

A Psychoanalytic Study of Rape Trauma in Tekena Ikoko's Dinah

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Abstract

*Rape is deeply a traumatic experience that inflicts lasting psychological, emotional, and social damage on its victims. It is a pervasive issue that thrives on silence, often leaving survivors to suffer in isolation. This study examines the psychological effects of rape trauma in Tekena Ikoko's *Dinah*, employing psychoanalysis and Rape Trauma Syndromes as its theoretical frameworks. Through a qualitative analysis of the novel, the paper explores how sexual violence disrupts the lives of victims, leading to emotional detachment, self-blame, depression, and, in extreme cases, suicidal ideation. The study also highlights the role of societal attitudes in either exacerbating or alleviating the suffering of survivors. By examining the experiences of the protagonist and other characters in the novel, this paper presents the destructive power of rape and its far-reaching consequences. However, it also sheds light on the possibility of healing, emphasizing that while the journey to recovery is arduous, it is attainable. The study affirms that rape, though a life-altering violation does not have to define its victims permanently. By breaking the silence surrounding sexual violence, survivors can reclaim their agency and find a path toward healing and restoration.*

Keywords: *Rape, Literature, Psychoanalysis, Rape Trauma Syndrome, Dinah*

Introduction

Rape is a complex and difficult topic for many to understand (Quake 2022). To this day, it remains one of the most underreported and most misunderstood crimes worldwide. It is a form of sexual sadism involving unlawful sexual penetration through coercion, force, blackmail or false promises. Brinda Karat, a women's right activist,

asserts "I believe that whatever violates the integrity of a woman's body should be considered as rape". Sexual violence, apart from being dehumanizing, constitutes unlawful intrusion on an individual to privacy and bodily sanctity (Akpan, 2015). Victims often navigate the risks of vulnerability and trust, which can lead to betrayal, (Ogho 2021). In familial cases, rape victims frequently trust their attackers, believing them incapable of harm. In cases involving strangers, victims lack any prior connection that could justify or empowers the attacker's actions.

Rape is often perceived as a crime affecting primarily female victims, but many men also experience it. However, societal norms make it harder for men to speak out, as they are often perceived as physically stronger and less likely to be overpowered by women. Additionally, the belief that men derive greater sexual pleasure due to their physiological responses reinforces the notion that women are more frequent victims. As a result, male victims often remain silent, fearing disbelief or stigma. Those who come forward are frequently misperceived as willing participants. Despite this, Kristen argues that, regardless of men's lower resistance after arousal; they still have a choice in their sexual relationships.

To hold to the myth that men must have sex once aroused is to buy into several assumptions: (1) there exists a "point of no return" once men are physiologically aroused; (2) when aroused to the point of ejaculation, men must have sexual intercourse; and (3) if a man cannot have sexual intercourse once he is aroused, he will somehow be hurt. Men may not be in control of their physiological responses to stimuli, but they do have a choice about how they relate to others when they are sexually stimulated. (Kristen 2002)

Therefore, rape is a profoundly traumatic experience that leaves lasting psychological, emotional, and social scars on survivors. It is not merely

an act of physical aggression but a profound violation that disrupts a victim's identity, self-worth, and sense of security. According to Herman (1992), trauma resulting from sexual violence manifest in various ways, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissociation, and emotional numbness. Survivors often struggle with intrusive memories, anxiety, depression, and social isolation, making rape trauma a critical subject of psychological and literary analysis.

Literature has long served as a medium for exploring the psychological impact of sexual violence, offering insights into the survivors' experiences and coping mechanisms. Tekena Ikoko's *Dinah* presents a compelling narrative of rape trauma, shedding light on the protagonist's psychological turmoil, her journey toward healing, and the societal reactions to her experience. The novel aligns with what Cvetkovich (2003) describes as "trauma cultures" literary texts that document the lasting effects of violence and provide spaces for emotional and social engagement with trauma.

