



RAPE: A PSYCHOLOGICAL THEFT OF DREAM (THE EXAMPLE OF BOLANLE IN LOLA SHONEYIN'S THE SECRET LIVES OF BABA SEGI'S WIVES)

BEATRICE MORENIKE AFOLABI; & OMOTOLANI SADIA OYIN-ADEJOBI.
General Studies Department, the Polytechnic, Ibadane.

Abstract

Violence against women in form of rape has been widely discussed and condemned in different fora because rape as an emotionally scarring event cannot be over-emphasized. However, in Nigeria, cases of men raping women are still so rampant and it is worrisome. It is worrisome because the act signifies a symbolic infringement on the rights and psychological state of the victim who sometimes has her life negatively, remodeled, her dreams battered, shattered and stolen sometimes and has to live with these emotional scars for years after the evil act. Therefore, this paper examines rape as a psychological theft of dream as stereotypically characterized in Bolanle in Lola Shoneyin's The secret lives of Baba Segi's wives. The paper discovers that rape victims are susceptible to disorientation, depression, hopelessness, loss of focus; identity; interest in activities ones loved and suicidal thoughts amongst others. The paper concludes that rape as a dastardly act negatively impacts the psychology of the rape victims much more than the physical abuse. The paper then recommends among all others that conscious and massive awareness on the prevention of the evil act be created at all levels of governance particularly at home among family members. Also recommended is the implementation of effective penalties on the rapist to serve as a deterrent to others and proper reorientation of victims from derailing psychologically as a derailed psychology could lead to a derailed destiny.

Keywords; Violence, rape, psychological, theft, dream

Introduction

Rape remains one of the sad facts of life globally. While the physical damage caused by achieving a forceful penile- vaginal contact can be devastating, the emotional and psychological trauma associated with rape are more

devastating and could leave in their wake an individual who is wrecked and scarred for life. Campbell and Wasco (2005) defined rape as sexual assault involving vaginal, oral or anal penetration and linked to the threat of force, actual force, intoxication, mental status or the inability of the victim to give consent. Idoko, Nwobodo and Idoko (2020) explained that rape revolves mainly on the question of consent or the conditions through which participation in the sexual act or penetration is achieved. Bandhari et al (2011) also conceptualized rape as unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will of the victim who is most frequently a female, a person who cannot give valid consent or a person under a particular age. Rape is a global phenomenon and has been demonstrated to have far-reaching psychological, physical and social effect on victims.

The realization that the female gender is more often than not the victim in cases of sexual harassment including rape has traditionally been explained on the basis of the hierarchical gender relations and the gender power inequalities which are prevalent in the society (Meel, 2017; Layman, 2020; Idoko et al, 2020). Rape is an important theme when sexual relations in Nigerian societies are considered. On the one hand, this importance derives from the widespread prevalence of the act; on the other hand, cultural biases relegate the importance and effects of rape especially among couples. Campbell and Wasco (2005) and Chabra, Rai and Chakko (2014) noted that these biases coupled with the stigma associated with victims of rape have distorted the reporting process thus making it difficult to judge accurately the extent of rape in the society. The poor reporting, stigma and the devastating emotional and psychological effects of rape are themes which are constantly been explored in contemporary literature. These literary forms provide a window and a lens through which the realities underlining rape and its effects on the lives of victims can be explored. This paper explores how rape births a psychological theft of dream in the context of Bolanle a stereotyped character in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*.

Rape and its Psychological Implications On Victims

The devastating emotional and psychological implications of rape on the lives of victims are best understood from the context of the psychological underpinnings of the rape process itself. Chabra et al (2014) explained that

rape is precipitated among men who are linked with psychological traits such as impulsivity, anti-social traits, anger, lack of empathy and the need to dominate women. It is however important to note that rape can also be precipitated by alcohol or drugs consumption. Idoko et al (2020) explained that this consumption serves the role of reducing inhibitions, distorting the ability to interpret cues and impairs the ability to make good judgment. Furthermore, the interplay of psychological traits and the loss of inhibition and judgment have led to the emergence of a typology of rapists; disadvantaged men, opportunistic rapists, high-mating effort rapists and partner rapists (Thornhill & Palmer, 2000; Porter & Allison, 2013). It is therefore evident that rape is at root a two-way psychological process with the rapist stimulated by psychological aberrations and the victims having to suffer emotional and psychological after-effects and traumas. Eastaerl (1992) argued that the assumption that all women really want to be raped or asked to be raped cannot be true because rape is a crime with devastating effects on the victims.

