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Hope in the wake of rape: Mourning, rage and refusal in womxn's accounts of sexual violation

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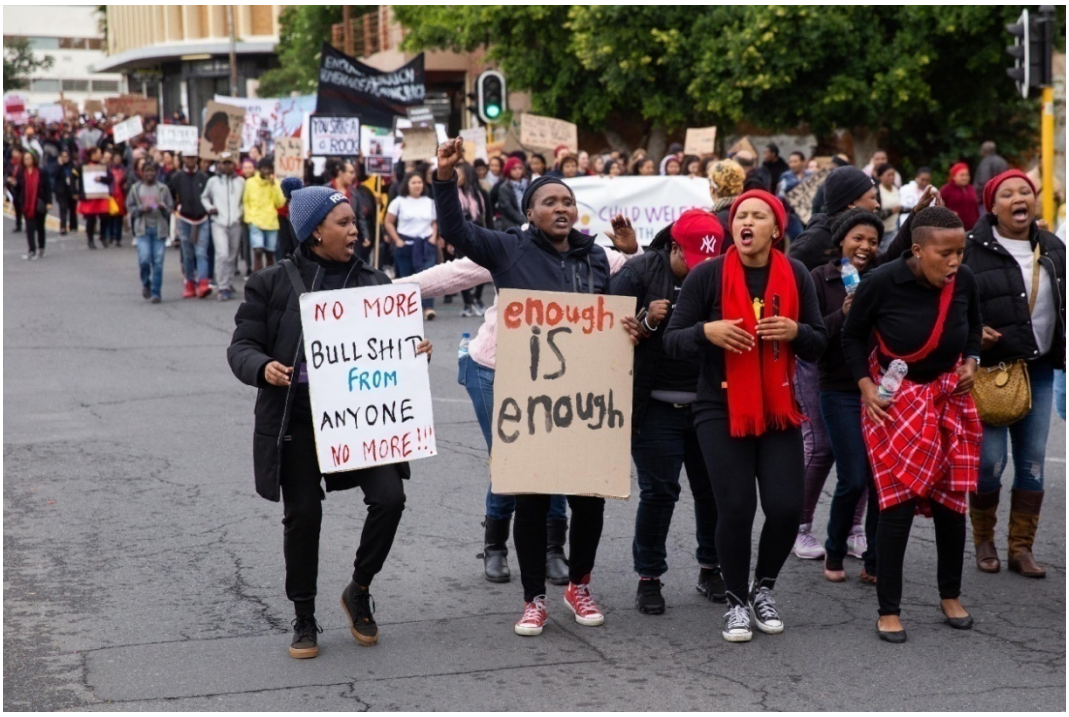
Abstract
This paper explores if hope is possible in the wake of rape. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 16 womxn who have been raped in South Africa it explores how hope emerges within the context of endemic sexual violence. Moving beyond individualistic, (neo)liberal conceptions of hope proposed by mainstream psychology, I offer a social-political conception of hope that is bound up with mourning, rage, and refusal. This is a hope both constituted by and disruptive of the current state of sexual violence in South Africa. Womxn reflected on the normalisation of sexual violence and how this constrains the possibilities of constructing a different society. Yet, simultaneously, womxn's refusal of dominant understandings of rape demonstrates how sharing stories provides opportunities for solidarity which disrupt the isolation and alienation produced by rape. In the face of dismissal, denial, and shame, sharing their pain and violation, womxn perform a hopeful act, which demands care and empathy both within and beyond the interview. Womxn articulate hope in the wake of rape enmeshed with hopelessness and the pain of the present, without foreclosing possibilities for less unequal, less unjust, and less violent futures.

