

A re-reading of Judges 19 in juxtaposition to the Zimbabwean women's vulnerability to 'punitive rape'

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With the rise of feminist thinking, the phenomenon of the rape culture has admittedly drawn the attention of many academics especially in biblical studies. While several academics have done a commendable job of demonstrating how ancient biblical stories can have a bearing upon elements of the modern rape culture, the bulk of the literature has been penned from a Western standpoint and it is only by inference that one can find a resonance with the African situation. Given that the rape culture is not just a Western phenomenon but a pervasive global challenge, this article introduces an African perspective on this matter. Wearing feminist hermeneutical lenses, the article engages in a comparative analysis of the gender-based violations, human rights abuses, and the absolute lack of hospitality depicted in Judges 19–21 with the experiences of a Zimbabwean woman, Rutendo Munengami. It then taps into the lived experiences of the given women as resources which can be used to seriously think about the ugly dehumanising effects of rape and in so doing, bolster efforts towards combating the modern rape culture. In this article, it is our contention that people, the world over, and the Zimbabwean society in particular, need to earnestly acknowledge the pain and anguish experienced by the Levite's concubine as well as Munengami and other countless women who have been victims of rape. We conclude the article by restating that wherever the rape culture is prevalent, people need to embrace and uphold the principles of human dignity, hospitality, justice and equality, and resolutely move away from a culture of denial and apathy when it comes to issues of rape.

Contribution: This article juxtaposes the experiences of the sexual violence endured by the concubine in Judges 19 and that of a Zimbabwean woman, Rutendo Munengami. It concludes by proffering possible ways of curbing the rape culture which has crept into Africa like a cancerous worm.

Keywords: gender-based violence; Gibeon men; human rights abuses; Israelite tribes; punitive rape; texts of terror; theology of hospitality; Zimbabwean women.

Introduction

With the advent of feminist theological thinking, research on Judges 19 took a turn from the common approach of blaming the woman for having 'prostituted herself' to re-telling the story from the concubine's vantage point. Among the decisive feminist voices with respect to a change in interpretation of this text, is Phyllis Trible and Susanne Scholz. In recent years, adding weight to the need for a re-reading of this story is Helen Paynter (2020); Blyth, Colgan and Edwards (eds. 2018). It is in the same spirit that in the first part of this article we take the concubine's and 'Rutendo Munengami's stories side by side, seeking to re-tell them from their vantage points and raising them up as embodied cries of outrage. In the second part of the article, we then explore how these two women's experiences can be used as resources to seriously engage the problem of rape in contemporary Zimbabwe. The article draws to a close by countering the human rights violations, depravity and dehumanisations clouding the Judges 19–21 narrative and the case of Munengami, through proffering a theology of hospitality and human dignity as resources for reclaiming and restoring the humanity and dignity of women exposed to diverse forms of gender-based violence in our contemporary times (Mwandayi & Chirongoma 2020; Sande & Chirongoma 2021).

1. As will become clearer in this article, she is one of the victims of politically motivated 'punitive' rape experienced by countless women in Zimbabwe.

Note: Special Collection: Women Theologies, sub-edited by Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale (Midlands State University, Zimbabwe) and Tanya van Wyk (University of Pretoria).

Re-reading the concubine's narrative

Revisiting the story itself, the narrative begins to unfold when an unnamed Levite sets out on a mission to pursue his unnamed concubine² who, due to some misunderstanding, had since left him to go and stay at her maternal home. While the text would want people to believe that it was the woman's unfaithfulness which had caused this separation, the Levite equally appears to have had wronged the concubine as shown by him going out of his way to persuade the concubine to come back. This may also explain why the Levite had to wait for some months before following his concubine wife. It is unfortunate that the text does not give the woman a voice to show exactly what had made her to finally pack her belongings and return to her father's house. The decision she finally made shows that she must have been fed up of living with this man and it may even be a pointer to what led her to be unfaithful (if she was) to him in the first place. Tribble, however, rejects the idea that the woman was of loose morals arguing that she simply became angry with him and moved away. The source of this contention comes from the fact that in the Hebrew text, the verb *znh* is used (*znch* in the Masoretic Text) which means 'harlot' and *orgisthe* in the Greek text or LXX meaning 'angry'. For Tribble (1984), the story itself allows for both readings. Although she was given no voice by the male author/s (the Deuteronomist/s), at least her non-verbal communication shown by leaving the Levite and going back to her maternal home, shows that she was a woman who could decide her own fate in a society which frowned at the aspirations of women. Her departure, as suggested by Smith (2009), could be perceived as an act of survival. She could have weighed the cost of staying and found that it outweighed the potential consequences of taking flight. Even her father does not send her back, which shows that he probably knew something we do not know (Smith 2009).

