

Of seduction and male abuse: Exploring the less-talked-about using Tamar's stratagem (Gn 37–38)

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Gender-based violence has often been framed and perceived as exclusively a women's issue. As a result, terms such as 'violence against women' and 'gender-based violence' have often been understood and used interchangeably. In the fight and campaign against gender-based violence, men have been reckoned to be the most common culprits behind fuelling violence against women. While indeed to a large extent men are the perpetrators of gender-based violence, little attention, however, has been paid to at least two things: the loose usage of the term 'gender' as if exclusive of men, as well as the violence that some men suffer at the hands of some women. It was the thrust of this article to bring on the table the less-talked-about sexual abuse that some men suffer at the hands of some young women using Tamar's trapping of Judah as an entry point into the discussion. Using a socio-anthropological approach, the article argued that the behaviour of some young women towards men older than themselves through manipulating their sexual weakness is a form of gender-based violence that calls for a redress.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The theme of gender-based violence is by definition of multidisciplinary interest. This contribution highlighted the less-talked-about abuse of men, which is also of significance within multiple disciplines including biblical studies, social anthropology, theology, cultural studies and even history.

Keywords: gender-based violence; African women; seduction; Tamar; Judah; sexual harassment; corsets; sexually hypersensitive.

Introduction

Since time immemorial, men have often been blamed for gender-based violence and for fuelling such violence against women. In this article, however, I set out to discuss the less-talked-about sexual harassment of men by women. In almost every society, chances of finding young women who are seductive are quite high. Some of these women either just decide or are influenced by peer pressure to trap sugar daddies so that they can get all the goodies of life that they may be after. It is this aspect of 'trapping men' that this article is interested in and would like to pursue at some length, for the author sees this as a violation of men's rights and freedom. Women know that men generally find it hard to resist the sexual advances of a woman, and hence some often manipulate this weak point to obtain what they want from men. Such an act is characterised in this article as being abusive of men. To achieve the desired end of this article, firstly I begin by discussing the stratagem used by Tamar to win over Judah, and then secondly, I examine how some young African women manage to manipulate the God-designed feature of men as sexually hypersensitive in their favour.

Tamar's seduction of Judah (Gn 38:1–30)

The events leading to the seduction narrative can be traced back to the incident of Joseph being sold into Egyptian slavery by his brothers (Gn 37–39). It was at this time that Judah 'left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah' (Gn 38:1). While the text does not provide a clear motive why Judah decided to separate from his brothers, from the narrative, one could assume that the incident of a brother sold into slavery and a father in mourning must have been sufficient to trouble the consciences of people like Judah and Reuben (Assohoto & Ngewa 2006).

As the narrative unfolds, Judah forged some friendly ties with some Canaanites which eventually resulted in him meeting the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua, marrying her and siring

children with her (Gn 38:1–4). From the union, the woman bore him three sons, namely Er, Onan and Shelah. When Er was grown enough, Judah arranged a wife for him called Tamar, whose parentage is not stated by the biblical writer but who was most probably a Canaanite also. Er, however, did not live long enough to have children, as he is said to have been put to death by God because of his wickedness. No clarity, however, is given by the biblical writer as to in what way he was characterised as wicked.

Taking to his advantage an old known custom of levirate marriage, Judah gave Tamar to Onan to raise seed for his brother. It was the practice of the time that when a sibling married a widow of his brother, the first child she bore was regarded as the son of the dead brother and so would inherit the estate of his father (Dt 25:5–6). It appears Onan inwardly wanted to inherit his older brother's portion himself, and so while he did not refuse to marry Tamar, he purposely spilled his semen on the ground (Gn 38:9). Such selfishness towards his late brother and Tamar did not go unpunished, as the Lord slew him also.

