

Pumla Dineo Gqola's *Rape: A South African Nightmare*

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Reviewed by

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Rape: A South African Nightmare is a book by a South African professor of literature at Wits University, Pumla Dineo Gqola. It is a contextual study of rape which explores rape within a specific locale, specific culture, including social change and current challenges and the history of rape. However, as readers and scholars of gender discourses residing outside South Africa, this book appeals to us because of its subject matter, its framework and its focus on the global problem of rape.

While it is written for a public audience, the book has not abandoned its academic structure. Its academic rigour lies in its methodology and compelling analysis of the patriarchal construction of rape. Framed with a feminist critical lens, and weaved with an intersectionality thread, Gqola's book constitutes an in-depth analysis of the violence of rape. It employs a wide range of public texts to illustrate how rape plays and functions in the South African contexts. This book will shape our own culture-specific understanding of rape.

The body of the book consists of eight chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. Both the introduction and conclusion reflect Gqola's personal and political commitment to issues surrounding violence against women, especially rape. Each chapter explores rape's relationship with various other social categories. These categories include rape and race, violence and rape, and the role of rape in the manufacture of female fear. In a chapter focusing on the rape and of children and the elderly, she questions why some rapes are considered "more shocking and devastating than others" (2015:125-142)? The last two chapters focus on deconstructing and analysing rape myths, and violent masculinities and war talk.

Chapter 1: 'A recurring nightmare' lays the context and foundation of her discussion of rape. It explores the what, why, and how of rape, as its functions. Gqola writes that her book is a "political project" (p.23) that critically enquires her society's relationship with rape and how deeply rape is embedded in the psyche of South Africans. Therefore, her objective is to make "sense of rape's hold on (the) society and to interrogate the histories of rape in South Africa" (p.36). She argues against the idea that rape is sex. Rape, Gqola insists, is both about power and sexual violence. She asserts that Rape is "not a moment by a language" (22). Rape as a language means we can foreground rape as a discourse. We can point to the invention of knowledge (through language) about rape. Rape as a language means the statements, vocabulary, social, violent imagery and the language of truth used to talk about rape.

Chapter 2: 'What's race got to do with rape?' examines the intersection of race and rape. Race and rape are what Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks and Kimberly Crenshaw call the "interlocking systems of oppression" (1990:221-238). This means that both rape and race are

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categories of oppression, violence and subjugation. We, therefore, should not conceptualise race and rape in isolation but consider both categories as dependent on one another.

Gqola's objective is to deconstruct the idea that rape is a contemporary social problem. She cautions that if we take the view that rape is a manifestation of post-apartheid culture, her society will not be able to fight the stranglehold of rape in "contemporary South Africa" (2015:45). Rape, according to Gqola, has a genealogy which can be traced back to the "architecture of slave-ordered Cape Colony" (p.40). She argues also that the history of rape, "is the history of slavery, colonialism and race science" (p.40). Moreover, South Africa was founded on the "trauma of slavery and sexual subjection" (pp. 42-43). Gqola makes the assertion that in the creation of a racialized society, the rape of slave and black women was the order of the day. Slave and racialized societies constructed the "stereotypes of African hyper-sexuality (p.43)" which sought to justify and legitimize the rape of slaves and black women. Constructing slave and black women as excessively sexual meant that they "would not have been rapable even when free" (p. 43).

Chapter 3 'Ruling violence,' explores the relationship between violence and rape. Although Gqola does not define violence, she asserts that violence is "adapted as a constant companion in our midst" (p. 55). On the other hand, society has pretended violence's invisibility yet violence rules and dominates. Violence, she further emphasizes, is ubiquitous and finds "expression in the academic business and non-governmental sectors, in culture, language, entertainment and government institutions" (p.61).

Violence's rule also has a hold on gender-based violence. She notes that gender-based violence exists in the context of an aspiration and idealized constitution which has placed gender legislation at the forefront. However, women's experiences of violence are in contradiction to the legislation enshrined in the constitution. Women are legislatively empowered, yet they do not feel safe in their streets and homes. She further observes that the ideals of the constitution have not so much as gained a footing as they are contradicted by the rule of violence.

She also notes contradictions in and flaws of the cult of femininity played out in women empowerment movements. Women empowerment movements have focused on single and narrow understandings of empowerment: women in the public spaces or professional lives of women. The movement has therefore not been transformative. Women empowerment has both failed and been hijacked by assuming that women in the workplace are the only ones who need empowerment. Additionally, the movement has not given a thought to male transformation, and to the domestic spaces which are dominated by women as spaces that need transformation.

Chapter 4 'Female fear factory' is a ground breaking chapter where Gqola's analysis is compelling and astute. This chapter builds on the work of Njabulo Ndebele's "*The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*" (1986), particularly his use of the spectacular and the theatrical as frameworks to her delineation of the female fear factory. Like a factory, the female fear factory functions to silence women, and to "regulate women's movement, sexuality and behaviour" (p.79). The female fear factory constantly reminds women that they are not safe, and that their bodies are not entirely theirs.

The female fear factory is performed regularly in public spaces. It is a factory that can also be called "the manufacture of female fear" as its function is to produce terror in women. It works by relying on quick effective transfer of meaning"(2015:80). It requires bodies to function, particularly bodies of women. As a product of patriarchy, female fear factory functions as "an effective way to remind women that they are not safe and that their bodies are not entirely theirs" (2015:79).

