Cakes, Rape and Power Games: A Feminist Reading of Story of Tamar (1 Samuel 13:1-19

Mussa Muneja
A note from the Editor:

At a BOLESWA meeting, which was held in Swaziland in 1998, it was resolved that it was necessary to launch an interdisciplinary refereed journal, which can serve as a platform where scholars can share views of an academic nature. After some delays, an International Advisory Board and an Editorial Board were finally set up in 2004 to oversee the launching of the journal. We are pleased to launch this first volume and hope that academics from many parts of the world will be able to contribute towards the development of this very important journal.

BOLESWA Journal of Theology, Religion and Philosophy (BJTRP) will be published twice every year by the Departments of Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) of three sister institutions comprising the University of Botswana, University of Swaziland and the National University of Lesotho. Its primary objective is to publish high-quality academic articles covering Biblical Studies, Religious Studies, Theology, and Philosophy. The emphasis is on providing original contribution in the humanities. However, interdisciplinary articles will be welcome with the approval of the editorial board. The publication of an article will depend on the evaluation of two referees and the Editorial Board. The Editorial Board invites contributions on any topic related to Biblical Studies, Religious Studies, Theology and Philosophy. Particular preference will be given to issues concerning the African continent and the development of its people.

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By Musa Muneja

Abstract

This paper examines avidly the trends of male power and how it affects negatively the disadvantaged, who are mostly females. It uses the case of Tamar in the Old Testament to make its argument in relevance to people who live in the 21st century. The essay employs feminist methods of Biblical interpretation. This is the best assumed approach since it is a woman [Tamar] who was grossly abused sexually by a man [Amnon] to meet political ends. After that, the paper advances to dissect visible and invisible characters as they responded to the rape of Tamar by Amnon. Each character is studied deeply and a possible application is provided to give lessons of avoiding gender based violence. Finally the paper suggests the need to stop blaming each other because of unfair utilization of male power in the past and even in the contemporary times. It urges people to reconcile and build a better world of women and men who live happily together in love, peace and justice.

1. Introduction

This article is going to discuss and analyze the event of rape of Tamar by Amnon. It will begin by explaining the method of Biblical interpretation used, which is feminist criticism and the rationale behind it. The paper will advance by featuring all characters that have been put into two groups, i.e. visible and invisible. Each character is studied and analyzed deeply and a possible application is made to give lessons of avoiding gender based violence. Consequently the paper lands smoothly to a conclusion which urges the need to reconcile and build a better world of women and men who live happily together in love, peace and justice.

2. The story of Tamar

The story of Tamar, who was raped by her half brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13:1-22) in the palace chambers of King David, is a well known Biblical narrative, but who dares to interpret it! Doubtlessly they are very few! It is a story, which is filled with horror, the quest for illicit sex, the use of food to seduce, violent
rape scenario, ruthless murder and power games between males and females in a patriarchal field of Biblical times. This narrative is truly pregnant with meanings awaiting their exposition: we cannot deny or abort this pregnancy. A child must be delivered though the pangs persist, a child must be born though not everyone will receive the baby with joy; a child must come to a world of hope, surrounded with love, security and affirmation.

In this labour room of interpretation, we are going to use the technology of feminist Biblical hermeneutics (born in 1960s and 1970s) to bring out the baby (Scottroff, Schroer, & Wacker 1998, Tamez 1991:61-70). This is a sensitive work; the life of the mother (Bible) must be preserved along with the baby (the meanings). The discourse will employ methodologies of interpretation as borrowed mostly from Cheryl Exum’s article entitled, “Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests are Being Served” (1995:69). These methodologies have served as a framework as the narrative was being read and interpreted. It should be noted that feminist writing is a recent genre in Africa, but it has been amply used to help readers understand the social context and the theological implications of the rape of Tamar. Below is the outline of feminist and womanist methodologies:

- To labour, back to the women of history, and thereby give us, their history back portraying hopes, sufferings, failure and accommodation, but also endeavour to open up liberating spaces for action.
- Exposition of the strategies by which men have justified their control over women.
- The quest to understand women’s complicity in their own subordination.
- The exclusion of women in the text though they participated equally with men.
- The reign of patriarchal culture, which, had no place for women.
- Critique of a Biblical writer who was not particularly interested in women issues.
- The power the Bible has upon women living in the 21st Century.
- Examination of socio-cultural location of today (gender inclusive) visa a vis social-cultural location of the Biblical times.
- Confession and acknowledgement that the Biblical text is patriarchal and problematic.
- Unmasking of churches’ and the states’ misuse of the Bible.
- Imaginative recreations of muted female voices
- Decolonization of texts that foster patriarchy and imperialism.

