

Rape and the Case of Dinah: Ethical Responsibilities for Reading Genesis 34

FRANCES KLOPPER (UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA)

ABSTRACT

The rape of Dinah in Genesis 34 is an unsettling story that creates discomfort for interpreters, evident in the variety and uncertainty displayed in their interpretations of the rape incident. Dinah's rape is either minimised, denied or the victim is blamed for what happened to her. Interpretations derive from the cultural assumptions of their time and interpretations of this text reflect a culture that encourages rape and sympathises with the rapist. These interpretations have ethical consequences, for by silencing the victim and not taking a stance against the rapist, the rampant rape epidemic of our time is perpetuated. To substantiate this observation, interpretations of Genesis 34 will be explored, tracing the way interpreters read their cultural assumptions about sexual violence into the text. An ethics of Bible reading is proposed that accepts responsibility for the integrity of Dinah, the victim character in the text, as well as for those on the reception side of the interpretation.

A INTRODUCTION

The following anecdote from a recent publication on the ethics of Bible reading illustrates the thrust of this article. It tells of a class of Biblical Studies students who discussed the subject of violence in the Bible and the effect it has on today's readers. The question was: Would violence in today's world decrease if Jesus' command in Matthews 5:39 to "turn the other cheek", was adhered to? The majority of the class agreed that refraining from answering violence with violence would indeed have the desired effect. Whereupon a counsellor of abused women remarked that it was a very naive way of thinking as this text has killed more women than we can count.¹

The point I want make is that the Bible is not as innocent as it seems and biblical interpretation has ethical consequences. Texts, including interpretive texts, are dangerous,² for once they are born, they go their own way and there is no limit to the influence they have on people's lives. We can safely say that the

¹ Gary Phillips and Danna Nolan Fewell, eds. *Bible and Ethics of reading* (Semeia 77. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 1, as quoted in Gerrie Snyman, *Om die Bybel anders te lees: 'n Etiek van Bybellees* (Pretoria: Griffel Media, 2007), 129.

² David Clines, *The Bible and the Modern World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 28.

Bible has been the most influential document in shaping the ideas of Western culture regarding the place of women and the relationship between the sexes.”³

This article is concerned with interpretations of the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34. Interpreters commenting on Genesis 34 choose to belittle the rape by offering various arguments and interpretations that either obfuscate, deny or avoid the rape, or they turn to the age-old method of blaming the victim.

Since interpreters and readers as historical beings, do their interpreting and reading from where they stand in history, these interpretations, no matter how rational or scientific, reflect the cultural assumptions of the time – apparently a culture that minimises rape, sympathises with the rapist and blames the victim. Interpretations such as these continue to perpetuate our rampantly growing rape culture,⁴ placing the ethical credibility of the readings under suspicion.

Today’s readers of Genesis 34 are faced with challenging questions: How to react to a rape text that holds the risk of justifying sexual violence? How to explain the meaning of the narratives in the light of present woman readers’ attitudes and circumstances? How to read the text in such a way that the integrity of the characters, as well as that of the reader remains intact?⁵ In brief, how to perform an ethical reading of Genesis 34?

The study will proceed by considering aspects of ethical Bible reading, followed by an investigation of the propensity of rape as societal violence to serve as background for discussing the interpretations. After analysing interpretations of Genesis 34, a feminist interpretation “from below” offers Dinah the opportunity to tell her story.

B ASPECTS OF ETHICAL BIBLE READING

Schüssler Fiorenza proposed a double ethics of Bible reading, comprising an *ethics of historical reading* and an *ethics of accountability*.⁶ An *ethics of historical reading* changes the task of interpretation from finding out “what the

³ Susanne Scholz, “Was it really rape in Genesis 34?” in *Escaping Eden: New Feminist Perspectives on the Bible* (ed. Harold C. Washington, S. Lochrie Graham and Pamela Thimmes, New York: New York University Press, 1999), 182.

⁴ This study is indebted to a survey done by Susanne Scholz, “Was it really rape?” 182-198.

⁵ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “A critical feminist emancipating reading,” in *Engaging the Bible: Critical readings from contemporary Women* (ed. Choi Hee An and Catherine P. Darr. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 84-86.

⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation. Decentering Biblical Scholarship,” *JBL* (1988), 14-17. See also Snyman, *Om die Bybel Anders te Lees*, 53-62.

text meant" to questions of what kind of readings can do justice to the text in its historical contexts. It honours the context of the ancient writings as well that of the current reader or interpreter of the text. An *ethics of accountability* stands responsible for the ethical consequences of the text and its meanings. If the text legitimates values which conflict with today's ethical values and causes harm to its readers, it must be evaluated on behalf of the vulnerable person that might be affected by the act of reading. We therefore forfeit the claim of having performed an ethical reading if violence is done by our interpretation to either the text, a character in the text or those on the reception side of our interpretation.

Ethics understood in this way is in line with the view of the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas that ethics is more about *encounter* than evaluation. The reader is encouraged to view the text not as an object to be evaluated but as an "other", an interlocutor or participant in the conversation. Put differently, it is not about standing outside the text or narrative making ethical judgements, but about entering sympathetically into the experience of the characters and the moral complexity of the worlds they inhabit.⁷ In the words of Levinas: "It is given to me who answer before the one for whom I am responsible."⁸ He uses the term *hineni* to illustrate the role of the reader in the sense of "here I am, I am listening."⁹ Reading becomes an ethically responsible activity because I engage an "other", in this case Dinah, the rape victim in Genesis 34.

C RAPE AND THE CASE OF GENESIS 34

Studies on the subject of rape revealed that rape has long been part of human experience, confirmed by the numerous rape stories and passages in the Bible. It showed that rape occurs in epidemic proportions worldwide and that it is a reality in times of peace as well as war.¹⁰ Statistics (2007) has shown that South Africa leads the world in rape cases with 1 300 (99 according to some sources) women forcibly raped every day and a woman raped every 17 seconds. If taken into account that only 1 in 20 incidents are reported, the statistic

⁷ Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Whispering in the Word, Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 11–12, 66.

⁸ Emmanuel E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (trans A. Lingis; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 91.

⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, pages not mentioned, quoted in O.E. Ajzenstat, "Beyond Totality: The Shoah and the Biblical Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Strange Fire, Reading the Bible after the Holocaust* (ed. T. Linafelt, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 113–115.

¹⁰ For the work done by feminists on rape, see Susanne Scholz, "Through Whose Eyes? A 'Right' Reading of Genesis 34" in *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (ed. A. Brenner, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 161–164.

is infinitely higher.¹¹ There is no denying that South Africa qualifies as a “rape culture.”

Since 1970 feminist scholars have researched the problem of rape, questioning the assumptions and biases underlying the phenomenon. Their objective was to find the origin and reasons for the current prevalence of rape.¹² Conducted from the perspective of the experience of rape victims, the first thing that became painfully clear, is that rape is the worst act of violence against a woman.¹³ It shatters her most intimate sense of security and leaves her disadvantaged, vulnerable and exposed. Women are encouraged to tell their stories of physical and mental intimidation, to speak out their pain and make the world aware of the problem.

What is rape? Scholz defines rape as “the crime of forcing another person to submit to sex acts, especially intercourse.”¹⁴ For interpreting Genesis 34:1-3, it is important to realise that libido, the sex drive, is not the prime cause for rape. Rape is culturally institutionalised violence and as such “accepted, supported and promoted by society.”¹⁵

Also pertaining to the Dinah story, is the fact that rape takes on different forms, such as stranger rape, acquaintance rape, marital rape, or gang rape.¹⁶ Examples of each of these types of rape are found in the biblical narratives. The rape of Dinah is a classic case of acquaintance, or date rape. Victims of acquaintance rape tend to remain silent about their experience because this kind of rape is not recognised as a sexually violent act. In fact, date rape is not perceived as rape since the rapist and victim knew each other and met prior to the rape may have instigated the rape. The woman is frequently blamed for her lack of resistance, so she remains silent for fear of being disbelieved.¹⁷ Dinah’s silence has allowed interpreters to imagine that she consented. Date rapists often appear “normal” after the incident and pretend that nothing bad happened. They know that they have taken advantage of a woman and might attempt to contact her again, pretending to be friends. Shechem fits this description, al-

¹¹ Statistics vary depending on the sources, see: http://www.newstime.co.za/SouthAfrica/Staggering_South_African_Rape_Statistics/15830/; http://www.rape.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=875&Itemid=64

¹² Scholz, “Through Whose Eyes?” 160.

¹³ It must be emphasised that male rape is a silent reality in today’s society and male victims’ experiences are no less horrifying. In her excellent recent publication, Scholz devotes a chapter on male rape in the Hebrew Bible. See Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness, Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 157-177.

¹⁴ Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 129.

¹⁵ Scholz, “Through Whose Eyes?” 161.

¹⁶ Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 10.

