

## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

**Sarah Buckler**, *Fire in the Dark: Telling Gypsiness in North East England*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2007, 234 pages.

Reviewer: *Jane Helleiner*  
*Brock University*

Part of the series *Studies in Applied Anthropology*, this book stems from research conducted by the author while she was a development officer for Gypsies and Travellers in the region of Teesside, North East England. The book opens with the (non-Gypsy) author's account of a February 2002 meeting (attended by non-Gypsy council workers and service providers as well as two Gypsy representatives) the aim of which was "to decide on a course of action for the council regarding the presence of an unauthorised camp of Gypsies in the area" (p. ix). The author states that her goal is to try and "untangle exactly what was going on at the meeting, why no resolution could be reached—and why we were all left with a dull sense of frustration" (p. x).

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part, titled "The Wasteland" (in reference to the divide between Gypsy-non-Gypsy cultural worlds), the author discusses her theoretical approach which begins with Barth and Cohen's work on boundaries but moves on to Bourdieu and Vygotsky's production of culture and identity through processes of intersubjective socialization (later she draws on Foucault's technologies of the self). She addresses some methodological issues and begins to outline the political economy of Teesside. She locates Gypsies within the industrialization and de-industrialization of the Tees Valley and notes that while casual agricultural work has long been part of Gypsy livelihoods in the area, they have also been deeply involved in an urban economy "recycling scrap, working on the growing road and rail network, [and] selling household items to the residents of the rapidly growing townships" (p. 41).

In the second part of the book, "The Fire" (referring to the "face-to-face" world of Gypsies), Buckler describes how children are socialized into Gypsiness through their participation in a community of speakers that in turn produces a shared cultural landscape. She suggests that difficulties between non-Gypsy teachers and Gypsy students derive from the ways in

which the two parties have been socialized into different social worlds, with different stories and "patterns of expectation and understanding" (p. 79). She extends this theoretical approach to a discussion of how family relations are constructed through direct and mutual relationships based on an "ethic of care." She suggests further that we-they boundaries are not based on a Gypsy-non-Gypsy divide as much as a distinction between people who are part of one's social network and those who remain unknown others. Gypsy notions of "home" are therefore primarily about to "the ability to maintain and reproduce relationships" in land, space and place (p. 116).

In the final section of the book, titled "The Dark" (in reference to the "unaccountable" non-Gypsy world as seen by Gypsies), Buckler examines how non-Gypsies construct Gypsiness and returns to the concrete question of how non-Gypsy council officials spoke about Gypsies in the context of struggles over unauthorized camping. Buckler offers an analysis of two meetings held to address the issue. Buckler's microanalysis of both meetings reveals the complexity of the players in terms of their divergent constituencies, degree of relationship with and knowledge of Gypsies, their political orientation and their interpersonal positionings. Buckler's attention to the micro-dynamics of local level Gypsy-related policy making and implementation in the area of urban land use is innovative and should inspire more analysis of this nature. The account could be strengthened, however, by situating the localized struggles over camping in Teesside within a deeper historical and wider national context. Buckler's commitment to searching for mutuality across difference also appears to impede more critical exploration of her material (for example, the possibility of opposing interests between camping Gypsies and various arms of the council).

While there is a lot of tantalizing material and analysis, the study may be less than accessible for a reader not already familiar with the particular setting of Teesside and the theoretical and substantive literature being addressed. For a specialist in Gypsy/Traveller studies, there may also be some disappointment at the many intriguing insights that remain undeveloped. In terms of the latter, Buckler makes it clear that she is interested in challenging what she considers overly structuralist and perhaps essentialist interpretations of Gyp-

sies defined in terms of non-Gypsy–Gypsy binaries or cultural content. While she appears to have the ethnographic material to do this, it is not used to full advantage. For example, while she comments on how official preoccupation with the “problem” of camping Gypsies limits the scope of legislation, policy, service and funding (including her own paid position), and documents a history of Gypsies in houses (often not identified as “Gypsies” by non-Gypsy neighbours or service providers), she ultimately offers little new insight into the housed Gypsy experience. Related to this, her discussion points to how accommodation, locality–mobility, identity and political mobilization–representation played out in Teesside, but she does not explicitly address these issues. Likewise, she does not take the opportunity (also hinted at in some of her discussions), to address how Gypsiness–non-Gypsiness may have intersected with such variables as class, gender, generation or locality and region.

