–20). Yet, it is the experience of suffering and distress that often leaves people wondering, »Why?«. This also applies to Japan, where religion and disaster have been interwoven for centuries in a similar manner (see e.g. Rambelli 2014, 50–53; Smits 2006, 1045–1047).

8 Citing sociologist Max Weber, Dekker illustrates how suffering functions as the driving force of religious evolution because humanity finds itself in a moral predicament when disaster hits. Rational explanation models fail in providing answers, and suffering presents itself as a force that harms the stabilisation of how crisis is usually coped with. In Weberian terms, the end of rational explanation is the premise for the development of religion. Suffering as a state that goes beyond rational reasoning, may then provoke

a system like religion that offers explanatory patterns and deals with suffering and (personal and global) disaster (see ibid, 12–13).

9 Dekker explains that some religions ascribe a special status to the sufferers within the construction of (Western) society, and do not only construct a narrative or pattern in which suffering can be situated, but — in Émile Durkheim's words — socially legitimise and organise religious activity. Aside from the immediate societal influence of religious ideas on everyday life (e.g. prayer, rituals), some religions like Christianity or Shinto additionally work with conceptions of afterlife. Thus »[r]eligion, in this sense, is a tribute to the amazing abilities of the human imagination«, which may give »disaster an origin, a purpose« (Dekker 2017, 15) through the vast variety of religious characters, narratives, and rituals. With this in mind, Dekker states that religion and science coexist when dealing with disastrous events due to their different area of application in the process of understanding the »Why?« behind catastrophes (see ibid).

10 Religion is not replaced by scientific explanation, but rather they complement each other in offering diverse explanatory models and coping mechanisms from which society and individuals may choose according to their needs. As sociologist Niklas Luhmann states, science and religion are different systems with different functions (see Luhmann 2000). There is no substitution but a social differentiation at play, leading to a clearer distinction of religion and science within societies, but not to a dissolution of one for the other. Rather, Luhmann emphasises that the religious system can deal with problems created by other social systems, e.g. personal economic crisis (see Luhmann 2016, see also Kött 2003, 180–181).

11 Disasters never leave societies unaffected. In his article »Dealing with Disaster«, historian Peter Duus describes five characteristics of social disaster response after 3.11. The first one is *blaming*. The assumption blaming operates on can be understood as the expectation that the reason a calamity reached the people was somebody's fault. Since the act of blaming is a way of trying to understand and explain reasons why and how catastrophes happen, this can be directly linked to the second category: *coping*. The destruction and high number of victims caused by 3.11 provoked the need to deal with the losses, injured and evacuated people, as well as to rebuild the destroyed areas as quickly as possible to restore order. Institutional and private financial and relief support were at the core of coping with the immediate damages and harm. Reconstruction and revival of the region also refer to imagining a new world.

12 *Dreaming* of a better world is a response to what was gone and what could have been saved. Questions and ideas circulating around better infrastructure, livelier neighbourhoods, a non-nuclear world — aspects that were not there before but could make the region a safer, more attractive place. For the opportunity of materialising these dreams, Duus introduces the important aspect of *learning* from what has happened. Particularly concerning the transition to alternative energies, 3.11 evoked new and important considerations on how to rearrange the energy supply in Japan. *Forgetting* is the final aspect of responding to disaster. Duus claims that even though Japan has long been able to live with earthquakes through emergency drills, new technology and architectural adjustments, former events may not be consulted as a means to deal with a new catastrophe (see Duus 2012, 178-189).

Methodological Considerations

13 Fukushima and its religious communities are only marginally touched on in the field of religious studies. For that reason, an extensive investigation into the region's religious communities was necessary. Thus, the Grounded Theory Method as established by Glaser and Strauss was used in combination with narrative interviews and participant observation. Both are inductive approaches to the field and therefore necessary when working with the GTM, a methodology that generates theory inductively from within the material.

14 The GTM was introduced to the qualitative sociological study by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967. As an approach with the ultimate goal of generating theory on basis of a long, reflective and intensive analysis of data material, the GTM was first described as »a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses« (Glaser/Strauss 1967, 3). This is the essential goal. The main evaluation method used for the analysis of textual material (transcripts and notes from the participant observation in this case) is coding. Coding can be divided into three phases, as developed by Strauss and his colleague, Corbin. When the material is coded, which means closely read, rephrased and studied in order to extract the implicit meaning of what is said, it becomes the basis upon which abstract categories with properties are formed. These categories develop in the process of answering the research question (see Charmaz 2006, 47-50).

