

Fighting the Silence: The Democratic Republic of the Congo

**February 24 – March 2, 2010
Lenten Study 2**

Fighting the Silence Factsheet

- The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was invaded by Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi in 1998. The ensuing conflict lasted officially until 2004, but continues to flare up today. Eventually Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Sudan and Chad joined DRC in the counter attack.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1998 over 5.4 million people have died as a direct result of the war. The population of DRC is 56 million
- There are only 250 miles of paved roadway in the DRC which is the same size as Western Europe.
- The DRC has vast natural resources, including copper, tin, diamonds and coltan (important in manufacturing mobile phones).
- The diamond industry in the DRC is worth \$870 million/yr. Most miners earn less than \$1 per day.
- Life expectancy is 45 years. Infant mortality is 120 per 1000 live births. (In the UK the figure is 5 per 1000).
- Over 1.2 million people in the DRC cannot return to their homes for fear of violence.
- Currently the national rate of HIV infection is 20%. In 1998, it was 5%.

Rape is used systematically as a weapon of war. Statistics are difficult to verify since social stigma and social chaos mean many rapes go unreported.

- In 2006, 27,000 women and girls reported being raped in DRC's South Kivu province.
- Fistula (destruction of the vagina) is a widespread medical problem and is reported by most doctors as a war injury.
- DRC rape victims have been as young as 3 years old and as old as 70.
- Incidents of sexual violence against men and boys in DRC are increasing.

(Sources: BBC, Transafrica Forum, United Nations Food Programme, African Security Review)

Judges 19: 1-30 (NRSV)

The Levite's Concubine

19 In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite, residing in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. ²But his concubine became angry with him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for some four months. ³Then her husband set out after her, to speak tenderly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. When he reached her father's house, the girl's father saw him and came with joy to meet him. ⁴His father-in-law, the girl's father, made him stay, and he remained with him for three days; so they ate and drank, and he stayed there. ⁵On the fourth day they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to go; but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, 'Fortify yourself with a bit of food, and after that you may go.' ⁶So the two men sat and ate and drank together; and the girl's father said to the man, 'Why not spend the night and enjoy yourself?' ⁷When the man got up to go, his father-in-law kept urging him until he spent the night there again. ⁸On the fifth day he got up early in the morning to leave; and the girl's father said, 'Fortify yourself.' So they lingered until the day declined, and the two of them ate and drank. ⁹When the man with his concubine and his servant got up to leave, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, 'Look, the day has worn on until it is almost evening. Spend the night. See, the day has drawn to a close. Spend the night here and enjoy yourself. Tomorrow you can get up early in the morning for your journey, and go home.'

10 But the man would not spend the night; he got up and departed, and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him. ¹¹When they were near Jebus, the day was far spent, and the servant said to his master, 'Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites, and spend the night in it.' ¹²But his master said to him, 'We will not turn aside into a city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel; but we will continue on to Gibeah.' ¹³Then he said to his servant, 'Come, let us try to reach one of these places, and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah.' ¹⁴So they passed by and went on their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. ¹⁵They turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. He went in and sat down in the open square of the city, but no one took them in to spend the night.

16 Then at evening there was an old man coming from his work in the field. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was residing in Gibeah. (The people of the place were Benjaminites.) ¹⁷When the old man looked up and saw the wayfarer in the open square of the city, he said, 'Where are you going and where do you come from?' ¹⁸He answered him, 'We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; and I am going to my home. Nobody has offered to take me in. ¹⁹We your servants have straw and fodder for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and the woman and the young man along with us. We need nothing more.' ²⁰The old man said, 'Peace be to you. I will care for all your wants; only do not spend the night in the square.' ²¹So he brought him into his house, and fed the donkeys; they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

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22 While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the city, a depraved lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, 'Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may have intercourse with him.'²³ And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, 'No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man is my guest, do not do this vile thing.'²⁴ Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them; but against this man do not do such a vile thing.'²⁵ But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine, and put her out to them. They wantonly raped her, and abused her all through the night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go.²⁶ As morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light.

