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Silencing the Tamar(s) to Frame the politics of Black Masculinities and Rape Culture Discourse in South Africa

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Abstract

Using the rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13 as a hermeneutical lens, this article interrogates rape culture and the discourse of sexual violence in South Africa. This article mobilises Tamar's silenced voice to critically expose the hegemonic structures that sustain gendered violence within broader socio-political formations. While the narrative necessarily engages male actors, the analysis does not seek to centre perpetrators as subjects of sympathy; rather, it examines how systems of power produce and sustain conditions in which violence becomes normalised. Furthermore, the article interrogates colonial and racialised constructions of Black masculinity, challenging the enduring stereotype of Black men as primary perpetrators of sexual violence. It argues that such representations obscure the structural and historical conditions that underwrite rape culture while simultaneously reinforcing racialised logics of othering.

Keywords: Rape Culture; Hegemonic masculinity; Kyriarchy; Decoloniality; Power and knowledge production

Introduction

De Klerk (et al., 2024, p. 1269; Cepeda et al., 2022) posits that sexual violence[1] continues to be a pervasive global problem[2]. Although international comparisons often highlight South Africa's statistics, scholars consistently observe that the country ranks among those with the highest reported rates of rape (Egenasi et al., 2024, p. 1-2; de Klerk, 2024; 1264–1274; Mgoqi-Mbalo et al., 2017, p.301-308). However, such claims require careful interpretation, as they reflect not only prevalence but also the ways in which data is collected, reported, and contextualised. In South Africa, sexual violence is deeply entrenched, reflecting the intersection of historical and structural forces including colonialism, apartheid, race, and patriarchy. Sexual violence cannot be understood as a series of isolated incidents; rather, it must be situated within the broader socio-cultural

[1] Sexual violence refers to any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or unwanted sexual behaviour carried out without a person's consent. It includes a wide range of violations such as rape, sexual assault, coercion, harassment, and exploitation. My focus will be on sexual violence as a form of rape; I will use the terms interchangeably throughout the article.

[2] Dworkin et al. (2021) conducted a study that estimated a lifetime prevalence of sexual offences at 3.3% to 12.2% for Asia, 16.4% for Australia, 6.9% to 11.5% for Europe, 5.8% to 15.3% for Latin America, 13.0% for North America and 4.5% to 21.0% for Africa.

framework of colonialism which normalises, legitimises, and perpetuates gendered violence (Gqola, 2015:25). This implies that knowledge production on sexual violence is not neutral; it is rather embedded within hegemonic[3] and kyriarchal[4] power relations that shape how such violence is represented, interpreted, and circulated.

In her article *(Un) Remembering Sexual Violence in South African History*, Emily Bridger (2026:255-258) asserts that sexual violence in South Africa has been historically shaped by processes of selective remembering and forgetting, in which colonial and apartheid power structures determine whose suffering is acknowledged and whose is erased. Through the concept of "(un)remembering," she reveals how racialised and gendered hierarchies have structured both the occurrence of sexual violence and its representation in the archives, with Black women's experiences systematically marginalised. Even in post-apartheid mechanisms such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, these silences persist, underscoring the need to critically interrogate how history is constructed and whose voices remain unheard. Therefore, it is through this dynamic that the story of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13 offers a hermeneutical lens for examining the above assertion. Tamar's purposeful silencing[5] and the absence of justice in her narrative provides a critical site for exploring how power operates within contexts of gendered violence, highlighting both the structural and discursive mechanisms through which survivors are rendered voiceless, not because they lack agency; rather, their voices are suppressed by a complex web of oppressive structures.

The Distorted South African Rape Discourse

Sexual violence[6] is a grave violation of human rights that devastates individuals and communities worldwide (World Health Organization 2013:2). However, it has been over a decade since Helen Moffett (2006:132) argued that, in South Africa, perpetrators of sexual violence/rape are often assumed to be Black men. Although this crime has been found to affect all communities in South Africa, and while racial demographics are often emphasised in broader socio-political discussions, crime statistics highlight that individuals from all backgrounds commit sexual offenses (South African Police Service 2022:45).

