

The Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-19)

Through the Hermeneutical Lens

of Aotearoa New Zealand¹

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Preamble

This paper is a contextual reading of “The Rape of Tamar,” informed by contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand (henceforth ANZ) literature on domestic violence. I am involved in Homeworks Trust, an organisation that aims to establish specialised refuges and safe housing for women and their children in Auckland, New Zealand. Writing this paper allows me to combine interests in the Hebrew Bible as an independent biblical researcher and work on domestic violence issues as a member of Homeworks Trust. The research is the result of a wish to write a contextual paper, reading a biblical passage through the hermeneutical lens of contemporary ANZ social eyes.

Method

The method involves two sets of texts. One text is biblical and the other is selected contemporary ANZ literature on domestic violence and rape as a form of domestic violence. What both texts have in common is the subject “rape and domestic violence. The information on rape from one text is read referring to information on rape in the other text. Through a backwards and forwards reading between the two texts, understanding develops. Information on rape, observations concerning rape, and comments about rape are exchanged in the movement of intertextual referral.

There is much contemporary ANZ literature on domestic violence issues but few studies on rape as a form of domestic violence. The ANZ literature used for the purposes of this paper is selected with the help of those who research domestic violence issues in the Homeworks Trust team. Domestic violence material comes predominantly from a government document, two masters' theses, and the research of an Auckland University team. Although the language of the material is socio-scientific, the analyses are drawn from the experiential base of many women, offering a wider and more comprehensive lens, than a single ANZ case study.

The ANZ hermeneutical lens or ANZ perspective of understanding of rape dominates this paper. Firstly, recent literature on domestic violence, based on studies within the country, is deliberately chosen as an ANZ set of texts. The contemporary literature offers vocabulary and concepts which allow the biblical account of rape to be articulated in the words used in ANZ. Other levels of the ANZ hermeneutical lens are more difficult to pin-point and less overt but none the less present. For example, the author of the paper is a New Zealander and living in "this place," involved in domestic violence issues. This gives a further contextual base to the paper.

The biblical text is a narrative, the recounting of Tamar's rape. The story has a beginning, middle and end offering a chronological sequence for the method to follow. Different persons appear in the story, the abuser, the abused, and people related to and involved with the abuser and the abused. ANZ literature offers information on the nature and role of abusers and the abused. As the story unfolds different actions take place. The actions are viewed through the hermeneutical lens of contemporary ANZ literature. The story takes place in a specific setting or physical environment as does rape in any contemporary setting. These four points make up aspects of the method. To facilitate understanding of the biblical text, clarification is sought in Hebrew word searches, biblical articles, and cross-references within the Hebrew Bible.

As already mentioned, there are many "interconnections" between the two texts (Tull 1999:165), be

it the theme of rape, or those involved in the rape: the abuser and the abused. Both texts treat rape as a phenomenon of domestic violence.

Definition of Family or Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is so widespread in ANZ that the Ministry for Social Development has responded by publishing a document, *Te Rito: New Zealand Family Violence Prevention Strategy* (2002). It is a government strategic plan, aiming to prevent domestic violence. The document is generalist, producing definitions as a result of extensive consultation over a broad field. Family violence is defined as, “a broad range of controlling behaviours, commonly of a physical, sexual and/or psychological nature which typically involve fear, intimidation and emotional deprivation” (*Te Rito* 2002:8).² The operative phrase in the definition is “controlling behaviour.” The perpetrator of violence within the family unit exercises “controlling behaviour” or power over others in that household group. This will be demonstrated in Amnon’s case shortly.

Contemporary ANZ Literature on Domestic Violence

For their master's theses Debbie Hager (2001) and Clare Murphy (2002) interviewed ANZ women, who have experienced abusive relationships. As a result of interviews Clare Murphy observes that the psychological abuse of male partners over their female partners 'is reinforced by social beliefs, which give men the right to dominate women' (Murphy 2002:15). Men persistently dominate women by using power and control. They intend to dominate and to win during the relationship at all times and at all costs. The man's sense of self grows the more the woman's sense of self diminishes. The abuser lives in safety and the abused in fear. Murphy's research on psychological abuse expands in much detail some of the general comments made in *Te Rito*, that male power and control over a woman is a 'controlling behaviour'.