27 In the morning her master got up, opened the doors of the house, and when he went out to go on his way, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold.²⁸ 'Get up,' he said to her, 'we are going.' But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey; and the man set out for his home.²⁹ When he had entered his house, he took a knife, and grasping his concubine he cut her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.³⁰ Then he commanded the men whom he sent, saying, 'Thus shall you say to all the Israelites, "Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out."'

“Break my Body, Eat and Drink Me”: Raped and Dismembered -costly hospitality in reverse! **(Fulata L. Moyo, PhD).**

Introduction

When I was growing up, I did not look forward to Christmas celebrations. Among other things, Christmas entailed celebrating around a very special rare meal: rice and chicken! Being a communitarian people whose very essence of our life embraced hospitality at its core meant that some of us as members of the family would in turn forfeit such a looked-forward to meal in the name of taking care of the neighbor. So after some years of missing such an anticipated meal, I stopped looking forward to it. It seemed as if the neighbor was more important and his/her interests came before mine as a child in the family. How come I could so easily be sacrificed?

Though the story of the “Concubine” in Judges 19 is about costly sacrifice through dismembering and death, it always reminds me of my being sacrificed to hospitality. Whose interests and safety do we serve in our understanding of hospitality?

Judges 19 as costly hospitality in reverse

Hospitality is a form of spirituality in the practice of God’s welcome. It is reaching across difference to participate in God’s actions bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis. Though as a Judeo-Christian imperative, its biblical witness is clear (Hebrew 13:2, Exo 23:9, Mat 25:31-46), nevertheless it is a difficult and challenging call of duty.

It is a call to be in solidarity with strangers, the different ‘other’ as well as the ‘naturally’ unlovable. It involves the care, provision and protection of the stranger. So the host or hostess would make sure that the guest is cared for, fed and housed securely.

Hospitality is a complex issue in this story. It begins with the Levite travelling to his estranged partner’s father’s home in Bethlehem. The couple are not married – a concubine in this context probably means effectively a second wife – and when the woman becomes angry she returns to her father. After four months apart, the man travels to Bethlehem to woo her back and is greeted joyfully by the woman’s father and wined and dined for several days. What is this hospitality about? Is the father anxious to heal the rift so that he can be rid of his daughter...since her return from ‘marriage’ jeopardised the family’s reputation and dignity? Does he believe that reconciliation is what his daughter wants? How can it be ‘reconciliation’ if no space for honest and mutual narrative has been provided? Does the father stand to benefit from a good relationship with his daughter’s partner? The level of urging the Levite to stay, and the Levite’s eventual decision not to prolong his stay but to leave late on the fifth day imply a degree of tension.

Having left so late, the couple require hospitality to break their journey home for the night. The man refuses to stop at Jebus (Jerusalem) which was a foreign city at that stage.

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Instead he chooses to journey on to Gilbeah or Ramah, which are Benjamite towns, supposedly allies. However, despite waiting in the town square, no hospitality is offered until an old man who comes from the same area as the Levite and offers hospitality with these words: "Peace be to you, I will care for all your wants; only do not spend the night in the square." Then, when the men of the city demanded that the host release the Levite so that they have sexual relationship with him, the his reaction raises questions about who, between the Levite and the woman, he really considered his real guest and who deserved to be cared for and protected. Before sacrificing the 'concubine,' he was even willing to sacrifice his virgin daughter.

In the end, it is the 'concubine's' Levite partner who forces her out to provide sexual hospitality to the Benjamite men, who gang rape her until she collapses. They then abandon her at the old man's door.

This is surely one of the most horrific stories in the Bible. It is certainly not one that was read to me at my mother's knee. We can only be repulsed by the Levite's subsequent actions – taking the woman home (it is unclear whether she is dead or alive), dismembering her and distributing her body parts throughout the land with the message 'Has such a thing ever happened since the Israelites were freed from Egypt? Consider it, take counsel and speak out.'

What has happened in recent years in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where rape has been a systematic weapon of war, is similarly repulsive. The stories in this week's film 'Fighting the Silence' are heartrending. How should we consider these stories, take counsel and speak out?