Adekoya (2014), Chabra et al (2014) and Idoko et al (2020) explained that there is a close relationship between the physical trauma occasioned by rape and the emotional and behavioural stress. Physically, forcing penile-vaginal or oral and anal intercourse could result in muscle tension, genitourinary complaints, disease, injuries, headaches and unwanted pregnancy. While these physical effects could on their own trigger painful memories in the victim, they usually pale in magnitude when compared with the emotional and psychological trauma. The behavioural consequences of rape include phobias, eating and sleeping disorders, isolation in cases of marital rape, anorexia, drug and alcohol addictions, nightmares and suicidal actions. Emotionally, the long-term effects of rape on the victims include depression, fear, anxiety, lack of trust, shame, humiliation, anger, rage, low self-worth, phobias and the perception that the world is malevolent (Campbell & Wasco, 2005; Meel, 2017; Layman, 2020). Cox et al (2010) further explained that rape as a phenomenon triggers changes in the mental psyche of the victim which in the long run distorts their thought processes. The long-term implications of these coupled with the fact that the victim cannot generally speak out in a society which attaches stigma to rape and discourages victims from mentioning it. Furthermore, rape

victims experience a shift in their relationship with members of their family and friends and more importantly aberrations in their relations with members of the opposite sex. Badmus (2019) stressed that the nature of this change is unpredictable and can range from complete disgust with members of the opposite sex to a sense of resignation to an aggressive and violent relationship which is borne out of a sense of humiliation and the loss of self-worth.

In literature, a number of physical and psychological implications of rape are codified in the concept of the Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS). The concept of RTS was derived mainly from the work of Ann Wolbert Burgess and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom. Cox et al (2020) explained that RTS encapsulates the psychological trauma which is experienced by a rape victim and includes the disruptions to the normal cognitive, interpersonal, emotional and physical behaviours of the victim. RTS is essentially an amalgam of physical and psychological signs and symptoms as well as the reactions experienced by rape victims. The peculiarity of RTS revolves mainly around the wide time range within which it can be experienced. This ranges from immediately after the act to many years or even decades afterwards. The various manifestations of RTS form the core of the various depictions of rape and its effects in literature.

Depictions of Rape in Literature and Theatrical Forms

Rape, like any other social phenomenon which impacts significantly the lives of people, has been depicted in various literary and theatrical forms. In American and European literature, there is a wide-ranged tendency to depict rape as an act found mainly among the lower classes. Asaah (2007) expressed that the frequency of rape in peacetime and during periods of wars in history suggests that gendered violence is inevitable. It is however not limited in terms of perpetration to the lower classes. Literary works such as Toni Morrison's *Bluest Eyes*, Ann Petry's *The Street*, Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* are examples of renowned works of literature which have explored various aspects of rape and how it has devastated the lives of victims. Young (2007) noted that an important aspect of these works of literature is the prevalence of women as victims. While individuals of both genders can be

raped, females are more generally the victims. Chiazor et al (2020) further explained that the prevalence of female victims of literature is an accurate mirror of what the reality is in the society. The social constructs which position women as vulnerable also play the role of labeling women as transgressive and as such necessitating rape as a punishment to be inflicted by men on women. Also, a common theme in these works of literature is the view that the perpetuation of rape by men is often as a result of an earlier sexual experience which may serve to traumatize and at the same time stimulate the man by positioning aggressive or violent sex as a means for sexual release.

For works of literature depicting rape in the African society, there is the underlying element of possessing the woman as a property. Badmus (2019) and Idoko et al (2020) explained that rape is a common form of violence in African societies and revolves from infringements of human rights, self- preservation, dignity and privacy. These signify the most common happenstances in literary works which have depicted rape in the African setting. Also, because women are considered properties to be owned in the traditional African setting coupled with the widespread practice of polygamy, rape is considered an event which subtracts from the value of the woman and as such is seldom reported. Therefore, the tension generated by the question of whether rape should be reported or not by the woman is a common theme in literature depicting rape and further aggravates the emotional and psychological after- effects of rape experienced by the victim.

