Hearing Tamar's Voice: Contextual Readings of 2 Samuel 13:1-22[1]

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ABSTRACT

The story of Tamar in 2 Sam 13:1-22 formed the basis of a qualitative research inquiry that investigated the intricate functioning of the intercultural Bible reading process. It is a process theoretically based on the combined hermeneutical frameworks of Feminism and African hermeneutics. Although the research showed that the intercultural Bible reading process cannot avoid the complexities of an inherent power dynamic, it proved to be a space that promotes human dignity and has the inherent capacity to facilitate social transformation. The intercultural Bible reading space can thus be described as a dynamic meeting place: a space that facilitates the meeting of individuals from various cultural backgrounds and reading positions, but also the meeting between modern readers and the culturally removed biblical text. In this paper I will look at the reception history of 2 Sam 13:1-22, describing the rape of Tamar in traditional scholarship as well as feminist and African scholarship. Special attention will be given to the feminist scholar, Denise Ackermann's interpretation of hope. I will then discuss the interpretations that were given by the intercultural Bible reading groups that were constructed for the qualitative research inquiry. In doing so, I will show that the intercultural Bible reading space is a dynamic creative space that allows individual readers to draw on a wealth of personal contextual knowledge as a key to interpret the Bible text. In the intercultural Bible reading process, a diversity of readers are thus brought together that find creative new ways to journey through old biblical landscapes by drawing on contextual knowledge and sharing interpretative gifts.

A INTRODUCTION

In 2 Sam 13:1-22, we encounter the heartbreaking story of Tamar, the daughter of David and the sister of Absalom, who falls prey to the ill intentions of Amnon, her half brother. Amnon devises a sordid plan with the help of Jonadab, his crafty friend, and involves amongst other King David as accomplices in the execution of this plan. The story is skillfully constructed and

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draws the reader into the plot. Helpless to do anything to Tamar's situation, the reader becomes a distant witness to the crime committed against Tamar when Amnon fails to listen to her pleas and finally rapes her. After the violent physical act, he continues to shame her by sending her away from his house, bolting the door behind her. Tamar publicly displays her grief by putting ash on her head and tearing her beautiful dress; a dress fit for a princess. Absalom guesses as to the cause of her disgrace and takes her into his house, while David only turns red with anger, but does no more. Her voice is not heard again. She withers away in the house of Absalom, her brother, as a desolate woman.

When Tamar pleads with Amnon not to disgrace her, in a uniquely strong voice for a female character in the Biblical narrative tradition, the storyteller remarks: "But he refused to listen to her."[2] A group of culturally diverse women engaging with each other and the story of Tamar as part of a qualitative research inquiry into the intricate dynamics of the Intercultural Bible reading process, picked up on the fundamental importance of this statement by the storyteller. The group remarked on the fact that this statement made by the storyteller could be seen as a thematic one, for it is not only Amnon who does not listen to Tamar, but, in terms of the immediate context, also Absalom, David and the community she lives in. But if one considers the fact that the story of Tamar is not part of any lexicon and very seldom used in the context of preaching,[3] it seems that the observation also rings true for the modern context. Drawing on personal contextual knowledge of the painful disgrace associated with rape situated in a contemporary context, the Bible study participants also observed that the fate of Tamar is one shared by many women in the South African context today. So, often he/she/they/we/us are also not willing to listen. So often the voice of the individual victim fades away or gets lost, drowned out by a sea of noise. Although the story of Tamar is temporally and culturally removed from modern readers/hearers by two thousand years and a series of cultural changes, it also remains the story of many women today.

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2 2 Samuel 13:16 as translated in the New International Version.

3 Birch comments on this tendency: "The text is not read publicly in the church, and it is seldom preached. Persons experienced at Bible study are often shocked to have this story called to their attention. They had no idea such a story was a part of the biblical tradition. It is as if the silence counselled by Absalom has extended through the centuries to the present." Cf. Bruce C. Birch, "The First and Second Book of Samuel," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 2; ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1306.

It is partly as a result of the universal and timeless nature of the story[4] that it came to serve as the basis for the intercultural engagement that gave 38 women the opportunity to hear Tamar's voice.

B CREATING A SPACE WHERE TAMAR'S VOICE COULD BE HEARD

The history of the interpretation of the Bible is a history of power and control. In this regard Jeremy Punt argues as follows:

> Attempts to say what the Bible "really means," to get the meaning, always stood in service of purposes determined by ecclesial, socio-political, ethical, nationalistic or other such concerns. Attempts to subvert existing claims to the Bible and its meaning often served similar, if opposing, interests. Although the very notion of the meaning of the biblical texts are denied by some today, it has to be

[4] The choice for an OT narrative text as the basis for a modern intercultural engagement was based on the following considerations: 1) The Bible is a well known and often discussed piece of literature that functions in believing as well as non-believing communities. Participants would be able to engage with Biblical text from their unique reading positions whether believing or secular. 2) Narrative text is more approachable for modern readers, in the sense that readers approach characters in stories as they do people in everyday life. See Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 39. 3) Stories are a unique tool for gaining insight and making sense of reality. Ackermann explains this dimension of stories as follows: "Telling stories is intrinsic to claiming one's identity and in the process finding impulses for hope… Narrative has a further function. Apart from claiming identity and naming the evil, narrative has a sense-making function. The very act of telling the story is an act of making sense of an often incomprehensible situation, of a suffering and chaotic world in which people wrestle with understanding and in so doing seek to experience relief." Cf. Denise M. Ackermann, *Tamar's Cry: Re-Reading an Ancient Text in the Midst of an HIV/AIDS Pandemic* (Johannesburg: Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa, 2001), 18-19. 4) Feminism informs the choice of narrative in a number of ways: a) Because of the central focus on personal experience of Feminism, the text must tell of something that touches reader/hearer on 'n existential level. The story chosen for the research must thus invite modern readers/hearers to engage with it from out of their own world of experience. b) The story of the rape of Tamar brings the venerable position of women in society in focus. Women in modern contexts are encouraged to engage with the text on this sensitive issue and break the silence. c) Feminism places emphasis on the body. In the story of Tamar's rape her body is central. Modern readers are thus encouraged to read and speak from a position of the body. d) The abuse of power and the influence on women and children are emphasised in the choice of text. 5) Tamar appeals to a communal ethic when she says that: "…such a thing is not done in Israel." As African hermeneutics, that appeals to a communal ethic, functions as a backbone to the intercultural bible reading process, it seems important to hear the voice of someone let down by the community.

