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MALE-CENTRIC BIBLICAL LITERATURE AND MARITAL VIOLENCE: READING THROUGH MELANESIAN INTERPRETIVE LENSES
Part 1

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Abstract

It is explicit, biblical literature is male-centric and its implications on male-female power relations are seen as leading to marital violence. This two part article examines the male-centric biblical literature through Melanesian interpretive lenses. The article proposes the Melanesian concept of *Nem* as one way of interpreting the male-centric biblical literature. *Nem* plays a central role in the male-centric socio-cultural power structures and values that order male-female power relations in Melanesia. Since *Nem* fills this vital role in enabling us to understand male-female power relations in Melanesia, the article investigates whether *Nem* played any comparable role in biblical times. Particularly, it explores whether *Nem*, as a Melanesian hermeneutical tool, can help interpret biblical literature that gives preference to men over women. It examines the Hebrew term *Shem* in relation to *Nem* and argues that the concept of *Shem/Nem* can bring fresh understanding of the male-centric biblical literature and its authors. It examines Jesus's response to the concept of *Nem* in the New Testament, and recommends Jesus's emphasis on "service" as an ideal power relational concept in male-female power relations.

Key Words

Nem, marital violence, big-man, big-name, male-centric, biblical literature, Melanesia, *Shem*

INTRODUCTION

This two part article discusses the male-centric biblical literature and its implications for male-female power relations that lead to violence against women. More specifically the discussion proposes the Melanesian concept

of *Nem* as one way of interpreting and understanding the male-centric language of the Scriptures.

The article will be presented in two parts. The first part, presented in this issue, examines the Melanesian concept of *Nem* and how this relates to male-female power relations in Melanesia. It argues that men's desire to gain *Nem* for themselves and their society underlies the unequal male-female power relations that lead to violence against women. Since *Nem* fills this vital role in enabling us to understand male-female power relations in Melanesia, part one investigates whether *Nem* played any comparable role in biblical times. Particularly, it explores whether *Nem*, as a Melanesian hermeneutical tool, can help interpret biblical literature that gives preference to men over women.

The second part of the article examines the Old Testament male-centric literature in relation to *Nem*. More specifically, it examines the Hebrew term *Shem* in relation to *Nem* and argues that the concept of *Shem/Nem* can bring fresh understanding of the male-centric biblical literature and its authors. Second, the article examines Jesus's response to the concept of *Nem* in the New Testament. More specifically, it examines Jesus's emphasis on "service" as an ideal power relational concept in human relationships. It argues that power relations in human relationships, especially between women and men are not for dominating the women, rather they are a means to serve one another, specifically to serve women.

THE CONCEPT OF *NEM* AS A MELANESIAN INTERPRETIVE LENS

The first section defines the concept and examines its communal and personal aspects which affect male-female power relations.

DEFINING THE CONCEPT

The concept of *Nem na Namba*, Neo-Melanesian Pidgin terms, can be literally translated as "Name and Number." They represent much more than identifications like one's appellation or one's numerical placing as they typically would in English. Instead, these terms represent a concept which is equivalent to the idea of one's social status and honour which is similar to honour and shame values of the Mediterranean societies.[2] It designates

[2] For examples on the Mediterranean values of honour and shame, how these values ordered their social life and relationships, see Pierre Bourdieu, "The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle

one's standing or value or one's achieved or bestowed position in the society. It is also associated with the idea of *bik-man* or *bik-nem*, which can be translated as "big-man" and "big-name" in English. They describe achieved status equivalent to the idea of honour.[3]

Basically, the main characteristic of the concept of *Nem* is the public recognition of one's social standing. It comes in one of two ways. It could be inherited from the family or clan at birth or along with the naming rite (see further below) or it could be conferred based on one's achievements (see further below). By its very nature both the inherited and achieved standing may be either gained or lost in the perpetual challenge for public recognition. Since the group is so important for the identity of a Melanesian person (see further below), it is critical to recognize that a person's status comes primarily from group recognition. It is a public matter. When someone's achievement is recognized by the group, the result is a new social status. With this status follows the expectation that one must continually demonstrate one's success in public activities.[4] In this case the interaction between men is always characterized by competition with others for recognition. Such social interaction often takes the form of challenge and re-

Society," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. Jean G. Peristiany (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), 191–241; Jean G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966); Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour," in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 503–11; Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," in *Honour and Shame*, 19–77, reprinted in Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1–41; David D. Gilmore, "Honour, Honesty, Shame: Male Status in Contemporary Andalusia," in *Honour and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, ed. David D. Gilmore, American Anthropological Association Special Publication 22 (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 90–103.

