
Open Meanings: Settler Colonialism, War, and Survival in Juliet Kono's Anshū: Dark Sorrow

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Abstract

This paper explores Juliet Kono's novel *Anshū: Dark Sorrow* as both an Asian settler text of Hawaii and a border-crossing novel that deals with Japanese women's experiences at the intersection of American and Japanese imperialism. Much of Kono's other work centers on the Japanese American experience in Hawaii, but this most recent novel orchestrates a border crossing for contemporary Japanese American audiences in Hawaii as it traces the story of Himiko, a teenager who is sent back from Hawaii to Japan shortly before the bombing of Pearl Harbor and spends the war years in Japan, ultimately becoming an atomic bomb survivor. While this border-crossing novel participates in settler erasure of Native Hawaiians and works to justify settlement in Hawaii through depiction of the horrific Japanese wartime experience, it also draws parallels between the violence of war and the violence of settler colonial extractive industries in Hawaii through a motif of fire that runs throughout the novel. Beneath the wartime drama of Himiko's story, the plot is driven by Himiko's struggle to find meaning in and acceptance of disastrous events precipitated by U.S. and Japanese imperialisms. The novel ends paradoxically with Himiko transcending her ego and her anshū—or sorrow over guilt—to offer images of her scarred body to U.S. doctors and scientists who will study the effects of the bomb. Her body thus becomes a signifier that will cross borders and be inscribed with hegemonic post-war meanings, but can also be inscribed with anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, and pro-peace meanings by critical readers of the novel, opening up space to recover a Japanese settler identity that resists settler colonialism and militarism in Hawaii today.

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