> acknowledged that many people continue to find the Bible a valuable guide for their lives. The Bible as site of struggle involves, however, more than difference of interpretive opinion. The Bible is involved in the discourse of power and is drawn into a struggle for interpretive control as well as eventually, ownership thereof.[5]

Looking back at the history of biblical scholarship,[6] it is clear that a privileged position of power was long held by the practitioners of Western aca-

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[5] Jeremy Punt, "From Re-Writing to Re-Reading the Bible in Post-Colonial Africa: Considering the Options and Implications," *Missionalia* 30/3 (2002): 410-442.

[6] Through the course of history different strategies have been applied to interpret biblical text. Broadly speaking, four main phases of biblical scholarship can be distinguished. Each phase focuses on a different aspect of the interpretation process: 1) Historical critical approach: the world behind the text. In this approach to Bible interpretation the focus is on the description of the text in terms of its process of development and the world in which the author/s functioned. Jonker describes this movement as follows: "The historical-critical approaches hold in common the presupposition that (biblical) texts can and should be understood only in the light of the historical context within which they originate…" Cf. Louis C. Jonker, "Approaches Focusing on the Production of Texts," in *Fishing for Jonah (Anew): Various Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (eds. Louis C. Jonker and Douglas Lawrie; Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005b), 27-58. 2) Literary approach: the world of the text. The text in itself became the main focus of Biblical scholarship. "A text is a unique linguistic unit, constituted by the relationship of the parts to one another and to the whole. Whereas historical criticism regarded meaning as a function of origin, those who turned to the text itself regarded meaning as a function of the relationships among the parts of the text" Cf. Douglas Lawrie, "Approaches Focusing on the Texts Themselves," in *Fishing for Jonah (Anew): Various Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (eds. Louis C. Jonker and Douglas Lawrie; Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005a), 68. 3) The role of the reader in the interpretation process: The world in front of the text. In this approach the role of the reader is taken serious. "(T)he reader does not merely discover meaning, but plays an active part in the creation of meaning." Readers furthermore do not read text in isolation but as a function of the constant interaction between the text and the reader's personal context. The context of the reader becomes the key to the understanding of text. "The specific context of the reader provides the horizon of understanding that enables the reader to make sense of the text" Cf. Douglas Lawrie, "Approaches Focusing on the Reception of Texts," in *Fishing for Jonah (Anew): Various Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (eds. Louis C. Jonker and Douglas Lawrie; Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005b), 111, Lawrie, "Approaches," 111. 4) Hermeneutic of suspicion: the world under the text. "A number of influential approaches to the interpretation of texts are based on the suspicion that there are hidden factors at work in the production, circulation and reception of texts." Lawrie continues by describing a "hermeneutic of suspension": "The hermeneutics of suspicion suspects that what usually remains hidden is indeed a guilty secret. Neither authors, nor texts, nor readers are 'innocent' or neutral. They often work together to keep up the (false) appearance of normality and ra-

demic scholarship. The language, themes of discussion and focus of investigation were mainly determined by the few who had access to the academic environment. This privileged position is challenged by Feminism and African hermeneutics by arguing for a different space of conversation and different conversation partners. Hamar maintains that:

> Feminist liberation theologies challenge traditional Western understandings of power in two major ways: first, by a change of perspective from those who dominate and are in control, to those who are experiencing domination – more explicitly, by shifting the perspective from the point of view of oppressors to the perspective and comprehension of the oppressed; secondly by a redefinition of power from "power over," domination and coercion, to a notion of power characterized by mutuality, reciprocity and "power with": a redefinition of power from domination and coercion to "co-powering" and cooperation.[7]

The intercultural Bible reading space theoretically developed out of the combined hermeneutical framework of Feminism and African hermeneutics. Whereas Feminism argues for the importance of the contextually imbedded voice of the individual,[8] African hermeneutics[9] theoretically offers a communal

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tionality." Cf. Douglas Lawrie, "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion: The Hidden Worlds of Ideology and the Unconscious," in *Fishing for Jonah (Anew): Various Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (eds. Louis C. Jonker and Douglas Lawrie; Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005c): 167.

[7] Anna K. Hamar, "Some Understandings of Power in Feminist Liberation Theologies," *Feminist Theology* 12 (1996): 10-20.

[8] In Ackermann's definition of Feminism, the inclusivity of the term is made clear. Feminism is described as follows: "The commitment to the praxis of liberation for women from all that oppresses us. Feminism does not benefit any specific group, race or class of women; neither does it promote privilege for women over men. It is about a different consciousness, a radically transformed perspective which questions our social, cultural, political and religious traditions and calls for structural change in all these spheres." Cf. Denise M. Ackermann, "Meaning and Power: Some Key Terms in Feminist Liberation Theology," *Scriptura* 44 (1993): 2124. The importance given to the contextuality of individual voices grows out of one of the fundamental principles of Feminism namely the central role of women's experience. Ackermann describes the importance of this principle for a feminist hermeneutic as follows: "A feminist hermeneutic, like all hermeneutics, is grounded in experience, and more particularly in women's experience of oppression… It is essential to acknowledge that experience itself is interpreted and filtered through our cultural matrix, which in turn is formed by the race, class, time and histories of our lives. There is no universal experience for all people or even for all women. Yet, while accepting the particularity of experience as a hermeneutical category, we must acknowledge the universal fact of discrimination against and oppression of women." Cf. Ackermann, "Meaning and Power," 21.

space where the voice of the individual can be heard. The space that African hermeneutics describes, allows for the transformation from a situation of multiculturality to interculturality, where the differences between various cultural agents are not merely tolerated but rather celebrated and where they are brought into real interaction. African hermeneutics thus asks for an ethic of hospitality. As Vosloo proposes:

> The challenge posed by the moral crisis does not merely ask for tolerance and peaceful co-existence or some abstract plea for community, but for an ethos of hospitality. The opposite of cruelty and hostility is not simply freedom from the cruel and hostile relationship, but hospitality. Without an ethos of hospitality it is difficult to envisage a way to challenge economic injustice, racism and xenophobia, lack of communication, the recognition of the rights of another, etc. Hospitality is a prerequisite for a more public life.[10]

The praxis of the intercultural Bible reading process therefore implies the coming together of diverse individuals from different cultural backgrounds within a safe space that allows for the interaction between these individuals and the culturally diverse Biblical text.[11] The intercultural Bible reading space

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[9] The term African hermeneutics does not imply a singular all encompassing movement or approach to theological issues. Africa is fragmented and approaches to theological issues are numerous. Pluralism is of course not unique to Africa, but rather typical of a post-modern reality, a reality that challenges the universalisation of human experience. "Resistance to this universalising and imperialist tendency, therefore, means an assertion of the radically, irreducibly plural nature of human existence. It implies a fundamental respect for the Other, one that does not and will not attempt to reduce the Other to the Same. Life is basically dialogical, like a good conversation. It is a relation that retains its distance; it is a face-to-face engagement that respects the 'otherness of the other'; it is committed to hearing the voice of the other. Pluralism, thus, is a given fact of political, cultural, theological and religious life." Cf. Robin Peterson, "Theological and Religious Pluralism," in *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives* (eds. John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 223. African hermeneutics takes diversity seriously and does not strive towards the creation of a new approach to biblical interpreation, but as Jonker rightly states: "An African hermeneutic is rather a hermeneutical stance or disposition according to which, and in service of which, a whole variety of exegetical methods or tools are used." Cf. Louis C. Jonker, "'Contextuality' in (South) African Exegesis: Reflections on the Communality of our Exegetical Methodologies," *OTE* 18/3 (2005a): 637-650.

[10] Robert Vosloo, "Public Morality and the Need for an Ethos of Hospitality," *Scriptura* 82 (2003): 63-71.

[11] The intercultural moment thus lies on two levels: on the one hand lies the difference between various cultural frameworks, that Jonker describes as follows: "Intercultural hermeneutics therefore takes its point of departure in the interaction, the

poses challenges for the traditional bipolar model[12] that is used to explain the hermeneutical process. Kessler[13] problematises all three traditional elements involved in the hermeneutical process, but he primarily indicates how the role of the reader is challenged by the intercultural Bible reading process:

> In the traditional model, the reader is understood to be singular – one reader… In contrast, within the process of Intercultural Bible reading, the position of the reader becomes plural. By definition, the reader is no longer an individual or a single group, but multiple readers who are linked together. The receiver of the text is not a single pole in this hermeneutic model; it is a plurality of poles.[14]

Kessler goes on to describe the unique position of the reader in the intercultural Bible reading process as follows:

> These readers do not simply have the text as object of interpretation; they have other readers with whom they communicate. Reading the text thus becomes a double communication. It is communication with the text, as in the traditional bipolar model. And by means of the text, it is communication with the author. However, reading also includes communication with other readers. This communication forms a constitutive part of the process of understanding. Understanding the text is no longer possible without the communication with other readers. Through intercultural Bible reading, these other readers are no longer readers who come from the same context. These readers are different from one another and they are global.[15]

By allowing for the interaction between culturally diverse individuals, the intercultural Bible reading process theoretically becomes a safe space that promotes human dignity and facilitates social transformation.

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communication between different cultures," and on the other hand the interaction between diverse modern Bible readers and the culturally removed Biblical text. Cf. Louis C. Jonker, "The Global Context and its Consequences for Old Testament Interpretation" (paper presented at the 19th Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 15-22 July 2007), 6.

12 Kessler describes the traditional bipolar model as follows: "The traditional hermeneutical model may be called bipolar. The centre of this model is always the text, which may be written or spoken, although biblical texts are, of course, written texts. One pole of the bipolar model represents the text's author… The second pole of the bipolar model represents the receiver of the text." Cf. Rainer Kessler, "From Bipolar to Multipolar Understanding," in *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (eds. Hans De Wit, Louis C. Jonker, Marlene Kool and Daniel Schipani; Indiana: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2004), 452.

13 Kessler, "From Bipolar to Multipolar Understanding," 452-459.

14 Kessler, "From Bipolar to Multipolar Understanding," 456.

15 Kessler, "From Bipolar to Multipolar Understanding," 457.

In order to test the above mentioned theoretical claim of the intercultural Bible reading space, an empirical study was conducted in the local congregation where I served as pastor. The empirical study explored the complexities of the intercultural Bible reading space by examining aspects such as the inherent power dynamic that functions in the space as well as the role that the ideological framework of individual participants played in the Bible reading process. Because of the dynamic complexities of terms such as power, ideology and culture, a theoretical framework was required that would bring into play the hybrid identity of above mentioned terms. Power, ideology and culture were critically analysed in the intercultural Bible reading process by using the theories of Foucault[16], Thomson[17] and Hofstede[18] representatively.

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[16] Foucault understands power as a relational strategy that functions in such a manner as to achieve more power. Foucault shows that where there is power, there is resistance, and that not all power is negative. "When Foucault discusses power, he does not mean by this idea a fixed quantitative or physical force, something innately possessed or held by individuals or institutions. He acknowledges that power often is channeled through people or institutions, but this is not due to the inherent 'power of such people or institutions. Rather, Foucault understands power as a force, something present throughout the world and in all people. Power is therefore something distinct from authority. Everyone has power, whether they exercise that power individually, in groups or through institutions." George further remarks in this regard: "Power, whether individual or institutional, always seeks to become more powerful and influential in society, and thus there is constant interaction, negotiation, and competition among forces. Frequently, forces combine in particular, complex arrangement or configuration in order to achieve more power." Cf. Mark K. George, "Foucault," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Andrew K. M. Adam; Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000), 92-93. The theory of Foucault on power is of great importance for the study of the intercultural Bible reading space because it focuses on the relational nature of power and how it functions in a particular social environment.

