Whilst the description of lives and livelihoods in the two study villages is interesting (there is a welcome emphasis given to research methodology, author positionalities and empirical detail in the book), the focus on villager’s narratives of household labour allocation is perhaps insufficient as a research strategy for really getting to grips with gender and power in this context. Readers will need to look elsewhere for a more complex discussion of gendered power in contemporary rural Java, but that said, this book is a welcome addition to recent work on gender in Indonesia and deserves to be read alongside other contributions in this vein.

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Aloha America is a carefully researched and well-written account of the history of United States imperialism, colonialism and militarism in Hawai‘i, all seen through the multifaceted lens of “hula circuits.” To understand the profound link between hula and politics, Imada explores “how and why hula performers have become such material and symbolic embodiments of Hawai‘i” (4).

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the United States utilized hula as a powerful but subtle instrument of conquest. Portraying Hawai‘i as gentle and feminine, primarily through hula, the US created a feeling of “imagined intimacy,” making Hawai‘i seem desirable, comprehensible and assimilatable. This ambience of familiarity paved the way for political activities, such as the annexation of Hawai‘i in 1898 and the construction of military facilities prior to World War II. Hawaiians, however, used hula to communicate counter-colonial sentiments, even while appearing compliant. Through the use of kaona (the veiled language that accompanied hula) they were able to disguise political critiques from the colonizers. Hula also became a critical vehicle for the survival of Hawaiian language and culture.

Imada’s research methods are impressive. They include archival work, oral histories and interviews with former hula performers, many of whom are invisible in the archival record. She also includes “counter archives,” namely the souvenirs, songs, photographs and other fragmentary evidence that Hawaiians collected for themselves. Her comprehensive methodological approach provides a welcome, more nuanced, understanding of individual Hawaiian performers and their performances than has been offered by previous accounts.

The first chapters cover the early colonial period and the 1893 overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom. King Kalakaua, known as the “Merrie Monarch,” was a great supporter of hula. Musicians and dancers from his royal court
traveled to the mainland to perform, making their first overseas appearance at the 1893 Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition, where dancers lived and worked at the fairgrounds for six months. While performing in Chicago, they learned about the American-backed overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i. In protest, the troupe chose not to return to their homeland and instead took their tour to other parts of the United States, and eventually to Europe. As they traveled farther afield on the hula circuits, they connected with political figures and prepared themselves to actively oppose colonialism. Always, while performing in the role of peaceful “primitives” on stage, they were engaged in subversive political activity. For example, they attached photos of Queen Lili‘uokalani to the sheet music they sold at the fairs to spread news about the political upheaval in their homeland.

In a later chapter Imada explores hula through the stories of individual performers during the time when hula became a fixture in places like the Hawaiian Room at the Lexington Hotel in New York City. Although Hawai‘i had already been incorporated as a US territory in 1900, most Americans had little opportunity to come in contact with Hawaiians until the 1930s, when hula performances became popular as an indispensable feature of the growing tourism industry. Ray Kinney’s “Aloha Maids,” all of whom were hapa haole (part-white), became the main attraction at the Lexington Hotel. They fit the image of women who were sexually available, non-threatening, and desirable to American men. Lacking access to Hawaiian materials, the performers adapted their appearance, music and songs to what was available and fashionable on the mainland. They improvised with cellophane and plastic, and were instructed to wear stage make-up. “Little Brown Gal,” one of the most popular songs, described the thrill of meeting a “little brown gal in a little grass skirt in a little grass shack in Hawai‘i” (178). While these images of an exotic but docile Hawai‘i circulated on the mainland, American tourists and military personnel were arriving in Hawai‘i in record numbers. These hula circuits permitted hula to obscure American military buildup through the presentation of images of desire and accessibility.

Imada next discusses the military details of World War II by analyzing archival photography and film, and specifically a film called Luau, A Native Feast. Ray Kinney and his hula troupe entertained the troops on the US continent. With troops arriving in Hawai‘i by the thousands, hula performers in the islands worked to provide military entertainment. Even after the war ended, hula dancers continued to perform in army hospitals for convalescing soldiers. During this period the Army played an important role in transforming the lu‘au from a celebratory and communal Hawaiian feast to an event that provided tourists with the sensory pleasures of eating, looking and listening. This new style of lu‘au, which incorporated hula for the first time, introduced a host-guest structure, where Hawaiians provided all the labour and the military engaged in all the relaxation and consumption. Through the Army’s manipulation of hula, military authority was disguised
as island hospitality. Hawaiian culture became celebrated for its military worth, with lei makers being required to switch from working with flowers to weaving camouflage nets for US Army engineers.

An epilogue brings the story into the present by underscoring ways in which activism and tourism can work synergistically. Imada describes examples of the current usage of hula as a Native Rights activist tactic where kumu hula (hula teachers) protest the exploitation of hula as simple entertainment. For example, when asked to perform for the 1997 opening of the new Hawai‘i Convention Center, they declined because, although millions were spent on art for the centre, not one Native artist had been invited to contribute.

By presenting a meticulously researched and balanced account Imada shows that “hula performance and its global circulation can be read neither as wholly complicit with a colonial or neocolonial system nor unproblematically resistant to it” (262). With its thoughtful interpretations and profound insights, Aloha America contributes significantly to the fields of American Studies, Anthropology, Pacific Island Studies and Women’s Studies.

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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

This book begins with good intentions but quickly disappoints. Dedicated to strong local communities and livelihoods, the book’s authors—Paul James (director of the Global Cities Institute at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology), Yaso Nadarajah (senior research fellow in the Globalism Research Centre, RMIT), Karen Haive (former assistant deputy secretary in the Department for Community Development (DFCD), Papua New Guinea) and Victoria Stead (Ph.D. student in the Human Security Program, RMIT)—along with thirty individuals acknowledged on the title page, set out to discover ways of “supporting and building the base-level foundations for enhancing the resiliency and vibrancy of communities under threat” (xi). Partnering with the Papua New Guinea DFCD, the team of researchers began community mapping, in 2006, in “urban, hinterland, and remote” communities to contribute to the development of an Integrated Policy for Community Development. Due to political violence and a state of emergency in Southern Highlands Province and administrative issues and funding delays in relation to Manus Island, community mapping was carried out in only eleven locations in four provinces (Central, Morobe, Madang, and Milne Bay). In spite of no representation of a Highlands community, a final draft of the policy document was accepted by the national Parliament in 2007 and