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Healing the Collective Grief: A Story of a Marshallese Pastor from Okinawa

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Abstract: World War II and the Cold War never ended in the Marshall Islands. A seamless continuum of colonialism, wars and nuclear testing destroyed their ancestral islands, traditions, as well as the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the people; it caused them profound personal and collective grief. This article considers the grieving of the Marshallese people, through the lens of a life story of a migrant to the Marshall Islands from Okinawa, Chutaro Gushi (1911–1977). The examination uses the concepts provided by grief studies, such as personal grief and collective grief, and applies the theoretical and conceptual framework presented by the social constructionists, such as meaning making, social validation, and moral injury, to frame the understanding of their grieving, coping and healing processes. The life story of pastor Chutaro revealed an intricate reflexive interface between his personal grief and collective grief in the Marshall Islands. His personal grieving and healing process was also closely linked with the healing of the collective grief that was also an element of his personal grief. In this process, Christian churches played crucial roles to bridge the two levels of grief. They facilitated the transformation of Chutaro’s profound personal grief and moral injury into a powerful public mission to give voices to the victims of the nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands.

Keywords: collective grief; church; World War II; the Atomic Age; nuclear testing; Marshall Islands; Okinawa; Nan’yo; colonialism; moral injury



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1. Introduction

For a century (1885–1986), the Marshall Islands were ruled by Germany (1885–1913), Japan (1913–1945), and the United States (the U.S. (1945–1986)). This century of colonial dominion also encompassed World War I, World War II (WWII), and the Cold War, or the Atomic Age. This colonialism militarized the Marshall Islands, brought uninvited WWII battles, tested numerous nuclear weapons, and devastated the otherwise tranquil islands and their people. Immediately following WWII, two of their 26 atolls, Bikini and Enewetak, were destroyed and made uninhabitable by 67 nuclear tests, while other atolls were severely contaminated by the radioactive fallout. Countless lives were lost and the wellbeing of the Marshallese people suffered as a consequence—a legacy that lives on even today.

At an international conference held in Tokyo, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, a globally renowned Marshallese poet and social activist, compellingly articulated that the modern Marshallese history represented the grieving of the Marshallese people. She lamented the impacts of colonialism, WWII, nuclear testing, and climate change, all of which brought irreversible damage and losses to their ancestral islands, traditions, and physical and spiritual wellbeing (Jetnil-Kijiner 2017, 2018; Keown 2017). These losses caused profound and prolonged collective grief for the Marshallese people, which persist to this day.

This article applies the concept of personal and collective grief to study the grieving of the Marshallese people, through the lens of a life story of Chutaro Gushi (1911–1977) who migrated to the Marshall Islands (1930) from Okinawa, Japan. He experienced traumatic war episodes that caused the profound grief articulated by Jetnil-Kijiner. Chutaro lived in the Marshall Islands through the Japanese mandate, WWII, and the Atomic Age. Bereaved

by the devastating news that WWII had destroyed Okinawa and killed his family, he chose to remain in the Marshall Islands and lived as a Christian, Marshallese, deacon, and a pastor, in that order. This article considers this process of transformation as a meaning-making process of a griever, where Christian churches played pivotal roles in connecting personal and collective grief. Chutaro's life story also invites us to a profound historical reflection and the realization that WWII did not end in 1945 in the Marshall Islands, Okinawa and Japan; it seamlessly continued into the Atomic Age and the 21st century.

This study is based on studies and secondary data available in publications, blogs, and audio-visual references. The major sources of Chutaro's life story are biographical materials published by Tetsuo Maeda, based on his series of interviews with Chutaro over the course of three years (1973–1975), supplemented by additional information and clarification provided by Maeda in person and by emails in response to my inquiries (2020). The study also considered brief biographies of Chutaro by a former seminary director, Genichi Muroto ([Muroto 1977](#)); anthropologist, Shuzo Ishimori ([Ishimori 1978](#)); and online blogs by an independent writer, Fumiko Moriyama ([Moriyama 2015a](#), [2015b](#), [2015c](#), [2015d](#)). Inferences were also drawn from oral histories, compiled by Akiko Mori, of repatriated Okinawan migrants to Micronesia, who were from the same generation as Chutaro ([Mori 2013](#), [2016](#), [2017](#)).

A vast body of literature on the nuclear issues in the Marshall Islands informs and underscores the distressing effects of the nuclear tests that are evident across the Marshall Islands ([Johnson 2009](#); [Maeda 1991](#); [Niedenthal 2013](#); [Saito 1975](#); [Takemine 2017](#); [Toyosaki 2005](#); [Weisgall 1980](#)), although the availability of studies on interplays between religion and nuclear issues is limited ([McAndrews 2008](#); [Hudson 1977](#); [Regnault 2005](#); [Shimazono 2019a](#); [Wier 2018](#); [Welty and Gabriel 2020](#)). The colonial history of the Marshall Islands was informed by publications by Francis X. Hezel ([Hezel 1983](#), [1996](#), [2001](#), [2003](#), [2015](#)), Paul Clyde ([1935](#)), Greg Dvorak ([Dvorak 2011](#), [2014](#)), Kumao Takaoka ([Takaoka 1954](#)), Mark R. Peattie ([Peattie 1988](#)) and Tadao Yanaihara ([Yanaihara 1935](#), [2018](#)), and by traditional religion and Christianity in the Marshall Islands through literature by missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions ([Bliss 1906](#)), John Garrett ([Garrett 1982](#), [1992](#)), Dobbin et al. ([Dobbin et al. 2011](#)) and Peter Rudiak-Gould ([Rudiak-Gould 2010](#)). Pre-WWII and WWII data and stories regarding Nan'yo were obtained from the official reports and manuscripts of Nan'yo cho (the South Sea Ministry of the Japanese government; [Nan'yo cho 1924](#), [1931](#), [1936a](#), [1936b](#), [1939](#)), Boei-cho (Self-Defense Agency), and Okinawa-based institutions, as well as publications by other authors ([Mouri 1998](#); [Shimizu 2001](#); [Watanabe 1985](#)).