[17] Thomson claims that to study ideology is to "study the ways in which meaning (signification) serves to sustain relations of domination." He elaborates on this definition by saying: "The analysis of ideology, according to the conception which I propose, is primarily concerned with the ways in which symbolic forms intersect with relations of power. It is concerned with the ways in which meaning is mobilized in the social world and serves thereby to bolster up individuals and groups who occupy positions of power… To study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination." John B. Thomson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (California: Stanford University Press, 1990), 56, 131.

[18] In line with the more dynamic cultural definition of Geertz, Hofstede describes culture as: "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another." Cf. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), 1-33. Geert H. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviours, Institutions, and Organisations across Nations* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publica-

The empirical Bible reading space and process that was constructed for the study brought together female Bible readers in Grahamstown,[19] in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Four separate sessions took place with a group of eight culturally diverse women[20] taking part in each session. The sessions were planned and constructed in order to optimalise the meeting between the culturally diverse women[21] and to allow for enough time to engage with the culturally diverse Biblical text.[22] The three hour sessions consisted of ten

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tions, 2001), 9. Hofstede distinguishes between three levels of culture namely: universal, collective and individual, that manifests itself in values and cultural practices. Hofstede identifies five universal depth dimensions of culture: "…each rooted in a basic problem with which all societies have to cope: (1) Power distance, which is related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality; (2) Uncertainty avoidance, which is related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future; (3) Individualism vs. collectivism, which is related to the integration of individuals into primary groups; (4) Masculinity versus femininity, which is related to the division of emotional roles between men and women and (5) Long term versus short term orientation, which is related to the choice of focus for people's efforts: the future or the present." Cf. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences*, 29.

[19] I conducted the research in Grahamstown owing to my position as the Minister of the Dutch Reformed church in Grahamstown. As a result of my position in the community I had contact with a broad spectrum of believers who could take part in the study. The physical research was conducted in the Rectory of the Dutch Reformed Church in Grahamstown and created an ideal space where the participants could meet each other and engage in a free, non-threatening and comfortable space. The Rectory is a quiet and spacious home that allowed all the participants free movement and enough silence to contemplate the Biblical text.

[20] Cultural diversity was ensured in each group by the fact that participants were selected according to a structured profile. The profile was constructed in such a way as to represent the cultural diversity that exist in the Eastern Cape region. Each group consisted of a young person, a skilled reader, a reader for the Dutch Reformed community, someone representing the Anglican community, a black/Xhosa speaking woman, a non believer, a reader between the age of 30-40 years and a final participant that would enhance the group diversity in any way possible.

[21] The sessions were designed to stimulate inclusive thinking. "In the extension of the capacity to change perspective lies the capacity for inclusive thinking. Inclusive thinking means that one experiences and approaches another as someone with the same human dreams and longings for a safe, happy, and full life." Cf. Marlene Kool, "Intercultural Bible Reading as a Practical Setting for Intercultural Communication," in *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (eds. Hans De Wit, Louis C. Jonker, Marlene Kool and Daniel Schipani; Indiana: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2004), 370. The process that was constructed therefore had to create a feeling of safety in participants and needed to allow enough time for in-depth interaction.

[22] As mentioned above, the Biblical narrative of 2 Sam 13:1-22 formed the basis for the intercultural engagement. Participants were led through a process that allowed them to engage with the Biblical narrative on a deep level.

phases that slowly led the participants deeper into the intercultural engagement. In Phase 1, participants were introduced to each other and the three hour process was explained. A workbook[23] was introduced to the participants in which all of the relevant data was collected for the imperial study. During Phase 2 participants filled in a demographic questionnaire and completed a free writing exercise[24] that was developed for the study to test the ideological starting point of individual participants. Phase 3 introduced a time line exercise where participants got the opportunity to place themselves temporally with regard to major world events. Participants were asked to indicate when they were born, where they were in 1994[25] and when they first became aware of rape as a social issue that threatened women. This exercise served as a basic conversation starter, but also allowed individual participants to get to know the other participants a bit better. Phase 4 consisted of a *Lectio divina* reading of 2 Sam 13:1-22. The story was read meditatively in both Afrikaans and English. In order to place the Biblical text in a temporal context, the participants were given some background information on the world behind the text in Phase 5. In Phase 6, participants were given the opportunity to spend some quiet time on personal reflection. At which point in phase 7 participants were paired up[26] and given the opportunity to share their impressions of the Biblical story with each other. The emphasis in this phase was not on dialogue, but rather on creating a safe space where one person could talk and the other participant spent time listening to the interpretations of their partner. Phase 8 consisted of an open group discussion.[27] The discussions were introduced by the research assistant[28] and

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[23] The workbook that was used to collect all the research data, was designed especially for this empirical study. It contained, amongst others, all the questionnaires for the research process, a number of different translations of 2 Sam 13:1-22 and enough space to make notes and comment on the process.

[24] Hofstede's cultural theory, as mentioned above, identifies five depth dimensions of culture. Hofstede's theory represents culture as linear axes indicating the continuum between two opposite poles in each depth dimension. Two images per depth dimension were chosen to test the participants' basic ideological response (i.e. words located in a specific social context) before and after the intercultural engagement, by allowing participants time for free writing as a response to the images.

[25] 1994 was a watershed year in the history of South Africa, indicating the end of the apartheid regime as the first general elections were held. Fundamentally it was this change in the country that allowed for the possibility of intercultural engagement.

[26] Individuals were pared up by the research team to allow for engagement between individuals who were as culturally diverse as possible.

[27] The discussions were recorded and transcribed after the research process was completed.

[28] I had the privilege of working with Kim Barker, a very skilled research assistant. The task of the research assistant was to guide the research process and to ensure that all the phases took place in the allotted time. During the open conversation, the re-

continued freely for 45 minutes to an hour. After the conversation, in Phase 9, participants completed the free writing exercise for the second time. They also filled in a questionnaire pertaining to the power dynamics experienced in the conversations and exploring the power dynamic as depicted in the biblical story. In Phase 10, participants were thanked for their participation and given the opportunity to remark on the process and to give relevant feedback.

The data collected during the physical research process was reworked into a digital format in order to simplify the analysis thereof. After transcribing the recorded conversations, a detailed conversation analysis was conducted. The results of the conversation analysis formed the basis of the power analysis results that the study produced. The data collected in the free writing exercise was analysed with the help of a data analysis tool developed specifically for the research process and allowed for an ideological assessment of the participants before and after the intercultural Bible reading experience.