When the Levite finally decided to pursue her, the father-in-law was glad and was not prepared to let his son-in-law go away before 'spoiling' him a bit, possibly with wine or some other kind of home-made beer. Quite contrary to what he originally intended, the son-in-law found himself still enjoying his stay at his father-in-law's homestead on the 5th day after his arrival as the two made merry. (n.p.)

A sign that women were considered as second-class citizens in that society is the fact that only the father of the concubine is mentioned – 'the girl's father' (Jdg 19:3–9). Even when he made merry with his son-in-law, hardly does one find any mention of the mother, let alone the daughter. Both appear to be no partakers in the partying that is going on. Because it was 'the world of men', even the party appears to be the reserve of men alone. The concubine does not even voice

when to leave and it appears to be a matter between the two men, the son-in-law and the father-in-law. Her silence is presented in such a way that one would not believe that she was in the same house had the narrator not earlier indicated so. Given such a scenario, one is inclined to agree with Smith (2009), who asserted that:

The concubine ceases to exist, [...] until the Levite reclaims her from her father's (his father-in-law's) house [...]. In her father's house, she lives in a state of liminality; she is unclaimed property. (p. 25)

When the day of departure comes, she does not even give her opinion on what hour of the day to leave despite the long journey that was before them. In the eyes of the writer, she must silently obey the voice of the men. Being 'the world of men', every man in the story, including the male servant, speaks for himself (Jdg 19:11). Although she could have also sensed danger just like the male servant who was given a voice to speak out his fears, the concubine was given no room by the writer to speak for herself.

On reaching the city of their kinsmen, Gibeon, the Levite thought that they were now in safe hands unlike in the town of the Jebusites which they had passed by. Never had it dawned in their minds that their kinsmen were so hostile and uncaring towards strangers. The Levite most probably banked on the Priestly law which stated: 'When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong [...]' (Lv 19:33ff.) and believed that they would be shown the hospitality which is demanded by this law. When it later turned nasty for the visitors, who at last had been housed by a certain Good Samaritan (Jdg 19:16–21), it was again the woman who stood to suffer most. While it is possible to view her as someone who probably could have felt that she was somehow safe when the unknown assailants came and demanded that they wanted 'to know' the Levite, it might, however, be an underestimation of the pain she felt as a woman when those men were making such demands on her husband. Her pain intensified when there was talk of a game change between the master of the house and the assailants. When the owner of the house successfully begged the men to spare his visitor, she found herself being thrown out to face the vileness of the men of Gibeon. Given such a turn of events, one wonders: had she not been part of the entourage that had been housed by this man and was she not also covered under that Priestly law which called for hospitality towards the stranger? These are questions which none of the men in the house were bothered about. At least for them, trouble was over and what was to happen to the woman was her own business and so they comfortably slept in the house.

As a confirmation that women often stand at the receiving end of violence, the woman was dragged into the night. Surely it would be hard to imagine that she could not have tried to resist and cry out for help; but if her own husband could not stand to defend her, who else could have come to her rescue? There were at least three men in the house who could have done something to help her, but they just locked themselves indoors. The text does not specify the number of

²There has hardly been an agreement among scholars as to what is meant by the term 'pilegish' concubine. Tammi Schneider, for example argues that there is little evidence in the text to determine what it meant to be a concubine in the Israelite world. Some scholars, on the other hand, would like to believe that this term either refers to a concubine or a second wife, one who has 'inferior status'. Legally and socially, she is virtually a slave, secured by a man for his own purposes. As a lawful wife, she was guaranteed only food, clothing, and marital privileges (Ex 21:7–11; Dt 21:10–14). The children she bore would be considered legitimate; but because of her second-class status, they would not necessarily share in the family inheritance (Gn 25:1–6). Cf. Duell (2011).

men who violently satisfied their libido on her, but what stands out clearly is the fact that due to their being numerous in number, she could not stand their excessive force and she fell down dead the following morning. She died a defenceless woman. Even if she could have survived the sexual assault, she would not have survived the psychological trauma and she would have lived with it for the rest of her life. It was death in both aspects, physical as well as psychological.