Scholars like Maluleke (2018) argued that gender violence is a phenomenon that occurs across diverse cultural, racial, and socio-economic contexts. Research also

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[3] "Hegemonic powers" refers to dominant groups, institutions, or states that maintain control and influence over others not mainly through force, but through leadership, consent, and the normalisation of their ideas and values. This concept is most strongly associated with the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci, who argued that ruling groups maintain power by shaping beliefs, values, education, media, and culture so that their authority appears natural and legitimate (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*)

[4] Developed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Kyriarchy describes a broader system of power in which some men dominate other men, some women hold power over other women, and intersecting factors such as race, class, and sexuality shape who is positioned as powerful or oppressed within these overlapping hierarchies.

[5] Tamar is not silent in her story, but rather vocal, challenging her brother to prevent him from raping her. His male power overpowers her, which in the end helps him achieve the evil intention of violating her. I am therefore purposefully using her violated body and silenced advocacy to reconstruct my argument.

[6] According to the World Health Organization (2013:2), sexual violence is not only a physical act but also a profound violation of bodily autonomy, dignity, and human rights. It often involves the misuse of power, where perpetrators exploit vulnerability, authority, or social inequalities to control another person. My focus is sexual violence as a rape, however, I will be using rape and sexual violence interchangeably throughout the article.

demonstrates that rape is predominantly perpetrated by men, as a reflection of broader systems of gendered power and hegemonic masculinity that operate across societies (World Health Organization, 2013). However, evidence concerning sexual violence committed by other racial groups remains largely absent from both scholarly and public discourse. Even though data does reveal that rape affects all communities globally and locally, crime statistics have highlighted that individuals from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds commit sexual offenses (South African Police Service 2022:45)[7]. Bridger (2024:267) also notes a significant gap in historical research regarding how South Africans have understood and responded to sexual violence. This absence of historical grounding produces a discourse disconnected from structural and historical realities, resulting in skewed representations. Furthermore, many gender scholars in South Africa (Artz and Combrinck, 2003; Buiten and Naidoo, 2016; Mamabolo et al. 2022b; Padmanabhanunni and Gqomfa, 2022; Womersley and Maw 2009) to name a few, have cast their focus predominantly on black African men as perpetrators of this crime. Which raises the question: is sexual violence / rape truly a class or race crime?

According to Reid and Walker (2005), sexual practices, identities, and meanings have always been shaped by changing historical conditions and power relations in South Africa. Sexuality and rape discourse in South Africa must be understood not as isolated social phenomena, but as historically produced within intersecting systems of colonialism, patriarchy, racial domination, and legal control. For an instance, van der Spuy (1996:43–44) previously demonstrated in her critique of Cape historiography that enslaved women were rendered "invisible, insignificant or negative" through an overreliance on quantitative data such as sex ratios and fertility rates. In reality, enslaved women were legally vulnerable whilst colonial power gave men (especially white men) control over others' bodies. This statistical reductionism not only erased enslaved women's lived experiences but also enabled historians to construct causal links between demographic imbalance and sexual deviance, including rape and violence. This overlooked how colonial power, slavery, and gendered domination structured sexual relations, particularly the vulnerability of enslaved women and the coercive nature of intimacy in such contexts (van der Spuy 1996:44–45).

Shefer (2021:2–3) states that research across cultures and identities is shaped by power. She concurs that western feminist scholarship on sexuality and gender discourses is intentional in sustaining racism, classism, heteronormativity, and ageism, while privileging Global North, white, middle-class people. According to her, these gender disparities persist because knowledge production is still shaped by patriarchal and colonial systems that rely on extraction, representation, and surveillance. However, this is not unique to South Africa. Patricia Hill Collins (2000:81), Frantz Fanon (1952:45), and Angela Davis (1981:172) all argue that racial and ethnic groups have historically been subjected to stereotypes portraying black men as hypersexual or oversexed. Such

[7] In 2022, countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, Mexico, and Germany appeared among countries with high reported rape statistics globally (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2023:67). However, it is important to note that these rankings fluctuate annually. Moreover, these statistics reflect reported cases and are influenced by legal definitions of rape, societal attitudes toward reporting, and law enforcement practices (World Health Organization 2013:5). While some countries have more comprehensive reporting systems, underreporting remains a significant global issue (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2023:70).

constructions form part of broader racialised and sexualised propaganda that uphold Western hegemony and justify domination. Contrastingly, Weeks (1985:17) and van der Spuy (1996:43) conceptualise sexuality as historically constructed and shaped by multiple social forces rather than as a natural drive. Rather, explanations of rape that attribute it to male sexual deprivation are both empirically unconvincing and theoretically inadequate, as they obscure the broader structural, historical, and power-laden conditions that produce sexual violence.