A psychoanalytic approach to *Dinah* allows for an in-depth exploration of the unconscious impact of sexual violence, including repression, memory suppression, and identity fragmentation. Freud's (1915) theory of repression explains that traumatic memories are often pushed into the unconscious mind, only to resurface through intrusive thoughts, dreams, or behavioural patterns. Moreover, Caruth (1996) argues that trauma is not merely a past event but an ongoing experience that disrupts normal cognitive and emotional functioning. These perspectives serve as a foundation for analysing the protagonist's psychological responses to rape and the broader implications of trauma in the novel.

Additionally, feminist psychoanalytic theorists, such as Kaplan (1983) and Showalter (1985) emphasize the role of patriarchal structures in shaping women's experiences of trauma, particularly in societies where victims are blamed and stigmatized. Ikoko's *Dinah* engages with these

themes, portraying the social and psychological barriers that obstructs the protagonist's recovery. The novel functions as a critical text for examining how literature reflects and critiques societal attitudes toward sexual violence, victimhood, and gender-based oppression.

This study aims to investigate the manifestation of rape trauma in *Dinah*, with a focus on the psychological struggles and coping mechanisms of the protagonist. The paper explores how rape trauma shapes identity, relationships, and self-perception through the lenses of Psychoanalysis and Rape Trauma Syndromes. Furthermore, it contributes to the broader discourse on sexual violence, trauma recovery, and the role of literature in addressing these critical social issues.

Theoretical Review

This paper explores the psychological effects of rape trauma in *Dinah* by Tekena Ikoko, using Psychoanalysis and Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS) as theoretical frameworks. Both theories examine the impact of traumatic events on the human mind and emotions.

The development of modern psychology in the early 20th century led to the psychological analysis of literary texts, as noted by Hossain (2017). Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory divides the human mind into three levels, the conscious preconscious and unconscious levels. The conscious mind contains immediate thoughts, perceptions, and memories, while the preconscious mind consists of latent memories that can be retrieved when needed. The unconscious, the largest part of the mind, stores repressed desires and motivations, such as hunger, pain avoidance, and sexual urges (Rahim, 2002; Ahmed, 2012)

Freud classifies personality into three components: the Id, Ego, and Superego (McLeod, 2025). The id, operating on the pleasure principle, seeks immediate gratification of desires. The ego, informed by societal norms, and acts as a mediator between the id and superego, ensuring

socially acceptable behaviour. The superego internalizes societal and parental values, enforcing morality and suppressing unacceptable desires (Hossain, 2017). Defence mechanisms, such as repression and displacement, enable the ego to cope with internal conflicts (Bowins, 2004; McLeod, 2024).

Rape Trauma Syndrome, first described by Burgess and Holmstrom in 1974, is a form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that affects victims of sexual violence. RTS is primarily psychological, rather than physical, manifesting in behavioural and emotional symptoms that can persist for years. It progresses through three stages: the acute, outward adjustment, and resolution stages.

In the **Acute Stage**, which occurs immediately after the assault, victims may react in one of three ways: Expressed (overt distress), Controlled (emotional suppression), or Shocked Disbelief (disorientation and memory gaps). The **Outward Adjustment Stage**, lasting from weeks to months, involves victims presenting a facade of normalcy while internally struggling with trauma. They may either rationalize the event or avoid discussing it altogether. Finally, in the **Resolution Stage**, victims attempt to integrate the experience into their lives, though full healing remains uncertain. Symptoms of RTS include anxiety, depression, withdrawal, nightmares, flashbacks, self-blame, and suicidal thoughts.

From the explications above, it can be deduced that Freud's psychoanalytic theory has profoundly influenced psychology, yet it remains subject to critical scrutiny, particularly regarding its androcentric bias. One major criticism lies in Freud's conceptualization of female psychology as secondary to male development. His theory of *penis envy* suggests that women experience psychological deficiency due to their lack of a penis, reinforcing a patriarchal framework that equates masculinity with normalcy. In contrast, feminist psychoanalyst Karen Horney challenged this notion, proposing *womb envy* which is

the idea that men may feel inferior due to their inability to bear children demonstrating the gendered assumptions embedded in Freud's work.

