

Domestic violence in the Old Testament and during the COVID-19 pandemic: A question of identity

**Author:**Tiana Bosman¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Religion and Theology, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Tiana Bosman,
tibosman@uwc.ac.za

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With the global COVID-19 pandemic and different levels of lockdown being enforced across the world, domestic violence has escalated at an alarming rate. The restrictions on movement that lockdown has placed on countless women forced them to share a confined space with their abusers and the effects of this abuse are devastating. These women's identities are at stake. In a space dominated by their male perpetrators, they are at risk of becoming mere shadows of their former selves. All too often, they also lose their lives. This dire state of affairs brings to mind two women in the Old Testament, Tamar of Genesis 38 and Tamar of 2 Samuel 13, and how they were subjected to domestic violence. This article studies the plight of these women. Through the exegesis of these narratives, I highlight the similarities between the accounts of domestic violence and what we see globally today. The aim of this study is to add the names of the biblical Tamars to our collective list of names of women for whom we unite weekly against gender-based violence in the #ThursdaysInBlack campaign.

Contribution: This is a contribution from the field of biblical studies. The exegesis of two Old Testament narratives highlights the similarities between ancient accounts of domestic violence in situations of lockdown and what we see globally today. It calls for a recognition of women spanning the course of history who have suffered domestic violence.

Keywords: domestic violence; Genesis 38; 2 Samuel 13; Tamar; patriarchy; COVID-19; identity; #ThursdaysInBlack.

Introduction

On 05 April 2020, the UN Secretary-General issued a statement in which he addressed the surge in domestic violence that spiked shortly after strict levels of lockdown were enforced around the globe because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the press release, he declared:

I recently called for an immediate global ceasefire to focus on our shared struggle to overcome the pandemic. I appealed for an end to violence everywhere, now.

But, violence is not confined to the battlefield. For many women and girls, the threat looms the largest where they should be safest in their own homes. And so, I make a new appeal today for peace at home – and in homes – around the world.

We know that lockdowns and quarantines are essential to suppressing COVID-19. But, they can trap women with abusive partners. Over the past weeks, as economic and social pressures and fear have grown, we have seen a horrifying global surge in domestic violence. In some countries, the number of women calling support services has doubled. (Guterres 2020:n.p.)

The World Council of Churches (WCC 2020) made a similar appeal, stating:

In this season of enforced isolation to prevent the spread of COVID-19, there are also fears, which are not at all unfounded, of increased cases of domestic violence. These result from the reality that with enforced isolation, the victimized have limited outlets of escape. (n.p.)

This state of affairs reminded me of women in ancient Israel who, whilst not because of a pandemic but rather to the patriarchal culture of the time, were also subjected to conditions of lockdown and as a result of this have experienced violence at the hands of the men who were supposed to take care of them. In 2019, I presented a paper on Bathsheba and Tamar in 2 Samuel 11 and 13 (Bosman 2019).¹ Furthermore, I teach a post-graduate course on narrative exegesis in the Old Testament and one of the texts that I read with my students is Genesis 38 that tells of what happened to another Tamar when her husband died and she was left childless. I was teaching this

1. Presented at the Christian World Mission (CWM) *Discernment and Radical Engagement (DARE)* Global Forum in Taipei, July 2019.

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course again in the first semester of 2021, right at the time when the COVID-19 pandemic exploded. Because of my engagement with the texts prior to and at the start of COVID-19, it was not difficult to make the link between ancient times and our current crisis and to see how women from different times and cultures have had to carry the scars of domestic violence.

For this article with its focus on *New Landscapes in Identity*, I will do an exegetical study of the texts of Genesis 38 and 2 Samuel 13, focusing on the sections that highlight how the female characters, both called Tamar, found themselves in situations of lockdown and were subjected to domestic violence. Thereafter, through a short discussion of the *Thursdays in Black* campaign, I hope that this study will sensitise us even more to the fact that domestic violence is not a recent phenomenon that merely escalated because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Certainly, the pandemic has made us even more aware of the extent of domestic violence than we have been before, but this kind of ‘intimate violence’ has been committed against women from the earliest of times.

