Wayward Women: Sexuality and Agency in a New Guinea Society

Reviewed by Salla Sariola

Holly Wardlow’s book, Wayward Women: Sexuality and Agency in a New Guinea Society, is an excellent ethnography of women in whose lives selling sex plays a part. The research is based on 2 years of fieldwork in Papua New Guinea, including a collection of interviews using life-story narratives, and archival work with court records. Wardlow discusses women’s agency within the structural context of gender roles and political economy; using sex and sexuality emerges as one way to negotiate within these structures. The book contributes to the theorisation of agency, analysing it as ‘positive’ and ‘negative’, rather than as resistance. Agency is not necessarily always ‘liberatory’, but is everywhere, resembling Foucault’s idea of ubiquitous power (1998 [1976]: 92–102).

The book describes subjectivities created by economic changes in contemporary Papua New Guinea, and shows the ways in which these are gendered. In this process, sexuality plays a conceptually significant role. In this context, by default, women’s gender roles are rigidly defined by or confined to the household and marriage. The women who are the subject of this book, pasinja meri [lit. passenger women, women who travel away from villages to urban cities, and includes a reference to modernity as well as to sexual behaviour that is not restricted to marriage], have subverted gender structures and normative roles as wives. Being a pasinja meri gives women an opportunity to access amorous relationships, sexual relations, money, individuality and degrees of freedom, although through a stigmatised and disrespected role.

Wardlow shows how women who sell sex use agency, and that ‘sexuality unbound’ and selling sex play important roles in subverting existing normative marital relations, household gender structures and patterns of exchange. Women are not represented as victims in selling sex. Rather, they are portrayed in the broader context of their lives, and the notion of agency is discussed in other parts of their lives as mothers, clan members, etc. Represented in this broader context, women come across as complex, funny, dark, brutal, sexual and sensitive characters, who have lots of cheeky humour.

Although exchanging money and sex is one of the main themes of the book, Wayward women: Sexuality and Agency in a New Guinea Society is not simply a book about sex work or prostitution. Despite it not being explicitly stated, the book shows brilliantly how these terms pertain to political debates, in particular to geopolitical regions, and shows that to understand the experiences of women (and men) who sell sex, selling sex needs to be understood within the societal context. While the book describes women’s experiences in exchanging sex and money, it does not make claims of selling sex as a profession or oppression within the region, or theoretically.

This book is essential reading for anyone with interest in Papua New Guinea, in agency, in questions of gender and sexuality and in theories of selling sex, and it is an example of
an excellent piece of ethnography for anyone studying anthropology.

Salla Sariola is currently working as a postdoctoral researcher in the University of Durham on a 3-year ESRC-funded project, ‘International Science and Bioethics Collaboration’, and focuses on clinical trials in Sri Lanka. She has a PhD from the University of Edinburgh in Sociology and South Asian Studies, which was on sex work, sexuality and agency in Chennai, India.


Doing Anthropology in Consumer Research

Reviewed by Simon Roberts

As the nature of applied anthropology has evolved, the number of applied practitioners has swelled, as has the number of books charting these developments. The authors of this edited collection, both anthropologists, locate their book within the overlapping domains in which their work is situated – applied consumer research, market research, the pre- and contemporary history of applied anthropology and academic anthropology. Their history of the early uses and advocates of anthropological theory, methods and analysis within American business (such as Levy, Henry and Gardner) shines new light on the development of the discipline, prior to the schism that saw applied anthropologists being cast out by their more purist academic colleagues.

It is this schism, now waning, that provides one key context for Sunderland and Denny’s volume. However, it is to their credit that they do not allow the tired (and ultimately fruitless) tussle between academic and applied practitioners to beset their book. Instead, they provide what amounts to an ethnographic account of cultural analysis in the consumer research setting. They offer a strong and convincing argument for ‘anthropological ethnography’ (46), and provide a riposte to those who accuse applied anthropologists of lacking theoretical sophistication. They achieve this through substantive chapters that detail projects they have conducted (such as explorations of the meaning of offices and identity in New Zealand), and which, taken together, constitute a ‘long intertwined explorative ethnography of contemporary life’ (32).