Moreover, Freud's *Oedipus complex* primarily explains male psychosexual development while its female counterpart, the *Electra complex*, was left underdeveloped. This omission suggests a male-centred view of personality formation that inadequately accounts for female experiences. Additionally, Freud's theories were shaped by the cultural and historical context of 19th-century Europe, where rigid gender roles influenced his perceptions of human behaviour.

Contemporary critiques argue that Freud's perspectives fail to accommodate diverse gender identities and cultural variations. His deterministic view of gender development has been reconsidered in light of modern feminist and intersectional approaches, which emphasize the fluidity of identity and the role of socialization. While Freud's psychoanalysis remains foundational, addressing its limitations allows for more understanding of human psychology that moves beyond outdated gender binaries. A critical engagement with these limitations strengthens scholarly discourse and promotes a more inclusive psychological framework.

Synopsis of the Text

Tekena Ikoko's *Dinah* draws a biblical allusion to the story of Dinah, the only daughter of Jacob, whose innocence was taken by Shechem, the prince of Hamor. The novel explores themes of sexual violence, trauma, and societal judgment.

Dinah is a young beautiful and adventurous woman born into a nomadic family that consistently relocates for business and livestock rearing. At seventeen, her family settles in Hamor, where Shechem, the ruler's son, immediately falls in love with her. Although, Dinah is interested in him, she does not share his lustful desires. With the help of Reseda, Shechem's sister, Dinah sneaks out to meet him, but the

encounter turns tragic when Shechem forcefully violates her and holds her captive for three days, intending to marry her.

Dinah's brothers, Simeon and Levi, avenge her dishonour by deceiving the men of Hamor into undergoing circumcision and then slaughtering them while they are vulnerable. As a result, Jacob's family flees. However, Dinah faces rejection from her family and society, becoming a victim of stigmatization, self-hate, and victim-blaming. Haunted by nightmares and guilt, she struggles with the psychological trauma of her experience.

Her healing process begins when she has a dream about Tamar, another biblical figure who was violated by her half-brother. In the dream, Tamar encourages Dinah to let go of her pain. Further guidance comes from Wisdom, a dream figure who advises her on healing and renewal. A turning point arises when Uweka, a former palace maid, confesses to sexually abusing Shechem during his childhood, explaining his violent tendencies.

Through the character of *Dinah*, Ikoko both preserves history narratives and addresses contemporary issues of sexual violence and its psychological consequences. The novel highlights the struggles of survivors while emphasizing the importance of healing and societal change.

Aspects of Psychoanalysis and the Rape Traumatic Experience in Tekena's *Dinah*

Freud's psychoanalytic theory is based on three components of the mind which are the id, ego and the superego.

The Id as the driving force behind the downfall of Dinah, Shechem and Uweka

The id, operating on instinctual drives, plays a crucial role in the downfall of Dinah, Shechem, and Uweka. According to Freud, the id seeks immediate gratification of desires, including both survival and

destructive impulses (McLeod, 2025). Because they lack self-restraint, these characters succumb to their primal instincts. Dinah, a lonely nomadic girl surrounded by twelve brothers, struggles with isolation and is often overlooked due to her gender. Her vulnerability combined with Shechem and Uweka's unchecked desires, ultimately leads to their tragic fates.

Thus, Dinah, aside from having no friends to share her childhood with, is being overprotected by her parents to prevent her from misbehaving or getting into trouble. This overprotection further fuels Dinah's desires for freedom and thirst for exploration..

...The plan was simple. Through Lowanda, I sent word to Shechem. He was to urge one of his sisters to visit me and invite me out for a day of sightseeing she would promise to bring me back home before the eighth hour in good time for the evening sacrifice. (pg. 23 – 24)

This youthful exuberance and desire for self-gratification brought ruin upon Dinah. It ultimately led to her rape. If only she had been obedient such an incident would not have occurred Shechem desired her innocence and he waited for her well prepared.

