



Where are my brothers? The story of Dinah in Genesis 34 and women crying for help against sexual assault and rape in Eastern DR Congo

Marthe Maleke Kondemo
Stellenbosch University, South Africa
marthemaleke@yahoo.fr

Abstract

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been called the “rape capital” of the world. For almost two decades, people in the east of Congo have suffered violent abuses including killings, mass rape, mutilations, sexual slavery, and abductions, committed by local armed forces, rebels, and civilians. Helpless women and girls are raped, while the society looks on. Rape culture is upheld by the absence or lack of enforcement of laws addressing violence against women and discriminatory laws. In Genesis 34, while Dinah’s brothers are concerned and sympathise with their sister who has been raped by killing the rapist, Jacob kept silent. Approaching the text from a context of rape and sexual violence impunities against women, one is given the impression by the narrator that Jacob does not seem to be much concerned about his daughter’s rape but is obsessed by his own reputation, while Dinah’s two blood brothers desire for vengeance turns into excessive violence. If read from a *bosadi* womanhood perspective, Genesis 34 should stimulate the Congolese society to seek law enforcement strategies that would help reduce violence and end rape and sexual assault impunity against women. This article interrogates and examines the motives behind Jacob’s inaction and Levi and Simeon’s violent actions to challenge and outline the failures of the DRC system to support and care for women.

Keywords

Dinah; women; Democratic Republic of Congo; rape, violence, war, Jacob, justice

1. Introduction

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been labelled the “rape capital” of the world.¹ It has also been described as the worst place on earth to be a woman. The country’s history is shattered with civil wars and brutal acts of sexual violence. For almost two decades, the eastern part of the DRC has experienced an alarming rate of ongoing non-international and internationalised armed conflicts. Civilians have been drawn into the conflicts, which have been driven by a weak government and rich mineral resources. People in the eastern part of the country continue to suffer the worst forms of abuse, which include ethnic massacres, killings, mass rape, torture, arbitrary arrests, mutilation, sexual slavery, and abduction from armed local and rebel forces. This mass rape and other forms of sexual violence against girls and women (and sometimes against men and boys) cause enormous pain and affect victims and the community directly and indirectly.

The pattern of abuse is in part due to the lack of accountability for past crimes as well as the policy of integrating former rebels into the security forces without formal training and despite their involvement in past human rights abuses. While there has been some progress in prosecuting cases in recent years, the vast majority of military and police officers responsible for grave human rights abuse remain unpunished and in active service. Despite numerous attempts to implement peace agreements between warring states and parties, a democratically elected government, the reformation of laws, a revised constitution, and the presence of the world’s largest United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force, the rule of law in the DRC remains weak.² Though the government also recently declared a curfew in the eastern part of the country, rape and killing continue to be reported. The seed of rape is now spreading across the country, as men and boys organise themselves in gangs to kidnap, kill and rape women. This occurrence is a pointer to the decline in social values.

1 Kristof, Nicholas D and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 2009), 2.

2 United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) United Nations Security Council Resolution 1925 (1 July 2010), 1.

In Genesis 34, Dinah, Leah's daughter with Jacob, is raped by Shechem the prince of the land. On learning about her rape, her brothers react strongly by engaging in a mass killing of all the men of the city, but their father condemned Simeon and Levi for their action. The story ends with Levi and Simeon's question to their father (34:31), which may be understood as an accusation against him for not standing up for Dinah against Shechem.

Informed by my DRC context of human rights abuse, impunity and corruption, this article reads the story of Dinah as that of rape and examines the motive behind the action of Jacob's sons, as reported in Genesis 34, in order to outline the failures of the DRC system to support and care for abused women. While Dinah's brothers expressed concern for and sympathised with their sister, Jacob kept silent for fear of being attacked and sent out of the land. Based on Congolese women survival stories, I use the *bosadi* approach to read the story of the rape of Dinah to identify and deconstruct androcentric elements both in Genesis 34 and in the Congolese patriarchal culture and critically analyse Jacob's silence and failure to stand by his daughter. If read from a *bosadi* womanhood perspective, can Genesis 34 challenge the Congolese government to stand against the oppressor and produce more practical law enforcement strategies to end rape, sexual assault impunity against women, and offer special support and service to the victims? Thus, this essay is a call to the society in general and to the DRC's institutions that are mainly headed by men to hear women's cry for help in the context of gender-based violence, sexual assault, and rape – and act accordingly.

