

WOMEN DON'T HAVE TESTICLES
The 'making' of masculinity among twenty-first century Baruya
(Eastern Highlands, Papua New Guinea)*

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ABSTRACT. Among the Baruya people of the Wonenara Valley (Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea), 'making men' used to be a spectacular endeavour, gathering together the community on a regular basis to produce the next generation of adult men and turning them, through long and painful initiations, into fearless warriors (Godelier 1986). Defining masculinity is still a relevant topic to contemporary Baruya men, although it may take different forms and avenues than it did in the past. Indeed, the more formal and definitive means of traditionally 'making men' – ritual initiations and warfare – have been modified under the influence of pacification and of the introduction of churches and of a market economy. My research shows that the male domination of the past has been eroded because its ideological underpinnings based in understandings about sexual fluids have largely evaporated in the wake of new constructions of blood and semen. Moreover, the contexts for producing Great Men and for enabling male prestige have also disappeared, lessening the practised differences between the sexes. Contrary to what has been observed elsewhere in the region, newly adopted marriage practices, such as brideprice, have not had the effect of increasing male authority over women. However, while this aspect of their society and of the 'making of men' is gone, Great Men logics are still at play among the Baruya: the disappearance of contexts and statuses does not invalidate Godelier's model, which has shifted with modernity rather than having been replaced by a different model.

INTRODUCTION

On May 1st, 2013, my second day of fieldwork in the Wonenara Valley, Eastern Highlands, Papua New Guinea (PNG) – precisely where Maurice Godelier had carried out his seminal fieldwork from the late 1960s to the late 1970s – I saw a Baruya man hit his wife with a log outside their house.¹ While nearby observers informed me this was a common sight in every Baruya village, they still commented: 'He isn't a proper man' ('i

* I would like to thank all the Baruya who helped me through my research and daily life in Wonenara; it is hard to express the debt I feel towards them on a personal and a professional level. My most heartfelt gratitude goes especially to the people in Wuyabo, as well as to Pascale Bonnemère and Maurice Godelier for their supervision and invaluable advice and help throughout the years. This paper owes very much to Bruce Knauff, who has always created very stimulating exchanges and has helped me refine my thoughts. I would also like to thank Holger Jebens and the panel of reviewers at *Paideuma* who have undeniably contributed to making this paper stronger. Of course all errors, deficiencies or shortcomings remain my own.

¹ I stayed in the Wonenara Valley for an initial period of nine months in 2013, returning from January to late April 2014. I conducted this research as a doctoral student, funded by the School of Advanced Studies for Social Sciences (EHESS, Paris), and the CREDO (Center for Research and Documenta-

no trupela man') – not that conjugal violence is always condemned *per se*, but there are 'legitimate' reasons to beat up a wife, and this wasn't one of them. In that respect, the Tok Pisin sentence could rather have meant 'he isn't a proper husband', without necessarily passing judgment on his masculinity itself.² However, just as brothers are expected to behave a certain way, as a husband a man has prerogatives and duties towards the woman who is his wife, while still being someone else's sister – and this is also an integral part of what 'being a man' is all about. During the scene I witnessed, the woman's brother came to her rescue and demanded compensation, as he should, since blood had been spilled. The brother would thus strengthen his relation to his sister, while the husband, through monetary compensation (or more rarely, killing a pig and sharing its meat), would rebuild his relationships with his affines (his wife's brothers and her parents) and would restore the idea within the community that he was a man worth having a relationship with, someone capable of 'straightening' (*stretim*) or repairing the damage he has caused.

Defining masculinity appeared to me to be a complex issue for contemporary Baruya men, insofar as the more formal and definitive means of traditionally 'making men' through ritual initiation have been modified under the influence of pacification and the introduction of churches and the market economy. In anthropology, the Baruya are well known from Maurice Godelier's publications. In particular, his "The making of Great Men" (1986) demonstrated how male initiations were ideologically anchored in the exclusion of women, whose weakening qualities were considered a threat to masculinity. Godelier's paradigm of Great Men enriched Marshall Sahlins' (1963) binary model of Big Men versus Chiefs by ethnographically refining the dynamics of social stratification and power logics at play in the region. Godelier demonstrated that the Big Man model did not match Baruya conceptualisations of power and hierarchy. In this society decisions were taken collectively without ever following one figure of authority, and the main social hierarchy was between male dominance and female subordination, as deeply encoded in the conceptualisation of respective bodily substances: semen would make a body grow strong, whereas menstrual blood and vaginal fluids would weaken it. The status of Great Men was not achieved or necessarily inherited, it was 'discovered' during initiations, and then practised or refined throughout youth and adult life (sometimes with a subsequent initiation), whether as a great warrior (Yipma: *aoulatta*), a 'bush doctor' or sorcerer (Yipma: *kulaka*), a cassowary hunter (Yipma: *kayareumala*)

tion on Oceania, based in Marseilles, EHESS, AMU, CNRS, UMR 7308), under the supervision of Pascale Bonnemère (CNRS). I defended the resulting dissertation in February 2016.

² With English and Hiri Motu, Tok Pisin is an official language of Papua New Guinea; this lingua franca is an English creole, learnt as a second language by the Baruya (who speak Yipma, an Angan language). When some old people didn't speak Tok Pisin, I would ask a younger person to translate. At school, lessons are taught in English, but pupils mostly interact with the teachers and among themselves in Tok Pisin. While I could converse in Tok Pisin with the Baruya, I could only learn a few sentences of Yipma, without being able to interact with people in this notoriously difficult language (see Lloyd 1973).

or a salt maker (Yipma: *tannaka*). Godelier described these exceptional men as men who would rise above 'ordinary men', but only as long as their duties lasted. As such, contexts would make these men greater than their contemporaries, without ever resulting in any long-term hierarchy. While a Big Man would typically derive his authority from the prestige he acquired through the demonstration of wealth and influence (see Strathern 1971, Lemonnier 1990), there was no such concentration of functions among Great Men, whose sphere of influence would never extend beyond one domain. In other words, no influence in one area of social life (e.g. war) would translate into overall influence or authority over the group as a whole (see Lemonnier 1990).