¹⁷ Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 30.

though the outcome of the story is complicated by his murder by Dinah's brothers.¹⁸

Genesis 34 relates the story of Dinah as follows: Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Jacob left home one day to visit the women of the region, when Shechem, the son of Hamor, the prince of the region, saw her, seized her and raped her. Subsequently however, Shechem found himself attracted to Dinah and expressed the wish to marry her. During the marriage negotiations between Hamor and Jacob and his sons, the latter consent to the marriage of their sister on condition that Shechem's tribe is circumcised. The negotiations included a permanent alliance between the tribes, sealed with continual intermarriage. Dinah's brothers took advantage of the Shechemites' recuperation period and massacred all the male members of the tribe, plundered the city and took the women and children as booty. When reprimanded by Jacob, they justified their action by saying that they did not want their sister to be treated as a prostitute. A feature of this narrative that will become significant later, is that Dinah never utters a word, she does not have a voice in decisions that affect her life.

Genesis 34 is a disturbing story about sexual violence which makes it particularly suitable for identifying readers' views on rape. In most legal systems, what happened to Dinah would have been considered rape. Nonetheless, in their treatment of the story, interpreters sidestep or belittle the rape incident.¹⁹

D INTERPRETATIONS OBFUSCATING RAPE

The following interpretations are briefly explored to trace the way in which Dinah's story has been altered, expanded or invented in order for interpreters to read their cultural assumptions into the text. This is inevitable, since authors as readers cannot avoid approaching the text from their social location which informs and codetermines the way they read.²⁰ The assumption being that the interpretations of Genesis 34 will reflect the extent to which commentators, mirroring their cultures, accept or criticise sexual violence.²¹ It will also allow an assessment of the ethical responsibility displayed in the interpretive process.

The interpretations follow in four categories.

1 Was it love?

¹⁸ Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 38.

¹⁹ Joy Schroeder, *Dinah's Lament. The Biblical Legacy of Sexual Violence in Christian Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 3, 11.

²⁰ For a discussion of the situatedness of all knowledge and understanding, see Frances Klopper, "Interpretation is all we have. A Feminist Perspective on the Objective Fallacy," *OTE* 22/2 (2009): 88-101.

²¹ Scholz, "Was it Really Rape?" 195.

Doubt as to whether Dinah was raped already arises in the first verses of Genesis 34. Did Shechem fall in love with Dinah (v. 3) after he raped her (v.2) or did he rape her because he loved her? Terence Fretheim²² supports the latter by emphasising the description of love in verse 3 after an initial moment of passionate force in verse 2. Shechem's "passion" for Dinah took over and led, perhaps mistakenly, to too much force. As love overrules rape, Shechem's deed is suppressed and he is freed of blame.

Some commentators propose Shechem's marriage proposal in verse 3 as the solution for having raped Dinah before he fell in love with her. They view rape as turning into love and love incorporating and accepting rape, but as Scholz remarks: "When rape is accentuated, love talk is not involved."²³ In other words, rape and love are incompatible. As seen above, Genesis 34 clearly describes acquaintance rape.

Ita Sheres²⁴ declares that Shechem, by proposing to Dinah and declaring his love for her, "is the only person in the tale sympathetic to Dinah whereas all the others are deceitful." Tikva Frymer-Kensky describes Shechem's caring attitude as "poignant" for he reassures her; he lovingly offers his commitment and she stays with him because "he spoke to her heart."²⁵ We find interpreters working up sympathy for Shechem the rapist and the reader almost ends up admiring him.

2 Some or other catastrophe

Gerhard von Rad follows a historical approach.²⁶ He proposes that Genesis 34 be read as a reflection of ancient Israelite tribal history. In his reconstruction of the tribal history he describes how the Israelite tribes were in the process of settling in the vicinity of Shechem when "by some catastrophe" they were forced to leave the territory. Dinah's rape becomes some or other unidentified catastrophe for the sake of larger historical events. The problem with this approach is that the historical reliability of the Hebrew Bible is questionable and historically we can say very little about the narrative.

²² Terence Fretheim, *The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Comments* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1944), 574- 581, quoted in Scholz, "Was it really Rape?" 187.

²³ Scholz, "Through Whose Eyes?" 171.

²⁴ Ita Sheres, *Dinah's Rebellion: A Biblical Parable for our Time* (New York: Crossroads, 1990), 85.

²⁵ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 189.

²⁶ Gerhard van Rad, *Genesis. A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 335.

