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Church presence and gender relations in the Wonenara valley (Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea)

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Since 1951, date of the First contact, the Baruya of the Wonenara valley have twice been a pioneering frontline for Protestant missions. First in the 1960s, when several Lutheran and SDA pastors moved in, and the second time at the beginning of the 2000s, when three 'New Evangelical Churches' settled in the valley. After presenting the history of the presence of these five Churches, I analyse the pastors' ideas, as expressed during services or in informal discussions, about the place of women in daily life and in church, and about gender relations more generally. The observation of church services reveals a possibility of women speaking in public that was hitherto unknown. Moreover, the pastors' origins (Baruya or non Baruya) seem to play a role in the way they talk about women during their services, whatever their Church may say.

Keywords: Lutheran Church, SDA, Church of Christ, Evangelical Brotherhood Church, Revival, gender relations, organisation of space

It was only in the 1960s—fairly recently compared to what most Oceanians experienced—that the first missionaries, of American or Australian origin, arrived in the valley of Wonenara, a rural area in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea that can only be reached by air or on foot. Today, as elsewhere in the country, its inhabitants find themselves in situations of what has been called secondary conversion, a phenomenon John Barker dealt with in a recent paper. Barker identifies three phases of conversion, the most recent dating from the mid-1960s, which included promoting indigenous clergy to positions of leadership (2012: 71). Although the beginnings, the sequencing and the duration of each phase of missionisation are different in the Baruya setting I am dealing with in this paper than they are elsewhere, and are organised in their own manner, the term of secondary conversion may be applied. The pastors are all Papua New Guineans and, except for one old man who runs the Lutheran church, were born in an already Christianised universe, even though traditional rituals were still performed at the time.

A common question that arises in studies of Christianity in Oceania is that of social and cultural change, and in recent years of change in gender relations (Robbins 2009: 125–130, 2012). Years ago, Charles Forman considered that investigation is

needed into women's traditional roles, how Christianity may have changed these, and how it is pressing or being pressed to change them even further (1990: 28). However, only few studies on these questions were undertaken before the 2000s. As Linda Woodhead remarks, interest in gender relations in ethnographical situations where Christianity is a relatively recent phenomenon has not reached all disciplines equally. For example, the Sociology of Religion has lagged behind many other fields in taking gender seriously (2007: 550). The present article partially deals with this particular aspect, in examining the concrete way in which gender relations affect church organisation and how gendered roles and behaviour in church enhance or challenge established gender relations. In particular, I am concerned with the autonomy Baruya women have or don't have in choosing to join one particular Church, regardless of what their husband, brothers or uncles have chosen. In the field, I was also interested in looking at the possibilities women had to express themselves during the Christian services and, more generally, how they behaved (occupation of space inside the church, frequency of attendance, inclusion in activities related to the service), and what they were allowed to do in terms of participation, such as singing and playing musical instruments. I always compared these observations in the valley of Wonenara to those I made of male behaviours and potentialities offered to men. To study change, it was necessary to access earlier ethnographical descriptions and analyses, in particular those of Maurice Godelier, dating back more than 40 years and stemming from the same locality.

The field material I collected will thus be considered alongside that of Godelier, who wrote about relations between men and women and male initiations in the 1970s. My aim is to investigate any changes that may have occurred after several decades of the churches' presence. Male initiations have been described by both Godelier and Herdt—the latter having worked among a very similar group, the Sambia—as the institution that reproduces and maintains male domination. Both undertook their field research in the late sixties and the mid-seventies respectively, a time in which sexual antagonism was still an expression commonly used to describe male–female relationships in Papua New Guinea. In the Introduction to a special issue of *Social Analysis* they edited in 1982, Gilbert Herdt and Fitz Poole wrote that 'the idea of "sexual antagonism" has often provided an awkward and unwieldy lens though which to view the significance... of sex and gender in New Guinea societies' (1982: 5). Moreover, 'behavioural, cultural, psychological, and social dimensions of analysis are frequently confounded, and analytically distinct domains are confused in a lumping together of often disparate ethnographic phenomena without clear rationale' (1982: 4).

In the same issue, Kenneth Read, one of the first anthropologists to have worked in the Highlands, in the early fifties, made an analysis of the changes that affected male-female relationships among the Gahuku-Gama between 1950 and 1981. Returning to the village of Susuroka, not far from the Eastern Highlands Province capital, Goroka, Read noticed many changes. However, rather than tying these to the arrival of Christianity, which he does not mention, he clearly relates them to the cessation of

warfare and the demise of the *idza-nama* ('pig-flute') ritual complex that had been performed for the last time between 1950 and 1952 (Read 1982: 73).[1]

My own observations among the Baruya concern the same kind of ethnographical material Read used for handling the issue of change in gender relations among the Gahuku-Gama, since, on top of the abandonment of these two fundamental social institutions that were linked to 'sexual antagonism', he observed that many practices changed, becoming less marked than in the past. By the early 1980s marriages were no longer arranged by elders; young people did not consider sexual intercourse especially dangerous; and in Read's words, 'boundaries separating the sexes have opened significantly, even if they have not been eliminated entirely' (1982: 74); and 'women today are better able to express or find expression for their own identity' (1982: 72). Although, since Read wrote his paper, the 'male domination' concept has been harshly criticised for reflecting Western ideology, I have the same reservations as he did about the full legitimacy of assuming that early male ethnographers' works are biased by their own gender and dominant Western male ideology (Read 1982: 77; Bonnemère 2014). As a matter of fact, he wrote: 'despite the "biases" of my functional training (of which later workers have said that it was "justified in its time"), I emphasized ideological oppositions, anxieties and antagonism rather than simple reciprocity as the normative colouration of male–female relationships, though these are admittedly "catch-all" phrases which have been considerably refined since then by others better equipped to deal with them (e.g., M. Strathern 1978, 1980; Tuzin 1976)' (1982: 77).

