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Archipelagic Memory, Indigeneity, and Transnational Belonging in Shō Tanaka's "Homecoming" [1)]

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Ⅰ. Introduction

For over 125 years, Okinawans have emigrated globally, passing down their indigenous language and culture to future generations while navigating the pressures of discrimination and assimilation in their new homelands. In the United States, particularly after World War II, Japanese Americans were forcibly placed in internment camps, which heightened their awareness of belonging and exclusion—caught between U.S. citizenship and ancestral ties to Japan. However, Okinawans were largely erased from the dominant narratives of Japanese American experiences, which often oversimplify their historical and political positioning.

Unlike Japanese Americans, Okinawans in the U.S. have experienced dual colonization—first by Japan and later by the United States—before arriving in foreign lands, shaping distinct forms of agency and identity. Consequently, the situated knowledges, memories, and experiences of Okinawan Americans do not always align with broader histories of Japanese immigration and discrimination. This exclusion is further reinforced by the ways public narratives are constructed—through discourse, collective memory, and performative acts that shape belonging and recognition.

This dynamic of exclusion and contested belonging shapes how Okinawan Americans engage with memory, identity, and homeland, fostering alternative narratives that resist assimilation into dominant frameworks of ethnicity and nationhood. Central to this process is the concept of transnational belonging, which intertwines the complexities of their multiple homelands, and archipelagic memory, rooted in histories of migration and displacement across the Okinawan archipelago and beyond. In response, Okinawans in the U.S. have established mutual support systems such as Okinawa clubs and local associations, creating spaces for cultural continuity and connection. Many Okinawans in the diaspora navigate shifting linguistic and cultural landscapes,

continuously reconnecting with their homeland while shaping their identities in relation to their places of residence.

While studies of Okinawan diasporas often relate them to dominant multicultural narratives of their host countries (Kinjo 2010; Maehara 2010; Arakaki 2017), more nuanced and ambivalent narratives also emerge. These narratives express fissures, unbelonging, discomfort, and forgetting, revealing how layers of colonial experience resurface, exposing complicities and internalized colonialism that Okinawan diasporic individuals must navigate. I conceptualize these negotiations as part of an Indigenous diaspora experience—not merely about cultural retention or assimilation, but about reckoning with the complexities of displacement and historical trauma.

Rather than aligning with a multiethnic framework of inherited belonging to Okinawa as a static homeland, Shō Tanaka's prose "Homecoming: For Sugio Yamashiro (1950–2020)" (thereafter, "Homecoming")—a poetic reflection on returning to ancestral Okinawa—moves beyond nationalistic narratives and fixed identity politics.

Contextualizing "Homecoming" within the broader, officially recognized global Uchinanchu narrative, this paper examines how Tanaka's storytelling embodies ambivalant Okinawan indigeneity through decolonial resistance. His work disrupts linear narratives of belonging, foregrounding displacement, relationality, and the ethics of return. In doing so, it reveals how global Uchinanchu identity is often marked by ambivalence, creating fissures and moments of elusiveness. By highlighting Tanaka's prose, I explore how his work resists framing Uchinanchu indigeneity as a fixed identity, revealing its complexity, fluidity, and relational nature—shaped by ongoing negotiations of memory, cultural practice, and historical disconnection. These negotiations are significant in the context of settler colonialism and displacement experienced by Okinawan diaspora communities.

Drawing from Indigenous methodologies, including Mishuana Goeman's theorization of storied land (2013)—which examines how Indigenous peoples forge connections across borders through shared experiences of colonialism, displacement, and cultural resilience—this paper explores these linkages through "Homecoming." I argue that Tanaka, as an Okinawan diaspora poet and writer, engages with Okinawa not as a static homeland, but as a dynamic, transnationally interconnected site of struggle and survival. His work situates Okinawan experiences within a broader decolonial framework, reclaiming space for an evolving, archipelagic indigeneity—one that emerges in diaspora.