In the subsequent sections of the article, I first explain the key concepts and theoretical frameworks applied to this study (Section 2) followed by a synopsis of the modern history of the Marshall Islands (Section 3). I then discuss the life story of Chutaro Gushi, who lived through this phase of the modern history, and his process of coping with the traumatic war experience (Section 4). The conclusion highlights the reflexive nature of the personal and collective grief revealed in Chutaro's grieving and meaning-making process. Here, religion performed pivotal functions in connecting personal and collective grief and their healing processes.

2. Personal and Collective Grief: Theoretical Reference

This article applies the theoretical frameworks and concepts from grief studies, namely the concept of "collective grief" presented by Susumu Shimazono and the "formation of the new identity and reconstruction of the meaning of traumatic experiences" presented by Robert A. Neimeyer.

Susumu Shimazono, a prominent scholar in religious studies in Japan, explains that the grief inflicted by WWII was complex and multi-dimensional. As such, it remains unresolved in Japan and elsewhere. He draws a distinction between personal and collective grief. According to Shimazono, collective grief is comprised of multiple layers of numerous unique and delicate "personal griefs". These delicate personal griefs co-exist in commu-

nities and societies and together form a “collective grief”. However, collective grief is difficult to capture as “one” or to reduce to a single form, because much remains unspoken and reserved within each individual. Delicate and unique personal grief notwithstanding, communal support and care are critically important for the recognition and processing of personal and collective grief (Shimazono 2019b, pp. 188–219).

As a form of communal support, religious communities can play an important function. However, Shimazono echoes the British sociologist Geoffrey Gorer, who saw the diminished engagement with churches by the people of Britain since the 1950s as a factor that made their mourning and grieving processes more difficult (Gorer 1965). A similar trend was observed in post-war Japan (Shimazono 2019b, pp. 184–86). There were also adverse effects of the collaborative nature of the wartime relationships between the military government and the established religious organizations (Buddhism, Shintoism, and Christianity). Their first post-war task was to confront and come to terms with their own wartime experience before dealing with the effects of the war on the people and society (Ichikawa 1993; Matsutani 2020; Ogawara 2014). For example, in 1967, Protestant churches in Japan publicly repented their wartime practices and committed to pursuing concrete activities to address the issues stemming from WWII (The United Church of Christ in Japan 1967).

With regard to the process of healing personal grief at an individual level, Robert A. Neimeyer, a psychologist of a social constructionist orientation, emphasized the importance of “reconstructing meanings” in order to cope with traumatic experiences and losses (Neimeyer 2001). The “reconstruction” process redefines a new identity of the grieving individual and gives meanings to the traumatic experience in the context of one’s new purpose and journey.

Interplays of religion and the reconstruction process have been debated. A study by Wortmann and Park found diverse cases where religious beliefs were helpful for some while they induced struggles for others (Wortmann and Park 2009). Another study by Vis and Boynton that focused on posttraumatic growth and found that spirituality had positive effects on the posttraumatic growth (Vis and Boynton 2008). Further study by Lichtenthal with Burke and Neimeyer on the relationships between meaning-making and religious coping qualified that “individuals who have experienced a significant loss and who are disconnected from their religion may benefit from increased religious community support and from meaning-centered interventions that address their spiritual concerns to help facilitate the grief process” (Lichtenthal et al. 2011, pp. 2–6). While this finding was based on quantitative analysis and did not discuss why and how religion helps this grieving process, Dennis Klass explained the consoling effects of religion in one’s grieving process (Klass 2014).

Social constructionists also underscore that verbalizing emotions and story-telling are essential elements of the reconstruction process (Neimeyer et al. 2014). Studies on life writing, narratives and story-telling (Borg 2018; Hara 2017; McCooey 2017; Noguchi 2019; Yamada 2007, 2018) provide helpful framework to understand the told and untold and elements of trauma, grieving, and spiritual experiences.

I apply their theoretical framework of meaning-making and function of religion to guide a qualitative examination of the grieving of Chutaro and the Marshallese people in this article.

In order to consider why and how religion was able to provide positive support to Chutaro’s grieving and coping process, I also relied on the concept of “moral injury” (Bremault-Phillips et al. 2019; Buechner 2020; Purcell et al. 2018). In a recent study of war veterans in the U.S., Barton David Buechner, an Adlerian psychologist, discussed a set of concept and framework to examine the told and “untold stories of moral injury.” In explaining this set of concept and framework, Buechner articulates that psychological intervention alone cannot heal the grief that involves moral injury, and the healing process requires a multi-disciplinary approach that encompasses literary, philosophical and religious dimensions (Buechner 2020, p. 6). This scheme helps explain the depth and complexity of the grief triggered by WWII and the Atomic Age where it was not confined

to loss of loved ones but also entailed the trauma caused by the mass destruction, violence, and painful betrayal of moral values.

3. Historical Background: A Seamless Continuum of Colonialism and Wars

3.1. Colonial History, WWII and the Nuclear Test Sites

The collective grief of the Marshall Islands and Chutarō's life story were formed in the context of the Marshallese modern history. The Marshall Islands are a part of Micronesia archipelago, where colonialization started in 1885 and continued for a century. It was succeeded by three rulers, i.e., Germany, Japan, and the United States of America. Independence was attained by the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia in 1986, followed by the Republic of Palau in 1992 (Hezel 1996).

It is ironic that the international organizations intended to usher in global peace were the key party that legitimized the administration of those archipelagos by foreign powers under the façade of protecting the wellbeing of islanders and facilitating their transition to a "modern state" (Peattie 1988, p. 81). The League of Nations "mandated" Japan and the United Nations "entrusted" the United States of America to administer the archipelago (Kobayashi 1994). However, these appointments in practice were the function of military victories (or defeats). Germany captured all of Micronesia in 1898 after Spain lost the Spanish–American War. Japan then captured Micronesia in 1914 while Germany was preoccupied with WWI, and the U.S. captured it in 1945 after Japan surrendered in WWII (Hezel 1996). The "mandate" and "trusteeship" in effect represented a post-fact legitimization of these military takeovers.

