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Aloha ‘Āina As a Multicultural Lens in Kiana Davenport’s “Shark Dialogues”

Abstract

This study analyzes Kiana Davenport’s “Shark Dialogues” through postcolonial and ecocritical frameworks, exploring Hawaiian identity, cultural hybridity, and environmental stewardship. At its core is *Aloha ‘Āina* – a philosophy of love and respect for the land – which serves as a foundation for cultural survival and resistance against colonial forces. The novel features *hapa* (mixed-ancestry) characters who challenge colonial narratives while reflecting the complexities of modern Hawaiian identity. These characters embody the tension between indigenous roots and foreign influences that shape contemporary Hawaiian culture. Davenport connects Hawaiian struggles to broader indigenous movements against ecological and cultural exploitation. This study argues that “Shark Dialogues” redefines Hawaiian identity by creating a framework that unites environmental sustainability with indigenous resistance. Reading on “Shark Dialogues” contributes to ecological justice and decolonization discussions in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: ecocriticism, Hawaiian literature, indigeneity, postcolonialism, multiculturalism

Introduction: Historical and Cultural Context of Hawaiian Identity

Hawai’i’s location in the middle of the Pacific Ocean has long shaped its identity as a site of cultural confluence and colonial contestation. Polynesian voyagers

settled the islands approximately 1,500 years ago, establishing a society founded on kinship, sustainable land stewardship, and spiritual connection to nature (Atkins et al. 1994). This Indigenous¹ way of life persisted until Captain Cook arrived in 1778 which introduced Western influence and gradually transformed Hawaiian society. Missionary work in the 19th century altered religious practices and facilitated Western economic systems as plantation agriculture expanded. This expansion came at the expense of traditional land management and Hawaiian sovereignty (Silva 2005). These financial and cultural changes ultimately enabled the 1893 overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani by American and European business interests with U.S. military backing. The subsequent 1898 annexation, despite Native Hawaiian resistance, cemented Hawai‘i’s new role as an American military and economic outpost. This political transformation directly disrupted Indigenous governance systems, separated *Kānaka* (Native Hawaiians) from ancestral lands, and established colonial structures that continue to shape Hawaiian society today.

Hawai‘i’s demographic landscape has been shaped by its colonial history, mainly through the plantation economy that dominated the islands throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. This economic system encouraged large-scale immigration from Asia – including Japan, China, Korea, and the Philippines – to meet labor demands, transforming Hawai‘i into a uniquely multicultural society with no single ethnic majority. According to a 2023 survey, approximately 25.3% of Hawai‘i’s 1.45 million residents identify as multiracial (two or more races), while Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders constitute just 9.7% of the population (“Hawaii” 2023). Asians form the largest ethnic group, standing at 36.7%. This demographic composition continues to evolve through contemporary migration patterns as the islands attract significant numbers of mainland U.S. residents and international migrants. While enhancing cultural diversity, these migration patterns contribute to pressing challenges such as housing shortages and rising living costs. The interplay between multiculturalism and colonialism continues to shape Hawaiian society and its literary traditions (Sasaki 2016: 643).

The literary anthologies of the 1990s were central to shaping Hawai‘i’s multicultural discourse. Works such as “Multicultural Hawai‘i” (1998), “And the View from the Shore” (1991), and collections by Bamboo Ridge Press emphasized themes of identity, cultural hybridity, and *Aloha ‘Āina*. This concept goes beyond environmental care – it reflects a worldview grounded in genealogical ties between the *lāhui* Hawai‘i (Hawaiian people) and the land. Fujikane (2016: 45) describes *Aloha ‘Āina* as love and reverence for the *‘āina* – the lands, seas, and skies that sustain life. Hawaiians, as descendants of the land and the *akua* (divine

¹ In this article, we capitalize terms such as “Indigenous” and “Indigeneity” to acknowledge the political status and cultural sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. This choice follows established conventions in decolonial and Indigenous scholarship that recognize their distinct nationhood and rights, see (American Psychological Association 2020).

ancestors), are taught to practice *mālama ʻāina* (care for the land) with the same devotion shown to *kūpuna* (elders) and siblings (Trask 1993: 123). By doing so, they challenge dominant narratives that neglect the struggles of Indigenous Hawaiians and the enduring impact of colonialism on the land and its people. As Meyer further states:

Indigenous people are all about the place. Land/ʻĀina, defined as “that which feeds,” is everything to our sense of love, joy, and nourishment. This is not a metaphor... You came from a place. You grew up in a place and had a relationship with that place. This is an epistemological idea... Land/ocean shapes my thinking, my way of being, and my priorities of what is of value (Meyer 2003: 219).