Sexuality thus became a central site of governance, where the policing of bodies and desires reinforce broader systems of segregation and domination. In *Before the law: Criminalizing sexual conduct in colonial and post-colonial southern African societies*, Scott Long (2000:256) reveals that legal systems do not merely regulate behaviour but actively generate vulnerability, particularly by targeting marginalised groups and limiting their access to protection, thereby exposing them to heightened risks of violence and exploitation. The South African legal system reflects bias in the handling of sexual violence/rape cases, which often differ along racial lines (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006:29). This is particularly evident in the rape trial of Nicholas Ninow[8], infamously known as the Dros rapist (white), who assaulted a seven-year-old Black child in Silverton, Pretoria, in September 2018. Media coverage and court proceedings in Ninow's case were widely perceived as differing significantly from those involving Black men accused of similar crimes (Daily Maverick 2018[9]). His defence strategy emphasised psychological explanations and portrayed him in a sympathetic light, foregrounding his mental state as a mitigating factor. This approach, which appeared to elicit public empathy, contrasts sharply with the treatment typically afforded to Black defendants in comparable cases. The differential handling of sexual violence cases in South Africa is rooted in the enduring legacies of colonialism and apartheid, which institutionalised racial hierarchies within the legal system. Racialised stereotypes continue to shape perceptions of victim credibility, while structural inequalities in access to resources further disadvantage Black women. Most noteworthy is the dismissal of the black child whose body was violated. Subsequently, the legal system reproduces broader configurations of race, gender, and class that determine whose victimhood is recognised and whose is marginalised. However, A major South African study by Bollen et al. (1999:43–65) demonstrates that women's experiences with police, courts, and service providers are uneven and mediated by broader structural inequalities, including race and class, which shape both access to justice and the quality of institutional responses.

Helen Moffett (2006:134) contends that rape narratives gain traction when they involve a "racialized other," who are often depicted as morally depraved and dangerous. Rodrigo (2003:15) argues that media representations of violence through language, imagery, and tone construct narratives that shape public perception. These narratives are often influenced by cultural biases, political agendas, and social values and are designed for broad acceptance. This produces what may be termed a colonial "intertextuality of narrativity," where present understandings are shaped by accumulated historical

[8] https://genderjustice.org.za/convicted-dros-rapist-nicholas-ninow-showed-no-remorse-for-his-actions-and-sought-to-evade-accountability-on-the-basis-of-his-abuse-of-drugs-and-alcohol/

[9] Daily Maverick. (2018, September). Coverage of the Nicholas Ninow trial and public reaction to the Dros rape case. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za

representations. Colonisation systematically sought to weaken subjugated men psychologically, socially, and economically to maintain dominance (Frantz Fanon 1963:250). Within this framework, rape narratives reinforce structures of white supremacy.

Van Heerden[10] (2018:n.p), who reflected on public reactions during the Ninow trial in the Daily Maverick, recounts how radio callers insisted, "It cannot be a white person," revealing a deep-seated denial about white male perpetration of rape. Van Heerden links this denial to historical amnesia regarding slavery and colonisation. This demonstrates how the narration of history shapes contemporary perceptions. During colonialism and slavery, white men held power and were rarely framed as sexual predators in dominant historical narratives. These histories have often been told in ways that protect white innocence or minimise white violence. Therefore, communities today inherit a kind of "historical amnesia" they forget, ignore, or downplay the history of white perpetration of sexual and racial violence.

Media and academic representations work together to condition society to understand rape through a distorted racial lens. The understanding of who can be a "rapist" is therefore shaped by race and historical storytelling, not facts. For Shefer (2021:1), sexual violence / rape is deeply linked to constructions of masculinity that valorise dominance and control. Haslam (2006:252), in agreement, asserts that patriarchal systems rely on the dehumanisation of subordinated groups. In reducing individuals to less than fully human, systems of power justify violence, exploitation, and marginalisation. Therefore, reducing the issue to individual men's behaviour risks obscuring the broader structural forces at play.