I interrogate how masculinity, in both its singular (being a man) and plural forms (as evidenced by the multiplicity of statuses where a prestigious male agency can be enacted), emerges and expresses itself when the traditional contexts for its emanation and materialisation are virtually moribund. Indeed, war was the main occasion for proving one's masculinity, the avenue of 'Greatmanship' *par excellence*, as both the great warrior and the sorcerer would seize this occasion to demonstrate their skills against the enemy. Male initiations, spurred and justified by the ever-latent risk of war with the neighbouring group, the Ipmani, were the main social gathering, as the Baruya never organised large-scale exchange ceremonies. Both these contexts found themselves under attack when the Baruya were colonised and Christianised, when they were told to put down their bows and arrows while learning to 'do business' ('mekim bisnis'), that is, to follow another model, that of the rational man of Western economic theory. The exchange of money for a wife, apparently quite a substantial change within a society formerly used to practising sister exchange, will be of major interest in trying to understand how money is, or is not, socially valued, and in analysing men's roles in marriages today. One can ask where Baruya men stand now, and how they define themselves in relation to these new contexts. While studies such as Scarlett Epstein's (1968) or Ben Finney's (1973) demonstrated how Big Men were entrepreneurs in the making, and how the social logics and dynamics of their societies prepared them to welcome and adapt to Western-style capitalist modernity, very little has been said about the relationship between Great Men – who seemingly share no trait with entrepreneurs – and this same modernity.

I focus here on the mutation of the avenues for Greatmanship in order to understand how men are 'made' as men (and who or what 'makes' them men, assuming this processual aspect of masculinity is still relevant among Baruya) when women challenge their long-standing superiority and dominance by accessing the same domains of prestige and influence. I also argue that male domination is no longer ideologically inscribed in the superiority of semen by analysing the symbolic shift that both semen and menstrual blood have undergone and showing how closely tied this shift is to a new organisation of gendered roles and places within Baruya society. Finally, I attempt to reflect upon the construction of gender as a modality of action within a type of relation-

ship that is defined by the Baruya – albeit in an essentialist perspective – as a biological ‘given’. In that respect, an assertion I often heard in the field could be worth further analysis. People would point to babies’ or young boys’ testicles, saying ‘em man, em i gat bol’, which could indicate a construction of gender that starts within the bodies. This could also point to the idea of a masculinity that could be compromised because of the disappearance of specific contexts that used to ‘produce’ or assert it, though it is still located there, in the attributes of the male body. Hence bodies are still conceptualised as sexed surfaces that index gender difference in a way that seems highly essentialised; yet my own research indicates that these essentialised bodily differences no longer effectively underpin or justify gender asymmetry among the Baruya in the contemporary context. The meanings of the bodily fluids have changed dramatically, such that semen is no longer unambiguously understood as life-promoting. Thus the contemporary dynamics of the Great Man society no longer operate to polarise the genders, though they still robustly operate to ensure relative egalitarianism and a lack of centralised authority between men.

MATERIAL POSSESSIONS AND MASCULINITY

My own knowledge of and familiarity with the Baruya first stemmed from a three-year Master’s thesis based on Maurice Godelier’s own field notes, digitalised and stored in restricted access on an online platform (see Dousset 2009); this initial step of the project enabled me, after my own fieldwork from 2013 to 2014 as a doctoral student, to conduct a longitudinal analysis of the variable relationship between Baruya marriage norms and actual practices. While looking into the impact of brideprice on a society formerly used to practising sister exchange almost exclusively, I tried to assess the relevance and usefulness of the paradigms elaborated by Godelier to shed light on various phenomena observed among the Baruya, both the model of Great Men and the concept of male domination in talk about the genders, their relations, roles and construction. Dealing with masculinities means reflecting upon femininities as well, especially insofar as traditionally Baruya masculinities had to be constructed against their feminine counterparts.

When prestige disappears from traditional contexts, new opportunities and avenues open up, and as Bruce Knauft observes, ‘in Melanesia and Amazonia, male prestige is increasingly dependent on the acquisition of cash and commodities; conversely, it is less directly dependent on the efficacy of local corporate or collective male activities’ (1999:190). Having disappeared from collective contexts, prestige would be embedded within more individualistic avenues, or at least it would depend on the actions and entrepreneurship of a single individual. Indeed, while the Baruya are still relatively isolated from the rest of the country (no road links them to the nearest town, and they

have to walk in the bush for two days before reaching the Highlands Highway), they are part of a wider economic network, as they started in the 1970s to grow and sell their parchment coffee to coffee export companies based in Goroka (the capital of Eastern Highlands Province) or Ayiura (the capital of the district). Some Baruya have opened a trade store (*stua*) to sell the manufactured products that have become indispensable even in remote villages (soap, matches, salt, cooking oil),³ reinvesting the benefits in new merchandise and in the school fees for their cousins who live in town and small contributions to brideprices.⁴ Similarly, a few individuals migrate to town for short periods of time in order to work as security guards, on coastal plantations or in various kinds of companies.⁵

Their situation contrasts starkly with the reports of other ethnographers in different parts of the country: Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi, for example, shows that the Gende, in the south of Madang Province, have emigrated en masse since 1982 and 1983 because they had a social incentive to do so – indeed, the obligation to take part in the exchange system was crucial to the definition of masculinity. Men were proved to be men insofar as they could have and produce wealth as well as be part of the exchange networks:

[...] many Gende men were asking themselves whether they were 'pigs' or 'men', and if they were 'men', why was it that 'money' bossed their every move rather than it being they who bossed money as their ancestors had bossed pigs? Ever since western goods and cash were accepted into the Gende exchange system, their uneven distribution has been a factor in migration. [...] From the 1970s into the 1990s, as many as one half of Gende men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five were living in towns far distant from their home villages (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 2012:84–85).