A woman’s place in the patriarchal context of the Old Testament

I support the widely recognised view of Bird (1996:951) and others that ancient Israel was a deeply patriarchal society (also see Ademiluka 2018:343; Brown 2017:34; Fuchs 2008:52). The word patriarchy means ‘rule of the father’ (Meyers 2014:9). Whilst Meyers (2014:23) critiques the denotation of ancient Israel as a patriarchal society where the social system was dominated by males, she admits that gender equality did not exist (Meyers 2014:26).

Abasili (2011:559–560) and Bird (1996:952) explain that a woman’s place was predominantly in the domestic domain where she had to focus on childbearing and childrearing, along with managing the household. This was a male-headed household and women never really belonged in the household that they found themselves in:

Married women are outsiders in the household of their husbands and sons, while daughters are prepared from birth to leave their father’s household and transfer loyalty to a husband’s house and lineage. (Bird 1996:952)

Even in the domain of the family, men had legal authority over women (Bird 1996:953). Genesis 38 is a clear case in point and will be discussed in the next section.

Whilst women could fulfil other roles as well, their primary roles were those of a wife and a mother (preferably with many sons) and the duties that came with those roles (Bird 1996):

The barren, or childless, woman suffered not only lack of esteem, but also threat of divorce or expulsion from her husband’s household at his death. Unable to continue his line, she cannot claim his inheritance, and she has no sons to support her in old age. (p. 953)

This background on a woman’s place in the Old Testament society is important for our discussion on what transpired in Genesis 38 and 2 Samuel 13. My discussion of the two texts will consist of a recounting of the events by providing my own translation of the Biblical Hebrew text, followed by the critical engagement that exposes the domestic violence in the texts.

Domestic violence committed against Tamar in Genesis 38

Genesis 38 tells the story of ‘Judah and Tamar’. This is the heading that we find in the majority of Bible translations. Judah married a Canaanite woman whom we never learn the name of. He had three sons with this woman. When his firstborn son, Er, came of age, Judah acquired a wife for him. Her name was Tamar. Er did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh and Yahweh killed him. These events cover the first seven verses of Genesis 38.

After the death of Er, Judah ordered his second son, Onan, to fulfil the levirate duty towards Tamar (Gn 38:8). This entailed that Onan should marry Tamar and have sex with her so that he can erect seed (offspring) for his dead brother Er and thus keep Er’s legacy alive. Legally, the child or children born from a levirate marriage would be regarded as the deceased brother Er’s descendant/s (Wenham 1998:366). Onan, however, was unwilling to erect children for his brother:

So whenever he went into the wife of his brother he ruined [*his semen*] to the earth, so as not to give his brother a descendant. (Gn 38:9)²

The Biblical Hebrew for *תשח* means ‘to ruin to the earth’, of human semen, meaning to allow one’s semen to spill on the ground and be ruined’ (Koehler & Baumgartner 1999). The next verse (v. 10) tells us that what Onan did was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, so Yahweh killed him too. Then follows an instruction from Judah that contains a very condemning sentence for Tamar:

Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law: ‘Live as a widow in your father’s house until Shelah, my son, grows up’. For he thought: ‘So that he won’t die, also him, like his brothers’. So, Tamar went and lived in her father’s house. (Gn 38:11)

As time went by, it became clear to Tamar that Judah had no intention of giving her to his third son Shelah. When word got around that Judah was going to a sheep-shearing festival not too far from her father’s house, she took desperate measures to trick him by exchanging her widow’s garments for clothing fit for a prostitute. She covered herself with a veil and sat at the side of the road where Judah would pass by and, hopefully, request her services. All went according to Tamar’s plan and she fell pregnant with Judah being the father of her twin boys. This was the outcome that Tamar desired. For her to have a chance at a secure future, she needed to give birth to a boy. However, when Judah found out about Tamar’s pregnancy and realised that this meant that she, who was sent to live as a

2.All translations of the biblical texts are the author’s own.

widow in her father's house, acted like a prostitute, he almost had her burned in public.