Keywords
Hope, rape, South Africa, refusal, rage, mourning



"About a thousand women march against gender based violence in Cape Town, South Africa" on 1 August 2018. Photo by Ashraf Hendricks. © 2016-2020 GroundUp.
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As we face ongoing crises in relation to climate change, war, the cost of living, migration, and the COVID-19 pandemic, among many others, questions about the possibilities of or hopes for a better future loom large. In my own work with womxn[1] who have been raped[2] in South Africa, I found myself often returning to questions of hope – could there be hope in the wake of rape, and if so, what kind of hope would this be? In this paper, I present a critical and situated exploration of hope within the context of endemic sexual violence, developed in relation to the narratives of the 16 womxn I interviewed. Moving beyond individualistic, (neo)liberal conceptions of hope proposed by mainstream psychology, I offer a social-political conception of hope that is bound up with mourning, rage, and refusal. This is a hope both constituted by and disruptive of the current state of sexual violence in South Africa. I begin by outlining the dominant ways in which hope has been conceptualised within mainstream psychology, as well as the problematics of these conceptions. I then discuss more critical conceptions of hope which are embedded within the inequalities of the present. I outline the

[1] The term 'womxn' is used to refer to all people who identify as women, female, femme, or trans. This term is intended to highlight the diverse and fluid ways in which gender is experienced and constructed.
[2] Within feminist scholarship there has been significant debate about whether to use the terms "victims" or "survivors" of rape. The term "victim" is seen to denote powerlessness and passivity, while "survivor" denotes resilience and agency (Alcoff & Gray, 1993). However, these binary categories preclude more complex understandings of how individuals may negotiate their post-rape experiences (for example, as simultaneous "victim-survivors" or by oscillating between these two categories). I have therefore chosen to use the term "womxn who have been raped".

ways in which hope/hopelessness are socially and politically constituted in the South African context, including in relation to sexual violence. I then turn to hope in the wake of rape, as developed within the narratives of 16 womxn who have been raped in South Africa.

Conceptualising hope

Hope has a long history as an object of philosophical, religious, and artistic exploration (Kleist & Jansen, 2016). Within the humanities and social sciences, the notion of hope has been explored from many different disciplinary perspectives (Lopez et al., 2003). Broadly, hope has been defined as "what sustains life in the face of despair" (Zournazi, 2002, p. 15). Hope is also commonly bound up with orientations towards the future (Hage, 2016; Kleist & Jansen, 2016). Within the discipline of psychology, one of the central conceptualisations of hope was developed by Charles R. Snyder. He proposed that: "hope is defined as the process of thinking about one's goals along with the motivation to move towards (agency) and the ways to achieve (pathways) those goals" (Snyder, 1995, p. 335). This two-factor model of hope has been central to the development of positive psychology (Colla et al, 2022). Psychological science has demonstrated the benefits of hope for individual functioning, with psychological conceptions of hope being linked to post-traumatic growth, resilience, and recovery (Colla et al., 2022; Mosley et al., 2020; Park & Chen, 2016; Saint Arnault & Sinko, 2019). For example, hope is seen to promote feelings of well-being (Bennett, 2015; Cherrington, 2018). In contrast, a lack of hope or hopelessness is seen to be linked to depression, distress, and suicide across a range of different contexts (Abramson et al., 2002; Cohen et al., 2018; Klonsky et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2015).

Within mainstream psychology, hope (and hopelessness) tend to be conceptualised in liberal, decontextualized, and individualist ways, focusing on individual capacity, subjectivity, or behaviour (Bennett, 2015; Colla et al., 2022; Mosley et al., 2020). More critical scholarship (both within and beyond psychology) has highlighted the problematic effects of these kinds of constructions of hope. Individualistic conceptualisations of hope make individuals responsible for cultivating and sustaining hope, while failing to engage with the broader contexts in which hope is produced. Katie Stockdale (2021) has argued that it is necessary to attend to how oppression, privilege and power produce, shape, and damage people's hopes. In certain contexts, "people, in virtue of their social, political, and locations must 'hope against hope' for many of their desires to be fulfilled, if they are capable of hope at all" (Stockdale, 2021, p. 27). For example, in conditions of extreme poverty where people are struggling to survive day by day, there are limited possibilities for hopeful orientations towards the future (Long, 2021). Within (neo)liberal contexts hope may also operate to create particular kinds of aspirations which obscure the structural conditions of capitalism and inequality; for example, hope for upwards social mobility through 'hard work' (Hage, 2003; Wrangel, 2017). These kinds

of hopes may simultaneously create tolerance for uncertainty, insecurity, and poverty in the present, suspending people in a continual not-yet, rather than producing desires for political mobilisation, refusal, and the imagining of alternative worlds (Wrangel, 2017).