It would be simple if one's gender could wholly explain the content of one's field notes, and I am inclined to say that, if male ethnographers did not pay enough attention to female activities, it is because women were 'less visible' than men and were made invisible by their society. In short, for me, Marilyn Strathern's position advocating dismissal of vocabulary and concepts used in anthropology prior to the late seventies for dealing with gender relations in settings other than Western ones (1988) is not something that should be accepted outright. It has still to be proven in every single ethnographical case. Similarly, I don't follow without some reservation her idea, here only very succinctly presented, that there is no such fixed entity as 'woman' or 'man'. Again, I would not take it as dogma or as something that needs not be questioned. But let's now go into the details of the Baruya ethnography.

SOME HISTORICAL ELEMENTS

Five churches were operating in the Wonenara valley in 2010: the Lutheran and Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Churches, and the Church of Christ, the Revival, and the Evangelical Brotherhood Church (EBC), which arrived in recent years and are often called the New Evangelical Churches.[2] All these denominations have a different local history, which is detailed below. As everywhere in the Pacific, 'these new Pentecostal congregations have added to the religious complexity of local Christianity as they have usually won their adherents from longer established former mission churches' (Barker 2001: 105). What this author wrote in one of the first ethnographic

books on Christianity in Oceania (Barker 1990: 3) applies to the area studied here as well: in Melanesia, because of the absence of large political units, converts had to be won village by village.

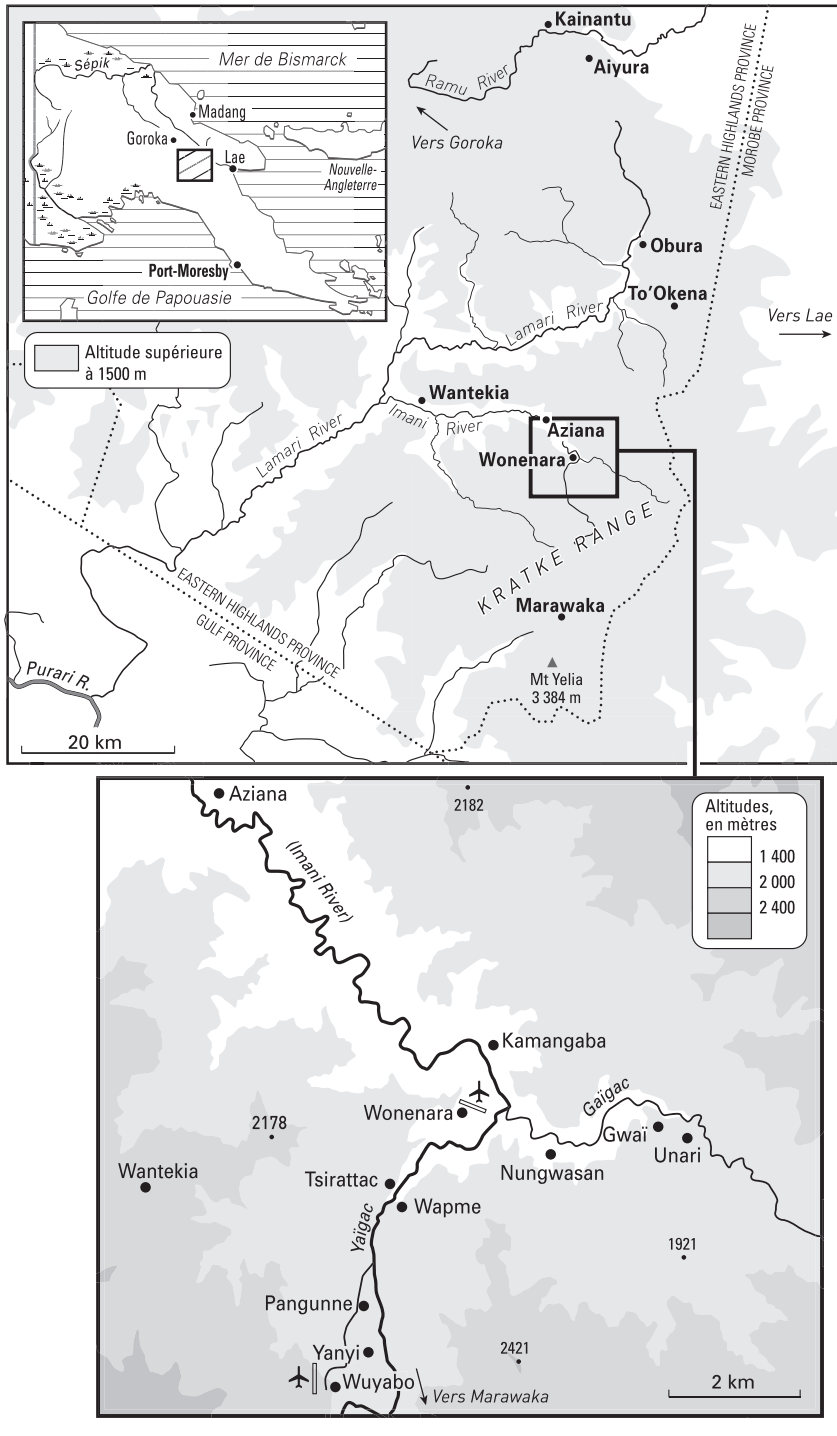
Patrol officer James Sinclair was the first white man[3] to enter the Wonenara valley in 1951. As soon as an airstrip was in use,[4] 10 years later, American and Australian missionaries of two denominations (New Tribes Missions and Lutherans) settled in different villages not far from the Wonenara airstrip, while SDA New Guinean evangelists built a church on its other side, where periodic enemies, the Ipmani, lived (see Map 1). The Lutherans were the most influential because they were very much involved in education[5] : as early as the mid-sixties, more than thirty pupils, all boys, were going to school and learning to read and write, either in Tok Pisin or in English.[6] The objective of the Lutheran Church was mainly to train future catechists (pastors), but also aid-post orderlies and teachers. After several years of schooling in Tok Pisin a few young men were sent to town for this purpose.