15 Narrative interviews were chosen as the main source of data collection.[5] In light of the debate about cultural relativity, it is noteworthy to mention that the way experiences or happenings are narrated is tightly linked to the cultural frame of each individual. Being culturally prepared and able to communicate according to the cultural and social premises is crucial when conducting narrative interviews outside one's own cultural background (see Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2009, 96-97).[6]

16 Interviews in Japanese and participant observation in church services, at Shinto rituals and a shrine festival were conducted between August and September 2018 in Fukushima prefecture. Two case studies were chosen from a small pool of data from religious groups due to their representative nature of the situation in Fukushima prefecture.[7]

17 The first example is a community that used to gather at a destroyed and now rebuilt Shinto shrine. The second example follows a Baptist church community on their joint evacuation to their newly built church. The information about the communities derives from interview material and participant observation. This sample can neither represent all Shinto shrines and their communities nor all Baptist churches in Japan, let alone the diversity of Shinto and Protestant traditions in general. I gathered my data from interviews with people in leadership positions because it was difficult to get direct access to the members of each religious community. However, these religious experts always referred to their community rather than reporting from their own perspective. Yet, their own experiences shaped the material, which means that there might be different notions and opinions within the groups that I could not fully explore due to capacity limitations. This study is only a starting point in the study of religious communities after 3.11.

18 Before delving into my case studies, a short note on religion in Japan is necessary. In Japan, it is part of everyday life to participate in rituals at temples and shrines or to

venerate the ancestors. Although his data may be outdated, Michael Roemer's research about religious affiliation in Japan, which compares different statistics about religious affiliation (from e.g. the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication or the Japanese General Social Surveys, JGSS), shows paradox aspects of Japanese religiosity. Shinto and Buddhism can sometimes appear as one's religious affiliations simultaneously, while in other cases Buddhism is understood as religion and Shinto as culture. Some studies show completely different results, namely that respondents do not identify as religious at all. While the circumstances of the surveys need to be more intensively discussed in order to draw conclusions, the contrary results imply a discrepancy between the term religion and religiously designated activities (see Roemer 2009, 298-305). Since many Japanese people appear to dissociate with religion due to historical circumstances,[8] they rather make use of terms like tradition or culture to describe rituals that almost every Japanese person experiences (e.g. McLaughlin 2013, 312; see also Reader and Tanabe 1998).

Shinto Shrines in Fukushima: Protecting the Protectors

19 The first exemplary case study discusses Shinto shrines. Shrines are considered sacred architecture inhabited by *kami* (see Breen/Teeuwen 2010, 1).[9] Since Shinto is a contested subject of study, I refer to scholars of Japan Breen and Teeuwen's definition. They describe Shinto as a tradition linked to ritual space and activity. Hence, festivals, rites and religious practices conducted at the sacred grounds of a shrine are the basis of Shinto (see ibid, 1-2). Since Shrine festivals and religious rituals can be understood as socially important communal activities, the »abolition of local shrine festivals [...] often coincidently means the loss of the social bonds that maintain a village community« (Thelen 2019, 221).

20 »Frequently, affiliation with a Buddhist temple or Shinto shrine is based on geography«, Roemer notes (2009, 301), which is important when looking at the spread of Shinto. Shrines (as well as temples) are scattered all over Japan. But as said before, it is difficult to pin down without a thorough analysis of how surveys are designed. According to Roemer, there are studies that suggest that more than 85% of Japanese people are affiliated with Shinto, others speak of almost 110 Million people (the population at that time, 2004, measured ca. 120 Million; see ibid, 301-303).

21 Priest Mori is one of the Shinto priests serving in the coastal area of Fukushima. He experienced the disaster personally. As priest, he used to hold festivals at about sixteen community shrines, of which eight were destroyed. One of them is Yamada Shrine, which was rebuilt in Sōma in September 2016. Its current location is less than 50km away from the nuclear power plant FFNPP. Shortly after the disaster, people were able to come back to the cities of Minami-Sōma and Sōma. They could rebuild their homes because the low radiation levels do not pose a health risk. Yet, only a few kilometres away is the evacuation zone (no-return area).