2. Women – victims of rape

Horrible levels of rape and other forms of sexual violence have plagued the eastern part of DRC for almost two decades. It is estimated that as many as 200,000 survivors of rape live in the DRC today. Soldiers and police officers, as well as Congolese and foreign armed groups, are among the main perpetrators. They use sexual violence as “a weapon of war” to control the region and destroy families and communities. Girls as young as two years' old and women older than 80 years, as well as some men and boys have been their target. Sadly, “Many rapes, notably those committed by armed groups, involved genital mutilation or other extreme brutality. Several

armed groups also abduct women and girls as sex slaves”.³ The perpetrators often harm their victims with machetes and other weapons before or after raping them. Many victims develop serious medical complications following rape or even die from their wounds.⁴ Another troubling situation is that of rape performed by some members of the peacekeeping forces of the United Nations who rape women and young girls as young as 10 years old, sometimes in exchange for food and sometimes with knives or sticks.⁵ In June 2011, an armed rebel group entered several villages and abducted many women. The victims were tortured and repeatedly raped in their homes or in the street. Some victims were raped in front of their family members and neighbours to humiliate them and thus cause their exclusion from the family circle and community.⁶ The result is low self-esteem, and many tend to leave their families to take refuge in a place where no one knows them. For children, it is a terrible thing to be abandoned by a humiliated mother and father. This shows that rape destroys the family and community.

Referring to his daily contacts with rape victims, the Congolese gynaecologist and Nobel Peace prize-winner, Dr Dennis Mukwege, says that “the word ‘rape’ or ‘sexual violence’ cannot fully translate the horror that hundreds of thousands of women are living with in this part of the world.”⁷ Alarmingly, he notes that in certain villages, over 90 per cent of

3 Amnesty International, Democratic Republic of Congo: Amnesty International’s Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review (2009), 5. [Online]. Available: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR62/009/2009/en/536d63eb-4c71-4c19-bd19-c014966bb7cf/af620092009en.pdf>.

4 Democratic Republic of Congo: Ending Impunity for Sexual Violence. New Judicial Mechanism Needed to Bring Perpetrators to Justice, 1. [Online]. Available: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/10/democratic-republic-congo-ending-impunity-sexual-violence>.

5 Amnesty International. “Stop Violence against Women”, 2004, 1. [Online]. Available: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/92000/af620182004en.pdf>.

6 Report on Violence against Women in North and South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Alternative Report for the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 55th Session July 8–26, 2013, 5.

7 Rape as a Weapon of War: Accountability for Sexual Violence in Conflict. Hearing before the Sub-Committee on Human Rights and the Law of the Committee on the Judiciary’s 110th Congress, 2nd Session, 1 April 2008, 1. [Online]. Available: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-110shrg45210/pdf/CHRG-110shrg45210.pdf>.

women have been victims of sexual abuse.⁸ To call rape simply an act of brutality or aggression does not fully capture the full nature and horror of this crime. The severe lack of resources including human resources in the judicial system “exacerbates impunity”, the stigmatisation of victims and a reluctance to pursue rape cases, the high cost of legal proceedings, the lack of protection for victims and witnesses, as well as the increasing dogmatisation and stigmatisation or “shaming” within the society.⁹ In his UN address on 25 November 2006, Kofi Annan, observed that, “Violence against women causes untold misery, harms families across generations, and impoverishes communities. It stops women from fulfilling their potential, restricts economic growth, and undermines development”.¹⁰ Rape fundamentally destroys the future of the society because when women are destroyed, there is no possibility of renewal of the community.