As if the humiliation she had endured was not enough, her corpse went on to be cut into various pieces and it was distributed around the country among other Israelite tribes. Although there is nowhere in the text where it attested that such a thing was ever done to a human being, there is evidence that a similar custom prevailed in ancient times as seen in 1 Samuel 11:7 where one meets Saul cutting into pieces the oxen he had and distributing the flesh throughout the territory of Israel as a way of summoning them to a war with the Ammonites. In the case of the concubine, its inhuman appearance helped excite a keener resentment against such a horrible crime, thus calling for a punishment proportionally severe (Gaebelein 2011). While the Levite had a message to bring across to fellow Israelites, the woman's remains are hardly given any honour. She is denied burial for there is nowhere in the text where one finds mention of those parts of hers which were distributed being buried. Being denied burial among the Israelites was one of the worst humiliations a person could receive (see Mwandayi 2011:29), and yet the men of Israel seem not to worry about this woman as they give priority to what they should do with the men of Gibea. Like a piece of old useless cloth, she had been used first by the men of Gibea to satisfy their wild sexual appetites and now she had been used by the Levite and other tribesmen to decide on the fate of the Benjaminites and then simply dumped. The whole story, as summarised by Tribble (1984:65), 'depicts the horrors of male power, brutality, and triumphalism; of female helplessness, abuse, and annihilation'.

Despite the fact that her remains appear not to have been accorded any honour, the woman's dignity shines out in that the war which the rest of the Israelites waged against the culprits, the Benjaminites, was all in honour of her. All because of her, many among the Israelites sacrificed their lives in the initial stages of the battle (Jdg 20:20–25) and the Israelites could not surrender until they saw that justice in the name of the woman was done. This is a clear illustration of the politics of the body, where men on two opposing fronts use women's bodies as their battleground. It is such an affront that the Levite fails to defend his concubine while she is still alive, but he goes on to invite others to fight alongside with him to restore her lost dignity. This speaks volumes on the less pronounced dignity that was accorded to women in Israel, patriarchal though the nation was. Thus, although editors of this story might not have given this woman a voice, she could not be silenced even in death. The observation made by Katherine Verdery (1999) fits well into this context when she noted that a remembered dead body is much more than a dead corpse. It is a material symbol of history. A dead body re-orders the world of meaning and establishes cosmic

order. Indeed, as a result of this woman, the Israelites sought to restore the lost order in Israel when they fought to root out the evil that had permeated their society.

Shared narratives – The concubine's and Rutendo Munengami's

Since 1980, the Zimbabwean elections generally have been marked by a spirit of cowing one's opponent either through psychological torture or by use of actual physical violence (Kriger 2005). The June 2000 and June 2008 elections in particular witnessed a heightened level of violence which cascaded into the shedding of blood. According to Kriger (2005):

[O]ver 200,000 incidents of political violence occurred in the first half of 2000 and this forced the MDC to cease campaigning a few weeks before the election in over 20 constituencies, mainly rural ones. (p. 29)

Similarly, Chirongoma (2009:8) lamented how 'a climate of lawlessness ensued and rape became increasingly common, making women more vulnerable to HIV infection'. The post-election violence of 2000 spilled over into 2003 as perceived opposition party supporters and their families were still targets of the marauding Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front supporters. Pursuing a political vendetta against Fani Munengami, the then Glen View North Member of Parliament, armed men visited his house in search of him, only to find his wife Rutendo Munengami and their children at home. As a way to inflict pain on Munengami, they beat her up and sexually assaulted her. Narrating her ordeal she (Rutendo Munengami cited in Mpofu 2010) said:

One of the assailants lifted a gift that I had received from my husband and asked if he was good in bed which I did not answer [...]. He went ahead to ask *sei wakashamira mutenges* (Why are you dressed in skimpy clothes for a sell-out). He walked towards me and lifted my nightdress and raped me once in front of my nine-month-old son. (n.p.)

The torture inflicted on the woman and her son who was made to witness such a savage brutality is indeed unthinkable. We now turn to discuss how Munengami's ordeal shares much in common with that of the concubine.