Whilst the story took a compelling twist after Tamar took matters into her own hands, these happenings are not the focus of the current article. The main focus is on what happened before Tamar's temporary and secret 'change of status' from being a widow to a prostitute; indeed the actions of Onan and Judah drove her to act as she did.

Domestic violence committed by Tamar's second husband Onan

After Tamar's first husband Er's death, his brother Onan obeyed Judah's command to take Tamar as his wife. By doing so, it seemed like he was honouring the levirate custom. This custom was put in place not only to perpetuate the name of the deceased brother but also to provide future security for the widow (Niditch 1979:146). However, we quickly learn that Onan had no plans to truly live up to the levirate custom. He had no intention of giving his brother a descendant. Whenever he 'went into her', he withdrew prematurely and spilt his semen on the ground. This was a great injustice committed against Tamar. Claassens (2012:661–662) refers to it as a 'context of dehumanization'. In support, I argue that it was a form of domestic violence. By marrying Tamar whilst not being prepared to give her what would give meaning to her life most of all things (see the previous section on a woman's role as wife and mother), Onan held her captive. It was not in a woman's power to divorce her husband (Bird 1996:955). Tamar was trapped in a marriage where she did not stand the chance of having children.

Moreover, Onan did not refrain from having sex with Tamar. Whilst consciously denying her the possibility of procreation, he used her body for his own sexual gratification (Abasili 2011:559). The violence against Tamar is accentuated by the choice of words in verse 9, where Tamar is not called by her name or 'his (Onan's) wife' but merely referred to as 'the wife of his brother'. The words alert us to the fact that Onan was not prepared to take responsibility for Tamar as his wife. He still thought of her as 'his brother's wife' and, for him, she was a mere object of sexual pleasure.

Through all of this, Tamar remained silent. Abasili (2011:560) rightfully argues that, given the patriarchal context that she found herself in, her silence could indicate her 'powerlessness to correct Onan'.

Domestic violence committed by Tamar's father-in-law, Judah

Because Onan maltreated Tamar, Yahweh killed him too. At that time, Judah, thinking that his two sons' deaths were somehow linked to their marriage to Tamar, sent his daughter-in-law to go and live as a widow in her biological father's house. He did this under the false assurance that once his youngest son, Shelah, was old enough, he would marry Tamar (v. 11). The narrator gives us inside information about Judah's thoughts, disclosing that he did not want

Shelah to die like his brothers. His intention with sending Tamar off to her father's house is clear: He never wanted her to come back again; he had no plans whatsoever to give her to Shelah in marriage (Claassens 2012:663).

By referring to Tamar as Judah's 'daughter-in-law', the narrator stresses the fact that Judah was the main male figure who should have taken responsibility for Tamar (Wenham 1998:367). When she married Er, she left her father's house and became part of the family of the house of Judah. After the deaths of Er and Onan, her father-in-law had to take responsibility for providing necessary things to her, at least until Shelah was old enough to step up (Niditch 1979:146). But this is not what happened. Judah, the primary male responsible for the future and the fate of his daughter-in-law Tamar, expelled her to return as a widow to her father's house.

As she was a widow who belonged to Judah and with the false promise of future marriage to his third son, Tamar was placed under strict lockdown conditions. During all those years, she could not resume a normal life. She had to wear her widow's garment and, as she was supposedly promised but never to be given to Shelah, Judah condemned her to a life of imprisonment and shame (also see Flesher 2020:274). His treatment of her robbed her of an opportunity to become a wife and a mother. When the opportunity arose for Tamar to break free from her prison and put her own life at risk for the slim chance of securing a future, the only plan that she could come up with asked of her to hide her identity and to act like a prostitute, to sell her body to the man who sentenced her to a life of isolation, to allow this man to use her for his own sexual gratification (just like his son Onan did) in the hope that she may fall pregnant and escape from her life under lockdown.