Economic disparities double up with another issue, that of the definition of masculinity itself: '[W]hile it can be interpreted as a problem of inequality, the Gende – and especially Gende males – saw it as a question of masculine identity', as 'within this system, individuals reveal themselves to be more or less "good" and "human" on the strength of their exchange performances relative to competitors both within and outside their clan' (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 2012:84). A similar situation was described by Philip Newman among the Gururumba (Eastern Highlands), where a man counts as 'a fully functioning person' if he participates in exchange activities (1965:94). As Bruce Knauff explains, this

³ There are five trade stores in total in the Wonenara valley, serving roughly 2,500 inhabitants.

⁴ Those who go to high school or university still have to pay hefty sums, around 3,000 Kina a year at university level (the Kina is the national currency of Papua New Guinea. In 2016, 1 Kina was worth 0.33 US Dollars). At the elementary and primary levels, school is free since the introduction in 2012 of the "Tuition free-fee" policy (TFF), meaning that Baruya schooling their children in the valley, until the end of primary school, do not have to pay anything anymore.

⁵ Belonging to the Anga family, formerly known as 'Kukakuka' or 'Kukukuku' (see Godelier 1986:1–3), the Baruya are feared in the country for their fighting skills.

model of society suggests that male status ‘relies increasingly on material acquisition and success in a cash economy’. When these aspirations are not met, or only with difficulty, the situation ‘poses a threat to emergent notions of masculinity and can fuel new aspects of gender polarity or antagonism toward women’ (1999:171).

Contemporary Baruya social life does not place any incentive on having and displaying wealth, despite the introduction of money in day-to-day life. Money may be important in acquiring manufactured goods and paying a brideprice, but it is not important in itself and will not condition a person’s status. I have never heard any man be judged or valued, or even qualified or characterised, by the amount of money he earns. Certainly the disparities are vast: between a local teacher making up to 20,000 Kina a year and the average family selling coffee making between 500 and 1,000 Kina a year, the distinction is important; nonetheless it does not mean anything socially. This in turn explains the very limited migrations to town found among the Baruya: Although having money is desirable in order to take care of one’s family and be able to afford nice things, it has not turned into a social incentive.

At this point local brideprice practices are worth a longer analysis to show how they defuse the possibility for one man to become someone else’s creditor for the payment of matrimonial compensation; as a result, no status (no ‘higher degree’ of masculinity) can be obtained through the manipulation of brideprice (for example, ensuring someone else’s brideprice and becoming that person’s benefactor). Giving a sum of money to acquire a wife was not a part of traditional Baruya marriage, which was (almost) only sealed by the reciprocal exchange of sisters, or compensated in the next generation by the gift of a daughter. Twenty percent of the 489 marriages I recorded during my 2013 fieldwork in the Wonenara Valley were concluded with a brideprice, but this modality hasn’t caused sister exchange to disappear at all. They both co-exist, and one is interpreted through the lens of the other. For the Baruya, brideprice and sister exchange are two versions of one single system – that of reciprocal exchange. Something has to be given back for a wife, and that is the cardinal value of Baruya marriage. Godelier had argued differently: he saw two alternative logics, the pivotal element in brideprice being the idea that one allowed for ‘unlike’ things to be exchanged, while sister exchange existed only through the idea that a woman was only ever worth another woman (see Godelier 1991:227–228, 293–294). What is more, these two forms of kin ties would correspond to two modes of production and reproduction, as one was connected with the sphere of production of wealth, the other disconnected from it. In Godelier’s model, these institutional features would be mutually reinforcing, to the point of creating different ‘types’ of society: the Big Men and the Great Men societies.⁶ My contention is that the introduction of money into the matrimonial sphere has not transformed the nature of relations of kinship for the Baruya, nor has it led to a different social stratification between men.

⁶ For further reflection on this model, see Malbrancke (2015).

However, the nature of alliances has changed in so far as it is now more and more up to women to decide whom they will marry. No longer dependent only on their families' choices, marriages now pertain to a more 'private' sphere, and new considerations come into play for young people when choosing a partner.⁷ People need to know that their future spouse will not be a lazy person and will always work efficiently in the gardens, thus being able to sustain a family.⁸ The idea of physical attraction also emerges from the women's testimonies; however, the local criteria for attractiveness remained vague in my interlocutors' assertions: 'I just liked him', 'I liked how he looked', etc. This underscores the fact that men lose control in a sphere where they used to be able to 'dominate' their sisters and daughters. As a wife, a Baruya woman will not 'belong' to her husband: every individual I interrogated on the subject felt strongly that a person was not someone else's property, even while being that person's responsibility. Meanwhile, the increase in brideprices has not had the effects observed elsewhere in the region, such as legitimating violence against a wife who has been 'bought' with money. Interestingly, all the Baruya women I interrogated on the subject were only worried about 'their' brideprice not being paid, as they said this absence of compensation could put them at greater risk. To them, a husband who has given compensation for a wife (either by giving money or by exchanging a sister or giving a daughter) has proved capable of taking care of them, and is less likely to be violent.

The opposition between brideprice and sister exchange is not as marked as elsewhere in the region,⁹ maybe because the Baruya have adapted the practice of brideprice to their own logic of sister exchange. It is not a preferred way of marrying, but it is seen as a solution to a demographic impediment: in the absence of a 'sister' to exchange, there can be no direct reciprocal exchange, and the promise of a brideprice to come at a later date resolves this problem. As a result, no marriage is conditioned by the payment of a brideprice, which usually happens anything from four to thirty years later (after ten years on average). No one can benefit from someone else's need for cash to get married – marriages happen, and then the compensation will follow, the nature of which depends on factors that do not pertain to the possession of money alone. Having a daughter who agrees to marry someone from her mother's lineage, for example, would settle the matter. This contrasts sharply with what Zimmer-Tamakoshi observed among the Gende, elsewhere in the Highlands (2012), where the need for cash is linked to a pragmatic necessity (getting married) as well as a symbolic one (proving one's worth). Among the

⁷ As Godelier explains, in the past families would organise a sister-exchange when the future spouses were still babies (especially in the case of 'delayed exchange', when a girl was being given back to her mother's lineage); sometimes, two co-initiates would agree to exchange their sisters, thus forging long-lasting bonds between their two lineages (Godelier 1986:20).

