Okinawan Peruvians’ Search for Home and Impossible Return in Doris Moromisato’s *Chambala era un camino* (1999)

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Abstract

In her collection of poems, *Chambala era un camino*, Okinawan Peruvian poet Doris Moromisato attempts to recapture her origin and home by traveling back and forth between her childhood in Chambala, her birthplace, and Okinawa, her parents’ homeland. Her efforts to recover her origin and home, however, turn into an interminable pursuit, entailing an endless journey that is further complicated by a more recent migrant traveling—from Chambala to the industrial city of Gunma, Japan. The exploration of her origin and home implies not only her unattainable destiny, but also the possibility of finding innumerable ways (re)defining her origin(s) and home(s). This study explores the emergence of these myriads of unknowables in Moromisato’s poetic journey, through Iain Chambers’ theory of the “migrant landscape,” to which he refers as a type of writing that brings skepticism to traditionally defined concepts such as origin and home, which arises due to the phenomena of migration, opening up ongoing and interminable interpretations of once established concepts. Chambers indicates that migrancy denotes a constant transmutation prompted by the relocations and displacements of people crossing borders, whether by force or voluntarily. *Chambala* can be interpreted as a “migrant landscape,” allowing Morimosato no return to her origin and home, yet at the same time, opening up infinite paths to her plural destinations. The ongoingness in finding multiple destinations leads Moromisato to depict herself as always on the move, oscillating between a yearning for her origin and home yet repudiating the clear demarcation of that origin and home.

Introduction: A Map of Transpacific Border-Crossings

In her collection of poems, *Chambala era un camino* [*Chambala Was a Path*] (my translation)¹ (1999), Doris Moromisato Miyasato (1962–), Okinawan
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Peruvian poet, attempts to find her origin and home through the weaving of a back-and-forth tapestry between Chambala, her birthplace, where she spent her childhood, and Okinawa, where her immigrant parents spent their childhoods before leaving for Peru. Her efforts to recover her origin and home, however, turn into an interminable pursuit, entailing an endless journey that is further complicated by a more recent migrant traveling—from Chambala to the industrial city of Gunma, Japan. Debbie Lee-DiStefano and Rebecca Riger Tsurumi, scholars of Asian Latin American literature, consider *Chambala* as an artistic creation in which Moromisato meditates on her ancestral roots as a daughter of Okinawan immigrants in order to search for her identity and place of belonging (Lee-DiStefano 17-35; Riger Tsurumi 124-28). These critics have primarily examined how Moromisato traces the formation of her identity back to her birth, childhood, and her immigrant parents’ experiences that she heard about and observed as a child, while also focusing on how she connects her family’s past memory and her own to her present life, in order to explore her identity formation.

However, Moromisato’s opening section, “Todo sucedió en Chambala” [“Everything Happened in Chambala”] poses questions that neither of these studies has drawn close attention to. She asks: “¿Cómo retornar a la infancia?, ¿cómo recuperar las sandías de los interminables veranos, a mis pequeñas cómplices que migraron a metrópolis lejanas buscando fortuna?, ¿cómo revivir a mis muertos, a mi madre arrebatada por el silencio?” (6). [“How to return to my childhood? How to recover the watermelons of the endless summers, my little accomplices who migrated to far away metropolis, looking for fortune? How to revive my dead, my mother carried away by the silence?”]. Moromisato asks herself how she can return to her childhood after leaving and abandoning her birthplace in order to migrate or move to somewhere else in the name of progress and development and how she can recover her childhood memory and revive her dead ancestors, including her mother, who quietly endured her life.

Rather than directly striving for answers to these primary questions, Moromisato first, ponders over the German poet Rainer Marina Rilke’s advice that guides her to “live the questions” now and let her life penetrate itself into the answers, and then discloses that this book was born out of her hope of stumbling, someday through her poetry, upon the answers:
Decía Rilke que tenga paciencia con todo lo que en el corazón permanece sin respuesta, que viva las preguntas, y que un día no muy lejano se introducirá mi vida en las respuestas. Aún espero ese anhelado amanecer. Este libro nace de esa fe pues presiento que las palabras, mágicas y desgarradoras, serán mi único intento. (6)

[Rilke said to be patient with all the things that remain in one’s heart without answers, to live the questions, and that one day, not so far from now, my life will make its way into the answers. I’m still waiting for that special dawn. This book rises out of that faith, because I have a feeling that these words, magical and heartrending, will be my only attempt]. (6)

Moromisato engages the reader in her ongoing search for answers that takes place in the poems of “magical and heartrending” words that serve as a generator for her to recollect her, both wonderful and distressing, childhood memory, in order not necessarily to return to her origin and home, but rather to delineate multifarious ways for reevaluating and redefining origin and home.

This study attempts to discuss how and why Chambala era un camino [Chambala Was a Path] can be read as a text of a “migrant landscape,” to borrow Iain Chambers’ expression. A “migrant landscape” refers to a type of writing that brings a skepticism to the traditionally defined concepts such as history, origin, home, and identity; a skepticism which emerges due to the phenomena of migration, opening up ongoing and interminable interpretations of once established concepts (9-11). In his book Migrancy, Culture and Identity, Chambers indicates that migrancy denotes a “perpetual movement of transmutation and transformation” prompted by the relocations and displacements of people, whether by force or voluntarily, crossing borders (1-3), as enunciated as follows:

Migrancy [...] involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming – completing the story, domesticating the detour – becomes an impossibility. (5)
In such a journey full of detours, “we move into a vaster landscape [in which] [o]ur sense of belonging, our language, and the myths we carry in us remain, but no longer as ‘origins’ or signs of ‘authenticity’ capable of guaranteeing the sense of our lives, [...] now linger[ing] on as traces, voices, memories and murmurs that are mixed in with other histories, episodes, encounters” (Chambers 18-19).