Taken closely, the stories of the two women happen against the backdrop of violence, which initially is intended to be inflicted on their husbands but in the end, they, by default become the violated ones. In both cases, the original intention of the perpetrators was to discipline and punish the men (spouses) but upon realising that they had been denied the chance, they did not want to feel defeated from achieving their goal; hence, they resorted to violating their wives' bodies. Through this way, they knew that the spouses would feel horrible about it too, because they would end up feeling as if the violation had been inflicted on their own bodies.

Whether or not these women consent to be violated in place of their husbands does not appear to be the preoccupation of their violators; they are not given a voice, rather, they are

simply expected to comply with the male voice. To the violators, it appears as if it is a men's world and raping anyone at will should simply be unquestionably accepted as the fate of women just because they exist to please men anyhow and anytime. That they have a dignity to preserve and that the men themselves have a responsibility towards the preservation of that same dignity appear out of the question. Both stories thus exude the politics of the female body. The rape faced by these women was due to control and dominance of the female body by men. The action taken by the perpetrators was driven by the idea that a woman's body exists primarily for the pleasure of men. Such a conceptualisation is extremely hazardous and contributes to the formation of a culture where women are only considered valuable if they satisfy men. This results in sexual assault, violence against women, and repression of their sexuality. Typically, a woman's pleasure is frequently given up for a man's pleasure. Women are usually seen as useful, only if they can execute sexual actions that delight men at the expense of their own pleasure, comfort, and permission. It is quite unfortunate that due to patriarchy, as observed by Sabala and Gopal (2010), a woman's body from childhood socialisation and gender construction is being prepared for male sexual gaze and sexual satisfaction. For instance, girls are often encouraged to acquire skills and qualities that are feminine and these are expected to complement men's superior masculine traits. Such a conceptualisation of the female body should be challenged and resolute efforts should be made to reverse it.

Like the concubine who was sexually abused by people who were supposed to have protected her because she too was a daughter of Israel, the same fate befell Munengami, daughter of the soil. From the fact that the assailants knew her husband's political affiliation, one can draw a valid conclusion that it was not outsiders who came in to rape her but fellow kinsmen whom she most probably knew very well and with whom she shared the same neighbourhood. This confirms Smith's assertion that 'in contexts of perceived familiarity and/or normalcy, oppression and brutality against women and children can more easily occur with little or no interference' (Smith 2009:30). It is characteristic of the rape culture that assailants are often familiar people. It becomes intensely traumatising when a person realises that one's own enemy is someone living next door. It will be even worse when the rape victim continues to see her attacker almost on a daily basis coupled with the attacker showing no remorse for the evil he would have done. Although the concubine did not live to see her tormentors, she died knowing that it was her own fellow Israelite brothers who should have protected her but had chosen to treat her shamefully. Familiarity thus, opined Smith, can be employed as either a deterrent against violence or as the ideal pretext or context for the perpetration of violence (Smith 2009).

Both women experience helplessness as they are sexually violated. They cannot fight back their tormentors for they are physically overpowered. Although helpless, the women remain morally strong, not willing to betray their husbands through

consenting to their violation. While critiqued at times, resilience and commitment until the end is part of the Ubuntu philosophy that is taught to African married women. Both the concubine and Munengami demonstrate such moral stamina, remaining resolute and faithful to their 'absent' marriage partners. As characteristic of rape cultures that victims often feel ashamed of their violated bodies, the concubine and Munengami must have naturally felt alienated from their violated bodies.

Due to a politicised corrupt system beyond their control, both women are denied the chance to seek justice for themselves. Both women, however, are not forgotten elements; they have a society to stand for them. In the case of the concubine, justice in her name was sought through fighting and the eventual extermination of the Benjaminites. In Munengami's case, while it was not solely a result of her experience of rape, one can safely argue that it was what she and other women experienced that became part of the basis towards the formation of the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI) during the period of the Global Political Agreement (2009–2013) in Zimbabwe. It is unfortunate, however, that due to heavy politicisation, ONHRI failed to achieve proper healing of the nation's wounds and after the 2013 elections, there was hardly anything to talk about it which was still there. It thus remains a challenge upon the Zimbabwean society to seek justice for people like Munengami and other women who continue to experience torture and sexual harassment of various forms at the hands of men.