[3] For more on these Melanesian terms and other related terms, see Frederick Steinbauer, *Neo-Melanesian Dictionary* (Madang: Kristen, 1969).

[4] For example, see Marshall D. Sahlins, "Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5 (1965): 285–303; Donald Tuzin, "Politics, Power, and Divine Artistry in Ilahita," *Anthropological Quarterly* 51 (1978): 60–67; Bronwen Douglas, "Rank, Power, Authority: A Reassessment of Traditional Leadership in South Pacific Societies" *Journal of Pacific History* 14 (1979): 2–27; Maurice Godelier, *The Making of Great Men: Male Domination and Power among the New Guinea Baruya* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Maurice Godelier and Marilyn Strathern, eds., *Big Men and Great Men: Personification of Power in Melanesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

sponse. Characteristically, it is about male-male power challenges. Such power relational interaction between men takes the form of challenge through ceremonial exchanges, warfare, and other symbolic gestures.[5]

However, although the primary dynamic is male to male, there is often an impact on women. Although women are innocent participants, they are the main victims. For instance, the practice of polygamy, in addition to reasons like sexual satisfaction, expanding of one's alliances, and the supply of labour to produce valuables for practices like *Moka*,[6] is based on male-male power challenge. Here men acquire more wives, and at times forcefully, for the benefit of men's economic ability to measure up to a challenge, to overpower a challenger, or to keep a challenger indebted to him in a ceremonial exchange.[7] The practice of bride-price, in addition to economic gain or to reciprocate with the bride's family, also demonstrates the economic prowess of the groom's family and tribe, lest other men challenge the groom and his tribe for not being manly. In like manner, male roles in society are regarded as superior to female gender roles and as such women are treated as inferiors and servants for the male quest for *Nem*. Not only that, even to serve a woman is regarded as a sign of inferiority, men's greatest fear.[8]

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[5] For example, see, Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1961); Andrew Strathern, *The Rope of Moka: Big Men and Ceremonial Exchange in Mt Hagen, New Guinea*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Annette B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Anthony Forge, "The Golden Fleece," *Mankind* 7 (1972): 527–40.

[6] *Moka* is a local vernacular term (*Melpa* language of Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea) that describes a ceremonial exchange in which pigs and shell wealth are amassed to compete in the male-male wealth exchange competition. See Strathern, *The Rope of Moka*.

[7] Some other ceremonial exchanges are those of yam cultures mostly practised in the Sepik region and the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea. For more on this practice, see Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*; Forge, "The Golden Fleece."

[8]For more examples on socio-cultural values and the influence of the concept of *Nem* on social structures and social relationships, see Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*; Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*; Strathern, *The Rope of Moka*; Marilyn Strathern, *Women in Between: Female Roles in a Male World: Mount Hagen, New Guinea* (London: Seminar Press, 1972); Marilyn Strathern, "Introduction," in *Occasional Papers* 18 (Port Moresby: Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea, 1985), 1–13; Marilyn Strathern, ed., *Dealing with Inequality: Analysing Gender Relations in Melanesia and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California

Anthropologists, like Anthony Forge, have observed and described this male-male interaction as a form of male egalitarianism.[9] He asserted that, "in egalitarian New Guinea society it is only the men who are equal in the sense of being at least potentially the same or identical. Women are different ... the differences are those of complementarity; men and women are interdependent but are in no sense the same or symmetrical and cannot be identical."[10] Forge's observation paints a picture that equality is based on sameness or on what is identical. This assertion denotes that there is inequality between man and woman based on their difference, but they complement each other in their difference.

Forge's argument is significant; however, his assertion may be based on liberal political philosophy that may isolate the women's part in the total practice of the concept he described as egalitarianism.[11] Margaret Jolly, on the other hand, argued that the much talked about egalitarianism in Melanesia is only an illusion. She asserts that the dominant idiom of equality used to describe equality in Melanesia has been that of Western liberal political philosophy. She contended that in particular the protracted discussions based on the idea of "big-man" use the concept of egalitarianism in this way. Thus, as with most "western liberal thought, the canonical conception of the political individual or citizen is male."[12] So long as the ideals of egalitarianism in Melanesia are understood in terms of that liberal philosophy and not based on the intrinsic human worth, equality is only a daydream.[13] Jolly's argument must be respected, but in opposing the liberal political approach to egalitarianism in Melanesia, she introduces yet another issue,

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Press, 1988); Gabriele Sturzenhofecker, *Times Enmeshed: Gender, Space, and History among the Duna of Papua New Guinea* (Standford: Standford University Press, 1998).

