

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Tamar Summons the Church to Account: Resisting Patriarchal (and Ecclesial) Impunity in 2 Samuel 13:21

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Abstract

This article documents and reflects on gender-based Contextual Bible Study (CBS) work on 2 Samuel 13:1–22 over more than thirty-five years, much of it shaped by work with Anglican communities. CBS work on the story of the abuse of Tamar provides a shape to the article, beginning with the identification of the Church by women survivors of violence as the silencer of Tamar, then of the Church as the abuser of Tamar, then of the Church as the excluder of Tamar in its lectionaries and liturgies and then of the Church as abandoning Tamar with impunity. The article summons the Church, through a CBS on 2 Samuel 13:21, to hear the summons of Tamar to change.

Keywords: Bible; Contextual Bible Study; impunity; sexual abuse; Tamar

Introduction

South African Black Theology has made a distinctive contribution to post-colonial and decolonial liberation theologies, concurring with feminist forms of liberation theology that the Bible itself is part of the problem. The biblical text, any biblical text, is a site of ideological and theological struggle.¹ The dominant and dominating ideological and theological systems of any of the Bible's sites of production have left their ideological and theological mark on a text's formation and the text's final form.² Fortunately, the presence of redacted, partially coopted, resisting voices is never entirely absent, always leaving traces and glimpses of their presence.

The Contextual Bible Study (CBS) work of the Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research (Ujamaa Centre) has for more

¹Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 32, 125–26, 53.

²Gerald O West, 'Scripture as a Site of Struggle: Literary and Socio-Historical Resources for Prophetic Theology in Post-Colonial, Post-Apartheid (Neo-Colonial?) South Africa', in *Scripture and Resistance*, ed. Jione Havea (New York and London: Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2019).



than thirty-five years facilitated a Bible re-reading process in which ancient marginalised voices within biblical text are brought into dialogue with contemporary poor and marginalised communities. One of our earliest CBS, for example, was with racially segregated Anglican congregations in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, on Mark 10:17–22.³ We used this CBS in the late 1980s, in apartheid South, to understand how Anglicans actually ‘read’ their Bibles and how racially diverse Anglicans would engage with the systemic dimensions of economic inequality in this biblical story.

The CBS praxis of the Ujamaa Centre was forged within the interlocking systems of apartheid South Africa. The anti-apartheid ‘struggle’⁴ was against ‘the system’,⁵ while recognizing that ‘the system’ was a compound noun, incorporating ‘interrelated’ or ‘intertwined’⁶ or ‘interlocking’⁷ or ‘intersecting’⁸ systems of oppression. Each of these metaphors and their bodies of theory understand that ‘oppression is not a singular process or a binary political relation, but is better understood as constituted by multiple, converging, or interwoven systems’.⁹ This quotation, taken from Anna Carastathis’ useful analysis of intersectionality theory and interlocking systems theory,¹⁰ emphasises the antiracist Black feminist origins of each. Our reference to South African Lebamang Sebidi’s Black Theology analysis, however, makes it clear that Black Consciousness too understood that ‘the black people of this country suffer a double [interlocking] bondage: racial oppression and economic exploitation’.¹¹

However, what Black South African women always knew, and what post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa has clearly demonstrated, is that oppression is more than a double bondage. There are multiple interlocking systems of oppression. No sooner had the ‘new’ democratic South Africa been ushered in by Nelson Mandela and a mighty host of ordinary South Africans than women invited the Ujamaa Centre to do CBS with them within their realities of gender-based violence.

This article documents and reflects on gender-based CBS work on 2 Samuel 13:1–22 over more than thirty-five years, much of it shaped by work with Anglican

³Jonathan A. Draper and Gerald O. West, ‘Anglicans and Scripture in South Africa’, in *Bounty in Bondage: The Anglican Church in Southern Africa: Essays in Honour of Edward King, Dean of Cape Town*, ed. Frank England and Torquil Paterson (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1989).

⁴Lebamang Sebidi, ‘The Dynamics of the Black Struggle and Its Implications for Black Theology’, in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free: Essays in Black Theology*, ed. Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986), 2.

⁵Albert Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), 157.

⁶Sebidi, ‘The Dynamics of the Black Struggle’, 31, 32.

⁷Combahee River Collective, ‘The Combahee River Collective Statement’, *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 3/4 (1977): 271.

⁸Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics’, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1 (1989).

⁹Anna Carastathis, ‘The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory’, *Philosophy compass* 9, no. 5 (2014): 304.

¹⁰Carastathis, ‘The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory’; Anna Carastathis, ‘Interlocking Systems of Oppression’, in *Critical Concepts in Queer Studies and Education: An International Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Nelson M. Rodriguez et al. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

¹¹Sebidi, ‘The Dynamics of the Black Struggle’, 35.

communities. CBS work on the story of the abuse of Tamar provides a shape to the article, beginning with the identification of the Church by women survivors of violence as the silencer of Tamar, then of the Church as the abuser of Tamar, then of the Church as the excluder of Tamar in its lectionaries and liturgies and then of the Church as abandoning Tamar with impunity. The article summons the Church, though CBS, to hear the summons of Tamar to change.