Rape: The Case of Bolanle in the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives

Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (subsequently referred to as *The Secret Lives*) is a very remarkable Nigerian work of literature which symbolizes and expresses the theme of rape, the psychological theft occasioned by rape and the short and long- term of Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS). Adekoya (2014), Moolla (2017) and Badmus (2019) explained that Lola Shoneyin's work explored in vivid and quite graphic terms the themes of adultery, polygamy, myths, and the twin subjects of rape and sexual violence. Akbar (2018) reported that the novel is a work exploring the complexities of a polygamous home and the duties

imposed on the wives by the society. *Baba Segi* was a wealthy merchant with three wives, *Iya Segi*, *Iya Femi* and *Iya Tope* who took on Bolanle as the fourth wife. Bolanle's marriage to *Baba Segi* and the inability to conceive set off a chain of events which led to the discovery that *Baba Segi* was not the biological father of any of the seven children in his marriages. His lack of fertility prompted each of his older wives to engage in extramarital affairs in order to have children.

However, Bolanle's marriage to *Baba Segi* was underlain by the emotional and psychological implications associated with her rape experience:

... he grabbed a handful of my hair and dragged me into his bedroom, threw me on the bed. He climbed on top of me on the bed. He climbed on top of me but I clamped my legs together and pleaded for him to stop. My resistance annoyed him and pulled a pillow over my face. I was sure I was going to die because I couldn't breathe (P. 115)

In the novel, Bolanle was an English graduate and her status as a university graduate would have necessitated that she does not marry an illiterate, malodorous trader like *Baba Segi*. Badmus (2019) explained that unlike the earlier wives, Bolanle's marriage to *Baba Segi* was contracted not on the basis of social and economic constraints on her part but because she harbors a secret deep within her psyche:

... how could I tell her that I failed to preserve my dignity (P. 16)

This remains an important symptom of RTS and limits the range and depth of emotional experiences which the victim can experience after the rape. Bolanle was raped by the son of her mistress when she was fifteen and had to have an abortion. To Bolanle, her marriage to *Baba Segi* was symbolic and derives from the trauma associated with the rape and the abortion. To Bolanle, her marriage to *Baba Segi* is a shelter which affords her the opportunity to heal from the trauma of the rape:

... somehow it all made perfect sense when I met Baba Segi. At last, I would be able to empty myself of my sorrow. I would be with a man who accepted me, one who didn't ask question or find my quietness unsettling. I know Baba Segi

wouldn't be like younger men who demanded explanations for the faraway look in my eye (P. 16)

... I didn't come here to get away from my mother, I come to escape the feeling of filth that followed me. After everything happened, I tried hard to continue being myself but I slowly disappeared. I became Bolanle – the soiled, damaged woman (P. 16)

Idoko et al (2020) earlier explained that victims of rape feel a constant sense of shame and internal feelings of worthlessness and guilt which limits their emotional life and responses and from which they usually need time to heal:

... so yes, I chose this home, Not for the monthly allowance, I choose this family to regain my life, to heal in anonymity (P. 16)

Foster and Nwiyor (2017) have also provided a cogent explanation on the life of Bolanle in the household of *Baba Segi* and how it signifies a psychological theft of her dreams. From the novel, it was evident that Bolanle was an academic genius while in school; someone who was never beaten to the second place by her peers and who was the envy of her sister Lola:

...ten years ago, ... I was alive then. I was head girl of my secondary school, head of the school literary and debating society I know I was the daughter every parent wanted. I could tell from the way they asked my opinion of their children's conduct in school. Those were the days I was mum's beloved child (P. 110)

She was also the apple of her mother's eyes and neat and always dressed properly. So, it is quite logical to assume that Bolanle had big dreams:

... I wanted to smell wealth and glimpse the lifestyle I aspire to, the luxury I would live in when I was older and rich (P. 113)

Her marriage to *Baba Segi* is condescending and contracted to fill an emotional void in her life: (Shoneyin, 2010; Foster & Nwiyor, 2017).