22 Priest Tanji, the Fukushima official from the Association of Shinto Shrines, the most famous shrine association in Japan, explained the difficulties shrines have faced since 2011. Out of the 3035 shrines in Fukushima prefecture, 240 were left behind when the people evacuated the area. Since people either started a new life elsewhere or cannot move back to the radioactively contaminated areas, the shrines in the respective region

face decay. For Fukushima-based priests, of whom many had to evacuate, this is an unbearable condition; for in Shinto thought, shrines are of pivotal importance to religious practice, communal activity, and spiritual encounter. Shrines function as protectors of the region in which they are built. The people living around a shrine can rely on it to be their vindicator in times of distress. Concurrently, the location, the nature, the landscape around a shrine benefit from its continuous guardianship. Therefore, shrines cannot be moved.

23 Both priests are part of a group that initiated a new festival called *mirai no matsuri* (festival of/for the future). The main event is held at a big shrine in Fukushima City, and besides ritual dance, poetry and theatrical performances concerned with 3.11 and the fate of the prefecture are presented. Whilst a local poet wrote the script himself, the *kagura* dancers are invited from southern Japan for there has not been a local *kagura* group for a long time in Fukushima.

A Christian Perspective: Coming Closer to the Biblical World

24 The second case study is a Baptist Christian church. For reasons of simplicity, the term »Christian sample« is used, yet this church has a distinct tradition and can only be viewed as one example.

25 Christianity is not widespread in Japan, Roemer quotes studies that speak of less than 1% of households associated Christian traditions (see Roemer 2009, 307–309). Nevertheless, Christian traditions such as getting married in a building resembling a church or wedding chapel under the guidance of a (sometimes fake) priest are part of everyday life in Japan, too (see ibid, 301; Löffler 2018).

26 Fukushima First Bible Baptist Church almost carries the same name as the Fukushima First Nuclear Power Plant.[10] The church was originally founded in 1947 by American Baptist missionaries in Ōkuma town, Futaba district. Pastor Satō and his wife Chieko have been the leaders for more than two decades. In the last few years, the church members grew in number and their church moved several times.[11] Before 3.11, Fukushima First Bible Baptist Church was located roughly 20min away from FFNPP (three of the former buildings of the church were built within a 10km radius to it). Satō wrote a diary about the church's evacuation, since about sixty church members from the community happened to move from Fukushima to Tokyo to live at a campsite for a year. The campsite belongs to the German organisation *Liebenzeller Mission* and is used as a place for Christian retreats. The bonds to the serving missionary and the German Protestant Church of Bremen that financially supported the evacuees are maintained until today. The church's journey was also partly broadcasted on television, for their joint evacuation was rather special.[12]

27 Life at the campsite, with its minimum privacy and growing uncertainty about the future became more intense when church members realised that they could not simply return home. Their church building was now situated in the exclusion zone, so they could not and may never be permitted to return. Additionally, they lost everything, all their belongings, their houses, and the church building. If they want to relocate to a place in Fukushima prefecture, they will need to look for suitable premises and buy property. Satō thus went back and forth between the campsite and Iwaki City, situated

at the seaside in south Fukushima. Although he and his wife report having felt that they should go to Iwaki in the future, they never would have expected that 3.11 finally led them there. Thus, Satō looked for property there for a fresh start. After a while, the church was able to buy land. They also invested in property for houses for their elderly members and build a new building, which now serves as a church and community centre. The Satōs see their lives and the church's evacuation as a possibility to reach people, and as their mission to the residents in Iwaki City.

Results & Discussion

28 Four categories were generated from the data by means of coding and simultaneously re-entering the field. These categories deal with the destruction of places and spaces (1), communal revival (2), criticism (3), and lastly with Christian coping (4), which was a category necessary to be established, but not suitable to the Shinto community. All four categories are essential to understand how religious leaders and the communities navigate their own losses, while following the ideal of comforting the local communities, as well as how disaster reinforces or alters religious views, interpretations, and responsibilities.

(1) Destroyed Space as Parameter for the Impact of 3.11

29 What happened to Shinto and Christian communities on and after the threefold disaster is not only the precondition, but the peremptory element that fostered why and how these religious communities have transformed ever since. The communities faced devastation and communal splits due to immediate evacuation, and the destruction and insurmountable distance imposed on their communal life, i.e. houses, and religious spaces such as shrines and churches. Through the contamination, the church became a place far out of reach for its community, and Satō concluded: »Our church became useless.«[13]

30 A similar feeling of loss is seen in the Shinto community. Considering Fukushima as part of rural Japan, the loss of shrines and shrine festivals is a social forfeiture of a central part of local communities. Mori's account of the hopelessness felt in the immediate aftermath displays this well, when understood in terms of the dual significance shrine grounds bear: As hosts of the *kami* and hosts of communal festivals, both the ties binding the community together and the protection offered by the *kami* were washed away on the very same day.