In Chambala Moromisato creates a space of migrancy in which she constantly moves from one place to another, taking detours and allowing her no return to her origin and home. Yet at the same time, her constant movements and detours, stemmed from “traces, voices, memories and murmurs,” enable her to discover infinite paths to her plural and unknown destinations. Chambers calls the emergence of this unknownness “the paradox in the belly of writing,” which “like the ambiguity of travel, [...] starts from known materials—a language, a lexicon, a discourse, a series of archives—and yet seeks to extract from the limits of its movement, from the experience of transit, a surplus, an excess, leading to an unforeseen and unknown possibility” (10). In Chambala, Moromisato locates herself in such a traveling site where she comes to realize that she always has to be on the move, oscillating between a yearning for her origin and home, yet repudiating the clear demarcation of that origin and home, in order to find innumerable ways for (re)defining and (re)approaching her origin(s) and home(s).

The structure of Chambala can be understood as a display of a map of the spatio-temporal routes that Moromisato takes in her journey. The prose introduction “Todo sucedió en Chambala,” [“Everything Happened in Chambala”] in which Moromisato, dedicating the book to her mother, a peasant from Okinawa, contemplates the moments when she was conceived and born in Chambala, agricultural zone on the outskirts of Lima, where her parents worked as immigrant peasants. This section first presents Moromisato’s memory of the beauty of Chambala, yet immediately recalls its disappearance, which urges her to launch the questions, quoted above, regarding her return to Chambala and the recovery of the beauty. The introduction is then followed by twenty-four poems which are carefully assembled in four thematic sections—home, father, mother, and migration—, and a closing prosaic poem which serves as an epilogue of the entire collection. The first section, “Morada donde la luna” [“Dwelling Where the Moon Is”], takes the reader to the memory
of her childhood home in Chambala. In the second section, “Crónica de mi padre” [“Chronicle of My Father”], the author travels into Uchiná (Okinawa in the Okinawan language) through her father’s eyes, which gaze away at his father and the land and people of a fishing and rice farm village in Okinawa. In the third section, “Madre no canta más” [“Mother No Longer Sings”], Moromisato returns again to Chambala, where the poetic voice mourns her mother’s death, but revives her mother both as a mother who gives birth to and raises her in Chambala and as a child growing up in the village of Akamichi, Okinawa. In the last section of the collection, “Tillandsias y Destierros” [“Tillandsias and Exiles”], Moromisato extends her journey of going back and forth between the memories of Chambala and Okinawa into the industrial city of Gunma, Japan, where many Japanese Peruvians has recently emigrated to work as contract laborers.

Through this structural framework of the collection as a whole, Moromisato demonstrates that her trip to her birthplace, Chambala, is not a simple nostalgic return to her origin, looking back at her childhood from the present moment, but rather a point of departure that leads her to leave and arrive in Chambala multiple times, intertwining her childhood memory to her ancestral memories from Okinawa, as well as linking her parents’ immigration experience to her sister’s recent reverse immigration to Japan. Delineating a map of spatio-temporal transpacific border-crossings, Moromisato elucidates the impossibility of returning to and staying at one place and time zone and suggests that, carrying her baggage accumulated and multilayered at each crossing point, she simply drifts herself into an immense, transmutable, and impenetrable “migrant landscape.” In this study, I examine six poems, “El hogar” [“The Home”], “Chambala era un camino estrecho y polvoriento” [“Chambala Was a Narrow and Dusty Path”], “Aguacero de enero (Chambala, 1953)” [“Downpour of January (Chambala, 1953)”], “Chambala, 6 de setiembre” [“Chambala, September 6th”], “En Gunma la luna es un pastel de arroz” [“In Gunma the Moon is a Rice Cake”], and “Tillandsias,” [“Tillandsias”], which are most closely related to the theme of the “migrant landscape.”

“El hogar” [“The Home”]: Traveling into the Night Sky

“Morada donde la luna” [“Dwelling Where the Moon Is”] opens with a poem,
“El hogar” [“The Home”], in which Moromisato pronounces her return to her childhood home through the poetic voice. The title, “El hogar” [“The Home”], evokes the feeling of togetherness and affection of a family, yet immediately contradicts such a pleasant connotation. The first six lines anticipate a presence of a disillusioned atmosphere at home:

Entre cuatro horizontes se apretaba la vida en mis ojos.  
Por el suelo se arrastraba la esperanza  
y el techo se abría como un cielo después de la lluvia.  
Así giraba mi infancia  
con los sueños a cuestas  
cargando en las manos un péndulo muerto. (9)

[Between four horizons, life pushed itself into my eyes.  
Hope crawled along the floor  
and the ceiling opened like a sky after rain.  
Thus spun my childhood with my dreams on my back  
and in my hands a dead pendulum]. (9)

The poetic voice describes her childhood home as a place made of “four horizons” where she observes both dreams and disillusions hovering between the floor and ceiling, two of the “four horizons.” Hope, crawling on the floor, is languishing, while the ceiling opens, inviting an exit from the stagnant floor into the open sky. Her childhood revolves around this contradictory atmosphere permeated by dreams cherishing inspirational imaginations toward the future and “un péndulo muerto” [“a dead pendulum”] that symbolizes motionless reality, inhibiting the spurts of aspirations.