To illuminate this argument, I first examine how Uchinanchu identity has been constructed around the World Uchinanchu Day declaration on October 30, 2016. I then review relevant literature on Asian American diasporas, analyzing how their experiences are shaped by and

negotiated in response to colonial policies in the United States. Additionally, I explore how Asian diasporic communities critically engage with their settler status on Indigenous lands, unpacking the intersections of colonialism. This self-awareness—reflected in narratives of migration, memory, and resistance—becomes a crucial part of decolonization, as diasporic subjects navigate their relationships to both their homelands and the Indigenous lands they now occupy.

II. The World Uchinanchu Day Declaration

The term "Uchinanchu," uchina as Okinawa and chu as people in the Uchina network commonly refers to people of Okinawan descent who emigrated overseas or to other prefectures and their descendants (Okinawan diaspora); Okinawa residents; and people with connections to Okinawa. For example, regarding the first one, in conjunction with the 6th Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival, an estimate was compiled showing that there are 415,361 people of Okinawan descent living overseas. This marks an increase of approximately 16,000 people since the previous festival (2011) and the first time the number has exceeded 400,000. Compared to 270,000 people at the first festival (1990), the figure has grown by 1.5 times (Okinawa Prefectural Exchange Promotion Division, 2016). The primary purpose of the festival is "to build networks with people of Okinawan descent and Okinawan associations residing in various parts of the world and to promote the establishment of an international exchange hub in the southern region of Japan" (Okinawa Prefectural Exchange Promotion Division, 2016). "World Uchinanchu" has become a symbolic representation of Okinawa, widely embraced by both Okinawan residents and people of Okinawan descent. Arakaki (2017) compellingly illustrates how the global Uchinanchu community is united by shared histories of poverty, war, and discrimination by mainland Japanese, fostering resilience, mutual support, and a deep attachment to Okinawa as "home." The World Uchinanchu Festival plays a crucial role in sustaining and globalizing this collective identity.

Extensive research on Okinawan diaspora identities examines migration patterns, remittances, and their economic impact, offering a geographical analysis of Okinawan emigrants—particularly their settlements in Latin America and the financial exchanges between diasporic communities and their homeland (Ishikawa, 1997, 2013, 2014). Building on economic and geographical perspectives, further studies have examined transborder networks among Okinawans, emphasizing cultural and linguistic ties. Kinjo (2010) explores the significance of chimugukuru, an Okinawan term derived from chimu (liver) and kukuru/gukuru (heart), which together convey deep affection and empathy. He argues that *chimugukuru*, sustained across generations and international boundaries, lies at the core of Uchinanchu identity. Expressed through art, language, and cultural

practices, it shapes a widely shared Okinawan ethos.

Kinjo (2010) further characterizes the Okinawan diaspora as a “"transnational ethnic group,"" highlighting how “chimugukuru” reinforces community bonds both within Japan and abroad. Through their distinct language, culture, and collective history, Okinawan emigrants have cultivated “a global network that embodies this spiritual and cultural essence.” Similarly, Maehara (2010) describes chimugukuru as the “"Okinawan mind and heart,"" defining it as a common disposition and orientation. He links this concept to Ichariba Chodee—the idea that “once we meet, we are siblings”—which he sees as central to Okinawan openness and inclusivity. He writes:

> “Being open, frank, and conveying ease… [which is] based on the idea of *Inu Uchinaanchu* (recognizing commonality in being Uchinaanchu), but at the same time, being inclusive and with ‘our hearts open toward others.’ Going outside of Okinawa to other places, Uchinaanchu pretty much convey their heart of *Ichariba Chodee* to the local people wherever they went” (10).

Arakaki and Kinjo foreground the historical and emotional bonds of the diaspora to understand Okinawans experiences and tactics of survival throghout the hardships in the immigrated countires. This kind of narrative is officiated on the World Uchinanchu Day declariaion.