Western views, on the other hand, often separate humans from nature, treating land merely as a resource. Conversely, Indigenous epistemology frames identity not in abstract ideals but in lived, sensory relationships with the land and sea. For Native Hawaiians, *ʻāina* is not simply a backdrop for cultural life. *ʻĀina* is an active agent, which informs values, memory, and modes of resistance.

While showcasing Hawaiʻi’s complex history, Hawaiian literature anthologies highlight the difficulty of defining the genre. Scholars like Hoʻomanawanui (2015: 227 – 228) debate whether it should be defined geographically – as literature from Hawaiʻi – or thematically – as literature engaging with Hawaiian culture. This debate is particularly significant given that Hawaiian literature was dominated by *haole* (white) authors for much of its history, raising questions about cultural representation and authority. As Native Hawaiian scholar Haunani-Kay Trask argues, only *Kānaka* can authentically represent Hawaiian experiences and cultural values (2000: 14). Her perspective underscores the importance of cultural self-determination in reclaiming Indigenous identity and resisting colonial erasure. U.S. territorialization has further complicated the concept of “Hawaiian,” leading literary scholars to employ varying terms like “Indigenous,” “local,” and “regional” when defining Hawaiian literature (Luangphinit 2006: 221). Amidst this evolving understanding of identity, *hapa*, meaning “part” or “mix,” identifies Hawaiians of mixed heritage, especially those with partial European or American ancestry. This usage further reflects the islands’ diverse demographic history and informs the complex nature of Hawaiian identity within its literature.

In her another essay, “A Cairn of Stories: Establishing a Foundation of Hawaiian Literature,” Hoʻomanawanui defines Hawaiian literature as a general, English-language term referencing writing by *Kānaka*, the indigenous people of Hawaiʻi (2017: 57). English is employed strategically as a medium in which the colonial language is utilized to reach a much larger (national/global) audience. This form of appropriation alludes to how *Kānaka* writers articulate their avenue for resistance through language associated with imperial power (Ashcroft 2001b: 35). These writers subvert the dominant discourse from within, turning an oppressive apparatus into a medium of resistance and visibility. *Kānaka* and

hapa writers such as Kiana Davenport, Kristiana Kahakauwila, and Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl challenge the dominance of Anglo-Saxon bias in Hawai'i's literary tradition. This representation traces back to Mark Twain's 1860's "Letters from Hawai'i", which exoticized tropical Hawai'i as an alien "Other" toward the American mainland. *Kānaka* literature directly subverts and challenges American colonialism through its counter-narrative, which, as McDougall explains, focuses not on what is "*haole* or foreign but upon Indigenous values instead" (2010: 61).

Situating Kiana Davenport within Contemporary Hawaiian Literature

Kiana Davenport is an acclaimed *hapa* writer whose work includes "Shark Dialogues" (1995), "Song of the Exile" (1999), "House of Many Gods" (2006), and "The Spy Lover" (2012). Raised in Kalihi and educated at the University of Hawai'i, Davenport embodies a cultural duality that shapes her literary perspective. She traces her maternal lineage to Hawai'i's earliest Polynesian settlers – navigators from Tahiti and the Tuamotu Islands who traversed the Pacific by reading waves and stars. Her paternal ancestry, meanwhile, links back to John Davenport, the Puritan clergyman who co-founded the American colony of New Haven in 1638. Davenport embraces the term *hapa*, which she explains "loosely translates to mixed" in Hawaiian, affirming, "I think it's important to emphasize that I'm mixed" (Ralph 2018). This dual heritage informs her literary voice and thematic focus in novels like "Shark Dialogues" and "House of Many Gods," where characters frequently navigate hybrid subjectivities similar to hers. Davenport writes from an in-between space, portraying authentic Native Hawaiian experiences and confronting environmental degradation, poverty, and racism. She describes herself as a "portraitist of Pacific peoples caught in the prevailing winds of change" (Ralph 2018), positioning Hawaiian struggles within broader postcolonial contexts while maintaining their cultural specificity.