In the next nine lines, the poetic voice goes on to reveal that it is her family that has brought “a dead pendulum” to the house and show how she manages to keep her dreams alive:

A mi puerta llegaban zapatos cubiertos de polvo  
y en la mesa existía un enigma llamado familia.  
Nadie movía el mantel de mi padre  
y mis hermanos muy silenciosos
sepultaban sus sueños en un plato de sopa.
Mi padre era un templo
el sol iba a las cinco a morir en sus brazos.
A través de mi madre las estrellas me alumbraban
y la luna era un sueño plateado y hermoso en el cielo de enero. (9)

[At my door shoes covered with dust would arrive
and at the table existed an enigma called family.
No one moved my father’s tablecloth
and my very quiet brothers
buried their dreams in a plate of soup.
My father was a temple
the sun at five went to die in his arms.
Through my mother the stars illuminated me
and the moon was a silver and beautiful dream in the sky of January]. (9)

The door where her father returns from work can be interpreted as the third horizon of the four that also suffocates hopes as the floor does. The oppressive air coming from the door along with his return makes her family become “an enigma” represented by a strange dinner scene where no one interacts with one another. Her father is the god-like authority who brings bread home by working hard from sunrise to sunset and rules the house. Her brothers must give up their dreams for making a living without confronting her father’s rules. Inside this house of enigma, where dreams cringe on the floor and are sealed in by the door, the only person who gives her hope is her mother. The stars and silver moon across her mother shine and brighten the poetic voice’s heart. In contrast to the floor and door, the ceiling through which the illuminations from the night sky are conveyed opens up a possibility of keeping her dreams alive.

Nevertheless, this possibility is blocked again, this time by the wall, the fourth horizon, which appears in the second stanza that finishes the poem:

Entre cuatro horizontes se hallaba incrustado mi hogar
con un almanaque cubierto de polvo
esperando volverse ayer
y en la verde pared el cuadro grave de mi abuela
y un triste reloj
    quieto
cansado
negándonos la vejez. (9)

[Between four horizons my home was found encrusted
with an almanac covered with dust
hoping to become yesterday
and on the green wall the serious picture of my grandmother
and a sad clock
    quiet
tired
denying us old age]. (9)

As with the floor and door, the wall where an old calendar, stopped clock,
and her grandmother’s picture are hung symbolizes the containment of
hopes of tomorrow. Even with the ceiling – the only horizon that invites
her to keep dreaming for the future –, she is enclosed in the forces of the
other three horizons – the floor, door and wall –, and her memory of her
home is immobilized and buried on the dusty calendar of the past, like her
grandmother’s picture buried on the wall. This unpleasant air of immobility can
be interpreted as some sensation that triggers the poetic voice to recollect her
childhood home and return there through her memory. And more importantly,
it is this unpleasant air at home that makes her recollect her wish to flee into
the shining stars and moon in the night sky. What Moromisato insinuates in “El
hogar” [“The Home”] is that the poetic voice’s coming home already indicates
her leaving home.

“Chambala era un camino estrecho y polvoriento”
[“Chambala Was a Narrow and Dusty Path”]: Homecoming
as Repeated Returns and Leaves

This co-presence of coming home and leaving home becomes more
pronounced in “Chambala era un camino estrecho y polvoriento” [“Chambala
Was a Narrow and Dusty Path”], first through the poetic voice’s movements of
going inside and outside of her childhood house. The poetic voice does not stay inside, unlike that of “El hogar” [“The Home”], but leaves the house to flee to her shelter, which she finds outside under the night sky:

Bajo este cielo, bajo esta misma luna
yo respiraba de niña esta misma orfandad.
Tendida sobre el polvo latía como un frágil animal
miraba al cielo y contaba una a una las estrellas
de pronto madre llamaba desde la cocina
trescientas diecisiete más la luna
las retenía entre los dedos y dejaba de contar.
La noche dentro de mi casa era menos mágica
afuera era enorme
y más blanca
coge [sic] bien la cuchara, decía madre
y de mis manos iban cayendo una a una las estrellas. (25)

[Under this sky, under this same moon
I used to breathe as a child this same orphanhood.
Spread out on the dust my heart beats like a fragile animal
[and I] watched the sky and counted one by one the stars
soon mother called from the kitchen
three hundred seventeen and the moon
I held them between my fingers and quit counting.
The night within my house was less magic
outside it was enormous
and whiter
hold the spoon correctly, mother used to say
and from my hands one by one the stars were falling]. (25)

The poetic voice remembers the feeling of abandonment in the inside of her childhood house and a remedy for her loneliness that she finds in the night sky. Looking at the moon and counting stars, the poetic voice feels the vast open space of the sky that steers her to the magical world of fantasy, far away from the reality of the house. Her mother calls her to come inside the house,
and her mother’s command makes all the stars caught in her hands fall down. The poetic voice is forced to remain inside the house and begins to unfold her anxiety at having to be bound to the mundane, enclosed world of adults:

Chambala era un camino estrecho y polvoriento
en el recuadro del viejo portal
se cocían habas, las manos se tocaban al dormir
se paría
y se moría apenas.
Bajo este cielo
mi padre llenaba la noche de canciones antiguas
madre remendaba la vieja colcha sobre la cama
y yo, echada,
presentía como poco a poco un extrañó dolor
brotaba de mi pecho y se iba deslizando
de bajo de mi vientre
hasta que estiraba los brazos y la encontraba allí
a mi lado, cerrando una puntada. Quieta, me miraba
trescientas diecisiete más la luna, me decía
y yo dejaba de temblar. (25)

[Chambala was a narrow and dusty path
at the fence of the old gate
they cooked broad beans, they touched each other’s hands to sleep
one gave birth
and died barely.
Under this sky
My father filled the night with old songs
mother mended the old blanket on the bed
and I, lying down,
sensed how little by little a strange pain
sprang out from my chest and was slowly sliding
under my womb
until I stretched out my arms and found her there
at my side, stitching. Quiet, she looked at me
three hundred seventeen and the moon, she said
and I quit trembling]. (25)

To the poetic voice, life in Chambala is unexciting, yet offers certain calmness, just as her enduring mother surrenders herself to gendered obligations, yet has the magical power to take her daughter back to the fantasy world of stars and the moon and expel fear from her daughter.