This chapter resonates with us for its hard truths. It brings to memory the lessons of safety we were taught in our formative years. One of the important truths was in learning that a man (then especially a stranger) was more dangerous than any animal. We were taught to not walk alone at night for fear of violent and rape attacks, and not to wear certain clothes since we risked being attacked or raped. Street harassment like catcalling was a daily reality. The female factory is a factory we intimately know as powerfully illustrated in this chapter.

Chapter 5 ‘Making sense of responses to the Jacob Zuma rape trial’, Gqola examines a range of responses to Zuma’s rape trial. This chapter demonstrates Gqola’s expertise and analytical skills. Her analysis is incisive and enthralling. The rape trial of Zuma was a “watershed moment for what it highlighted about societal attitude that had previously been slightly out of view” (2015:100). It reflected also how South Africans chose “to respond to someone accused of rape, on the one hand, and a woman who laid a charge of rape, on the other” (2015: 104-105). To demonstrate this, Gqola makes use of the media’s construction, definition, debates, analysis and framing of the rape trial. Zuma emerged in the media a protagonist. In the end, the supporters of Zuma’s were foregrounded and the victim backgrounded.

Chapter 6 ‘A forked tongue’ addresses child rape and molestation crimes. Gqola discusses and argues that a “forked tongue” rules when it comes to child rape and molestation. She employs four child rape case studies to demonstrate in each the public and justice system’s responses. Since each rape and molestation is different but interrelated, Gqola argues against the society’s idea that a uniform profile of a rapist or molester can be constructed. Often they are portrayed as monsters with deep psychological problems, but the rapists and molesters’ profiles in the case stories she undertakes are men and women entrusted with the safety of their victims.

Gqola doesn’t end there. She is critical of the justice system’s responses to rapists. Gqola observes through different rape case studies that there is a track record of the justice’s system sentencing of rapists and molesters. There is a case in which a rapist’s age became a factor in his sentencing. The judge dismissed that “no rapist or violator of children should be able to hide behind his age” (p.137). Another miscarried justice in a rape case was where a judge noted the reactions of the fourteen year old victim as having not “acted as though she was in pain when he arrived at her grandmother’s house after the rape” (p.141-142). The sentencing was reduced from a five to a three year because the “injury” the child rape survivor sustained is not ‘serious’ (p.141).

Chapter 7 ‘Rape myths’ deconstructs myths about rape. Rape myths are socially constructed, fabricated beliefs, extensively and obstinately held about rape. Gqola asserts that rape myths exist in various forms. Rape myths often remain either unchallenged or defended. They play a dangerous role of denying and justifying male sexual violence against females. Rape myths as violent cultural instruments of patriarchy function to keep the culture of rape intact.

Gqola discusses a significant number of rape myths of which only a few will be noted. Rape as inappropriate sex is one of the enduring and persistent myths. Gqola argues that rape is not sex, but an act of non-consensual violence directed at a woman or someone constructed as feminine” (p.144). It is about power. The second myth Gqola discusses is the idea that there is a proper way to respond to being raped (2015:145). This means that rape survivors are burdened with the responsibility of surviving rape. Male arousal and male need for sex is another rape myth. However, rape is never only about the need for sex as male arousal is controllable. Dressing a

certain way by women, being visibly drunk, or otherwise ‘asking for it’, have been persistent and enduring rape myths that used to justify rape. These rape myths work like a female fear factory discussed in chapter four. Gqola debunks the idea and points that “there is no correlation between how a woman dresses and her ability to escape rape” (2015:149). For rape is not about her seduction but about power.

Chapter 8, ‘Violent masculinities and war talk’ critically reflects on how space is made for violent masculinities and war talk to take public centre stage. Violent masculinities create public consciousness that are easily legitimized, acceptable, and ironically considered natural and desirable. Jacob Zuma and Kenny Kunene are set as true examples of “manhood on metaphoric steroids” (p.154).

During the Zuma’s rape trial, forms of violent masculinities and war talk were effectively enacted and staged. Zuma revealed himself through the performance of violent masculinities. Zuma’s performance of patriarchal masculinities in the public space reflected a tension between masculinities of violence and desirable masculinities. For example, Zuma sang ‘popular struggle toyi-toyi song “umshini wami”’ (p.158) during his rape trial. Gqola reads this as Zuma’s stark performance and comprehensive use of the “power of heroic masculinity” (2015:159) which he had historically embodied. The toyi-toyi song reflected Zuma in the “realm of heroic and militant masculinity” (p.158) and the complainant, by implication, was placed in opposition to struggle masculinity” (p. 158). Khwezi, Zuma’s rape victim was not perceived as a victim of rape but an enemy of Zuma and his supporters.

Gqola has successfully delineated rape as a recurring nightmare through the case studies she astutely analyses. Furthermore, the system of patriarchy is the foundation upon which rape is enacted and played out. However, Gqola does not define patriarchy. We have to infer that patriarchy is a system that uses various strategies to legitimize its power and influence. Gqola has effectively shown how the system of patriarchy is kept intact and partly sustained by rape. Though her analysis is complex and effective, it almost consistently articulates a bifurcation of gender as social and cultural construction of the binary division of male and female relationship. The book is indirectly structured by a narrative of powerful social relationships and ideas where men are villains and women are victims.

Gqola concludes that she does not wish to “think about rape, that it was not so close to home, that I did not have to think about the many times I have felt the difficult combination of rage and tenderness as I sat across from someone as they talked about how someone had raped them” (p.168). Moreover, Gqola does not provide (easy) solutions, though she advocates a “future free of rape and violence (and) one we deserve, and one we must create” (p.168). She wishes for (her) society to reach that space where we will be able to discuss rape without shaming rape survivors.

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