Just a comparative description, as we have provided above, is surely not enough. The issue at hand provokes more questions than answers. For example, one is made to ask: Is there more to do than just lamenting the endemic levels of rape in innumerable societies around the world today? Can the biblical concubine's story and that of Munengami offer resources for moving beyond feminised violence, igniting redemptive action? In fact, as observed by Blyth et al. (eds. 2018):

[N]o literature is ever value neutral, nor does it leave the reader untouched by the reading process, rather all texts invite their audience to embrace certain discourses, values and belief systems. (p. 2)

Echoing the same is Fiorenza who opined, 'Stories are never just descriptive but always also prescriptive' (Fiorenza 2001:136). It is against the background of this reality and questions that we now look at how the stories of these two women can be held as a mirror to actions in our contemporary society and how they can be utilised as resources for redressing the problem of the modern rape culture in Africa, especially in Zimbabwe.

The concubine and Munengami's cases as resources

Towards a theology of hospitality and human dignity

Given that the underlying issue which comes out glaringly clear from Judges 19 is the lack of hospitality, the concubine's

rape case beckons us to tap into a theology of hospitality and human dignity as springboards for addressing the rape culture in Zimbabwe. Writing specifically about the rape culture among the Shona people in Zimbabwe, Sande and Chirongoma (2021) put it across as follows:

In the Shona indigenous religion and culture, rape culture is embedded in the patriarchal and hierarchical structures, which elevate boys and men to a higher pedestal, whilst women and girls are pushed to the bottom rung of the societal ladder ... Whilst the interface between religion, genders, and sexualities has, and continue to, receive attention in sub-Saharan Africa, there is a need for complementing this by addressing how the Shona indigenous religion and culture promote rape culture. (p. 2)

As articulated by the foregoing citation, the rape culture in Zimbabwe seems to be deeply entrenched in the indigenous traditions. Therefore, this raises a clarion call for revisiting the indigenous cultural practices to ensure that women and girls enjoy their full humanity and dignity without having to live in constant fear of sexual abuse. From a theological point of view, Nico Vorster (2012) explained thus:

When we translate a theological concept of human dignity into concrete rights language, we might state that human dignity implies respect for the equal autonomy of each person and the right not to be devalued or treated in a degrading or unjust manner [...]. Theologically, the concept of human dignity is based on humanity being created in the image of God. (p. 5)

The above citation denotes that treating someone with dignity entitles them to be accorded worthwhile respect, hospitality and concern, because they stand in a special relationship to God. The Gibeon men stripped the concubine of her intrinsic humanity and dignity. In their writings, most African women theologians resonate that being hospitable is the essence of being African. As noted by Gathogo (2010:14), they are all in agreement that 'the way to the present and the future is hospitality'. Oduyoye (2001:94) succinctly puts it thus, 'God never forgets a deed of hospitality. That is my faith as an African'. If hospitality is the essential ingredient to our African identity, then the politically motivated atrocities committed against Zimbabwean women are crying out for urgent redress.

Unanimous response to atrocity

After the rape of the concubine, we read that other tribes were united in their disgust and anger at the horror of her rape and consequent death such that they were equally united in their commitment to punishing the Benjaminites who were responsible for it. The lessons from this biblical text should challenge all Zimbabwean people to work together in breaking the silence on gender-based violence. While we are not advocating for a war as happened in the Gibeon incident, we are, however, underscoring the fundamental importance of bringing to book the perpetrators who have caused untold suffering to people like Munengami and other womenfolk who have been victims of the rape culture. This resonates with Blyth et al. (eds. 2018) who

argued that the role of biblical scholars as critic and conscience within the academy, the classroom, and the societies in which we live is surely a moral imperative. We also concur with Susanne Scholz (2005) who insisted:

In the context of a global rape culture, it is crucial to uplift ancient rape legislation and to identify past and present strategies that continue obfuscating the prevalence of rape even today. (p. 2)

It is only when those who committed such criminal acts are made to account for what they did that Zimbabweans can possibly find a lasting solution to gendered and sexualised violence in our beloved country.

Although ONHRI was set up to try and heal the wounds of election violence which encompassed sexual harassment and the rape of women under the cover of politics, regrettably, the political grandstanding by some Zimbabwean politicians made it difficult for the Organ to effectively heal the psychological wounds of those victimised and their families. This was also worsened by the reluctance of the Attorney General's office to prosecute known criminals. It is against this background that in this article, we are appealing to the Zimbabwean nation, especially the relevant government authorities to bring to trial perpetrators of the politically motivated sexual abuse of women.