31 As a first reaction, religious coping mechanism occurred within the Christian sample concomitantly to social coping described by Duus. In the group's Christian worldview as explained by Sato, God is understood as the prime source of all things besides sin, and earthly shaking, floods etc. are all accounted for in Biblical stories as deeds initiated by God (e.g. Noah's Arc). By maintaining the focus on God's works in the world, this specific Christian community showed that despite technical advancements and scientific explanations, the question »Why us/me?« is ultimately answered with the assumption of a religious intervention.

32 Contrary to that is the lack of religious coping in the Shinto sample despite the initial hopelessness. In Shinto, nature is thought to be inhabited by *kami*, and *kami* influence what is happening in the world. Mori did not refer to a religious power interfering,

causing or allowing disaster. This is an interesting take on the events, much as if Mori — and consequently also what he would be teaching the religious community he ministers — did not need a religious reading to classify the disaster. In this, Dekker's analysis of a decline in religious coping resonates alongside a clear differentiation between the religious and the scientific systems. This could be linked to the way in which conceptual issues are approached in Shinto, since, as Teeuween and Breen suggest, it is a tradition that is based on religious practice rather than doctrine. I contend that Mori's statements underline the passive, reactive relationship Shinto doctrine has to the world's windings.

33 In opposition to this meek acceptance of the circumstances stands the Christian community that confers upon these dramatic events the idea that God is behind all of this. Dekker had taken this into consideration when he said that religious coping may still be needed, and even be of serviceto some in the scientific age — to provide an answer to suffering and loss, exactly what my Christian sample shows. Moreover, Luhmann's thesis that the religious system gives space to deal with contingency and problems from other social systems is apparent, too.

34 Furthermore, radiation and its effects on health continue to play a decisive role in the revitalisation process of Fukushima. On the one hand, the members of both religious communities were spread across the country during evacuation. Satō narrated that the fear of the health effects of higher levels of radiation divided the community; a status that cannot merely be attributed to the environmental issues of contamination, but also to the social issues of exclusion and fear of discrimination.[14] In Shinto, the religious community is almost always equated with the local community. A religious revival would be a delicate matter, if people could not return, Mori concluded. Without a local community, there is no Shinto community that could take care of the shrine.

35 On the other hand, radiation appears with an ambivalent coloration: Mori described radiation as something bigger than what can be eliminated by a religious ritual. Because of the severe damage the exposure to high doses of radiation can have on the body, radiation appears as more powerful than what can be (religiously) controlled. Although he would sacrifice his own health in order to make sure younger people are not harmed in areas with higher doses of radiation, the assumption of the inexplicable power radiation possesses lingers on.

36 In juxtaposition to Satō's aversion to believing radiation could in some way compete with Godly power, Mori's careful delineation of radiation resembles what scholar of religion Elena Romashko notes in her work about vernacular religious developments in post-Chernobyl Belarus (see Romashko 2016). For Mori, the enigma ›radiation‹ not only grows into an unfathomable source of power but also seems to be resistant to religious Shinto powers, i.e. the *kami*. This resonates with the ambivalence of how radiation is seen as both a powerful source of healing and destruction in Japan (see Yamamoto 2015, ii-iii). This could explain why Mori did not rely on religious explanations as to why 3.11 happened to Fukushima but rather situates radiation in another system (science). This simultaneously allows for a coping mechanism based on rationality, i.e. scientific explanation and reliance on scientific methods for e.g. radiation clean-up.

37 The Christian perspective, however, depicts quite the contrary, because it ultimately utilises religious coping to deal with the invisible force. As an ambiguous power, radiation in the Shinto example does not get intermingled with religious powers but rather inhabits an unreachable position, while the Christian example clearly opens up a

hierarchy with God as the almighty to radiation as one possible danger of the world, but nothing that could not be overcome. In both cases, it is an opponent to the religious community that can be overcome through faith or endured in acceptance, as a power with the task or will to interfere with the region. The impact that 3.11 has had on the community that witnessed how their communal place and space was damaged becomes a formative and influential parameter that would define communal life from then on.