The colonialization progressively militarized the archipelago. Germany constructed naval transport and communication bases in Micronesia (Takaoka 1954; Hezel 2015). Japan built naval bases across Micronesia as it geared up for the Pacific War (Boei-cho 1973). The U.S. then took over those bases and turned them into sites for assembling and testing atomic and nuclear weapons, as well as missiles (Hezel 1996).

The indigenous residents had no choice or voice but to watch the unilateral intrusions turn their peaceful ancestral islands into battlefields. The islanders lost their homes, families, and friends. Their dignities were unduly compromised. Moreover, they were allowed no time to rejoice at the end of WWII. From Tinian (Marianas Islands), air fighters carrying atomic bombs took off to Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 6th and 9th of August 1945. By September of 1945, five weeks after the Japanese surrender, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to conduct a series of nuclear weapon tests to examine their effects and potentials. Bikini and Enewetak Atolls, at the northern tip of the Marshall Islands, were selected as nuclear testing sites (Weisgall 1980, pp. 74–76). The war never ended in the Marshall Islands.

3.2. Nuclear Test Sites on Bikini and Enewetak Atolls

Indigenous inhabitants of Enewetak and Bikini had carefully and proudly taken care of their islands, which represented their ancestral domains, sources of identity, life and soul for centuries (Carucci 1997, p. 184). However, their islands were made into nuclear testing sites and destroyed (Carucci 1997, p. 9; Hezel 1996, p. 299). In March 1946, the U.S. military relocated Bikinians to Rongerik, about 125 miles to the east. In December 1947, residents of Enewetak Atoll were relocated to Ujelang, 130 miles southwest. They were relocated in order to free up the Bikini and Enewetak atolls for the testing of nuclear weapons (Johnson 2009, p. 6).

Attorney Jonathan Weisgall, in his article "The Nuclear Nomads of Bikini", depicts the proceedings of the resettlement announcement as follows: On 10 February 1946, the U.S. military governor of the Marshalls, Commodore Ben Wayatt, visited Bikini to catch the residents after their church service. He inquired if they were "willing to sacrifice their island for the welfare of all men . . . for scientists to learn how to use it (nuclear weapon) for the good of mankind and to end all world wars . . . as the Children of Israel, whom the Lord had saved from their enemy and led into the Promised Land (Weisgall 1980, p. 77)".

Chief Juda Kessibuki was made to deliver the Bikinians' response: "If the United States government and the scientists of the world want to use our island and atoll for furthering development, which with God's blessing will result in kindness and benefit to all mankind, my people will be pleased to go elsewhere" (Weisgall 1980).

Weisgall contests this navy record and points out that the Bikinians' response reflected their fear from the war experience and sense of disempowerment. He also laments that the reference to "the Children of Israel also had emotional impacts on Christianized Bikinians (Weisgall 1980, p. 78)". Jetnil-Kijiner similarly articulates that Bikinians did not fully capture Wayatt's message in English, which was not a language familiar to them at that time (Jetnil-Kijiner 2018). Before relocating to Rongerik (7 March 1946), Bikinians "decorated the community cemetery with flowers and held a ceremony to bid farewell to their ancestors . . . and left the atoll on a Navy landing-craft in silence or weeping (Weisgall 1980, p. 79)".

In December 1947, Enewetak atoll was selected as the second nuclear test site. Anthropologist Laurence M. Carucci, in his ethnography of the Enewetak people relocated to Ujelang, also cites the same message by the commander delivered to the people of Enewetak; "the tests would lead to peace and freedom for all human kind" (Carucci 1997, p. 1). Carucci also argues that the islanders agreed out of fear and a sense of powerlessness. As with Bikinians, Enewetak's people had barely survived the distressing warfare of WWII, were mourning the loss of their family and friends, and were horrified by the massacre of 3200 Japanese soldiers who were occupying the islands of Enewetak (Carucci 1997, p. 1; Hezel 1996, p. 229).

3.3. Nuclear Weapon Tests and Their Effects

During the 12 years between 1946 and 1958, a total of 67 nuclear explosions were detonated on Bikini (23) and Enewetak (44). Giff Johnson, a journalist and prominent anti-nuclear activist based in the Marshall Islands, explains that this translated into "1.6 Hiroshima bombs being detonated every day for the 12 years of testing (Johnson 2009, p. 4)". Johnson further underscores that, unlike Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where bombs were dropped from the air, tests in the Marshall Islands were detonated on the islands. This further intensified the destruction and the extent of the fallouts and radiation in the atmosphere (Johnson 2009, pp. 4–5).

These fallouts had serious impacts on the lives, health, and wellbeing of the people across the Marshall Islands. Islanders from the Bikini and Enewetak atolls not only lost their ancestral homes but lived unimaginable hardships as refugees on Rongerik and Ujelang. They were also exposed to the nuclear fallouts from a series of tests. Bravo is known internationally because of its magnitude and the coverage of its fallouts on the atolls of Rongelap, Utrik, Ailinginae, Rongerik (where Bikinians were relocated), and the Japanese fishing boat, the Lucky Dragon (Carucci 1997; Takemine 2015).

However, Johnson reminds us that Bravo was not the only explosion responsible for spreading deadly radiation and that these four atolls were not the only victims of the 67 nuclear tests. He refers to a report of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) that confirmed fallouts reached even the southern parts of the Marshall Islands, such as Jaluit, Mill, and Arno. Practically all the Marshall Islands and their people were affected by these nuclear tests. Four or more generations of the affected Marshallese people suffered acute and chronic radioactive syndrome, severe health impacts, premature loss of life, and abnormal embryoids such as jelly babies. The environmental destruction and contamination of these islands were overwhelming and irreversible (Johnson 2009, pp. 6–18).

However, the world outside the Marshall Islands had no knowledge of the nuclear tests and their devastating effects, because of their remote location under the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The Lucky Dragon incident caught attention within Japan and intensified its anti-nuclear movement, but the focus was confined to the Lucky Dragon and atomic bomb victims in Japan. Nonetheless, over 32 million people, representing nearly half of all voters in Japan at that time, signed the petition for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

The petition prompted the formation of the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs (*Gensui-kyo*) in 1955 as a grassroots network to express citizens' desire for a peaceful world without nuclear weapons ([Gensui-kyo 2021](#)). In 1965, a part of *Gensui-kyo* split and created a new organization, the Japan Congress against A- and H-Bombs (*Gensui-kin*), as a result of the intensification of the Cold War and the associated influence of political parties on the *Gensui-kyo*. The newly created *Gensui-kin* aimed to maintain the civil nature of the anti-nuclear and peace movement and to focus on the victims of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Bikini, yet their attention was focused on victims in Japan ([Gensui-kin 1978](#), pp. 7–17).