In contrast to mainstream psychological conceptions, more critical conceptualisations of hope engage with the painful inequalities of the present (Boler, 2004; Wale, 2022). These conceptualisations of hope are entangled with feelings of anger, bitterness, unhappiness, despair, and melancholy (Stockdale, 2021; Thaler, 2019; Unni, 2022; Winters, 2016; Wood & Litherland, 2018). For example, Winters (2016) has proposed a melancholic hope, which "in opposition to triumphant, overconfident narratives, tropes, and images, suggests that a better, less pernicious world depends partly on our heightened capacity to remember, contemplate, and be unsettled by […] violence and suffering" (p. 16). A critical version of hope is thus one that critiques the past and troubles the present in order to seek what could be in the future (Cahill et al., 2010; Zembylas, 2022). In line with this critical approach, and in order to situate hope amidst current harrowing inequalities, I now turn to hope and hopelessness in the South African context.

A hopeful/less nation

In this section, I outline the broader context of hope and hopelessness in which my research is located. This includes the broader politics of hope, as well as the ways in which hope and hopelessness are entangled with sexual violence. The notion of hope has been central to the democratic project in South Africa. Describing the new South Africa, Ian Shapiro and Kahreen Tebeau (2011) write:

> How could one overstate the hope and enthusiasm that accompanied its improbable birth? Millions throughout the country and around the world cheered as long lines of first-time voters queued patiently for hours in those three days in late April 1994 to legitimate the peaceful transition from apartheid and to select their first democratic government […] it was a dream that many South Africans […] never believed would come true (p. 1).

For millions of people, the hope of the new South Africa was the hope of living free from segregation and police harassment, the hope of access to basic amenities including sanitation, water and electricity, the hope of having a house made of bricks, the hope of new possibilities for dignity and respect (Ross, 2009). It was the hope of 'a better life for all', as articulated in the ANC's 1994 election campaign. Since 1994 however, this hope has been repeatedly frustrated, as social and economic inequalities continue to haunt South Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Wale, 2022). Amongst recent responses to the painfully slow process of societal change were the Fallist[3] student movements in 2015 and 2016.

[3] The Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movement began at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2015. Rhodes Must Fall (2015) describes itself as "an independent collective of students, workers and staff who have

These protests signal the ending of a politics of patience and hope (Pillay, 2016). The students, who have been 'born free'[4], ragefully[5] disrupt discourses of healing, reconciliation, and 'transformation' that have characterised the post-apartheid context, thus demanding an end to a permanent state of 'waithood' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Riaz-Mohamed, 2015). Kim Wale, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Jeffrey Praeger (2020) have referred to this as 'haunted hope', through which students (re)live the inequalities of the past, both within and beyond the university. The protests are disruptions of the 'new South Africa' as a project of hope – the students (and many others) are no longer prepared to wait hopefully for that which has been promised to them.