(2) Rearranging Communal Life

38 This core category summarises the most crucial developments and transformations. Due to the damages from 3.11, both communities had to construct their communal life anew. The creation of new and revival of traditional festivals are pivotal to the Shinto communities, not only to revive local communal ties but also to religiously console the hurt souls and spirits of the people. Mori stated: »So, we can share this feeling of comfort, [...] and wouldn't it be great if it were available worldwide?«[15] Specifically, when considered against the backdrop of the *mirai no matsuri* in the Shinto community of Fukushima, the case study of a traditional *kagura* in Miyagi prefecture by Susanne Klien underlines what is apparent in Mori's statement: Klien reports that working with dancers from outside the village was the only way to ensure that the tradition could be continued. Due to depopulation and the unfortunate demographic circumstances in rural areas, traditions are being kept alive through national contacts and the invitation of nonlocal actors to perform local dances (see Klien 2016, 372–373). A similar situation was witnessed in Fukushima prefecture during my participant observation. Through the revival and creation of festivals, tradition can be held onto; support from the spiritual realm can be pleaded for, and the local community can gather for a communal event. With the help of nonlocal dancers, the *kagura* at *mirai no matsuri* was realised as a festival that connects the prefecture nationally and internationally through its focus on considering hurt souls and spirits from the whole world.

39 In this light, it is valuable to refer to scholars of material religion Manuel Vasquez's and Kim Knott's (2014) analysis of the multi-scale importance of religious space for migrant communities around the world, as it helps to understand how the reconstruction of religious space after 3.11 functions as a way to connect with agents on various levels. Although migration is distinct from being relocated after evacuation within the same country, Vasquez' and Knott's argument demonstrate the pivotal function religious space have in re-establishing communities after resettling. The insight the authors provide into the multiple layers of the importance of religious space can help understand the religious communities in Fukushima.

40 In their article, Vasquez and Knott draw upon three migrant communities in different urban settings around the world, Kuala Lumpur, Johannesburg and London. While prayer and purification of the self through religious practice are important for the studied migrants to Johannesburg, a city still struggling to construct a post-Apartheid society, religious space located in Kajang, Kuala Lumpur becomes a key element for Indian and Chinese migrants who invest much of their resources into maintaining Hindu and Buddhist temples rituals despite political conflict. Just as the authors delineate for a migrant community of Bangladeshi Muslims in London (see Vásquez/Knott 2014, 332–344), rebuilt shrines serve as a place that allows locals to connect religiously (with the *kami*), locally (with other participants in ritual), and nationally,

since re-established shrines were constructed by means of (financial) aid from support groups from Japan, and also through the joint venture of the *kagura*. The rebuilt religious space links the local community transnationally by transgressing the borders of 3.11 and taking into consideration the suffering and grieving of all mankind. This ritual act offers one way to cope with loss and suffering. Thus, even though Mori did not designate a religious power as the originator of 3.11, *kami* and religious ritual are beneficial for the people in their grieving, suffering and loneliness — an act supporting Weber's understanding of why religion remains an integral part in overcoming tragedy, as Dekker delineates in his work.

41 The new church building in the Christian sample was constructed carefully in respect to and memory of the events that occurred in 2011 and after. As represented in its construction as a whole (including its positioning, a remembrance corner and stained-glass window picturing the old church), these Christians utilises its religious space to remember their past. Knott and Vásquez speak of an idealisation of the home country and culture when migrants relocate (see ibid, 338). Fukushima First Bible Baptist Church drew on similar concepts when the new church building was planned, particularly because churches are a rarity in Japan. In this case, not their home country but the former community that is now spread all over Japan is integrated into the church building. Included are the hardship of loss, the challenging life in evacuation without a home and the display of survival. This physical place becomes a memorial space, almost like a museum of the community's history. Thereby, the church's journey through evacuation and resettlement is visible to the local community in Iwaki. One may agree with Knott and Vásquez when they say that both visibility and invisibility, i.e. wielding some/no kind of influence within a social space through e.g. a religious building, of a migrant, or relocated, community can serve the purpose of entering the new locality (see ibid, 337–339). Hence, I argue that for these Christians, interweaving the history of its people with the materiality of the church building functions as one way of showing that they are still there. The message this sends to outside communities is clear: the church survived, relocated, recreated itself and integrated into the local community, while firmly holding on to tradition and the fate they had to endure.