It was hard for Judah to understand what was going on. The perception among the Yoruba that, 'if the earthly king does not see you, the heavenly King does' (Awolalu 1976) did not possibly occur to Judah and his sons, and the only thing he could do was to suspect Tamar as being behind the deaths of his sons. He thus hatched a false promise to marry Tamar to Shelah when he had come of age as a stratagem to send her back to her father's house. Tamar unknowingly complied with her father-in-law's plan and went away to her father's house, where she waited upon word from the father-in-law, but Judah gave no indication that he was ever going to call Tamar. On her part, Tamar eventually read that the father-in-law's neglect was deliberate. It so happened that during this period of her waiting in vain, Judah's wife died, and after the grieving period was over, word reached Tamar that Judah was visiting men who were shearing his sheep in Timnah (Gn 38:12). Just as Judah had secretly hatched a plan to send her away, she too began to think of a plan to reverse the misfortune that had been cast on her by her father-in-law. To her advantage was the fact that firstly, sheep-shearing was a period renowned for its drunken revelry (1 Sm 25:2–8 and 2 Sm 13:23), and secondly, the road to Timnah passed through Enaim, near where Tamar's father lived. From this, one can tell that Timnah and Enaim were basically walkable small towns from Adullam, where Judah lived.

Leading her to hatch her own plan was the fact that she was fully aware that having illicit relations with any other man was tantamount to adultery, because she already had been given away in marriage in Judah's house (Lv 18:15–16; 20:21). The severity of the punishment if one were to engage in extramarital affairs was later seen when Judah ordered that she be taken out and burned when he realised that she was pregnant – supposedly by harlotry, so he thought (Gn 38:24). Quite contrary to Judah's thinking, the threat of extinction had, however, propelled Tamar into the 'forbidden territory'. As given in the text:

14 So she removed her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife.

15 When Judah saw her, he thought she *was* a harlot, for she had covered her face.

16 So he turned aside to her by the road, and said, 'Here now, let me come in to you'; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law.

And she said, 'What will you give me, that you may come in to me?'

17 He said, therefore, 'I will send you a young goat from the flock'.

She said, moreover, 'Will you give a pledge until you send it?'

18 He said, 'What pledge shall I give you?' And she said, 'Your seal and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand'.

So he gave *them* to her and went in to her, and she conceived by him.

19 Then she arose and departed, and removed her veil and put on her widow's garments (Gn 38:14–19) NIV.

As given in the text, the seduction scene took place at the entrance to Enaim (Gn 38:14). The Hebrew place name, Enaim 'petah enayim', which can also be read as 'the opening of the eyes', according to Adelman (2012:93), is full of irony given that this was the site where sight is veiled. In this case, the irony is double, for with time there was to be recognition of what had taken place at this site, as the veil allowed a deeper truth to emerge eventually.

Something interesting also to follow in this story is how Tamar wins over her father-in-law, Judah. 'Tamar's daring stratagem', as Skinner (cited in Crawford 2010:487) would call it, has been the subject of various interpretations. The puzzle has often centred on why Judah did not recognise that it was Tamar and what influenced him to think she was a prostitute (Gn 38:15). Much attention has often been paid to the first critical part of Tamar's daring stratagem (which forms also the focal point of this article), where one sees that 'she took off her widow's garments, covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim' (Gn 38:14).

A common interpretation to the puzzle is that Judah failed to recognise that it was Tamar, his daughter-in-law, because of the veil that she wore. This common interpretation is derived from the fact that it was only the covering of her face which is mentioned in Judah's inference (verse 15). While it has been commonly thought so, a look at a number of ancient translations (LXX, the Vulgate, *Vetus Latina*, *Codex Lugdunensis*, Latin text of Jubilees) and later commentators (Rashi, Sforzo, Genesis Rabbah, Pseudo-Jonathan, Targum Neofitti, Luther, Calvin) who have exegetically examined this move taken by Tamar tends to show that while they differ in their interpretations, they avoid linking the veil to her guise as a prostitute (Huddleston 2001:8). The biblical support for cases where the veil does not indicate harlotry can be gleaned from such incidents like that of Rebecca in Genesis 24:65, when she veiled her face before meeting Isaac

for the first time, or the trick that was played on Jacob in Genesis 29, which could not have seen the light of the day if Leah had not been covered in veil. Thus, as argued by Huddleston (2001:17), the separation of the shroud or veil from the profession of prostitution in the exegetical tradition and the historic lack of a link between veils and prostitution proffer a compelling historical precedent for the reading that Tamar's veil was not decisive for Judah to regard her as a prostitute. The veil of Tamar, in other words, can be said to have concealed more than it revealed. Similar sentiments were also echoed by Westenholz (1989:247), who argues that 'it cannot be the veiling that led Judah to assume that she was a prostitute'. Tikva (1992:257) takes it up also and opines: 'The purpose of the veil in the Tamar story was not to identify her as a prostitute, but to hide her identity so that Judah would not recognise her'.