The issue of endemic gender-based and sexual violence in South Africa is also one which evokes both hopelessness and hope. South Africa is frequently referred to as 'the rape capital of the world' (Dosekun, 2013; Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002; van Schalkwyk, 2018). Research has repeatedly demonstrated alarmingly high rates of sexual violence. For example, one study found that 27.6 % of men reported having raped a woman (Jewkes et al., 2011). Another study found a lifetime sexual violence prevalence of 24.9% among women aged 18-49 (Steele et al., 2019). A third, (37.9%) of 17-24-year-old women surveyed at a university, reported having experienced sexual violence (Ajayi & Ezegbel, 2020). These statistics are accompanied by a "grammar of horror such as endemic baby rape, corrective lesbian and grand-mother rapes" perpetuated by the South African media (Hirschauer, 2014, p. 84). Pumla Gqola (2015) has proposed that contemporary South Africa is constituted by "the female fear factory" or "the manufacture of female fear", through which the threat of rape works to "remind wom[x]n that they are not safe and that their bodies are not entirely theirs" (pp. 78-79). Within this context the sexual violation of womxn has, to a great extent, become normalised, creating a widespread sense of hopelessness about the possibilities of intervening in and disrupting this status quo.

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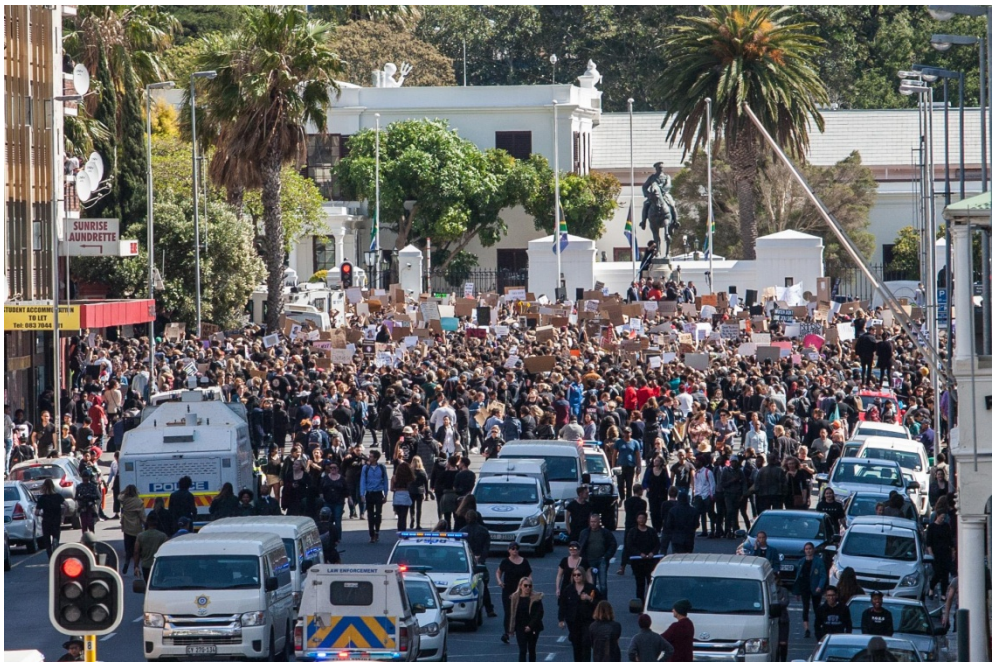
come together to end institutionalised racism and patriarchy at UCT" (n.p). Following the Rhodes Must Fall student protests, Fees Must Fall began in October 2015, as a student movement to protest against annual fee increases. Collectively Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall are referred to as the Fallist student movements.

[4] The term 'born frees' refers to the generation of South Africans who were born after 1994.

[5] I articulate rage as a particular kind of anger. While anger is an affective response to (perceived) injustice, rage is a reaction to the refusal to attend to this appeal for justice (Lyman, 2004). Rage is, thus, an affective response produced by being unable to take any more suffering, anguish, or distress, unable to remain painfully constructed any longer (Canham, 2018).



"Thousands protest against gender based violence outside Parliament in Cape Town, South Africa" on 5 September 2019. Photo by Ashraf Hendricks. © 2016-2020 GroundUp
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In the face of continued violation of womxn's bodily autonomy and the failure of various institutions, including the state and the police, to take this violence seriously, activist and performative interventions have been staged with increasing frequency to call attention to and challenge the ongoing onslaught of violence against womxn in South Africa (Shefer, 2019). Recent interventions, which I outline briefly below, include #RememberKhwezi[6], #RUReferenceList[7] and #TotalShutDown[8]/ #AmINext17[9].