Although Moromisato pictures the sky outside the house as a positive sphere that propels the poetic voice to temporarily move away and feel free from the hamperedness of the inside, the author neither creates a dichotomy of the inside and outside, nor idealizes the outside as opposed to the inside. What she does is to locate the conception of childhood home at the crossing sections of the inside and the outside at which the poetic voice moves back and forth between the two spaces. By making the poetic voice cross the boundaries, Moromisato highlights the impossibility of situating her childhood home at a singular, locatable space.

Many scholars who explore colonial and postcolonial conditions as well as cultural and political displacement and exile have reexamined the conventional understanding of home as a stable place and re-approached home as something instable and indefinable. To give a few examples, Gloria Anzaldúa, a Texan Chicana lesbian writer, exposes many ways for looking at home within the context of Chicana culture. She states: “[...] in leaving home I did not lose touch with my origins because lo mexicano is in my system. I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry ‘home’ on my back” (43). Although she asserts that her “home” is everywhere she goes, she confesses her fear of going home, where she is “abandoned by the mother, [to] the culture” that rules under the male-heterosexual Chicano domination (42-43). She feels estranged and alienated from the home established by the dominant culture, but the home she carries is everywhere. Similarly, bell hooks manifests such a contradictory interpretation of home within the context of African American women’s challenges and strategies for fighting against racial and gender discrimination. Hooks states: “At times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is the place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference.”
Home is no longer a static, familiar, and locatable place, but rather is “a mobile habitat,” that is contingent upon the dweller’s movements and is constantly provoking questions to mobilize the meanings of home (Chambers 4).

As seen above, in the poem “Chambala,” Moromisato depicts the poetic voice moving between the outside of the house/the cosmic immense space of the sky and the inside/the space of rules and confinement, making the reader see that for the poetic voice being at home does not mean staying still at one place, but involves plural points in motion – leaving the inside, temporarily staying outside, and returning to the inside. Whenever she remembers her home, both the inside and outside, as well as the crossroads of the two spheres, the locations of her homecoming are multilayered.

Beyond this multiplicity of being at home, her homecoming also involves the condition of leaving. The last concluding stanza of “Chambala era un camino” [“Chambala Was a Path”] elucidates such a contradiction of the condition of returning home:

Bajo esta misma noche, bajo esta misma orfandad
yo me dormía muy cerca a ella
para amarla,
para huir de su amor. (25)

[Under this same night, under this same orphanhood
I fell asleep close to her (it)
to love her (it),
to flee from her (its) love. (25)

If one interprets that the pronouns “ella” [“she/it”], “la” [“her/it”], and “su” [“her/its”] in the second, third, and fourth lines as referring to the word “orfandad” [“orphanhood”], it is possible to translate the “orfandad” [“orphanhood”] as Chambala – that is the poetic voice’s childhood home –, where she feels abandoned, yet protected and loved by her mother. She, assuring the protection of her hometown and mother, falls asleep, in order to cherish their love and at the same time, flee from her hometown, home, and mother to be independent. The last three lines communicate that the poetic
voice, holding the memory of her childhood home and her mother, will return
to them and leave them again to return again. This repetition of returning and
leaving formulates a circularity that disturbs the linear understanding of the
fixed places and times of arrival and departure, and this destabilization of the
linearity recalls Chambers’ notion of the movement of a migrant “traveler”
quoted above: “Migrancy […] involves a movement in which neither the points
of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain” (5).

The first section of the collection, “Morada donde la luna” [“Dwelling
Where the Moon Is”], ends with this poem, but her journey without a clear
point of departure and arrival or final destination continues. Indeed, she is
about to leave Chambala, carrying her memory of “un camino estrecho y
polvoriento” [“a narrow and dusty path”], and enter the terrain of her father’s
memory of Okinawa, in which the understanding of arrival and departure is
further complicated.

“Aguaçero de enero” (Chambala, 1953) [“Downpour of
January (Chambala, 1953)]: Mobilizing “an Old and
Remote Memory” of Okinawa

In the second section of the collection, “Crónica de mi padre” [“Chronicle of
My Father”], Moromisato presents her father’s experience as an immigrant
through four poems. The same poetic voice from the first section, “Morada
donde la luna” [“Dwelling Where the Moon Is”], opens her father’s chronicle,
presenting what she observes from her father as a child in Chambala, but in
the middle of the section, the poetic voice changes to her father’s own that
recounts his immigration to Peru from Okinawa with a nostalgic yearning for
his homeland. Thus the linear concept of a travel itinerary, already disarrayed
by the multiple movements of returning and leaving in the first section, is
further unsettled by another layer of spatio-temporal traveling – her father’s
leaving Okinawa, arriving in Peru, and his return to his hometown through his
remembrances.