3. The rape of Dinah

Genesis 34 is about rape, power, and violence. It is a complex story mainly because of its complicated ethical dilemma marked by the mass murder of the rapist and the members of his family community. The story begins with the freedom of a young woman who leaves home to go and visit the daughters of the land and it ends with a question from her brothers to their father, “Should our sister be treated like a whore?” (Gen 34:31). Dinah’s plan to visit other women turns into a nightmare. In verse 2, it is said that “Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her. He took her, lay with her, and *innah*¹¹ her. Shechem uses his masculinity,

8 *Rape as a Weapon of War*, 1.

9 J. Mansfield, “Prosecuting Sexual Violence in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Obstacles for Survivors on the Road to Justice”. *African Human Rights Law Journal* 9 (2009): 370.

10 K. Annan, ‘International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November’, 2006, 1. [Online]. Available: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sgsm10738.doc.htm>.

11 The word “*innah*” carries different meanings (to rape, to force (sexually), to defile, to violate, to humiliate, to weaken), depending on the context, but all have a violent connotation making it difficult to translate the word. Therefore, many modern English translators render it as “rape”. Though the biblical Hebrew does not have a proper word for “rape”, the Bible is aware of the fact that women can be forced into sex. Cf. Sandie Gravett, “Reading ‘Rape’ in the Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of Language,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28, no. 3 (March 1, 2004): 279–99; Susanne

power, and position to satisfy his lust. His action deprives Dinah of her freedom. Shechem then falls in love with Dinah and wants to marry her. Her brothers, however, do not trust him. They trick the prince, his father Hamor and the male inhabitants of the town into circumcision and thereafter kill them. On hearing of these events, Dinah's father Jacob, who was silent, is now furious. He accuses his sons of stirring up trouble making him to be afraid of being attacked and destroyed. His shame was grounded in his fear and insecurity. The man, who shamed his brother and deceived his father and father-in-law, was now concerned about his own reputation. Jacob's failure to act or speak seems to be due to his fear of the powerful Canaanites.

Over the centuries, the dominant exegetical traditions have tended to acknowledge that the sexual event that occurred between these two characters in Genesis 34:2 was both violent and coercive. However, a few modern scholars are rather more ambivalent in their interpretation of the events depicted in verse 2. Thus, some have described Shechem's encounter with Dinah as a "seduction",¹² a "liaison", or an act of "passion",¹³ thereby trying to imply that it is to be focalised less as a brutal assault than as a typical and normative display of sexual desire.¹⁴ Indeed, some suggest that it is much more likely that this sexual encounter between the two characters was consensual and mutually desired.¹⁵ More recently, there is a far more radical challenge within biblical interpretation by scholars who question the very notion that Dinah was in fact the victim of a sexual assault based only on the textual evidence from the brief description in verse 2. Such a reading normalises Shechem's action as that of a love story, causing some

Scholz, "What 'Really' Happened to Dinah? A Feminist Analysis of Genesis 34", 2001, 14. [Online]. Available: http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/01_2/s.pdf.2001 ; Alison L. Joseph, "Understanding Genesis 34:2: 'Innâ,'" *Vetus Testamentum* 66, no. 4 (2016): 663–668.

- 12 Mary Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 177; Calum M. Carmichael, *Women, Law and Genesis Traditions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979).
- 13 Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 274–276.
- 14 Ogden Alice Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994), 89–90.
- 15 Hilary Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 185–187; Lyn M. Bethel, "What If Dinah Is not Raped? (Genesis 34)", *JSOT* 64 (1994): 19–36.

readers to question it as an episode of rape. Given “that the similarities of plot and language between Genesis 34 and the other biblical stories of rape or attempted rape reinforce the argument that here, too, it is a case of rape, not of seduction, even though the victim’s voice is not heard.”¹⁶ The lack of a radical separation of violence and sexuality that enables us to confront the power of the cultural construction of masculinity may normalise male sexual aggression.