The data collected and analysed confirmed the value of the intercultural Bible reading space as one that had the inherent potential to facilitate social transformation. Participants had the experience of being truly heard and of engaging with each other. The voice of "the culturally removed other" often challenged perceptions in individuals and helped them to comprehend the complexity that social situations often present. The discovery of the "other" and the everyday realities that others often have to face, resulted in a greater awareness of the participants' personal position, especially if that position was one of privilege. However, the space could not escape the problematic nature of an inherent power dynamic. Power functions in social situations and the inevitable forming of alliances between more powerful participants could not be prevented. When constructing groups for an intercultural Bible reading process, it is important to be aware of the realities of power in a social situation and to pick participants considering the issue of difference as well as issues that promote the formation of alliances.

In addition to the above mentioned research results, the study also produced wonderfully rich interpretations of Tamar's story. In order to fully appreciate the richness of the interpretations of the story of Tamar that was produced by the intercultural groups used in this study, I would like to compare it to the interpretations of traditional scholarship as well as interpretations developed by feminist and African scholars. The goal of the discussion is not to give a comprehensive or exhaustive indication of all interpretations of 2 Sam 13:1-22 that exists, but rather to show the trends of interpretation from different spheres. In comparing these different readings of Tamar's story, I will hope-

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search assistant guided the conversation, but did not in any way regulate it. The discussions that took place were free and open.

fully succeed in showing the importance of the voices that are heard from the margin and how their interpretations can enrich modern Biblical scholarship.

C LISTENING TO TAMAR'S VOICE

1 Hearing from the Centre

Traditional biblical scholarship, consisting mainly of white European or American males, considers Tamar's story as one incident in the intriguing plot of Absalom's revolt against David. Fokkelman's[29] commentary that first appeared in 1981 does not treat 2 Sam 13:1-22 as a separate story, but rather as a prelude to further enhance the complicated situation that exists between Absalom en Amnon with regards to the succession of David's throne. Anderson, in his commentary that forms part of the *Word Biblical Commentary*-series, states:

> The meaning of this pericope can be explained adequately only when it is seen as part of chaps. 13-20, which form a self-contained literary unit. It seems that Absalom's rebellion created the most serious political crisis during David's reign, and as such it could have been seen as God's judgment of David.[30]

McCarter agrees when he states: The story of the rape of Tamar and its consequences in chapters 13 and 14 stands as a prologue to the account of Absalom's rebellion.[31] McCarter is further of opinion that the two chapters mentioned above are primarily interested in Absalom. Amnon's crime is that of the rape of an unmarried women and not of incest. The Amnon-Tamar story is one of the most sordid accounts in the OT but it contains no explicit editorial comment; however, the pleading of Tamar is a more effective judgment on Amnon's actions than any editorial remarks or moralising could have been.[32]

Baldwin understands Tamar's story as a subdivision of the plot that extends from 2 Sam 13:1 to 19:40: The rape of Tamar initiates a series of events which dominate the latter part of David's reign and threaten to discredit him entirely, so that he almost loses his throne, together with any right to indicate which son should succeed him.[33] Brueggemann continues along these

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[29] Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses* (Assen: Gorcum, 1981).

[30] Arnold A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Texas: Word Books Publishers, 1989), 177.

[31] P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1984), 78.

[32] Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 177.

[33] Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 246.

same lines by stating that Tamar's story is the result of Nathan's judgment of David after he commits adultery with Bathsheba. He argues:

> David has put the future of his family at risk by his greedy seizure of Uriah's wife. The remainder of the succession narrative concerns that troubled family and particularly David's sons.[34]

He further describes the episode as part of the succession narrative:

> (c)hapters 13-19 concern principally Absalom. Within the larger unit, chapters 13-14 are commonly reckoned as a separate episode ostensibly having Amnon and Tamar as the lead characters. Even at the beginning (3:1) and the end (14:44) of those chapters, however, it is Absalom to whom attention is given.[35]

All the above mentioned interpretations thus imbeds Tamar's story into the ideologically-constructed narrative that describes the turmoil in David's house as the race for succession to the throne heats up. A remarkable alternative can be found in Birch's *The new interpreter's Bible* where the work of Pamela Cooper White is uses to illustrate how Tamar's story can be used to comment on issues of violence and abuse for modern readers. The pattern of Tamar's story is repeated in the story of many modern women who are the victims of rape or incest, yet whose experience has been denied or hidden.[36] Birch further comments on the fact that the story is not often used in liturgical contexts, and this reiterates its importance for modern reading/believing communities.

> In reading this story, we are forced to recognize our own experience in this ancient tale. There is an empowerment that comes from recognizing that this story names present realities as well as those long passed. If such stories are read as part of our own biblical tradition, similar stories can be faced in our own lives … to read of the courage and wisdom of Tamar, may encourage those who have been victimized in our own time to give voice to their own experience, so that conspiracies of silence do not allow continued violence to be denied or ignored.[37]

Birch's interpretation takes the voice of Tamar seriously and indicates how her voice can be used to empower modern readers and to help in the unmasking of situations of violence.

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[34] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 286.
[35] Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 286.
[36] Birch, "The First and Second Book of Samuel," 1306.
[37] Birch, "The First and Second Book of Samuel," 1306.

In conclusion, it can therefore be stated that traditional scholarship predominantly interprets Tamar as an event and not as a person. Tamar's story forms a small part in the larger, more important narrative of the House of David and of the intriguing plot that develops in the race to succession. According to this interpretation, the story of Tamar is part of the Absalom narrative, which is on its part again a part of the David narrative. An ideology-critical approach to the text reveals the relevance of this interpretation in that it quite accurately identifies the ideological motivation behind the composition of the narrative.