⁸ A man needs to clear new gardens and make fences, while a woman will have to ensure the daily harvest of the staple crops, sweet potato and taro.

⁹ In fact, in Tok Pisin, the Baruya would talk of 'buying a wife' ('baim meri') for both modalities of alliance.

Baruya, there is little strategy or idea of profit associated with the amount of money parents ask for: it is not up to them to decide how much a girl should be compensated for. Varying between 500 and 2,500 Kina, the sum will depend on how closely tied the two families already were before this new alliance.¹⁰ Nobody emerges as a powerful ('rich') figure who could help finance someone else's brideprice in order to obtain benefits or favours in return and thus gain in renown – a typical Big Man-like strategy. Richer individuals will not help someone who is from another lineage (his own lineage should help collect the money, and in turn he will help them too). No relationship of creditor and debtor emerges from the practice of brideprice, maybe partly because of its flexible quality and because the brideprice is paid collectively. It is always men as a group (the groom, his real and classificatory brothers, his uncles and his cousins, etc.) who pay a person's brideprice and who will, later on, receive a small amount of money when a brideprice is paid for a woman from their lineage or clan; that is, there is no 'making' of a man through the payment of a heavy brideprice. The fact that richer Baruya men do not always marry more than one woman is also significant: polygyny was always possible among the Baruya, but limited by the obligation to give a 'sister' in compensation. The introduction of a brideprice might have meant getting more wives for those who happen to be well off.¹¹ Yet this does not happen. It seems that among Baruya money and marriage, while being linked, do not entail each other.

This disjunction between material possessions and masculinity does not mean that material possessions are not enviable. Manufactured objects are coveted possessions, whether they are of practical use (torches to go to the latrines at night, solid shoes to walk up and down the mountain) or objects of prestige (an analogue watch, even though one may not be able to tell the time). These objects, quite often associated with the anthropologist who brought them and gave them as gifts to interlocutors and friends, are sought after by virtually everyone. The main object associated with prestige in this respect is the cell phone: Digicel coverage (the main phone operator in Papua New Guinea) is hardly present in the valley, with only one patch on the airstrip at the top of the mountain allowing one to check text messages or missed phone calls, but many a Baruya man comes back from town proud and happy to have acquired a second-hand phone, rarely topped up, and rarely functioning. He will then go to the airstrip every day to point it to the sky and wait until a notification appears, or until someone sees him with a phone in his hand. A more recent addition to the objects of

¹⁰ The closer two families are, the more often they eat together, the less money they will exchange in the case of a marriage with brideprice, as if to indicate that a brideprice should establish these ties, creating a shared context for commensality. When these contexts already exist, people express the wish not to destroy these ties by asking for too much money and 'embarrassing' the other family, or by creating sour feelings. Money is seen as an ambivalent force that is capable of both creating ties and destroying them.

¹¹ These wives, in turn, help raise more pigs, sometimes with the prospect of becoming more important in the large-scale exchange ceremonies. See Andrew Strathern (1971) and Marilyn Strathern (1972).

male prestige is firearms: I could count five of them in the whole valley, ranging from a Winchester to a home-made gun, rarely equipped with ammunition; they would cost between 300 and 1,500 Kina, and were again used purely for prestige, as they would almost surely jam if fired. What is remarkable here is the idea that no hierarchy is ever associated with this sort of prestige: possession of rare objects merely points to a fact (one went to town, works closely with the anthropologist, or has a salary), but it is never coloured with axiology in the sense of someone being 'worth more' than someone else, being 'better' or 'more of a man'. No man's reputation or name is made greater by the possession of material goods, as far as I know. As a result, no power is associated with wealth, and no rich man will become an important man because of his wealth.

PRESTIGE AND POWER

'Making' a Baruya man is thus a process that does not involve money or the material means made available by modernity; the ethnographer has to look elsewhere to see what makes a man, and assess whether the question of authority is an important one in defining manhood. As stated earlier, Godelier's model of Great Men described clearly how functions and statuses did not imply authority over the group as a whole. Even the best of warriors, those whose name were recalled for generations afterwards (Godelier 1986:107), would never gain authority over other spheres of social life; and if they were to do so, carried away by the lure of prestige gained during warfare, they would be considered despots, and killed (1986:174–175). Men would take decisions collectively. In the past, the process of 'making a man' was in fact one of 'making men', a cohort capable, as a whole, to defend the group and to come to a consensus over matters regarding the community.

Since Godelier's time, however, when Papua New Guinea gained independence in 1975, a new democratic system was imposed on its many groups, asking them to elect, every five years, one figure of authority who would be their 'go-between' with the government. The Local Level Government (LLG) elections happened during my fieldwork, in July 2013, and their smooth proceedings point to the respect with which the Baruya treat the process.¹² That said, while the Baruya do comply with the idea of locating authority within a single person, they do not necessarily follow that person's decisions in practice. A story told by Yangweema, who was *consol* in the valley for five years for the

¹² There are five *consol* in the valley, elected for five years, and a 'President' for the whole district; people vote by choosing three names out of the pool of candidates, who can be men and women, aged over eighteen. They elect at the same time the *consol* of their 'ward' (or 'vote area') and the President of their district. This system of multiple choice is meant to defuse any attempt at corruption; but as Rāiwin, a 31-year-old man, told me, 'You just vote for your friend'. Politics are not associated with 'colours', parties or ideas, and it is the network of people ready to vote for someone that determines the outcome of the election.