3. Characters

Before we enter into the delivery room, let us get first the life history of our patient. The narrative of 2 Samuel 13:1-22 comes with a background of David’s murder of Uriah and confiscation of his wife Bathsheba. According to Prophet Nathan, God was not pleased with that. Though David repented with sincerity, the consequences of his sin of adultery and murder were to be replicated in his monarchical household. Immediately after that, a curtain is pulled back, and five visible characters are seen. The first of these is Amnon the son of Ahinoam, the firstborn among King David’s sons. He shows immaturity and infatuation throughout the drama. He rapes Tamar, loathes her, and finally throws her out to die in silence. He is killed by Absalom two years down the road. Another character is Jonadab, a shrewd and cunning person. He participates in mapping the capture of Tamar. Jonadab is later seen before David the murder of Amnon. Tamar, the princess, is the victim of rape, androcentric violence and rough power games of the Hebrew patriarchal culture. Furthermore, no one is there to facilitate her healing from the rape trauma. The aging King David also appears. He is not critical enough to discover the crafty mapping of his “boys” to get hold of Tamar. Moreover, David fails to vindicate justice on behalf of Tamar. However, David’s failure becomes an opportune
for Absalom to accomplish where the father failed. Absalom vindi- cates justice, but in miscarriage by killing Amnon. It should be noted that Absalom’s main desire is to inherit the throne, so Tamar is used as a scapegoat to carry him to national power. Finally, there are two invisible characters, the curtain does not show them, but we readers with magnifying lenses of feminism can, and they can not hide from us! These are the silent Hebrew women and the narrator who was busy articulating the androcentric culture. The whole drama happens in royal family in the ancient Israel nation when it was in its golden age. The patriarchal culture, which had no place for women per se, dominated every segment of life, from family life to politics and even in religion. In the end of this paper it will be seen that there are undeniable parallel lessons as we live in the 21st century.


(a) Amnon

Amnon was the first born son of Ahinoam and King David. According to Hebrew culture, Amnon was destined to be the heir to the throne after the death of his father. At the time of the drama, he was a mature young man with great desire to get whatever he wanted because the family traditions embraced patriarchy. He fell in “love” with Tamar, his half sister whose brother was Absalom. He in fact wanted her body, to use it the way he wanted; to strip it off, of its God-given dignity and thereafter throw it to desolation. But how could he get hold of her? That was a puzzle he could not unravel. The more he thought about it, the more he became infatuated. Amnon’s body became haggard, his face wearing a mourners’ mask, his eyes dim for lack of vision to trap princess Tamar—a virgin sparkling with virtue. Here comes Jonadab the son of Shimea, who is also a nephew to David (vv 2-5). He is a crafty and very shrewd man, and he uses his brilliance to aid the trapping of the innocent Tamar. Once trapped, she will be seduced to bake cakes for the “sick.” And that will be an opportunity for Amnon to use male power backed up by patriarchy to rape her and finally stigmatize her violently. Jonadab told Amnon to pretend being sick; sleep in the bed, and refuse to eat anything until his father pays a visit! When that happens, the father is told that Amnon cannot eat until Tamar comes into his room to bake cakes for him. David is told that Amnon can be well only if he, “eats out of her own hands.”