Debbie Hager as a result of interviews with abused women observes a link between domestic violence and mental illness (2001:6). Her interviews with ANZ women focus on the traumatic psychological effects of domestic violence on women. She concludes that on-going domestic violence starts to change the perception women have of self. They gradually lose their sense of self-esteem, becoming increasingly confused as a result of the power tactics of the abuser. Hager's research is particularly applicable to the post-rape scenes.

A University of Auckland research team, Peter J. Adams, Nicola Gavey & Alison Towns in an unpublished article, 'The Rhetoric Men Use to Colonize the Experience of Women,' observe that socialisation allows men to talk in a superior manner about women, feeling 'they are the bosses' over women (ca. 1999). Their research is based on interviews with men who have been violent towards their partners. The research team note that the language of the interviewed men reflects a belief that they are superior to women. These men feel women deserved to be abused. For example, violent men do not think women should have the final decision-making role in the family. The University of Auckland's research and Clare Murphy's research is applied to the pre-rape scene and Amnon's socialisation.

The focus of the paper is rape as a form of domestic violence. It is difficult to find ANZ studies specifically on sexual assault or rape in the context of domestic violence as no literature appears to be written. Therefore recourse is made to an article of a North American, S. Amelia Stinson-Wesley, 'Daughters of Tamar: Pastoral Care for Survivors of Rape' (1996:222-239). Stinson-Wesley, from her pastoral background with traumatised women and children offers clear definitions of rape, and post rape, given in the sections on Tamar's rape and post-rape scenes. Her definitions elucidate what Tamar may have suffered. ANZ literature and Stinson-Wesley's research offer insights into the attitudes of an abuser before rape, what a woman might suffer during and after rape. Rape most frequently occurs within the supposed safety of the family home.

An ANZ Reading of the Rape of Tamar

2 Samuel 13:1-19 contains three scenes,

- 1) 1-10, pre-rape: Amnon grows up in an environment where socialisation allows him to become an abuser. He plans the rape and follows out his plan.
- 2) 11-14, the rape: the actual rape scene is Amnon's sexual assault of Tamar.
- 3) 15-19, post-rape: after the rape, Tamar suffers from trauma and shame.

1) Pre-rape: Amnon, Socialised To Be An Abuser

Amnon is born into an environment of suggested rape and hence family violence through David's role-modelling. As stated in *Te Rito*, 'violence in families/ whanau contributes to the continuation of violence within families/ whanau and society in general' (2002:9). David commits family violence within the royal household when he takes Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). Bathsheba is brought to David so he can sleep with her. There is no account or sign of whether sex was non-consensual or consensual, whether Bathsheba resisted or not (Schwartz 1999:346).³ David is king and Bathsheba is the

wife of one of David's well-regarded military leaders. David assumes kingly rights as he takes Bathsheba, whether she wants it or not. The cycle of assuming male rights continues into the next generation when Amnon rapes his half-sister.

Violence within a family inevitably has an effect on the society around as people outside of the family become implicated in the violence. In following his "private desire" David's act has social ramifications. David's taking of Bathsheba leads to the death of her husband Uriah. All those involved in Uriah's death are implicated in the violence of David. In Amnon's case it is not the taking of a leading employee's wife, but a sibling.⁴ Amnon's taking of Tamar leads eventually to his own death at the hands of Absalom's attendants. What happens within the royal household walls becomes known outside of the walls. David's act is named as "sin" in the words of the prophet Nathan, (2 Samuel 12:13), implying that David's behaviour is against the expectations of the citizens of Israel. There is a link between private and public behaviour, especially when the household is the royal household. The biblical story and the social message of *Te Rito* proclaim the same message, domestic violence has social ramifications.