Wuyabo voting area, where I resided, sheds light on the actual exercise of power. This sixty-year-old man had always wanted to build a dispensary (*haus sik*) in the village to avoid the two-hour walk down the valley and back again for sick people in need of medication. The only *haus sik* was also known for running out of medication quite often, as I witnessed happened for two months in 2013. Having received a subsidy of 1,000 Kina from the government, Yangweema bought some of the materials needed (corrugated iron sheetings, nails and various tools) and offered to pay a few men for the other tasks – gathering wood, making planks, building the actual house. But the remaining budget didn't allow him to pay each of them very much, and no one agreed to help. One year later, the materials were still not being used, and the money was lingering in the 'community account'. This shows, Yangweema said, 'that no one follows us, no one listens to us'. Some former and current *consol* disagreed with his statement, telling me that, on the contrary, people are very respectful of the authority placed into the people they elect; Filip, who replaced Yangweema, even said: 'Of course they obey, otherwise it would be chaos here'. But in my view Filip misread the situation, thinking that the absence of the authority of one person over the whole group would lead to a state of anarchy. What happens is more subtle: while the Baruya willingly vote and elect a 'representative', they don't invest a lot of authority (if any) in that figure of power. Instead, many more statuses emerge, often with overlapping functions, and very different sources of designation. The 'magistrates' are chosen by the population, trained in town, then paid by the government and act as mediators in the disputes; sometimes these disputes require the ruling of a village court (*kot*), where the magistrates act as official representatives of the Papua New Guinean state.¹³ But other Baruya men are also self-proclaimed 'mediators', or 'mausman', or 'lidaman', all terms that cover the same functions, as these men all act as intermediaries to help resolve conflicts between two parties. Some of them think they have a right to intervene during the proceedings of a village court, or during any gathering, to lecture the audience and to rephrase the rules of living together for the benefit of the assembled community. Some will claim to be 'elected', or 'designated' by a group of people from the community; however, the mode of designation will not in turn determine how much 'authority' they have. Power and authority are thus as fragmented as they used to be, and important decisions can only ever be taken collectively. In July/August 2013, with the threat of war with the neighbouring Ipmani looming, men would gather and talk.¹⁴ The negotiations could involve members of the Ipmani group, and sometimes women (who, however, would not easily talk in public), and no one would ever appear or stand as a leader or be given more authority over the group as a whole for a long period of time. The fact that women can take part in these negotiations is remarkable: they have entered the political sphere, both in the sense of having a voice in public

¹³ There are currently six magistrates in Wonenara Valley.

¹⁴ Ipmani and Baruya have regularly fought over land disputes; the last such conflict officially ended in the late 1980s.

matters and being involved in the decision-making process, and in the sense of being allowed to achieve and exercise positions of governance. Women can run for 'consol', but no woman has been elected as yet in Wonenara, and double standards clearly apply, for people say they would not vote for a non-educated woman, even though education is not expected from their male counterparts. Meanwhile, women are more educated than in the past: the figures I collected show that at the local school, more and more girls are enrolling every year, especially since the elementary and primary levels are free and parents do not feel they have to make a choice between sending a son or a daughter to school.¹⁵ Women also handle matters pertaining to the economy, as it is they who are in charge of picking, washing and drying the coffee; they keep the profits of the sales to themselves, free to share them or not with their husbands and free to buy what they wish. My contention is that this change within Baruya society has been permitted by a shift in how male and female bodily substances operate symbolically today. The 'male domination' described by Godelier as the key structuring of social relationships lost its ideological justification when people started to think of semen and blood differently, encouraged by exogenous discourses brought about by recently introduced institutions, such as churches, schools, Western-inspired body of law and progressively internalised. In turn they shape a new understanding of how to act with the other sex within the social sphere as well as in private.

FROM SEMEN TO BLOOD: A SHIFT IN THE SYMBOLISM OF SUBSTANCES

If we follow Godelier, the ideological making of men and masculinity was anchored in what Gilbert Herdt called a 'fetishism of fluids' (1999), whereby semen (the embodiment of maleness) is placed in stark opposition to menstrual blood (the embodiment of femaleness), these two polar opposites standing for life and death respectively:

[S]perm is life, strength, the nourishment that gives life strength. Therefore men give their sperm to drink to their wives weakened by menstruation or childbirth. But sperm also makes women's milk, develops their breasts, and makes them nursing mothers. [...] Sperm gives men the power to make boys be born again outside the mother's belly, apart from the world of women, in the world of men and by their efforts alone (Godelier 1986:52).

Radically opposed to this life-enhancing substance, menstrual blood was thought to be dangerous and taboo, causing women to seclude themselves every month in a temporary

¹⁵ This assertion must be qualified. Domestic obligations will be heavier on little girls, who help their mothers with various chores every day after school. It is also easier for a man to postpone marriage until he finishes his studies; a woman will have to drop out of school when she gets married. In 2013, 85 percent of 'Grade 8' (the last level of primary school) successfully passed the exam to continue on to 'high school' (in town or in Marawaka; from then onwards, school fees apply). Out of the thirty pupils who passed, only four were girls.

shed (Yipma: *mundeanga*), where they would go to give birth as well. In the old days, the whole village would be segregated, men and women treading on different paths and sitting in different parts of the house. As Godelier shows clearly, the ‘facts of the female body’ were a constant source of disgust and fear among men. He mentions what he perceived to be quite violent reactions on the part of the men who were once interrogated by him about the possibility of frequenting the *mundeanga*, or going anywhere near a vagina. He talked about screaming and yelling, an attitude that ‘verges on hysteria, mingling disgust, repulsion, and above all fear’ (1986:58). The fear is that men’s strength will be weakened by mere proximity to vaginal fluids, while menstrual blood is a reminder of a wound, pouring out of an invisible gash – as such, it is ‘out of the norm’, and outside the boundaries of the body (see Douglas 1966).