The King came and things went on smoothly, as planned. Tamar was commanded to go and nurse the patient. She was obedient to the voice of her father. Tamar did not bother to be critical. She was the only chosen woman among the king’s daughters! She began baking cakes, which were actually invalid to Amnon for he needed other “cakes”. When the meal was spread before him he refused to eat. He demanded the manservant to rid off all people inside the room except Tamar. The order was carried out successfully (v. 9). He again commanded Tamar to bring the cakes into the bedroom. She obeyed because she was a woman with no power to say no even in questionable circumstances. Her only option was to obey at once. After a voluntary entrance to the room, Amnon used his masculine power to grab her hand, and said to her, “Come and lie with me (v.11)”. She refused literally by saying “No my brother. Do not dishonour me! Such thing is not done in Israel; do not behave so infamously. Where could I go and hide my disgrace? You would sink as low as the most infamous in Israel.”(vv 12-13 REB). She even went on pleading before her molester, “Please you can even request the King’s favour perhaps he will grant it!”(v.24) Amnon could not listen, being committed to get what he wanted, he overpowered her; raped her in the royal courts and finally commanded that she be thrown out, bolting the door at her disgraced face! She finally disappeared into her brothers’ house in the clouds of mourning. Later after two years Amnon is killed by a command ordered by Absalom, at a sheep shearing festival (v.28).

Amnon represents all men and women of today (white or black, learned or unlearned, rich or poor) who cling into patriarchy as we live in a gender inclusive culture. Such people oppress women by their words. They misuse their power and trust derived from religion, politics and economy to deny women equal rights in the arena of life. These people are like thieves. They steal women’s God-given dignity and integrity to participate fully in the arena of life (Njoroge 2005: 1-19). As we live in the 21st century, we still witness misuse of male power. Surprisingly enough, this condition is accepted cordially by most women of Africa. Consequently, we realize that, the transmission of HIV & AIDS virus is higher among women than men. Rape is everywhere in the married couples, in the schools, in work places and even in chambers of male clergy! Denise A. Ackerman records a painful incidence of misuse of male power in her paper:

He married me when I was only 18. He knew that he was positive. I did not know until my baby was tested. Then I found out that I was also positive. I knew it was him. He married me
because I was a virgin. He believed that if he slept with a virgin he would be cured. So I walked out. Now I counsel women who are HIV positive. There is life after infection (Ackerman 2000:1).

Though this woman was violated and seduced by a man, she resolved to stand out and help other women to aware and careful of men who misuse their power after the pattern of Amnon. The Amnons of today must be confronted with words and measures of justice. Such men must pay the price of their injustices. They must be responsible for miseries caused upon millions of women and orphans we have in Africa. They must be liberated to follow the example of Christ who did not marginalize "the other" due to the reason of his maleness. If the Amnons do not change, let the women initiate change within themselves, bearing in mind that, patriarchy is long overdue.

(b) Jonadab

This character is very vital in this narrative. Because the author does not buy any time, he quickly presents him just at the onset of the drama. Jonadab will temporarily disappear but he will later reappear to report the murder of Amnon by Absalom (v.32). According to the author, Jonadab is the son of Shimea, and is also the nephew of David. Jonadab was an adult man well endowed with intellect, but he goes forth to meet the infatuated Amnon and misuse his intellectual powers. Jonadab hatches a plan to trick the King and ultimately land Tamar in the hands of a merciless and sexist Amnon. Jonadab is very subtle like the serpent in Genesis 3. He begins with a question, "Why art thou, being King's son lean from day to day? Wilt thou not tell me?" (v.5). That is how Jonadab probed the insides of Amnon. The narrator does not tell us the intentions of Jonadab. Perhaps, he was genuine at the beginning! But if Jonadab was genuine, then why did he suggest a deadly plan of tracking and ultimately getting hold of the innocent Tamar? The plan was to make Amnon pretend as if he were really sick, so that the King would order Tamar to come and give him food on her own clean hands. Jonadab is deeply infected with the virus of patriarchy. He acts unwisely though he has a sound mind. He finds exhilarating fun in oppressing an innocent woman, who unfortunately has no voice although she is of a royal lineage.

Jonadab uses his age experience to harass the young, the weak and the vulnerable. Jonadab as betrayer of women rights and of all who love justice for all, takes Judas' trend long before his birth to betray the innocent Jesus (John 14:22 NAB). Jonadab acts as a catalyst to stir the game of seduction, cakes, rape along with stigma, and finally murder for the sake of power! He stands away from the game and becomes a jolly spectator in an amphitheatre of androcentric violence. Jonadab is in fact cheering up the results of his experiment on human rights!