42 Knott and Vásquez ascribe a political dimension to this phenomenon, since religious (migrant/relocated) communities are part of a socio-political system (see ibid). By becoming visible and influential in a social space, they also demand to be recognised by society. Moreover, in the reconstruction of the church the identity of its community is manifested. As its architecture resembles a bird with spread wings directed towards the exclusion zone, the church thus can be understood as a political and ideological statement that maps the community's journey while also placing it visibly into the new landscape and social environment.

43 The Shinto sample of the Yamada Shrine and Mori's narration testify to a resembling mechanism. The shrine grounds bear witness to the disaster through its location and its history written down on a sign. Since shrines are not as unusual as Christian churches in Japan, the rebuilding of the shrine hints at the wish to sustain the religious connection and to offer a place of worship and festivals to the community rather than being the physical manifestation of the religious community itself.

(3) Government & Media Criticism

44 Satō and Mori also uttered some criticism, formulated rather cautiously, but with a firm undertone. This third category depicts this criticism. Stemming from experience and the negative consequences of radioactive contamination, the religious communities seem to have become (more) aware of the innate risk of nuclear energy.

45 For Satō and Mori and their religious communities, this dramatic recess shifted their focus to the political aspect of nuclear energy. In combination with communal revival, the relocated and rebuilt communities are visible survivors of the nuclear disaster that should not reoccur. Mori stated that »I think they should stop building nuclear power plants.«[16] However, Satō noted that the Japanese government will not stop using nuclear energy because it still wants to sell the technology abroad, »even if [that means] it would lose Fukushima completely.«[17]

46 Satō and the church members turn to prayer to change the politicians' minds on energy policy. Although a socio-political process, the sample demonstrates how, for some Christians, religion and placing their trust in God to change ideas is the preferred way of tackling the problem nuclear power plants pose. This may also be interpreted as a means to influence political or worldly agents through the work of God by praying for his intervention. For even if the circumstances of the prefecture show that operating an NPP can devastate a region, the government did not change the situation and the idea that religious intervention may lead to an understanding of the dangers, Satō hoped.

47 In terms of media representation, the implication that 3.11 is falsely presented resembles trends that go beyond the media. As the research literature suggests and as Romashko notes about Belarussian survivors (see Romashko 2016), communities in contaminated areas are rarely studied in academia. Hence, a blind spot has developed that leaves out the voices of those actually affected. The picture transmitted about Fukushima online is oftentimes negative and focuses on the accident. Mori said himself: »Even if you look at the internet, you don't really know what it means, if you only see the [radiation dose] data.«[18] Therefore, Satō and Mori want to articulate what moves their communities and how they have been dealing with the situation, as the information online is complicated and neither well explained nor representative.

48 Criticising the government and media is connected to what Duus says about blaming after disaster. Satō and Mori did not directly blame politicians for the accidents, but their statements imply that if such a catastrophe reoccurred, it would be the government's fault. Particularly because of 3.11, their criticism can also be interpreted as an attempt to ensure that Japan would learn from the events, another category Duus introduces.

(4) Increased Christian Self-Identification

49 The last category that evolved from the analysed material can only be assigned to the Christian community and illustrates how, in the aftermath of 3.11, Christian self-identification increased tremendously. This did not occur in my Shinto sample.

50 Since they are well aware of God's agency in this world, Satō, his family and many members of the church reflected on their communal evacuation, relocation and

recreation with regard to Biblical stories about the history of the Israelites. In contrast to them, the Shinto sample did not refer to a change in (religious) vocation or self-identification. The role of shrines and Shinto rituals did not change as a result of 3.11. As the statements of Tanji and Mori depict; to connect people and *kami* is one of the main social functions of Shinto, and according to the data, this was the case before and will continue to be the role of Shinto. 3.11 did, however, transform the Fukushima First Bible Baptist Church's mission.

51 What is most striking is the fact that the question »Why?« lingers behind many of the assertions of Satō, and he found answers in many different Biblical stories. By leading his church through evacuation and toward a new land, Satō felt like Moses whose vital role in the Israelite exodus was to be the leader of a people in need. Satō and his family referred to the Jewish story of queen Esther and her decisive role in saving the Jews.

52 As other case studies of coping among religious communities show, Christians often integrate life events into their spiritual biography by indicating that God uses suffering and disaster to, as Sato said send a message, warn people or to start a new era (see also McGeehan 2017, 269–271). Deducing meaning from what happened to them, members of the church tried to find their place in God's plan. Satō referred to the Fall of Man in Eden, God's garden. In his view, 3.11 can be read as a message for today's society: Just like Adam and Eve were cast out of paradise because of their sins, people are cast out of their homes due to the ongoing »sin« of climate change. By letting a disaster such as 3.11 happen, society may finally be galvanised.