Davenport's novels, particularly "Shark Dialogues" and "House of Many Gods," portray Hawai'i's cultural landscape by focusing on mixed-heritage characters navigating complex identities. "Shark Dialogues" examines the struggle for cultural belonging against colonial legacies, using intergenerational narratives anchored by figures like matriarch Pono. She acknowledges colonization's injustices but differs from Trask's more confrontational political stance. As Davenport asserts,

our history, forced and illegal annexation, imprisonment of our queen, destruction of our kingdom, and mass theft of our native land by the white sugar oligarchy – is a unique story in all the world... Any contemporary Hawaiian writer addresses that tragic history directly or in the subtext of their novels. Native Hawaiians, whether living at home or elsewhere, carry those transgressions in their hearts (Ralph 2018).

Her work incorporates themes of sovereignty, identity, and environmental care, using the concept of *Aloha 'Āina* as a guiding principle. Davenport's "House of

Many Gods” portrays Native Hawaiian resistance to the U.S. Navy’s occupation of Kaho’olawe and Makua Valley as a clash between Western and Hawaiian environmental views (Indriyanto 2023: 98). A central issue shared in her fiction is how *Aloha ‘Āina* expands beyond its Indigenous origins to articulate a shared connection to the land that crosses ethnic and cultural boundaries. By depicting *wahi pana* (sacred sites) as contested between Indigenous care and capitalist development, Davenport shows that cultural survival depends on environmental protection. Ultimately, she positions storytelling – through memory, family history, and ancestral wisdom – as a means of cultural resistance and an avenue for redefining Hawaiian identity.

Defining Multiculturalism in the Context of Settler *Aloha ‘Āina*

To understand *Aloha ‘Āina* as a multicultural ethic, it is first necessary to clarify what multiculturalism is. As Murphy (2012) notes, no single set of normative principles unites all multiculturalist perspectives. Broadly, multiculturalism refers to the recognition and accommodation of objective cultural differences – distinct beliefs, traditions, languages, and ways of life that shape individual and collective identities. Parekh expands this view, arguing that multiculturalism is not only about cultural diversity but about acknowledging that human beings are shaped by their specific cultural backgrounds (2000: 3). In turn, public policy in a multicultural society should respect and accommodate these embedded cultural practices. Viewed through this lens, *Aloha ‘Āina* can be understood as a shared cultural value in Hawai’i’s ethnically heterogeneous society.

Aloha ‘Āina has emerged as a shared concept in multicultural Hawai’i. While its origins lie in Native Hawaiian traditions, it is now embraced by individuals of mixed heritage and even *haole* residents. Fujikane, herself of Japanese descent describes settler (non-Native) *Aloha ‘Āina* as “growing an intimacy with land that brings about more *pono* (just, balanced, and generationally secure) arrangements of life” (2021: 16). She argues that being a settler and being a practitioner of *Aloha ‘Āina* are not mutually exclusive. Settlers can disrupt colonial structures by standing at the front lines of decolonization, helping to carry the burdens Indigenous communities have long shouldered. This adoption does not erase its Indigenous roots but reflects a growing recognition that environmental care and cultural respect are interlinked. Furthermore, Goodyear-Ka’ōpua in “The Seeds We Planted” (2013) argues that settler allies can practice *Aloha ‘Āina* by acknowledging their role in settler colonialism.

