



Wayward Women: Sexuality and Agency in a New Guinea Society

Holly Wardlow

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Written with uncommon grace and clarity, this extremely engaging ethnography analyzes female agency, gendered violence, and transactional sex in contemporary Papua New Guinea. Focusing on Huli “passenger women,” (women who accept money for sex) *Wayward Women* explores the socio-economic factors that push women into the practice of transactional sex, and asks how these transactions might be an expression of resistance, or even revenge. Challenging conventional understandings of “prostitution” and “sex work,” Holly Wardlow contextualizes the actions and intentions of passenger women in a rich analysis of kinship, bridewealth, marriage, and exchange, revealing the ways in which these robust social institutions are transformed by an encompassing capitalist economy. Many passenger women assert that they have been treated “*olsem maket*” (like market goods) by their husbands and natal kin, and they respond by fleeing home and defiantly appropriating their sexuality for their own purposes. Experiences of rape, violence, and the failure of kin to redress such wrongs figure prominently in their own stories about becoming “wayward.” Drawing on village court cases, hospital records, and women’s own raw, caustic, and darkly funny narratives, *Wayward Women* provides a riveting portrait of the way modernity engages with gender to produce new and contested subjectivities.



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