The Silencing of Tamar

Our very first CBS workshop which focused on gender was with an ecumenical group of women, which included Anglican women, in 1996: 'Women and the Bible in South and Southern Africa'.¹² The workshop was attended by more than ninety women, most of whom came from South Africa, but also with a few guests from eSwatini (Swaziland), Lesotho, Malawi, Kenya and Brazil. The first day was given over to the sharing of women's experience, using drama and devotional reflection. The focus of the second day was 'Women and Culture' and our CBS was based on Mark 5:21–6:1, a CBS which we have used in various forms many times since. The Bible study was facilitated by Beverley Haddad, an Anglican priest, and Malika Sibeko, a Methodist minister and staff person in the Ujamaa Centre. The focus of the third day was 'Women and Violence', where we used our 'Tamar' CBS on 2 Samuel 13:1–22 for the very first time. The impact of the CBS was felt by all of us who were there, with many of the women making use of the counselling offered by Beverley Haddad and Nhlanhla Mkhize from the Psychology Department of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The Ujamaa Centre anticipated the potential traumatic effect of this CBS and so ensured that these colleagues were available during and after the CBS to offer counselling. The focus of the fourth day was 'Women and the Church', and our CBS wrestled with 1 Timothy 2:8–15, a CBS which like our CBS on Mark 10:17–22 has formed the basis for our CBS pedagogical training.¹³

We use, revise and reuse our various CBS, learning collaboratively from our community-based work. Ordinary readers and hearers of the Bible co-constitute each and every CBS. Such has been the case especially with respect to the 'Tamar' CBS. The 'Tamar' CBS, which was based on the pioneering biblical studies work of Phyllis Tribble,¹⁴ has been used hundreds of times in very diverse contexts and has formed the nucleus of widespread ecumenical work against gender-based violence.¹⁵ The overwhelming response by women has been one of empowerment. We have

¹²ISB, *Report of the ISB Biennial Workshop, 23–27 September 1996, 'Women and the Bible in South and Southern Africa'*, Institute for the Study of the Bible (1996).

¹³Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993), 51–59, 77–84.

¹⁴Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 36–63.

¹⁵Gerald O. West and Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, 'The Bible Story That Became a Campaign: The Tamar Campaign in South Africa (and Beyond)', *Ministerial Formation* 103 (2004); Tearfund, *Hand in Hand Bible Studies to Transform Our Response to Gender-Based Sexual Violence* (Teddington: Tearfund, 2015); Feccclaha, *Tamar Campaign: Contextual Bible Study Manual and Sermon Outlines on Gender Based Violence and Peace*, The Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) (Nairobi, 2017).

been told again and again: ‘If this biblical story is in the Bible, we will not be silenced’. The initial response to the CBS has almost always been: ‘We did not know that this story was in the Bible’; followed after some reflection by the question: ‘Why has the Church hidden this story from us?’

Such has been the reception of the ‘Tamar’ CBS that we have kept its shape fairly familiar. The only revisions we have made to the CBS have been to slow down the re-reading process with respect to Tamar’s speeches and actions (see the prompt following Question 4).

In plenary:

1. Listen to a dramatic reading of 1 Samuel 13:1–22. What do you think this biblical story is about?

In small groups:

2. Read 2 Samuel 13:1–22 together again in small groups. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?

[Report back from each small group.]

In small groups:

3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?

4. What does Tamar say and what does Tamar do? Focus carefully on each element of what Tamar says and does.

[Report back from each small group.]

In small groups:

5. Are there women like Tamar in your church and/or community? Tell their story.

6. What resources are there in your area for survivors of rape?

7. What will you now do in response to this Bible study? What will you do immediately? What will you do once you have had time to plan more fully? What will your long-term plan of action be?

[Report back from each small group.]

We have published extensively on various aspects of this ‘Tamar’ CBS,¹⁶ and we will continue to do so as we continue to journey with survivors of gender-based violence. What was significant about the very first ‘Tamar’ CBS was that there was no

¹⁶Gerald O. West, ‘The Tamar Campaign: Returning Tamar’s Testimony to the Church’, in *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, ed. Isabel A. Phiri and Dietrich Werner (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2013); Gerald O. West, ‘Deploying the Literary Detail of a Biblical Text (2 Samuel 13:1–22) in Search of Redemptive Masculinities’, in *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J.A. Clines*, ed. James K. Aitken, Jeremy M.S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013); Charlene van der Walt, *Toward a Communal Reading of 2 Samuel 13* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2014); Gerald O. West, ‘The Poetics of Redacted Absence as Presence: Kin Eyes Hearing Tamar (2 Samuel 13)’, in *Narrating Rape*, ed. Rhiannon Graybill, L. Juliana Claassens, and Christl M. Maier (London: SCM Press, 2024).

immediate connection during that inaugural workshop between the theme for the third day, 'Women and Violence', and the theme for the fourth day, 'Women and the Church'. Though the women gave voice to their many concerns about their churches, particularly with respect to women's leadership, they stopped short of saying that the Church itself was violent. What they did say, and what multitudes of women have said since in response to Question 3 is: 'The Church is our Absalom; while the Church offers refuge to the desolate survivors of gender-based violence, it silences us!' The women are here referring to 2 Samuel 13:20.

What this CBS offered survivors of gender-based violence was a neglected biblical story which, once recovered, gave voice to their experience. Though Tamar is eventually silenced by her brother Absalom (13:20), women have already heard her clear and eloquent voice (12–13, 16) and have witnessed her prophetic refusal to be rendered invisible (19). Absalom's silencing has come too late. Tamar has spoken and acted and survivors of gender-based violence have heard and seen. Almost every action-plan (Question 7) includes some form of engagement with their churches, as women find and forge ways for survivors of gender-based violence to be seen and heard 'in Church'.