[9] See Forge, "The Golden Fleece," 527–40; Lisette Josephides, *The Production of Inequality: Gender and Exchange among the Kewa* (London: Tavistock, 1985); Margaret Jolly, "The Chimera of Equality in Melanesia," *Mankind* 17 (1987): 168–83; Godelier, *The Making of Great Men*; James Flanagan, "The Cultural Construction of Equality on the New Guinea Highlands' Fringe," in *Rules, Decisions, and Inequality in Egalitarian Societies*, ed. James G. Flanagan and Steve Rayner (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988), 164–80; James Flanagan, "Hierarchy in Simple 'Egalitarian' Societies,' in *Rules, Decisions, and Inequality in Egalitarian Societies*, 1–19.

[10] Forge, "The Golden Fleece," 536.

[11] See Annette B. Weiner, *Women of Value, Men of Renown* (Saint Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1977), 228–29.

[12] Jolly, "The Chimera of Equality in Melanesia," 168.

[13] Jolly, "The Chimera of Equality in Melanesia," 168–83.

equality based on an individual autonomy which may be problematic in a community-centred society like Melanesia.[14]

Forge and Jolly's observations make two important claims about the concept of *Nem*. First, Forge sees the event of male-male challenge for honour and status among men as a challenge of equals and he describes the practice as egalitarianism. Second, Jolly, on the other hand, recognises the way in which egalitarianism is discussed in Melanesian studies and suggests that there is no egalitarianism where intrinsic human worth is not recognised. Their arguments both deal with human relationships. Yet, Melanesian egalitarianism is based not on inherent human value, but on male-male power challenge, a challenge in which women are innocent participants and may become the victims.

In Melanesia, egalitarianism unfortunately may not mean equality to Melanesians in the sense of individual autonomy based on an inherent value as is understood from the Western world (Jolly), rather it is based on power relationships between males who share the same or identical opportunities (Forge).[15] It describes the concept of power challenge among men. As Geoffrey White described, with a few notable exceptions, "Melanesian societies do not exhibit marked forms of hierarchy in ranking, inherited titles, chiefly etiquette, and so forth".[16] Although the diversity of the region makes generalization impossible, an important feature of most indigenous PNG communities is adherence to egalitarian values that see power dependent on networks of exchange and personal reputation built up over time. This aspect of social organization is associated with consensus-style decision-making rather than reliance on positions of authority or elite status.[17] This consensus style is summed up in the concept of *Nem*. It is a symbol of power competition among men in a competitive environment, and men must continually demonstrate their success in public activities.

[14] For problems associated with introducing individual autonomy in Melanesia, see Joel Robins, "Equality as a Value: Ideology in Dumont, Melanesia and the West Social Analysis," *The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 36 (1994): 21–70; Andre Beteille, "Individualism and Equality," *Current Anthropology* 27 (1986): 124–34; Marilyn Strathern, "Introduction," 7–10.

[15] See Robins, "Equality as a Value"; Beteille, "Individualism and Equality"; Strathern, "Introduction," 4–8.

[16] Geoffrey White, "Indigenous Governance in Melanesia," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia*, (ANU discussion paper, 2007), 6.

[17] White, "Indigenous Governance in Melanesia," 1–16.

THE COLLECTIVE ASPECT OF THE CONCEPT OF *NEM*

The communal aspect of the concept of *Nem* begins with the naming rite. A naming rite is an indispensable link to different types of kinship structural systems, values, and relationships. It defines and identifies an individual's place and responsibility to uphold the values of a society and to defend the honour and status of that society. It means one's social behaviour within and without the society must adhere to the status of the name one bears, and one must seek to defend the past and to build on it in collaboration with the community. The naming rite is therefore a connection between the past and the present and between the community and the individual. It describes a set of relationships and obligations bestowed upon each member of a society to uphold in relationship to one another. It endows individuals with the right to challenge and be challenged. Such relationships are linked through a naming rite and the succession of a common name that all must defend.[18] For example, Ward H. Goodenough observed that for the Lakalai peoples of West New Britain in PNG, the naming rite emphasizes one's place in a procreational chain or in formally structured kin and social relationships. He concluded that the Lakalai naming practices and forms of address function as a counterbalance to the effect that the workings of the social system tend otherwise to give the people's images of themselves and others.[19]