Building on this narrative of survival and solidarity, the declaration of World Uchinanchu Day on October 30, 2016, further affirmed the emotional and historical bonds within the diaspora. This momentous occasion garnered global attention when then-Okinawa Governor Takeshi Onaga officiated the announcement at the Okinawa Cellular Stadium during the closing ceremony of the 6th Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival. As part of the celebration, the moderator chanted a proclamation that encapsulated the spirit of the Uchinanchu identity: “Our chimugukuru will be passed down eternally, our Uchina Network will grow, and the Uchinanchu of the world will continue to prosper.” [2] The declaration followed remarks by Andrés Higa, a third-generation Okinawan from Argentina, and Tadashi Andrés Ysa Urbina, Okinawan descent from Peru:

> We Uchinanchu have it all.
> We Uchinanchu have the power to shape the future.
> We Uchinanchu have hope for the future.
> We Uchinanchu have the valor to set off into the world.
> We Uchinanchu have the generosity to forgive each other.
> We Uchinanchu have the spirit of mutual aid to help each other.
> We Uchinanchu have a rich traditional culture.
> We Uchinanchu have the fortitude to overcome difficulties.

> We Uchinanchu have gratitude for our ancestors in our hearts.
> We Uchinanchu have love for our families in our hearts.
> We Uchinanchu have love for all those we meet in our hearts.
> We Uchinanchu have love for our ancestral home in our hearts.
> We Uchinanchu have a love for peace in our hearts.
> We Uchinanchu are proud to be Uchinanchu.
> And we Uchinanchu are one. [3)]

The repetition of phrases like "We Uchinanchu have" reinforces this narrative through acts of performativity (Butler 1990). The celebration served as a pivotal moment for Okinawan identity worldwide, drawing attention to the global community of Okinawan descendants, emphasizing their shared heritage and fostering collective pride and unity. The stadium hosted a full audience constituted of participants from around the world, who were part of the event's grand finale and boradcasted in Okinawa. This was significant in that it aseerts "common" Okinawan identities and drew attention to the global Okianwan community's shared heritage, focusing on culture, mutural aid and love for the ancestral home. Furthermore, their manifestation was officiated by the then-Governor of Okinawa, Takeshi Onaga: "I am proud to stand before you to declare this day as 'World Uchinanchu Day.'" The event not only acknowledged the struggles and ongoing challenges faced by Okinawan descendants in various locations, but it also unified and amplified these issues through official recognition. In this sense, the event occasions a public assertion of their existence and collective identity and experiences, which not only grants Uchinanchu identity in the present moment but also ensures continuity through the annual observance of World Uchinanchu Day commemorated each year, was weel as the five-year gatherings in the homeland..

Further, the website provides historical context to frame a public narrative of Uchinanchu emigration worldwide:

> Over 100 years ago, Uchinanchu strived to succeed in foreign lands, carrying a strong will and the spirit of Bankoku Shinryo (Bridge between Nations). They overcame many difficulties, and created new lives abroad, and passed on their Okinawan culture and identity to their children and grandchildren. Our hope is to promote and develop the international Uchina network they have created and help it to prosper in the future. With this goal, World Uchinanchu Day was created on this day.By creating World Uchinanchu Day, Okinawan youths Andres Higa and Tadashi Andres Ysa Urbina immortalized the history, culture and identity of the Uchinanchus of the world and this will not be lost to history." [5)]

As public narratives, Uchinanchu Day reflects shared stories that connect personal experiences to broader societal discourses (Somers 1994). While the event was initiated and narrated by two Uchinanchu, it draws on the hardships faced by their ancestors and the ongoing racial discrimination experienced in their countries of residence, cultivating a form of collective memory. Public memory and collective identity are central to how societal groups selectively remember and forget events to create a shared past (Halbwachs, 1992).

Such public narratives shape Uchinanchu identity by structuring how communities remember their past, interpret their present, and envision their future. They organize collective memory in ways that reinforce group cohesion, centered around key historical moments and shared experiences, which shape how communities perceive their past and mobilize for the future (Somers 1994; Melucci 1989; Assmann 1995). This process of collective memory, shaped by the shared narratives of hardship and resilience, aligns with the scholarly contributions of Kinjo, Arakaki, and Maehara. Their research deepens our understanding of the relationship between Okinawan diasporas and their homeland, emphasizing how these communities serve as symbolic representations of Okinawa. These representations, as highlighted by the scholars, are embraced not only by Okinawans in Okinawa but also by those of Okinawan descent worldwide, reinforcing Okinawan identity among participants (Kato et al., 2018).