When we turn to consider the representation of Dinah’s rape in Genesis 34:2, it is striking to note that the narrator by no means wasted words in furnishing his reader with a detailed or comprehensive depiction of this episode. In a detached way, the narrator combines three verbs to describe Dinah’s rape: “He took her, and he laid with her, and he raped her”. The verbs underscore the increasing severity of the violence. We are granted no access to the underlying motive for Shechem’s action here, nor does the narrator spend any time in revealing Dinah’s reaction to being used as the object of such an apparently precipitous sexual attack. What we observe is that, after the rape, Dinah’s role shifted from being an active subject to that of a passive subject. Without either explanation or warning, she is no longer a woman going out on her own to seek female company but instead is an assaulted and abused object in the hand of a man who appears to have neither sought her consent nor given much thought to her wellbeing.¹⁷

Dinah’s rape is not only marginalised, but she is also silenced. Informed by women’s stories of rape, therefore, Dinah’s silence can be explained by the damage that the violence has caused in her. Whether in biblical Israel or in contemporary culture, rape assaults women to the very core of their physical, psychological, and spiritual being. It destroys their relationship with the world around them and their very own sense of self. Women who have been raped confront the threat of death directly and concretely as they experience raw terror in the realisation of their own powerlessness and vulnerability. To deny the absolute horror and brutality implicit in

16 Yael Shemesh. “Rape is Rape is Rape: The Story of Dinah and Shechem (Genesis 34)”, 2007, 20. [Online]. Available: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240752635_Rape_is_Rape_is_Rape_The_Story_of_Dinah_and_Shechem_Genesis_34.

17 Caroline Blyth, “Terrible Silence, Eternal Silence: A Feminist Re-Reading of Dinah’s Voicelessness in Genesis 34”. *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2010): 86.

the act of rape is to undermine radically the victim's suffering. It is to minimise and silence the reality of her suffering and to deny her status as the wounded victim of a truly terrible and atrocious act.

4. Jacob's silence: the anger and outrage of Dinah's brothers

Regarding Dinah's rape, the text notes that, "Jacob held his peace until they came" (34:5). Jacob was curiously silent about the incident but the reason behind his silence is not clear.¹⁸ Jacob does not condemn the whole affair but "keeps silent" and prepares to do business with Hamor. Two of Dinah's brothers, Simeon, and Levi, however, consider Shechem's rape of Dinah a shocking outrage. In their view, their sister has been made unclean. Like a prostitute, she has become a person of outsider status, unfit to be a bride.¹⁹ This section gives the impression that Jacob's sons were far more offended and outraged than their father Jacob was. In contrast to their father Jacob, who did not respond immediately, Simeon and Levi reacted strongly, "They grieved, and they were very depressed". Their anger led them to kill Shechem and his father Hamor as well as the men of Shechem and to capture the women and children. Although the severity of their action is difficult to tolerate, the murder seems to be a consequence of the rape. The brothers are driven by the fact that Shechem had oppressed Dinah, their sister.

The story of Tamar's rape in 2 Samuel 13 and that of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19 and 20 describe similar acts. On each occasion, the woman's male kin respond with an act of violence. The violence associated with their action goes beyond the simple desire to take vengeance on the rapists. When we consider Genesis 34, we see this same tendency for violence by the rape victim's male kin. Simeon and Levi respond by initiating an act of vengeance that goes well beyond any desire for personal retribution against the rapist. It is as though, in each narrative, a woman's rape comes

18 Barker, Kenneth L, Kohlenberger John R III. Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary. An Abridgment of the expositor's Bible Commentary. Vol1: Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 43.

19 Suzan Niditch. Genesis. Carol. A. Newsom, Sharon H Ringe and Jacqueline E Lapsley (eds). *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Twentieth Anniversary Edition. Revised and Updated (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press: 2012), 41.

to symbolise a serious infraction of the rules that govern interfamilial and intertribal order; this most personal violation of the victim's body is thus reconceptualised as a catalyst that ultimately unleashes the violence that results from such an infraction.²⁰ Alice Keefe²¹ has noted that, in these three texts, “narrative representation of the woman's experience of rape embodies the dynamics of the social chaos which follows. Thus, the horrors of rapes in these narratives serve as loci of meaning in which the reality of war as the fragmentation of community life gains powerfully graphic expression.”