At the end of 1968, both the Australian administration and the Lutheran Church decided that efforts should be moved to the Marawaka Valley, one day's walk to the south (see Map 1), where an airstrip had been opened the year before. The move was a literal one, since the buildings of the government station were all dismantled and planks, corrugated iron, furniture, generator, and everything else were carried all the way there by men and women, and rebuilt.

As a consequence of this move, the Wonenara airstrip was closed in 1970 for lack of maintenance, since the Lutheran mission and school no longer existed, while around the same time Christianisation of the valley had ceased to be a priority. The New Tribes Mission had gone, and the SDA were operating in the Ipmani territory. After Independence was granted by Australia in 1975, one patrol officer (*kiap*) was put in charge of keeping law and order in the valley and of making people work on the airstrip, which was re-opened in 1977.

In 1983, a serious conflict broke out between the Baruya and the Ipmani, causing seven deaths among the Baruya. Fighting ceased completely in 1987, but each side felt that hostilities might resume, explaining why, around 1990, the people living in Wuyabo (see Map 1) decided to build their own airstrip rather than use the one at Wonenara that separated the Ipmani territory from their own. Among the other consequences of the conflict was the closing of the government school for almost 30 years. It reopened in 2007 in Yanyi, a 20-minute walk from Wuyabo on the track to the Wonenara station (see Map 1), offering grades one through seven. If the pupils' families want their children to go beyond grade seven, they have to send them to Marawaka to stay with relatives. During this period marked by the absence of church missions and schools, by minimal law and order and by a tense atmosphere with their neighbours to the north, different phases of the male initiation cycle were organised, with related gender-related behaviours that included establishing the boys' residence in the village men's house, hidden from women's eyes.

Of the three mainstream denominations present at the start, only the Lutherans and the SDA are still operating: the Lutheran church is located in Wuyabo and is run



Map 1 The Baruya territory, with a focus on the Wonenara valley.

by Nareka, a Baruya man who is now 70 years old and who was one of the young men sent to Bible college in town by the first (white) Lutheran missionaries. The SDA Church is located near the Wonenara station and is run by a non-Baruya schoolteacher.

The New Evangelical denominations settled in the Wonenara valley progressively between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 2000s. This roughly corresponds to 'a worldwide rapid growth over the last three decades of marginal Protestant religious groups (. . .) [as well as to] the flame of Pentecostalism and charismatic *revival* [that] has run like a fireball around the globe' (Ernst 1996: 3–4).[7] In 1987, a Baruya man living in Lae, the capital of Morobe Province (see Map 1), discovered the Church of Christ there and decided to teach what he had learned to his village, Unari, located on the northwest side of the valley. Since 2007 there has been another Church of Christ church alongside Yanyi, which is run by the son of a local councillor for Wuyabo, who had been in charge for almost four decades (1973–2010) and who is himself a Revival Church follower. The Sunday services now alternate every other week between Unari and Yanyi. In 2002, the Revival Church was introduced into the valley by a man educated at the Lutheran school before 1968 and sent to a high school near Goroka, where he 'learned' the Revival message.[8] He managed to have the church built alongside the Baruya side of the Wonenara airstrip, although both Ipmani and Baruya people attend the Sunday service, which may be a sign that peace is now well established. The third new denomination is the Evangelical Brotherhood Church (EBC). It reached the Ipmani area in 2006, where a pastor called Martin, a non-Anga, settled to run the church. In 2008, a young Baruya had a church built in Wuyabo, and Martin arrived in 2010 to take over.[9]

The arrival of these new denominations reflects what J. Robbins calls 'localization', a term he uses to define the process when 'authority and leadership in matters of Christian belief, practice and church organization shift from larger church institutions —usually foreign missions and the ecclesiastical structures they have created—to local congregations' (2001b: 87). He adds that 'it is by positing a Spiritual authority that bypasses the mission to communicate directly with local people that charismatic and Pentecostal revivals make of themselves such 'handy and effective means' of localization' (2001b: 88). However, these movements did not eliminate older Churches or even undermine them as has been the case in other parts of Papua New Guinea, such as among the Ambonwari, where [charismatics] continually challenge 'traditional' as well as ordinary Roman Catholic forms of leadership (Telban 2009: 155). What is striking among the Baruya is that, although the worship leaders' discourse in the Church of Christ, the Revival and the Evangelical Brotherhood Churches tends to denigrate older ways of believing (Lutheran and SDA), their coexistence in the same valley may well impede a sweeping and generalised adherence to one of these evangelical movements exclusively, and has not led to the abandonment of other forms of faith. Choice of religious affiliation[10] de facto creates a rather stable diverse religious landscape.

Although the present paper deals primarily with the impact of Christianity on gender relations, it is thus also a contribution to the study of denominational pluralism, a situation characteristic of many parts of Melanesia in general and of Papua New Guinea in particular, where different denominations compete with each other within the same local setting and for which anthropological accounts are, according to H. Jebens (2005: xiv), still an exception.

IMPACT OF CHRISTIANISATION ON GENDER RELATIONS

As we know from Godelier's ethnography, which dates from the 1960s and 1970s, relations between Baruya men and women were governed by strict rules regarding the organisation of space in the village as well as inside homes. Women could only use the walking tracks that were located in the lowest parts of the village (1986: 10), and menstrual and birth huts were built in zones reachable via such tracks.[11] Inside the houses the space was, and still is, organised around the central fireplace, with a rear zone where only men may sit and sleep, and a front zone where women sit, make their net bags, sleep and cook the daily meals. Male initiations were described as the institution that reproduced this state of opposition between the sexes, as it was termed at the time. The rituals were organised in four stages spanning over 10 years, during which boys and young men could not see or talk to their mothers. They stayed in the men's house during the weeks or days when the rituals took place in the forest. Female initiations were also held when a few young girls had their first menses. Organised by women, these rituals lasted one night and the following morning, and consisted of haranguing the girls to make them understand that a new stage of their life was starting, that they had to abandon the carefree times of their childhood and that they had to enter a period more concerned with the duties of upcoming married life, which would involve obedience to their husband and raising children.[12]

We have already seen that the first wave of Christianisation in the Wonenara valley, from 1960 to 1970, did not have a pervasive effect, except on the few boys who went to school and were sent to be trained as pastors, aid-post orderlies or teachers. These 10 years of missionary presence were not sufficient to make people forsake their female and male initiations, which appeared to them all the more important in the context of the re-emergence of ancient conflicts with the Ipmani. The Baruya Lutheran pastor who runs the Church in Wuyabo today was already running it in the eighties and nineties. He supports initiations, stating that the Bible does not prohibit them, that it is possible for the Christian message and these rituals to go hand in hand, and that they have always been the strength of the Baruya people, including the success of the youngsters at school.