2 Hearing from a Feminist Position

Cheryl Exum illuminates the focus of feminist readings of biblical stories, especially stories of female characters, when she states:

> I do not speak of these women's stories in any absolute sense, as if by deconstructing the male voice, we will be closer to the "truth" or "the real story." To suggest that there is one proper way to read the text, results in an authoritarianism characteristic of phallocentric criticism – a position that feminist criticism rejects in its recognition (and celebration) of contradiction and multiplicity. A feminist reading will not be a neutral reading, "neutral" or "objective" readings usually bring terms for what turn out to be androcentric readings. The relation of reading to truth involves the issue of interests, and our interests determine the questions we ask to a text.[38]

Feminist readings of 2 Sam 13:1-22 thus try to unmask the androcentric ideology behind the story and tries to give a voice to the victims of the story. Women's reaction to the story and the open discussion of their interpretations, give a new voice to victims.

Feminist interpretations of the story of Tamar characteristically start with a discussion of the world in which the readers of the text find themselves. How Tamar's voice impacts on the realities of real flesh and blood readers, is often the focus of feminist readings of the story.

Phyllis Trible uses, amongst others, the story of Tamar in 2 Sam 13 in her seminal work, *Texts of Terror*.[39] Trible divides the story in three episodes namely 1) Before the crime, 2) The crime – Amnon and Tamar, and 3) After the crime: Episode one presents the characters and their circumstances; episode

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[38] J. Cheryl Exum, "Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative," in *The Pleasure of her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts* (ed. Alice Bach; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 45-67.

[39] Trible, Phyllis, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

two reports a scheme devised for the prince by his advisor; and episode three enlists the authority of the king.[40] Some cursory remarks on Trible's interpretation are in order. She remarks with regards to Tamar's introduction to the reader/hearer:

> First named is Absalom, the third son, whose presence hovers over the entire tale, though he himself appears only near the end. Last is Amnon, the firstborn, whose desire initiates the action. Between these two males stands the female who relates to each of them and also has her own identity.

Tamar's reaction when the intentions of Amnon become clear is also highlighted by Trible as she indicates how Tamar's wisdom stands over and against the shady plan of Jonadab. Trible remarks: In the presence of a rapist, Tamar panics not. In fact, she claims her voice.[41]

Tracy Hansen follows the line of Trible's above quoted remark when she states in a very honest and vulnerable interpretation of the text: It is a story that I found very helpful as I began to face up to the sexual abuse I had suffered as a child.[42] Hansen shows how the story of Tamar has important similarities to modern situations of rape that happen within family structures. The familiar nature of the perpetrator, the silence with which authorities often meet claims of rape and violence and the process of grieving that the victim experiences are just some of the points of connection that she highlights. Hansen's interpretation is a remarkable example of a reading where the reader identifies with the victim in the story.

Cheryl Exum[43] makes a number of valuable points in her discussion of female victims of rape in biblical narratives, aptly named, "Raped by the pen." This article is very important for the discussion of the Tamar story. I conclude this section by naming the main points of Exum's argument. First, Exum states:

> There is no sense in which the damage that can be done by a literary text is comparable to the actual violence as experienced by women in the real world, to the trauma and pain inflicted on the body through an act of sexual aggression and hatred.[44]

Also in the case of Tamar it is important not to lose sight of the fact that she is in the first place a victim of physical sexual violence. The crime com-

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40 Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 37.
41 Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 45.
42 Tracy Hansen, "My name is Tamar," *Theology* 95 (1992): 370-377.
43 J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).
44 Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 170.

mitted against her is written on her body. Second, the rape of Tamar also takes place in the narrative space: The narrated rape is perhaps the most gruesome and violent tale in the Bible.[45] By reading and re-reading the narrative of Tamar's rape the act of violence is repeated in the mind and heart of the reader. As mentioned above, Tamar's story is presented to the reader imbedded in the succession narrative of David. Tamar's story thus becomes merely an episode in a greater patriarchal intrigue. By portraying her story in this way, Tamar is raped on a third level, by the writer of the story. Her story becomes just another building block in a bigger narrative, a narrative that is dominated by men and power. Thus, according to Exum, Tamar is the victim of the violence of rape on at least three levels.

The interpretations given by feminist biblical scholars clearly explore the theme of violence on a number of levels by using personal experience as the starting point. The system, the writer and the physical act are closely looked at in order to truly hear Tamar's voice. The use of personal experience as starting point gives rise to a richness of diverse interpretations as discussed above.

3 Hearing from an African Place

In this section I discuss an important study that was done at the University of KwaZulu-Natal under the leadership of Gerald West with 2 Sam 13 as focus text. The study concretely explored the realities of West's practice of "contextual Bible study."[46] In the study 2 Sam 13 was read by ordinary readers, after which point the issue of sexual violence was discussed. The reading groups were constructed as follows:

> In each community we divided the participants into four small groups, one consisting of older women, one consisting of older men,

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[45] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 171.

[46] West describes the point of departure of the process of "contextual Bible study" as follows: "The contextual Bible study process includes at least four central concerns or commitments. They are, first, a commitment to read the Bible for the perspective of the South African context, particularly from the perspective of the poor and oppressed; second a commitment to read the Bible in community with others, particularly with those from contexts different from our own; third a commitment to read the Bible critically; and fourth, a commitment to individual and social transformation through contextual Bible study." Cf. Gerald O. West, "The Bible and Theology," in *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives* (eds. John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio; Maryknoll: Orbis books 1994): 18.

> one consisting of younger women, and one consisting of younger men.[47]

The text was read by each group and then a discussion took place between the groups. West states:

> Our research showed quite clearly a measurable impact. First, all the groups have owned the issue of gender violence. This is most marked in the responses by the older men. This group was initially quite defensive in their responses. However, after the "Contextual Bible Study" there was no hint of defensiveness at all among either the older or younger men. Indeed, these male groups were able to enter, without reservation, into the contours of a theology of those who have been raped. One of the remarkable features of the Bible study on 2 Samuel 13:1-22 is that it has the capacity to reach men in a way that bypasses their usual defensive response to the issue of gender violence. The ownership of the issue among the women was more nuanced, as one would expect. The men have had to move quite substantially, whereas the women were already committed to the issue of gender violence. For the older women the Bible study provided resources with which to explore and analyze the social construction of gender, and this is an enduring aspect of their appropriation. For the younger women the Bible study clearly dispelled the notion that women who are raped "were asking for it." The impact of the Bible study for them is that they are able to move beyond having to defend women from such charges and into a more in-depth analysis of the effects of abuse on women.[48]

West summarises the results of the study as follows:

> (1) The Tamar "Contextual Bible Study" clearly provides a vocabulary with which to talk about a lived experience which is not normally talked about "in church"; (2) Second, the Tamar "Contextual Bible Study" has totally transformed the discourse of the churches. All the groups agreed that the church was a place in which "these things" were never discussed. Not only was the church not a safe place to speak of these matters, if gender violence was discussed, it was to condemn the victim/survivor herself. By the end of our research process each church has not only become a site in which "these things" can be discussed, it has become a safer place too; (3) Third, and closely related to the above points, the Tamar "Contextual Bible Study" has given resources for a theological engagement with the issue of gender violence; (4) Fourth, an

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[47] Gerald O. West, "Contextual Bible Reading: A South African Case Study," *Analextra Bruxellensia* 11 (2006): 146.