It is on the basis of this observation that some scholars have thought of moving away from searching for an answer to the puzzle only in the first action taken by Tamar of veiling herself. The success of Tamar's stratagem to secretly sire a child with Judah appears to have depended upon at least two inter-related aspects, namely cover-up and location. While the cover-up concealed her identity, it was the location which made Judah think that she was a prostitute. In support of this position, Vawter (1977:397–398) strongly believes that 'Tamar's "disguise" as a harlot, on the contrary, consisted not in what she wore but in her displaying herself publicly by the wayside as a woman available for commerce'. Sitting by the roadside with face partly covered appears to have generally been the custom of prostitutes so that they could easily prey on possible clients who passed by (Ramban cited in Huddleston 2001:7). As for Tamar, there is a clear intent here displayed in her actions; she is not simply playing prostitute for any man – she is lying in wait for her father-in-law, Judah. By so doing, there is every reason to believe that Tamar was aware of the accommodation that could be made to the principle of levirate marriage that a father-in-law, in case of serious need, could perform the levir's duty. According to Nahum Sarna, it was a common practice in the whole of the Ancient Near East that in certain circumstances, the father-in-law could assume the role of a levir. Taking note of Hittite laws of the 14th – 13th century BCE, Sarna cites a provision in the laws that if a married man passed on, 'his brother shall take his wife, then [if he dies] his father shall take her' (Sarna 1989:266).

Just as Tamar had planned, the moment Judah saw her by the entrance to Enaim, he took her to be a prostitute and from then on, her design began to work out. As a result of her actions and location, Judah successfully negotiated for sex. Though Judah was not aware of who she was, as for Tamar, she was fully aware of him, knowing him both literally and figuratively. While Judah, in other words, was blind to her identity, knowing her only physically, she, on the other hand, was the true knower. Such a paradox is captured well by Zvi (1984), who argues that:

A man may know a woman (physically), and (yet) be mistaken about her identity. He may even know her carnally without any awareness whatsoever. On the other hand, a woman being

possessed in sex, apparently the object, may yet be the subject; the only possessor of the volatile element of awareness. She may know the man that mis-takes her. (p. 188)

Some, however, have been quick to blame Judah for stooping so low for the services of what appeared to be a prostitute. Van Dijk-Hemmes and Orton (1989:148), for example, think Judah made a huge error when he went for the services of a prostitute (Tamar). According to them:

[I]n the ancient Near East, women had the right to make love to a stranger or a priest. This was seen as a sacrifice to the Goddess of love, Astarte [...]. In Israel this practice was strictly discouraged. (Van Dijk-Hemmes & Orton 1989:149)

Considering that Judah had stayed in the Canaanite land for at least 20 years, they expect that Judah was at least aware of the role of such women. While that may be the case, there may be need to bear with Judah given that there are, as Crawford (2010:487) would argue, two evils that human beings, in their entire history on Earth, have never been able to eliminate or even to control: one is drunkenness and the other is prostitution. It is my argument here that Tamar appears to have known this weak point of men in general and hence chose to manipulate this weakness to her advantage. A look at the preceding events leading to Tamar's stratagem brings to light an interesting dimension that may help shed light to this manipulation of Judah's weakness. One is told in verse 13: 'And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold, thy father-in-law goeth up to Timnah to shear his sheep'. It is actually this message passed on to Tamar that forms the bedrock upon which she lays her grand plan of luring Judah so as to engage with him in sexual intercourse with the hope of conceiving by him. The text, in other words, brings to light several things that triggered Tamar to hatch her plan. In the first place, it is not overstretching one's mind to think that Tamar should as well have been informed by the anonymous figure who brought her the message of Judah going up to Timnah that her mother-in-law had passed on. Aware now of these two developments, Tamar could have considered this an opportune moment to go out for Judah, given that she knew that he would be in high spirits and with an increased libido, given the festival mood associated with sheep shearing. Given also the period that had elapsed between the mourning of his wife and his going to Timnah, she probably knew that Judah would think of quenching his sexual thirst as a way also of consoling himself for the loss of his wife if he saw a prostitute. Her move can thus be characterised as a well-calculated one, and indeed, she obtained what she wanted.