Since the year 2000 and the settling of three New Evangelical denominations, most Baruya people have become Christians. Many in Wuyabo attend church services twice a week and no women in the valley go to their gardens on Sundays (on Saturdays for SDA members, see also Eriksen 2006: 231). Denominational diversity implies that, on Sunday, people from different places meet on trails since they are not always members

of the Church that is located in their own village. But, as Decktor-Korn writes (1978: 407), this does not mean that there is overt competition between denominations at the local level. According to A. Strathern and P. Stewart, this theme of competition, or even of conflict between churches, is always potentially present. Whether it develops or not is a matter of historical circumstances, either endogenous or exogenous or both (2009b: 322).

Pastors of the new churches preach more vigorously than their Lutheran and SDA colleagues, and, with the exception of Church of Christ,[13] they encourage people to play their guitars and tambourines. This provides for an entertaining and cheerful form of worship that definitely pleases the youngsters. In this regard, the pastor of the Revival Church is particularly active: every 30 seconds or so, he shouts at the audience with a Yumi tok? (see note 14 for translation) to which the answer is a rousing Amen! Less frequently, but still several times during the service, the minister says: Yumi tok? Praise the Lord! Allelujah! Tenkyu Jisas! Glori bi! Amen![14] The basic message upon which this denomination is based is very simple: 'We, the Revival, are following Verse 2, Chapter 14 of the First Letter to the Corinthians'. As it says: 'For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit'.[15] People feel a direct connection to Jesus as soon as they are able to utter a 'belawabelewale', in other words, to speak in tongues (glossolalia). Moreover, because of the supposed capacity of the pastors to call on the Holy Spirit to treat sickness, and of the ideal location of the church near the Wonenara airstrip, attracting Ipmani people as well as Baruya, the Revival Sunday service is the best attended.

What can be said about the impact of the new denominations on gender relations, given that 40 years of Lutheran and SDA presence, including 10 years of very active presence in the 1960s and 30 subsequent years of a much looser one, did not cause important social and ritual institutions to totally disappear? At the time of Godelier's fieldwork, small changes had occurred, such as the attenuation of the physical violence husbands sometimes exerted on their wives. During male initiations, young boys were treated less harshly than before First Contact.[16] On the whole, there has been a reduction of what was called sexual antagonism (Herdt and Poole 1982).[17]

In the same vein, 20 years after First Contact, it was generally accepted that girls should be sent to school, but this does not exclude the usual model, according to which boys are favoured over girls, for they do not help their mothers with gardening, cooking and housekeeping as girls do. This trend was particularly visible when the only school was in Marawaka from 1970 to 2007, a period when Wonenara families tended to keep their daughters close to home. An important consequence of girls' lesser access to education is that many adult women do not speak Tok Pisin and are not as confident speaking in public as men are. For the missionary Frater, who wrote in 1922, this was a character of sorts that women had: 'An Ambrym woman, in ordinary circumstances, is the shyest and most timid of mortals' (quoted by Eriksen in 2006: 234). This reserved attitude is thus not proper to Baruya women, but it is certainly linked to a state of things that was more prominent in the past than it is nowadays. Presumably because of a late First Contact and ideologies and practices that ruled

gender relations and persisted longer than they did in less remote areas, Baruya adult women are still not at ease in public,[18] and men contribute to maintaining this situation. This is true, for example, during Revival services, when the pastor asked for people who wanted to make 'testimoni',[19] that is, to give a short narrative of what joining the Revival Church changed in their life and how this was a change that had not occurred when they were members of other churches. Comparing two of these testimoni, one from a man and one from a woman, will help to illustrate this point.

What was striking was that the woman spoke more softly than the man and that she spoke in Baruya rather than in Tok Pisin. Her testimony was understood by everybody, since the Ipmani speak the same language as the Baruya, but her narrative was nonetheless translated into Tok Pisin, so it had to go through the voice of a man, the pastor. This seemingly anecdotal fact reveals much of the state of gender relations in the Revival Church. While this church constantly denigrates the old aspects of the local culture,[20] with its shamans and separate initiations for boys and girls, its vision of gender relations remains unchanged from pre-pacification times: no woman can have a role in the service, they are only allowed to shake the tambourine to accompany the men playing guitars and, most of all, they are regarded as persons who need to be helped by translation[21] when their talk gives credit to the church during testimony time.

The same is true for the Church of Christ, but it is expressed differently. Botswi, its pastor, referred to the Bible,[22] which he knew by heart, when discussing with me the correct behaviour for women according to his Church: in Paul's First Letter to Timothy (Chapter 2, Verses 11 and 12) it is written that 'A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent'. This may be the reason why, when two women in conflict with each other, who had not come to church for some time, wanted to be reintegrated, the pastor was the only one to tell their story. The two women listened with their heads bowed, looking guilty. Even if they were unable to speak Tok Pisin, he could have asked them to talk in Baruya and have their words translated. But he preferred instead to be the only one to talk, because, as the Bible says, women have to be silent. More generally, women play no particular role within the church itself: they are only allowed to clean the grounds around the building, to take care of the flowers that have been planted, and to collect and cook the food given to the whole congregation after the service.[23]

As for the initiations, the pastor spoke of them as practices of darkness: In the past, we were with these people! Look at these *muka* and *sanginie* rites (respectively first stage of the male rituals and first menstruation rituals), and look at all these practices of the past, would you like to come back to them? Are they practices that God created or not? Jesus crushed them[24] and so we are now in the light. Now, people who have abandoned these practices are good, they tell me 'hello' when they see me on the track, even the Ipmani against whom we fought shake hands with me.