On the 6th of August 2016, during the Independent Electoral Commission's (IEC) ceremony announcing the results of the election, Simamkele Dlakavu, Tinyiko Shikwambane, Naled Chirwa and Amanda Mavuso stood up as, then president, Jacob Zuma was addressing the nation. With their backs to Zuma, facing the crowd and the cameras, they held up placards that read "I am 1 in 3"[10] "10 yrs later" "Remember Khwezi" and "Khanga"[11] (Wazar, 2016). The protest was a disruption of the narrative of democratic progress in South Africa, demanding that the nation reflect on how womxn are continually failed within

[6] https://twitter.com/hashtag/RememberKhwezi?src=hashtag_click
[7] https://twitter.com/hashtag/rureferencelist?lang=en
[8] https://twitter.com/hashtag/TotalShutdown?src=hashtag_click
[9] https://twitter.com/VinylAngel/status/1168515790280318978
[10] This is a reference to the widely circulated statistic that 1 in 3 womxn in South Africa will be raped in her lifetime.
[11] 'Khanga' refers to the draped cloth that Fezekile was wearing on the night that she was raped by Zuma. During the trial Zuma testified that her wearing of the khanga was an invitation for him to have sex with her.

the new South Africa (Gqola, 2017). The reference to "10 yrs later" was a prompt to reflect on the fact that it had been 10 years since Jacob Zuma was acquitted of raping Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzwayo.

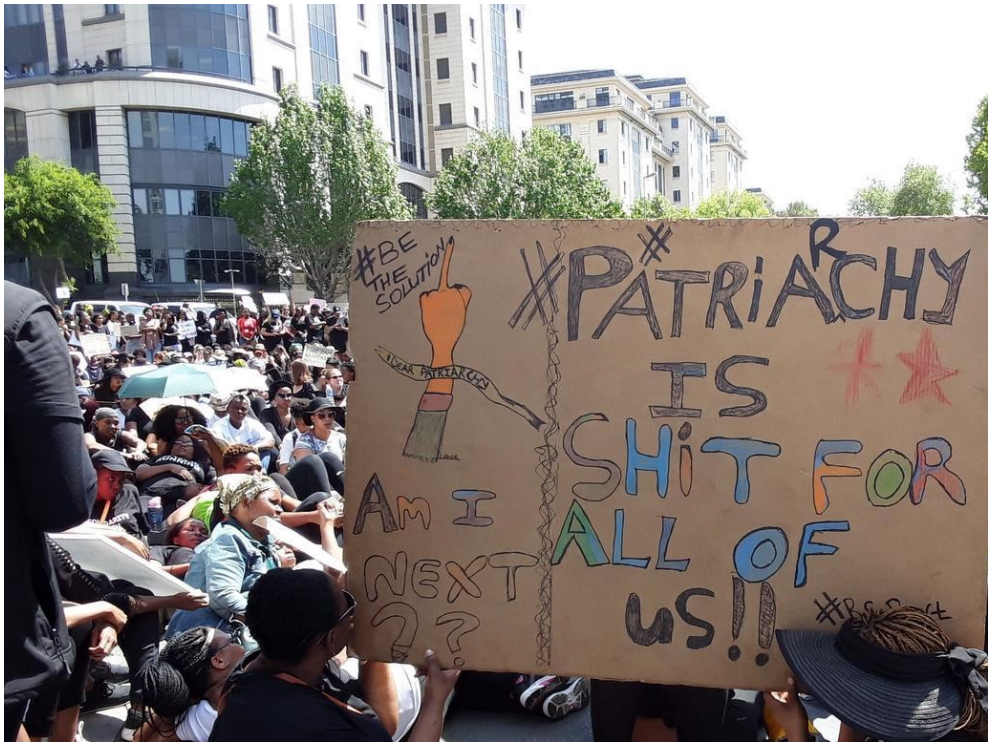
On the 17th of April 2016 a list of eleven men's names and "et al" (denoting "and others") was published on the Rhodes University Queer Confessions and Crushes Facebook page – entitled "Reference List" (Seddon, 2016). The list was posted as a response to the university management removing posters protesting against sexual violence. One of the posters stated: "You are more likely to be excluded for plagiarism than you are for rape" (Haith, 2016, n.p.). Following the publishing of the RU Reference List, womxn and queer students disrupted university classes and marched topless to protest against the university management' repeated failure to respond to rape on campus (Gouws, 2018). The protest quickly spread to other South African universities, including UCT, the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN), and the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) (Shewarega Hussen, 2018)[12].