Perhaps such a positioning might be thought of as a settler *Aloha ‘Āina* practice or *Aloha ‘Āina*. A settler *Aloha ‘Āina* can take responsibility for and develop attachment to lands upon which they reside when actively supporting *Kanaka Maoli* who have been alienated from ancestral lands to reestablish those connections and also helping to rebuild Indigenous structures that allow for the transformation of settler-colonial relations. (Goodyear-Ka’ōpua 2013: 154)

Such a practice reimagines belonging not as a claim to ownership but as a commitment to justice and relational accountability. This involves engaging with the land through an ethic of care, which centers on Indigenous leadership and sovereignty. Furthermore, this approach avoids appropriating cultural values for personal or symbolic gain. As Gupta observes in her Moloka'i case study, the island's "embeddedness in a larger cash-based economy" (Gupta 2014: 393) creates challenges. Residents must balance economic needs with protecting the natural resource base for local sustainability. In this way, settler *Aloha 'Āina* becomes a transformative gesture that challenges colonial hierarchies. This practice aligns everyday practice with the broader goals of decolonization and land restoration.

This study examines how "Shark Dialogues" reconfigures *Aloha 'Āina* within a multicultural framework. While traditionally rooted in Native Hawaiian knowledge systems, *Aloha 'Āina* in the novel extends to characters of mixed heritage and non-Native descent. Davenport develops what might be called settler *Aloha 'Āina* – a form of land-based belonging that acknowledges Indigenous rights while transforming colonial relationships into reciprocal ones. The narrative depicts environmental stewardship as a shared but unequal responsibility. Consequently, it shows characters who navigate complex cultural identities as they develop meaningful connections to the land. Through Jess's reconnection with her ancestral plantation and Vanya's transnational activism, Davenport demonstrates how *Aloha 'Āina* can bridge cultural differences while affirming Indigenous sovereignty. The novel ultimately redefines Hawaiian identity by presenting *Aloha 'Āina* as an inclusive practice that builds solidarity and supports Indigenous resilience in postcolonial Hawai'i.

Until now, multiculturalism in Hawaiian literature has primarily been examined through an Asian-American lens, often focusing on using Hawaiian Creole English (pidgin)² as a linguistic and cultural marker. In Milton Murayama's "All I Asking for is My Body," the narrative transforms from a double-lingual discourse into a polyglot expression, incorporating diverse "Japanese" and "Englishes." Murayama is regarded as a pioneering figure in Japanese American literature for his innovative use of Hawaiian pidgin and creole, which captures the complexities of cultural and linguistic hybridity (Chang 2004: 160). Similarly, Lois-Ann Yamanaka's early works, such as "Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre and Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers," are foundational texts in Hawai'i's Local literary canon for their thematic depth and formal innovations. Yamanaka's unapologetic use of Hawaiian pidgin English and staunch defense of its linguistic value solidify her place within the 1990s tradition of Local Asian writers (Naoto 2010:

² Hawaiian Creole English (HCE) emerged as a communication tool for diverse plantation laborers in Hawai'i. It blends English, Hawaiian, and other languages, using Hawaiian grammar, reflecting the multicultural plantation environment. Miyares describes HCE as "a creolized form of English that employed Hawaiian grammatical forms and sentence structures alongside a synthesis of English, Hawaiian, and laborer-contributed words" (2008: 512).

298 – 99). This study highlights *Aloha ʻĀina* as a unifying identity marker in Hawaiʻi, unlike previous studies focusing on Hawaiian Creole English (HCE) and multiculturalism.

Reading on Kiana Davenport’s “Shark Dialogues”

Davenport’s “Shark Dialogues” explores the colonization and marginalization of Native Hawaiians. The novel centers *Aloha ʻĀina* as both a philosophy of resistance and a cultural framework for environmental and spiritual survival. Murphy observes that Davenport’s narrative captures Native Hawaiian connections to land as foundational to identity, memory, and struggle (Murphy 2009: 6). Yet the novel does more than portray Indigenous environmentalism – it extends *Aloha ʻĀina* to characters of *hapa* descent and non-Native figures, suggesting a broader ethic of care that resonates across Hawaiʻi’s multiethnic society. Davenport envisions settler *Aloha ʻĀina*, where non-Natives form land relationships grounded in solidarity with *Kānaka*. Her novel promotes just collective stewardship through resistance to essentialist identity and support for Indigenous renewal and reconnection toward *āina*. “Shark Dialogues” envisions cultural unity through layered dialogue and ecological ethics, emphasizing ongoing decolonization, not assimilation.