The Bible verses he referred to when talking with me are in tune with the lessons given during the initiations and with the idea that women have to submit to the will

of men. This is rather paradoxical since he was the pastor who denigrated most vehemently the life-cycle rituals of earlier times. Here, there is no transformation of the state of things regarding gender. Different conceptions of time and change seem to be operating in the mind of Botswi: one that emphasises rupture with local practices, such as initiations and tribal fights, and another with no alteration of the ways of living that are consistent with what is written in the Bible. Things thus appear as paradoxical but are not: abandonment of ancient practices and continuity of others depend on what the Christian book says.

The Lutheran Church, as we have seen, has no problem whatsoever with traditional customs.[25] Contrary to the New denominations, there is no incompatibility in the mind of Nareka, the Lutheran pastor, between supporting initiations and being a Christian.[26] No prohibitions of any kind are imposed on the followers. People who have always smoked, chewed betelnut or have more than one wife can be Lutherans.[27] This Church is the oldest in the valley and in continuity with the past, despite the fact that, when the first white missionaries settled, this was clearly not their aim. They wanted the Baruya to go to school, to be educated. But in the Wonenara valley at least, schooling boys has never been seen as preventing them from being initiated, during the holidays for example. In Marawaka, the impact of the school has been deeper since it has been operating together with the Lutheran mission since the 1970s, when both moved there from Wonenara.

Attachment to the past and its institutions makes the Lutheran church a place where the organisation of space conforms to what was, and mostly still is, the domestic space in Wuyabo: the men on the far side from the door, that is, seated on the front benches, and the women and young children near the door on the rear benches. The mixing of men and women was not marked, as I saw when a woman arriving late would try to sit close to another woman rather than next to a man. But a few young women usually play the tambourine and sing, together with a few young men who play the guitar, notably when the church is open but the service has not yet started because the 100 or so regulars have not all arrived. Such spatial organisation between the sexes has been mentioned in analysis of Miniafia people by D. Wakefield, who linked the mixed audience at Christian Revival Crusade services to moral depravity: 'Men and women sat interspersed in the congregation (instead of men on the right and women on the left as in Anglican churches) to facilitate inappropriate touching between the sexes' (2001: 43).

The organisation of space in the Wonenara SDA church is similar to that described in the Miniafia Anglican church. When I arrived on Saturday, April 10, the faithful were already in the church; all the men seated on the right-hand benches, and the women and young children on the left. In addition, age is taken into account, since among the adults the youngest tend to be in the front and the oldest in the back. The service was led by one of the teachers from the Yanyi school. During the service, a woman holding a Bible spoke as well—an extraordinary thing by Baruya standards and criticised by the other denominations. People did not play musical instruments but instead sang a capella. Afterwards, Bible school took place outside with different

pastors teaching groups of people of the same age or marital status: older ones, adults with babies and small children, young married couples, and finally children, who were taken in charge by a woman.[28] She was not a schoolteacher, since there are only male teachers in the valley, but she was sufficiently knowledgeable about the Bible to be chosen to teach children. The SDA church seems to offer an important space for women to be involved in the service itself (see also Keller 2004: 108 fn 11), precisely because of its Bible school sessions for children, of whom women are the primary caretakers.

The other church where women are very much present, although in a different way, is the Evangelical Brotherhood Church (EBC), which, like the Lutheran Church, is located in Wuyabo. In 2010, Martin, a non-Anga pastor I repeat, settled with his family and started to run the church, which had been built in 2008 by a young Baruya man who served as his assistant. This church attracts a great majority of, and often even exclusively, women.[29] This was also the case when the first baptism was organised on the 9th of November 2011: out of 21 candidates for baptism, 15 were women.[30] This is a situation commonly encountered in Melanesia (Douglas 2001: 628), and A. Eriksen's observation for Ambrym, in Vanuatu, could be applied to the people living in the Wonenara valley: 'Women's involvement in the church does not only parallel, but far exceeds, men's preoccupation with the church' (2005: 293). A woman from Mount Hagen, where A. Strathern has worked, suggested that women are more concerned than men in church affairs in her society because the Holy Spirit works especially well in women (Stewart and Strathern 2001: 100). In any event, the fact is that women are quicker to abandon habits that are considered 'bad' by most of the denominations.

When Martin arrived in Wonenara, he proposed holding a service every day at twilight, but the women told him that this would keep them from feeding their pigs, something they do precisely at sunset. So it was agreed that four days of the week would be devoted to EBC *lotu* (services in Tok Pisin) and that these would take two different forms. On Tuesdays and Fridays, prayer meetings of about an hour are held in the pastor's house just before dawn, around 5:00 AM.[31] The most assiduous women of Wuyabo, about 10, sit around the fireplace and listen to the pastor, who reads Bible verses and prays. The services held in the church take place on Sunday morning and on Thursday at twilight. Most of those attending are women, and during the Good Friday service I attended, the pastor made a reference to this situation when talking about the death of Jesus. As it is written in Matthew's Gospel Ch. 27 v. 55,[32] he said, women followed Jesus and helped him. In the places of worship, only women and no men were hearing Jesus' talks. It's like in Wuyabo where only the women come to the services!

These remarks and the insistence on the important presence of women in the Bible, as carers of Jesus and primary hearers of his lessons, was something I never heard in any other church of the valley. Similarly, it was in EBC that a young woman prayed in a loud voice, while the congregation, but also the pastor and the male assistants, listened with bowed heads. Indeed, the pastor and the assistants of the EBC

Church are all male, but women are accepted as persons who can pray in front of an audience.

CONCLUSION

With this ethnography in mind, how may we answer the question of how gendered roles and behaviour in church enhance or challenge established gender relations?