The Abuse of Tamar

I personally have facilitated the 'Tamar' CBS many times as part of my work within the Ujamaa Centre, appreciating every invitation to work with a particular faith-based organization. But no invitation has been as surprising as the invitation we received as the Bible Study Team at the 2008 Lambeth Conference.

Having heard about the CBS process, probably from Sue Parks who was the Manager of the 2008 Lambeth Conference, as well as from some of the members of the Lambeth Design Group, Archbishop Rowan Williams invited me to form a team which would construct a series of Bible studies based on John's gospel. Archbishop Rowan was resolute in constituting a Lambeth Conference quite different from 1998, 'encouraging . . . the planning groups for Lambeth to see how not only the agenda but also the style of our meeting might maximise the opportunities for training and development'.¹⁷ Archbishop Rowan, together with the Design Group, envisaged the daily Bible studies to be the foundational building block of a more participatory and inclusive 'style' for the Conference. In his 'pastoral letter to the 38 Primates of the Anglican Communion and Moderators of the United Churches, setting out some thinking on the Lambeth Conference in 2008', Archbishop Rowan says the following about the Bible studies: 'The daily Bible studies will again be fundamental for our time together. I have already begun the commissioning of this work; and its emphasis will be strongly based on the experience of biblical reflection in the developing world'.¹⁸

Archbishop Rowan had been advised that the kind of Bible studies that the Ujamaa Centre facilitated lent themselves to inclusive participation, and so he

¹⁷Rowan Williams, 'Archbishop Sets out Thinking on Lambeth Conference 2008 (Thursday 9th March 2006)', Rowan Williams, 2006, <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1497/archbishop-sets-out-thinking-on-lambeth-conference-2008.html>.

¹⁸Williams, 'Archbishop Sets out Thinking on Lambeth Conference 2008 (Thursday 9th March 2006)'.

commissioned me to form a Bible Study Team which would prepare the Bible studies for Lambeth 2008. As Archbishop Rowan indicates, the Bible Study Team did indeed represent rather well experience from the developing world, including South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Joyce Muhindo Tsongo), Tanzania (Dickson Chilongani), India (Sathianathan Clarke), New Zealand (Jenny Plane Te Paa), the USA (Mary Chilton Callaway) and England (Clare Amos).¹⁹ Indeed, the presence of so many from the developing world and from the margins of the developed world, together with the participatory format of the Bible studies, worried some within the planning groups, so I was invited to lead a series of CBS at the St Augustine Seminar in November 2006, where crucial preparatory work was being done.

The CBS process was well received at the St Augustine Seminar. An unexpected outcome of these St Augustine CBS was that those representing the planning for the Spouses Conference decided that they too would use exactly the same Bible studies as the bishops. As Jane Williams, who was the Convenor of the Spouses Conference, said to me: 'If these are the kind of Bible studies the bishops will use, then we too will use them'. And this is what was done. The Bible Study Team trained carefully selected bishops and spouses prior to the Lambeth Conference to take up the task of facilitators of each small group of bishops and spouses.

It was the process-driven character of the CBS-like Bible studies we constructed and the facilitated participatory nature of each Bible study at the beginning of each day that led, I think, to the unexpected invitation by the Spouses Implementation Group to the Bible Study Team to facilitate a joint Bible study on seventh 'ordinary' day of the Lambeth Conference. The seventh day was conceptualized as a combined day, on which the two conferences, the bishops' conference and the spouses' conference, joined together for the theme: 'Equal in God's Sight: When Power is Abused'.²⁰ A few days before this combined day, members of the Spouses Implementation Group approached Jenny Plane Te Paa and asked her to convene a meeting with the Bible Study Team so that we might collaborate on a Bible study for the joint day. Jenny Plane Te Paa had been at one of the Ujamaa Centre's launches of the Tamar Campaign, in Kenya in 2005, and so was familiar with the 'Tamar' CBS. She suggested we might use this CBS on the joint day.

The Spouses Implementation Group embraced this suggestion and so we began work on preparing the 'Tamar' CBS for more than 650 bishops and more than 550 spouses. I shared the usual shape of the CBS, but the delegation from the Spouses Implementation Group insisted that we change Question 5 to: 'In what ways does the Church abuse its power?' and Question 6 to 'In what way can we as leaders in the Church respond to abuses of power?'²¹ This was a remarkable innovation, foregrounding 'the Church' as a perpetrator of violence against women. One of the

¹⁹Unfortunately the representative from Latin American was not able to attend our planning workshops.

²⁰Anglican Communion, *Official Programme & Event Guide*, Lambeth Conference (2008), 20, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/129204/programme.pdf>.

²¹Marites N. Sison, 'Bishops, Spouses Hold Joint Session: Lambeth Looks at Violence against Women', *Anglican Journal* (29 July 2008), <https://anglicanjournal.com/bishops-spouses-hold-joint-session-lambeth-looks-at-violence-against-women-8003/>; Solange De Santis, 'Bishops, Spouses Discuss Power Abuses in Joint Session', *Episcopal Press and News* (29 July 2008), https://episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=072908-04.

spouses' group, Maria Akrofi, a medical doctor married to the primate of the Church of the Province of West Africa and bishop of Accra, Archbishop Justice Akrofi, expressed the lived reality of women in the church when she said that the Church is not exempt from inflicting violence against women, noting that women who experience abuse at the hands of their spouses who are priests or bishops often have nowhere to go.²²