4. The Story of Pastor Chutaro

In 1971, the overwhelming effects of nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands were finally presented by a Marshallese, Ataji Balos, to a *Gensui-kin* audience in Japan. Pastor Chutaro Gushi (1911–1977) facilitated this connection. Chutaro believed that the Marshallese people must be treated with justice, and the Marshallese victims must present, in their own voices, their realities and stories directly to the outside world ([Maeda 1991](#), pp. 188, 247). As a pastor, he lived to realize this conviction and mission. The following is a story of how he came to live this mission as a Marshallese pastor.

4.1. The Marshall Islands and Okinawa

Before entering the story of Pastor Chutaro, it is worth capturing briefly the context of the modern histories of the Marshall Islands and Okinawa. Shaped under the same colonial and military structures of Japan and the U.S., Marshallese and Okinawan modern histories share some common elements. The Marshall Islands and Okinawa made considerable sacrifices during the battles of WWII in 1944 and early 1945, respectively. Harsh adversities were imposed on the lives of the ordinary people across those islands, foreshadowing the complete defeat following the deployment of atomic bombs in August 1945. Chutaro Gushi shouldered the effects of both battles as an Okinawan migrant in the Marshall Islands.

As mentioned in Section 3.1, Japan was mandated by the League of Nations to administer the Marshall Islands (1921–1945), and there was a *Nan'yo cho* (South Sea Ministry) sub-office on Jaluit in the southern atoll of the Marshall Islands. According to the 1930 *Nan'yo cho* data, about 420 Japanese lived in the Jaluit region. Most of them were associated with the Japanese administration or state companies. Only seven were engaged in fishery ([Nan'yo cho 1931](#), p. 267), and Chutaro was one of them.

Okinawa was a significant source of the labor force across *Nan'yo Gunto* (the South Sea Archipelago). The economy of Okinawa was limited and employment was difficult to find during this time. Thousands of Okinawans migrated to South and North America, the Philippines, Indonesia, Hawaii, and other Pacific Islands including the *Nan'yo*. Okinawans were productive and popular in *Nan'yo*, as they were good at operating and fishing on small boats and easily adjusted to the tropical climate. They caught a variety of fresh catches, such as *katsuo* (skipjack tuna), *maguro* (yellowtail tuna), and shellfish, for frozen, canned, or dried exports to Japan ([Akimoto 1943](#), pp. 15–17; [Okinawa-ken Kitaya-Cho Kyoiku linkai 2006](#), pp. 117–22).

4.2. Chutaro Gushi, a Migrant from Okinawa

Chutaro migrated to the Marshall Islands in 1930 from Okinawa. There, he experienced traumatic episodes of WWII that devastated the Marshall Islands. Chutaro told parts of his life story to Tetsuo Maeda through a series of interviews in Majuro. Maeda came to know of pastor Chutaro's engagement with the nuclear issues on the Marshall Islands, through his research on the nuclear tests. Maeda was among the first journalists who visited the Marshall Islands, a part of the Trusted Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) entrusted to the U.S. by the United Nations. Japanese was banned from the TTPI for nearly 25 years after 1945, and the ban was lifted after the signing of the Treaty of Micronesia between the U.S. and Japan in 1969 ([Maeda 1991](#), pp. 206–8).

Chutaro relayed to Maeda how he came to the Marshalls, how he worked across Micronesia, a bit of his war experience, why he remained in the Marshall Islands, and how he lived his new life as a Marshallese Christian. Chutaro also explained how he came to doubt the U.S. Government's safety declaration for Bikini and Enewetak, how he spent six months in Utrik examining the radioactive contamination, and what he had concluded.

Chutaro Gushi was born (1911) in Nakajin-son, a farming village in Okinawa, as the fourth child of the family. He planned to join his uncle in South America after graduating from Nago High School. However, the course of events directed the 18-year-old Chutaro to Jaluit. For the first three and a half years, he was on a fishing boat and also collected trochus shell (*takase-gai*), used for making buttons. Chutaro then spent the next eight years travelling on a small boat all over Micronesia as a copra dealer. He looked forward to getting together with his fellow Okinawans to chat in the Okinawa dialect over plenty of *awamori* drinks. He had hoped to return to Okinawa one day, once he accumulated sufficient savings (Maeda 1975a, pp. 31–32).

Young Chutaro was successful. By 1941, his savings in his bank account in Yokohama, Japan, had reached JPY 4800 (Maeda 1975a, p. 32), the equivalent of 9.5 times the average annual salary of a high school graduate at that time (Shirakawa 2020). In late 1941, Chutaro boarded a ship destined for Yokohama to collect his hard-earned savings. When the ship stopped in Saipan for a few days, Chutaro met his friend and was warned; if he landed in Yokohama, he would be immediately recruited into the military; if he returned to the Marshalls, he would escape military conscription. Chutaro contemplated his options and decided to return to the Marshalls, foregoing his savings in Yokohama (Maeda 1975a, p. 32). He did not yet know that he would not return to Japan for another 30 years.

4.3. The War, Trauma and Grief

On this ship heading back to the Marshalls, he heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941). He returned to Mili, where he was based at that time (Maeda 1991). Thereafter, the Marshall Islands, located in the easternmost part of the *Nan'yo* archipelago and closest to Hawaii, were quickly entangled in the warfare between the Japanese and the U.S. military. According to the *Boei-cho Boei Kenkyu-sho Sennshi-shitu* (Defense Agency Research Center, war history section), seven Japanese Navy bases were constructed across the Marshall Islands, including Mili. The construction of airstrips on Mili started in 1940. Islanders were mobilized as construction workers and providers of food for the Japanese soldiers. Mili was overwhelmed by 7000 soldiers who had to be fed, while the island originally had only 700 inhabitants (Boei-cho 1973, pp. 58–60).