The final chapters of Judges relate the lamentable stories of the battles which ensued between the Benjamites and the Israelites as the latter sought vengeance for the crime against the concubine woman. Thousands of people are slaughtered, thousands of women are raped, abducted dancers become wives for the Benjamites and there is lasting separation between the Benjamites and the Israelites. It is a story of inter-ethnic chaos, violence and revenge which sounds all too familiar in the modern world. Some Biblical scholars argue that this sorry tale is recorded as a reminder to the Israelites of why they were right to have moved from rule by judges to monarchical rule. Others have argued that such horrific tales should be excised from the canon since they hold no clue to the saving grace of a loving God.

The story of the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo is both one of geopolitical power play and of many, many individual tragedies. Like the inter-ethnic conflict in the book of Judges, the war between DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and others may seem incomprehensible to those who watch from a distance. The individual tragedy of the abused concubine and of the women in the film are much more resonant and yet in both the film and the Bible narrative, the male protagonists find excuses, prejudices and political theories to keep them from accepting the basic truth of human suffering. Tragedy fuels further tragedy, as revenge and violence escalates and trauma compounds.

In both stories, it is the lack of justice for the individual women which is most painful. Their bodies are wrecked by the careless greed of men but the response from their kinsmen is one of shame, disgust and further violence. Do we ever find ourselves responding to another's pain with such violence? What motivates us to push the abused further away?

Many of us, Sunday by Sunday, and especially in the lead up to Easter, are invited to reflect on the self-giving hospitality of Jesus, who gives his body and blood for the good of creation. How do we make sense of these stories in the light of this central focus of Christian faith? A body willingly given is very different to a body taken by force. Does a God who knows rejection and violence have a special message for women who share these experiences? How do we avoid the risks of belittling or fetishising violence when we even begin to make these links?

We do not know the names of either the concubine or the woman whose story we hear in the film clip. And yet their stories have lessons to teach us. How do we honour their witness in our daily lives?

Contextual Bible Study (CBS) methodology

Since for those readers that are not familiar with the Contextual Bible Study methodology we still had to include some explanations (very much against the principle of CBS), the formulation of the questions of reflection still followed the CBS methodology.

Otherwise this methodology as a brain child of liberation theology, is an interactive study of the Bible text, which allows the context of the reader to be in dialogue with the context of the biblical text for awareness raising and transformation. The study questions are formulated guided by five key C's. These are: Interactive – *Community*, Context of the reader – *Context* (Social Location); Context of the bible – *Criticality*; Raising Awareness-*Conscientisation* ; Transformation – *Change*.

Questions for reflection

1. What themes would you identify from the story?
2. Who are the main characters and what do you know about each one of them?
3. According to the Benjamite host, who was his guest? Why? (V23)
4. What kind of a host and a father was this Benjamite old man?
5. To what extent was he, as the host, willing to go so as to ensure that his guest was protected from the violent community? (V23-25)
6. What happens when costly hospitality is forced on vulnerable women as hospitality providers? (Vv25-28).
7. What title would you give to this story?
8. Do you have vulnerable women who are forced to provide costly hospitality in your communities? Who are they?
9. What are you doing about providing and protecting such women in your communities?
10. What resources do you have for such a ministry of hospitality?

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Liturgy and Prayer

Identify the Democratic Republic of Congo in the atlas or on the globe. Put out products from the DRC – maybe a cellphone, since the DRC has 80% of the world's reserves of Coltan, which is essential for cellphone manufacture. Or gold, or copper. You may also want to download one of the pictures of women from the DRC from the study site.

Lighting the candle

God bringing light and banishing fear,

We light this candle as a sign of our willingness to be your light in the world.

We remember before you the peoples of the Democratic Republic of Congo, their abundant land, their painful and war torn history. We bring before you the people whose story we have witnessed.

Give voice to those whose grief and pain is unspeakable; give compassion and strength to those who would hear in order to heal. Empower those who dare to speak the truth to power. Inspire those who challenge prejudice and envision new ways of relating. Nurture health and hope and peace in a land torn by violence and war.