Under the authority of both her second husband and her father-in-law, Tamar was subjected to domestic violence that continued for many years. This brings us to the story of another Tamar who also suffered severely at the hands of the men who were supposed to take care of her.

Domestic violence committed against Tamar in 2 Samuel 13

2 Samuel 13 recounts what happened to one of King David's daughters, also named Tamar. Most of the Bible translations entitle the chapter 'Amnon and Tamar'. The New English Translation and the New Living Translation provide a better translation with 'The rape of Tamar'.

The scene for the story is set when we read about Amnon's infatuation with his beautiful half-sister, Tamar. With the advice of his friend and cousin, Jonadab, he devises a plan to be alone in a room with Tamar. Amnon, pretending to be sick, asked his father, King David, to send Tamar to prepare food for him where he could watch her and then eat from her hand (2 Sm 13:1–5). In verses 6–7, the plan was put into motion, and in verse 7, we find Tamar on her way to Amnon's house to do as her father asked her.

After Tamar had finished preparing the food, she placed it in front of Amnon, but he refused to eat. Instead, he ordered everyone (all the servants) to leave the house. After everyone left, he told Tamar to bring the food to his bedroom so that he could eat from her hand. Tamar, silent throughout the entire narrative so far (a silence that reminds us of the other Tamar's silence), did as she was told (13:8–10). What happened next should be translated in its entirety:

[A]s she brought (it) close to him to eat, he [forcefully] grabbed (קָחָהּ) her and said her: 'Come, lie down with me, my sister!' But she said him: 'No, my brother, do not do violence to > rape me (עָנָה), for this is not done in Israel! Do not do this foolish/disgraceful thing! As for me, where will I take my shame? And you, you will be like one of the fools in Israel! Now please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you'. (2 Sm 13: 11–13)

But he was not willing to listen to her voice. He was stronger than her > he overpowered her [same verb as 'forcefully grab'] and he did violence to > raped her and lay with her [OR 'he answered her by raping her']. Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred. For the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he loved her. Amnon said her: 'Get up and leave!' (vv. 14–15)

But she said to him: 'No, for this great evil by sending me away is worse than the other that you did with me'. But he was not willing to listen to her. He called his male servant and said: 'Send this one (OR this thing) from upon me to the outside and lock the door behind her!' (vv. 16–17)

(Now she was wearing a long robe, for this is what the king's virgin daughters wore.) So, his servant sent her outside and bolted the door behind her. (v. 18)

Then, Tamar put ashes on her head and the long robe that she wore – she ripped it to pieces. She put her hands on her head and she went, crying as she went. (v. 19)

Her brother Absalom said to her: 'Was Amnon, your brother, with you? Now, my sister, be quiet; he is *your brother* [emphasis]. Do not set your heart on this thing'.

And Tamar lived desolated in the house of Absalom, her brother. (v. 20)

We never hear of Tamar again. Raped by her half-brother Amnon, her future life, if we can call it that at all, wasted away in the house of her other brother Absalom (Bosman 2019).

Domestic violence committed by Tamar's brother Amnon

What Amnon did to Tamar is a clear case of sexual violence and rape. I argue that this brutal act was perpetuated by the patriarchal context of that time. When King and Father David sent Tamar to go to the house and prepare food for her (faking) sick brother Amnon, she dutifully obeyed (Ackermann 2001:7). She was, after all, sent by the head of the household to perform a duty that was expected of women. Knowing her place in the family and in society at large, Tamar obliged without a word of protest.

As the situation progressed to a point where Tamar realised that she was in danger of being violated (where Amnon grabbed her for the first time in verse 11, ordering her to lie

down with him), she found her voice and protested vehemently in no uncertain terms. In her initial protest before Amnon overpowered and raped her, she said 'no' four times! Whether Tamar was prepared to marry Amnon (who was her half-brother and therefore this was possible) or whether she was just trying to buy herself some time and 'talk herself to safety' as Gray (1998:49) suggests, we do not know, but her suggestion that Amnon should talk to David first and ask permission for her hand in marriage fell on deaf ears. I add my voice to that of Casey's (2010) in the thought-provoking title of her article 'What part of "No" don't you understand?'