[18] For some of the earliest anthropological manuscripts or literature that did some preliminary work on Pacific Island peoples and their cultures between mid-1800s into the 1930s see, Robert Codrington, *The Melanesians: Studies in their Anthropology and Folklore* (London: Oxford University Press, 1891); George Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, (London: John Snow, 1861); Boyle T. Somerville, "Ethnographical Notes on New Georgia, Solomon Islands," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 26 (1897): 357–412; Basil Thomson, *The Fijians: A Study in the Decay of Custom* (London: Macmillan, 1908); W. G. Ivens, *Melanesians of the South-East Solomon Islands* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1927); Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages* (London: Routledge, 1929); Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York: Morrow, 1935). These and other early literature on the Pacific peoples prior to 1960s may or may not directly deal with social structures or the concept of *Nem* but they have influenced anthropological work in the 1950s and onwards. Some of the work that will be referred to in this discussion may have stemmed from this earlier work.

[19] Ward H. Goodenough, "Personal Names and Modes of Address in Two Oceanic Societies," in C*ontext and Meaning in Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Melford E. Spiro (New York: Free Press, 1965), 265–76. See also Ward H. Goodenough, "Property, Kin, and Community on Truk," in *Yale University Publications in Anthropology* 46 (London: Yale

Rolf Kuschel, looking at Bellona peoples of the Solomon Islands,[20] said the concept of name is a significant factor in the social structuring of the peoples. Name carries social responsibilities both to the living and dead (ancestors) and is value laden and must be closely guarded against any behaviour that brings disrepute to the name.[21] Lamont Lindstrom, speaking about the Tannaese of Vanuatu, observes that the constitution of kinship groups and the definition of social personalities depend on the concept of name. This gives an individual his or her position within the social order that is conferred through the name rather than by the occurrence and genealogical facts of birth. This reliance on name rather than on descent kinship permits the continuing, successful reproduction of not just a single hero-like figure as is characteristic of the hierarchy of a rank system of kinship, but complexly interrelated sets of kinsmen and women who collectively uphold the name of a given society.[22] James West Turner concluded on his observation of Matailobau people's naming concept in Fiji, that, while the living members of the kinship group are identified with their ancestors as a general category, a name is a special bond with specific ancestors. Despite the fundamental social transformations that were occurring during the period in which it took shape, the current system of naming in Matailobau asserts the link to the past and to the ancestors who play a role in providing or withholding prosperity and well-being. The ancestors are made present in their names and in the persons of their descendants who bear them. The concept of name also asserts continuity by identifying persons in relation to their children and grandchildren, that is, with respect to specific descendants rather than ancestors. Individual identity is socially important but muted by a naming system that stresses social identity or status. By identifying with the past through the naming process within the social structural kinship system the people of Matailobau embed their present in their past.[23]

University Press, 1951); Felix M. Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology: The Science of Custom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958); Raymond Firth, *Human Types* (Westport: Greenwood, 1938), reprinted in 1983.

[20] Bellona Island of the Solomon Islands is located on the border between Melanesian and Polynesian Islands.

[21] Rolf Kuschel, "Cultural Reflection on Bellonese Personal Names," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 97 (1988): 49–70.

[22] Lamont Lindstrom, "Personal Names and Social Reproduction on Tanna, Vanuatu," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 94 (1985): 27–47.

[23] James West Turner, "Some Reflections on the Significance of Name in Matailobau, Fiji," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 100 (1991): 7–24.

Observations by Goodenough, Kuschel, Lindstrom, and Turner emphasise the connection between the communal and the individual aspects of *Nem* through the naming rite. The concept of *Nem* as social status becomes the key either to fulfilling the potential and expectations of the name received, or by failing to honour the name given, shame and dishonour comes to the tribe. The naming process sets the stage, but it is the concern for *Nem* as status to be achieved which maintains and develops the potential inherent in the name received.