Jonadab represents key perpetrators of female and ultimately male violence. He begins by violations of the value of truth. He proceeds to manipulate and rob the dignity of Tamar by using the merciless hands of Amnon. Jonadab finally acts as a reporter of the murder of Amnon before David, an event perhaps if willing, he would have halted it! Jonadab is a clear representative of powerful western nations, who have no mercy for Africa. They are daily hatching plans with good names like Globalization—a free market economy. But, who is it that really benefits? Is it Africa, which slowly recovering from the sufferings of slave trade, the pangs of colonialism and the stigma of being a Third world continent or the western Bourgeoisies? Imperialism and patriarchy are still rampant and persistent as they were employed in the life of Jonadab. Africa needs to stand tall and confront, challenge, change all oppressive structures both regionally and globally. The struggle must still be waged, though our mother Africa, seems to use a clutch as she is walking ahead her children. Africa is calling: A luta continua—who will heed the call? (Dube 2000:197-201, Njoroge 2005:1-19)

(c) Tamar the Princess

Princess Tamar was the daughter of Maacah and King David. She was a self-respecting woman. Tamar had a sound character until the time she met Amnon, who violated her virginity. As we shall see later in this section, Tamar had a critical mind. She was Absalom’s sister. He used her as a way to get to the throne of his father after the death of Amnon. The entire narrative surrounds entirely the horror chapters of her experience as a woman. Nevertheless, the narrative’s point of view was not about her. She was Absalom’s sister. He used her as a way to haul power struggles within a patriarchal culture in the ancient Hebrew nation. It is in this struggle, which was marked by family politics and sex passions, that Tamar found herself: seduced, raped, stigmatized and finally mutilated to speak no more—because “where could she go to hide her disgrace?” (vv. 12-13 REB).

As the curtain unveils, she is seen, holding a frying pan, a bottle of oil and some wheat flour. She comes on time to nurse the "sick" Amnon. Princess Tamar is wearing a beautiful, long sleeved tunic, which was a customary respectable wear for virgins in Hebrew culture. The dress matched her beauty...
and chastity. But to Amnon that meant nothing apart from a desire to satisfy his quest for sex; without caring about her dignity. Amnon calls Tamar into his bedroom. Amnon refuses to eat the cakes, because he needed the other "sort of cakes". Amnon grabs her hand. The narrative is silent on whether she struggled for her freedom or not (vv. 12-14). He then suggests that, they have sex. Tamar comes to her senses. She discovers that she has been deceived and right in the domain of a potential rapist. Because she has a sharp critical mind, she retrieves some ethical codes stored in her mind; as her sole weapon against the rapist. She cries out for mercy, please "my brother, don't do anything to me for such a thing has never been done in Israel!" Amnon refuses to reason. He cannot rise above his infatuation; therefore he proceeds to rape Tamar. Afterwards, Tamar is evicted out of the room so violently because he, "hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated was greater than the love wherewith he had over" (v.15).

This is the situation when love is mingled with lies. It breeds loathing, hatred and finally violent stigmatizations. This act broke Tamar's heart completely. "She went away perforce displaying all signs of her grief: a rent robe, ashes on head and loud wailing (Howley 1977:102)." Tamar had hoped that her brother Absalom would console her; but to her bitter dismay he told her: "Amnon is your brother, regard not this thing (v.20)." So she remained desolate in her brother's house. Why did the brother fail to console her? Where was King David—to speak words of healing to her? Was she a motherless child? If her mother Maacah was alive, where was she to stay close to her daughter in this bitter season of her life? I can conclude that she was not only a victim of rape, but also an object of betrayal by her entire family (Ackerman 2004:50-57). I firmly concur with the Anonymous who said: "the greatest pain in life is not to die but to be forgotten; to be left in the dust after another's great achievement." After Amnon's great unfair achievement of raping Tamar, she is left alone in the dust of her wailing. She is literally forgotten by everybody including the parents, the siblings, the leaders in Israel; even the women of Israel could not raise their voices for the restoration of Tamar! I should believe that she must have felt that, the only person who cared for her psychological trauma most was herself—therefore she died inside while still living, because no one, including herself, could aid her to break the silence for justice!