The Biblical Hebrew word עָנָה, which can be translated as 'to do violence to' or 'to rape' as is the case in verse 12, is a homonym. Most often, it means 'to answer' (see Koehler & Baumgartner 1999). This word occurs twice in 2 Samuel 13: first in verse 12 where Tamar protested, saying 'No, my brother, do not do violence to > rape me (עָנָה)' and then again in verse 14 where Amnon would not listen to Tamar's voice of objection and he overpowered her, עָנָה her and lay with her (had sex with her, which, depending on the context can also mean 'to rape'). With a play on words, it is possible to translate verse 14 as: 'He would not listen to her and he answered her by raping her' (Bosman 2019:8). Sadly, this is true of so many cases of domestic violence, where the woman's 'No!' is not taken seriously and answered with the brutal act of physical assault and/or rape. Van der Walt (2012:200) praises Tamar's 'courage to name the violence'. However, this courage did not protect her from Amnon.

As if the violent act of rape was not enough, Amnon, driven by an overwhelming hatred for Tamar after he raped her, ordered her to 'get up and leave!' As Tamar was a virgin, there would be an option for Amnon to marry her after the rape. Whilst we may have many objections against this practice today, it was a way of restoring the honour of the raped virgin in ancient Israel and of securing a future for her. When Amnon chased her out of his house, this 'added insult to injury' and made it clear that he did not regard her as 'fit to be married even by a rapist' (Anderson 1998:175). At this point, Tamar dared another courageous 'No!' (v. 16), but yet again Amnon refused to listen to her. Gone is the term of endearment 'my sister' with which he tried to convince her to cooperate. When he called his servant to remove Tamar from his presence, he referred to her as 'this one', a word that can also be translated as 'this thing'. When reading verse 17 closely ('Send this one/this thing from upon me to the outside and lock the door behind her!');

[H]is choice of words 'from upon me' screams of irony. One gets the sense that Amnon is still playing his pretend-game. Earlier, he pretended to be sick, now he pretends that Tamar has violated him in some way and she needs to be removed from his presence, almost as if he wants the servant to drag her away from on top of him! Moreover, the servant must lock the door behind her – as if Amnon is seeking safety! Not only did Amnon disgrace Tamar in his violent act of rape – his treatment of her directly after the rape is utterly disgraceful, in Tamar's own experience, worse than the rape itself. (Bosman 2019:n.p.)

Domestic violence committed by Tamar's brother Absalom

After being removed under protest from Amnon's presence, the narrator informs us that Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the robe that she was wearing. By putting ashes on her head, she acted like a widow who was mourning the death of her husband (Anderson 1998:175). Even though she was not married yet, she was perhaps mourning because of the realisation that she would now never have the chance of getting married. She added her voice of protest to the concrete symbols of ash on her head and a torn robe that could no longer cover her body and cried as she went.

Tamar's courageous public display of her distress was not difficult to interpret. Absalom's question to Tamar was spot-on: 'Was Amnon, your brother, with you?' For a brief moment, there seems to be a glimmer of hope in this narrative. Tamar's brother Absalom realised that Amnon raped her, he asks a question that communicates care and the reader has hope that justice will be served. But this hope is extinguished immediately when Absalom utters his next sentence: 'Now, my sister, be quiet; he is *your brother* [emphasis]. Do not set your heart on this thing' (v. 20). It's as if Absalom tells Tamar to get a grip on herself, to pull herself together, to not let this thing get to her. He diminishes her extreme existential experience of being violated and robbed of a future life and he makes space in his house for her where she can be kept out of the public eye and live, devastated, there. Whilst some scholars may argue that Absalom provided Tamar with a safe space, a place of refuge (see Brueggemann 1990:288), I argue that he condemned her to a life of imprisonment.