On one hand, these symbolic characteristics have fostered solidarity and mutual support within the Uchināānchu diaspora, which were crucial for survival amid various forms of discrimination encountered in new homelands. However, scholars in ethnic studies caution against defining ethnic minorities through fixed traits, as such characterizations risk reinforcing essentialist narratives that obscure structural conditions and constrain agency. This type of framing may inadvertently obscure for instance, labor exploitation by presenting cultural traits as natural, rather than historically and socially constructed, as means through a resilient disposition of Uchianchu (Hall & Gay 1996; Liu 1998).

This critique is particularly relevant to Okinawan and Okinawan diaspora studies, where the portrayal of Okinawans as inherently peaceful or accepting can underrepresent the historical and ongoing impacts of Japanese and U.S. colonialism and militarization. Okinawa's postcolonial history is marked by a continual struggle for survival and negotiations with Japan and the U.S., both of which sustain unequal power dynamics (Kina 2011; Shimabuku 2018; Ginoza 2019). Okinawan emigration was not an exception to the influence by these forces. For instance, Japan's annexation of Okinawa in 1879 and the subsequent treatment of Okinawans as second-class citizens spurred migration in search of economic opportunities (Tomiyama 1990). World War II further exacerbated this trend, with the devastation of the Battle of Okinawa and U.S. military

policies pushing many Okinawans into diaspora communities.

The postcolonial and militarized conditions of Okinawa did not cease with the formal conclusion of the U.S. occupation in 1972 under the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR). Scholars across disciplines have explored the enduring impacts of these conditions. Lisa Yoneyama (2016), for instance, argues that the postwar U.S. occupation desgnatied Okinawa's position in Cold War geopolitics, perpetuating its militarization. Wendy Matsumura (2015) further analyzes Okinawa's labor conditions under colonial capitalism, suggesting that these systems continue to structure postcolonial inequalities. Moreover, Okinawa's historical memory is profoundly shaped by its postcolonial identity, particularly in relation to the 1945 Battle of Okinawa. Matsumura contends that a unified Okinawan identity was strategically manipulated by mainland Japanese capitalists, intellectuals, and politicians to suppress Okinawan resistance under Japanese rule. Through this capitalist mode of production, "Okinawa" was produced and reproduced as an organic, transhistorical entity, rather than a site of active contestation (Matsumura 2015). In this way, the history and heritage of Okinawa, particularly the hardships experienced through colonialism, are integral to the collective memory of Uchinanchu.

This colonial Okinawan experiences extends beyond the islands and nation-state boundary. Uchinanchu who migrated to the U.S. faced further inclusion and exclusion within the complex racial and ethnic formations of their new country of residence, and incorporated into the Asian American experiences.

III. Okinawans in the Asian American History

The Asian American diaspora is historically complex, shaped by migration, exclusion, resistance, and cultural negotiation. It encompasses diverse histories, from Chinese laborers who built railroads and worked on plantations in the 19th century (Karuka, 2019) to subsequent waves of Japanese, Filipino, Korean, and South Asian migrants, including refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, particularly after the Immigration and Nationality Act (Espiritu Gandhi, 2022). Given this diversity, the concept of an "Asian American" identity is not a fixed ethnic category but rather a political and social construct—a coalition forged in response to racism, exclusion, and imperialism, as exemplified by the Asian American movement of the 1960s and–1970s.

Asian American experiences reflect both distinct and shared histories in the United States, shaped by racial policies, labor dynamics, and political struggles. The fight for civil rights, anti-imperialism, and decolonization in the U.S. particularly galvanized marginalized communities to seek greater representation and control over their histories in academia. These efforts culminated in

demands for Ethnic Studies departments in California's higher education system—a direct result of student activism in the late 1960s, with Asian American students playing a critical role alongside Black, Chicano, and Native American activists. Solidarity with Black, Indigenous, and Latinx movements profoundly shaped Asian American activism (Ishizuka, 2016; Fujino, 2012; Kurashige, 2008; Kochiyama, 2004; Kim, 2010; Okihiro, 2016). Building on this framework of racial and ethnic solidarities, I argue that understanding Uchinanchu experiences in diaspora requires contextualizing their dynamic relationships in their settled lands and interactions with other marginalized racial and ethnic minorities. This perspective helps illuminate how Uchinanchu identities are continually shaped, reshaped, and reproduced as an organic, evolving form in diaspora.