Domestic violence, not only tends to continue from one generation to the next in a family and have an effect on society, it is also "a deliberate act" (*Te Rito* 2002:9). Or, as Stinson-Wesley even more succinctly puts it, "rape is a planned act of violence" (1996:224). Rape is premeditated and planned, second nature to the controlling behaviour of the abuser. This is certainly the case with Amnon who without a doubt plans the taking of Tamar, inspired by his friend, Jonadab. At least nine verses lead up to the actual rape. An array of people is inculcated in Amnon's plan, Jonadab, David, Amnon's attendants, though they may not be aware of their roles in the fulfilling of the plan. Jonadab helped Amnon think up a rape plan. David, according to Amnon's plans, sends Tamar to attend to the "ill" Amnon. The attendants do as they are told by their royal master. After all this preparation and planning, Amnon is, at long last, alone with Tamar in his bedroom.

Based on the research of Adams, Gavey & Towns, one can say Amnon's plan to rape is made in a

social environment that favours male interests. Amnon may think, plan and act the way he does because his socialisation has allowed him to do so. Amnon is nurtured by the society around him to be able to rape Tamar. He is favoured; he is after all the first born son to the king, living with the awareness that he is successor to the throne. Tamar is female, and a ‘œmere’ half-sister. If David took Bathsheba and appeared to get away with it then Amnon can take Tamar, and get away with it. Besides, Amnon, as a male, is physically stronger than Tamar and can take her by physical force, regardless of her wishes. Adams, Gavey & Towns (ca. 1999:1-14) observe that men, who have exercised violence towards women, feel superior to women. These men claim they are the boss in relationships, entitled to positions of control and influence. Their language, when talking about or to women, suggests and insinuates the inferiority of women and hence they project the feeling, that women are worthy of abuse. Based on this ANZ research, one can say, Amnon does not plan his relationship to Tamar as though she is an equal. She is someone to stalk and claim. He is socialised to have control over his future victim.

The narrator relates in the framework narrative how Amnon looks upon Tamar from his ‘œsick bed.’ The physical environment is described rather than readers being told how characters feel or what their thoughts are. The pre-rape scene is seen through Amnon’s eyes as he lies in bed. Amnon watches Tamar as she kneads the dough, as she works, bends and as her body moves before him. Amnon feeds his unrequited desire for Tamar from his sick bed, his desire swelling with expectation as he awaits the moment when he can have her for himself without interference. Gray rightly notes that the passage is ‘œheavy and dripping with sexual connotations’ (1998:45). The male story is told. The pre-rape scene focuses on Amnon’s physical desire of something, not a relationship to a human being of worth.

Amnon controls the environment he is in, as well as planning it. He does nothing to make Tamar feel at ease in his environment. The final stages of the pre-rape scene are set in Amnon’s room, in his physical space. The biblical narrator describes the location as her ‘œbrother Amnon’s house’ (2 Samuel 13:7). The people around are ‘œhis’ attendants. Tamar is his food preparer. Amnon is the centre of attention as he has planned and as he has been socialised to believe is his right. Amnon commands and those around him obey. Amnon, orders ‘œeveryone to withdraw’ (2 Samuel 13:9) from his room so he can be alone with Tamar. Amnon’s imperative speech pattern continues when

he addresses Tamar, "Bring the cakes inside and feed me." Amnon does not use the polite *nā* suffixed to the Hebrew verb to express his wishes. Tamar is in an environment, physical and social, where Amnon is in a position of spatial and physical power. She is his prey.

2) The Rape: Non-consensual Sex Is Sexual Assault

Amnon, finally alone with Tamar, says, "Come lie with me my sister." Tamar replies, "No," and uses a further three negative constructions in her verbal response to Amnon's demand. Four negatives (in bold in the quote below) are in her first sentence, *al* (three times) and *lo* (once) as the negative Hebrew forms.⁵

"No, my brother,

do **not** force me;

for such a thing is **not** done (*sh*) in Israel;

do **not** do anything so vile (*neb'âlâ*)! (2 Samuel 13:12)

Tamar's "no" means that any sex, that follows, is non-consensual. If a woman says "no," then sex is rape. Tamar uses verbal resistance.

Amnon does not listen. He uses force to get what he wants, shown by the use of three repeated verbs in the following schema (Trible 1984:46-47).