Several scholars refer to the original circumstances in biblical times to explain Genesis 34. Fewell and Gunn²⁷ claim that Shechem acts appropriately within the narrow limits of Israelite society. He acts in Dinah's best interests by offering to marry her as it would give her a respected status in a society that offered no other option for raped women but to marry their rapist. So Shechem did the right thing and if sympathy is needed, it is to be sympathy for Shechem.

According to Robin Parry²⁸ every story is told from some perspective and every story has to marginalise some characters and events to focus on whatever the author wants to bring under the reader's attention. In Genesis 34 Dinah's rape is marginalised and she is silenced because in ancient Israel rape was not a crime against women, but against men (husbands and fathers). Female sexuality was male property. The question arises whether a woman who has no claims over her own sexuality can be sexually assaulted by any means? The reader is informed that Dinah would not have experienced the rape as a violation of her being and her body since her values were not western values. She would have perceived her rape in categories of "folly" and "defiling."

Speaking for Dinah about the effect of the rape on her body and psyche, smacks of denigrating the rape on the grounds of its acceptability in Israelite times. The fact is that we simply do not know enough about the history of rape in biblical times to make categorical statements about the subject.²⁹

3 Objection to intermarriage

Insider *versus* outsider arguments abound in the literature and hold that the story of Shechem and Dinah reflects the dilemma of small groups struggling to survive by remaining separate and distinctive. Yairah Amit³⁰ sees at the heart of the Dinah story an objection to marriage between the Jacob group as outsiders and the Canaanites as the indigenous inhabitants of the land. The story reflects the conditions of the Second Temple period when the text came into being. The plot serves a hidden polemic against intermarriage between the returned Judean exiles and the Samaritans who inhabited the land during the

²⁷ Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn, "Tipping the Balance: Sternberg's Reader and the Rape of Dinah," *JBL* 110.2, (1991), 193-211, as quoted in Scholz, "Was it really Rape?" 189.

²⁸ Robin Parry, *Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics: The Rape of Dinah as a Case Study* (Milton Keynes UK: Paternoster, 2004), 234-237.

²⁹ See Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 6-7.

³⁰ Yairah Amit, *Polemics in Hebrew Narrative* (trans. Jonathan Chipman; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 99, 196, 211. For another account of the parallel between the Genesis 34 and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, see Alice O. Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 87.

exile. Interpreters adhering to this view admit to Dinah's rape but view the rape symbolically as a metaphor for male insider *versus* outsider political agendas.

They agree that Dinah was a pawn in male power politics, but "neglect the emotions of the female pawn," as Brenner aptly puts it.³¹ These readings contribute to the marginalisation of Dinah.

4 Blaming the victim

Through the centuries commentaries minimised the rape by blaming Dinah for "going out" to meet the Shechemite daughters in verse 1, although contemporary critical commentators rarely openly revert to this method. In the public opinion, however, excuses for rape still flourish and thrive: "She was asking for it," "She enjoyed it," "Boys will be boys."³²

Marion Taylor and Heather Weir examined nineteenth century American and British lay women's interpretations of women's stories in Genesis.³³ The nineteenth century was a time of rising criticism, but for most women it was also a time of elevated piety. Religion, purity and femininity were qualities every woman was expected to display. The authors found that woman interpreters were unwilling to explore issues related to female sexuality. It was improper to even mention sexuality in public. Rape narratives in the Hebrew Bible were regarded as shocking, abhorrent and disgusting. Those who dared to comment on Genesis 34, used Dinah's behaviour in moral lessons as an example for young girls of how not to behave. By avoiding these difficult stories, they tried to live up to an ideal of protected and refined ladies "who are not only to be good, but to know nothing except what is good."³⁴

However, the persistence of rape makes silence about the "unmentionable sin" of rape dangerous and complicit, since silence enables the violent status quo and keeps it alive. It leads to victims blaming themselves and living with guilt for the rest of their lives.

Joy Schroeder analysed the way Christian readers interpreted biblical narratives about rape and sexual violence in the early church, the Middle Ages and the Reformation, bringing to the text their cultural insights and assumptions. In numerous cases sexual violence is justified as the victim's rightful punishment for some sin she committed. Augustine (345-430 C.E.) regarded

³¹ Athalya Brenner, *I Am ... Biblical Women Tell their Own Stories*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 14.

³² Schroeder, *Dinah's Lament* 238.

³³ Marion Taylor & Heather Weir, *Let her speak for herself: Nineteenth century women writing on women of Genesis* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006).