On the joint day, as we began, Jane Williams explained that one of the things that went into the planning of this joint day was the issue of how power is used and abused within the Church, and how that this was something that the women wanted to address together with the male bishops.²³ She introduced the joint day with a theological reflection on violence, reflecting on 'Violence done within the Body of Christ is violence done to the Body of Christ'.²⁴ The Bishop of Malaita, Terry Brown, kept a daily journal of Lambeth 2008, documenting rather well this particular joint day. He notes how Jane Williams 'pointed out the hypocrisy of preaching Christ crucified but at the same time exercising power in an abusive way, and the many kinds of abuse of power, each with its own excuse'.²⁵ As Terry Brown notes, 'She begged all to engage in the activities of the morning, as a Gospel imperative'.²⁶ The shape of our joint time together was then carefully explained by Jenny Plane Te Paa, who was then the Principal of Te Rau Kahikatea, the Maori college of St. John's College, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. She made it clear the focus would be on violence against women and girls and offered a thoughtful analysis of the causes of violence against women and girls, citing deeply entrenched traditional beliefs, the unequal status of men and women in many areas, and the belief that women are less capable and trustworthy than men, etc.²⁷

The joint day then moved into the processes of CBS, beginning with a dramatic performance by the Riding Lights Theatre Company of various New Testament texts related to violence against women, and then a dramatic reading of 2 Samuel 13:1–22.²⁸ I then briefly explained the CBS process we would follow, explaining why we had encouraged them to form small groups of women and small groups of men, enabling safe sacred space especially for women, and how we would use the CBS questions to structure the conversation within small groups, and offering opportunities for small groups to report back to the plenary of over 1000 participants, and more than a hundred small groups. The CBS questions had been translated into six other languages, and there was simultaneous translation via headsets. We encouraged participants to form small groups within a language group, enabling in-depth sharing.

²²Sison, 'Bishops, Spouses Hold Joint Session: Lambeth Looks at Violence against Women'.

²³Sison, 'Bishops, Spouses Hold Joint Session: Lambeth Looks at Violence against Women'.

²⁴Terry Brown, *Lambeth Reports* (2008), Day 12 (which corresponds to 'Ordinary Day 7 in the programme), <http://anglicanonline.org/resources/essays/misc/LambethTerryBrown.html>.

²⁵Brown, *Lambeth Reports*, Day 12.

²⁶Brown, *Lambeth Reports*, Day 12.

²⁷Brown, *Lambeth Reports*, Day 12.

²⁸Anglican Communion, *Lambeth Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008: Equipping Bishops for Mission and Strengthening Anglican Identity*, Anglican Communion (3 August 2008), 15 §48, https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/72554/reflections_document_final-pdf.

At this stage of the CBS, there was some shifting between groups as participants formed language-based groups and as the women (who included the few women bishops) asked the few men who had wanted to join a women's small group to leave and join the men's small groups. With the small groups settled, Jenny Plane Te Paa and I slowly and carefully facilitated the 'Tamar' CBS process, for over three hours. Very few left the process, though some women found it too traumatic to continue and some men felt the CBS was positioned against them.²⁹

The impact was significant. After the CBS there was a sense that something had changed among us. Jenny Plane Te Paa concluded with a solemn warning that bishops were not to be abusers, whether personally or institutionally.³⁰ We encouraged the participants to make use of the Chaplaincy Team, who were familiar to the bishops and the spouses,³¹ and who made themselves available throughout the day. The impact of the CBS also found expression in the summative document 'Lambeth Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008: Equipping Bishops for Mission and Strengthening Anglican Identity':

49. The violence meted out to women and children within the body of Christ is violence done to the body of Christ. Violence takes many forms including physical, financial, emotional, psychological, intellectual, cultural, sexual and spiritual abuse. Women and children suffer disproportionately from the effects of abusive power. The whole of the church and the world can be damaged by the human will to exercise power. Jesus offers an alternative use of power. He washes his disciples' feet, he submits himself to Pilate's unjust judgement, and he dies on the cross as the one through whom all things come into being.

50. It was noted that the abuse of power is an extraordinarily complex multi-layered issue and involves the individual, the group, the community, the institution, is intensely personal, unavoidably political and has far-reaching consequences. If clerical authority is abused or exercised without restraint, humility or respect the betrayal for all concerned is profound. Challenged to reclaim the gospel truth of the dignity of the human person the Conference affirmed the need for special care to be taken so that power would always be life-giving. It was acknowledged that in several diocese and provinces there is a need for training and appropriate pastoral measures to be put in place to make the church an accountable and safe place for all people.³²

The Spouses Implementation Group offered prophetic witness through the praxis of their version of the 'Tamar' CBS, providing biblical, theological and pastoral impetus to various 'Safeguarding' initiatives.³³ The Anglican Church of Southern

²⁹Brown, *Lambeth Reports*, Day 12.

³⁰Brown, *Lambeth Reports*, Day 12.

³¹Communion, *Lambeth Indaba*, 5 §8, 43 §161.

³²Communion, *Lambeth Indaba*, 15–16 §49, 50.