Amnon "took hold of her" (13:11) "being stronger than she" (13:14)

(*hזq*, to be strong or to take hold)

Amnon says, *â€œlie with meâ€* (13:11) and he *â€œlay with herâ€* (13:14)

(*Âjkb* to lie with)

Tamar says to Amnon, *â€œdo not force*

= violate meâ€ (13:12)â€ Amnon, *â€œforced = raped her (13:14)â€*

(*â€›nh* to force or to humble)

What ensues is an act of violence as Amnon uses power and physical force to rape Tamar. The biblical text is unequivocal, Amnon rapes Tamar by force. The rape is against her will.

Tamarâ€™s three sentences, two before the rape and one after, are constructed with tightly knit language, be it carefully chosen grammatical constructions or key words (in italics and underlined in the quote above and below). There are repetitions of words stemming from the same Hebrew verbal derivative, *nbl* or *â€›sh*. For example, the verb *â€›sh* *â€œto do,â€* is used twice- once in the niphal, a simple passive tense and once in the jussive (*â€™al* plus *â€›sh* in the jussive), a milder form of the negative and prohibitive command construction of *loâ€™* plus the imperfect (Kelley 1992:173-174). In this instance Tamar softens the prohibition and chooses the more dissuasive jussive construction.

In the same sentence, Tamar uses the key word, *nebÄlâ* *â€œanything so vileâ€* as well as the dissuasive negative. The stem of *nebÄlâ*, from the verb *nbl*, refers to an inappropriate and stupid act, translated by McCarter as sacrilege (McCarter 1984:322). Sacrilege is an act that violates the sacred relational order within society (Soebo 1997:712; Keefe 1993:82). Rape, or this foolish and sacrilegious act, *nebÄlâ*, not only affects the two people involved it also affects society at large. Tamar is suggesting firmly but politely to Amnon that rape is against the social expectations of the citizens of Israel.

Tamar continues to resist, using a further key word derived from *nbl* in her second sentence, *nÄbÄl*. If

Amnon goes ahead with *nebĀlā*, a foolish and sacrilegious act, he becomes a *nĀbĀl*, a social scoundrel, a fool, or as McCarter argues, an outcast, a moral pariah (1984:323).

A As for me,

where could I carry my *shame* (*herĀ•pā*)?

B And as for you,

you would be as one of the *scoundrels* (*nĀbĀl*) in Israel.

Now therefore,

I beg you,

speak to the king;

for he will not withhold me from you." (2 Samuel 13:13)

Tamar reminds Amnon of the negative social ramifications of rape, the foolish act, suggesting that his social status will be that of a social outcast, introduced with "as for you." Her lot is to be one who has to carry, shame, *herĀ•pā* another key word, introduced with "as for me." She carries shame. He becomes an outcast. Shame is the "disgrace" that one party can "put" on another, or the reproach that can rest on a nation (Bechtel 1991:54; Kutsch 1986:209-215). When Tamar says, "Where shall I carry my shame?" it means that she has not lived up to the social expectations of those around her. The state of shame impacts on "who she is." Shame decreases honour and lowers status. Tamar then again tries to redeem the situation, offering a possible alternative action where there would not be loss of social status for them both. She suggests that Amnon obtain the king's permission for the relationship.

In Tamar's third and last sentence, this time after the rape, she uses the word, *rĀ*, meaning evil. She does not use *rĀ* to describe the rape but to describe Amnon's act of sending her away as being worse than the actual rape. According to Exodus 22:16 and Deuteronomy 22:28, a man who raped

a virgin was obliged to marry her (Cartledge 2001:537). Tamar alludes to this obligation. The act of sending her away is an expression of divorce. Her rape is *rāâ*, wrong but the sending away/ divorce is an even greater *rāâ*, evil. The number of key words referring to actions bringing social disorder and shame multiplies: sacrilege *nebĀlā*, shame *herepā*, scoundrel, *nĀbĀl*, and evil, *rāâ*. Ammon's rape of Tamar will have a negative impact on society at large.

The dissuasive vocabulary that Tamar uses in the dangerous environment of her rape echoes that of Judges 19-20. When the Levite returns home with his *pīlĀ'gĀ'Āj*/ concubine, a fellow Ephraimite offers him hospitality in Gibeah. However, the perverse locals want to have intercourse with the Levite (Judges 19:22). The man offering hospitality says, "Do not act so wickedly, do not do this vile thing" (Judges 20:6). Tamar's words in Hebrew, using *nebĀlā* and *rāâ* echo those of the Ephraimite of Judges, and even exactly the same phrase, "do not do this vile thing" Tamar's words allude to the fate of the *pīlĀ'gĀ'Āj*/ concubine of Judges, when she speaks to Amnon.