It may be difficult for the modern reader to process the fact that Jacob and, by extension, the brothers were considered the primary injured party in the biblical narrative, and not Dinah! Even more troublesome is the possibility that Dinah is being partially blamed for what happened to her in the opening line of the story. However, one should understand that the story of Dinah was set in a historical context in which women were regarded frequently as objects. By raping Dinah, the Hivite prince seriously dishonoured the Jacobites, demonstrating their incapacity to protect and defend “their women”, and thereby destroying any notion they might have entertained about their authority and power. Unlike their father, the brothers appeared to believe that such a dishonouring violation of community order was not something that could be resolved by Hamor and Shechem's seemingly generous offer of economic and political recompense. Money, marriage, or any form of favour could not make her disgrace go away.

The brothers however want to restore the honour of their family. They reject the possibility that Shechem should redeem his action through payment. To accept the proposals would have been to violate the sacred principles of their call as a family and to sacrifice the promises of God for worldly gain. Dinah cannot be traded for economic gain. The brothers insist on Dinah's wellbeing.²² Verse 27 mentions that the other sons of Jacob join in the attack of the city, slay the inhabitants, and plunder the city because their sister has been defiled. The writer does not deplore the situation; he

20 Blyth Caroline, “The Narrative of Rape in Genesis 34”, *Interpreting Dinah's Silence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 89.

21 Alice A. Keefe, “Rapes of Women/Wars of Men”, *Semeia* 61(1993): 79.

22 Susanne Scholz, “What ‘Really’ Happened to Dinah?” 1.

seems to look favourably on the massacre of the Shechemites, for which all of Israel takes responsibility.

What seems clear is that the tension between the horror of the rape and the enormity of the killings encouraged many interpreters to minimise the rape. To many scholars, the rape of one woman pales in comparison to the murder of many men. Yet, the widespread elevation of the rapist and the indifference toward his accountability demand an alternative interpretation. This interpretation is also illustrated by the silence of Jacob. His silence is interpreted as being reflective of a calm spirit and a desire to act in a way that was beneficial to both Israel and the neighbouring cities. While Jacob's sons lacked self-control and were irrational, Jacob tried to act with honour, forgiveness, and patience. However, Jacob's behaviour does not help the rapist to regret his act and repent. Jacob's failure to respond was a weakness, which also suggests an unwillingness to support his daughter. Early commentators on this text do not condemn the sons of Jacob but they do condemn Shechem's behaviour. Was the reaction of the sons of Jacob justified? The contemporary reader can only speculate. While it is easy to judge their action from a modern perspective, I believe that the Hebrew writer has left indications for us to understand and find meaning in the story. Their answer to their father in the form of a question, "Should he treat our sister as a prostitute?" (Gen 34:31), suggests that they felt justified, and that the narrator left the audience to ponder on the question and reflect on the story.

Simeon and Levi became the heroes not because of their act of murder but because of their desire for social justice. They were not motivated by greed, power, or envy but by anger and a feeling of powerlessness. They did not consider their personal interests while negotiating with the rapist, the same person who destroyed the life of their sister, or with the people who destroyed their peace and integrity for the sake of maintaining their position in the land and of gaining wealth and protection; what mattered most was their sister's dignity. Someone was supposed to act to put an end to the rape culture that was taking place. Hence, I partially agree with Mitchell that the execution or threat of reprisal encourages an adversary to refrain from or discontinue violating the laws of war. In other words,

reprisals provide an important deterrent or compliance effect.²³ However, it does not necessarily mean violence. The first response to an offence should not be a counter offence or violence. A reprisal attack usually leads to counter-reprisal attacks, destroying more lives, increasing the level of insecurity, and affecting economic activities. Violence does not achieve much. Instead, it creates a cycle of violence. Therefore, laws must be established against the oppressor and to create safeguards to prevent the perpetuation of violence.