While Tamar might have been justified in fighting for her deprived justice, which resulted from having been treated like an object of pleasure by Onan and having been made to wait endlessly in false hope by Judah, the manner she used to reclaim that justice was unethical, for it is tantamount to sexual abuse. Sexual abuse, as defined by the American Psychological Association (2016), is the 'unwanted sexual

activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent'. As further elaborated by Jayapalan et al. (2018), sexual abuse is any kind of non-consensual sexual contact that can happen to anyone of any age group. In the case of Judah and Tamar, one could of course argue that both consented, but one should not be blind to the fact that Judah was not aware that it was Tamar, his daughter-in-law; otherwise, he would not have consented, and the text itself implicitly alludes to this when it says Judah had 'no further relations with her' (Gn 38:26) after he came to know the one he had mistaken. The fact that Tamar took advantage of Judah's weak point and concealed her identity is enough evidence that she sexually abused Judah.

The stratagem of young African women

The perception that black women are sexually hyperactive predated the institution of slavery in Africa. During the early days when European travellers first landed on the African soil, they came into contact with what appeared shocking to them: scantily dressed natives. Being victims of their own cultures, they quickly interpreted such dressing as a sign of lewdness. A further cultural shock to them were the tribal dances of Africans, which appeared sexually suggestive, and the fondness that Africans had for polygamous marriages. To the Europeans, this was proof beyond reasonable doubt that Africans had uncontrolled sexual lust. William Bosman, as cited by Pilgrim (2002), characterised African women on the coast of Guinea as 'fiery' and 'warm' and 'so much hotter than the men'. Following the footsteps of Bosman was William Smith, who is said to have described African women as 'hot constitution'd Ladies' who 'are continually contriving stratagems how to gain a lover' (Smith cited in Pilgrim 2002). While such a blanket depiction of African women as lascivious by nature appears to be an enduring stereotype, it should be quickly pointed out that such a conceptualisation of them is nothing but too narrow. It is indeed a big mistake to assume that all African women are innately promiscuous or predatory Jezebel prostitutes. The other weak point to the above Western conceptualisation is that it harbours a false state of things that it is only black women who are highly seductive, alluring, worldly, tempting and lewd, while white women are conceived as models of self-respect, self-control and even sexually pure.

Such a critique, however, to the stereotyped Western mind is not meant to sanitise all African women. It is undeniably true that there are some sections of our African women who are indeed continuously contriving stratagems to win men whom they perceive to be wealthy or for other ulterior motives best known to them. This resonates with Maya's (2015:1) observation that 'sugar daddies' are increasingly becoming a better option for younger women who are not only sexually curious but who are also attempting to fund ridiculously high educational costs with money from rich men. To this, Luke and Kurz (2002:3) add that in sub-Saharan

Africa, entering into sexual encounters with older partners is fast becoming the norm for adolescent girls. They further observe that the motivations for such young women to engage in cross-generational sex are varied and overlapping, but most often gifts such as soap, perfume, meals out or jewellery are being perceived as symbolic of a woman's worth, and those who do not receive such gifts in exchange for sexual relations are humiliated (Luke & Kurz 2002:4). The prevailing mentality across Africa among such young women is encapsulated in their oft-used popular slogans: 'You use what you have to get what you want' or 'When you open your legs, you eat' or 'When you close your legs, you starve' (Mensah 2019:5). The message implied by such slogans is clear, namely the commodification of the body for the client's use.

As part of their stratagems, they work on the psychological make-up of men, that men usually are attracted to a number of physical characteristics in women such as face shape, waist-to-hip ratio, body symmetry (Zelazniewicz & Pawlowski 2011:1) and other secondary sexual traits such as breast size, curvy hips, big buttocks and toned, sexy legs. It is not a surprise, therefore, to see some young women in our African streets wearing tops that hardly cover their breasts. In an effort to get the attention of a man who might be near, it is characteristic of such women to perform shenanigans they know quite well would attract male attention such as leaning forward as if to pick up something, be it either on the table or in their bag, but the real intention would be to sneakily give the man a gaze at their breasts. While there are a number of issues which may affect breast attractiveness such as shape, pigmentation and asymmetry, breast size, as noted by Zelazniewicz and Pawlowski (2011:1), is perhaps one of the most visible and eye-catching phenomena to men in cultures where clothing normally conceals breast shape. Such women know quite well that giving a chance to a man to take a sneaky peep now and then would only make him want to see them more and thus hopefully lure the man to themselves. By so doing, such young ladies do not consider themselves victims of sex with men beyond their ages who have resources but rather as active agentic and consumerist entrepreneurs who deliberately exploit partners in the relationship for gifts and other 'modernist' items (Gukurume 2011:1; Shumba, Mapfumo & Chademana 2011).