Decolonial Theoretical Framework

Decolonial theory challenges the assumption that contemporary African social structures are indigenous or historically continuous, arguing instead that they are deeply shaped by colonial epistemologies and power relations. Scholars such as Mbembe (200:11-12), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:75-80), and Mudimbe (1988:1-3) demonstrate how coloniality continues to structure knowledge, identity, and governance. Together, these scholars call for a rethinking of African histories and social systems beyond Western frameworks, emphasising the need to recover suppressed epistemologies and more fluid, relational modes of social organisation.

Analysing the story of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13 through a decolonial theoretical lens enables African scholarship to challenge and disrupt the dominance of Eurocentric interpretive traditions that have historically shaped biblical studies. Rather than treating the text as culturally neutral or universally applicable, a decolonial approach situates interpretation within the realities of colonialism, apartheid, and ongoing structural inequalities, allowing Tamar's narrative to speak meaningfully into African experiences of gendered and racialised violence.

[10] Van Heerden, O. (2018, October 2). To denialists who still won't listen: White men do rape. *Daily Maverick*. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2018-10-02-to-denialists-who-still-wont-listen-white-men-do-rape/

Reading Tamar's Silenced Resistance (2 Samuel 13)

2 Samuel 13 tells the tragic story of Amnon and Tamar, two children of King David. Amnon, David's eldest son, becomes obsessed with his half-sister Tamar. He is consumed by desire for her, but instead of acting honourably, he is advised by a friend (Jonadab) to pretend to be ill so Tamar can come and care for him. When Tamar comes to his room to prepare food for him, Amnon forcibly rapes her. Afterward, his "love" turns into deep hatred, and he rejects her harshly, sending her away in shame. Tamar is left devastated, she tears her royal robe, puts ashes on her head, and cries out in grief. Her full brother Absalom comforts her but quietly harbours anger toward Amnon. King David hears about what happened and is deeply angered yet does not take decisive action against Amnon. Two years later, Absalom takes revenge by arranging Amnon's murder during a banquet. After that, Absalom flees.

Feminist and theological scholars have long recognised that Tamar speaks, protests, and resists, yet her words ultimately fail to alter her fate or secure justice, reflecting how patriarchal systems both record and neutralise women's voices. Phyllis Trible (1984:131–137) reads Tamar's narrative as exposing the systemic marginalisation of women, arguing that her speech functions as a moral witness to male violence even as it is contained within a structure that renders it ineffective. Similarly, Frymer-Kensky (2002:107–110) emphasises that Tamar's speech underscores the absence of agency afforded to women, highlighting not only her personal silencing but also the broader societal complicity that denies her justice.

In this way, Tamar's voice is not absent but strategically limited, illustrating how patriarchal texts can preserve traces of resistance while ultimately subordinating them. Susan Ackerman (1998:180–185) situates Tamar's experience within a wider pattern of female voicelessness, suggesting that such narratives compel the audience to confront the consequences of male violence and communal indifference. Likewise, Brenner (1993:152–158) argues that Tamar's constrained speech is a deliberate literary feature that both exposes and critiques male authority, while Eskenazi (1998:45–49) interprets it as indicative of the structural powerlessness imposed by familial and political systems.

Secondly, the narrative of 2 Samuel 13 presents not merely an isolated act of sexual violence but a layered system of patriarchal power embodied in the figures of Amnon, Jonadab, and David. Amnon represents the entitlement of elite masculinity that normalises access to women's bodies; Jonadab signifies the complicity of those who enable and strategize violence within networks of power; and David embodies institutional failures, where authority recognises injustice yet refuses to act. Together, these figures reveal that sexual violence is not simply the product of individual deviance but is sustained through interconnected systems of power, complicity, and coercion. Such a reading resonates with contemporary analyses of rape culture, in which violence is produced and maintained through the convergence of personal agency through which the individual like Amnon chooses to commit the act of violence and social endorsement (other people or society like Jonadab support it, encourage it, or do nothing to stop it, and institutional inaction of authorities like David fail to act, punish, or protect the victims

Metaphorically reading Tamar's silenced speech alongside contemporary analyses of sexual violence / rape and Black masculinities in South Africa demonstrates that her voicelessness is not merely literary but resonates with global patterns of structural and

racialised violence. Just as scholarship often selectively portrays African sexual violence while obscuring the prevalence of rape in Western contexts (UNODC 2019:–36; Eurostat, 2021: 2–4; FBI, 2022:1–3; Walby, Towers, and Francis, 2016:121–123), Tamar's silenced voice draws attention to the ways in which kyriarchy, privilege, and systemic inequities intersect to suppress both testimony and justice, thereby offering a lens through which to interrogate ongoing narratives of gendered violence and the racialisation of Black men as perpetrators.

