Compte rendu de *Fencing in AIDS: Gender, Vulnerability and Care in Papua New Guinea* de Holly Wardlow

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rejoue de manière fictive une cérémonie de deuil : l'un des personnages porte un costume de deuil des îles de la Société (*'heira tupapa'u*) dont un exemple est reproduit dans l'ouvrage (Wismer, p. 273).

L'épilogue d'Alban Bensa clôt l'ouvrage : il présente tout à la fois une synthèse des réflexions et une proposition d'ouverture pour des recherches futures. L'anthropologue océaniste reconnaît les constructions sous-jacentes à l'« exotique », les « transformations » et « traductions successives » (p. 334) qui les sous-tendent, grâce à une mise à distance qui est en même temps une « proximité immédiate avec les cadres sociaux de la perception de l'observateur » (Bensa, p. 333). Il souligne également la « plus-value symbolique » (*ibid.*) de cet exotisme qui séduit les Européens ; Bensa insiste en particulier sur la part de distinction sociale opérée par la possession d'objets exotiques pour les élites européennes (Bensa, p. 332), faisant finalement de l'exotique une forme de définition de soi en miroir de l'autre. Le siècle suivant parachève ce phénomène avec la consolidation des États-nations, fortifiés par la mise en place de coutumes et de traditions folkloriques (Gallais *et al.*, 2020).

En définitive, cette publication s'inscrit dans un courant de recherches fécond et nécessaire portant sur l'histoire des collections muséales conservées en Europe. Elle entremêle regard historique et enjeux actuels, enrichis par le propos de l'exposition et les événements qui l'accompagnaient. La présence d'une pluralité d'auteurs évite ici l'écueil de la répétition des propos et des connaissances apportées grâce à un jeu de renvois des textes les uns avec les autres. Elle permet une diversité de thèmes et d'approches, œuvrant ainsi à une importante et utile synthèse sur la question de l'altérité et de l'exotique dans l'actuel territoire helvétique.

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Since the beginning of field-work, exchange, myth and ritual, political action and social change have stood out in Melanesian ethnography. But perhaps one of the foremost topics in regional research has concerned the contested concept of the gendered person in society. Holly Wardlow's *Fencing in AIDS* makes a strong contribution to this latter issue. The book, which is written with great clarity and organized with no less purpose, makes use of research done from 2004-2013 during which Wardlow probed Huli women's experiences of the epidemic in Hela Province in Papua New Guinea (PNG). It is, as she calls it, a "ten year narrative about HIV" (p. 26) that blends case studies and bright excursions into relevant theoretical and comparative literature in support of an argument about how a weak postcolonial state combined with customary gender-inequalities, and changing Huli concepts of male and female in a context of extractive industries to constitute women's struggles with the epidemic in and around the town of Tari, a center of mining and energy projects in the country.

Bounded by razor-wire fencing, the resource-extraction sites in the vicinity of Tari are isolated, densely populated, rural development enclaves that are minimally integrated with their host economies. Commuter labor goes on, the so-called 'fly-in-fly-

out' (FIFO) workers, made up of both Australians and non-local nationals, put in two-week shifts to support themselves and their families back home. Meanwhile, the customary landowners who receive royalty payments the companies pay out to them, swan around town in big SUVs, live in new, electrified houses, and have large polygynous households –by contrast to non-landholders who are reduced to offering them daughters in marriage as a way of forging alliances with them. The extraction enclaves, divided by emerging class inequalities, are spaces of HIV vulnerability because sex workers, known as *pasengia meris* in Tokpisin, gravitate to their male workforces and their disposable cash.

The risk of disease transmission in Tari was exacerbated by the absence of the state. From the 1990s to 2010, it had no government services. Overrun by violence, health care workers left town in fear. Broken down vehicles were abandoned along the roadsides. The churches were largely the only source of information about the epidemic during those years. But by 2010, anti-viral drugs (ARVs) became available.

