

Beauty and Power: Transgendering and Cultural Transformation in the Southern Philippines (Explorations in Anthropology)

Mark Johnson



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This compelling study of gender and sexual diversity in the Southern Philippines addresses general questions about the relationship between the making of gender and sexualities, the politics of national and ethnic identities and processes of cultural transformation in a world of contract labourers and transnational consumers. The book focuses, in particular, on the meaning and experience of local 'gays' -- transvestite/transgender-homosexual men -- who are at once celebrated as purveyors of beauty (defined in terms of a global American otherness) and valorized as impotent men and defiled women. In short, America functions both as a sign of their abjected status and as a space for imagining and reformulating various gendered identities.

This innovative work -- one of the first ethnographic studies to be published in the aftermath of the region's civil unrest -- will be of interest to anyone working on gender, the body and sexuality. Not only does it extend the boundaries of cross-cultural studies of non-mainstream genders and sexualities by directly engaging the entanglement of local sensibilities with global images and discourse, but it also demonstrates that there is nothing ambiguous about ambiguity -- gendered, sexual or otherwise. Rather, this ambiguity is the specific product of different historical relations of power through which various cultural subjects are created and re-create themselves.

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