In “Aguaçero de enero (Chambala, 1953)” [“Downpour of January
(Chambala, 1953)”], Moromisato switches the poetic voice from the daughter’s
voice to her father’s in order to penetrate his inner thoughts at a deeper level.
This poem takes the reader to the time, twenty-one years later, after he arrives
in Laredo, Peru, from Okinawa, when the poetic voice establishes himself in Chambala, owning agricultural land. The poem opens with a scene in which the poetic voice, walking in the middle of a big January downpour toward his land, wishes for his sown field to be moistened:

Aguacero de enero, moja mi tierra
humece el camino que me lleva al sembrío.
Fuertes suenen tus gotas al caer sobre el prado.

Aún el cielo no se desprende de los cerros,
¿qué será del barco donde divisé por primera vez estas tierras?
¿qué será de su madera esta húmeda mañana?

Ay, las antiguas promesas.
Tornando la vista al horizonte
dejé a mi padre cultivando el arroz
mis juegos envueltos en un pañuelo
una lágrima flotando en el viejo estanque
cuando el incesante croar de las ranas parecía burlarse de mi pesar. (35)

[Downpour of January, wet my land
moisten the road that takes me to the sown field.
Strong your drops sound upon falling into the meadow.

Still the sky is not loosened from the hills,
What has become of the ship where I made out these lands for the first time?
What has become of its wood this humid morning?

Oh! the old promises.
Turning my eyes to the horizon
I left my father cultivating the rice
my toys wrapped in a handkerchief
a tear floating in the old pond
when the frogs’ incessant croaking seemed to be making fun of my regret]. (35)
Listening to the sound of the downpour drops and contemplating how the heavy rain connects the sky and hills, the poetic voice starts remembering the wooden boat in which he saw the lands in the distance, upon coming to Chambala. Then his memory traces back to the moment when he left his hometown for a promise of opportunities and success and turns to the scenery of a rice field where his father is working. The poetic voice feels melancholic about his father and meditates on what he has obtained and what he has left:

Aguacero de enero, avanza por los surcos
y me acompaña tu voz.
Antes la fortuna era un trozo de pan
un nuevo latido en el pecho.
Ya nadie nos quitará este suelo
nadie arrancará la esperanza de mis manos.

Separo los labios y atrapo con mi lengua
un trozo blando de tu cuerpo,
¿de qué sabor será mi historia, de qué color la sangre que esparcí?
¿habrá terminado padre de sembrar el arrozal? (35)

[Downpour of January, I move forward through the furrows and your voice accompanies me.
Then fortune was a piece of bread
a new beat in my chest.
But now no one can take this land from us.
No one will tear hope from my hands.

I separate my lips and catch a soft bit of your body,
what flavor will my story be, what color will be the blood that I scattered?
Will my father have finished sowing the rice field?] (35)

The poetic voice is certain that he has earned his own land as a result of his pursuit of success and hard work and continues to try to own it, yet he ponders how his life story, especially his struggles, will be painted. And immediately, he wonders if his father has finished planting his rice field. Despite the questions
La cosecha está lejana, dejo correr el agua en los almácigos
y las preguntas zumban como abejas por mi mente.
Mi única certeza es este riachuelo
abriéndose camino entre guijarros y hojarascas.
Aguacero de enero, íntimo amigo
rocia mis lágrimas
mi escaso y blanco cabello
y no cuentes a nadie que soy feliz bajo tu manto.
No relates mi gloria
ni que el estanque de las ranas
es ya una vieja y lejana memoria. (36)

[The harvest is far off, I let the water run on the seedbeds and the questions buzz like bees around my mind. My only certainty is this stream opening up a path between pebbles and fallen leaves. Downpour of January, close friend wash down my tears my thin and white hair and don’t tell anyone that I am happy under your cloak. Don’t tell my glory or that the pond of the frogs is now an old and remote memory]. (36)

The thoughts of certainty and doubts continue to wander back and forth in the mind of the poetic voice, and he constantly endeavors to focus on taking care of his land, advancing forward, like a stream opening up a path between pebbles and fallen leaves. Yet, the January rain, which he calls “íntimo amigo” [“close friend”], provokes a melancholic feeling that leads him to his memory of his father working on the rice field, his struggles, success, and pride. Nonetheless, at the end of the poem, he wants neither to reveal his melancholic emotion and tears, nor to show his success, concluding that what he has endured is “now an
old and remote memory” (36).

On the one hand, one can read “Aguacero de enero” [“Downpour of January”] as a poem which shows his mixed emotions piled up toward his past memory are restored in the archive of “an old and remote memory” (36). On the other, when it is read side by side with the poems in the previous section, “Morada donde la luna” [“Dwelling Where the Moon Is”], “Aguacero” [“Downpour”] can be interpreted as a space in which Moromisato revisits and mobilizes the memory of her father—described previously as a stern, emotionless authority figure—, by depicting him here as an immigrant from Okinawa who has been caught between melancholic emotions toward his homeland and his effort to constrain them. By mobilizing the father’s memory of Okinawa, Moromisato excavates and reconstructs his movements of leaving Okinawa, arriving in Peru, and returning to his hometown at an emotional level. In so doing, she disturbs again the conventional concept of being at home, questioning where his home is. His home can be Okinawa, Laredo, Chambala, and somewhere else between them, or an unknowable space. This instability of “being home” recalls the notion of multilayered homes articulated by Anzaldúa and hooks, as shown above. Revealing the contradiction kindled by the symbiotic existence of the plurality (everywhere) and unlocatability (nowhere) of home, Moromisato demonstrates the difficulty of attaining and maintaining a memory of home at one place, even in the form of a chronicle that is supposed to function to record occurrences of the past, including the exact points of departure and arrival, as facts in a chronological order.