Moreover, Tamar's voice that is heard yet not heeded, recorded yet not empowered reflects how dominant patriarchal systems shape the archives, allowing certain expressions of suffering to appear while simultaneously constraining their transformative potential. The racialised construction of Black men as hypersexual predators must be read alongside Tamar's story, where sexual violence is structurally embedded within structures of hegemony and kyriarchy, a system where different kinds of power like gender, race, class, status, etc. all combine to control and dominate others. The narrative demonstrates that sexual violence emerges not from race but from systems of power, entitlement, and silence. Through placing these contexts in dialogue, this study challenges colonial narratives that isolate violence within particular racial groups while obscuring its broader structural roots.

Archival Silence

Grosfoguel (2016:10) explains racism as a system that creates a hierarchy in which certain groups are positioned as more "human" or superior to others. Importantly, this hierarchy is not fixed; it can be constructed in different ways depending on historical and social contexts. In cases where colonisers and colonised populations share similar skin tones, other distinctions such as language, culture, class, or religion may be used to establish and maintain this sense of superiority. This is to assert that colonialism went beyond African borders and each colony experienced its own kind of objectification based on various markers. Stoler (2004:5), whose works analysed the European colonies, asserts that colonial powers aimed to not only physically dominate colonised territories but also to control the minds and bodies of the colonised people. This was a long-term and ongoing process, which sought to reshape the identities, cultures, and behaviours of the colonised populations.

Colonialism not only facilitated but also systematised sexual violence within its colonies. Yet, as Bridger (2026:260) observes, colonial archives frequently either omit such violence altogether or frame it in ways that justify, minimise, or obscure its reality. This produces what scholars describe as "archival silence," where the absence of documented evidence does not suggest that sexual violence did not occur but rather reveals how relations of power continue to shape what is recorded, preserved, and ultimately legitimised as historical truth.

According to Catherine Burns, the regulation of sexuality must be understood as a deeply political project in which the state exercised extensive control over sexual expression, rendering it both highly regulated and publicly silenced (Burns, 2012: 1–3). Through legal frameworks such as censorship laws and the Immorality Act, sexuality became a key site through which racial, patriarchal, religious, and medical forms of power were consolidated, demonstrating that sexual life was never merely private but structurally governed.

A comprehensive approach to sexual violence requires an awareness of the social and political structures that have shaped how violence is perceived and acted upon. Understanding how South Africans process present and future realities requires an examination of the past, as the legacies of history continue to profoundly shape contemporary sexual dynamics. However, Posel (2005:242) maintains, historical accounts of sexual violence in South Africa are largely underdeveloped, and analytical studies on the issue are scarce. This gap in research calls for a more nuanced approach, one that draws on narratives from other colonial contexts to paint a glimpse of sexual violence within South Africa.

The loss of historical records may lead to skewed conclusions about sexuality discourse in South Africa. Hence, scholars like Bridger (2024:268) posit that existing evidence does indicate that rape was widespread across various racial and class groups, both before and during apartheid. I would argue, however, that Bridger's statement is not entirely a reflection of truth regarding the pre-colonial African societies. Oyěwùmí (1997:20–25) challenges the tendency to universalise Western gender frameworks when interpreting African societies. Erlank (2022), in her book *Convening Black Intimacy: Christianity, Gender, and Tradition in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa*, illustrates how colonialism and apartheid profoundly reshaped and misrepresented African sexualities in the past. Her findings reveal that precolonial African societies maintained a structured gender order where rape was neither normalised nor considered an accepted social practice. Moreover, van der Spuy argues that in the past, sexual violence in the Cape was embedded in relations of domination, where white settler men exercised coercive sexual power over enslaved women. Crucially, she exposes the racialised double standard in historiography: the scarcity of white women for the coloniser was interpreted as empowering, even though the colonisers stole black women from African men to curb the scarcity of women. However, the shortage of enslaved women for black men was used to pathologise Black male sexuality (van der Spuy 1996:45).