The main social gathering in Great Men societies are the male initiations, which prepare little boys for warfare and allow the masters of rituals to ‘detect’ who will be the next Great Men. Such initiations, conducted regularly, were for Godelier unambiguously aimed at making men without women: in this respect they constituted a second birth, from which their mothers were absent.¹⁶ It was only through initiation that the boys’ bodies could grow and be purified from the female substances they had been in contact with throughout infancy, substances that were thought to be polluting and weakening. It would take ‘ten years of sexual segregation, four major ceremonies at intervals of several years [...] to separate a boy from his mother, to sever him from the world of women, and to prepare him to cope with women again when he marries’ (Godelier 1986:47). This purification was also conducted through regular inseminations of the younger initiates by their non-married elders. This transfer of semen was deemed indispensable in order for them to grow strong, as semen was considered to be the source of life and strength, but it was believed to be limited in quantity in the male body. Much like the neighbouring Sambia (Herdt 2006), the Baruya thought that male bodies were not able to develop on their own, and needed this outside intervention, as opposed to the female body, which was never in need of external intervention to become ready for reproduction.¹⁷

I argue that the notion of masculinity today is less constructed against the female realm: notions of ‘pollution’ (e.g. Douglas 1966, Meigs 1984) and of ‘sexual antagonism’ (Langness 1967) have been revised and questioned. Herdt and Poole (1982) see them as distorted lenses that do not adequately reflect the local processes of construction and the conceptualisation of genders. Moreover, in the field, I have observed that a new perception of bodily substances has come to redefine matrimonial prescriptions and proscriptions – both in discourses, and in actual practice – as well as the place accorded to women in the process of reproduction and in socio-economic spheres of daily life. People’s relations with the other sex have been influenced by exogenous discourses that

¹⁶ Godelier (1986:47). But see Bonnemère (2004) for a reappraisal of women’s place in male initiations.

¹⁷ Female initiations would only last a fortnight, at the onset of the first menstruation.

focus on equality between the sexes; these discourses are relayed by recently established institutions, such as churches, school and institutions of justice. They emphasize physiology, and in a hygienist way talk about diseases that are not always inscribed within the female body, thus lessening the importance of the rhetoric of 'strength' and 'weakness' that used to shape Baruya understanding of male and female bodies. As a result, these discourses have contributed not only to changing the perception of bodies, but also to guide new behaviours between the sexes. Nowadays men and women mingle more and more in all areas of social life – working, playing, and socialising together. In the rhetoric of substances, I gathered overwhelming testimonies showing that blood is increasingly being reinvested with positive connotations, being the substance used to point to a shared identity. Indeed, people used to think of themselves as a unit going through the male line, in virtue of shared semen;¹⁸ 'We are one just blood only, one family' ('Mipela wanpela blut tasol, wanpela famili') is a common expression nowadays. As a result, family ties through women are now seen as closer than they used to be: the mother's sister's daughter (MZD), formerly a 'preferred' cousin, is now forbidden for marriage and is in fact avoided.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the taboo against menstrual blood is slowly decreasing: young married women with children told me they do not have to be secluded during their menses anymore, and men will not systematically avoid them. Also, young men at school learn about the physiology of the bodies and do not fear being in contact with girls. Some men even told me that menstruating women just need to wash their hands if they are to cook for them. A hygienist and medical discourse prevails now, having removed stigmatisation or valorisation of bodily substances: it is all about what they can carry, not about what they represent in themselves.

In this respect, an important change has to be underlined here: semen is still at the centre of discourses and still guides sexual practices, but in a completely reverse way from the past. Fellatio is now taboo, as semen has lost its former status as a life-enhancer: instead of thinking that it helps people grow stronger, the Baruya now conceptualise it as an agent of death. In the Wonenara valley, people are well aware of sexually transmitted infections (especially syphilis and gonorrhoea), and they stigmatise semen as the main vector for the transmission of such diseases. Its ingestion is thus unthinkable: indeed, married men and women now declare that oral sex is no longer practised by anyone, be it young initiates in the men's house (the practice had disappeared in the early 1960s [Godelier, pers. comm.]) or husband and wife. I argue that this is partly because of a shift in the symbolic value attributed to semen, which was moved from a nourishing, life-inducing substance to a source of disease. Sexual matters cannot be discussed easily, and they cause some discomfort with interlocutors of both sexes. I started

¹⁸ As a result, cousins on the father's side – father's brother's daughter (FBD) – would be the most forbidden for marriage, as being the 'closest' to a male Ego.

¹⁹ I have used a software called "PUCK" (free download on www.kintip.net), a useful tool to deal with considerable quantities of genealogical data. I obtained statistics about marriage patterns, using the data collected by Godelier and myself. See Malbrancke (2012, 2016).

discussing the subject with women who particularly liked and trusted me. I only asked married people about it, as sexual issues are not meant to be brought up in front of younger and unmarried people.²⁰ To the question of whether or not they would ‘drink their husband’s water’, women react today with disgust and fear – precisely the reactions observed by Godelier among the men thirty-five years earlier, when he would bring up matters of female vaginal fluids, especially menstrual blood (1986:58). My female friends were very sympathetic towards me as they heard me talk about fellatio: they assumed that I was only asking because I was used to it myself (which they also found amusing). So they warned me that semen is not meant to be ingested (‘i no bilong kaikai!’) and predicted serious illness should I do so. Although men declare that fellatio is no longer practised, their own etiology of sexually transmitted infections attempts to cast the blame and source of contamination on to a certain category of women: those who occasionally sell sex to married men, thus causing infections to spread. The figure of the ‘tukina meri’,²¹ the local expression used to qualify women who either exchange sexual favours for money or who are known to sleep with many men, is particularly interesting and reveals a radical change in the polarisation of the bodies: men are now ready to pay to have sex – that is, to bring their sexual fluids in contact with a woman’s. Women told me that all men now disregard the traditional taboos surrounding sexual intercourse, which is a constant subject of complaint for them.²² They confided in me that their husbands would ‘ask everywhere, all the time’, forcing them to agree if necessary; the women complained especially because of unwanted pregnancies, which augment their workload. As Pamela (a woman in her mid-thirties with four children) phrased it: ‘They always want to have sex, but then we have to take care of the children, so we’re tired of it!’ However, a new taboo has emerged: a man should abstain from sexual intercourse with his pregnant wife, a prohibition that was not explained or justified by my female interlocutors, but spelled out as an obvious fact. This contrasts perfectly with the norm of the past, whereby ‘the man, not content to make the child with his sperm, continues to “nourish” it by means of repeated coitus, and makes it grow in the woman’s belly’ (Godelier 1986:51), a habit consistent with the vision of semen as the substance of life. Conversely, nowadays semen is perceived as a harmful substance, which extends in-utero and results in men no longer ‘nurturing’ the foetus. In fact, this changing perception