Tamar offers diplomatic, dissuasive, verbal resistance to rape. She uses all her faculties to refrain Amnon from rape: a clear refusal with the word, "no," diplomacy with the dissuasive jussive. She appeals to social reason, and she makes reference to a previous frightful instance of rape in Israel's history. She offers physical resistance. Despite all this resistance, Tamar is raped, forced into a sexual act against her will. Stinson-Wesley defines rape as, "any sexual act that is attempted or completed by force, threat of force or coercion against another person's will" (1996:225). Even more clearly put, Amnon's actions are criminal. Tamar is exposed to "forced sexual activity" otherwise known as "sexual assault." Tamar's rape in the end is not the result of sexual urge or motivation as is often given as a kind of excuse for men's behaviour. Her rape is not love or sex. It is violence.

Violence permeates all of Amnon's behaviour. The boxes in the diagram below show the words used in the biblical text at each stage of the rape to describe Amnon's state of so-called love. The words describing Amnon's feeling and physical state express sick emotions rather than life-giving ones.



PRE-RAPE	Fell in love, Tormented,
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Made himself ill,

Looks haggard,

RAPE	POST-RAPE
Lie with me Amnon stronger than Tamar, He forced her Lay with her,	Seized with a very great loathing, Loathing was even greater than the <i>â€</i> lust, "Get out!"

The negative energy of Amnon's pre-rape phase "feeds" the drive to destructive action, listed in the rape phase. Violence and "controlling behaviour" are characteristics of the abuser type. The words of the biblical text in the third box demonstrate how so-called love has turned to loathing in the post-rape phase. Different actions result from Amnon in each rape phase, reinforcing the words of the story and shown in the following diagram.

AMNON'S ACTIONS

Premeditates rape

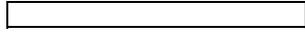
Plans rape

Feigns illness [a lie]

Uses force Violates Tamar Does not listen, 2x [deaf]	Rejects/discards Tamar Hates (<i>â€</i> used 4x)
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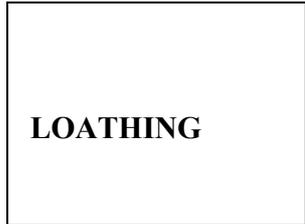
After the rape Amnon says to his attendants, "Send this thing away" as he is seized with hate, the word "hate" used four times in the one sentence. Love/lust has turned to loathing/hate as shown in

the following diagram.



LOVE

LUST



According to Tribble, Amnon has reduced Tamar to the state of a “disposable object” (1984:157-8). Loathing is the shadow side of lust. In commenting on Judges 19, Bal writes, “Rape is an expression of hatred, motivated by hate, and is often accompanied by offensive verbal language” (Bal 1988:157-8). This observation is equally applicable to Amnon. His actions are not relational and show no respect for Tamar. She is stalked, caught, and used to gratify his needs. Amnon’s controlling and destructive actions demonstrate attitudes of the “abuser type.” The intensity with which Amnon “desired” Tamar is now the intensity with which he hates her.

After the Rape: Tamar’s Trauma And Shame, Private And Public

Rape victims suffer physical and psychological effects. Immediate physical effects may be pain, especially in those areas where the assailant uses force, for example, the chest, arms, and legs (Stinson-Wesley 1996:226). Longer-term physical effects may be difficulty concentrating on daily tasks, disturbed sleep patterns, nightmares, and insomnia. There may be loss of appetite, nausea, and stomach pains. It is not known what effects Tamar suffered but it may be any of the above mentioned.

On a psychological level, all women who have been raped experience some kind of post-traumatic distress. Rape victims experience loss of physical and mental dignity because rape is an invasion. Rape means women lose control over their emotions and body because they are violated against their will as their right to say no has been abused. Debbie Hager in her interviews with ANZ women observes that as a result of rape, women often suffer a feeling of “total helplessness, profound emptiness, or total dislocation” (2001:46,50). Effects of rape are loss of emotional and psychological well-being, seen in Tamar’s outward physical state after her rape.