5. Giving victims a voice

Rape has long been considered a crime so unspeakable, so shameful to its victims, that they are rendered mute and cloaked in anonymity.²⁴ Rape remains the most under-reported of crimes. Beside the physical assault, for a victim, rape is the aggression against her emotions and her mental system. It is the attack on her person, her own dignity, her intimate self. Rape is aggression against her own identity. A victim knows that her (or his) person has been reduced to an object or thing used by the rapist to vent his anger, rage, and hatred, and this is the reason most victims feel worthless, “dirty”, and “infected”.²⁵ After the rape, some survivors develop hatred of their bodies which they believe is the cause of their suffering. Therefore, many decide to remain silent.

The police and judiciary, the media, medical personnel, and members of the community usually contextualise rape within the boundaries of accepted sexuality. By doing so, they fail to recognise that coercive acts of sexual aggression are occasions of unlawful assault that brutalise women on a physical, emotional, and spiritual level. Consequently, in many cases, female victims of rape do not trust the judicial system. They regard it as corrupt. We should not be surprised, then, that so many of these women never share their terrible trauma with anyone; they choose stigma or silence

23 Andrew D. Mitchell, “Does One Illegality Merit Another? The Law of Belligerent Reprisals in International Law” in *Law of Reprisals*, *Military Law Review* 170 (2001):177.

24 Mitchell, “Does One Illegality Merit Another?”

25 B. Diken and Carsten B. Laustsen, “Becoming Object: Rape as a Weapon of War”, *Body and Society* 11 (2005): 113.

rather than endure the contempt or hostility they may face from those who should support them and encourage them to heal.²⁶

Unlike in the account of the rape of Tamar by her half-brother, Amnon (2 Sam 13:12–14), we do not hear Dinah speak or cry out in resistance before Shechem took her. We are not told who and how the message of Dinah rape reached Jacob. According to verse 26, Dinah never left the rape scene. Dinah's experience is not an important factor in the story. The text does not tell us how she felt about Shechem or about her brothers' revenge, or even what happened to her after she was rescued. Some commentators assume that the traumatic nature of the rape affected Dinah and it would have led to her fate as a silenced rape victim. "By being denied the opportunity to share her experiences with her family and community, by being faced only with social disgrace, devaluation, and shame, Dinah suffers perpetually the fate of the silenced rape victim, isolated, stigmatised, and deprived of a supportive audience".²⁷ Like the many rape survivors who feel they can never share their experience with anyone, even with family and friends, Dinah too is denied the opportunity to give voice to her own experience of sexual violence. For Bail, "silence and silencing are characteristic of approaches to sexual violence against women. Women's stories are silenced, or if these stories are told at all, women's voices are excluded".²⁸ In the case of Dinah, we are not told if her silence was her own decision or the choice of the narrator who was more concerned about her brothers' reaction than her feelings.

For decades, women were not allowed to speak and share their stories. For some, it was by fear of being stigmatised but for others by lack of safe space. In 2009, women, all victims of sexual violence, from various provinces gathered in the DRC capital, Kinshasa, to break the silence around sexual violence. They publicly spoke about their ordeal and called for nation-wide mobilisation of support for the "Stop au Viol" Campaign. They issued a call to the church and to people of power and influence in the country to take concrete action beyond public declaration of goodwill in order to effectively

26 Blyth, "Terrible Silence, Eternal Silence", 109.

27 Blyth, "Terrible Silence, Eternal Silence", 505.

28 Ulrike Bail, "The Breath after the Comma: Psalm 55 and Violence against Women", *Journal of Religion & Abuse* 1, no.3 (1999): 7.

end the sexual violence that has ravaged and humiliated thousands of women and girls in the DRC.²⁹ The women explained the reason behind their decision to speak out, as they stand on behalf of all women:

It is a cry on behalf of all women, those who have spoken out, and those still in hiding because of the stigmatization and the shame. One survivor denounced the complicity that exist between the rapist and those who refuse to act as she argued, “in my eyes, all those who tolerate sexual violence, turn a blind eye, refuse to denounce and condemn these barbaric acts – they are all as guilty as those who commit these crimes...” Another survivor said “we have chosen to speak out so that we can help each other to get back to our families and our lives... I know now there is a network of activists all over the country. I am now a member, but until you speak up you cannot be heard”.³⁰

Remaining silent is a weapon that continues to destroy their lives. Naming it is the first step to dismantling the rape culture. To speak and be heard is to have power over one’s life. To be silent is to have that power denied.³¹ Breaking the silence is an effective way of eradicating rape and other forms of sexual violence. Therefore, Congolese women refuse to be silenced by their rapist or any other person. They do not want someone else to change their stories or try to fill in the gap created by their silence. Women’s voices are a wake-up call to their fathers and brothers to find concrete solution to free them from the hands of rapists and put an end to their suffering.