³⁴ Taylor & Weir, *Let her speak for herself*, 440-441.

rape as God-sent, for it teaches women to think again about future sinning.³⁵ Dinah's sin was not so much her going out to see the girls in the vicinity; her great vice was that she "went awalking to gaze and see fashions as women were ever desirous of novelties and given to needless curiosity."³⁶ Curiosity caused women to compare their own beauty with the appearance of others, resulting in the sins of seduction, pride and vainglory.³⁷ Many readers attributed the sin of lust to Dinah, of enjoying the sensual delights of the rapist's attention.³⁸

At a time when virginity and chastity were the great virtues of Christian behaviour, medieval exegetes used the fate of Dinah to enforce the strict enclosure of nuns within the walls of the cloisters to protect them from rape and seduction.³⁹ Martin Luther (1483-1546), by reading Genesis 34 historically from the perspective of a father with daughters, had more sympathy for Dinah and cast less blame on her than some other reformers like Calvin and Zwingli. He knew that daughters are curious and cautioned the parents to warn them against venturing out alone.⁴⁰

These interpretations from centuries ago influence today's readers indirectly by contributing to the myths and beliefs about sexuality and rape we inherited.

Ellen van Wolde views the ethical implications of blaming Dinah as follows:

Rape is a terrible thing, the extreme denial of a person's integrity. As bad as rape, is the prohibition of free movement, of having one's own perspective and the denial of speech, because it makes people invisible and disappear from our memories. Worse than rape, however, is genocide on a people, the slaughter of all the men and the capturing of all the women and children. And Dinah is held responsible for it. The first and last words of the text show that the blame falls on Dinah.⁴¹

Although van Wolde's value judgement about rape being a less heinous crime than murder is questionable, she acknowledges that by subtly shifting the

³⁵ Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 9. See also Schroeder, *Dinah's Lament*, 66.

³⁶ Gervane Babington (1550-1610), bishop of Llandaff, Wales, quoted by Shroeder, *Dinah's Lament*, 49.

³⁷ Schroeder, *Dinah's Lament*, 17.

³⁸ Schroeder, *Dinah's Lament*, 11.

³⁹ Schroeder, *Dinah's Lament*, 51.

⁴⁰ For a discussion on Luther's empathetic interpretation of the Dinah story in his Genesis commentary, see Schroeder, *Dinah's Lament*, 33-40.

⁴¹ Ellen van Wolde, "Rape or Worse?" *OTE* 2 (2002): 225-237.

blame on Dinah for her misfortune and the murder that follows, is not ethical and the text must be challenged on her behalf.

E ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that interpretations of Genesis 34 contain numerous assumptions that agree with a present-day belittlement of rape. Scholars suggest that the rapist “really” loved Dinah; they find rape less harmful in ancient Israel; they maintain that in ancient Israel a marriage could make amends for rape; they explain the events in terms of the dynamics of group oriented societies in which sexual intercourse is only a “catastrophe” when it threatens the survival of the community.⁴² About the consequences of interpretations that avoid sexual violence, Sternberg warns: “Tell it not to the rapists, publish it not in the streets, for some would call it a licence to rape.”⁴³

Strictly speaking, interpretations cannot be termed “right” or “wrong,” but there are criteria to decide whether they are ethical or not. Due to the Bible’s powerful influence on its readers, unethical readings of the Dinah story have the potential to encourage sexual violence. By not addressing or condemning the rape, they implicitly support the prevalent rape culture in today’s societies.

That begs the question of what the ethical responsibilities for interpreting Genesis 34 are. In the feminist tradition it requires an empathetic reading from below, through the eyes of the vulnerable characters in the text, the “other” in Levinas’ terms.

F DINAH’S SILENT SCREAM

The interpretations above and the biblical account of the Dinah affair in Genesis 34 have one thing in common: Dinah’s silence. She was doubly muted, muted by the biblical author and kept muted in the interpreters’ imaginations. An ethical interpretation is obliged to give her an opportunity to reclaim her voice and offer her perspective on what happened.⁴⁴ Or was her silence really a stifled scream, a begging to be heard, as Naomi Graetz suspects?⁴⁵ Was she so traumatised by the assault that she was unable to speak out her pain? Her imagined story, that is, what she might have said if only she had spoken, is now told, assuming that it will expose the terror of rape and put the minimising interpretations into perspective.

⁴² Scholz, “Was it really rape?” 195.

⁴³ Meir Sternberg quoted in Scholz, “Was it really rape?” 197.