Many scholars have noted that the experiences of Okinawan Americans differ from those of both mainland Japanese Americans and the broader Asian American community, due to their historical marginalization within Japanese American communities. This marginalization, rooted in cultural, linguistic, and class differences, shaped Okinawan Americans' social position (Sumida, 1991; Kimura, 1998; Nakasone, 2002; Yamazato, 2007, 2019). For example, mainland Japanese immigrants often perceived Okinawans as backward, reinforcing social and economic hierarchies through discrimination within Japanese communities. As a result, Okinawans in the U.S. faced "dual forms of prejudice and discrimination"—both from white plantation owners and from Japanese immigrants (Yamazato, 2007, 91).This dual marginalization mirrors memories of Okinawa's colonial history and the racialization of Okinawans as Indigenous peoples—a critical dimension that remains underexamined in both Asian American studies and Okinawan immigrant studies. Recognizing Okinawan Americans as Indigenous peoples of Okinawa, or descendants thereof, is essential to understanding their diasporic experiences within the broader context of settler colonialism and racial formations in the United States.

IV. Archipedagic Memory and Diaspora Indigeneity in Tanaka's "Homecoming"

Shō Tanaka's *Homecoming: For Sugio Yamashiro* (1950–2020), published in the *Okinawan Journal of Island Studies*(2021), is a deeply reflective meditation on diasporic return, ancestral memory, and disconnection. A fourth-generation Okinawan, Tanaka reflects on his journey to Okinawa in 2016, nearly a century after his great-grandparents emigrated from Yanbaru, Okinawa's northern region. The prose highlights the ambivalance of return, recognizing that "it is easy to romanticize the homecoming process, yet the act of returning has been fraught with loss" (125). Tanaka admits he had "long ignored and cast aside" his ancestral roots. By subtly referencing Sugio Yamashiro through the names of his great-grandparents, Taro and Uto Yamashiro, Tanaka

highlights the deeply personal journey of reconnecting with one's roots. The absence of Tanaka's own surname—Yamagushiku—further emphasizes a disconnection from his ancestral genealogy and roots. This reflects the ambivalence of return and reconnection, steering away from the romanticization of a glorified, collective Uchinanchu identity. Instead, it reveals the complexities of identity within the Okinawan diaspora, where the longing for reconnection is tempered by the challenges and realities of distance from one's homeland. Tanaka's narrative avoids idealized memories, portraying a journey of nuanced negotiation rather than a simple return to heritage. Through this lens, archipelagic memory captures Okinawan indigeneity as multifaceted—defined not only by belonging but also by dislocation, rooted in place, body, blood, and emotion, while acknowledging the layered realities of diaspora and return.

In the poem appears earlier, Tanaka seems to blur the boundaries between memory and lived experience, creating a vivid narrative that oscillates between past and present. The subject, "he," while unnamed, evokes a sense of a figure who may be both present and absent, navigating the emotional terrain of longing, loss, and the quest for reconnection.:

he rubs katsuo-bushi
flakes between his legs
handfuls of rancid paper
tuna fins slicing the skin
a rotten carcass dangling
high and dry he is sprawled
and spread open until high tide
ocean rushes into him
salt sending agony into his creation
as every one of his descendants awakens

Tanaka's poem uses vivid imagery and shifting timelines to explore the fluidity of memory and identity in the diasporic experience. By leaving the subject unnamed, the poet creates a space where ancestral ties remain both tangible and elusive, illustrating that reconnection is an ongoing process. The interplay between memory and lived experience evokes the ambivalence of return and the emotional complexities of diasporic identity. Tanaka reflects on how memories—personal and collective—are passed across generations, crossing the waters that connect islands and lands, shaping the present while keeping the past both distant and immediate. The imagery of rubbing katsuobushi (dried skipjack tuna) between the legs—an old Okinawan practice—embodies Tanaka's effort to reconnect with his heritage, evoking memories of childhood and

family. The decayed imagery of “"rancid paper”" and “"rotten carcass”" conveys the difficulty of reviving fading practices, connecting to the broader concept of archipelagic memory. This concept intertwines space, time, and identity, using the imagery of the ocean and water to reflect the processes of remembrance, return, and disconnection within the Okinawan diaspora.