Because this title is part of the *Studies in Applied Anthropology* series, the reader might expect more explicit discussion of methodology, ethics and politics. Buckler does make reference to some of the conflicting identities that she assumed vis-à-vis Gypsies, council officials, academia and family in the context of doing fieldwork “at home,” but there could have been more reflection on the significance of these for the research process and product. Buckler’s description of leaving her development officer job due to the challenges of combining this kind of employment with academic writing, teaching and mothering may make the study more of a cautionary, than an encouraging tale for those aspiring to applied anthropology.

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**Sandra Bamford**, *Biology Unmoored: Melanesian Reflections on Life and Biotechnology*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, 230 pages.

Reviewer: *Karen Sykes*  
*University of Manchester*

Sandra Bamford has written an unusual book based on 31 months of research into the livelihoods of the people who call themselves the Kamea. *Kamea* refers to a group of 14,000 Kapua speakers, who reside in the Gulf Region of Papua New Guinea. It is a locale that is markedly the antipode to Bamford’s geographical and conceptual world. In that time, she learned how to live in a world that did not privilege biology as a determinative feature of what it means to be human. The Kamea taught Bamford a number of things about how they think differently about “human nature” as it was understood by evolutionary biologists of the last two centuries, and by contrast how they understood the make-up of each person. She summarizes what she has learned about the several assumptions that the Kamea hold in the first chapter of her book. These assumptions define non-biological thinking, which she sees as the mirror of biological thinking. That mirror is

then used throughout the rest of the book to reflect upon a number of contemporary debates about biotechnology in Western locales. The result is a fascinating book, aptly titled *Biology Unmoored*.

*Biology Unmoored* is written to make a point. That point is that some people live quite well with alternative versions of kinship as human nature; ones that are untrammelled by popular Western understandings built of concepts from medical and especially biological science. What these forms of daily existence look like, conceptually, ritually and mundanely, challenges Bamford to name them, which she does in her introduction to the text:

1, the capacity to mother or father a child is not given in the nature of things, but depends, instead, on the relationships that one forms with non-human species. 2, in contrast to the guiding precept of evolutionary biology, there is no embodied link that connects the generations; the organic world is understood in nongenealogical terms. 3, males and females, mothers and fathers, create markedly different kinds of social relations. Unlike Euro-American logic, there is no essential equivalence with respect to the kinds of relationships that men and women are seen to engender. 4, bodies do not exist as autonomous entities, but have the capacity to act directly upon one another. Therefore, it is entirely possible for one person to eat for another. [p. 6]

Bamford calls these examples of non-biological thinking by contrast to biological thinking, which is a form of Western academic reasoning that privileges human nature and concomitantly, the argument that human nature should not be violated on moral grounds because it is determinative in the general make-up of each person. This latter concern I will return to below.

I wish to first discuss the structure of Bamford’s own argument. *Biology Unmoored* uses a complex three-way comparative method to expose non-biological thinking and biological thinking as they work in popular disputes over the ethics of biotechnology in Euro-American contexts. A couple of misconceptions about what Bamford is up to with such a comparison should be dispelled immediately. Firstly, the reader should not assume that the Kamea live in a world afloat where the flow of life and their movement in its waters is best described as “unmoored.” That is not so and it is not Bamford’s claim. The Kamea are very clear to anchor their knowledge of who is kin in a series of decisions about how they are related to each other. Bamford does not present the Kamea as ignorant of biology or of paternity or sibling relationships. She shows that Kamea think that human make-up is an effect of social relationships. The relationships between parents create a relationship to the child: they care for the child because they care for each other. The transmission of genetic substances is simply not a focus of their attention and does not matter in how they tether children to parents and parents to each other. Secondly, the reader should not assume that this is an account of Kamea society in the round. While some readers might want