THE PERSONAL ASPECT OF THE CONCEPT OF *NEM*

The individual aspect of the concept of *Nem* as a status is based on the idea that all males in a society are equal and thus have the equal right to compete for their standing in the society. This is what anthropologists described as Melanesian egalitarianism.[24] Kinship structural systems, values, and practices, either in socio-political, socio-religious, or socio-economic spheres, are structured in a way that gives every male equal opportunity to manoeuvre to gain *Nem* for himself and for his family and tribe. This involves competing with other men within and without the society which this discussion describes as male-male power challenge. This individual aspect of the concept of *Nem* can be equated with what anthropologists describe as the concepts of big-man, great-man, rich-man, and poor-man. These descriptive titles portray the personification of the individual aspect of the concept of *Nem* and paint a picture of male-male power challenge.[25]

For instance, Marshall D. Sahlins in a comparative analysis of Polynesians and Melanesians in an article entitled "Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia," claimed that there is opposition between the competitive and egalitarian socio-political structural systems of Melanesia and the stratified rank-based systems of

[24] See Forge, "The Golden Fleece"; Josephides, *The Production of Inequality,* 24–34.

[25] See Sahlins, "Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief"; Donald Tuzin, *The Ilahita Arapesh: Dimensions of Unity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976). See also Tuzin, "Social Control and the Tambaran in the Sepik," in *Contention and Dispute,* ed. Arnold L. Epstein (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), 317–44; Tuzin, "Politics, Power, and Divine Artistry in Ilahita"; Bronwen Douglas, "Rank, Power, Authority: A Reassessment of Traditional Leadership in South Pacific Societies," *Journal of Pacific History* 14 (1979): 2–27; Maurice Godelier and Marilyn Strathern, eds., *Big Men and Great Men: Personification of Power in Melanesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Polynesia. He identified two social forms associated with leadership structural systems, the big-man, who acquired a big-name through factional politics, and the manipulation of reciprocal exchange relationships, and the chief, whose social identity or status is derived from the hierarchy of ranks at birth.[26]

Maurice Godelier and Marilyn Strathern's edited work, *Big Men and Great Men: Personification of Power in Melanesia* considers the typology between the "big-men and the great-men."[27] This volume works at two levels. First, the contributors look at the mutual patterning of leadership, kinship, social ideology, and exchange in a wide range of Melanesian societies. The main concern of this part is the evaluation of the widely accepted categorisation of Melanesian leadership and political orders of "big-men, great-men and chiefs."[28] Second, the contributors present a case study of the chasm between sociological and cultural orientation that permeates Melanesian anthropology. Generally, these authors propose "big-manship as a particular conjunction of kinship and economy, such that things and persons substitute for each other in a range of transactions that especially includes bride-price."[29] That is, material things transacted in exchange for women and the reproduction of kinsmen and women.[30] They assert that through these competitive ceremonial exchanges "big-men" create their social identity or status. By contrast, "great-men" do not acquire their social status through the managed circulation of accumulated wealth. They emerge instead where public life turns on "ritual initiations," where marriage involves "exchange of women," and "where warfare similarly prescribes the balanced exchange of homicides." Accordingly, the typological distinction between "big-men and great-men entails a difference between logics of social reproduction, and it is these alternative logics rather than

[26] Sahlins, "Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief."

[27] Strathern, "Introduction," in *Big Men and Great Men: Personification of Power in Melanesia*, 1.

[28] See Pierre Lemonnier, "From Great Men to Big Men: Peace, Substitution, and Competition in the Highlands of New Guinea," in *Big Men and Great Men: Personification of Power in Melanesia,* 7. For further reading on the first type of big men and great men typology in this book see pages 5–156.

[29] Strathern, "Introduction," in *Big Men and Great Men,* 1.