When it comes to the curvy hips, big buttocks and toned, sexy legs, many of our young women today in Africa know how to expose these by wearing either excessively short, tight and revealing skirts that barely cover the underwear or revealing trousers or sometimes short-shorts. In the event that a woman feels her natural make-up is not bringing her to the level she wants, they know where to purchase buttock and breast enhancement creams and pills. Little, if any, attention is paid to the side effects of these creams and pills, as long one has achieved an immediate desired need. Advances in technology have also brought on the market modernised corsets and tummy tuckers which help shape the body in a desired way. Not every lady, however, who

wears these corsets or tummy tuckers may be out for 'a kill', but such additional hidden garments have often been worn with a seductive mindset. Although it is debatable, I submit the position that the tendency of feeling dissatisfied with one's natural make-up and the attempt to enhance it connotes a desire to deceive someone (usually men) through disguising oneself in some shape that is not God-given. In fact, the debate around the meaning and purpose of shaping corsets dates back to the mid-19th century among feminist dress reformers, ministers of religion, couturiers, health and hygiene activists and advocates of tight lacing. By the early 20th century, the debates had intensified (Fields 1999:355). As new fashions of corsets appeared more constricting, protests against their use became louder. This historical record of protest against constricting corsets is enough evidence to show that, despite women now having achieved greater freedom of choice and mobility in dress, women's struggles in making corsets acceptable to all have not entirely ended.

One is also given to a common defence that is made concerning excessively short, tight and revealing skirts, as well as even the unusually short shorts, as being fashionable and that the loincloths that Africans wore before the arrival of Christianity were by far much shorter than the miniskirts commonly sighted on our streets today (Oyekan 2002:83). What needs to be taken seriously, however, is that while many of our great-great-grandmother's generation innocently went scantily dressed in their *nhembe* or *shashiko* 'loincloths' with bared breasts, this traditional innocence cannot be transferred to contemporary times. No matter how we try to run away from it or decolonise the African mind, the fact is that we have been conditioned by Western, Christian ideas about decorum and propriety and especially uneasiness about the body (Oyekan 2002:83). It is against such conditioning that if a lady in this contemporary age wears a garment similar to that of our great-great-grandmother's generation, then it would be a provocation to the society and particularly to men, for it cannot be taken as being out of innocence but rather on purpose, with some ulterior motives. It should, in other words, be made clearly known that such a disregard for the changes that have happened over time and dressing as in the days of old are tantamount to abusing men. We are living in a context far different from that of our ancestors, and women should not pretend to be reliving those days when in actual fact they are intentionally out to seduce men. It is something quite outrageous that after performing her shenanigans, a wily seductress blames a man for being a pervert. I would like to assume that there are some men rotting in our jails who should have been given lighter sentences had their initial sexual abuse been taken into consideration during their trials for allegedly molesting women.

Conclusion

To bring the contentious discussion to some end, it is perhaps good to reiterate that the behaviour of some young ladies

towards men who are almost the ages of their own fathers, if not their grandfathers, is tantamount to sexual abuse of these men as they manipulate their sexual weaknesses. Knowing very well that fewer men have the capacity to resist the sexual advances of a woman, they manipulate this natural make-up of men of being sexually hyper-active than women. Using the story of Tamar who waylaid Judah, the article has successfully underscored the fact that women can abuse men sexually. When women are out for a 'kill', they really can draft and execute stratagems by which most men only come to realise that they have been trapped after they have sexually known the woman. While a man may know the woman physically, he may be mistaken about her real identity, given her hidden intentions. On the other hand, the woman who may apparently be the object may oftentimes be the only possessor of the volatile element of awareness. She may know the man that mistakes her.

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