



Christine Stewart

*Name, Shame and Blame:
Criminalising Consensual Sex in
Papua New Guinea*

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reviewed by [Tui Nicola Clery](#)

1. Christine Stewart's *Name, Shame and Blame: Criminalising Consensual Sex in Papua New Guinea* explores the ways in which colonially inherited laws criminalising 'prostitution' and 'sodomy' continue to effect social perceptions and attitudes towards people who sell sex in contemporary Papua New Guinea (PNG). Stewart argues that the criminalisation of sex involving consenting adults continues to have significant impacts in the lives of people who sell sex. The research for this book took place primarily in the capital, Port Moresby. It draws upon the author's substantial lived experience in PNG as a student, researcher, government adviser and activist in the area of law reform, focusing on legislation related to the management of HIV.
2. Positionality is crucial to the data gathered for this book. The author's life story, political and ethical positioning, and relational networks are openly declared. Stewart describes her allegiances in a way that allows the reader to appreciate the importance of relationships to social research in the PNG context, and especially when research involves marginalised and highly stigmatised communities who may keep their sexuality and sex lives private to ensure their own safety in a highly patriarchal and homophobic cultural context. Women in PNG are subject to many forms of violence. The substantial risks to physical safety and challenges in terms of freedom of movement faced by Stewart as a female researcher are compounded by her 'outsider' status. The range and depth of stories she has been able to access once again highlights the importance of established relational networks as essential to the success of this research.
3. This book contains interesting and valuable discussions around the complexities of terminology currently used to describe people who sell sex, and men who have sex with men. Stewart points out that descriptive terms are influenced by enduring colonial histories, including laws and accompanying popular attitudes that make anything outside of heteronormativity unacceptable and illegal, and condemn sex outside of marriage. Stewart argues that 'lawfare,' the colonial control and the regulation of Indigenous sexualities, extends powerfully into the present.
4. Descriptive terms used to describe sex and sexualities vary across cultural contexts and histories, and are intimately connected to place and time. Terminology currently used to describe people who sell sex in western discourses, such as the term 'sex worker' which focuses on claims that selling sex should be seen as a valid occupation (and accorded the status, rights and protections that would be

given to workers in other professions) rather than as an overarching identity marker, is highly problematic in PNG. Sex work remains criminalised under PNG law, and Stewart argues that the term 'sex worker' fails to accurately describe either the political or practical reasons that people chose to exchange sex for money/goods in contemporary PNG. Stewart makes a clear distinction between the motivations for men and women becoming involved in selling sex. Her research shows that many women in PNG begin to sell sex after experiencing family violence, and leaving marriages in which they have often been victims of rape and sexual abuse. Because of the stigma associated with being a single mother rooted in Christian ideas of the ideal family, family and community support for women who have left their marriages is often withdrawn. As no social services are available to support women and children in this situation, options are severely limited. Selling sex is one of the few options available, hence Stewart's use of the term 'survival sex' as most relevant for women in the PNG context.

5. Stewart's interviews with gay men who sell sex in PNG reveals a different set of opportunities and constraints. She argues that rather than simply engaging in selling sex as a means of survival, 'gays' are often exploring and enacting their sexual identities. They have a greater ability to negotiate 'transactional sex' with clients; this is based on their own physical strength and ability to defend themselves, knowledge gained from community based and educational networks both formal and informal, and through threats to expose their client's sexual activities. Although there are clear and significant risks involved for both men and women who sell sex and both groups are highly stigmatised and discriminated against in patriarchal PNG, Stewart notes that men who have sex with men generally have greater agency, and are not necessarily seeking a way out of a life which involves selling sex.
6. Perhaps the most memorable and powerful sections of this book are stories of the experiences of men and women who sell sex in PNG, many of which depict institutionalised violence by the police. These stories illustrate the stigma, discrimination and violence experienced by sex sellers at individual, communal, organisational and state levels. Stewart explains that one of the catalysts for undertaking this research was violent police raids that took place at the Three Mile Guesthouse in Port Moresby in 2004, which were widely covered in the local media in PNG. Police stormed this building which was believed to be a brothel, arresting all men, women and children present. Police looted valuables, forced women to chew and swallow condoms found on the premises, and were physically and sexually violent, including engaging in gang rape. All those present during the raid, regardless of their status and age, were publically marched two kilometres to the local police station. During this march women were publically shamed and humiliated, they were forced to hold condoms in their mouths and wave inflated condoms above their heads, and they suffered verbal and physical abuse from the general public as they walked through the streets. After a long period in custody without access to food or medical treatment for their injuries, thirty-nine women were arrested for living on the earnings of prostitution, and forty-five men went free as there is no facility in PNG law to recognise male sex workers. In fact, later investigations showed that there were no male sex workers present at the time.
7. HIV prevention was used as an excuse for the raid at the Three Mile Guesthouse. This rationale is exemplified in the way that condoms featured strongly and symbolically in the abuse of women during this incident. Despite the palpable risks to people who sell sex from both clients and people in positions of authority such as the police who enact sexual violence upon them, women involved in selling sex are simultaneously stigmatised and caricatured as carriers of HIV/AIDs. The public imagination makes direct links between people who sell sex and HIV. Stewart terms this the 'doctrine of immaculate infection' (page number) which blames sex workers for the spread of disease, and fails to recognise the evidence that marital infidelity based on popular and widespread notions of masculinity which celebrate and/or ignore male promiscuity and extra-marital sex, poses