It may seem that, in this paper, I focused mainly on women and their changing positions and roles due to the arrival of Churches in the Baruya landscape. But this is a simple effect of observation and phrasing. Given the situation of sexual antagonism from which I start, owing to the available ethnography (Godelier 1986), a situation which mostly prevents women from doing things (like being close to their sons from their initiation onwards or walking on all the village paths, etc.), I chose to deal with what they are now allowed to do. But, as I have tried to make clear throughout the paper, changes affect relations between men and women as well as gendered representations of femaleness and maleness equally.

While both initiations and Christian services are ritual practices having the potential to alter people's lives and minds, only the latter accept a mixed-sex audience, which means that women have now access to a ritual performed by men on the same footing as men. Though it may seem a bit daring, this connection has already been made by other authors. Forman, for example, notes that, in most Oceanic societies, women were not normally accepted as participants in religious ritual. Hence, the presence of women in Christian services marked a significant change for most island women (1984: 156). P. Stewart and A. Strathern draw another parallel between the collective youth conventions organised by Pentecostal Churches and the initiation rituals that were formerly held in many parts of the New Guinea Highlands (2001: 95).

Moreover, Jesus makes no distinction between the sexes when granting mercy, so there is a potential equality of the fate of men and women after death. Baruya women as well as men have their own destiny in their hands, as in other regions of Papua New Guinea, where people claim that women and men are equal in their ability to achieve salvation for themselves (Robbins 2009: 127). In the Wonenara valley, individual autonomy is also visible in the freedom everybody has to change church affiliation independently of the other family members.[33] This is an important aspect for women: they can choose the church they want, and many in Wuyabo went to the EBC when it settled in their village. This denomination is much more demanding in terms of time and daily conduct than the Lutheran church, where men are more numerous: there are a minimum of two services a week, and converts have to stop smoking, chewing betelnut, and playing cards. This choice to quit behaviours associated with the past makes individuals agents of their own relationship to God,[34] for the quality of which they are the only ones responsible (see also Schwarz 2010: 66–67). In that sense, new denominations also reconfigure [. . .] women's understanding of their own positions. Women converts see themselves as obedient primarily to God (Robbins 2004b: 133).

The case of Spirit women in Telefolmin is interesting in this regard, since through them, the Holy Spirit made God's wishes for Telefolmin known and a thoroughgoing program for the transformation of Telefol society was launched (Jorgensen 2007: 120). For example, Spirit women reveal God's desire for a closer relationship between men and women in the context of the Christian family. This induces changes in daily life, since God had meant for people to be able to eat everything together (ibid.), while in the past there were taboos on women eating foods considered to be reserved for men and vice versa.

Gendered roles and behaviour in church have indeed made a contribution to the enhancing of established gender relations that began following First Contact.[35] But there is great variation among the Churches in the ways women are treated: in one (Church of Christ), they can't speak or pray; in another (EBC), their presence improves their status in the eyes of the pastor when it comes to caretaking and ability to control their conduct. In still another (SDA), a woman can hold a Bible and speak during the service and is the one who runs the children's Bible classes. However, in any of the Evangelical-Charismatic Churches present in the valley, Spirit women have never emerged and women are not the voice of the Holy Spirit, as has been the case in the Min region for example (Jorgensen 2007; Robbins 2012).

Most remarkable among the Baruya is that the two pastors who enhanced and spoke in positive terms of the role of women, or accepted that a woman occupies a role during the service—although a small one—were not Baruya. This is relevant and points to a resistance from within the society itself, despite a thin opening towards a less denigrated position for women. For example, Nareka, the acting Lutheran pastor and a Baruya man, defends both the initiations and the Sunday Lutheran service and does not ask any special behaviour from followers. People who prefer not to alter their previous behavioural habits are mostly Lutherans. This way of life may be considered less open to the new ways for women to assert themselves. In Wuyabo, the village where the Lutheran Church operates, women still give birth in special huts in the lower part of the village, where they stay for many days before being allowed to come back to their house, and the concept of female pollution has not vanished. Again, we may here be faced with two conceptions of time and continuity ('traditional' and Lutheran), which in the field do not present as sharp an opposition as that between the 'traditional' and the Evangelical Churches' conceptions, with the emphasising a break with the past (see Robbins 2007: 16 for more details, as well as Meyer 1999: 214).

By attracting women and giving them confidence in the superiority of their religious engagement over that of men, and by encouraging their good conduct in general, EBC is possibly the Church with the highest potential to change this state of things, and to make women less submissive towards men. The SDA denomination, which predates EBC by 40 years in the valley, has probably acquired the same potential incentive by allowing some women to teach children at Bible schools and to speak during the service. Only the future will tell, but both of these Churches may be considered as having a potential role in promoting women's critical reconsideration of the established gender relations. Globally, as many authors have emphasised, '[a]

restricted and subservient position in village life was all that was open to women in many islands. Therefore, women found church vocations more attractive than did men' (Forman 1984: 168). In a more recent paper, Eriksen analysed the successful involvement of women with the Presbyterian Church and their role in its spread since the end of the nineteenth century, in the context of the *mage* graded society and the bigmen, which through time brought a hidden level of agency to the fore. The Church came to develop a new value system,[36] which challenged the hierarchy of the *mage* and opened the way for women onto the public scene in a much more powerful way than before (2006: 244).

The role played by some Churches in enhancing Baruya gender relations towards more equal statuses must be apprehended in the larger context of giving girls access to the outside world of education, which until the 1970s was totally closed to them.[37] In the Wonenara valley, as we have seen, the Yanyi school re-opened only in 2007. During the conflicts with the Ipmani, most of the boys were sent to Marawaka for their education, but only a few girls had this opportunity because of the school fees, because they would be unable to help at home and because boys are simply favoured over girls in the realm of schooling (Forman 1984: 159). Robbins remarks in his 2009 work that gender changes have to be thought more as unintentional consequences of changes in values than as a fully articulated model of gender equality (2009: 127). Furthermore, it is only when acting as Spirit women that these women were granted significant prestige and looked to as some of the most important persons in the community (2009: 128).[38]

There is, however, still some resistance, not only from Lutheran traditionalists but from two other New Churches as well: the Revival pastor, for example, berates the SDA for allowing women to stand near the altar and speak in front of everyone; and the Church of Christ pastor refers to the Bible to legitimise the fact that he does not give women any freedom to speak at all.