³³See for example Michael A. Guerzoni, *Child Protection in the Church: An Anglican Case Study* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

Africa (ACSA) explicitly acknowledges that their earlier intent to create ‘a Safe and Inclusive Ministry’ within ACSA ‘was amplified by the testimony of the Lambeth Conference in 2008 to the many forms of abuse of power within society as well as the church from which women and children suffer disproportionately, and the challenge to reclaim the gospel truth of the dignity of the human person and to exercise power in ways that would always be life giving’.³⁴

The Inscribing of Tamar

As an initial ice-breaker during our facilitation of the Lambeth-Tamar CBS, as the small groups settled, I asked participants, while seated, to stand up if they had ever heard the story of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1–22) read aloud before. Very few stood up. I then asked those who were standing to remain standing only if they had heard this biblical text read aloud on a Sunday. Most sat down. I challenged participants to check, as homework after the CBS, whether their particular Anglican lectionaries included 2 Samuel 13:1–22 as a reading on a Sunday. Immediately after the CBS, as we left the tent, mostly in silence, a few bishops came up to me and said they were sure their lectionary did include this text on a Sunday. In the years that followed Lambeth 2008, most of these bishops wrote to me to say that they had been wrong, that this biblical text is not allocated to a Sunday. Some vowed to change the lectionary.

I continue to use this ice-breaker in our ‘redemptive masculinity’ CBS version (see below) of 2 Samuel 13:1–22.³⁵ It remains a regular reminder to participants that their churches keep this text from them. The Ujamaa Centre continues to campaign within the churches we work with, whether directly or through one of their faith-based groups, for the inclusion of Tamar’s story. The lectionary is one way in which Anglicans might inscribe Tamar’s story. Anglican liturgy is another way.

As I have indicated, CBS always ends with an action-plan or action-plans. In order to encourage participants to envisage actual local action, we often suggest to participants that they might consider using CBS resources to construct a prayer or a liturgy that they might offer to or use in their local church. Creating a liturgical resource is a useful exercise, for it is overtly theological in orientation, and so consolidates the theological resources produced by the CBS. Constructing a prayer or a liturgy is also practical for it is something a small group can do within the time frame of the CBS, as a final act.

While Church liturgy is slow to change, our experience is that CBS participants are eager for Church liturgy to change. For many of our participants, their church’s liturgy is alienating. Personally, for example, I have always been troubled, as have others,³⁶ by what is known as ‘The Prayer of Humble Access’: ‘We do not presume . . .’. This prayer has formed a component of Anglican liturgy since

³⁴ACSA, *Safe Church Guide*, Anglican Church of Southern Africa (2024), <https://anglicanchurchsa.org/safe-church-guide/>.

³⁵West, ‘Interested Readers’, 309.

³⁶Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, ‘Not Worthy So Much as to Gather up the Crumbs under Thy Table: Reflection on the Sources and History of the Prayer of Humble Access’, *Sewanee Theological Review* 50, no. 1 (2006): 81.

1548,³⁷ so it has a substantive Anglican theological pedigree. However, having done numerous CBS with marginalised sectors of our South African society, I was always conscious of the many kneeling around me who were constantly told by dominant Church theologies that they were not worthy, because they were HIV-positive, or unemployed, or living with a disability, or queer. Furthermore, as a biblical scholar the question that hovers over this prayer every time I kneel to take the Eucharist is how Thomas Cranmer, who composed it, and the generations of Anglican theologians, who have continued to include it in successive Prayer Books, have understood a constitutive gospel text which has been used in its formulation, namely Mark 7:24–31 (and/ or the parallel in Matthew 15:21–29).

Provoked by pervasive theologies of retribution and by biblical studies work on this text as I knelt in church during the Communion liturgy, refusing to recite the prayer, I wondered how many others around me were silently resisting this liturgical prayer. Fortunately, an opportunity to pose this question to them came via an invitation to the Ujamaa Centre to prepare a Lent series of Bible studies for the ACSA, focusing on their vision and mission statements, among which was a commitment to 'liturgical renewal'.³⁸ In this Lent series, I specifically included a CBS on Mark 7:24–31.³⁹

I have reflected on this CBS in detail,⁴⁰ so here I will focus only on how the CBS invites participants to re-read the 'Prayer of Humble Access' alongside a re-reading of Mark 7:24–31 which draws on Anglican feminist readings⁴¹ and then encourages participants to become engaged in liturgical renewal by asking them: 'How would you edit the "Prayer of Humble Access"? What would you retain and what would you delete?' The participants had no problem in taking up this task, and various revisions of the prayer were shared as part of the CBS. Our consensus was that what was generally understood as a prayer of exclusion was based on a biblical text about radical inclusion. My hope was that this particular CBS might actually lead to a renewal of this particular liturgy in ACSA, but that has not yet happened. However, this CBS is a good example of how doing biblical studies from and with the margins offers resources with which to deconstruct and reconstruct Church liturgy.

Our work with the 'Tamar' CBS has often generated liturgical-type report backs from small groups, whether in the form of a prayer, or a song, or a drama, or a symbolic ritual. In recent work on the biblical text, where I have interrogated the socio-historical redactional process that have constructed the final form of the text,

³⁷John Dowden, 'A Contribution Towards the Study of the Prayer of Humble Access', *The Irish Church Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1908): 9.

³⁸ACSA, 'Mission Priorities', Anglican Church of Southern Africa, 2021, accessed October, 2021, <https://anglicanchurchsa.org/mission-priorities/>.

³⁹'A Vision and Mission for Our Church: ACSA', Ujamaa Centre, 2013, http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/Libraries/manuals/A_Bible_Study_series_for_the_Anglican_Ch.sflb.ashx.

⁴⁰Gerald O. West, 'Recovering Eucharistic Crumbs: Re-Reading Mark 7:24–30 for Liturgical Renewal', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 172 (2022); Gerald O. West, 'Liberating Liturgy: Liturgy as a (Biblical) Ritual Site of Struggle', in *Liberation Quest(ion): Rituals and Ceremonies*, ed. Jin Young Choi and Sithembiso Zwane (London: SCM Press, Forthcoming).