Of great interest are the narratives about HIV infection that Woodward analyzes as relational –rather than individually– based terms. Women attribute infections to the failure of the care of kin, parents and elder siblings who did not pay school fees, forcing women out of households and into sex work. Sarah, so we learn, was raped and infected with HIV when the bus she was taking back to Tari was held up at gunpoint by a group of men in retaliation for a previous murder. But she blamed her mother, from whom she later demanded compensation, for sending her alone on the bus to buy betel nuts and cigarettes in another town.

Changing concepts of male and female also contributed to disease transmission. In the past, there were two kinds of "blood," strong and weak, outgoing and passive, hot and cold, which were associated with male and female. Men feared contact with feminine substances would make them feminine and weak so Huli husbands and wives did not live together. By the 1990s, however, "blood" was changing. As Huli women became more autonomous, they came to prefer companionate marriage and emotional attachment, sexual fidelity and monogamy. Huli marriage shifted "from distant intimacy towards proximate intimacy" (p. 85). Wardwell elicited stories about couples who used to live separately had now come to live under one roof, a change that occurred in a single generation. Conjugal co-residence, men grumbled, caused spouses to come "to know each other too well" (p. 86). Men became vulnerable to their wives ability to inflict emotional pain on them. Moreover, husbands complained, wives gambled, flirted and smoked. Domestic violence increased: husbands and wives fought each other while men also had to deal with corrupt police and politicians, racist mining personnel, claims on the resources on customary land. Huli women bore "the brunt of men's postcolonial existential distress" (p. 13).

Wardwell also interviewed middle-aged widows and divorcees in 2012-13 who were receiving anti-viral medication (ARV). They took it faithfully and were advised to adhere to a regimen that included eating a healthy diet, abstaining from overwork, alcohol and tobacco, and using condoms, or remaining chaste. So as to enhance the efficacy of the ARVs, they were also encouraged to try and remain calm. AIDS was thus viewed as an affective disorder. Huli are well known for having labile personalities. While HIV+ women tried to "fence in" their anger (p. 134), they worried compulsively about their children, land rights, and the stigma to which they were constantly subjected. They were also known to distract themselves from feelings of loneliness by seeking the company of children and "phone friends" with strangers to whom they confided late at night when overcome by anxiety. At the same time, they stayed away from kin who shunned them, and did not go to market, sports events, or village courts where they might encounter them. Avoiding anger, Wardwell observed, led to their "self-exclusion in the name of caring for the self" (p. 147). Many stayed single, thus to avoid re-marriage and its inevitable conflicts. To appear "normal," they also engaged in "exaggerated care about hygiene" (p. 156) and tried to be neat and tidy with hair, nails and dress. Nor did they share food or utensils with others. It was as if, says Wardwell, they were constantly observing traditional Huli menstrual taboos (p. 155). Living with AIDS is also related to customary Huli injunctions to "fence" women "in." They also sought to be open about their sero-status with kin and neighbors in order to make known their good intentions. Some women engaged in daily acts of generosity, thinking that should they become sick in the future, they would need help from others. Huli women's "burdened virtue" (p. 161) made them less powerful in society.

A "fence" is a Huli metaphor that not only signifies spatial boundaries, but boundaries in social and moral space. The ethnographic story Wardwell's book has to tell thus concerns how, from a Huli standpoint, the epidemic is understood as a "breakdown of fences" in need of repair. Huli people therefore think that controlling AIDS requires people to become better Christians and better Huli. As an account of a society in turmoil, and facing enormous challenges, *Fencing in AIDS* is surely one of the most depressing ethnographies to come out of Melanesian anthropology in recent years. It is also one of the best. It does contain a bit of sexually explicit material that might make some undergraduates uncomfortable, however I think it would make an excellent contribution to courses in medical anthropology, gender and society and of course on the contemporary Pacific, but most particularly, to introductory classes on cultural anthropology.

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