as great a risk in terms of the spread of HIV.

8. Stewart's research also illustrates the importance of maintaining the appearance of heteronormativity at all times, and the extent to which 'gays' in PNG will go to keep their sexual activities hidden. Being in the closet is the safest option in many ways for men who have sex with men in PNG, as the social stigma and risks involved in being openly gay are so immense. For example, Stewart shares the story of 'Victor' a man working on a range of activist projects related to human rights and HIV in Port Moresby which brought often unwanted media attention and a high public profile. Rumours that Victor was gay led to him being assaulted and gang raped by a group of men as an act of homophobic violence. He consequentially contracted HIV and was forced to leave PNG because it was impossible for him to receive healthcare treatment for HIV in PNG without his sexuality being fully exposed. This would initiate further stigmatisation and the constant threat of further violent assaults. This is the story of a sexual exile, however many 'gays' in PNG simply do not have the finances or social mobility to enable them to leave the country, so silence and secrecy abound.
9. Although 'gays' and transgendered research participants in this research explained that homophobia preached by increasingly fundamentalist Christian churches is at the heart of the social condemnation and stigma that they face, Stewart claims that the maintenance of criminalisation has also made a significant difference to social norms. She argues that strong cultures of male violence among the general public and the police force are supported and underpinned by laws which enable law enforcement agencies to respond with increasing severity and violence towards vulnerable groups such as people who sell sex. Stewart's research shows that institutionalised violence enacted by police and supported by the law, significantly reduces the ability of people who sell sex to access services such as counselling, HIV prevention information, and other health and social services. She argues that this negatively impacts the self-esteem and self-worth of people who sell sex.
10. The narrative approach used in this work makes this book very readable and the stories are memorable. Legal examples and developments are skilfully interwoven with real life examples. Stewart makes good use of intersectionality theory to illustrate the ways in which dominant members of society create and maintain control and privilege. She points out that the creation of dominant narratives about marginalised groups such as sex sellers as promiscuous, dirty, fallen and diseased, are necessary for the maintenance of the 'ideal' woman who is modest, pure and unassertive, and who upholds custom. These powerful narratives are socially constructed, and used to justify discrimination, and reproduce relations of power and control.
11. This book is clearly written and accessible. It will appeal to scholars at all levels, and to students across the social sciences and the law. The contribution that this book makes to understanding the situation of people who sell sex in PNG, and how the law contributes to shaping public attitudes is significant. Despite attempts at legal reform after independence and a desire to make the laws in PNG more reflective and respectful of Indigenous epistemologies, many colonially inherited laws related to sodomy and prostitution remain in place despite PNG's constitution being founded on the political and civil human rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Tensions between these ideals, international law, imported laws and the principals of customary law in PNG create a complex and conflicting picture wherein law and morality often become entangled. By exploring how the law contributes to shaping public attitudes and discourses through time, Stewart exposes the ideas and narratives about morality and power on which many forms of discrimination are based, and provides readers and activists with information which can help to challenge oppressive and stigmatising laws.

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