Delius and Glaser (2002:30) argues that in South Africa, the systemic violence of apartheid, including labour migration, forced relocations, and mass incarceration, fractured families and contributed to rising infidelity, jealousy, domestic abuse, and the emergence of toxic masculinities which focused on dominating women. Delius and Glaser's work here reveals a toxic masculinity that emerged within African men that brought about the systems of Western invasion. Elucidating this, Oyěwùmí (1997: 20–25) contends that colonialism fundamentally reconfigured indigenous social structures by imposing rigid, hierarchical gender categories that were not originally central to many African contexts. Through the privileging of male authority and the reorganisation of social roles along patriarchal lines, colonial systems of governance actively contributed to the marginalisation of African women, rendering them increasingly invisible in both public and private spheres. According to Dube (2003:210), colonialism was a form of violent gendered domination, producing Africans who are shaped by Western influence.

As a result, many African women who moved to Johannesburg from the 1940s onward encountered various forms of harassment and violence. Subsequently, by the 1950s, rape had become a severe issue, with young women in the townships enduring

high levels of sexual violence (Glaser 2000:11)[11]. Thus, rather than being incidental, the prevalence of rape in 1950s townships must be understood as structurally produced and emerging from intersecting forces of racial segregation, economic inequality, and patriarchal domination that rendered African women especially vulnerable to sexual violence. However, this Westernised African man seems to have become problematic for the same system that produced his toxic masculine nature today.

Mofett (2006:130-133) writes that in the South African context both Indigenous men and Indigenous women are seen as threats to the dominant power structures and continue to be subjected to various forms of control and surveillance. In concurrence, Bridger (2024:268) asserts that colonial ideology portrays black women as inherently hypersexual and immoral, leading to the perception that they could not truly be victims of rape, since assault against them was considered neither harmful nor unlawful. This mindset resulted in the institutionalisation of rape against black women by white men, alongside a widespread devaluation of black women's bodies which in turn enabled interracial rape. Scholars such as Lucy Valerie Graham (2012:15) argues that although most sexual violence in South Africa has historically occurred within racial groups, narratives of interracial rape have disproportionately dominated public imagination, legal discourse, and literary representation. However, in this context, accusations of rape across racial lines were often politicised: allegations involving Black men and white women were treated with heightened severity, while violence against Black women particularly by white men was frequently ignored or minimised.

Nonetheless, whilst the South African power structures are adamant about denying that sexual violence runs across race and class, evidence from other countries demonstrates that in Western-dominated contexts, crimes of sexual violence are also prevalent and are committed by Western men to women in their societies. However, South Africa's violent history, shaped by colonialism, racial segregation, and militarisation, played a crucial role in embedding sexual violence across both white and black communities (Bridger 2024:206). Furthermore, until the 1970s, rape was not widely recognised as a pressing social issue. Incidents within white communities received far little attention, while those in black communities were largely analysed (Bridger 2024:269). This phenomenon continues to this day. According to archives from the Rand Daily Mail of 1975–1976, during the 1970s, reports of sexual violence within white communities increased, particularly cases involving young women living alone in Johannesburg apartments. Additionally, Johnson and Sigler (1997:6–7) writing on the experience of women in Europe during the Middle Ages also posits, "traditional attitudes regarding violence against women and the status of women were also dominant. Rape was viewed as an expression of male power and domination and was regulated by the courts and the community to maintain power over women rather than to protect them from being violated". Notably, this European historical reality demonstrates that rape

[11] As a result of rapid urbanisation and the racialised labour demands of the apartheid economy, many African women who migrated to Johannesburg from the 1940s onward encountered multiple forms of gendered harassment and violence. Scholars such as Charles van Onselen (1982) and Belinda Bozzoli (1991) demonstrate that the city's social fabric was profoundly shaped by migrant labour systems that separated families and produced hyper-masculinised urban spaces. Within these environments, African women were often constructed as socially and sexually available, particularly in overcrowded townships and informal settlements where policing was uneven and patriarchal control intensified.

was a norm in Western society long before the colonisation of Africa. Concurrently, Welsing (1992:113) asserts, "rape is, a symbol of White culture and an unjust sick behaviour in which the genitals become weaponised". For Stoler (2004:532), sexuality was not merely a symbolic representation of colonial power but a tangible and direct aspect of colonial control. It was a tool used to regulate, exploit, and subordinate.