Consequently, there appears to be no clear and unique answer to the question of whether established gender relations have been modified with the arrival of Churches. The most relevant factor is the pastors' origin (Baruya or not), rather than the presence and discourse of a particular Church. In effect, the same attitude towards women is found in the Lutheran Church, for whose pastor performing initiations while being a Christian is not problematic, and in the Revival Church or Church of Christ, whose pastors assert that the rituals of the past are practices linked to darkness, which need to be eliminated. If Baruya women's behaviour seems to be on its way towards a (limited) change, there is also clearly some resistance from Baruya pastors to allowing this movement to proceed too quickly, probably because this would have consequences on gender relationships more generally, something non-Baruya pastors do not feel, as they come with their families. Even though what Forman wrote 30 years ago does not fit the Baruya situation, given that the contexts he dealt with have a longer Christian history, some of his words find an echo here: 'The most recent changes that have brought women into the governing bodies of churches seem to be inspired more by external than by indigenous influences' (1984: 170). I would therefore venture to

conclude by quoting his closing sentence: 'The history of Pacific women innovations is obviously not finished'.[39]

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NOTES

1 Interestingly, Read wrote: 'though the two are clearly connected, I do not think the connection is in a one-way direction such as "no warfare, no initiation"' (1982: 73). This is the case as well among the Anga groups, where initiations are still performed in some areas although inter-tribal fighting ended in the seventies.

2 Such denominational diversity is not uncommon in Oceania (Decktor Korn 1978).

3 For me, the best term in this particular context would be 'Australian', but it might lead to misunderstanding. The one usually employed when speaking of the Pacific is 'European', but it is not adequate here because, given the recent dates of First Contacts in New Guinea, the people who entered the Highlands were Australian several generations earlier. In passing, I should mention that James Sinclair is well known for his almost 30 books on New Guinea.

4 According to W. Fugmann, Lutheran aviation made an outstanding contribution to the churches and also to the development of Papua New Guinea. More than 40 airstrips have been built by the Lutherans in New Guinea (1986: 579). Wonenara's is among them (1986: 621).

5 It is a well-known fact that in Papua New Guinea churches are deeply involved in education, health delivery, media, and various businesses, including one of the largest regional air services (Barker 2013: 147).

6 Forman wrote that the Lutherans in New Guinea waited until after World War II to start these schools because their congregations resisted the idea of letting girls live away from home (1984: 159). In the Wonenara valley, opening schools to girls has been a far slower process. See page 7.

7 See also Robbins 2004b: 117.

8 As J. Robbins explains at the very beginning of his monograph about the Urapmin, the Revival movement among them was not the product of direct expatriate missionary work. It was, instead, brought in by local people themselves who had experience of the outside world (2004a: 2). In the Wonenara valley this situation extends to two out of the three New Evangelical Churches that are now well established.

9 I recently learned that he has now been replaced.

10 See also Strathern and Stewart 2009b: 311.

11 Changes have appeared in this matter, although not as markedly as among the Urapmin, for example, where the decline of Afek, the 'old woman', as the most important figure in the culture has lifted all taboos and rituals linked to her and made the habit of having separate paths for men and women obsolete (Robbins 2009: 126). Among the Baruya, no more paths are reserved for women, but menstrual and birth huts are still located in the lower part of the hamlet.

12 I must say that I was amazed by comments engaging me to take a critical perspective on the description of Baruya male–female relationships with the help of feminist writings. As I was not in the Wonenara valley in the 1970's, how could I be critical of what the ethnographer present at the time writes? To me, this would be like imputing motives to him.

13 The Church of Christ prohibits the use of musical instruments because a verse from the Book of Amos in the New Testament (V-23) says: 'yupela i no ken paitim ol gita samting. Mi les long harim'. In English, 'Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen'. Source: http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Amos%205&version=ESV.

14 What do we say? Praise the Lord! Allelujah! Thank you Jesus! Glory be! Amen!.

15 Source: http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2014&version=ESV.

16 Carnet 12, p. 118 (1968). Godelier's field books have been digitalised as part of the online archival and annotation system called ODSAS (http://www.pacific-credo.net/index.php?page=odsas).

17 This situation is not encountered in all Papua New Guinea societies: in his 1997 book *The Cassowary's Revenge*, Tuzin, for example, as quoted by Douglas (2001: 628), notes 'an upsurge in "domestic brutality" as enraged, frustrated men, loosed from the comfort and ritual restraints of the Tambaran, lashed out against defiant, "Revival-authorized" women'.

18 This is also true among the Urapmin, where a mass conversion in 1977–1978 had the effect, according to people, of downplaying gender distinctions. Still, most of the women, 'while acknowledging that speaking formally in church is open to them, do not feel comfortable doing so' (Robbins 2012: 119). These two examples run counter to a fact noted elsewhere that women are considered as receiving more gifts of the Spirit, and these gifts underwrite their work as lay preachers, healers, evangelists, and prophets whose voices are often heard in church and other public settings (. . .). These settings provide opportunities for women to develop public leadership skills" (Robbins 2004b: 132). See also Telban (2009: 152), who notes that a woman may act as a medium who experiences the Holy Spirit through trance.

19 In the early days of the Revival movement that reached them in 1977, the Urapmin as well related during such 'testimoni' the miraculous experiences they had (Robbins 2001b: 83).

20 Discussing Pentecostalism's ability to retain its shape across cultures, J. Robbins writes that it may be due to its very firm and explicit rejection of indigenous religious traditions (2001a: 8).

21 Although an SIL couple did spend several decades in the valley, the New Testament they produced (together with an ordinary dictionary) is not used in any of the operating Churches' Christian services. Thus, contrary to what C. Handwan writes for the Guhu-Samane (2010), being faithful to, or on the contrary trying to write down a new translation, has never been at stake. My use of the term 'translation' refers only to the uneasiness women feel, firstly at speaking in Tok Pisin and secondly in front of others in a rather unfamiliar setting.