“Chambala, 6 de setiembre” [“Chambala, September 6”]: Multilayered Memories of Homes Between Chambala and Okinawa

In “Chambala, 6 de setiembre” [“Chambala, September 6”], a poem which appears in the third section of the collection, “Madre no canta más” [“Mother No Longer Sings”], this multilayered and contradictory location of home, which emerges as a result of Moromisato’s traveling to Okinawa through her father’s memory, is further expanded through her second returning to Chambala, where she remembers her mother’s childhood memory in Okinawa, combining it with her own memory of her mother in Chambala. It is this
expansion of the multilayered location of home due to which it becomes impossible to fully recover the memory of her homeland only in Chambala.

“Chambala, 6 de setiembre” [“Chambala, September 6”] opens with a scene in which the poetic voice, lying on the bed where her mother died, remembers a conversation with her mother before she died:

Yazgo sobre la misma cama
donde descansabas aquella mañana
desde aquí viste deshojarse al chirimoyo,
tiritar de frío a los labriegos
y, al llegar la primavera, sonreíste
débilmente

[...].

Pero la tristeza te vencía,
me lo decía tu mano fría entre las mías
pronto volveremos a pisar juntas
las hojas secas en el patio,
pronto, te mentía
y tú callabas para no incomodarme
cuando el miedo asomaba por tus labios
y nuevamente dejabas que otra boca gritara por ti
al otro lado del mar, cuando eras niña en Akamichi
y ayudando en la cosecha una enorme sandía reventó
sobre tus pequeños pies. (47)

[I lie down on the same bed
where you were resting that morning
from here you saw the apple tree shedding its leaves,
and saw the farmers shiver from cold
and, when spring came, you smiled
weakly

[...].

But sadness was defeating you,
your cold hand between mine told it to me
soon we will step together again
on the dry leaves on the patio,
soon, I lied to you
and you were quiet so as not to make me uncomfortable
when the fear appeared through your lips
and again you let another mouth yell for you
at the other side of the ocean, when you were a child in Akamichi
and helping in the harvest an enormous watermelon broke open
over your tiny feet]. (47)

Both know that death is approaching to her mother, but the poetic voice tries
to give her mother hope to live. Listening to the daughter’s kind lie, her mother
keeps quiet in order not to make her daughter uncomfortable. In her quiet
mother, the poetic voice sees a quiet girl from Akamichi, Okinawa, who gets
scared, but keeps quiet when a big watermelon falls onto her feet in the time
of harvest. The daughter leaves Chambala for a moment to travel to Akamichi,
through her mother’s memory of her childhood, and connects the idyllic
picture of a summer day in Akamichi to the vigorous land of Chambala:

Yazgo, sobre la misma cama
donde dejaste que un profundo sueño te arrastrara
hacia esa oscura parte de mi vida donde tú
ya no respires. Y miro,
por donde miraste pasar la primavera
y me detengo en el mismo lugar donde la abeja
recogía su polen, y aún
sigo creyendo que todo conflúa esa mañana
  mi voz lenta prometiéndote la pradera
para que no dejara de respirar esta tierra
ahora estéril,
vacía. (47-48)

[I lie down, on the same bed
where you let a deep sleep drag you
toward that dark part of my life where you
no longer breathe. And I look,
from where you watched the spring pass by
and I stop at the same place where the bee
collected his pollen, and still
I keep thinking that everything converged that morning
    my slow voice promising you the grassland
so that you would not stop breathing in this land
now barren,
empty]. (47-48)

The poetic voice imagines the fertile spring in Chambala that her mother
saw passing by and remembers her promise to her mother to keep the land of
Chambala from becoming barren and lifeless. However, the last two lines, “ahora
estéril / vacía” [“now barren / empty”], indicates that Chambala has stopped
breathing just as her mother has. In the daughter’s mind, the death of her
mother is connected to the barrenness of Chambala, her birthplace. Although
the poetic voice tries to recover the fertile land of Chambala as the way her
mother saw it in the spring and hopes to keep the image of her mother alive, it
soon becomes clear that the poetic voice cannot hold on to the fecund land of
Chambala – that is – the symbol of her mother’s fecundity and vitality.

One may interpret that it is this physical disappearance of her mother
and Chambala that impedes Moromisato from returning to the same land
and the same home. She can find them nowhere. However, the reason for the
impossibility of going home is more likely to be related to the multilayeredness
of homes that she remembers in this poem. As examined above, Moromisato
interconnects the life and death of her mother with those of Chambala. As
soon as the poetic voice remembers Chambala as her home, she remembers
not only her mother, who gave her life and was her first home, but also her
mother’s childhood memory of Akamichi, which was her mother’s home.
Because the poetic voice’s home is located in her multiple-layered memories of
homes, it exists in all of these locations. However, these locations are constantly
changing as she moves back and forth between Chambala and Okinawa, and
hence it becomes difficult to pinpoint which one is her “true” home and define
what it means to return home.
“En Gunma la luna es un Pastel de arroz” [“In Gunma the Moon is a Rice Cake”]: Home away from Home

Then, in the last section of the collection, “Tillandsias y Destierros” [“Tillandsias and Exiles”], Moromisato extends her ongoing search for the indefinable meaning of returning home to a more recent traveling to Gunma, northwest of Tokyo, where many Japanese descendants from Peru and Brazil went to work as migrant workers, known as dekasegi laborers, at the end of the 20th century.4 In a poem of this section, “En Gunma la luna es un Pastel de arroz” [“In Gunma the Moon is a Rice Cake”], the memory of Chambala travels to Gunma in Japan where the poetic voice’s sister now works as an immigrant (dekasegi) laborer. It opens with her going home on a bicycle at dawn after her shift at an assembly line:

Pedaleas y cual serena flecha
divides el aire fresco de la mañana.
[⋯].