The ocean, invoked as a force that “rushes into him,” symbolizes the surge of ancestral memory across space and time. Its ebb and flow mirror the dynamics of diasporic displacement and return, capturing both the restorative and painful tension of reconnection. The ocean serves as both a physical boundary and a metaphor for the movement between past and present, highlighting the ambivalence of returning to a home that feels distant and fractured. This imagery resonates with Epeli Hau’ofa’s concept of the “sea of islands,” where the interconnectedness of island communities and their shared history transcend physical and geopolitical boundaries. It challenges the fragmentation imposed by colonial forces that separate islands, islanders, and dispersed diasporas across the ocean. In this context, Tanaka seeks to trace a sense of belonging that transcends linear time and geopolitical borders.

Further, imagery of water also plays a crucial role, acting as a vehicle of both cleansing and submergence, evoking the tension between remembrance and forgetting. In Tanaka’s reflection, the ocean transmits ancestral memories, filling the cracks of personal and collective histories. Yet, it also brings pain and loss—“salt sending agony into his creation”—highlighting the complexities of return, disconnection, and identity. The water is both restorative and corrosive, connecting past trauma to the lived experiences of the diaspora. The water moves through generations, linking past trauma with present struggles. His journey to navigate islands and ocean can be understood within the context of archipelagic memory, which emphasizes the ocean as a connective force. It links diasporic memories, fragmented like islands, to resist colonial boundaries that limit the possibilities for Indigenous articulations of diaspora.

His journey to trace Okinawan memory began with seeking Okinawan people through his Okinawan relatives, but search is met with resistance by his uncles and an auntie, kept denying the exisitance of Okinawan community in the area which Tanaka describes “a strange kind of forgotten intimacy—somehow, we have condemned our own people to death, over and over again” and the LA smong making the attempt of the seaerch clouded and erased (126). The resistance felt like a shared and collective amnasia to confront the diaspora’s fragented memory. His ancle question and skepticism on Tanaka’s search for roots—as “as if our ancestors were simply some roundom strangers”—refelct chllegns of navigating a collective identity that has been neglectd, forgotten or denied (126). The repated denial of Okinawans exisitance by his elders felt like an act

of "condem[ing] their own peole to death" perhaps reflecting a legacy of colonialism, discoloation, and loss of culture, that his Okinawan elders try to forget, coop, or deny in order to exist in the settled land. Tanka continues to resist the forgeting and attempts to meaningfuly engage in a work of reclaiming his indigeniety after the prolenged absense and historical erasure of his memory.

Tanaka came across a village name in an old family stuck, feeling like a magnetic force at play. While the moment felt like "revisiting a lover" but an uncertin if he "had the concent to see one more tme" (126). Here, Tanaka seems to express a profound amibivalance and uncertainty, reflecting both a personal and colelctive struggle with the impact of disconnection. Negotiating between a sense of "cultural sin" caused from thrity years of absesne of recognition of his roots, a deep snse of internalized loss and alienation. The sin highlights the tension between his desire to reconnect with his ancestoral heritage and the assimilationalist forces in the US that shaped his estrangement that has "bread into [his] DNA" (126). The delicate interplay of loinging, pain, and discomfort from rediscovering was a rapture between past and present marked by his elders denial.

Through the negotiation, his indigeniety seems to be woeven in his narrative of loss and resileince that is shaped by the intersction of history, family and personal and intergenerational journy to his ancestoral land, Okianwa. Yet the action is frought by ambivalance between his right to claim his heritage and resaervations of claiming his indigenous ancestry. He describes the physical journey north to the village as a transition from modernized spaces to the more natural, contrasting the urban landscape of Los Angeles with the uncertain terrain of Yanbaru's rainforest—a place where something ancient lingers, where indigenous memories are stored. As he approaches the village, he feels his blood "flowing heavy," suggesting the deep emotional weight of reconnecting with a memory long disconnected, disowned, and deserted since his great-grandfather's departure—an event marked by finality: "He didn't appoint guardian spirits to keep the doors open; he didn't light incense" (126).