Newcomers to such applications of anthropology will find these accounts illuminating. Rather than simply focusing on the story of their projects, and how the research was conducted (though we learn of methodological innovation in the process), Sunderland and Denny explore their use of theory and analysis to make intelligible and meaningful their fieldwork. There is also much insight into the ways in which such work is used and received within their clients’ organisations. To this extent, the book represents the first ethnography of commercially applied anthropology. Later chapters discuss the ‘entanglements’ – epistemological, practical and strategic – that their work involves. Their reflections and suggestions (for this is an eminently practical book) on the use of photography and video are especially timely, given the growing interest in visual strategies in anthropology.

This book is not a ‘how to’ guide (like Hy Mariampolski’s Ethnography for Marketers), but it is a manifesto for cultural analysis. It speaks to a wide audience. One can imagine the book being useful and inspiring for many types of readers: those teaching research methods, students thinking about career trajectories,
seasoned applied anthropologists looking to sharpen their thinking on current practices or market researchers wishing to develop their anthropological understanding. As a book that explores the politics and poetics of applied anthropology, the volume is itself an intriguing ethnography of applied anthropology, which anyone interested in the evolution of the discipline should consider reading. Sealing their achievement is the enthusiasm and commitment to their craft that the authors display, which, in an eminently anthropological way, they temper with a sense of critical reflection on their research practices.

Simon Roberts has a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Edinburgh. He is currently an anthropologist in the Digital Health Group at Intel Corporation, focused on inventing technologies for independent living for ageing populations.

**Anthropology and Science: Epistemologies in Practice**


Reviewed by Rachel Douglas-Jones

The challenge the authors faced in naming this volume is similar to that faced by a reviewer in describing it. How to channel without narrowing, and represent without reducing, the richness of contemporary research into issues that connect, in some way or another, with ‘science’?

Anthropology and Science is a collection of ten essays drawn from the fifth decennial conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth. The editors take pains to state first what the book is not, before demonstrating the broad relevance that papers falling under the title of ‘Anthropology and Science’ can have to scholars in all areas of anthropological research.

It is made clear that this volume is neither a discussion on the ‘anthropology of science nor a revisiting of the once vexed and now distinctly dusty issue of whether anthropology is a ‘science’ (1). Explaining what it is, however, takes the editors through a history of anthropological engagements with the idea of science, from Ludwik Fleck to Levi Strauss, Viveiros de Castro to interactions with Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK). Serving partly as a broad history and literature review, the dense but informative introduction lays out key cases, authors and theories that give context to the collection. The reader is pointed in the direction of threads picked up by the ensuing essays, which are ‘drawn together by a common concern with connections and flows of knowledge’ (11).

Here the significance of the subheading emerges: it is through anthropological approaches that epistemologies can be seen in practice. Edwards, Harvey and Wade praise the ‘fine grained ethnographic studies’ (11) for complicating the ‘narratives of universalism, revealing complexity, ambiguity and a constant spilling over and across domains’ (10). And this the various authors achieve, with energetic, occasionally virtuosic, writing. Through passions for topics as distant as narratives surrounding architecture in Kazakhstan (Alexander, 58) and atomic bomb designers in the USA (Gusterson, 114), each chapter approaches a different facet of ‘living and dynamic epistemologies and practices’. The authors illuminate their topics through carefully chosen details and concise, clear analysis, demonstrating how close attention to knowledge-making connections can reveal unexpected and intriguing dynamics.
in the ‘co-construction of science and the social’ (10).

This book has broad appeal, speaking as much to the interested undergraduate as to the established academic. The short, digestible, often fascinating chapters traverse many terrains; they are as valuable dipped into as read right through. For those familiar with the literature that the introductory overview lays out, the diverse sections sparkle with the challenge of unexpected connections and parallels, revelatory dis-junctures and, most importantly, rich ethnography, which both pleases and restates, through example, the importance of this method in studying ‘epistemologies in practice’.

Rachel Douglas-Jones is an MRes (Anthropology) student at the University of Durham, and will commence her PhD research on the governance of biomedical research in Sri Lanka this coming October.