“Shark Dialogues” highlights Native Hawaiian values while emphasizing the evolution of a contemporary multiethnic Hawaiian identity. From an ecocritical perspective, the novel underscores the importance of connectedness to the land and environment for the cultural survival of this hybrid community. Davenport prioritizes an “Indigenous land-based identity” (Toyosato 2000: 72) over discussions of bloodlines or racial purity. Reflecting on Kay-Trask’s debate regarding “who is Indigenous Hawaiian”, the novel does not advocate for reclaiming an “authentic, pre-colonial Hawaiian identity” (Ashcroft 2001a: 89). Instead, it posits the survival of *Aloha ʻĀina* epistemology as central to the Hawaiian community. Davenport strategically centers female perspectives, particularly through matriarch Pono and her granddaughters Jess and Vanya, who serve as narrative and ideological anchors. Pono, a kahuna (shaman) and *Aloha ʻĀina* practitioner of mixed Euro-American and Polynesian descent exemplifies this focus. Her four granddaughters – Jess, Vanya, Rachel, and Ming – further represent contemporary Hawaiʻi’s multicultural composition.

From a narratological perspective, Kiana Davenport’s “Shark Dialogues” exemplifies Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the “dialogic novel”, a narrative featuring multiple independent voices rather than a single authorial viewpoint (1984: 30). In this polyphonic structure, Davenport ensures that her characters’ perspectives are “not subordinated to the author’s voice” but instead “stand on equal footing with it” (Bakhtin 1984: 7). A distinctive feature of “Shark Dialogues” is its shifting narrative perspective across chapters. While Pono anchors the intergenerational story, the novel also shifts into the inner lives of other characters. Readers gain insight into other prominent characters such as Jess and Vanya, whose distinct worldviews and personal struggles unfold alongside Pono’s. Davenport’s use of a polyphonic narrative is a deliberate strategy to convey how different cultural

perspectives coexist and intersect within Hawaiian identity. For instance, Jess, once alienated in New York gradually embraces her Hawaiian roots by inheriting Pono's land and continuing her legacy. Vanya, by contrast, channels *Aloha 'Āina* into a transnational form of resistance, linking Hawaiian sovereignty to broader Indigenous and environmental struggles.

Davenport constructs a polyphonic narrative in which storytelling becomes a means of preserving cultural memory and resisting colonial erasure. When the granddaughters – who share Hawaiian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and European ancestry – return to Hawai'i, they reconnect with their cultural roots through Pono's storytelling. These narrative sessions function on two levels: as intimate family history and as acts of collective historical reclamation against colonial erasure. Davenport's postcolonial discourse adopts the Western narrative tradition, utilizing English and the novel form. However, its dialogic nature enables the creation of a resistant, collective, and hybrid text that repurposes the colonizer's language (Spencer 2007: 16).

In "Shark Dialogues," genealogy is a central cultural survival and identity reconstruction mechanism. This aligns with Kauanui's assertion that, in Hawaiian contexts, genealogies serve to connect people to place and landscape (2008). Davenport structures her narrative through interwoven accounts from multiple characters, demonstrating how storytelling serves personal and political purposes. These stories reveal their family history – particularly that of their grandfather, Duke Kealoha – and provide access to histories suppressed by colonial accounts. Pono articulates the transformative power of this genealogical knowledge when she tells her granddaughters: "When I finish... you will know who you are" (Davenport 1995: 326). After Pono's death, her granddaughter Jess continues this work of lineage preservation, recognizing that "She could do that for them, begin the backward journey" (Davenport 1995: 476). Through Jess's writing, tracing ancestry becomes an act of postcolonial resistance that merges personal memory with collective history. Davenport thus appropriates the colonizer's language to serve Indigenous purposes. In doing so, she establishes a hybrid literary space where marginalized histories are preserved and reclaimed.