The description of Tamar’s outward appearance is intended to show how Tamar inwardly feels. One sentence, made up of four clauses, describes Tamar’s state after her rape.

- a) But Tamar put ashes on her head,
- b) and tore the long robe that she was wearing;
- c) she put her hand on her head, and went away,
- d) crying aloud as she went. (2 Samuel 13:19)

a) “But Tamar put ashes on her head.” The head is placed at the peak or superior part of the human body (Müller 1997:1184-9). Dressing the head with a head-dress symbolizes dignity but to the contrary, applying ashes is a symbol of lowliness (Isaiah 61:3). Tamar puts ashes on her head, an action that echoes that of Job (2:8) sitting in ashes. Both Tamar and Job have lost social standing and are humiliated. They lament their loss of social status which is closely allied with their diminished sense of being. Figuratively, ashes signify that which is without value or what is loathsome. Ashes on the head are a sign of humiliation and disgrace (Wanke 1997:939-941; Cartledge 2001:538). The shame, *herepâ*, that Tamar spoke of before the rape, “but where could I carry my shame” is now reality. Tamar now carries shame, reduced to a lower social status in her eyes, and in the eyes of the society (Bechtel 1991:54).

b) "to remove the long robe, *ketonet passim*, that she was wearing." Tamar wears a *ketonet passim* (as did Joseph in Genesis 37:3).⁶ An etiological note comments that, "this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed" (2 Samuel 13:18). Tamar's robe is special, and a symbol of her elevated social status. She, however, tears her special robe. The tearing or rending of clothes is an act of grievous affliction, revealing the sorrow of the heart (Bibleworks 1999). Tearing of clothes is often used in a context where the words sackcloth and ashes also appear.⁷ Tamar's coloured noble *ketonet passim* has become her sackcloth. The tearing not of sackcloth but a fine long robe is an expression of loss and lament.

Tamar has had her dignity torn from her, through rape. The physical invasion is now expressed with physical gestures. Before the rape Tamar has the dignity of her name. The name Tamar is derived from the word for palm tree, a tree considered to be among the tallest and most graceful of all trees found in the Middle East. If this is the allusion meant by her name, then it is confirmed, by the narrator who describes Tamar as beautiful (2 Samuel 13:1). Tamar was a person of beauty and grace but now violated, beauty and grace are exchanged for feelings of shame and loss, symbols of emotional distress (Bibleworks 1999). Tamar has become a person whose body has experienced loss of many different kinds - loss of control over her body, over her life, over her dignity.

c) "she put her hand on her head, and went away." To put one's hands on one's head is a gesture of grief (McCarter 1984:326). Jeremiah 2:37 also uses the image of hands on the head to express the shame of Israel as a rejected lover. Covering the head with one's hands and with ashes is a double image. It produces a more intensified expression of the abused person's state of deep shame.

d) "crying aloud [*zâq*] as she went." The basic meaning of the root *zâq* is "to cry for help in time of distress." In the qal stem, the word is used almost exclusively in reference to a cry from a disturbed heart. Tamar's cry is not to summon another, but to express her deeply felt distress. *zâq* is a verb used in situations of acute distress and hence is used to express a human cry of pain (Bibleworks 1999; Albertz 1997:1088-1093). Tamar's "crying aloud" is an audible expression of

pain, emphasising the distress already expressed through her visual appearance and gestures.

Tamar's body language is one of pain. She laments her lost dignity, her social being. The actions resemble a rite of shame. The stylized account of Tamar's inner world that is ritual-like, links her with all other raped women. After the ritual we only know that she has refuge in the house of her full brother Absalom. Whether she regains her dignity we do not know as the narrative no longer speaks of her. The post rape scene is dominated by physical symbols that express Tamar's inner trauma.