In August 2019, which is celebrated as 'Women's month' in South Africa to commemorate the 1956 Women's march to the Union Buildings, at least 30 women from a range of different backgrounds, in different parts of the country, were killed, many of them by their partners (Davis & Kubheka, 2019). Widely publicised cases included those of Uyinene Mrwetyana, Leighandre 'Baby Lee' Jegels, Janika Mallo, Jesse Hess, Meghan Cremer and Lynette Volschenk (BBC, 2019; Merten, 2019). Many of these womxn were subjected to sexual violence before being killed. August 2019 represented just one moment in the relentless assault, both embodied and symbolic, on the bodies and senses of womxn in South Africa (Gqola, 2017). In particular, the rape and murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana by a post-office worker when she went to collect a parcel, provoked wide-spread outrage and horror (Levitt, 2019). Uyinene's murder sparked hashtags such as #AmINext and #SAShutDown (Levitt, 2019; Lyster, 2019). Protests, led by womxn and queer people, were staged in both Johannesburg and Cape Town in response to what many called "the war on womxn's bodies" (Hoosain Khan, 2019, n.p).

I read these protests as acts of critical hope, which are "radically unreconciled to the present" (Eagleton, 2015, p. 69). Through these protests womxn make the pain of rape intelligible, while demonstrating rage that these conditions prevail (Gouws, 2018). These are acts of collective mourning – for all the womxn (and people of other genders) that have been violated. These protests refuse and disrupt dominant narratives about rape – as individualised acts committed by a select number of perpetrators and which blame womxn for being raped. Instead, they assert that rape is rooted in cultures of patriarchy which denies womxns' humanity, dignity, and rights, in line with critical feminist perspectives (Alcoff, 2018; Gqola, 2015; Mazibuko, 2018). These protests are

[12] Both the Remember Khwezi protest and the RU Reference list occurred within the context of the Fallist student movements and calls to decolonise institutions of higher education in South Africa. Within the Fallist student movements there were multiple instances of violence against female and queer activists by their male comrades (Lujabe, 2016; Ndlovu, 2017; Ratele, 2018).

also examples of how hope is cultivated alongside rage under conditions of oppression (Stockdale, 2021). Here rage is both a response to the injustice of the violation of rape and a response to the failure to take it seriously. Thus, rage is not only directed towards rapists but also towards "a world that reproduces that violence by explaining it away" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 31). In demanding the protection of womxn's rights and dignity, they demand a different future. Thus, these protests "provide hope and inspiration for collective action to build collective power to achieve collective transformation, rooted in grief and rage but pointed towards vision and dreams" (Cullors in Solnit, 2016, p. xiv). They are examples of how hope can be cultivated through solidarity or hoping together (Stockdale, 2021). It is within this context in which hope is enmeshed with hopelessness, mourning, rage and refusal in which my own research about rape is located. Below I provide a brief overview of the research project before turning to my analysis of hope in the wake of rape.