²⁰ I conducted the first part (nine months) of my fieldwork accompanied by my partner; as a result, my status as a married woman with no children helped me join into conversations that might have been kept from me had I been single.

²¹ This refers, of course, to the national currency, the Kina, and more particularly to the two-Kina bank-note. Interestingly, women who are known to sleep with many men are elsewhere called ‘passenger women’ (‘pasinidia meri’), as is the case among the Huli of Papua New Guinea’s Southern Highlands Province described by Holly Wardlow (2006). This reference to movement, to an absence of ties (with their families, with the institution of marriage and brideprice) does not occur among the Baruya, who focus on the monetary aspect of the behaviour.

²² Specific tasks (like clearing a new garden) or moments of the day used to regulate sexual intercourse (Godelier 1986:18, 62, 129), lest the reproduction of nature and society be at risk.

of bodily fluids goes together with changing ideas about procreation: no longer denied, women's role in making a child is now acknowledged to be on the same level as men's, even though only women are deemed infertile. This analysis of the new symbolism surrounding bodily substances shows how men have lost a supremacy that used to be inscribed within their bodies at birth and reasserted later on through initiation. However, a new essentialist view of men and women seems to have crept in in recent years, and is regularly asserted in the phrase mentioned above: 'Em i gat bol'.

Since Marilyn Strathern's germinal book, "The gender of the gift" (1988), research has moved away from the idea that gender was always inscribed in people's bodily attributes, positing instead that in Melanesia it is conceived as a modality of action. Indeed, Strathern observed among Hagen people (Western Highlands) that women were not defined as such according to set attributes, but rather according to their action as producers (of goods destined to be exchanged), while men were such as transactors. Both actions were crucial in a society where large-scale competitive exchanges are the main ceremonial event. I do not deny that gendered concepts of masculine and feminine do not depend on and are not reducible to male and female sexed bodies. In fact, the Baruya's old 'fetishism of fluids' is less pronounced than in the past, and this shift in the representation of the bodies in turn leads to a less essentialist view of male and female roles and places within societies, as these are no longer strongly linked to what people have in their bodies. Yet, the quote already mentioned, stressing the importance of men's testicles as a starting point to assert a form of 'identity', seems to recall some literally essential facts about bodies that do not disappear when their substances shift in meaning and symbolism. Men and women do not have the same genitalia, and this remains the case in the way Baruya both see the two sexes and conceptualise their roles within society. This declaration of difference is not the proverbial 'he's got balls', denoting a purely male form of courage by metonymy; it is nothing else than the mere fact of biological life, the first given that will then help people navigate within complex entanglements of relations, coded behaviours and rules between the two genders. And maybe it is the last rampart of men's threatened – or even diminished – masculinity.

But instead of observing a 'backlash effect' on the part of this compromised masculinity, with new forms of violence against women, I witnessed the emergence of a discourse, shared by both sexes, that blames this state of affairs on men's 'laziness': Men are said to perform fewer tasks than before and to let women take charge of more and more of the daily work. In fact – and this is a contrast with situations observed elsewhere in the country – women are also finding spaces within the political and economic spheres, albeit with restrictions. While it would be hazardous to assess the increase in or reduction of violence in contemporary Baruya society in comparison to the past in absolute numbers,²³ I can try and understand the dynamics of the perception of violence. It is

²³ According to people's testimonies, rapes are a new phenomenon in Wonenara. Mr Nokai, a magistrate appointed by the population and trained in town to apply the Constitution and the local law,

hard to link discourses with actual deeds, as I suspect that many incidents of violence are not reported and cannot be factored into the assessment of daily violence. Moreover, a tendency to glorify the past and to paint it as a state of general happiness and smooth coexistence between the sexes – a rhetoric I often heard in the field, but which is at odds with what Godelier observed e.g. 1986:148) – makes it difficult to gauge whether the instances of violence have been aggravated, or rather made public more often, and thus more often condemned. I argue that my own assessment of Baruya daily life shows an increasing condemnation of violence against women.²⁴ Men and women alike know very well which contexts make conjugal violence ‘legitimate’ or not. Girls are reminded during initiation that not feeding their husband, playing cards instead of working in the gardens or sleeping with other men would lead to ‘well-deserved’ blows.²⁵ These normative discourses not only legitimise conjugal violence, they define it as a part of the matrimonial sphere and relationship, a punishment for not following expected wifely duties – and wives told me they have a similar right (although not expressed during initiations) to tell off a lazy husband, sometimes even physically. However, a man is strictly forbidden from beating up his wife on the grounds that she refuses to have a co-wife: as this is her right, and as her decision is what ultimately counts to allow for a second marriage on the part of the husband, the man must obey and cannot get angry or violent. Such violence makes him an ‘improper’ husband, like the man described in the story opening this paper. Within contemporary Baruya society, beating up a wife becomes ‘violent’ (i.e. is perceived as such) only when it is deemed inappropriate. But the very fact that more and more acts of violence between the sexes (no matter the genealogical tie between them) are perceived as inappropriate and thus condemned by the population, and sometimes sanctioned by the judicial system, is remarkable. Men complain about a situation where they feel women’s declarations (especially when a man is accused of rape) have more weight their own and will *in fine* ‘win’ in a village court. As far as I know, not all rape accusations end up in the condemnation of the accused. In July 2013, the accused was Mr Nokai himself, the magistrate in charge of settling these very cases. No village court was held, and he remained magistrate in the valley. He later told me that he had had consensual sex with a lady, who afterwards asked for money; disap-

estimated that he had to deal with about ten cases of rape a year in the valley, settled by village courts. The assailant would either pay a sum of money as compensation (varying between 500 and 1000 Kina) or go to prison in town if his lineage could not pay. Godelier (pers. comm.) only knew of one instance of rape during his own fieldwork; it resulted in the death of the attacker. He reckons that the phenomenon was indeed not as widespread within the group as it is today.