An ANZ reading of the Rape of Tamar

The pre-rape scene, read with the hermeneutical lens of the ANZ literature, presents Amnon as a person with many of the characteristics of an abuser type. His father was an abuser and he is one. He is raised in an environment where as a male he is socialised to feel superior: favoured son, male rights, and physical strength. As with many rapists, he carefully plans Tamar's rape. Raping Tamar is not an act on the spur of the moment. Abuser characteristics mean he will prevaricate or take any measure to get what he wants. He feigns illness and is not transparent in his dealings with others. Amnon exercises controlling behaviour over Tamar, having her called to his physical space by his attendants, paying no heed to her clear "no," nor listening to her rational pleas. He physically forces her with sexual assault. The intensity with which Amnon loved/lusted before the rape becomes the intensity with which he loathes/hates the "thing," the royal woman, after the rape. Destructive, controlling behaviour, typical to the abuser type, drives his actions. Tamar's experience of rape is similar to that of many women who are raped in ANZ. Her rapist is known to her, it is her half-brother, Amnon. The rape occurs within the domestic environment of the royal confines.

Tamar presents herself as a very courageous woman during the rape scene. She says a very clear "no" to Amnon's command to lie with her, but he takes her by force. She offers physical and verbal resistance. She reiterates her "no" several times, speaking firmly but diplomatically. She appeals to social reason, using key words such as *nĀbĀl* (social outcast), *nebĀlā* (sacrilege), *herepā* (shame), and

raâ€ (wrong), trying to stop Amnon from raping her. The key words refer to the relationship between citizens, especially royal citizens and the citizens of the Israelite society. She pleads not to be raped but Amnon forces her. His act is one of sexual assault. It is not sex, or love, but an act of violence. The ANZ literature reviewed offered little analysis on how women tried or might try to stop abusers from raping them. (Perhaps this is an area where public health could develop training strategies for women in rape resistance.) Tamar offers as much rational, reasonable and clear resistance to rape as she is able. Unfortunately, it is to no avail. Tamar is far more aware of the social ramifications of rape than Amnon.

The ANZ literature tends to treat the post-rape scene in phases or separate the physical from the emotional trauma in the person suffering. An ANZ reading highlights Tamarâ€™s loss of control over her body. Her right to say â€œnoâ€ is violated with Amnonâ€™s act of rape. Probably she suffers bruising to her wrists and other parts of her body as a result of Amnon physically imposing himself on her. As Hager notes, rape victims suffer some form of emptiness or dislocation after rape. Tamar is invaded body and soul, losing her right to control over her body. However, the biblical description of Tamarâ€™s inner trauma, expressed with ritual-like gestures of mourning and loss- ashes on her head, her beautiful courtly clothes rent, crying aloud, gives a universal reading to her situation, uniting her with all raped women. The biblical data on Tamarâ€™s trauma and shame, if not as differentiated as the ANZ literature, is more holistic in its expression.

After the rape, Tamarâ€™s full brother, Absalom, says to her, â€œBe quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother;â€ (2 Samuel 13:20). Absalom with these words expects Tamar to be silent although in action he does allow Tamar to take refuge in his house. The narrator in the framework narrative then notes, when Tamarâ€™s father, â€œKing David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstbornâ€ (2 Samuel 13:21). David is silent on the matter of Tamarâ€™s rape and takes no action. Two male family members, father and brother, are silent. However, the rape incident does somehow become public. If one accepts that most probably the biblical narratives were written by men, then it is men creating the words put into Tamarâ€™s mouth during the rape scene. It is men saying â€œnoâ€ to rape through Tamarâ€™s words. It is men condemning Amnonâ€™s behaviour saying that rape is â€œevil,â€ and against â€œsocial

order.â€ Although male family members are silent about Tamarâ€™s rape other men such as the biblical male writers are not silent about the rape, and furthermore condemn the behaviour.

Tamar offers verbal resistance to Amnonâ€™s rape, and I speculated, based on the ANZ literature, that she probably gave physical resistance too, but both forms of resistance were to no avail. If Tamar was a 21st century female would she be able to defend herself with methods learnt at self-defence courses? Unfortunately, most probably not. Defence strategies are focussed primarily on repelling a stranger or extricating oneself from a situation of stranger rape. By far the majority of instances of rape occur within the domestic environment. The dynamics of domestic violence, as noted in the definition of domestic violence at the beginning of the paper, are about the persistent power and control of the abuser over the abused. With time, the abused takes on a daily survival mentality, trying to perpetually avoid or reduce violence, developing a self-defensive behavioural pattern that aims at receiving as little violence as possible. In a domestic violence context, being raped may be a less violent form of violence than for example, being hit with an object, or wounded with a weapon. Allowing rape may even momentarily relieve the abuserâ€™s escalation towards greater violence. Living in a domestically violent relationship is a daily struggle for survival, let alone trying to fend off sexual abuse/rape as one of many forms of domestic violence.