6. Where are my brothers?

The prevalence of sexual violence raises questions about human nature. The silence of the church and society on sexual violence raises questions about the nature of community. The structure of oppression in sexual

29 “Breaking the Silence: DRC Rape Survivors Take Their Campaign to the Capital and Call for a Move beyond Pledges to Concrete Action” (2009):1.

30 Breaking the Silence: DRC Rape Survivors, 2.

31 Ahrens E. Courtney, “Being Silenced: The Impact of Negative Social Reactions on the Disclosure of Rape”, *American Journal of Community Psychology* 38 (2006): 263.

violence raises questions about God.³² All too often, the brutality and destructiveness inherent in rape and the injustice underlying its subversion of women's sexual and bodily integrity are overlooked by the institutions and individuals who constitute the victim's community.³³ Jacob's silent and impassive character appears to conceptualise Dinah's rape, not as a serious assault on his daughter's physical and sexual integrity, but rather as an event that had serious political repercussions for him. Unlike their father, Dinah's brothers appear to be deeply moved when they hear the news of her violation – they are “grieved and deeply angry”.

Jacob's words in verse 30 suggest that his emotional energies are entirely bound up with his own political concerns and not with any empathic appreciation of Dinah's suffering as a victim of rape. At no point throughout this narrative does Jacob express any compassion, anxiety, or concern for Dinah's welfare, neither does he acknowledge the terrible ordeal that she has just endure. He does not even attempt to talk to her after her return home. Instead, he maintains absolute silence and an emotional distance between himself and his daughter. For whatever reason, Jacob refused to protect Dinah. Like Dinah, women often suffer twice due to, first their rape and then, the lack of attention they receive from their families and communities. Jacob is perceived as a person who is more concerned about his own honour and reputation. However, Simeon and Levi are motivated to act because the damaged honour of their sister. Jacob is overcome by an egocentric pragmatism that is concerned only with his safety and the potential materialistic gain from the interaction with the Hivites. Simeon and Levi, however, are guided by what Sternberg calls their “idealism”.³⁴ He concludes that Simeon and Levi are the heroes of the story. Through their violent reprisal against Shechem's crime, the narrator has stored up enough sympathy with the reader to balance the excesses of their violence.

32 Newton, J. Poling, *The Abuse of Power* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 13–14.

33 Ann J. Cahil, *Rethinking Rape* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 132–144.

34 Meir Sternberg, “Biblical Poetics and Sexual Politics: From Reading to Counter Reading”. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 474.

“Does our sister deserve to be treated as a prostitute?”³⁵ According to Clark, this question not only requires an answer but a response. If the answer is yes, then we are careless and abuse our power to humiliate our sisters, as did Shechem. If the answer is no, then what do we do? Should we continue in silence out of fear, hesitation, or weakness, as did Jacob? If the answer is no, then, the Hebrew writer encourages us to respond as leaders of a community of faith. The community of faith is challenged to respond through strong leadership, confrontation, boldness, and a strong faith in Yahweh.³⁶ It is lamentable that rape is rarely the subject matter of sermons from our pulpits or discussions in our meetings. Though churches have been helping women to move beyond their traumatic situations, in some cases providing material, financial and medical support, there is an absence of adequate support structure for survivors and victims of violence coupled with the laxity of justice, as cases of violence are rarely criticised in official reports unless they end in death. The church therefore should continue to play a more proactive role in speaking out and advocating for women. It must be active in processes of transformation through preaching and teaching that would speak out against the root causes of rape. The fact that rape is rarely the subject matter of sermons and discussions in our classrooms, is lamentable. The text of Deuteronomy 22:23–29 assumes that a raped woman’s screams would be heard by others, and she would be rescued. There seems to be no excuse for the community’s silence or failure to respond to the issues of abuse or sexual violence. Keeping silent about sexual violence or failing to acknowledge the troubling reality of rape and sexual violence is to be complicit. The abuse of women affects the whole society; without a woman, there is no family, church, or nation.