In Australia, Smith (2023:21) posits that white settlers used euphemisms like "rushing the gins" to minimise and normalise the sexual violence against Indigenous women, equating it to recreational pastimes. Such violence was celebrated as a demonstration of physical dominance and racial superiority, consolidating power and reinforcing the colonial order. Stoler (2004:532) deducts that these inequalities were not incidental but foundational to colonial systems' operations. Colonial cultures used gendered hierarchies to reinforce racial distinctions, with imperial authorities often positioning women as symbols of subjugation and exploitation. This dynamic justified colonial domination and shaped societal norms, intertwining gender and racial oppression as essential mechanisms of control. Stoler, whose reflection is from the European experience, argues that in every different type of colony, significant similarities could be traced in the management of sexuality and the construction of racial categories.

Evidently so, in *Manhood, and 'Houseboys': An Analysis of Natal's Rape Scare of 1886*, Lucien van der Walt (Mertens) (2021) examined the socio-political context behind the rape panic that gripped Natal in December 1886. The author argues that this scare was less about actual cases of violence and more about white settlers reinforcing racial and gender hierarchies. Van der Walt argues the fear was fuelled by white anxieties over economic competition with Africans and tensions arising from Africans working as domestic servants in settler homes. This crisis enabled white settlers to assert control over both black men, by framing them as threats, and white women, by reinforcing patriarchal norms. Initially, the colonial government responded by passing laws such as 'native' registration systems and capital punishment for rape, highlighting how racialised fears were institutionalised to maintain white dominance. Notably, the centrality of masculinity in colonial discourse normalised violence as a tool of domination. It embedded systemic inequalities that persist today, influencing modern power dynamics and gender relations. This South African sexual violence social script shares connections with Zoe Smith's (2023) Australian script, in *Violation and Violence: The Hornet Bank massacre and interracial rape on the nineteenth century Queensland frontier*, in which the author utilised the 1857 Hornet Bank massacre as a case study to examine gendered and racialised ideals and discourses surrounding interracial rape in mid-nineteenth-century Queensland. Smith highlights the role of sexual violence, particularly the threat of rape against Indigenous women, as a tool of colonial control. Similarly, this violence was used to assert white male dominance, degrade Indigenous men, and disrupt Indigenous social structures. However, vice versa, the rape of white women by Indigenous men was portrayed as a grave emasculation to white power. Hence the Black Peril ideology, which served as a gate-keeping threat for the colonial power.

In connection to the above arguments, Erlunk (2022), although limited by her Western cultural frameworks in her explorations, investigates how Christianity significantly reshaped ideas of intimacy, gender roles, and family structures within Black South African communities during the early 20th century. She argues that forms of Christianity

introduced through mission work and colonial structures served as the central force to redefine what became perceived as a "modern" black intimate life (2022:6). This influence extended to practices like marriage, sexuality, and morality, often blending traditional African customs with western Christian ideals to create a new hybrid culture. However, the hybridised culture is a dangerous zone for Africans because it creates rules and norms of its own which may be detrimental to the social structure of South African society.

Notably, the same script was observed by Whyatt (2023), writing for Haiti in the Dominican Republic context, who argues that the systemic rape of Indigenous women that persists to this day can be traced to colonisation. The colonisers unleashed widespread brutality, including the rape of the native women, along with killing, torturing, and enslaving Indigenous peoples with extreme cruelty. According to Whyatt (2023), the historical ramification continues to influence the present scourge of sexual violence suffered by the indigenous woman in her own country. Hence, Dove (1998:525) deducts if systemic violence is the cause of the societal chaos with regards to sexual violence, it comes as no surprise that "the African male as a degraded human under White supremacy employs the cultural norm of Europeans to display his aggression".

Bradley (1978:xx), as discussed by Dove (1998:525), connects the development of Caucasian racism with sexual aggression toward women. In this sense, racism operates as a system that governs political, economic, and social life, shaping access to power, rights, and resources (Mills 1999:60–64). According to Bradely, the tendency of Caucasians towards racism originates from a history of sexual aggression against women. This sexual aggression was then extended to justify discrimination based on physical racial characteristics. Essentially, Bradley (1978:xx) suggests that the underlying motivation for both sexual and racial aggression stems from a desire for dominance and control, which manifests differently depending on the target. Dove (1998:529) argues that Western patriarchy and racism, despite being different forms of oppression, are not isolated but interconnected and mutually reinforcing. This insight is significant in demonstrating that sexual violence cannot be reduced to a single axis such as gender or race but must instead be understood as the product of intersecting systems of power that operate simultaneously in what feminist theorists conceptualise as kyriarchy. Hence, Wright (1984/1994:7–8) calls white supremacy a psychopathic disorder.