Because of the patriarchal society, Tamar was at the mercy of the men in her family – one who raped her and the other who provided a place for her to remain in lockdown for the rest of her life. Initially, my focus was on Amnon and Absalom as the male family perpetrators who violated Tamar's body and identity. However, as my research progressed, I realised that there is a third male aggressor in this story – King David, the father of Tamar, Amnon and Absalom.³ As head of the household ('father of the house') not to mention the king of the nation, David embodied power. He was the one who heeded Amnon's pitiful request and sent Tamar to prepare food for him and to feed him from her hand. He was the one who 'set the stage' for what was to come. He was also the father who heard about what happened afterwards but did nothing to comfort or console Tamar and he did not hold Amnon accountable for what he did (see Casey 2010:170).

Raped by one brother, silenced by another and unprotected by her father who will not call his son to account for his violent actions, Tamar is left voiceless and silenced – history condemning her to become another forgotten victim of violence justified by its historical context. (Casey 2010:166)

3. Arguably, Jonadab's name should also be added to this list, but because he is not as close to Tamar as the other male relatives, I am not discussing his role of instigator further.

Common themes of domestic violence

In the Old Testament times, women suffered as a result of domestic violence because of circumstances that were similar to our experiences in 2020 of a hard lockdown. The reasons for lived experiences of lockdown differed: In the ancient times, women were 'locked down' or placed under lockdown by the patriarchal society at large and, within their immediate family structure, by their male caretakers, whether husband, father, father-in-law or brother/s. In our current time and context, everyone (regardless of their gender) was under lockdown in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19. This enforced lockdown of 2020 caused family members or life partners to live in close proximity to each other day in and day out for an extended period, being in each other's space constantly. As a result of having to share an enclosed space for a long period, many women were (and still are) abused by their male caretakers.⁴

After a close reading of Genesis 38 and 2 Samuel 13, several similarities between ancient times and our current time have come to the fore. Domestic violence is nothing new. Whilst it is not only women and children who suffer because of domestic violence, the majority of victims and survivors certainly belong to this group. This research article focused on the experiences of two women in the Old Testament and also takes into account the reports on women who have been abused during the COVID-19 time of lockdown.⁵

Domestic violence can have different faces. It is not only about physical and sexual abuse but also includes other forms of violence. Tamar (Gn 38) was abused sexually by her husband Omar (today we might even equal Omar's sexual gratification with rape), whilst her father-in-law Judah inflicted domestic violence on her by sending her away to a life of shame and isolation in the house of her biological father. If not for her escape plan, her biological father's house would have become the place of her life sentence of imprisonment, enforced by her father-in-law.

It is a sad reality that assumed safe spaces, places of refuge, are often prisons of violence and injustice for many. In our two Old Testament stories, both Tamars were unsafe in the domestic spaces that they found themselves in and in the company of their supposed caretakers. For Tamar of Genesis 38, this meant her own home (whilst married to Omar) and the house of her biological father because this house has become the prison that her father-in-law Judah sent her to. For Tamar of 2 Samuel 13, it meant the house of her half-brother Amnon where he raped her and the house of her brother Absalom where he kept her quiet for the remainder of her life. We can also include the house of her father, King

4. While space does not allow to include many articles that highlight the extent of domestic violence during COVID-19, Kofman and Garfin (2020:1–4) are amongst numerous scholars who discuss the alarming number of instances of domestic violence during COVID-19.

5. Uroko and Enobong (2021:1–8) also provide insight by reading Genesis 34 alongside the COVID-19 crisis and instances of rape and domestic violence.

David, because he was the man who sent her to her brother Amnon's house to serve him in the first place.