53 In this light, the arduous experience of evacuation and relocation functions as an initial starting point for a new vocation. As Satō reported from his travels through the world, during which he preached about the church's experience and the gospel, people were deeply moved, and he concluded that God uses his church's journey to save non-believers.

54 It is striking, however, that a heightened religious self-identification was not detectable in my Shinto sample. Mori instead emphasised that the community needed to be reunited by re-establishing shrines in the region. This leads to the conclusion that for the communal members who visit shrines, the space itself is of utmost importance to religious practice. That self-identification was not discussed can be traced back to what is typical to Japan: religious self-identification in reference to Shinto remains a difficult topic, at least in reference to my sample. Aside from this possibly being the result of how Shinto is categorised as culture by many in Japan, this may also be linked to the fact that Japanese prioritise *genze riyaku* (worldly benefits) —and a multireligious approach to achieving them (see Reader and Tanabe 1998) — over exclusive religious adherence (the contrary to most Christian communities).

Concluding Remarks

55 This article outlined how religious communities in Fukushima experienced 3.11. Their loss of ritual space, scattered community and the need to start over are essential elements of post-disaster developments among religious communities. By means of the GTM, structural and inner-religious differences and similarities were analysed, providing an insight into the multi-layered processes of communal reconfiguration from two different religions' points of view. Although distinct in their handling of the catastrophe and aftermath, the two case studies and the results of the analysis explain

how disaster recovery and religious communities interrelate. As sources for religious dealing with disaster in providing means to cope with loss through festivals or locating Fukushima's story in the greater narrative of Biblical stories, both communities function as essential harbours of hope and feeling at home.

56 There still is much work to be done in this field of research. Religious communities like Buddhists, new religious, or migrant religious communities are not included in this study. As highly significant agents in the Japanese religious landscape, a study with different religions will give a fuller picture of the situation. Additionally, an international comparison may lead to the possibility of formulating theoretical conclusions as to how the actions of religious communities are more generally interwoven with disasters, e.g. regions with similar experiences of catastrophes such as Sri Lanka (see Levy, Slade, and Ranasinghe 2009), Indonesia (see Adeney-Risakotta 2009) or the Marshall Islands (see Nakahara 2018).

57 Lastly, a study of the interrelation of religious communities and the political dimension may lead to further understanding how in times of disaster, political sentiments of religious groups are challenged, rearranged, or taken more or less seriously in the open discussion of disaster.

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NOTES

1. It is difficult to speak of distinct religious groups, for this may suggest a tightly knit assembly of members, whereas the reality often looks different in Japan (see Roemer 2009). Whenever I refer to religious communities, I include both the locally established and space-centred religious groups as well as the narrower congregations.

2. I apply Niklas Luhmann's (2000; 2016) understanding of religion as a social system distinguishable from other social systems (e.g. economy, science or politics) by operating on the binary code transcendent / immanent in communication (for an application on Japan, see Kleine 2013).

3. Many studies focus on religious festivals or religious response by different religions (see e.g. McLaughlin 2013; Klien 2016; Graf 2016). Even though they are crucial factors in dealing with catastrophes, communities that are connected through a shared religious worldview or space are rarely the focus of post-disaster research, specifically after 3.11.

4. The fieldwork was generously financed by *LabExchange*, InStudies, at Ruhr-University Bochum.

5. Narrative interviews spring from the idea that an impromptu account by an individual allows the interviewer to understand how experience is cognitively reproduced and the structure of what was experienced may be reproduced in the structure of the narration (see Przyborski/ Wohlrab-Sahr 2009, 92–93).

6. I studied Japanese and had lived in Japan prior to my research. My academic and personal experience and involvement with Japan allowed me to adapt to the societal and cultural environment as much as possible. Constant reflection and re-evaluation of my own role as a foreign, female scholar with other scholars from Japan and Europe helped in conducting the interviews and evaluating my material in regard to possible influences given by my presence and behaviour during research.

7. During my fieldwork in Japan, I met six religious leaders and various members of religious communities. During the two month I was there, I could see that two communities represented the different transformational processes of the various groups well. I intensified studying these complementary communities. Since I only had limited access to the field, my study must be regarded as first approach, not a full-fledged analysis of all religious communities in Fukushima prefecture.