It was ironic that, while Chutaro made the difficult choice to return to Mili to avoid a military conscription, his fluency in Marshallese and English pulled him into the Japanese Navy, tasked with the procurement and preparation of food for the soldiers (Maeda 1975a, p. 33). His ability to collect pine oil, further led him to an assignment to look after Takaiwa Island, where pines were nursed to produce fuel, according to Fumiko Moriyama, who published a blog on the Chutaro family (Moriyama 2015b, 2015c, 2015d). Those assignments would have heightened his moral dilemma as he had to mediate between the islanders and the Japanese Navy whose inhuman treatment of the islanders had worsened.

WWII agonized the islanders across the Marshall Islands. Among the most distressing episodes was the rebellion on Celbon, an outer island of Mili. Most islanders on the Mili island were resettled to Celbon, in order to allow for the construction and operation of the Japanese naval base and airstrips on Mili. Maeda, in his special report on the Celbon massacre in the 24 August 1975 issue of the *Mainichi Magazine*, recounts a story he learned from a son of the Mili traditional chief. For his father, giving up their ancestral island and relocating the people to another island meant the ultimate expression of loyalty to the Emperor and his military. Unfortunately, as historian Mark Peattie and Maeda both point out, this ultimate loyalty was met by the starved Japanese soldiers' brutal treatment of the islanders relocated to Celbon. Infuriated islanders rebelled and almost managed to fend off the Japanese soldiers. However, a single surviving soldier reported the incident to the

commander on Mili; all islanders on Celbon were massacred immediately (Maeda 1975b, pp. 34–37; Peattie 1988). Chutaro witnessed this traumatizing incident but told Maeda he'd rather not talk about episodes of the war (Maeda 1991, p. 217).

This episode alludes to the prevalence of severe starvation that had induced violence across the Marshall Islands. A diary of a Japanese soldier on Wotje island edited by Shiori Ookawa vividly depicts the magnitude of starvation, malnutrition, and consequent death on Wotje (Ookawa 2018), and Morikawa's blog confirms that the same applied to soldiers and islanders on Mili and Chutaro. Food supplies to Mili had dried up as the U.S. Navy was blocking all access to Mili (Maeda 1975a, p. 33). Maeda quoted Chutaro's rare account of his war time experience as follows:

I had to avert my eyes. They say desperation bewilders men. I saw the worst of them . . . I'd rather die in a battle; eating leaves and dying of starvation, serves no purpose for the country (Japan) (Maeda 1991, p. 217; Totemo mitewa iraremasen deshitayo. Ningen kyuu sureba juusei wo arawasuto iimasuga, dorehodo made ni datsuraku suru mono nanoka. Senshi suruno wa shikatanai. Shikashi Konoha wo kutte shinde nani ga okuni no tame ni narunoka)

Determined to survive, Chutaro and several dozens of islanders swam out of Mili and surrendered to a U.S. naval ship. Chutaro intimated to Maeda that the swim, in retrospect, was a critical step that permanently "connected" him to the Marshall Islands. He explained further to Maeda that the U.S. ship rescued them, and gave him a job to transport the surrendered Japanese soldiers from other atolls such as Wotje and Jaluit. After some months, Chutaro learned through an American Officer that the Emperor had ended the war, Okinawa was completely destroyed, all Japanese on Okinawa had died, and the U.S. had taken over Okinawa. Overwhelmed by the news, Chutaro wrote to his family in Okinawa twice, but never heard back from his family. The U.S. took over the entire South Sea Archipelago in August 1945 (Maeda 1975a, p. 33).

Chutaro had come to the Marshall Islands at the age of 18, with a hope to return to Okinawa after establishing his financial foundation and reunite with his family back in Okinawa. At age 34, Chutaro confronted an unbearable reality and his hope had vanished. The only consolation to the devastated Chutaro was that his appeal to remain in the Marshall Islands, that he presented after much deliberation, was accepted by the U.S., who were implementing a complete repatriation of all Japanese nationals and migrants (Ishimori 1978, p. 16; Maeda 1975a, p. 33).

Considering the depth of the trauma and loss experienced by Chutaro, it would be difficult for anyone to ethically capture his total experience in full. As such, this article respects his narratives told as given and takes them as his experience and the story that he chose to share. Recalling the interviews with Chutaro, Maeda referred several times to Chutaro's reservation to talk about his experience during the war. This echoes the observation of Akiko Mori, who has studied the WWII experience in Nan'yo by interviewing several Okinawan migrants of the same generation as Chutaro, who had repatriated from Nan'yo.

Many storytellers told Mori that recounting their war experiences was difficult as it inflicted tremendous pain. For most of them, interviews with Mori (2006–2013) were the first time they even mentioned their war experiences in Nan'yo and their associated trauma that never healed. Those who took the courage to tell their stories did so in order to prevent the future generations from making the same mistake (Mori 2013, pp. 2–4). In Nan'yo, WWII killed over 15,000 Japanese civilians; of these, more than half were Okinawan. An equally high number of Koreans and islanders lost their lives. Mori argues that the absence of official records of those victims from Okinawa, Korea, and Nan'yo reflects the marginalization of those groups under the Imperial Japan (Mori, p. 4).

Chutaro and repatriated Okinawans shouldered painful agonies of the war and discrimination, but much remained unspoken. They constitute an element of the unspoken collective grief in Japan caused by WWII, that Shimazono referred to. Buechner, underscores the importance of this "unspoken" collective grief in storytelling of war experiences,

and discusses the concept of “moral injury” to help understand untold and unheard issues faced by war veterans in the U.S. Buechner explains that wars cause profound disruption of deeply held values, beliefs and frames of reference, i.e., moral injury, affecting the sense of self identity, social roles and relationships (Buechner 2020, pp. 4–5). Chutaro’s personal grief also encompassed “moral injury”, caused by the trauma of the massacre, violence of soldiers, starvation, working for the military on both sides, the crushing of identity, loss of his family and home, and several other elements that remained unspoken. Concurrently, those elements of grief and moral injuries also constituted the collective grief in the Marshall Islands, Okinawa, and Japan. He belonged to each of them, yet he did not belong to any in full, and endured his own unique personal grief.