⁴¹Kittredge, 'Reflection on the Sources and History of the Prayer of Humble Access'; Dorothy A. Lee, 'Clean and Unclean: Multiple Readings of Mark 7:24–30/31', in *Terror in the Bible: Rhetoric, Gender, and Violence*, ed. Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon and Robyn J. Whitaker, *International Voices in Biblical Studies* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021).

I have suggested that Tamar's speeches may reflect the voices of other subaltern women, a chorus of voices which have been given to an elite princess, the daughter of king David.⁴² I have made an attempt to reconstruct the 'voices' of Tamar (see below). Given this analysis, my suggestion to Ujamaa Centre colleagues has been to introduce a further question in our 'Tamar' CBS after the current Question 7 (see above).

We do not encourage a detailed report back from the women's small groups after Question 5. It is important that each small group feel that their small group is a safe and sacred space. When we facilitate we encourage each small group to be cautious about what they report when they return to the plenary gathering. We assume, and the embodied engagements with Question 5 confirm, that much of what is shared remains in the small group as a 'hidden transcript'.⁴³ What is reported to the plenary is a 'public transcript' version.⁴⁴ By aligning Questions 5 and 6, we also connect the reality of violence against women with potential local resources to support survivors and to address violence against women. Question 7 then invites each small group and/or the plenary group as whole to formulate particular forms of action they will undertake, in the immediate, medium and long term.

We might envisage, I have suggested, a liturgical form of action as part of Question 7, using the redaction-reconstructed voices of Tamar. Given the lived reality of the Church as an unsafe place for women and reluctance of the Church to address violence against women, and given the excising of 2 Samuel 13:1–22 from most Church lectionaries on a Sunday, concluding the Tamar CBS with a liturgical resource might be useful. I suggest we might offer the following final question, including as it does my reconstruction of a chorus of subaltern voices behind and included within Tamar's voice:

8. How might we enable our own local churches to recognize this biblical story and our voices as women who have experienced sexual abuse? We can identify a poetic core to the speeches of Tamar which may come from the experience of ordinary women survivors of sexual violence. We can reconstruct their poetic voices as follows:

And she said to him:
Do not, my brother,
Do not debase me;
for
it is not done,
thus
in Israel.
Do not do,
this vileness.

⁴²West, 'The Poetics of Redacted Absence as Presence: Kin Eyes Hearing Tamar (2 Samuel 13)'.

⁴³James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), xii, 1–16.

⁴⁴Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, xii, 1–16.

And I,
 where will I walk,
 with my disgrace.
 And you,
 you will be become,
 as one of the vile men,
 in Israel.
 But he was not willing
 to hear
 her voice.

How would you express this poetry in your own language? Write a related psalm that could be used as a resource within the liturgical life of your church.

Though somewhat cumbersome, we could work with this Question 8 and discern how we might adapt it further. What this reconstructed poem offers is an additional reconstructed form-critical and source-critical site of engagement, increasing the text's capacity for appropriation by specifically inviting liturgical innovation.

The Abandoning of Tamar

When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry [, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn] (2 Samuel 13:21, NRSV).

I have added square brackets to the New Revised Standard Version translation, noting that this portion of the text is not found in the Masoretic text and consequently is not found in many translations, including for example the commonly used South African isiZulu or isiXhosa translations. The extended text is found in the Septuagint and Qumran manuscripts and may well represent earlier Hebrew versions. However, because we usually work with the biblical translations of our participants, and because this variant reading is often not reflected, this extended text has not been a feature of our 'Tamar' CBS work. But perhaps it should be. Indeed, as I will argue in this final section of my article, this extended text version of verse 21 deserves its own CBS.

What the extended text of 2 Samuel 13:21 represents is 'abandonment'. David Tombs has used this concept to reflect on the King David's first and second abandonment of his 'royal concubines' in 2 Samuel 15–20. Tombs conceptualizes the notion of 'abandonment' by focusing on the victims' 'initial abandonment by those who could perhaps have prevented their rape, then on the rape itself, and finally, their second abandonment in the aftermath of their assault'.⁴⁵ He recognises that 'contemporary survivors of sexual violence who turn to their community for

⁴⁵David Tombs, 'Abandonment, Rape, and Second Abandonment: Hannah Baker in *13 Reasons Why* and the Royal Concubines in 2 Samuel 15–20', in *Rape Culture, Gender Violence and Religion: Biblical Perspectives*, ed. Caroline Blyth, Emily Colgan, and Katie B. Edwards (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 117.

help or compassion are often subjected instead to blame, stigma, and social rejection'.⁴⁶ Such forms of abandonment, Tombs argues, 'often reinforce' the initial trauma caused by sexual violence 'through the secondary victimisation at the hands of people who could instead offer their support'.⁴⁷ 'This should be of particular concern to Christian churches and other religious communities', Tombs insists, 'whose own responses to sexual violence often reinforce the stigmatisation and discrimination felt by survivors of sexual violence'.⁴⁸ He cites the work of South African Elisabet Le Roux in corroboration, who writes,

Many, if not most, churches are promoting sexual violence through their teachings, practices and response to sexual violence survivors, for example by admonishing those who disclose violations and ordering them to keep it secret. Unfortunately, those churches that choose non-involvement actually also contribute to the continuation of sexual violence. By not condemning it they are implicitly condoning the beliefs, perceptions and activities that facilitate sexual violence.⁴⁹