8. In a religiously motivated terrorist attack, the New Religious Movement オウム真理教 *Aum Shinrikyō* induced sarin gas in a Tokyo subway, which killed about 13 people. The media discussed this incident intensively. This in addition to memories of the formerly predominant so-called State Shinto ultimately led to a distant and somewhat fearful view of religion (see Fujiwara 2005, 354).

9. »Although the Japanese word *kami* is usually translated into English by terms such as deity, god, or spirit, none of these words precisely captures its full meaning« (Yama 2019, 172). In this work, I will use *kami* without a translation to keep its ambiguous and multifaceted meanings.

10. Both were the first ones of their kind, the first Baptist church and the first power plant in that area.

11. Church locations can be more easily changed, especially because in Protestant understanding, the space itself is not sacred compared to Catholic churches (see e.g., Kilde 2002). This is different in the case of Shinto shrines, because shrines are built as a home to the respective *kami* and are considered a means of requesting protection in exchange for devotion, as my interviewees explained to me.
12. The church's journey was televised on a morning show by channel OAB (2012) twice (OAB: »*Genpatsu ni ichiban chikai kyoukai*«) and on the date of farewell from the camp (OAB: »*Genpatsu ni ichiban chikai kyoukai. Fukushima ni modoru hi.*« and TV Asahi (2012) which can be found online (TV Asahi: »*Terementarii 2013. ›3.11‹ wo wasurenai.*«).
13. 「教会がダメになった 。」
14. Aside from the health and environmental effects of radiation, exposure to radiation as well as the fact that one comes from Fukushima can lead to discrimination due to fear and a lack of information (Sawano et al. 2018).
15. 「慰める気持ちを伝えることができる、何かーが、やっぱワールドワイドに、*あってもいいんじゃないか。」
16. 「原発のも、作るのやめた方がいいと思うし。」
17. 「福島全部なくすけれども。」
18. 「ネットで、こ、データだけをとってもね [...] 本当にどうなんだろうっていうとこがね。」

ABSTRACTS

Seit der dreifachen Katastrophe am 11. März 2011 (3.11) unterliegt die Region an der Küste Nordjapans einem steten Wandel. Besonders in der Präfektur Fukushima, in der es durch verschiedene Unfälle am Fukushima Daiichi AKW zu einer hohen radioaktiven Kontamination kam, sind die Folgen noch immer omnipräsent. In derart beschwerlichen Zeit erleben lokale religiöse Gemeinschaften ein angestiegenes Bedürfnis nach religiösen Riten und kümmern sich gleichzeitig um den regionalen Wiederaufbau. Sie erlebten die Katastrophe selbst mit und mussten ihre Kirchen, Tempel und Schreine neu errichten. Viele Studien untersuchten bereits, welche entscheidende Rolle Religionen in der Bewältigung von Katastrophen haben. Dieser Artikel liefert nun auf der Basis von Feldforschung unter Baptisten und einer Shinto-Gemeinschaft erste Schlussfolgerungen darüber, wie Religionsgemeinschaften in Fukushima von der dreifachen Katastrophe beeinflusst wurden. Verlust und Wiederaufbau werden zu entscheidenden Parametern in der Reorganisation des Gemeindelebens nach der Wiederkehr in die Region. Mit ihren neuen religiösen Gebäuden versuchen die Gemeinden, das Wiederbeleben der Region als entscheidende Akteure mitzuprägen.

After the triple disaster of 3.11, the region along the coast of Northeast Japan has been continuously transforming. Especially in Fukushima Prefecture, where a series of accidents at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant resulted in high radioactive contamination, the event's aftermath still lingers on. In this challenging time, local religious communities show a heightened need for religious ritual and socio-communal reconstruction. They experienced the disaster first-hand and had to re-establish their religious sites and recreate their communities, while simultaneously becoming a source for coping strategies and a hope for those in distress. This article provides initial findings of how the triple disaster has impacted religious

communities in Fukushima by drawing from the results of fieldwork done among a Shinto and a Baptist community in 2018. Loss and reconstruction become defining parameters for the reconfigurations of communal life upon return. With their re-claimed spaces in the region, the communities try to decisively shape the reviving of the region.

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Schlüsselwörter: Japan, Katastrophe, Fukushima, Gemeinschaften, Raum

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