4.4. Transformation

How did Chutaro deal with his grief and moral injury after the decision to remain in the Marshall Islands? In short, he reshaped his life by forming a new identity and family as a Marshallese Christian. He assimilated into the island communities through his Marshallese family and church. Those relationships generated the communal support that helped him transform his grief and moral injury into his new identity and public mission as a pastor, to heal the collective grief in the Marshall Islands and, to some extent, Japan.

Chutaro married his girlfriend in Mili, a pastor at the local Congregational Christian church (Muroño 1977). Chutaro managed a store and worked closely with his family and neighbors to reconstruct Mili. The fact that he was elected a deacon in 1953 and formally naturalized as Marshallese in 1958 (Maeda 1991, p. 218) would signify his social acceptance and validation within the church and island communities. His Christian identity was further solidified through his ordination as a pastor (1964), prompted by a calling in a dream, according to Shuzo Ishimori, an anthropologist who came to know Chutaro during his fieldwork in the 1970s. Chutaro set himself a higher mission beyond general pastoral duties. His special goal was to repent for the sins committed by Japan during the war (Ishimori 1978, p. 16). Chutaro’s stated reasons for becoming a Christian also implies what he may have meant by “sins”:

I had lost my home, my family, and any hope I had had of returning to Okinawa. It was devastating. I also saw the worst facets of human nature during the war. Before the war, I was never interested in religion. I had never even entered a church building (Maeda 1975a, p. 33; yahari kikoku wo dannen shitakoto ga ichibann ookii desu. Soreni sennsouchuu, ninngen no juusei wo misetuke rareta kotodesu ne. sennzenn ha shuukyuu ni kannshinn nannka nakatta shi, kyoukai ni itta kotomo nakattan desuga ne).

The link between sins and conversion to Christianity is also expressed in the life story of Saburo Niigaki, another Okinawan migrant to Saipan who became a pastor after his traumatic experience of the war. He survived the U.S.–Japan battles on Saipan, was captured by the U.S. Navy and imprisoned in Oahu as a prisoner-of-war for a death sentence. Flashbacks of Saipan, fear of the death sentence, and the loss of his beloved grandmother and mother, among the 100,000 deaths in the three-month battles on Okinawa in 1945, agonized his years in the prison (Mouri 1998, p. 206). The author of Saburo’s biography, Tsuneyuki Mouri, explained that Saburo’s conversion owed to the overwhelming sorrow and desperate search for the salvation and forgiveness promised to Christians. As with Chutaro, Saburo was never interested in religion, especially Christianity that was detested in Okinawa as *Yaso Kyo*, i.e., pagan (Mouri 1998, p. 159). Saburo was eventually released from prison and lived his new mission as a pastor. For him, the goal was to help heal the collective wounds and sorrow of Okinawa (Mouri 1998, p. 207).

Saburo and Chutaro, both without prior religious affiliation, dealt with their personal grief and moral injury by attaining a new Christian identity. Their cases support the theory presented by Lichtenthal et al. (2011, pp. 2–6), and more recent findings that “confirmed significant links between spirituality and mourners’ ability to find multifaceted meaning in their loss, with social validation of their attempts to do so accounting for much of their

success" (Testoni et al. 2021, p. 11). This concept of "social validation" helps explain the process Chutaro experienced in coping with his personal grief. He became a Christian, deacon and pastor. The attainment of these identities and roles involved a due process within the local Christian community, that also served the mechanism of social validation.

4.5. *The Church and Social Justice in the Marshall Islands*

Chutaro's integration into the Marshallese society through the church resembles the paths taken by prominent migrants to the Marshall Islands in the past. Hazel and Garret, experts on the history of Christianity in Micronesia, explain that the Congregational churches established across the Marshall Islands in the 1850s became important advocates of social justice. The formation of this role was also facilitated by migrants who married locally and were naturalized in the Marshall Islands. These migrants gained local acceptance through their contribution to the local churches. By the time German rule started in 1885, churches were safeguarding the islanders from abuse by colonial entities. Churches advocated for the provision of basic services, adequate worker compensations for islanders, and contributed to the consolidation of the financial and social grounding of the local churches, to name a few example (Hezel 2003, pp. 71–72; Garrett 1992, pp. 281–83). Pastor Chutaro joined this tradition. He was especially active in addressing the effects of nuclear testing across the Marshall Islands, to be explained below.

4.6. *Reconnecting with Okinawa and Japan*

In 1970, pastor Chutaro spent a year in Tokyo at the Theological Seminary for Rural Missions (*Tokyo Nooson Dendoo Shinngakkou*, or *Noden*). This seminary was established in 1927 by a Canadian missionary, Alfred Russel-Stone, for the formation of missionaries to work in village communities to save the people from social injustice. Post-WWII, the seminary focused on (i) ecumenical activities, (ii) reconciliation with the former colonial territories and Okinawa and the clarification of responsibilities over the wounds of war, (iii) communion with the earth and soil, and (iv) the examination of issues relevant to missionary and theological work in agricultural village communities (Noden 2020). Although the exact background that brought Chutaro to *Noden* is not yet known, *Noden's* mission (ii) directly overlapped with that of Chutaro i.e., "to repent for the sins committed by Japan during the war" (Maeda 1975a; Muroño 1977). Three items stand out as fruits of his year in Japan.

First, Chutaro re-discovered his family in Okinawa. The Chutaro family in the Marshalls was finally reconnected with the Gushi family in Okinawa (Maeda 1991, p. 218; Moriyama 2015b). Second, his visit to Japan affirmed Chutaro's deep affection for the Marshall Islands, and he frequently expressed this at *Noden*. Muroño, the *Noden* director at the time, compared Chutaro's occasional mention of Okinawa with more frequent and enthusiastic expressions of the Marshall Islands. Chutaro became especially vibrant when he talked about his dreams and hope for Mili. His love and appreciation of Mili and the Marshall Islands, that fully embraced him in his worst state of despair, are apparent in the quote below:

If we spend 30 minutes out in the sea, we easily catch a few Tuna fish. They give us plenty of fresh delicious sashimi and fill our stomach. The sashimi in Japan is tasteless. The life on our islands may seem a bit far from civilization but we live rich and joyful lives. (Muroño 1977, p. 3)

The statement, "tasteless sashimi in Japan", provokes our imagination and remains open for interpretations.