[30] See Strathern, "Introduction," in *Big Men and Great Men,* 1–3.

the figures of prominent men themselves that properly merit comparative treatment."[31]

From a socio-religious perspective, Donald Tuzin, in *The Ilahita Arapesh: Dimensions of Unity*, pointed to the close connection between socio-political power structures of the peoples and the initiatory rites that place men in classified groups. He claimed that in the East Sepik Ilahita community, initiated men claim the power to punish violation of societal rules, control hunting and gardening, and uphold regulations that govern communal survival and prosperity.[32]

On the other hand, Karen J. Brison argued that scholars' depictions of a Melanesian big-man as a selfish individualist who makes his name by building complex networks of debt and clientage which allow him to call pigs and shell valuables from his followers at the right moment to vanquish his rivals with an impressive transaction of material wealth, are questionable. Against this notion, in her observation of the Kwanga peoples of East Sepik Province of PNG, she argued that to many Melanesians, big-men are primarily "men of talk" who keep their communities in order and protect them from harm and from enemies through their oratory skills. Thus, there is a close association between leaders and oratory skills, power of words that pronounce and invite war or power of words that can bring peace and harmony or even make and break reputations or destroy or restore relationships.[33]

Brison is pointing to one of the important aspects of big-manship mostly overlooked. However, like others she can also be accused of only painting a picture of an individualist sucking in everyone under his influence to vanquish his challengers. She seems to neglect the importance of the interrelatedness of talk to socio-economic and socio-religious spheres of influence in the socio-structural systems of the people.

Critics of Sahlins argued that his observation of the political types in the Pacific region demonstrates a superficial regional categorisation of the peoples and their socio-political structures: Melanesia or Polynesia. One central observation against Sahlins is that even the so-called Melanesian region

[31] See Strathern, "Introduction," in *Big Men and Great Men*, 1–3. Here Strathern gives a good summary of the book in the introductory to the book.

[32] See Tuzin, *The Ilahita Arapesh*; Tuzin, "Social Control and the Tambaran in the Sepik"; Tuzin, "Politics, Power, and Divine Artistry in Ilahita."

[33] Karen J. Brison, *Just Talk: Gossip, Meetings and Power in a Papua New Guinea Village* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

is diverse in itself and general categorisation is a misrepresentation. For instance, Bronwen Douglas and others like Ann Chowning and Margaret Jolly stress that the ideal types simply did not capture real variation. More particularly, Douglas suggested that there was a need to separate rank, power, and authority and that the dynamic interplay between ascription and achievement needed to be studied more closely in a range of societies.[34]

Nicholas Thomas perhaps was the most critical of Sahlins's analysis of the political types in the Pacific region. He argued that Sahlins has persistently characterized particular social groups in Polynesia and Melanesia in terms of the presence or absence of some kind of centralization or hierarchy. He contended that circularities were developed such that Polynesia explicates hierarchy, while the category of Melanesian egalitarianism has been defined in part simply in terms of the absence of Polynesian features such as chiefs and stratification. Thomas asserted that this amounted to overt racism with the notion that Polynesians are more advanced culturally than Melanesians. He further stated that, while a great deal of systematic analysis of particular societies has taken place, there is a larger level of characterization at which the identification of a society as Polynesian is meaningful. Because ethnological and evolutionary categories are compounded, political variation at the larger regional level has been recognized only in relation to a unidimensional continuum between localized egalitarianism and chiefdoms or proto-states. The exercise of characterization has thus collapsed into one of typology. Although much sophistication has emerged in ethnographic studies, this has somehow not been translated into a more subtle multilinear view of regional political forms. The development of Western thought concerning Pacific societies appears to have been constrained by the categories of those who initiated it. [35]

Robert J. Foster, reviewing Godelier and Strathern's edited volume, argued that this volume neither validates nor refutes Godelier's comparison of big-men and great-men. Instead, most of the fourteen papers bend and stretch his typology; some virtually dissolve it. Put differently, the papers explore the limits and exploit the potential of the big-men/great-men con-

[34] Douglas, "Rank, Power, Authority." For further reading, see Ann Chowning, "Leadership in Melanesia," *Journal of Pacific History* 14 (1979): 66–84; Jolly, "The Chimera of Equality in Melanesia."

[35] Nicholas Thomas, "The Force of Ethnology: Origins and Significance of Melanesian Polynesian Division," *Current Anthropology* 30 (1989), 27–41.

trast, but do not propose an alternative.[36] John Barker commenting on the same volume said, certainly, it would address the most glaring absence in the collection but the lack of attention to recent history fails the work. He said several authors asserted that capitalism favours the big-men over the great-men, but provided only a few anecdotes. Thus, after hundreds of pages of often dense ethnographic detail and critique, it is odd indeed to see the big-man stereotype applied so casually.[37]