On the one hand, Tamar may represent African women, particularly those living with HIV & AIDS. Many of them have contracted the disease not because they are great sinners, but, in most cases, they have been seduced and raped like Tamar and became infected. It does not matter whether they were married or single; young or old; literate or illiterate—they are all victims of patriarchy and male oppression. Their feminine bodies have made them to be subject to ridicule, adulation, envy, discrimination and stigma. In her article, Malebogo Kgalemang, entitled, "John 9: Deconstructing HIV & AIDS stigma," she says forcefully:

In most societies women have no voice and they are prone to contracting the virus, firstly because of their biological make-up and secondly because of the fact that they are powerless. They cannot stand for themselves and insist on fidelity from their partners nor can they insist that their partners should use condoms when having sex or even refuse sex when it is demanded from them (Kgalemang 2004:153).

In the context of this situation, therefore, I urge African women to join hands together and fight for human rights. It is a well known fact that since the time of Tamar, men and even fellow empowered women have failed to speak for women rights more effectively. This is because patriarchy gives men an unfair superiority upon women through culture which is gender biased.

On the other hand, Tamar represents Western women, who belong to the colonizing powers, Tamar being a woman in the royal family in Israel, a land which, originally, belonged to the Canaanites, was only a victim of patriarchal oppression. But what of the Canaanite women, who were victims of double colonization,—patriarchy and imperialism? These forms of male oppression do overlap but are not identical (Dube 2000:197-201)! Isn’t that their cry is deeper than that of Tamar? Tamar has just been inflicted with half share of traumatization! No wonder in her wailing she does not mention the sufferings of Canaanite women, because she is part of the Colonizer. She is just concerned about herself and does not thinking of “other” women who are suffering a double measure of colonization. This is true of western women today. Their feminist biblical interpretation only caters for the subversion of patriarchy. They ignore other more serious forms of patriarchy, which involve going beyond the borders of a particular colonizing nation. Thanks be to God, who hears the silenced voices of those who suffer a double colonization. God has revealed to us a new form of feminist Biblical interpretation with a decolonising approach of Biblical texts. This method will cause the long silenced voices to be heard, at last, in all realms of life.
King David

King David was the son of Jesse and had many wives. He married, among others, the following: Maacah (the mother to Absalom and Tamar), Abinoam (the mother to Amnon), Michal (who was cursed by David not to bear children), Bathsheba (the mother to Solomon, who later inherited the throne from his father) and Abigail (conquered from war). David married so many women in order to satisfy male desires which included: having a large family, marrying for political and economic alliances, for military conquests, and sometimes because he had power to get any woman—for no one would dare to stop him! That is how patriarchy worked. A man with power had a right to seduce, to monopolise economy (cakes), to rape and finally to murder.

As the curtain falls back, we see King David in his royal robe and a golden crown approaching slowly. He is a conqueror among his own people and beyond the borders of Israel. Canaanites and Philistines must bring tax and tributes to Israel. At the time he comes to see “the sick boy”, his character had been seriously tainted by rape of Bathsheba; and murder of Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba. He was brought to confession by Nathan the prophet. He was told that, the sins he committed would surely be repeated in his own royal household (chs.12: 11). Cheryl A. Kirk-Dugan(2003) speaks more of David’s vacillating personality.

Closer and still closer, the King now is entering the house of Amnon, his son. He has been tricked by Jonadab’s plan. Though he conquered nations, he failed to unravel the simple trick of Amnon and Jonadab, He now meets the boy. The boy seems to be sick. Thereafter David asks what he can do for the “sick boy.” The boy says that, he would really need Tamar to come and bake cakes for him, perhaps that would encourage him to eat! (v.6). Because he had power over women sexuality, he did not care if the coming of Tamar would risk her feminine innocence. Because he was a forgiven sinner, he did not know the pains of rape, had he known that, he would have never exposed Tamar to Amnon.

In verse 7 a command is given to bring Tamar with immediate effect. Tamar responds very quickly, and she comes in the house of Amnon when the King is gone out to fulfil other royal responsibilities. She is seduced, raped and stigmatized by Amnon. David hears of the painful story. The narrative says he was very angry but he literally did nothing to vindicate the justice of Tamar. He did that because Amnon was his first born (v.21).

David represents all irresponsible male parents; all irresponsible male leaders in churches; governments, and other institutions. Because they are empowered through patriarchy and imperialism, they enjoy gender based violence. As a result, they cannot speak for the justice of the Tamars. Though they have attained local and international prosperity, like King David in his golden age, they literally do nothing to help the sufferings of women. If they act, they just do so passively for the sake of showing-up. They do that because the rapists are their firstborns and underground allies in the institution of patriarchy. In this narrative David failed to speak for Tamar because he was vastly weakened by his past wrong doing. Consequently, he could no longer be in a position to enforce the moral code for he was no model for it; so are the androcentric leaders in various sections of life (Buttrick 1990:201).