Third, Chutaro established contacts with organizations that dealt with atomic victims in Japan. He gained knowledge of the effects of nuclear and radioactive substances in materials about the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs. This confirmed his doubts about the safety declaration announced by the U.S. Government regarding Bikini and Enewetak. He became convinced that radioactive residuals did not disappear after closing the nuclear weapon testing sites (Maeda 1991, p. 218). Chutaro was the likely proponent of the bridge

between the Marshall Islands and the Japan Congress against A- and H-Bombs, *Gensui-kin*, paving a way for the Marshallese people to speak to *Gensui-kin* directly.

In August 1971, two participants from the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands joined and spoke at the *Gensui-kin* annual assembly. They were Ataji Balos, a member representing the Marshall Islands at the House of Representatives of the Congress of Micronesia, and Palauan Moses Uldon, who established the Federation for the Independence of Micronesia. Balos spoke about serious health issues confronting the Marshallese victims after their exposure to nuclear fallout, and also requested that specialized doctors from Japan visit the Marshall Islands (Toyosaki 2005, pp. 19–22).

In 1972, Ataji Balos and John Ainjain, the Magistrate of Rongelap, attended the annual *Gensui-kin* assembly. John Ainjain was the first nuclear victim to speak to an audience outside the Marshall Islands. His son, Leko, was the first officially recognized hydrogen bomb victim in the Marshall Islands (Maeda 1991, p. 190). Leko was exposed to Bravo just after turning one-year-old, and immediately suffered from acute radioactive syndrome. Thyroid problems developed at the age of 12, followed by severe leukemia some years later. Leko was only 19 years old when he died (Maeda 1991, pp. 184–88). Nearly 30 years after the nuclear testing began in 1946, the victims finally gained the voice to express their agonies to the outside world. Pastor Chutarō quietly moved his mission forward by re-connecting his new and old homes, the Marshall Islands, Okinawa, and Japan.

4.7. Pastor Chutarō and the Next Generation

Chutarō's activities on nuclear issues intensified after returning to the Marshall Islands in April 1971. He began to suggest to the people of Bikini and Enewetak to put their repatriation plan on hold until the residual radioactive substances were fully removed. In 1973, Chutarō also requested for his placement in the parish church on Utrik, as he wanted to investigate the contamination on the island and the effect it had on the people. He observed the annual visit by the American Energy Commission (AEC), that only collected the islanders' blood samples and X-rays, but did not provide any medical treatment (Maeda 1991).

These observations convinced him that returning to the contaminated islands would expose the islanders to high health risks. He started to persuade the islanders to forgo their repatriation to Bikini and Enewetak. Chutarō explained to Maeda:

I became a pastor to serve the people. Our job is to first save people. Scientists bring foreign food and goods to the islands. I advise the islanders to throw these away and not to accept any money. Instead, I ask them to demand for their right to live and for the protection of their wellbeing. They must appeal and my goal is to fully back them up (Maeda 1975a, p. 34; *watashi wa ninngenn no tame ni bokushi ni natte irunodesu. Mazu ninngen wo sukuwaneba narimasen. chosa dan wa shokuryou wo mottekite kigenno torunndesu. Watashiha itteimasu. Sonnamono umi ni hourikonde shimae. Soreyori inochi no hoshou wo youkyuu shinasai. Mazu karera ga kokuhatsu suru. Watashi no mokuteki wa sorewo ato oshi suru koto desu*).

In 1974, *Gensui-kin* obtained a sample of soil from Bikini. The laboratory tests found that a resident on Bikini would experience an annual average of 600 mrem radioactive exposures (Maeda 1991, pp. 221–22), far beyond the permissible exposure level (170 mrem) set by the U.S. Government in 1959, which was further lowered to 100 mrem in 1990 (Johnson 2009, pp. 18–19). Chutarō was right to discourage the people from repatriating to heavily contaminated islands.

In 1976, the local newspaper on Majuro reported on the excessive plutonium observed in the blood samples of repatriated Bikinians and workers employed in the rehabilitation of Bikini. Separately, the AEC reported that the in-take of food grown on these islands would accumulate, over 20 years, eight times more radioactive substances than are permissible for human consumption. In 1978, the U.S. Government found that 12 out of 99 repatriated Bikinians who underwent health check-ups measured cesium levels above the permissible

line set by the Government. This evidence led the U.S. Government to close the Bikini area and to remove the repatriated Bikinians, once again (Johnson 2009, p. 19).

Pastor Chutaro unfortunately could not witness this development in 1978. He died from cancer in March 1977 at the age of 65, survived by six children. Chutaro's death was mourned in the Marshall Islands and in Japan. An obituary published in the July 1977 issue of *Kansho (the Atoll)*, a monthly newsletter of the association of surviving families of the Japanese soldiers who died in the Marshall Islands, expressed profound gratitude to his sincere engagement with the surviving families. Pastor Chutaro used to regularly offer memorial services for thousands of souls who did not get to return home and assisted their surviving families during their visits to the Marshall Islands (Muroño 1977). The obituary reveals pastor Chutaro's quiet work for healing of the collective grief in Japan, by honoring and remembering the wounded Japanese souls, living and dead, through his memorial services for them. Perhaps, it was another element of his repenting for the sins of Japan.

Subsequent generations of Marshallese and non-Marshallese anti-nuclear activists succeeded Chutaro's legacies. Additionally, churches continued to play their roles. Several Marshallese voiced and appealed to the world by actively joining the conferences of the Nuclear Free Independent Pacific held in Fiji (1975), in Ponape (1978), and in Honolulu (1980) (Smith 1997; Regnault 2005). In 1983, the late Darlene Keju (1951–1995), a prominent Marshallese activist, gave an eye-opening speech at the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Vancouver. Her gentle but powerful stories of the nuclear victims stunned the international audience and prompted immediate media reports across Europe and North America. They came to know the absence of medical care, the delivery of deformed babies, still births, and jelly babies, who represented but a glimpse of their distressing reality persisting even 25 years after they stopped nuclear testing. Darlene was invited to represent the voices of the Marshall Islands at subsequent WCC meetings and actively engaged in the health and social justice work in the Marshall Islands, until she passed away from cancer at age 44 (Johnson 2013, pp. 131–50).