[48] West, "Contextual Bible Reading," 146.

> important impact of the Tamar "Contextual Bible Study" was to move the groups to action.[49]

It is noteworthy to deduce from the discussion of the results of the study that the community time and again uses the story as a platform to discuss issues pertaining to the community itself.[50] Sexual violence as a critical issue in the African context is unmasked when the story is read in the community. Out of the discussion above it is clear that the community is in the centre of the interpretation. Issues that influence the community become the starting point for the discussion.

4 Gaining Hope by Listening

Denise Ackermann reads the story of Tamar in a remarkable way from her unique social position:

> My reading of the Tamar story is done self-consciously from a woman's perspective. Women have distinctive questions about and insights into the biblical texts derived for our life experiences. We know that the Bible, as the source book of our faith, is a powerful means for defining women's place in society and that it has been invoked to justify women's subordination to men. So our readings are suspicious, critical and questioning as we seek meaning for life. We also, in Teresa Okure's words "read from this place." "Reading from this place" is about the relationship between the biblical text and the social location of the interpreter.[51]

According to Ackermann's interpretation Tamar is not only the victim of rape but also becomes a social outcast deserted by her family structure. Her position thus changes from "my sister" to "this woman" in a society which is ruled by male power.

> Tamar lives in a world where men manipulate and coerce by using their power and in which her life is ruined by events she has no control over. Amnon uses his male power and privilege to destroy.

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[49] West, "Contextual Bible Reading," 146-147.

[50] West remarks in this regard: ""(I)n our experience literary-type questions almost always lead into socio-historical-type questions; this is important, because it indicates the need ordinary readers have to locate faith in real concrete contexts." Cf. Gerald O. "Contextual Bible Study in South Africa: A Resource for Reclaiming and Regaining Land, Dignity and Identity," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (eds. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube; Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001): 607.

[51] Ackermann, *Tamar's Cry*, 6.

> In societies where the silence on sexual violence is not broken, abuse of power is not held accountable.[52]

The story of Tamar becomes, as also indicated in other above mentioned interpretations, a subplot in a narrative dominated by male power. Ackermann consequently reads the story of Tamar against the background of the HIV-pandemic and the startling reality of violence and sexual abuse in the South African society. Violence is an endemic reality in our society. The very fabric of our communities is fracturing as fear invades South African homes and lurks at our stop streets.[53]

Out of Ackermann's creative reading of the Tamar story she presents certain clues for resistance and hope.[54] Firstly, Ackermann indicates that Tamar's courage to name the violence that was committed against her can also in the modern context be the starting point to offer resistance against acts of violence and abuse. By naming and identifying situations of injustice, the process of establishing justice begins. Secondly, Ackermann shows that Tamar's story places important issues pertaining to narratives on the table.

> Human beings cannot survive without a narrative of identity. Telling stories is intrinsic to claiming one's identity and in this process finding impulses for hope. For those living with HIV/Aids there is a need to claim and to name their identities in order to move away for the victim status so often thrust upon them.[55]

Thirdly, Tamar's story is a story written on the body. The focus on the physical body helps believers not to fall into the trap of thinking according to a pietistic spirit/flesh-dualism. Rather, the body is placed at the centre of the theological debate, especially where the issues of violence and Aids are being touched upon. Finally, Ackermann remarks on Tamar's mourning and lament:

> I suggest that the ancient language of lament offers a vehicle for expressing the raw emotions arising from situations such as Tamar's. The language of lament also offers the Body of Christ the opportunity to say: "We are suffering, we stand in solidarity with all

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[52] Ackermann, *Tamar's Cry*, 8.

[53] Ackermann, Denise, M., "'For Such a Thing is not Done in Israel': Violence Against Women," in *Archbishop Tutu: Prophetic Witness in South Africa* (eds. Len Hully, Louise Kretzschmar and Luke L. Pato; Johannesburg: Human & Rousseau, 1996): 145.

[54] Ackermann, *Tamar's Cry*, 16.

[55] Ackermann, *Tamar's Cry*, 18.

> who suffer, we lament while we believe that there is hope for all in the Good news."[56]

Ackermann's reading offers a perspective of hope in the most broken and fragile circumstances by hearing the voice of the courageous women who speaks out regardless of her situatedness in complex relationships of power.

In conclusion, it can thus be remarked that both feminist and African interpretation strategies start from the point of view of the reader. The circumstances of the reader is the starting point for an interpretation against the grain of the text that allows for the voice of Tamar to be heard. Denise Ackermann's interpretation is a noteworthy example of this strategy.

D HEARING TAMAR'S VOICE FROM A DIFFERENT PLACE

Tamar's story, diversely interpreted by various traditions as indicated above, formed the basis for the empirical intercultural Bible reading process that was presented in the beginning of this article. The conversations that took place during the physical empirical research sessions were recorded, transcribed and analysed. A detailed description of the research results in this regard is not possible in this article due to space constraints[57] but I would like to present certain trends that could be identified in the analysis of the data.

First, the women repeatedly voiced their surprise that the text is one that has its origin in an ancient culture that is removed in time and space from their world of interpretation. This reaction flows from their experience that the story is remarkably relevant to the modern context in which they function. The story echoes their experience and mirrors the social realities that they find themselves living in. The relevance of the story gives rise to a primarily social interpretation of the text. The interpretation process noticed in the four groups that participated in the research is that of a dialogue between the world of the text and the social realities that exist in the lives of the participants. Because of the high level of identification, the women questioned the reasons why the story is not used more often in liturgical situations in the life of the faith community.