The absence of ritual—traditionally performed by lighting incense in Okinawan Indigenous culture to seek ancestral guardianship for journeys away from the homeland—symbolizes a severing from his roots. Acknowledging the immense difficulty of resurrecting these connections, Tanaka seems to feel that Okinawan Indigeneity is irretrievably lost, yet the pull to reconnect remains powerful. Although he is physically near his ancestral village, an ethical tension of diasporic belonging prevents him from getting closer; he feels unentitled. This suggests that the legitimacy to access Indigenous memory is not a given, but rather a negotiation with history, responsibility, and presence.

Tanaka's grief is not static or intangible; instead, it becomes nonlinear, tangible, and malleable—

something that can be “cut with a knife,” “partitioned,” or “shaped like clay” (126). Even as he attempts to let go of his grief, releasing it into the water, it “rains down on [him] once again.” This suggests that Indigenous roots do not offer closure but rather an ongoing confrontation with history. Tonawanda Band of Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman argues that even in displacement, Indigenous memory returns, haunts, and resists erasure (2013). This critique of linear colonial time resonates with Tanaka’s cyclical imagery, where memory refuses to be forgotten. The repetition of grief and remembrance continuously draws him back to the place through water. Water, in this context, is not merely an abstract space but a deeply storied entity in Okinawan Indigenous culture, linked to Niraikanai, the mythical realm of ancestors across the ocean.

For Tanaka, homecoming is not about simple restoration but a confrontation with intergenerational wounds, where grief resurfaces like rain—an experience that echoes Marianne Hirsch’s theory of postmemory (2012), where trauma is passed down through generations. This tension between memory and identity is further explored through Franz Fanon’s analysis in The Wretched of the Earth (1963), where he examines the psychological effects of colonization on men. Fanon argues that colonial structures induce a crisis of identity and masculinity, often leading colonized men to feel inferior and emasculated. In response, they may perform masculinity as a way to assert power and resist colonial stereotypes that depict indigenous and ethnic minorities as weak (Fanon 1963; Connell 2005). In contrast to this stereotypical performance of masculinity, Tanaka resists such identification, embracing vulnerability instead. His expression of discomfort, nervousness, and internalized pain stands in stark contrast to the more masculine, confidently delivered notion of what it means to be Uchinanchu. While Uchinanchu men may often feel expectation to assert pride in their Okinawan identity through collective masculine declarations, such as “We Uchinanchu have it all” chant seen during Uchinanchu Day, Tanaka’s approach does not conform to this uncomplicated collective identity. Rather, his narrative reflects an ongoing negotiation of belonging, memory, and history, characterized by fragmentation and complexity.

Tanaka articulates how Okinawan Americans often adopt settler colonial ways, highlighting the complexities of diasporic identity: “As Okinawan in the diaspora, more often than not we adopt the settler colonial ways of the countries in which we make our lives—segregating us from the Indigenous knowledges that run deep in the places we migrate to” (125). This reflection reveals how dominant colonial structures in the U.S. further alienate him from Indigenous knowledge while reinforcing his internalized detachment from ancestral traditions. Homecoming does not resolve this disconnection but instead exposes the gaps between belonging and estrangement.

During Obon, the three-day ceremony honoring ancestors, Tanaka does not receive an open

welcome but instead encounters a moment of rhetorical questioning: "Ancestors were supposed to be greeted? And groomed? And fed?" (126). Rather than passive or silent figures, the ancestors become an active presence, confronting him with their own inquiries: "Where have you been? Why have you returned? What do you want from us?" (126). Here, return is not a simple reconnection nor an automatic claim to indigeneity, but rather a call to accountability(126). Despite feeling unworthy and confronted, Tanaka ultimately receives: "gifts and customs, prayers and provocations" (126). Yet, even in receiving, he struggles to respond: "I could barely wrap [my] tongue around a thank you. I was stunned—as a stranger in a land I had forgotten I had known" (126). This concluding moment encapsulates the paradox of diasporic return, which simultaneously marks Indigenous displacement. Memory and land remain storied but not easily reclaimed, making the act of remembering not just a personal journey, but a form of resistance to colonial diasporic histories.