*... my life was wrecked and I didn't know how to fix it,
I still don't know (P. 150)*

It is quite assumable that the rape incident which occurred when she was fifteen created an emotional void which made her psychologically imbalance to pursue her dreams and entered into a condescending marriage:

*I was too ashamed to let her see the trickle shell I'd become ... The more she pushed, the more-resisted. I didn't want a job! I didn't want a white wedding! I just wanted the war between who I used to be and who I'd become to end. I didn't want to fight anymore. (P. 16)
... It didn't bother me that I wouldn't have a tiered wedding cake, confetti, a veil or a high falutin sermon from a practiced priest. I didn't expect any nuggets of wisdom from my mother, no echoes of look after our daughter from my father and certainly no mad dash for a final car – side embrace from Lara (P. 18)*

Studies done by Easteal (1992) and Campbell and Wasco (2005) contended that victims of rape generally experience low self-esteem, depression and shame which are all psychological conditions that can truncate their ambitions and makes them settle for less in life. This is evident in the life of Bolanle who not only made horrible marital choices and must have experienced a really low level of self-perception or worth to explain her choice of husband and life to her family or friends who would find such choices strange and unexpected:

Have you never paused to wonder how my heart stopped when you brought a married man to visit me? Or how long the dagger he dipped into my throat was when you told us that you had been courting for months? Under my roof. Bolanle! Under my roof! My house was burning and I didn't smell the smoke (P. 148)

Another important component of the psychological theft caused by rape in the life of Bolanle the character relates to the destructive emotional tendencies she adopted which in the long run clouded her judgment and

led to other destructive behaviours which further arouse the ire of the other wives and fuelled the various conspiracies against her.

Iya Segi and Iya Femi still shout, hiss and spit. They sweep the floor all the time singing satirical songs to ridicule me. But it's not their fault that they are so uncouth. Living with them has taught me the value of education (P. 22)

Cathy (1996) and Adekoya (2014) explained that victims of rape tend to develop psychological disorders such as depression, fear, shame, withdrawal, guilt, humiliation, anger, rage, phobias and low self-worth. These disorders generally constrain the normal functioning of the individual within the social setting, triggers awkward behavioural responses and hamper the rational decision-making process. These disorders in the long run prevent the achievement of aspirations thus psychologically robbing victims of their dreams. This is a theme in Lola Shoneyin's novel and plays out in the life of Bolanle. Bolanle developed Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) after the rape and was fanatically interested in the accumulation of material things which have no intrinsic or practical value but only serve to sate her own tastes and function as a form of therapy:

...I walked the market and spotted the tiny, second hand bric a brac stall ahead ... it was the only place in the market where vibrant coloured wares could be honestly and accurately admired. My nose longed for the smell of old brass kettles, my eyes for the caustic stairs at the bottom of aged bowls... I caressed it and my sadness fell away. This was my secret reprisal ... (P. 44)

On the one hand, this is mainly a waste of resources; on the other hand this accumulation of meaningless items diverted her attention away from the pursuit of other important goals. This is an important implication of rape and the destructive tendencies in the lives of victims:

... my life was wrecked and I didn't know how to fix it, I still don't know (P. 149)

The psychological theft of dreams in the life of Bolanle was also apparent in the way she experienced marriage itself. Bandhari et al (2011) and

Layman (2020) noted that rape generates physical and psychological stress in victims which alter their attitudes towards sex, relationship with the opposite gender and even the perception of marriage itself. This is apparent in the life of Bolanle. For Bolanle, sexual intercourse in her marriage with *Baba Segi* is nothing more than a ritual chore:

... he returned at midnight to hammer me like never before. He emptied his testicles as deep into my womb as possible. It was as if he wanted to make it clear, with every thrust that he didn't make light of his husbandly duties. He wanted to fuck me pregnant. If there was ever a moment when the memory of being raped became fresh in my mind that was it (P. 43)

One of the dreams she was denied in her marriage was that she was never able to achieve orgasm or full coital enjoyment:

But things have changed. Now there is no pleasure in the pleasing, no sweetness in the surrender. Baba Segi only comes to deposit his seed in my womb. He doesn't smile or tickle me. He doesn't make joke about my youth, he just rams me into the mattress. (P. 43)

The implication of this for Bolanle was that she never enjoyed marriage. More importantly for the marital dreams which Bolanle must have harbored, the rape and abortion which followed the rape are traumatic events which colored marriage as only a system of obligations on the part of husband and wife. While this is a symptom of Post-Traumatic Stress, it nevertheless made for an awkward marriage which Bolanle must cope with:

But things have changed. Now there is no pleasure in the pleasing, no sweetness in the surrender. Baba Segi only comes to deposit his seed in my womb. He doesn't smile or tickle me. He doesn't make joke about my youth, he just rams me into the mattress. (P. 43)

The situations described above stem from changes in the self- perceptions which Bolanle has about herself after the rape and the abortion. Shoneyin (2010) reported that Bolanle described herself with adjectives such as *soiled* and *damaged* after the rape. Bolanle also claimed that she married

Baba Segi and came to his house in order to escape the filth which she associated with the rape and the abortion. This is evidence of her psychic neurosis which robbed her of not only of the joys of marriage but also of the aspirations she could have fulfilled had a traumatic event like rape not shattered her sense of self-worth:

Bolanle, you are the biggest disappointment the world has seen.

Conclusions

Rape is a recurrent global phenomenon and a menace to millions of lives. Besides from the physical injuries associated with rape, the emotional and psychological scars associated with rape leaves marks which last for years and even decades. While females are more often than not the victims of rape, it is a condition which affects both genders. The importance attached to rape in different cultures has over time led to various literary depictions. Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* is a novel which addresses the complex nexus of marriage, fidelity, sexual violence and the trauma associated with rape. For Bolanle, the victim of a rape who found herself in a polygamous marriage with a semi-literate merchant with three wives, rape was not just a physical event but an act which triggered a number of psychological events leading to the non-realization of her potentials. This was manifested in the facts that her marriage was a condescending one, her development of psychologically destructive behaviours and the fact that she could not even enjoy her marriage. In conclusion, rape can best be described as a physical process which culminates in minutes but which leave scars and emotional damages that can last for years and decades dictating the future paths of victims subjected to the harrowing ordeal.

References

- Adekoya, O. (2014). Love's metamorphosis in third generation African Women's writing: An example of Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. *Tradition and Change in Contemporary Fiction*, 2018, 333- 334.
- Badmus, A. E. (2019). Nigerian women growing up: Purple hibiscus and the Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives. *From the European South*, 97- 111.

- Bandhari, S., Winter, D., Messer, D. and Metcalfe, C. (2011). Family characteristics and impact of long term sexual abuse. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 50(4), 435-451.
- Campbell, R. and Wasco, S. M. (2005). Understanding rape and sexual assault. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20(1), 127- 131.
- Cathy, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Chabra, S., Rai, D. and Chakko, K. A. (2014). The emotional and psychological aspects of rape. *Journal of Evolution of Medical and Dental Science*, 3(34), 9001- 9009.
- Chiazor, I. A., Ozoya, M. I., Udume, M., and Egharevba, M. E. (2020). Taming the rape scourge in Nigeria: Issues and Actions. *Gender and Behaviour*, 14(3), 7764- 7785.
- Cox, P. J., Lang, K. S., Townsend, M. and Campbell, R. (2010). The rape prevention and education theory model of community change: Connecting individual and social change. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 13(4), 297- 314.
- Easteal, P. W. (1992). Rape. *Violence Prevention Today*, 1, 1- 12.
- Foster, L. J. and Nwiyor, A. B. (2017). Testimonies as therapy: Trauma in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. *Journal of Humanities and Social Policy*, 3(2), 44-50.
- Idoko, C. A., Nwobodo, E. and Idoko, C. I. (2020). Trends in rape cases in Nigerian state. *Africa Health Sciences*, 20(2), 668- 675.
- Layman, K. E. (2020). *The representation of rape and sexual assault within news media*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.872>
- Meel, B. I. (2017). An epidemiology of sexual assault among older women in the Mthatha area of South Africa. *Medical Science and Law*, 57(2), 69- 74.
- Moolla, P. F. (2017). The polygamous household in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*: a haven in a heartless world. *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 48(1), 79- 96.
- Porter, L. E. and Allison, L. J. (2013). Examining group rape: A descriptive analysis of offender and victim. *European Journal of Criminology*, 3(3), 357- 381.
- Shoneyin, L. (2010). *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Abuja: Cassava Republic
- Thornhill, R. and Palmer, C. (2000). *A natural history of rape: Biological cases of sexual coercion*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- Young, T. A. (2007). *Rape in contemporary American literature: Writing women as rapeable*. A Masters' Thesis submitted to the Department of English, Florida State University.