Secondly, the women showed an awareness of the fact that it is a male voice that tells the story[58] of Tamar and asked critical questions to unmask this

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[56] Ackermann, *Tamar's Cry*, 18.

[57] For a full description of the data collected see "Bylaag U" in the Appendix volume of: Charlene van der Walt, "Ideologie en Mag in Bybelinterpretasie: Op Weg na 'n Kommunale Lees van 2 Samuel 13" (D.Th. diss., University of Stellenbosch, 2010).

[58] The skilled readers that participated in the discussion groups illuminated the world behind the text and the role of the narrator by sharing their knowledge on this subject. By sharing their knowledge, a new dimension of the story was opened up to the

voice. Participants understood that Tamar's story is embedded in a male dominated narrative that mainly focuses on the intrigues surrounding the male point of view, but they expressed their surprise that the story is included in biblical literature at all.

In terms of a narrative discussion, the participants mainly focused on the characters.[59] Amnon was seen by the readers as someone who is controlled by his own desires and has no regard for any of the other characters in the plot. He was regarded as selfish and inconsiderate. Tamar was primarily seen as an innocent victim who falls prey to not only the ill intensions of Amnon, but the entire male dominated system in which she functions. Her reaction in the final part of the story was perceived as being courageous in the sense that she voices the violence that was committed against her. Although Tamar was predominantly seen in a positive light, participants also questioned her innocence and asked why she did not pick up on the danger that was lurking under the surface of her family structure.[60] Noticeable was the highly critical evaluation of Jonadab. One of the groups went so far as to say that Jonadab was instrumental in the violence that was committed against Tamar and if it wasn't for his dangerous advise none of this would have happened. The subversive advice that he extended to Amnon was thus regarded extremely negatively. David's lack of reaction against the crime committed against Tamar was also understandably seen in a negative light. Absalom's revenge against Amnon was understood as a natural consequence of the pain that was caused to Tamar, but the participants agreed that the entire situation could have been prevented if the family structure did not fail Tamar. The unnamed characters, such as Tamar's mother and sisters, were commented on in the light of the male voice that tells the story and the male dominated plot. Their exclusion from the plot was not a surprise to the participants. The lack of reaction by any of the characters to truly assist Tamar in her time of pain and desolation was met with critical shock from the participants.

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group. The intercultural Bible reading space is a remarkable meeting place for skilled and so called "lay"-readers.

[59] Issues such as plot, time, perspective and the role of the narrator also come to the fore, but the discussion is dominated by the issues concerning the characters in the story.

[60] Some participants employed a hermeneutic of suspicion and read the story against the grain. Not all participants felt comfortable with this strategy to Biblical text. The openness to explore alternative positions and interpretations seemed to depend on individual participant's perception of the authority of scripture. The connection between the use of alternative strategies and the perception of the authority of scripture seems noteworthy.

The discussion of the narrative realities and especially the behaviour of the characters within the plot sparked discussion of similar realities in the social environment in which the participants found themselves. As a result, some of the participants strongly identified with David and Absalom in their apparent inability to react appropriately to Tamar's pain. Participants related how they sometimes witness things that make them very angry or sad, but that they also did nothing to change the reality or to make a difference. Some participants felt that the price one pays when getting involved in the fight for justice is very high. Stories to illuminate these painful realities were shared amongst the participants. It is noticeable that in response to hearing Tamar's story, participants shared their personal experiences with one another. This reaction probably flowed from the recognitions of strong similarities between Tamar's reality and the modern context that constitute the participants' reality.

As stated at the outset of the argument, the remark of the story teller "but he did not listen to her…" becomes an important key for an interpretation of the story. Participants mean that it is not only the reality of Tamar's story, but so often repeats itself as the reality of modern women. This painful reality that many women experience was discussed in great detail and the participants shared strategies and stories of hope and courage to counter this life denying trend.

In conclusion, it thus seems that the women interpreted the story of Tamar, using as starting point the realities of their own social environment. The women identified with the all too familiar story of Tamar which empowered them to tell their own stories and to explore themes of hope. Some of the participants felt that the social realities experienced by women had changed drastically since the time of Tamar's story and that women today can empower themselves and others. Although some of the women responded to the story with hope, the predominant interpretation is one rather of recognition of social injustice and the reality of violence against women. The intercultural conversation allowed women to share their stories and to explore the themes of violence and injustice. It thus seems clear that women used their own experienced social reality as a key for the interpretation of the Tamar story. For some, the conversation brought hope and empowerment, and for others it gave words to express yet again a lament for women who experience the realities of violence and rape. The women used their own stories to lament the pain of violence and rape, but also to encourage each other and to dream about alternatives.

E CONCLUSION

The intercultural Bible reading space brought together women from a diversity of cultural backgrounds and a variety of life orientations. The space that was created allowed participants to feel safe and to share openly their experiential realities with regard to the very difficult subject matter, namely rape and violence against women. The process was designed in such a manner as to

allow for optimal engagement with the "other" as well as with the culturally removed Biblical story of Tamar. In the intercultural discussions that took place as part of the empirical research process, women drew on their own experiences and interpretive gifts to find new ways of hearing Tamar's voice and relating her story to a modern context. In line with more contextual approaches to Biblical text like feminism and African hermeneutics, the women used their own context as a key to gain access to the intricate dynamics of the story. The ideological realities that mainstream scholarship seem to focus on, were also picked up on by the groups as they identified and questioned the voice of the male narrator. The intercultural Bible reading process thus seems to be one that brings together a number of important different perspectives and allows for a creative interaction between these voices. By being together and journeying with the "other," new interpretative realities were unlocked and new paths were found through old biblical landscapes. In doing so, the women responded to one of the core challenges of feminist theology as described by Serene Jones:

> The cartographical metaphor makes clear that feminist theory is concerned not so much to reconstruct the terrain of faith as to provide markers for travelling through the terrain in new ways.[61]

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[61] Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000): 19.

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