The novel reflects on how spiritual and physical connectedness to the land is the foundation for political consciousness and collective resistance. Pono, the protagonist, laments the loss of Hawaiians' connection to their ancestral land, mainly as *Kānaka*s sell their land to tourist resort developers on the Big Island. She condemns this action, asserting that "freedom depends on the possession of the land" (Davenport 1995: 331). For Pono and the *Kānaka*, the attachment to the land is familial rather than monetary. Hawaiians do not view themselves as landowners but as stewards, emphasizing a relationship of care and responsibility rather than exploitation.

The land doesn't belong to us, you see. We belong to the land. So it ever was, even when we lived under a feudal system, long before the *haole* came... Hawaiians who

are stupid and greedy, sold their honor with their land for easy money, then find whites laugh at them, think of them as low, lazy, without culture. (Davenport 1995: 332)

Her quote resonates with what Whyte describes as “colonial ecological violence” (2018: 128) – a structure in which Indigenous peoples are made vulnerable to both environmental and cultural harm through ongoing systems of occupation and exploitation. Thus, Pono teaches her granddaughters, “sell your land, you sell your souls” (Davenport 1995: 338). For Pono, land is vital as a repository of family history and the foundation for cultural survival and continuity. This principle resonates with recent developments in Indigenous ecocriticism, such as Chakraborty’s (2024) critique of resource extraction in India’s Meghalaya region. Davenport’s narrative underscores that those who advocate for environmental justice rooted in *Aloha ‘Āina* are often individuals of mixed ancestry. This is particularly true for Pono’s granddaughters, Jess and Vanya.

Jess’s narrative reinterprets the settler *Aloha ‘Āina* as she moves from cultural estrangement to active stewardship of the land and inheritance of Pono’s legacy. Initially, Jess embodies cultural alienation: abandoned by her white husband and estranged from her daughter due to racial prejudice, she has lived disconnected from her Hawaiian roots and from the *‘āina* itself. In the opening chapter, she recalls “the day she understood she was excluded from their [her husband’s and daughter’s] world” (Davenport 1995: 5). Her worldview, shaped by mainland American norms, reduces the land to a material resource, a perspective Pono sharply criticizes as naive and devoid of cultural depth. “How is it, Jess? You know so much. And yet you are naive. You think land means only trees and soil” (Davenport 1995: 137). Through Pono’s genealogical narratives and her reconnection with family history, Jess gradually transforms her relationship to place. She begins to understand the land not as a commodity but as a living repository of memory and identity that demands care rather than exploitation. She inherits Pono’s coffee business and the gift of prophetic dreams, becoming the hub of her family’s wheel and the generatrix of the story (Wyatt 2012: 131). Her return to the Big Island and care for the family farm marks her acceptance of *kuleana* (responsibility). This commitment affirms her role in preserving their land and ocean inheritance for future generations (Knopf 2023: 97).

Vanya, Pono’s other granddaughter, extends the discourse of *Aloha ‘Āina* beyond Hawai’i’s shores, articulating its resonance within a broader transnational and Indigenous context. Vanya, a Hawaiian activist and attorney living in Australia and New Zealand, advocates for Native Hawaiian sovereignty. She also emphasizes the shared environmental ethics that unite Indigenous communities across the Pacific. Vanya reframes *Aloha ‘Āina* not as an exclusively Hawaiian concept but as part of a larger constellation of Indigenous relationships to land and sea across the Pacific. Her articulation underscores the cross-cultural significance of ecological connection with place and resistance to settler-colonial regimes. This is particularly evident during her participation in a Conference on

Public Women for Saving Island Environments in Brisbane, where she is challenged as a “Yank” – an outsider presumed to lack authentic ties to Oceania. In response, Vanya invokes the history of Hawai’i’s illegal annexation, asserting her historical and cultural claim to Oceanic identity.