"Hundreds gather outside the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) to protest against gender based violence" on 13 September 2019. Photo by Zoë Postman. © 2016-2020 GroundUp.
https://www.groundup.org.za/imagegallery/photo/1324/

Exploring experiences of rape

Broadly, my research explored how womxn's feelings about their experiences of rape are structured by the social context of sexual violence in South Africa. Here feelings are conceptualised not as individual psychological dispositions but as mediations between the psychic and the social and between the collective and the

individual (Ahmed, 2015). This approach was informed by affective, feminist, decolonial and African-centred perspectives. I was interested in "processes of affecting and being affected" and affect and affectivity in relation to what bodies can, and do, do in relation to other bodies (Ahmed, 2015, p. 208; Lykke, 2018). This included attending to the ways in which the womxn I interviewed and I are deeply *affected* by being situated in (South) Africa (Ratele, 2019). My approach builds on the work of both feminist and decolonial scholars who have demonstrated the ways in which oppression is enacted at the level of feelings[13] (e.g. Ahmed, 2015; Lorde, 1984; Fanon, 1967). This approach pays attention to "how power circulates though feelings and how politically salient ways of being and knowing are produced through affective relations" (Pedwell & Whitehead, 2012, p. 116). As well as the ways in which what is felt has the potential to break down, reinforce, build up and bring into focus the multiple frames through which life is structured (Engle & Wong, 2018). I understand hope as a relational, political, visceral, and embodied element of everyday life, constituted by structures of power and operating as a possibility for resistance (Suffla et al., 2020).

I recruited participants via the Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust Facebook page[14]. Anybody who identified as having been raped and who identified as a womxn was eligible for inclusion in the research. I interviewed the first 16 womxn that contacted me. The interviews were conducted between August 2018 and May 2020. I also drew on my own experience of rape and shared this with participants in the interviews (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I interviewed each participant twice, to build trust and develop in-depth, nuanced understandings of their experiences. Participants selected the time and place for the interviews. Two interviews were conducted over the phone due to my inability to travel to those parts of the country[15]. The interviews where semi-structured, guided by open-ended questions about participants' experiences of rape, as well as their reflections on rape within the South African context more broadly. Prior to the initial interview I provided each participant with an information sheet, outlining the details of the study. Participants were required to sign a consent form before the interview began. Participants who were interviewed over the phone were asked to give verbal consent. I provided each participant with a list of counselling resources they could access in the case that they experienced the interview as distressing. Despite the sensitive nature of the topic, most of the participants appeared to experience the opportunity to share their experiences as largely constructive, cathartic and affirming. Some of them explicitly reflected on this in the follow up interview. I shared my analysis with all my participants to ensure that they were comfortable with the ways in which I had represented

[13] I have chosen to employ the term feelings in recognition of the "the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences" (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 80).

[14] I chose this strategy so that the invitation to participate in the research would not be completely out of the blue, in order to avoid triggering people. Through this platform, participants were already engaged in a space in which rape was discussed.

[15] Despite the less personal nature of a phone interview, I felt it was important to include the experiences of womxn who live outside of the main national metropoles in order to diversify the perspectives offered by my research.

them and their experiences. None of the participants raised any concern with my analysis and some of them acknowledged the significance of being able to read what I had written.

Participants

The womxn I interviewed were aged between 19 and 50, with the majority of them being in their late 20s. Nine participants self-identified as 'white', six as 'black' and one as 'mixed heritage'. Nine participants self-identified as heterosexual, five as queer, one as lesbian and one as bi-sexual. Most of them lived in middle-class neighbourhoods (12) and had completed university level education (13). All participants identified as South African, except one, who identified as Zimbabwean. Six of the participants indicated their first language as English, two as Shona, two as isi-Xhosa, two as Afrikaans, two as both English and Afrikaans, one as Sotho, and one as Venda. Due to my own linguistic limitations, all the interviews were conducted in English. Most participants (10) lived in Cape Town, two in Pretoria, two in Johannesburg, one in a town in the North West province and one in a township south of Gauteng. I have used pseudonyms to protect all participants' identities. I provide details of each of the participants whose narratives I share below, in recognition that their identities and experiences are not reducible to the categories I have provided here.