Where David failed, his son Absalom succeeded by killing Amnon. This suggests that when there is delay for vindication of justice, people tend to revenge—an act of taking law into their own hands. No wonder, in Africa we have rampant civil wars, along with witnessed genocides in Rwanda, Burundi, and Darfur in Sudan. These are due to these irresponsible patriarchal leaders. To make matters worse in these manslaughter occasions, women are raped, girls are molested or left to look after huge families while economically disempowered. Therefore, I urge women and men of Africa, to subvert patriarchy and function in a non-dualistic relationship, a relationship that will give justice to all, beginning with women and children of Africa.

Absalom

Absalom was a brother to Prince Tamar, a son to King David and Maacah. He was the first born to his mother. He was a very subtle person. He had great power of persuasion, which he used later to convince a larger part of the nation of Israel to revolt against his father. Absalom wanted to take over the throne. In summary, he was a person who thirsted for power and he would get it at any cost; even if it would mean to silence the voice of his raped sister; or murder his brother Amnon in the “name of his sister” to accomplish the ends!
As the curtain unveils, we see Absalom in his own home trying to muse how he can get into power without getting anybody suspicious! At a distance he sees Tamar coming. Her wailing voice can be heard from a far. She has rented her royal tunic and ashes are upon her body. Her hands are clasped on her head; her red cheeks have strips of dried tears due to a long walk in the sun. She seems so weary and weak, even a dumb beast can sense that, this female human being has been crushed to the bottom of her heart! Absalom runs down to meet his distressed sister. He embraces her. Without wasting time he asks, “what is the matter?” (v.20). In deep sobs and a mournful sounds she narrates that she has been seduced, raped and finally thrown away by Amnon. Absalom “sympathizes” and tells Tamar not to take the matter so seriously, after all Amnon is her brother. It would not bring any sense to bring any “noise” about it! (vv. 20, 21). According to the story, as days elapsed, Absalom returned into his quest for leadership; suddenly a new idea flashed into his mind—that was to use Tamar’s rape incidence as a way to ascend to the throne! How was this to be done? Amnon is to be murdered, because he is the only rival to the throne. Two years down the line Amnon was murdered at a sheep shearing festival prepared in the honour of Amnon. On this event, Absalom, depicts another true colour of patriarchy, he uses male power to attain power in the act of killing Amnon; while using the back of Tamar (a woman) to accomplish his false designs (Smith 1997:114-135).

Absalom represents male and female leaders in Africa, who are power-thirst but are not willing to speak for the marginalised, the discriminated and sexually oppressed. Sadly enough they, “use” them to accomplish their ends in attempting to get positions of power. Male church leaders are no exempted from this; no wonder there is a call for African Church leaders to break the silence and advocate justice for women and children in an endeavour to curb HIV & AIDS transmission. The ICASA Satellite Session on “The role of Religious Leaders in Reducing Stigma and Discrimination Related to HIV & AIDS” reports:

Religious leaders have a unique catalytic role to play in addressing stigma and discrimination within communities. Religious leaders can influence a community’s response. Unfortunately, many religious leaders have spoken in judgment against HIV/AIDS equating it to sin that afflicts un-believers and those who have fallen short in their morals. Ironically, religion is full of hope for those who suffer and this can be translated into action to support those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Theologian Musa Dube emphasized the need for the Church to understand issues that drive the HIV epidemic such as gender inequality, social injustice and denial of rights. Religion needs to address women as a social category of the population that is affected by HIV/AIDS. “Religious writings predominantly come from a patriarchal culture, a fact that disadvantages women because it leads to gender inequality,” she said (ICASA 2003).

5. Invisible Characters

The Invisible characters are participants, who act behind the scenes. They are found in the shadows of active characters. They can only be visible under special lenses; in this case Feminist lenses are preferred. These characters are as important as the visible ones. We actually need them very much because their voices have been suppressed. The invisible characters speak as loudly as the visible ones if empowered (Exum 1995:65-85). Since our narrative was written within androcentric culture, it naturally follows that, the invisible characters are not important because they do not meet the patriarchal point of view of the writer. In our narrative we have two groups represented namely, Hebrew women and the narrator.