'Hence', concludes Tombs, 'addressing such secondary victimization is one of the most appropriate and effective contributions that churches and faith-based organisations can make to make to support survivors of sexual violence and to challenge the rape-supportive discourses that sustain such violence'.⁵⁰ Summoning the Church to account, Tombs has offered a CBS resource on this text to the Church.⁵¹

Beverley Haddad takes up Tombs' conceptualization of 'second abandonment' and uses it to refer directly to the South African Church: 'Having ignored the destructive effects of patriarchal, culturally oppressive relationships experienced by many women, Church leadership chooses to ignore the potentially deadly consequences of these relationships and abandons them to HIV vulnerability and gender violence'.⁵² My contribution to this important trajectory of work on abandonment is to argue that Tamar is serially abandoned, but that Tamar's resisting speech (verses 12–13, 16) and public lament (verse 19) both shames and summons King David and the Church to come out from behind their cloak of impunity.

Tamar is abandoned serially: by Amnon, by Jonadab, by David, by Amnon's household servants, by Absalom, by David . . . and by the Church; by Amnon's obsession (13:2), by Jonadab's permission (13:4–5), by Amnon's dissimulation (13:6a), by David's devotion (13:6b), by Amnon's preparation (13:6c), by David's

⁴⁶Tombs, 'Abandonment, Rape, and Second Abandonment', 127.

⁴⁷Tombs, 'Abandonment, Rape, and Second Abandonment', 127.

⁴⁸Tombs, 'Abandonment, Rape, and Second Abandonment', 127.

⁴⁹Cited in Tombs, 'Abandonment, Rape, and Second Abandonment', 127.

⁵⁰Tombs, 'Abandonment, Rape, and Second Abandonment', 127.

⁵¹Mwai Makoka and Gerald O. West, *Health-Promoting Churches: Contextual Bible Studies on Health and Healing*, vol. III (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2022), 26–29. <https://www.oikoumene.org/resourceres/publications/health-promoting-churches-volume-iii>; Emily Colgan and Caroline Blyth, eds., *Accompanying Survivors of Sexual Harm: A Toolkit for Churches* (UK: The Shiloh Project, 2023), 41–45.

⁵²Beverley Haddad, 'Second Abandonment: Reflecting on HIV, Gender Violence and the Church' (Theological Society of Southern Africa Conference, 'From Versailles to Kempton Park: Theological and Ethical Reflection on Peace and Peacemaking', 20–22 June, Howick, South Africa, 2018).

omission commission (13:7), by Amnon's perpetuation (13:8b), by Amnon's machination (13:9b, c, 10a, 11b), by the household's submission (13:9d), by Amnon's incomprehension and violation (13:14), by Amnon's rejection (13:15, 16b, 17), by the servant's submission (13:18b), by Absalom's silencing consolation (13:20a), by David's patriarchal perpetuation (13:21) . . . and by the Church's elision. My assonance is an attempt to portray the cadence or resonance of the system that violates Tamar, over and over again. Indeed, the story of Tamar is a story of an ominously 'harmonious' system of violation. Each of the male characters, from the major to the minor, enables the serial abandonment – rape – abandonment of Tamar.

What 2 Samuel 13:21 makes clear is that this patriarchal system operates with impunity. I invoke here a concept from the political realm, particularly as it has been used by intercultural Bible reading scholarship in Latin America. Introducing their interpretive project Hans de Wit and Edgar López write: 'Violence has had a twofold impact on these [Latin American] people and their communities. First their human rights were violated, and then they suffered again because of the state's negligence, its institutional role of explaining away – of justifying – the actions of the victimizers'.⁵³ The state operates with impunity, which López describes as follows, citing the UN Commission on Human Rights' 'Updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity':

'Impunity' means the impossibility, de jure or de facto, of bringing the perpetrators of violations to account – whether in criminal, civil, administrative or disciplinary proceedings – since they are not subject to any inquiry that might lead to their being accused, arrested, tried and, if found guilty, sentenced to appropriate penalties, and to making reparations to their victims.⁵⁴

This intercultural Bible reading project turns to Luke 18:1–8 as its biblical site for engaging impunity: 'The cry of the widow before the judge is a real outcry in Latin American societies, as real as their hope that justice will be done In the Lucan text, the participating communities see reflected their pain but also their struggle for justice'.⁵⁵ The published research on intercultural Bible study work on impunity offers detailed and particular contextual analysis of impunity, with each community-based Bible study group conversing with Luke 18:1–8 from their reality of impunity.⁵⁶

⁵³Hans de Wit and Edgar Antonio López, 'Introduction', in *The Widow and the Judge: Memory, Resistance, and Hope: Intercultural Reading of Luke 18.1–8 in Latin American Contexts of Impunity*, ed. Hans de Wit and Edgar Antonio López (Amsterdam and Elkart: Foundation Dom Hélder Câmara Chair, VU University and Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2020), 1.

⁵⁴Edgar Antonio López, 'Impunity in Latin America as a Challenge for Theology', in *The Widow and the Judge: Memory, Resistance, and Hope: Intercultural Reading of Luke 18.1–8 in Latin American Contexts of Impunity*, ed. Hans de Wit and Edgar Antonio López (Amsterdam and Elkart: Foundation Dom Hélder Câmara Chair, VU University and Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2020), 4, note 4.

⁵⁵de Wit and López, 'Introduction', 1.