Detrás de los arrozales, los anillos y las tuercas
te esperan cada día,
con oficio coges cada pieza
todo chip tiene un vacío que llenar
toda hebra su principio y su final
y en cada una de ellas está el regreso a casa.

Cuán inmensas las promesas, las leyendas desde la otra orilla.
El progreso era esto, te dices cabizbaja,
nor llegar a la luna. (59)

[You pedal and like serene arrow
you divide the fresh air of the morning.
[⋯].

Behind the rice fields, the rings and screws
wait for you every day,
with that job you pick up each piece
every chip has a space to fill
every fiber its beginning and its end
and in each of them there is the going home.

How immense the promises, the legends from the other shore.
*Progress was this*, you say to yourself with your head down,
not getting to the moon]. (59)

Her sister has left her child behind in Peru to work in Japan, in hope of giving him better life, but has doubts about her sacrifice of not seeing her child grow. Sensing her sister’s disillusionment, in order to comfort her sister, the poetic voice recites the story of a rabbit and the moon, told by their mother in Chambala:

> Pobre conejo, ¿recuerdas el relato de madre?
> Ser el más pobre de todos en la tierra
> y su mullido y blanco cuerpo era
> su más preciada ofrenda.
> El bosque, dijo madre, se colmó del humo de su piel.
> Abrumado Buda derramó copiosas lágrimas
> consagrándolo a la luna
> y nosotras con las mismas lágrimas en los ojos
> lo observábamos haciendo omochi en su elevado astro,
> travieso esparciendo harina a las estrellas
> mientras las orugas trepaban nuestros pies. (59)

> [Poor rabbit, do you remember mother’s folktale?
> Being the poorest of all on the earth
> and his soft and white body was
> his most precious offering.
> The forest, mother said, became filled with the fumes of his fur.
> Overwhelmed Buddha shed abundant tears
> consecrating him to the moon
and we with the same tears in the eyes
saw it making omochi (race cake) on his high planet
mischievous scattering flour to the stars
while caterpillars were crawling on our feet]. (59)

Through a memory of their childhood, the poetic voice endeavors to reunite herself with her sister, by taking her sister back to the night when their mother told the story of the poor rabbit that sacrifices his fur for an offering to the moon and is elevated to the moon by Buddha because of his goodness. That night, the two sisters together, listening to their mother’s story, cried and gazed at the rabbit pounding Japanese sticky rice into rice cake on the moon. Now in Gunma, her sister sacrifices herself, whose life is gauged by a clock that marks the beginning of a day of work, yet there is the moon in the shape of a rice cake, floating serenely in the sky:

Sólo la luna es un gran pastel de arroz
flotando imperturbable en el inmenso cielo. (60)

[Only the moon is a big rice cake
floating imperturbable in the immense sky]. (60)

And it is this same moon in the immense sky, called forth by the memory of their mother’s folktale, which connects her in Japan and her child in Peru:

Sospechas su tibia luz suspendida sobre los tejados
éste es mi sacrificio, te dices, y otra vez la duda te devora
hubieras preferido verlo crecer
pedaleando como un loco entre autos y veredas.

Cierras los ojos y recuerdas su mirada
su pequeño corazón aún latiendo en tu vientre
dónde tú vayas, yo iré, repites cada noche
cuando subas a los buses, cuando mires
el brillo de las manzanas y las cerezas
cuando veas esta misma luna,
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estará a mi lado, repites cada noche
como una oración. (60)

[You doubt the moon’s warm light hanging on the roofs
*this is my sacrifice*, you say to yourself, and again doubt devours you
you would have preferred to see him grow up
pedaling like crazy between cars and sidewalks.

You close your eyes and remember his look
his small heart still beating in your womb
wherever you go, *I will go*, you repeat every night
when you ride the buses, when you look at
the brightness of the apples and the cherries
when you see *this same moon*,
*you will be next to me*, you repeat every night
like a prayer]. (60)

The poetic voice elucidates her sister’s inner voice that shows her desperate wish to be with her child every night, implying her regret for not being able to see her child growing up. The only faith she has is that she and her son are watching the same moon, providing them with the same moment and space to be shared. The poetic voice transports the childhood memory in Chambala to Gunma in order to connect herself with her sister in Gunma and her sister with her son in Peru.

This imagination of reuniting with her son under the same moon can be interpreted as the moment and space in which the poetic voice’s sister figuratively feels at home temporarily. This “home” enables the poetic voice’s sister to talk, in her mind, to her child in Peru every night, while recollecting her sister, their mother’s story, and the tears that she and her sister shed listening to the story. However, it is not necessarily Peru or the same home as she left for Gunma, but rather a provisional and intangible habitat that emerges as a result of her leaving her homeland. It is this new “home” that allows her to remember her life left behind, but it is also this “home” that reminds her that she has left Peru and that she is away from home, not returning. Thus this “home” away from home situates her between a feeling of being connected
to home (Peru) through her memory and a sense of a loss of home. In this inbetweeness, going home means remembering what she has left behind and implies that it is impossible for her to fully return to home since her return is accompanied with a sense of a loss of home.