²⁴ This contrasts with situations observed elsewhere in the country, where paying a brideprice has been used as a ‘justification’ for violent acts against a wife (see Eves 2006). Baruya women are more anxious about their husband beating them up if no brideprice has been paid, or no ‘sister’ given back to their lineage.

²⁵ The last female initiations were observed by Pascale Bonnemère in March 2010. Many interlocutors have thus been able to tell me about their own experiences and the ‘teachings’ received during initiation.

pointed at not getting any, she accused him of rape and had her brothers rough him up. In my various discussions with both men and women on the matter, it became clear that most men believe all rape accusations to be lies, invented in order to obtain money. They told me that as families always need more money, they benefit from a daughter being raped (or claiming so), as compensation will be given to the parents and brothers of the victim. These same men believe that the law of the country, nowadays applied by the magistrate when settling a matter, is designed to protect women only: indeed, the Constitution, called “Mama lo” in Tok Pisin, seems to refer only to women (a wife may be called ‘mama’, like a mother), and seems to have been designed to protect them. The backlash effect is that women’s declarations are sometimes seen as lacking in credibility, and attempts are made to cast them as prostitutes who ‘always want more money’. Men thus see their ‘authority’ and status compromised by agents that do not pertain to their traditional life (school – where boys and girls sit on the same benches and learn biological facts about the bodies –, the courts, churches), but that are increasingly associated with ideas of prestige. Men no longer ‘carry’ the same significance as before in the group: women ‘carry’ the heavy loads (thus enabling physical reproduction on a daily basis for the household), they also ‘carry’ and transmit their blood to the foetus in equal measure with men, and their words ‘carry’ more weight in the court’s decisions.²⁶ Yet, Baruya men do not get caught up in any form of denigration or new forms of asserting masculinity. ‘Not being modern’ is not part of their rhetoric, even in their shaming of the new generation, who are too lazy to be ‘proper men’. Baruya men are shamed for not being like their glorious ancestors and they are also shamed for being needlessly violent. The sense that men are losing their role as the main agents in the reproduction of society is not counterbalanced by an assertion of physical dominance. Their role is increasingly questioned, as the symbolic grounding of male domination (the superiority and importance of semen) has been severely undermined. However, masculinity itself is never questioned and is never a source of competition within the social body – in that respect, it cannot vary in degrees, even when a man may have (temporarily) more functions than his contemporaries.

CONCLUSION

To an extent, however, Baruya men still have to be ‘made’ – or at least some aspects of manhood have to be brought to existence through social action. The rituals of male initiation may be devoid of meaning – ‘nating’ – as my interlocutors often told me, but they still happen. The first stage (Muka) was held in December 2013, when hundreds of young boys were separated from their mothers to be gathered in the men’s house, and many pigs slaughtered and eaten together, to mark this moment as one of commensal-

²⁶ I would like to thank Anthony Pickles for raising this idea (pers. comm. June 2015).

ity for everyone in the valley. Yet, with Pascale Bonnemère (2015:17) I argue that these initiations may not so much make *m e n* as they make potential *f a t h e r s*. As such, it is not gender that emerges from the various rituals and teachings, it is a way of becoming another type of man within the social sphere – no longer just a brother or a son, but a father. As a result, people now complain that young men and women get ‘marit nating’, an essentially ambivalent expression that talks about the (temporary) absence of compensation (to be specified at a later date) at the same time as it points to the fact that young people do not get married with the same ‘preparation’ (initiation) as before. Some girls may get married with no initiation, and people complain that young men haven’t learned, as boys, how to make a garden, build a house or be a husband and a father – at least not as effectively as in the past. It is always in the modalities of being a certain type of man or a woman involved in a certain type of relationship (a sibling, a spouse, an affine) that people define what kind of man or woman they are, and that is where they can potentially ‘fail’. Men are bad husbands when they beat up their wives; adult women who are violent towards other adults will even be called ‘childish’, as they are behaving like ‘little girls’. However, it is my contention that, for the Baruya, gender is what orients a person’s actions, a frame within which to act (appropriately or not) in a certain type of relationship that one’s gender will always imply (as everyone has parents, gets married and has affines). As Meyana, a 55-year-old ‘bush doctor’, once said to me and a group of women after a long session on genealogies: ‘Alright, now you women, you go work, me, I’m a man, I can just sit here and smoke’. Whether man or woman, people should act in such and such a way, actions that are further specified within an array of relationships implying the same or the other sex. When Baruya people point to a baby and tell me ‘em i gat bol’, or when they are drawing little people on a blackboard with chalk and add their genitalia, saying ‘em i man, em i gat bol nau’, it looks like gender is located in the body – a characteristic that is there or is missing, but the stepping stone from which the rest will flow. Later on, what kind of man they will become – a lazy one, a great one, a successful one – no longer depends on initiations, as new *a v e n u e s* for Greatmanship and prestige open up, even if *s t a t u s e s* disappear. The irony is that these avenues for pursuing male agency are now open to women as well, who are finding more and more space in society in which to be seen and heard. But one fact remains, strong enough (for now) to keep women out of certain places (like the men’s house), to create double standards when it comes to politics, and to define, whenever convenient, people’s ‘appropriate’ behaviours: women don’t have testicles.

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