Critiques by Brison, Douglas, Thomas, Foster, and Barker must be considered. They have pointed to some ethnographic issues that need specific attention. They also pointed to categorisation issues that may be of interest to some scholars—specifically Sahlins's critics—particularly Thomas's argument on superficial delimitations and stereotypes for the sake of justification of a certain type of political structure over the other. There can be no quarrel with Thomas's brief analysis of antecedents of the tenet of the cultural advance of Polynesia over Melanesia or with his conclusion that the delineation of major ethnic subdivisions suited a discipline obsessed with human types and racial distributions in search of a hierarchical framework for the evolution of humanity. However, Sahlins's general framework on the Melanesia/Polynesia distinction is still an appropriate working sociocultural contrast. There is no need to avoid the basic equation: Melanesian big-manship and Polynesian chiefdoms. Maybe we do need to explore ethnographic variations more closely with a range of societies in these regions, as Douglas pointed out.

To put it differently, in a society like Melanesia where there are no dichotomies between socio-political, socio-economic, or socio-religious categories, the endeavour to divide and address will probably have little bearing on the result. Although the critics have identified important other links that make up the whole, they have also fallen into the same error which they critiqued. They too have fallen short of identifying how the parts they chart out in their findings hold and pull together as one whole. We suggest that the one theme that holds all together is the concept of *Nem*. Social institutions, like the naming customs, set a contextual stage for seeking leadership, but it is the communal expectation and tribally driven longings to up-

[36] Robert J. Foster, Review of *Big-Men and Great-Men*, in *The Contemporary Pacific* 4 (1993–1994): 179–99.
[37] John Barker, Review of *Big-Men and Great-Men*, in *Pacific Affairs* 66 (1993–94): 621–23.

hold the *Nem* that shape the behaviour and create the ambition which enable a person to gain the *Nem* and to maintain leadership status and honour. Thus, the collective and the personal aspects of *Nem* influence the way one seeks to become a big-man or great-man or rich-man or, in failure, a poor-man. Not as a selfish individualist as Brinson pointed out, rather in collaboration and in association with the society. Individual leadership or seeking to become a big-man or a great-man, therefore, not only portrays one's personal status but in that personal achievement the society's *Nem* is represented.

CONCLUSION

This is significant because in Melanesian societies, though individuality is supported, it is mostly muted by the importance of collective social identity. Moreover, this is critical to understanding male-male power challenge, a challenge in which women play the innocent role of being economists in traditional societies, because their work makes the economy work, since the society expects them to create wealth for ceremonial exchanges.[38] For example, they are expected to bear children and raise them, raise pigs, and gather shell wealth and other valuables for ceremonial exchanges like *Moka*, as discussed earlier. In a way the communal and the personal role of *Nem* has a huge impact on male-female power relationships, especially for the women. Women have a dual role of supporting their husbands and their husband's community's *Nem* as well as supporting their brothers and their birth family's *Nem*. Hence, women face a tension because they have to build up the *Nem* of their husbands as well as their brother's *Nem* and identity. One way through which women build up their brothers and birth family's *Nem* is through bride wealth exchanged at their marriage. As Weiner shows in *Inalienable Possessions*, the wife brings into the marriage, and creates through her work as a wife, both material and non-material wealth to develop and contribute to upholding both her husband's *Nem* and her brother's *Nem*.[39]

The concept of *Nem* therefore is a significant contextual factor contributing to violence against women in PNG. These and other factors make

[38] For example, see Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*, 23–43. See also Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*; Mervin J. Meggitt, "Male-Female Relationships in the Highlands of Australia New Guinea," *American Anthropologist* 66 (1964): 204–24.
[39] Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*, 23–43.

Nem a key factor in the family structures and values in the society. Thus, for understanding Melanesian sociocultural power structures and sociocultural values and practices like gender role and bride-price that endorse men over women, *Nem* plays a central role. As shown in relation to leadership generally, *Nem* orchestrates the way sociocultural power structures and sociocultural values and practices are administered. Thus, in the endeavour to address unequal male-female power relations that lead to violence against women, one should consider examining and addressing the concept of *Nem* as a central contextual factor contributing to violence against women.

Hence, it is significant to examine the Hebrew term *Shem* as *Nem* and its impact on male-male power dynamics in the biblical literature, and its effect on violence against women, from a Melanesian perspective. Particularly, *Nem*, as a Melanesian hermeneutical tool, can potentially help interpret biblical literature that gives preference to men over women. This will be taken up in the second part of the article in a subsequent issue of *Melanesian Journal of Theology*.