Rethinking Black Masculinities

The rethinking of Black masculinities in South Africa must confront how global rape statistics are selectively mobilised within scholarship to reinforce racialised narratives of violence. Research on gender inequality and sexual violence cannot be separated from the global politics of knowledge production, as such discourses are often implicated in reinforcing existing geopolitical hierarchies. These global narratives intersect with long-standing colonial and apartheid logics that racialised Black masculinities as hypersexual, dangerous, and morally deficient. Consequently, the figure of the Black male perpetrator becomes overdetermined, while the structural conditions that produce violence such as racial capitalism and historical dispossession are rendered secondary.

I would like to dismantle this racialised framing by emphasising that sexual violence perpetrators/rapists like Amnon exist across all racial and social categories. Maluleke

(2018)[12], in the newspaper article discussing gender-based violence in South Africa, already argued that the men involved in gender-based violence was Black, Coloured, Indian and White. Maluleke claimed that in South Africa, perpetrators of sexual violence are found in every community, from urban elites to rural populations, and they include men from all racial backgrounds. He also acknowledged that whilst South Africa has many good men, it also harbours deeply psychopathic individuals who prey on the vulnerable within families, religious institutions, schools, and broader society. The failure to acknowledge this reality not only distorts feminist discourse but also upholds the very structures of violence that feminism seeks to challenge.

The true architects of structural violence are not only the perpetrators themselves but also the institutional gatekeepers in academia, media, and policymakers who sustain racialized narratives that shield white men from accountability. Therefore, by continuously focusing on Black men as the face of sexual violence, these narratives erase the colonial foundations of gendered oppression and deflect attention from the continued dominance of white patriarchal power. Joan Tronto (1993; 2013) and Karen Barad (2007) suggest, ethical scholarship requires more than methodological rigour and reflexivity; it demands an engagement with what may be termed caring relational ontologies. This approach foregrounds the responsibility of the researcher to remain attentive to the relational and ethical dimensions of knowledge production, particularly when engaging across differences of race, class, nation, and gender. The failure to adopt such an approach, risks reproducing the very hierarchies that feminist scholarship seeks to dismantle, especially in contexts where African bodies and sexualities have historically been constructed through colonial and racialised lenses.

Tamar's Silenced Cry in the South African Context

Tamar's silenced cry in 2 Samuel 13 operates as a powerful hermeneutical metaphor through which contemporary configurations of sexual violence in South Africa can be critically interrogated. First, her enforced silence mirrors the experiences of countless survivors whose voices are systematically muted within legal and institutional frameworks that often fail to deliver justice. In this sense, Tamar becomes emblematic of victims whose testimonies are delegitimised, dismissed, or rendered inaudible by a justice system that reproduce kyriarchal tendencies

Secondly, Tamar's violated and silenced body functions as a metaphor for the historical and ongoing subjugation of Black women's bodies within colonial and postcolonial contexts, where they have been systematically positioned as sites of conquest, control, and violence. This silence is not merely personal or individual; it is structural, emerging from the intersection of race, gender, and power that produces both material and epistemic erasure of Black female embodiment. Simultaneously, the systemic discourses that write about Black men constructs toxic narratives around their bodies, framing them as inherently threatening and reinforcing racialised fears that sustain ongoing control and dehumanisation. In this way, Tamar's story illuminates the interlinked violence of hegemony and colonial structures upon both Black women and men, exposing how power can be manipulated to silence, objectify, and criminalise Black bodies in multiple spaces.

[12] Maluleke, Tinyiko. 2018. "Men Are Not Trash, They Are Killers." *Sunday Independent*, 6 May 2018.

Thirdly, Tamar's silence can be extended more cautiously as a critical metaphor for Black masculinities, whose existence is frequently framed as threatening within dominant Western hegemonic discourses. This racialised construction legitimises ongoing processes of surveillance, dehumanisation, and control, even as structural power remains concentrated within enduring forms of white dominance. Thus, while Tamar's narrative foregrounds gendered victimisation, its metaphorical reach also exposes the complex entanglements of race, power, and representation that shape both the marginalisation of Black women and the racialised disciplining of Black men.

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