



## Wayward Women: Sexuality and Agency in a New Guinea Society

By 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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## Wayward Women: Sexuality and Agency in a New Guinea Society By Holly Wardlow Bibliography

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Review

“Rich . . . would be analytically useful within all fields seeking intelligibility of complex social relations.”  
(*Social Anthropology* 2008-08-01)

“Provokes new questions while addressing concerns of longstanding in Melanesianist ethnography.”  
(*Reviews In Anthropology* 2007-01-01)

From the Inside Flap

"*Wayward Women* is ethnography of the highest order from a region where anthropologists have provided works of singular merit since the days of Malinowski. The data are immensely rich and the analysis measured and balanced. References to theory illuminate accounts of daily life. The reader has a sense of witnessing and understanding the events alongside the author. This is a marvelous book."—Shirley Lindenbaum, co-editor of *Knowledge, Power, and Practice: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life*

"This is a highly original study of 'sex-work' in a Papua New Guinea society, written with great clarity and grace. At its core is a carefully rendered account of the way Huli 'passenger women' understand their motivations in relation to local bridewealth and kinship systems. *Wayward Women* is one of the finest accounts we have of women's experiences of marriage exchange systems anywhere in the world, and it is by far the most detailed and best-rendered account we have from modern Papua New Guinea. It is also a very substantial contribution to theoretical work in both anthropology and gender studies."—Joel Robbins, author of *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*

About the Author

**Holly Wardlow** is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Toronto.

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