⁴⁴ For imaginative reflections or *midrashim* on how Dinah may have felt, see Parry, *Old Testament Story*, 241.

⁴⁵ Naomi Graetz, “Dinah the daughter,” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (ed. A. Brenner, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 316-317.

Dinah voices her opinion in Athalya Brenner's book *I am... Biblical women tell their own stories.*⁴⁶

She starts her story:

The biblical story is not my story, it is not about me. It is really a political story, as noted by several commentators. I am but a pawn, an object. Often in biblical narrative a sexual union may symbolise the politics of intergroup relations, and that union may or may not be a matter of consent for the woman involved. In my case the union was male-initiated and violent.

“This how it happened,” she continues,

I was about twelve years old, an innocent young girl, who “went out” to meet the girls of the neighbourhood when I saw him, Shechem. We made eye contact and a cautious mutual attraction was acknowledged. So we talked and he invited me to his home and I went there, unsuspecting. I was so innocent. I was feeling safe, for in our culture hospitality to strangers was a sacred duty. Not for them, not for him, for he raped me. I did not consent. Do not believe the interpreters who try to deny it. It was a date rape, it happened in a situation of trust. The fact that my rapist decided to fall for me after the event and to ask my father for my hand in marriage, does not diminish his guilt. It can be worse, to be sure, for a deflowered girl, raped or not is damaged goods. Common opinion was that it was better for me to marry the assailant, in fact there is a biblical law that states:

“If a man finds a virgin that is not betrothed, and he holds her and lies with her and if they are found out...he will give the young woman’s father fifty pieces of silver, and she shall be his wife, for he caused her to suffer. And he cannot send her away throughout his life. (Deut 22:28-29)”

But it was impossible for me to love him, on the contrary, I came to hate him with the fervour of a victim. This is what happened to me that day. I suffered greatly, but nobody voiced my suffering. Hamor kept me in his house. I stayed there, silent, in a state of shock. To conclude then, I am Dinah, raped by Shechem as well as by the ongoing interpretations of my story doubting the rape and making it appear as *only* a metaphor for political relations.

⁴⁶ Brenner, *I Am ...*, 25–49. Dinah’s first person words are verbatim extracts from the chapter on Dinah’s story in Brenner’s book. The arrangement of the sentences and paragraphs and the connecting phrases are mine (F.K.).

G EPILOGUE

This study has shown that biblical rape texts can be engaged for enlightening contemporary debates on sexual violence. Interpretations of Dinah's rape in Genesis 24 were analysed and it was found that the majority undervalues the injustice perpetrated by rape and considers other factors as more important. Progressive Bible readers cannot afford to read this narrative and disregard the reality of a raging rape epidemic in our society.

Dinah's story can be read in a way that restores her honour as a person with value and choices. Rather than interpreting her story in the traditional feminist way which aims primarily at exposing the androcentric bias of the text and presents Dinah as an object used in male power games, she can be written back into history by permitting her to break the silence and tell her story. Dinah's story has the potential to demonstrate that liberation for rape victims can come from within. Raped women who may still be sitting silently on the sideline of life, passive, submissive, crushed, and marked for the rest of their lives, can refuse to remain silent. Silence implies resignation, and denial by interpreters of rape narratives, implies complicity. The fact that rape is rarely the subject matter of sermons from our pulpits and discussions in our classrooms, is a lamentable.

Genesis 34 is about date rape, but in our society marital or domestic rape needs special mention. It not only surpasses date rape in frequency, but it is one of the least spoken about types of rape. Baumann says that a woman is more vulnerable to a man if they are in a one-to-one relationship, for the man is a great deal more certain about his victim and her silence.⁴⁷ Husbands often believe that they are entitled to having sex without consent, and rape is used as punishment or a way of controlling their wives.

The objective and hope of this article is that the naming of biblical rape texts and the expression of discontent with the violent status quo, will inspire readers to break the silence about rape. The alternative possibility is that "it will remain in the shadows and dark places where those who perpetuate sexual violence want it to remain."⁴⁸

Schroeder's remark encompasses all that needs to be said about ethical interpretations of sexual violence texts: "The lessons of history may teach us the importance of using reverence and care in approaching both the sacred texts

⁴⁷ Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence. Marriage as Metaphor for the Relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic books* (Minnesota: Liturgical Books, 2003), x.

⁴⁸ Scholz, *Secret Witness*, 132.

and the stories told by victims of violence, listening to the voice of each with ears that hear.”⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ Schroeder, *Dinah’s Lament*, 239.

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