...During my short time out, the neckline of my dress had been ripped and I could tell that his hands had been busy. I lay still hoping this would satisfy him, pleading with gentle whispers that he should let go of me. But the desecration of my holy temple continued unabated. (pg. 5-6)

Not only did the urges of the id ruin Dinah, but Uweka's inability to control her own id also gave birth to a monster called Shechem. Uweka had sexually manipulated Shechem when he was young, inflicting psychological trauma on him. As a result, he grew up perceiving the

taking of innocence as normal, based on his own experience. Uweka later confessed to being responsible for the Dinah's fate

...Shechem did not need to abuse you or any other woman. He was the crown prince of Hamor. All the power, money, influence, and women were at his disposal. But he had a strange appetite for stolen waters and like a cursed dog, it moved him to love the forbidden and enjoy the inhumane. But who cursed him? The things I started as fun have now become a nightmare. (pg. 64)

The id is a primal aspect of human nature. Like a child, it desires immediate gratification, but the inability to engage the ego can lead to catastrophic consequences.

Superego as Dinah's first instinctive restraint:

The superego is the part of the mind where morality and higher principles reside, encouraging individuals to act in socially and morally acceptable ways, (McLeod, 2025). The super ego emerges when the ego successfully restrains the id, preventing the individual from acting impulsively or unethically.

As the guests walked in, I noticed a handsome young man standing behind the chief ruler. I felt an immediate attraction, Love at first sight? I hid my emotions and maintained my composure. Though my insides churned, I did not want my brothers to eat me up... He was a far cry from the boisterous male image of my circle, and it put a gentle tap on my heart for him, I itched to talk with him but decided to behave myself (pg 14)

The super ego in this context portrays Dinah as a responsible girl who is not easily swayed by her whims and impulses.

Electra Complex in Jacob's family:

According to Freud, the Electra complex occurs when a girl experiences *penis envy*, initially resenting her mother and forming a strong attachment to her father. Over time, she resolves this conflict by identifying with her mother, ultimately emulating her as part of her psycho-sexual development. Dinah's relationship with her father aligns with the characteristics of the Electra complex. She rarely sees eye to eye with her mother, who, in turn, becomes easily irritated by her presence. Only on rare occasions does Dinah's mother find reason to express warmth toward her daughter.

...Mummy seldom called me Lady D. The pet name was reserved for special occasions. These were the rare moments when she was happy with me or when events had taken a turn that gives her a favoured position with daddy. More often than not, she would scream my full name and I knew that I was in for trouble. Dinah Jacob! Where are you? She would yell and then engage in a tirade that exposed her anxiety over my spending time with one of the other wives. (pg. 12).

There was clearly no love lost between Dinah and her mother. At her lowest point, she did not find silence with her mother. It should have been a time when maternal support filled very void, bridging the emotional gap between them. However, her mother wept for herself rather than the emotional turmoil into which her daughter had been plunged. On the other hand, Dinah's father was the epitome of assurance and comfort, someone on whose shoulders she could depend and whom she could entrust all her troubles. She was happiest happy when with him, and he showered her with all the love he could muster.

Psychosexual Influence on the Actions of the Characters:

One of the most enduring concepts associated with Freud is his psychosexual stages. Freud proposed that children develop in five distinct stages, each focused on a different source of pleasure: The stages include the oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital.

The text reflects on the fifth stage of psychosexuality the genital stage. Shechem satisfies himself by preying on innocent young girls. His sexual gratification is usually satiated in a sickly way. He could have any woman he wanted and as many of them that were willing to be his women but, he only gets satisfaction by forcefully taking what does not belong to him. In this manner, he was able to take the innocence of Dinah. More so, Uweka for fun, abused Shechem while he was young and thus marred him psychologically to think the best pleasure could come from force or coercion. Dinah also was up for adventure and exploration but her ego was able to put the id in check.

Stages of the Trauma Syndrome in Dinah's Healing

Rape Trauma Syndrome consists of three stages: the acute stage, the outward appearance, and the resolution. Dinah initially reacts with shock and distress toward Shechem but maintains a controlled demeanour before her judgmental family. She struggles with disbelief at Shechem's obsession, feeling trapped and wounded by his actions. While appearing composed, she internally battles severe trauma, finding no support from her family. In isolation, she descends into madness, speaking to inanimate objects and perceiving everything as her enemy. Her story highlights the devastating psychological toll of sexual violence and the loneliness of victims in their struggle for healing.