Indeed, Jacob’s silence and hesitance before and during the negotiations indicate a failure to lead. It seems Jacob was going through a leadership crisis. Jacob’s refusal to do what is right for his family has pushed two of his sons to do something, something terrible in response. “When God-appointed heads do not take appropriate leadership, it creates a void, which

35 The word “harlot”, *zanah*, signifying prostitution for hire is considered a dishonourable profession.

36 Ron Clark, “The Silence in Dinah’s Cry”, *European Electronic Journal for Feminist Exegesis* (2006): 1. [Online]. Available: http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/06_1/clark_silence.htm#_edn65

is often filled sinfully”.³⁷ He did not only fail to protect his daughter but also to control his sons’ actions. Like Jacob, the DRC has also faced a leadership crisis for many years, as its leaders fail not only to protect but to also to take effective action that would guarantee the peace and security women and of their territory. Leaders are more concerned about their personal interests and the wellbeing of their families. While Congolese are being violated and killed, they are careless make alliances and agreement with the same people who are responsible for the destruction of their country because of power and wealth. Good leadership should not allow a woman or anyone in the community to be humiliated. Whereas Simeon and Levi acted deceitfully, Jacob refused to act. Helpless women and girls are raped, and society does not firmly resist it. The DRC daughters who are abducted, abused, and made sexual slaves need their brothers, fathers, uncles, and husbands to rescue them as did Dinah’s brothers. The government therefore should put in place mechanisms that empower women, amplify their voices, support survivors, and promote gender justice and equality. Rape culture is sustained because laws addressing violence against women are either non-existent or not enforced.

To combat sexual violence, a number of provisions have been enacted in the Congolese Constitution. In 2006, a legislative and judicial reform was launched that was less tolerant of sexual violence and friendlier towards women. The new laws impose a penalty of five to 20 years’ imprisonment for rape and stricter penalties were established for indecent assault, which does not include penetration. Despite the progress made through these new laws, there have been very few successful prosecutions of indecent assault and rape. The failed justice system of the country has contributed to the increasing level of violence and impunity. Even though the government has ratified numerous conventions that call for the ending of all forms of discrimination against women, the lack of support by the Congolese government and the corrupt system imply that women have little access to the legal institutions because of the high cost of legal representation. Perpetrators, including leaders, must be brought to justice. Government officials should send strong and clear warnings to soldiers, officers,

37 Genesis Part Two: Patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. [Online]. Available: https://calvarychapelbishop.weebly.com/uploads/1/1/0/6/11063031/genesis_part_two__12-50_.pdf

combatants, and warlords that rape carries a high penalty. It is urgent for the government to take concrete actions to put an end to the insecurity, subdue the armed rebel groups and restore state authority.

7. Conclusion and recommendation

It is clear that ending violence against women and impunity is extremely difficult in the DRC because of the absence of effective laws and non-implementation of the ratified ones by an ineffective and corrupt system. However, Genesis 34 narrative contains indispensable tools that could be used to address the insidious rape that remains a taboo and continues to cause untold suffering to so many women. Read from the perspective of *bosadi* womanhood, Genesis 34 should serve to challenge and stimulate the Congolese society and its judiciary to become the conscience of the nation by coming up with effective safeguard actions, and creating awareness, preventing, and ending impunity against all forms of violence against women and standing by the women against the oppressors. If Dinah's brothers' violent reprisal has been challenged, Jacob's silence and inaction should be challenged even more. Dinah's story has the potential to positively empower the society to stand against the evil being done to Congolese mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. It should also empower women to talk for themselves and not allow the narrator to silence them as in the case of Dinah.

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