(a) Hebrew Women

Women are excluded in the narrative. We do not see them mourning with Tamar. We do not see them confronting Amnon for the sexual violence he did to their daughter. We do not see them calling Absalom to ask him, when he is going to talk to Amnon to settle the matter out. We do not see them approaching the King with the brevity of Abigail. The narrative speaks nothing at all about them. Nevertheless, this should not make us believe that there were no women in Israel when Tamar was raped. The reason for their silence is that, the patriarchal culture they were living in had made them to accept male dominance in all important institutions of the society. Women were not only deprived of power in marriage set-up, but also in religious and political arenas. Their work was to take care of their husbands, bear children and raise them in the culture which undermined the same women!

These repressed females represent African women in rural areas and in urban centres; they may be rich or poor, literate or illiterate. Due to their
gender, they are sexually harassed and even rapped. They are not given equal opportunities as far as education is concerned. My own mother was barred to continue with education because her uncle, who adopted her from tender age eagerly needed dowry in form of cattle, from my “then to be father”. He needed compensation because my maternal grandfather abandoned her children and disappeared into oblivion. He has not been found until today! But who could hear the cry of my mother who longed for further education? My father refused to hear her cries. He too embraced patriarchy. He denied her opportunity of going to school because he presumed she would be “unfaithful” to marriage vows! But who could listen to her cries? Thank God that I have heard her bitter mourning recently long after my grandfathers, and my father have passed away. And I have vowed in my life to write and speak for women until their voices will be heard. I will support their struggle for justice and equity. I will be on their side morally and materially.

(b) Narrator

The narrator is the person who tells the story. It is a person who conveys a message either in oral or written form. The narrator of 2 Samuel 13:1-22 is a male, born, raised, trained and converted in patriarchal culture. He does very well to give us the narrative account. And if he would remember to give it a title it would be “The Portraits of King David.” This is because, the running point of view is not entirely about Tamar (a woman) but about the life of King David who was vacillating between military conquest, adultery, rape, murder, confessions and consequences of his weak character. The narrative is a continuation of the consequences of David’s character as prophesied and recorded in chapter 12. It was all about confiscating Uriah’s wife and finally killing her husband a thing God did not approve. In summary, the narrative was written for men by a man. It has a male point of view. Women’s experiences are removed and those which are included have no hope to be heard. It is written to make women continue to believe that subordination is right even when feminine dignity is jeopardized. Nevertheless, we can not abandon the narrative. The narrative was simply written to tailor the fabrics of patriarchy in its generation.

The narrator of 2 Samuel 13:1-22, represents all writers and researchers who live in the 21st century and are still writing their works in the old fashioned way—a gender biased style! These writers, it does not matter whether they are: theologians, journalists, scientists, male or female etc; are to be decolonized; are to be liberated; are to be emancipated in body, soul and mind. They are supposed to mainstream gender issues in their printed pages in order to convey human equality in the entire spectrum of the body of knowledge (Thimmes 1998:279-282).

7. Conclusion.

To sum it all let me remind you that, all along we have been in the labour room struggling to bring out the baby of meaning from her mother Hebrew Bible. We used feminist and womanist procedures of interpreting the biblical narratives found in 2 Samuel 13:1-22. In the labour room we saw two types of characters namely: visible and invisible characters. The major character was Tamar, who was a victim of patriarchal oppression. Her muted voice is today crying out to seek restitution of Justice for women. Other visible characters were Amnon (the rapist male leader), Jonadab (the cunning male leader) and Tamar (the masses of oppressed women because of gender). Other characters include, David (the irresponsible male leader), and Absalom (the power-thirst leader at the expense of women troubles). The other group of characters namely as invisible characters, include the Hebrew women (suppressed on the basis of their gender) and finally the narrator (writers who write for men because they are men). All in all, it is not a time to find who has stolen the goat, or who has its skin or who heard the voice in the last moment. In other words, let us stop scapegoating. Let us reconcile and build a better world of women and men who live happily together in love, peace and justice. Because:

-Anonymous-
Bibliography


