Imperial Hospitality in Hawaii from World War II to the War on Terror

What makes Hawaii valuable to US military imperial projects is more than its strategic location in the Pacific basin, but what Imada calls imperial hospitality, enacted and imagined scripts in which islanders and soldiers play roles as host and guest respectively. This talk traces the emergence of mili-touristic luaus staged by US combat photography units beginning in World War II. As instruments of state hospitality, luaus regulated Hawaiian sexuality and rendered uneven colonial relationships into mutual and consensual encounters between Natives and outsiders. During the ongoing war in Iraq, these embodied and mediated performances continue to secure Hawaii as a rest and relaxation capital for US military personnel as well as haunt the nation’s relationships with other militarized sites.

Adria L. Imada is an assistant professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies at University of California, San Diego. Currently a Barbara Thom postdoctoral fellow at the Huntington Library, she is completing a book manuscript on the circulation of hula performers on the US continent and Europe during the American colonization of Hawaii.