Tamar is raped by her half-brother. As *Te Rito* notes sibling abuse is one of the common forms of domestic violence (2002:8) and named incest when the domestic violence is sexual intercourse between siblings. At least two collections of laws within the Torah outline forbidden unions among relatives and siblings: Leviticus 18 and Deuteronomy 27:20-24.⁸ Despite the laws there are cases of forced forbidden union, be it that of Tamar or Lotâ€™s daughters lying with him in the Hebrew Bible.

Biblical and civil law may forbid intercourse between certain family members but this does not mean that the law is always followed and that abuse of the laws does not occur. It does.

Family dysfunction within any household becomes social dysfunction outside of the household. As *Te*

Rito notes, violence in families contributes to the continuation of violence within society in general. In ANZ, the effects of domestic violence on a family member may be manifested in the public arena by behaviour such as a child with socialisation problems, the inability of a woman to remain in her job, or frequent moving of job/location of a family. In the context of the David dynasty, family violence continues after the rape of Tamar. In an act of revenge, Amnon is killed by the soldiers of his half-brother, Absalom. Subsequently, Absalom organises a civil-uprising in which he loses his life, and last but not least their father, David returns to the guerrilla life-style which he led before settling in Jerusalem. Socially unacceptable behaviour in citizens does not remain private, it takes on a public outlet.

Family violence such as Amnon has perpetrated on Tamar is unacceptable social behaviour. Society is appalled by violence within families. Today's newspapers relate stories of domestic violence as does the Hebrew Bible. Violence against those closest to us does occur even though the law forbids it. Domestic violence is not acceptable behaviour and we must say so and keep hearing that it is not acceptable. Tamar calls rape a sacrilege against social order. She also says it is wrong and brings shame on all societies in which it is perpetrated. It is not right that brothers violate their sisters. We must continue to tell the stories of domestic violence, behaviour that is against social order. Every culture and age needs to be reminded that domestic violence and rape is unacceptable. This is the aim of the ANZ document *Te Rito*, and clearly one of the aims of the story of the rape of Tamar.

Notes

¹ This paper was first presented at the ANZABS meeting in Auckland, Nov. 2003.

² New Zealand documentation on domestic violence is supported by American literature. For example, Alyce D. LaViolette & Ola W. Burnett in *It Could Happen to Anyone Why Battered Women Stay* write, "violent relationships are characterized by fear, oppression, and control" (1993:xxi). They also observe that "domestic violence is about the abuse of power and control" (1993:viii).

³ R.M. Schwartz in *Adultery in the House of David*, writes of "David's forcible taking of Bathsheba" (1999:346).

⁴ Tigay in his commentary on Deuteronomy 27:22 notes that "marriage with a half-sister from a different mother was permitted at one time in Israel," but that "brother-sister" marriages were practiced mostly among the royalty" (1996:256).

[5](#) Hebrew transliteration is based on *The SBL Handbook of Style* (1999:26).

[6](#) The *ketonet* is a long shirt-like garment, generally of linen, sometimes embroidered, and a word frequently used when describing the clothing of priests. Post biblical sources such as Rabbinic Hebrew refer to the *ketonet passim* as a gown of strips, or LXX as a frock reaching to the ankles. McCarter argues for it as a long robe, accepting *passim* as the plural of *pas*, foot, (1984:325-326). This special garment is also worn by Joseph (Genesis 37:3, 23, 32).

[7](#) Several biblical passages express desolation through the tearing of clothes and several also make reference to sackingcloth and ashes (Esther 4:1,3; Isaiah 58:5; Jeremiah 6:26; Daniel 9:3 etc).

[8](#) Intercourse between siblings is forbidden by the Torah, but sometimes tolerated with a half-sibling in a royal context as mentioned in endnote 4.

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