⁵⁶Hans de Wit and Edgar Antonio López, eds., *The Widow and the Judge: Memory, Resistance, and Hope: Intercultural Reading of Luke 18.1–8 in Latin American Contexts of Impunity* (Amsterdam and Elkart: Foundation Dom Hélder Câmara Chair, VU University and Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2020); José Vicente Vergara Hoyos, 'Sharing Memories, Overcoming Solitude: Reading the Story of the Widow and the Unjust Judge in Situations of Impunity in Latin America (a Dialogue among Peru, Colombia, El Salvador, and Guatemala)', in *Bible and Transformation: The Promise of Intercultural Bible Reading*, ed. Hans de Wit

The emphasis in each of these intercultural Bible studies is political state impunity. My contribution in this section of my article is to use the notion of ‘impunity’ in relation to the Church, especially the Anglican Communion churches, and specifically the ACSA.

In an earlier intercultural Bible study project, which included substantive work on 2 Samuel 13:1–22,⁵⁷ there was some reflection which prompts my proposal for a CBS on the extended variant of 2 Samuel 13:21. For example, La Rip Marip from Myanmar reflects on how the Myanmar group engaged with David: ‘The Myanmar group saw the suppression of Tamar’s suffering as the inattentive behavior of the powerful: “At this point, we feel that authoritative people give very little attention to those who are suffering”’.⁵⁸ However, I want to take this trajectory of interpretation further, suggesting that if, as women have often said, it is Absalom (and/as the institution of the Church) who silences Tamar, then it is David (and/as the leadership of the Church) who with impunity abandons Tamar.

The Septuagint version of 2 Samuel 13:21 exposes David’s patriarchal impunity. The Hebrew text the Greek translators of the Septuagint used was slightly different from the one that has been preserved in the Masoretic Hebrew Bible. ‘To be sure’, Tuukka Kauhanen explains, ‘most differences in the text concern details of the stories Nevertheless, some of these differing details are by no means unimportant’.⁵⁹ The Hebrew text, she explains, continued to change after the Septuagint translation was made so that the Septuagint preserves a more ancient version of the Hebrew text. Significant for my argument is Kauhanen’s argument that ‘learned circles interested in the ideological and theological nuances of the text introduced minor changes that aimed at promoting the better side of David and Yahweh’s fidelity to his promise of the eternal kingship’.⁶⁰ The shorter Masoretic Hebrew version of 2 Samuel 13:21, used as the basis for most English and most African language translations, attempts to redact David’s callous condoning of Tamar’s abuse. Fortunately for Tamar and the Church, such ‘small late changes can be recognized with the help of the Septuagint’.⁶¹ The Septuagint depicts David’s impunity.

I invoke the notion of ‘impunity’ because Anglican Church leadership, like David, regularly fails in ‘bringing the perpetrators of violations to account – whether in criminal, civil, administrative or disciplinary proceedings – since they are not subject to any inquiry’.⁶² Anglican Church leadership, particularly in contexts where Anglican bishops are not answerable to anyone, preside over and perpetrate with impunity an ‘Unsafe Church’. A CBS on the extended text of 2 Samuel 13:21 would

and Janet Dyk (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015); Daniel S. Schipani, ‘Transformation in Intercultural Bible Reading: A View from Practical Theology’, in *Bible and Transformation: The Promise of Intercultural Bible Reading*, ed. Hans de Wit and Janet Dyk (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

⁵⁷Hans de Wit and Janet Dyk, eds., *Bible and Transformation: The Promise of Intercultural Bible Reading*, Semeia Studies 81 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

⁵⁸La Rip Marip, ‘Personal Application, Social Justice, and Social Transformation (a Dialogue between Myanmar and the Netherlands)’, in *Bible and Transformation: The Promise of Intercultural Bible Reading*, ed. Hans de Wit and Janet Dyk (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 162.

⁵⁹Tuukka Kauhanen, *2 Samuel*, Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions (CSTT) (Helsinki, 2015), <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/sacredtexts/2015/10/28/editing-the-septuagint-of-2-samuel/>.

⁶⁰Kauhanen, *2 Samuel*.

⁶¹Kauhanen, *2 Samuel*.

⁶²I cite here a portion of the UN Commission on Human Rights’ ‘Updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity’ cited above.

enable ordinary Anglicans to find a resonant scriptural site of struggle from which to articulate local Anglican theologies of resistance to ecclesial un-accountability and impunity.

Conclusion

The Ujamaa Centre has heeded the summons of the extended text of 2 Samuel 13:21 and is in the process of discerning the shape of a CBS on this variant text. We already have a 'Redemptive Masculinity Tamar' CBS in which we listen carefully to what Tamar says in 2 Samuel 13:12–13 about an alternative masculinity.⁶³ Tamar speaks clearly and eloquently (see above) before she is silenced by Absalom and abandoned by David. We know what Tamar says to Amnon, summoning him to be a different 'man'. But what would Tamar say to David, having experienced the abandonment of David her father, her patriarch, her king, and her Church? What would Tamar say hearing (through this CBS) the narrator's summation of David's response to the abuse of his daughter in 2 Samuel 13:21? Tamar, we are sure, will continue speaking, persisting with the widow of Luke 18:1–8 to summon those who do not fear God nor respect women (Luke 18:2), who operate within an 'infrastructure of impunity',⁶⁴ to account.

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⁶³West, 'Interested Readers'.

⁶⁴Arundhati Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (UK: Hamish Hamilton, 2017), 433, 34.

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