As women across the globe have suffered from social isolation and a loss of their identities during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tamars of Genesis and Samuel were also placed, or rather locked away, in family houses where they did not have free access to a public life. Tamar of Genesis 38 was expected to live as a widow (still dressed in widow's clothing years after her husband has passed away), and Tamar of 2 Samuel 13 lived 'desolated in the house of Absalom, her brother' (v. 20). This verse says it all. The women were removed from society and expected to stay in isolation.

This state of affairs also caused a loss of identity. Tamar of Genesis 38 lost her identity as wife and future wife. Whilst she remained the daughter-in-law of Judah when it suited him (when he wanted to pronounce judgment over her), she was not treated as such when he sent her away to her biological father's house. Furthermore, in her desperate plan to secure a future life for herself, she had to take on the identity of a prostitute and a deceiver. In a very real sense, we could argue that Tamar sacrificed her identity for the sake of a future. In contrast, we have witnessed the unbecoming of Tamar of 2 Samuel 13. She was one of the virgin daughters of King David, young and beautiful. However, after her brother Amnon raped and rejected her, she lost the hope of becoming someone's wife and the mother of children, and she lived a desolate, hopeless life in the house of Absalom. Women who suffer at the hands of their caretakers in situations of domestic violence are changed by these experiences. Their identities and all too often their very lives are at stake. It is for women (and children) like this that the Thursdays in Black campaign was called into life.

Thursdays in Black

The Thursdays in Black campaign is aimed towards a world without rape and violence. The history of this campaign can be traced back to the 1970s when the Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina protested against the violent government because of the disappearance of their children during the Dirty War.⁶ In the 1980s and 1990s, the WCC announced a *Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women* and this led to the campaign as we know it today (WCC n.d., *A look back...*). The Black Sash movement that protested against Apartheid in my home country, South Africa, together with women who protested in Israel, Palestine, Rwanda and Bosnia, also provided inspiration for the campaign (WCC n.d., *Thursdays in Black...*). In South Africa, the Diakonia Council of Churches inaugurated the campaign during the *16 Days of Activism Campaign for No Violence Against Women and Children* in December 2008 (We Will Speak Out South Africa n.d.). Since then, the South African church communities have become much more aware and active in speaking out against these forms of violence.

6. More can be read about this history at <http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/contemporary-07.html>

Thursdays in Black recognises that gender-based violence is often not obvious or visible and that rape and violence do occur in the intimate spaces of peoples' homes (WCC 2020). The campaign is simple, yet has a powerful message – it is a global call to all people who want to add their voice of protest against gender-based violence to do so by wearing black on Thursdays and in doing so to say NO to the abuse of women, children and men, also within the domestic sphere.

In the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WCC response team prepared a document called 'COVID-19 and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence' (WCC 2020). The purpose of the document is to assist people in dealing with these identity- and life-threatening issues. The document recognises the applicability of 2 Samuel 13 and starts with an excerpt from verse 12: 'And she said: "My Brother do not do this ..."'. It speaks directly to unsafe domestic situations and Thursdays in Black. Whilst I only found this document after I started working on this article, I am clearly not the first person to see the link amongst some ancient biblical accounts, gender-based violence, domestic violence and the pandemic.

Conclusion

This article explored domestic violence during the times of ancient Israel and links it with the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the contexts differ, the common factor points towards situations of lockdown where women cannot escape the unsafe domestic space that they share with (or because of) their perpetrators and are abused physically, emotionally and psychologically because they are trapped in these confined spaces. In the two examples taken from the Old Testament, both women are coincidentally called Tamar.

Six decades ago, the Thursdays in Black campaign was started by a group of women who could not keep silent anymore. This movement gained ground and has become a global movement that carries the support of major organisations, amongst which is the WCC. The aim of this study was to add the names of the biblical Tamars to our collective list of names of women for whom we unite weekly against gender-based violence in the #ThursdaysInBlack campaign. When we wear black on Thursdays, let it also be for the Tamars of the biblical times. Perhaps, the fact that the name and identity of Tamar of Genesis 38 survived and appeared much later in the genealogy of Jesus can encourage us not to give up in our fight against domestic violence.

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Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

T.B. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

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