22 In a recent paper, Manfred Ernst writes that Fundamentalists across all denominations insist that the Bible is absolutely and in its entirety without error (2012: 38). But in the Wonenara Valley, besides Botswi and what I took as a perfect faithfulness to the words of the New Testament, I also heard Revival pastors saying that anybody could have written the Bible, while retaining only one sentence to sum up their faith and practice (1 Korin 14: 2).

23 This situation seems to be rather peculiar since it was noted for other Papua New Guinea societies that, 'although the top leadership positions in the missions went exclusively to men, (. . .) the ability of women to attend and fully participate in church services and other activities tempered the overall power of men' (Barker 2013: 152).

24 The sentence here pronounced by Botswi could be read in the light of Robbins' paper on 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture' (2007) and particularly in terms of the 'Christian Model of Time' he sees as opposed to the anthropological one that impedes in some

way anthropologists to deal adequately with what people say about their conversion to Christianity (and especially Evangelical Protestantism). The notion of time for Christians is one made of ruptures and change and reflects the way its own history is constructed whereas anthropology has always defended the point that culture is based on reproduction and continuity.

25 This sympathetic and sensitive view towards the indigenous Melanesian religions is characteristic of mainline denominational churches, as John Barr notes (1983: 109).

26 This is also the case among the Miniafia of Collingwood Bay in Papua New Guinea, where local expressions of Anglican Christianity rarely came into direct conflict with traditional religious practice (Wakefield 2001: 40). 'Traditional religious thought is tolerated as "superstition", whereas non-Anglican Christian ritual formulae and doctrine are interpreted as "error" and actively renounced' (2001: 41).

27 The question of polygamy used to be dealt with by churches through compromises: for example, in Mount Hagen, 'the Assembly of God Church allows as many wives of a polygamist to enter the church as want to but a man practicing polygamy can join the church only on the condition that he will not take another wife after having joined' (Stewart and Strathern 2001: 98).

28 Bible Study in church or after church is specific to Seventh-Day Adventists. E. Keller writes that in remote Madagascar, 'the main purpose of Shabbath School is to discuss in small groups the past week's lessons of the Bible Study Guide and to help each other clarify and understand their meaning' (2004: 95). Although such Bible Study Guides are not used in the Wonenara valley—and I must say I don't know for Papua New Guinea as a whole –, such discussion takes place every Saturday with the Old Testament in hand.

29 As Robbins notes, a consistent finding in studies of Pentecostal-charismatic churches worldwide is that more women than men are active members (2004b: 132). Although this is on the whole true for the Wonenara valley, the involvement of women in the New denominations varies greatly according to each of them.

30 This baptism was not witnessed by me but by Pierre Lemonnier.

31 Similarly, B. Meyer describes prayer meetings held in the pastor's house among the Ewe of Ghana (1999: 113).

32 'There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him.' Source: http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+27&version=ESV.

33 Also see Bonnemère 2013. Note that this feature is in absolute contradiction with what A. Eriksen wrote about SDA members in North Ambrym: 'When a woman from Lindul married, there was a strong claim that the person she married should become a member of the SDA church. This was un-negotiable'. And she immediately added in the text and in the note that accompanies it: 'This is actually still often the case on Ambrym'. [Note: 'However, there are cases where SDA women convert and become Presbyterian, but these are not dominant. People generally say that an SDA woman seldom converts'] (2006, 231: 245). An intermediary situation seems to be found in Tonga, where there is no formal requirement that both members of the couple belong to the same denomination, but most of the time, one member of the couple switches to the other's denomination (Decktor-Korn 1978: 414).

34 As A. Strathern and P. Stewart noted in their introduction to a volume they recently edited, the analyses, working in the traditions of modernisation theory, have tended to suggest that Christianity implies a move to the 'individualist' as opposed to the 'collectivity' pole of personhood. Their own concept of relational-individual (Strathern and Stewart 1998) suggests that this idea is simplistic (2009a: 6). To reinforce this argument, they remark that 'while certain forms of Christianity may encourage a more personal tie to God, this is accompanied by intense communal action' (2009a: 26). I would add that such an opposition reflects a tendency rather than a simple

reality. In any case, Baruya Christian discourses tend to stress individual choice *when speaking about* their relationship to Church and to God (or Jesus) and, although attendance to Church is an intense collective moment, prayer is often made on a personal basis.

35 Robbins notes for the Urapmin that 'men (. . .) quickly turn their attention to building the churches, institutionalizing and routinizing Christian practice (. . .) Women, by contrast, particularly Spirit women, create their contemporary identity by minding the jagged edges left by the changes that men take for granted as having created a clan break' (2009: 128–129). Although the role taken by Spirit women is locally understood as completely new (Robbins 2009: 128), the anthropologist connects it to Afek, the female ancestor who used to be considered as the creator of [Urapmin] customs (2009: 126). Among the Baruya, no women take any such role, probably because there is no such ancestor, despite the common belief that women were at the origin of cultural objects, like fire, flutes and bows and arrows (Godelier 1986: 70–71).

36 This notion of value has been used by J. Robbins to explain change in gender relations brought by Christianity in three different ethnographical situations 'through controlled comparison' (2012: 114). While among the Urapmin (Robbins 2004a), radical change in gender relations has been brought through the rapid adoption of Christianity and its linked value, individualism, for the people from Ambrym in Vanuatu (Eriksen 2008), the position of women has changed in radical ways but has not changed values. The last case J. Robbins takes into account is the Huli one (Wardlow 2006), where traditional values co-exist with Christianity. The Baruya situation seems closer to the Huli one as no value associated with Christianity has as yet come to the fore.

37 I would thus agree with a concluding remark made by Jebens in his book where he emphasises the close link between religious and social change '(. . .) [since] religion is adopting various factors that affect social reality (2005: 239)'.

38 This sentence echoes what Godelier wrote about Great Men in Baruya society, where great warriors, shamans or ritual experts were prominent and authoritative figures only during the time of, respectively warfare, cures and initiations. In the meantime, they were considered like every other man (1986).

39 Forman 1984: 172.

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