There is an interesting connection between Darlene and the late Chutaro. In 1979, the first public presentation on nuclear issues was given in Majuro to a Marshallese audience by Giff Johnson, an American anti-nuclear activist who was visiting Majuro with his fiancée, Darlene. This event was held at a vacant lot next to a store managed by Chutaro's son, Chuji, who was the first public health specialist in the Marshall Islands. Chuji later became an important supporter of Darlene's work starting primary healthcare services at the grassroots level (Johnson 2013, p. 50).

The Marshallese people continued to voice themselves. They appealed to courts in the U.S. as well as the International Court of Justice, and actively contributed to the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) in which religious organizations played important roles (Welty and Gabriel 2020). This movement started in 2007 in Australia. It took roots in the nuclear free movements in the Pacific during the 1970s that were sustained for decades with the steady support of the Pacific Council of Churches (PCC) and the WCC (Wier 2018, pp. 137–38).

5. Conclusions

The life story of Chutaro discussed in this article is based on his narrative as recounted by Ishimori, Maeda, and Muroño. It illuminates highly personal grief that forms a part of the complex collective grief in the Marshall Islands, Okinawa, and Japan. At the same time, his personal grief was also a function of each of these three collective grief. Stated differently, personal and collective grief are formed reflexively. This reflexive interface is also found in the coping and healing process of the two levels of grief. Christian churches played pivotal roles in connecting the two levels of grief within and beyond the Marshall Islands.

Before discussing this further, a limitation of this study needs to be acknowledged. The study and conclusion capture the narratives that were recounted to (heard) and recalled by (interpreted) the authors (from Japan) of Chutaro's short biographies, and are confined

to the spoken elements. As Maeda noted, Chutaro was explicit about his reservation to talk about his war experience. This was echoed in the narratives of other Okinawan migrants to Nan'yo who had kept their experience to themselves. Those narratives of silence or unspoken stories are likely to be profound and significant, but are not captured in this study. As such, the article and its conclusion represent only a slice and partial dimension of multifaceted grief and moral injury. The subsequent conclusion is, therefore, based on a premise that Chutaro's narratives represented the partial dimension of his life story that he chose to share with a public domain (in Japan). Notwithstanding this limitation, there is much to learn from this specific dimension.

Social constructionists' theoretical and conceptual frameworks provide a relevant framework for explaining the reflexive interface of the personal and collective grief surrounding Chutaro and how churches worked in this interface. They explain the mutually reinforcing dynamics between individual and collective process of meaning-making and social validation as the core and essential milestones for transcending loss and grief (Lichtenthal et al. 2011; Testoni et al. 2021). However, to capture the nature of the grief imposed on Chutaro and the Marshallese people, the concept of moral injury (Buechner 2020, p. 4) and "the six pillar of moral value (care, fairness, loyalty, authority, sanctity and liberty)" by Jonathan Haidt are helpful for deepening our understanding of the traumatic element of their grief (Haidt 2012; quoted by Buechner 2020, p. 6).

As discussed through this article, the war completely destroyed the foundations of Chutaro's identity, i.e., family, ethnic and national affiliations, as well as his economic foundations that represented his success as an independent migrant. At the same time, exposures to the abhorrent scenes of the war profoundly destabilized his values, beliefs and frames of reference, causing him a grave moral injury. The violence of war (absence of care and fairness) desolated his loyalty to the authority (Japan) and its sanctity (Emperor). His grieving process, therefore, required a total reconstruction of himself in a new set of social references that also provided an alternative authority and sanctity.

Under these circumstances, churches functioned as an alternative and neutral social institution capable of providing a legitimate set of common values, beliefs and frame of reference, and an identity as Christians. In my view, there were five areas where the Christian churches, as a social institution, played unique roles in addressing the grief and moral injury of Chutaro and the Marshallese people.

First, at the personal level, Chutaro gained a new identity, i.e., a Christian, through the local church. This identity gave a new social membership that also enabled his attainment of social validation within the Mili community. Second, the local church offered him a safe, private and sacred venue to silently deal with his deeply personal spiritual wounds and trauma, especially those that remained unspoken. Third, it provided him with a set of specific social roles for the benefits of the broader community, e.g., a deacon and a pastor. Being brought to those roles represented his personal commitment to the church and its community, as well as a communal trust in his personal quality and qualification. In the process of Chutaro's self-reconstruction, meaning making, and social validation, the church acted as an enabler. It progressively led his meaning-making journey to an ambitious mission that, in the end, addressed the collective grief in the Marshall Islands more directly.

Fourth, at the collective level within the Marshall Islands, where there were frequent changes in the secular colonial authorities, Christian churches functioned as a stable source of alternative authority, identity and moral values. Fifth, at the collective level, an extensive network and institutional framework of Christian churches transcended national boundaries. This network was a crucial enabler that permitted Chutaro to deal with the transnational nature of his grief and that of the Marshallese. There was an explicit overlap between the *Noden's* goal to reconcile the remnants of the colonial and war history and Chutaro's mission, as a pastor, to repent the sins left by Japan. This overlap re-connected the Marshall Islands and Japan, where Chutaro functioned as a facilitator and enabler.

It remains to be confirmed if the case presented in this study can be generalized; it may be an exception that was made possible by the specific religious and sociopolitical

context of the Marshall Islands. A deeper study of this case as well as a comparative examination with other cases would strengthen our understanding of the mutual effects between personal and collective grief, as well as the potential and limitations of religion in the process of coping with and transcending grief and moral injury. Nevertheless, each of the five areas discussed above did demonstrate the reflexivity of the personal and collective grieving and healing, facilitated by churches that bridged the two levels of grieving and healing. Chutaro's life story exhibited the potential for an individual to translate a profound personal grief and moral injury into a powerful mission for collective benefits, when it is effectively embraced by the communal support of family, community and religion.

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