Yes, Hawaiians are American citizens. But you and I share the same ocean continent. We are all Oceanians first! She raised her hands, beseeching. “We’re such small nations, our news gets pushed aside. We have to count on each other to keep each other from dying. You know how the rest of the world sees us? You know what the London Times calls the Pacific? ‘An irradiated lake.’ We’re losing touch with the natural world, the mother sea, our beginnings!” (Davenport 1995: 330)

Vanya’s appeal to prioritize being “Oceanians first” underscores a collective Oceanic identity rooted in shared sea boundaries and ecological interdependence. This perspective echoes Epeli Hau’ofa’s influential concept in his essay, “Our Sea of Islands.” He redefines the Pacific not as a series of isolated islands, but as a dynamic cultural and ecological network held together by the ocean (1993: 7). Within this framework, *Aloha ‘Āina* functions as a Hawaiian principle of land-based stewardship and as part of a broader Indigenous worldview grounded in reciprocity with land and sea. Vanya’s international advocacy links Hawaiian environmental ethics with other Indigenous traditions like Māori *kaitiakitanga* (Smith 1999: 12). These shared principles highlight the centrality of ecological care to cultural identity and survival.

Vanya’s trajectory in “Shark Dialogues” illustrates an intensified expression of settler *Aloha ‘Āina*, fusing land-based responsibility with radical political action. Viewing the condition of Native Hawaiians as one of “bare life”³ and “bare habitation,” she rejects passive affiliation with land and instead engages in direct resistance to settler-colonial structures. Her activism escalates into acts of sabotage targeting geothermal facilities and resort developments. This marks a shift from symbolic protest to insurgent reclamation of *‘āina*. Although controversial, Vanya’s militancy reflects a settler *Aloha ‘Āina* praxis committed to restoring Indigenous autonomy, even at the risk of personal and political fallout. Her retreat into the Wai’pío mountains with her partner Simon deepens her embodied connection to the land. They are sustained by the natural environment and supported by the surrounding community. “Their odors were less human. They had begun to absorb the fragrance of flowers, vegetation, humid smell of soil” (Davenport 1995: 460). As a mixed-race couple aligned with the Hawaiian resistance, Vanya and Simon model a hybrid future grounded not in bloodline but in ethical ties to place. Duke, her grandfather’s assertion, has already foreshadowed this: “You’re

³ The term *bare life* comes from Giorgio Agamben. It refers to life that exists without political rights or protection. Bare habitation builds on this idea to describe a presence in land without sovereignty or cultural authority, as seen under settler colonialism. See Agamben (1998).

hybrids, all of you. You're what the future is" (Davenport 1995: 371).

Jess and Vanya represent two distinct yet complementary expressions of settler *Aloha 'Āina* in "Shark Dialogues." Jess embodies a reconciliatory approach grounded in continuity and stewardship, manifested through her return to manage the family's coffee farm and her commitment to "learn the old way" of cultivation (Davenport 1995: 463). On the other hand, Vanya's activism emerges through political consciousness and direct action against the military occupation of sacred lands. Both narratives challenge settler detachment by positioning ethical relationships with *'āina* as fundamental to identity formation and social justice. Their divergent journeys demonstrate that settler *Aloha 'Āina* comprises not a single prescribed practice but a spectrum of responsibilities shaped by individual history, context, and social position. Davenport's representation affirms that land-based belonging in a multicultural Hawai'i must engage with Indigenous sovereignty – not as a metaphor, but as lived commitment. In doing so, the novel envisions a future where *Aloha 'Āina* becomes a shared, though asymmetrical, foundation for solidarity and survival.

Conclusion

"Shark Dialogues" explores Hawaiian multiculturalism through its *hapa* characters who embody the layered cultural influences shaping Hawaiian identity within a settler-colonial context. The novel examines this diversity by depicting characters who navigate their relationships to land, culture, and belonging through the Indigenous philosophy of *Aloha 'Āina* (love of the land). Davenport extends this practice to characters of both Native Hawaiian and non-Native descent. In doing so, she highlights how those outside Indigenous identity can engage meaningfully in supporting Native sovereignty and land stewardship. The novel privileges female perspectives, mainly through the matriarch Pono and her granddaughters Jess and Vanya. This approach inserts women's voices into a historical discourse that has typically marginalized them under colonial and patriarchal systems. Ultimately, Davenport offers a future rooted in accountability, where settler *Aloha 'Āina* becomes a path toward decolonial solidarity and ecological regeneration.

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