...Don't come near me! I caught a glimpse of green as something fell near my feet. I staggered backwards instinctively. Is it not sex you want? Shameless creatures. It was an innocent twig. I picked it up and it became a

weapon in my hands. I whipped the tree. Who needs you. I can do without you! I would rather remain single than have you ever touch me. (pg41)

The first action of a controlled rape victim is to become delusional or insane. During this process, self-blame sets in. Victims tend to look at where they had gone wrong and what they could have changed to avert the situation. Dinah would reminisce on the steps she took and what landed her in the present situation.

I only wanted a friend. Where did I go wrong? I did not set out for sex. Why did my curiosity repay me with misery and woe? He said he loved me, then why did he victimize me. Why did he treat me like a harlot? (pg. 41)

Moving from this phase, there comes a projection of one's feelings upon others, the attributing of one's situation to an external entity whom we feel could have averted the whole situation but is willing to let it play out or someone whom we think could have being the cause of our misery. Dinah projected her misery on God. She was taught he was the saviour and Messiah. The one who handles every situation like it was nothing. But he was nowhere to be found when Dinah needed him the most.

By now I was on my feet panting like a wounded ant.
"And where was the God my father always talked about.
If he exists and is all knowing and powerful as they claim, why does he watch in silence? Truly I hate him as much as I hate the man who raped me! I spat out angrily.
(pg. 50)

After enduring an acute stage of trauma, Dinah enters an outward phase of healing. Though she presents a facade of recovery, she remains deeply wounded. Realising that genuine sympathy is absent; Dinah resolves to reclaim control over her life, demonstrating

independence despite the isolation. With only young Joseph by her side whom she feels is too immature to grasp her situation. she embarks on a gradual healing process aided by her dreams. Through sustained mental effort and acceptance, she eventually releases the resentment toward her family, her rapist, and life itself, acknowledging she was not the first victim and regaining her lost dignity.

Secondary Victimization on Rape Victims

Rape can be especially stigmatizing in some cultures especially African cultures with highly stringent customs and taboo pertaining to sex and defilement. In societies like this, a rape victim is being seen as impure especially if she is unfortunate to get pregnant, she would be viewed as damaged. Victims in such culture may be exposed to isolation, disassociation from family, divorce of married, prohibited from marrying if single or be given the capital punishment which is death. Tamah's story is an example of societal scorn in the text. She was immediately scorned by her brother, her rapist, scorned by the family and stripped off of her rights as a virtuous woman. It was enough to send one to the abyss.

Lady D, do you know what the beautiful robe of diverse colours represents? She asked. The once admirable dress was now completely disfigured after its transformation. She proceeded to answer knowing I could never guess. "It's our brand of chastity. It's our brand of purity. It's the hallmark of distinction. It's the exclusive design for the King's virtuous daughters" ... "Look at me" she continued stretching out her tattered dress before me. "This is what I became. My brother has stripped me of my symbol, destroyed my revered status and poured dung on my brand" (pg.56)

The issue of secondary victimization is like opening a healing wound. It re-traumatizes the victim. Most secondary victimization comes in

form of victim blaming. Victim blaming refers to the holding of the victim of a crime to be responsible for that crime. In the case of Dinah, her victimization came in many forms. Ranging from her servant who was privy to the issues that happened to domestic servants whom she was lord over but situations warranted that they Lord it over her. A servant would have the audacity to ask:

Do you realize the worth of your family investment
lost in Hamor? A servant boldly asked me (pg.39)

Mothers are meant to be safe havens, but Dinah's mother resents her, silently blaming her for her misfortunes. Envious of the love Jacob gives Dinah, she fuels her suffering as an act of revenge, punishing her for receiving the affection she herself lacks from Jacob.

... I could not walk past her without being subjected to hissing and sighing that were as loud as a trumpet blast. I could see an imaginary but real placard with words, "You are unclean," stretch out in front of her each time our glances mistakenly crossed. Why wouldn't someone bother to know my side of the story? (pg.38)

The reproach of Jacob was worse. All we had was silence. Her father's silence was louder than the waves of the sea.