While the work of ONHRI appears to have died a natural death with the cessation of the grade point average (GPA) in 2014, there is need for concerted efforts by all stakeholders to encourage the spirit of open dialogue so as to help women to get over their pain. As happened during the human rights violation hearings held by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa that certain women bravely recorded their experiences before the Commission (see Goldblatt & Meintjes 1997:7–18), Zimbabwean women should be given room to narrate their stories of trauma and resolute efforts should be made to acknowledge their pain. Only then can the healing process commence. In their healing, the whole nation also gets healed and is able to move forward in a democratic environment. This also finds echo in the words of Shadrack B.O. Gutto (2013) who said:

Acknowledging the wrongs of the past and making symbolic reparative actions for those wrongs are essential for ensuring that the pursuit for a better world of justice is not built on top of underlying sinkholes and on the waste dumps of past injustices. (pp. 30–45)

Writing from a similar context in Tanzania, Aidan G. Msafiri (2017) reminded us that:

[T]hese brutal and heinous acts interfere with the very God-given faculties and rights for women sexuality. They have far reaching negative psychological, social, cultural and emotional effects to women as persons with dignity ... the biological and physical persecutions have far reaching and destructive multiple consequences. These include denial of their God-given inviolable dignity and right for life, self-esteem, self-realization, self-actualization through development of their spiritual, cognitive, intellectual human and psycho-motor aptitudes and abilities. (p. 19)

Compassion towards perpetrators

Another resource that the concubine's story bequeaths to the Zimbabwean rape culture is that while the arm of the law should first take its course, in passing sentence, justice should at least have a human face. While no Benjaminite deserved the right to live, we are told that the Israelites had concern and care for the remaining Benjaminites. In the case of Zimbabwe, while all known cases of rape should be brought to book first and arrest and trial done to all known perpetrators, both in passing sentence and in serving time for their crimes, there is need to remember that they are fellow humans. In whatever befitting sentences which are handed to them, the aim should be more correctional than another infliction of gross suffering on fellow humans. However, in light of the unfortunate situation in Zimbabwe whereby known rapists are sometimes protected from facing the wrath of the law by certain political muscles, it could actually be healthier for victims to learn 'forgiving in advance' as popularised in the lyrics of Takesure Zamar Ncube in his song *Kuregerera* [Forgiving/Forgiveness] in *Advance* which he released in 2015. The lesson of life we get from this song is that one should not let progress in life be tied down by the lack of the word 'sorry'; it is not always that aggressors come forth and say sorry. Such wisdom reverberates Jesus' prayer on the cross: 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Lk 23:34).

Concern and care for the womenfolk

The most important lesson we learn from this story is to desist from violence and to value life as a sacred gift. As noted by Adeyemo (2006):

[T]he story reminds us of the Edenic paradigm whereby God's design for human sexuality does not intend women to be treated as objects to be manipulated by men, with no voice in what happens to them. (p. 318)

It is quite unfortunate that this is how African women are often treated by men who regard them as existing purely to satisfy male sexual needs and to create comfortable homes for the benefit of men. Such an attitude often results in the abuse of women and does not provide a foundation for a loving marriage.

Conclusion

As the article draws to a close, it is important for us to acknowledge that the concubine's story ceases to be just an age old narrative divorced from real life especially when one reflects on the culture of rape in Zimbabwe. A juxtaposition of the concubine's tragedy and that of Munengami, confirms the commonly accepted reality that at most, women stand at the receiving end of most forms of violence. It turns out to be more traumatising for women when the sources of violence are contexts of perceived familiarity. The concubine was sexually abused by people who were supposed to have protected her because she too was a daughter of Israel. The same applies with Munengami; it was her fellow Zimbabwean brothers who presumably stayed in her neighbourhood and

knew her husband quite well who without shame and respect committed the heinous crime towards her.

Gloomy though the concubine's story was, our contention in this article is that this 'text of terror' can still be used as a model for emancipation. As pointed out by Yani Yoo, 'the story invites the reader to witness and denounce the human evil against fellow human beings, especially women' (Yoo cited in Smith 2009:15). Embracing and upholding the principles of human dignity, hospitality, justice and equality, the Zimbabwean society must resolutely move away from a culture of denial and apathy when it comes to issues of rape. They must earnestly acknowledge the pain and anguish experienced by women like Munengami and other countless women who have been victims of the rape culture. It is only by acknowledging the bruised female bodies and souls that their healing can begin and in that process, the whole society may also receive holistic healing.

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C.M. and S.C. contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

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