V. Conclusion

I have demonstrated how the public narrative surrounding Uchinānchu celebrates a consistent and unified Okinawan identity, presenting it as a shared disposition among Okinawans worldwide. This narrative highlights the resilience of Okinawans in the face of racial discrimination in emigrant countries and underscores communal support grounded in shared ancestry, often expressed through Okinawan phrases like chimugukuru and ichariba chōre. However, alongside this dominant narrative, the works of Indigenous diaspora poet and writer Shō Tanaka shed light on the unspoken pain, ruptures, and disconnections from their ancestral homeland. Through his storytelling, Tanaka reveals how Okinawan diaspora experiences are shaped by ongoing negotiations of indigenous memory, cultural practices, and historical disconnections, particularly within the contexts of settler colonialism and displacement.

I argue that Tanaka's work reflect a form of diasporic indigeneity that resists reduction to a fixed ethnic or cultural category. Instead, it is an active, dynamic process of engaging with ancestral knowledge, land, and memory, even when these connections are fragmented, uncertain, or burdened by colonial histories. By emphasizing the ethical responsibility of Uchinānchu in the diaspora, Tanaka's work unsettles the essentialization of Uchinānchu identity, presenting it as a living, evolving practice that continuously challenges fixed notions of national, cultural, and ethnic identities.

Furthermore, I have delineated the interconnected concepts of archipelagic memory, diaspora indigeneity, and transnational belonging. By situating Okinawan diaspora within the broader frameworks of decolonization, I argue that Uchinānchu indigeneity articulated thorugh diaspora poet, resists the constraints of nation-state borders and instead emphasizes the lived realities of

diasporic communities. This perspective calls for a rethinking of indigeneity, acknowledging the dynamic and ongoing struggles of those who navigate multiple homelands and histories in the process of reclaiming and reimagining their identities.

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Notes

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2）The 7th World Uchinanchu Festival, Sekai no uchinanchu no hi seitei sengen [The World Uchinanchu Day Declaration], November 1, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/

watch?v=wqmieX22BXo.

3）World Uchinanchu Network, “Declaration of Govonor Takeshi Onaga, Andres Higa and Tadashi Andres Ysa Urbina,” Okinawa Prefecture, https://wun.jp/en/wud/declare; The 7th World Uchinanchu Festival, Sekai no uchinanchu no hi seitei sengen [The World Uchinanchu Day Declaration], November 1, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqmieX22BXo.

4）Ibid.

5）Okinawa International Exchange & Human Resources Development Foundation, “RE: The Establishment of ‘World Uchinanchu Day.”; World Uchinanchu Network, “What is World Uchinanchu Day?” Okinawa Prefecture, https://wun.jp/en/wud#:~:text=The%20World%20Uchinanchu%20Day%20was,previously%20lived%20in%20Nago%20city.

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ショ・タナカの『帰郷』における島嶼的、インディジネイティ、越境的帰属

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本稿は、沖縄の人々が 125 年以上にわたり世界各地に移住し、先住民の言語と文化を守りつつ、差別や同化の圧力に直面してきた過程、特にアメリカ合衆国における現代の経験に焦点を当てる。沖縄の人々は、日本系アメリカ人の支配的な物語においてほとんど語る場を持たず、日本とアメリカによる二重の植民地化の歴史的経験はしばしば不可視化されてきた。この排除は、沖縄アメリカ人が記憶、アイデンティティ、帰属感を形成し、同化に抵抗する物語を構築する過程に影響を与えている。本稿では、ショー・タナカの作品『Homecoming: For Sugio Yamashiro (1950-2020)』を通じて、沖縄のディアスポラがどのように島嶼と海を横断するトランスオーシャニックな記憶と向き合い、帰郷を通じてディアスポラ的先住民性をどのように交渉しているのかを明らかにする。また、タナカの作品が沖縄のディアスポラにおける先住民性をどのように動的に再想像しているかを論じる。さらに、ディアスポラ的先住民性が、植民地主義、記憶、身体、土地、海との関係性の中で流動的に表象される過程を明示し、タナカの作品がどのようにそのプロセスを交渉しているかを探る。

キーワード：島嶼の記憶、インディジネイティ、トランスナショナルな帰属