We ask it the name of Jesus, our brother and our friend.

Amen

Psalm 143

Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness. Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

For the enemy has pursued me, crushing my life to the ground, making me sit in darkness like those long dead. Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled.

I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah

Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me, or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit. Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

Save me, O Lord, from my enemies; I have fled to you for refuge.

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.

For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life. In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.

In your steadfast love cut off my enemies, and destroy all my adversaries, for I am your servant.

Reading: Luke 4:1-13

The Temptation of Jesus

4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.³ The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’⁴ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone.”’

5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.⁶ And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’⁸ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”’

9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,¹⁰ for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you”,¹¹ and “On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”¹² Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

A prayer for the women of the Democratic Republic of Congo

God whose love is like a mother’s warmth,

God whose love is like a mother’s strength,

watch over the women of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

May they know your presence as they face the challenges of their lives —

war, rape, lack of education, patriarchy, and more.

Grant them courage,

strengthen their faith,

renew their hope,

this day and every day. We pray in Jesus’ name.

Amen.

Written by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program - PC(USA)

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A prayer for the Democratic Republic of Congo

If the merciful God had not been on our side
We could have been crushed,
When most of the World powers came together to decide about the future of our country.
Oh Merciful Lord,
We thank you for making us kind people,
We thank you Lord for giving us a country rich in natural resources.
We beg you to convert people of bad heart and bad mind on the behalf of the Democratic Republic of Congo.
We beg you to teach us all how to live friendly with other people.
We beg you to help the Congolese people recover their humanity and taking over their responsibility on the Land you gave them.
We beg you to help us be a mirror and a source of blessings for our neighbors.
Let us become a pattern of peace and cooperation for the human being.
Let us be respectful of human rights and creation.
Help us benefit from the seeds within our Eden Garden and learn to share it carefully with other needy people.
Our heavenly Father, make us peacemakers.
Amen.

*Written by the Rev. Pierre Mpia Mopendo, International Peacemaker
Presbyterian Church of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo*

Another prayer for the women of the Democratic Republic of Congo

Spirit of compassion, who hears the cries of all those who suffer from war, famine, and violence,

Be with the women of the Congo whose bodies, lives, and families are torn apart by sexual violence.

Spirit of love, who sees the brutality and mutilation that have become daily realities for the Congolese women,

Bring healing to their bodies, their minds, and their spirits.

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Spirit of justice, who calls us to see, hear, and respond to the injustice and suffering caused by sexual violence,

Embolden us to speak out against those who use rape as a weapon of war.

Spirit of oneness, who seeks to reconcile all that is broken in this world,

Unify us as we work to bring an end to violence against women and girls around the globe.

Amen.

Written by Katey Zeh, Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing

Blessing

May God the creator, who danced creation into being, dance with us.

May God the redeemer, who lived for justice, live in us.

May God the sustainer, who offers hope, offer hope through us.

Amen

Video Discussion Questions

What was your immediate response to the film? What scenes and words do you remember?

What feelings did it evoke for you?

Which of the people in the film made an impression on you and why?

How did you respond to the following images in the film:

- The testimony of the husband of the woman who had been raped?
- The woman worker facilitating the meeting with army and community leaders?

What do you know about the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo over the past century?

- How might historic events have influenced the situation which exists today?
- In 1998, the invasion of the DRC by Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi led to a war involving nine African nations. Why did the Western media pay so little attention to such a major conflict?

The Congolese soldier is firm in his belief that 'enemy soldiers' brought rape to the Congo and that rape will 'die out' as a practice now that the war is over:

- How would you respond to his assertions?
- Can you think of other examples of this way of thinking from our own countries or experiences?

How does society in the DRC add to the victimisation and suffering of those who have been raped?

In what ways do our societies' attitudes add to the suffering of those who have suffered sexual assault?

What can we do to help those who have been assaulted?

Where do you see the presence of God in the movie?

Women in the DRC are experiencing suffering on a massive scale. How would you respond to someone who asked how God can allow such suffering?