Daddy stood in front of our house with Joseph the last son by his side. Eight of my older brothers formed a wall behind him. No one stepped forward to help me off the carriage. I manage to step down. My head bowed, my gaze cast downwards a subdued glance met expressionless faces. Daddy's stare pierced my entire being like coals of fire. I wish he would say something – anything. It was better than the torture of silence (pg.33)

Secondary victimization is a weapon wield by society to inflict pain upon the victim through their rash and base opinion of gender roles

and personalities. Today, many women get blamed and victimized for being the victim. The question they are subjected to ranges from “what were you doing in his house? Why were you outside at night? Aren’t you supposed to dress more decently?” These further push many victims down the drain. It is why many are discouraged to come out to amass support and justice.

Dream as a Healing Process

Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) explores dreams as means of fulfilling repressed desires. He distinguishes between actual dreams and hidden meanings, explaining how dreams transform forbidden wishes through condensation, displacement, and secondary elaboration, making them appear non-threatening while aiding psychological healing (McLeod, 2024).

Tekena beautifully used the idea of dream of to bring solution to the problem of Dinah. Dinah, after her incident loathed herself to the point of depression. She was castigated and left all alone but through dreams, relief and healing was brought to her. She said:

I had a total of four dreams within the space of two weeks. They were all interwoven. In each dream, I encountered someone who talked very intimately with me. The voices that spoke were so tender, compassionate and understanding. Their words dropped like cold water onto my hurt and soothed my pain. Some left me in shock, like the first day I saw a rattlesnake on my bed. Others made me feel stupid as if I had not been using my brains. But all of them enlightened and empowered me. They were a light in my dark tunnel. (pg.47)

The reality of what Dinah wanted was expressed in her dream and that was the beginning of her healing process. Joseph her younger brother further talked to her about dreams and the message they carry from

God. It became evident in one of her dreams where she was told about how great the family of Israel would become (pg.80).

Dinah hoped for a better future, though she found the message too optimistic given her chaotic reality. Her first solace came in a dream where Tamar, a victim of a worse fate, assured her she wasn't alone. Another source of hope was a man in flowing garments who shared Miriam's story, encouraging her to embrace the present. Her ultimate healing came in a dream where Wisdom visited, helping her release the past and see new possibilities. Through this, she found peace. Like Dinah, rape victims need to let go of the past to prevent painful memories from resurfacing and causing setbacks. Healing requires embracing hope and finding strength in moving forward. Thus, dream is no doubt a healing point and hope renewed. It is part of the unconscious and psychological in nature. It works with the brain and helps the brain to move forward from destructive thinking.

Conclusion

I was astonished by this revelation. I was certain I was the only person in our community who had gone through this terrible ordeal. But if it was true that many others were victim, why was the silence so loud? Why did nobody talk about it? Why was nothing being done about it? Why was I being treated like a harlot? (pg. 49)

Dinah presents the psychological toll of rape trauma, exposing how silence, stigma, and societal neglect deepen the victim's suffering. Through Freudian psychoanalysis and rape trauma syndrome, the novel reveals how trauma affects both the conscious and unconscious mind, influencing behaviour, emotions, and relationships. Dinah's struggle with self-blame and isolation reflects a broader reality where survivors often feel trapped by shame and fear, preventing them from seeking justice or support. Her realisation that others have suffered in silence highlights the pervasive culture of suppression surrounding

sexual violence. Thus, the novel portrays rape not just as a physical violation but as a lasting assault on the mind and spirit. Ikoko emphasises its enduring psychological impact by depicting trauma's stages: shock, denial, distress, and confrontation. However, *Dinah* also conveys that healing is possible when survivors receive love, acceptance, and societal support. The text calls for breaking the silence, challenging stigma, and ensuring justice for victims. Beyond legal action, fostering empathy and open dialogue is crucial in dismantling rape culture. Only when survivors are empowered to speak without fear can they reclaim their voices, heal from their trauma, and rebuild their lives with dignity and hope.

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