Since the beginning of her journey of returning to her origin and home, Moromisato has crossed the transpacific borders between Okinawa and Peru at multiple times. In the process of the border-crossings, she has bumped into the countless “traces, voices, memories and murmurs” of her parents, her sister, and her own, which are intermingled together with one another, making it impossible for her to end her journey with a single final destination that may clearly demarcate what her “authentic” origin and home are.

**Conclusion: Home into the “Unforeseen and Unknown”**

Although Moromisato’s journey does not offer a definable final destination or answer, she reveals what she has found so far throughout her traveling in the last poem of the section, “Tillandsias (cuando el verde se marchó de Chambala)” [“Tillandsias (When the Green Went Away from Chambala)’], which functions as an epilogue of the entire collection. Moromisato reflects on how her identity was formulated in Chambala as a daughter of immigrants from Okinawa who was immersed in the synthesis of already heterogeneous Peruvian culture and Japanese culture:

> En la escuela memoricé héroes y batallas, ideales de una patria construída [sic] con amor y sacrificio. Aprendí atenta mis deberes: atrapar la vida en japonés, reconstruir todo en castellano, amar en uchinaguchi y observar el quechua filtrándose como una nube por la ventana. (64)

> [At school I memorized heroes and battles, ideals of a homeland constructed with love and sacrifice. I learned attentively my obligations: to catch life in Japanese, to reconstruct everything in Spanish, to love in Uchinaguchi and to observe Quechua slipping like a cloud through the window]. (64)

Although she tries to hold onto her childhood memory of Chambala, where
her origin is and her identity was formed, she realizes that it is impossible to go back to the same environment of Chambala, because of the development of the city, Chambala of her childhood has disappeared as she states: “¡ayer, desde mi ventana vi caer nuestro imbatible pacaé” [“yesterday, from my window I saw our unbeatable guava tree fell”] (63). The unbeatable guava tree has fallen.

However, the resilient tillandsias plants still survive on the hills: “Esquivando ese dolor mis ojos huyendo hacia las tillandsias, fieles y adheridas a la piel de los cerros, sabias espectadoras que contemplaban con su silencio la caída de mi mano sobre un punto en el papel” [“Avoiding this pain my eyes fleeing toward the tillandisas plants, faithful and holding onto the surface of the hills, wise spectators who would contemplate with their silence the fall of my hand above a period on the paper”] (64). Noticing las tillandsias holding onto the hills, she quits writing this collection of poems. She stops her poetry, not because her memory ends with the destruction of Chambala, but because in the middle of recording her memory of childhood Chambala, she is reminded that that present-day Chambala, which continues to survive and exist in a different shape, is always connected to her past. Since the memory of her childhood Chambala is situated in relation to the present, her task of recording her memory cannot be stopped and is ongoing. The ending lines highlight the connection between past and present and the ongoingness of her memory of Chambala:

mi sacrificio,
mi anunciada derrota,
cómo mi vida nunca podría introducirse en las respuestas. (64)

[my sacrifice,
my announced defeat,
how my life would never be able to make its way into the answers”]. (64)

On the one hand, the tillandsias plants, which represent her memory of Chambala, have watched and recorded her sacrifice and loss. At the same time, however, they remind her that it is impossible to find a way to go back to her childhood, recover what Chambala has lost, and revive her mother and other dead people whom she knew, because the answers she found through her
mobilized and endless memories are constantly multiplied and ever-changing. This impossibility can be an answer to her questions given in the introductory section of this collection, as quoted above.\(^6\)

The title of the entire collection, *Chambala era un camino* [*Chambala Was a Path*], epitomizes Moromisato’s recreation of such a mobility and continuity of memories. The subject and verb “Chambala era” alludes to how Chambala was before—indicating a memory from the past, and the complement “un camino” connotes a pathway to somewhere unknown without a clear destination. The juxtaposition of a specific place of the past and an indefinite location of the future conveys that the memories of the past in Chambala are being transported toward the future and accentuates that process of the memories being moved and becoming something different. As examined above, *Chambala era un camino* mirrors Chambers’ elucidation of a journey into “a vaster [migrant] landscape” (19). Moromisato continues to carry Chambala, her birthplace, as her cultural baggage, while transforming it from her “origin” and “home” into the “unforeseen and unknown” (Chambers 10).

Notes
I would like to thank the reader for giving me constructive ideas to improve this paper.
1 The English translations of *Chambala era un camino* throughout this study are mine, unless indicated otherwise.
2 Rilke was one of the most important early twentieth century German poets. Rilke’s words that Moromisato paraphrases here are from “Letter Four” (July 16\(^{th}\) 1903) published in *Letters to a Young Poet* (1934) (20).
3 In the previous poem, “Aquí en Laredo (*Hacienda Laredo*, 1932),” Moromisato describes her father’s hard experience as an immigrant peasant at a sugarcane plantation in Laredo, Peru (33).
4 In his study on the 20\(^{th}\) century immigration of Japanese Peruvians to Japan, *Los peruanos en Japón* [*Peruvians in Japan*] (1999), Alvaro Del Castillo shows the immigration wave of Japanese Peruvians to Japan at the time of the Japanese economic boom at the end of the 20\(^{th}\) century. In 1998, the number of the Peruvians who were in Japan registered as temporary residents 41,317 (without registration 11,606), compared to 533 in 1986 (98-104, 108-117).
5 See the introduction of this study (Chambers 19).
6 See the introduction of this study.

Works Cited
Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Aunt