Analysis: Hope after rape

I have felt utterly hopeless in many moments during my research with womxn who had been raped. The magnitude of the violations that were shared with me, not only the acts of rape themselves but the lack of care by medical personnel, the police, family members and friends, as well as society more broadly was, in many moments, beyond comprehension. Simultaneously, as I was collecting narratives from womxn, I was constantly bombarded by newspaper headlines proclaiming grotesque acts of violence: 'HALF-NUDE TEEN FOUND DEAD IN TOILET' and 'RAPED BY FIVE MEN IN ONE DAY'. Thus, a sense of deep hopelessness was a key part of what it felt like to do this research. This feeling of hopelessness was echoed by Jamie[16] in our initial interview. She said: "there's a lot more of… like hopelessness, I suppose. Like 'ah fuck is this shit ever gonna end?'" And yet, as the project was drawing to an end, in awe of the fierce vulnerability of all the womxn who had shared with me, I found myself returning to hope (Helman, 2022).

In engaging with (critical) hope, I seek to disrupt racist and colonial constructions of South Africa as a place 'without hope'. As Floretta Boonzaier (2017) has powerfully demonstrated, poor, 'black' communities with high rates

[16] Jamie described herself as: "I… er am a counsellor […] I am a white queer person […] Um… so… middle-class upbringing, Joburg all the way. Um… er a mixture of private and public schooling throughout primary and high school".

of violent crime in South Africa are repeatedly represented in the mainstream news media as hopeless spaces. She shows how one particular community is described as "as a place of hopelessness, with 'social ills', including high levels of alcohol abuse, 'broken families', unemployment, poverty, high school dropout rates, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancies" (Boonzaier, 2017, p. 474). These images form part of a broader archive through which African people are rendered as passive victims of violence, trapped in conditions of unlivability (Judge, 2015; Mavuso et al., 2019; Shefer, 2018; Tamale, 2011). Thus, to construct people as being without hope is to deny possibilities for resistance, refusal and re-making of the world. To deny hope in the wake of rape is to reproduce notions of womxn who have been raped as 'irreparably damaged' (Barker & Macleod, 2018). Yet, I remain cognisant that a focus on hope in the wake of rape also has the potential to reinscribe glorified conceptions of survivorship, which deny the ongoing pain that 'survival' entails. Thus, I develop a social-political conception of hope in the wake of rape; a hope bound up with mourning, rage and refusal. As I will show this is a hope which is full of pain, rooted in woundedness and committed to mourning what has been lost (Bozalek et al., 2014; Thaler, 2019; Winters, 2016).

My analytical approach was guided by the following (entangled) questions: what are participants' affective responses to their experiences of rape? How are these affective responses entangled with the socio-political context of rape in South Africa? How am I affected by what participants tell me? What does my affective response indicate about the broader affective context of rape? My analysis was developed through multiple close readings of interview transcripts and extracts from my research diary, which I used throughout the research process to record reflections. The interview transcripts and research diary extracts were coded in relation to different affective responses to rape. Through repeated engagement with each individual transcript, as well as reading the transcripts as a 'whole', I identified the most dominant affective responses to rape, of which hope was one.

The pain of hope

All the womxn I spoke to reflected on the endemic nature of sexual (and other forms of gendered) violence in the South African context. This normalisation of sexual and other forms of violence against womxn constrains the possibilities of constructing a different kind of society.

> Buhle[17]: Society is shaped in a way that healing is not something that supposedly happens naturally, that when you get your, when you you you you, when you get raped […] the society is is is is channelled in a way that um everything that they do in society just drive you to feeling more unworthy [Rebecca: Mhmm], more unnormal [Rebecca: Mhmm] […] I think if society was welcoming of victims er

[17] Buhle described herself as: "I'm a 27 year old. I am married. I've got two kids. I'm a stay at home mom. Um but I do have a qualification that I did at UJ. Um I love my kids. I love my life. Um ja there are still things that I you know have to work through as a survivor but generally I'm a happy person […] I'm black… um straight [my home language is] Xhosa".

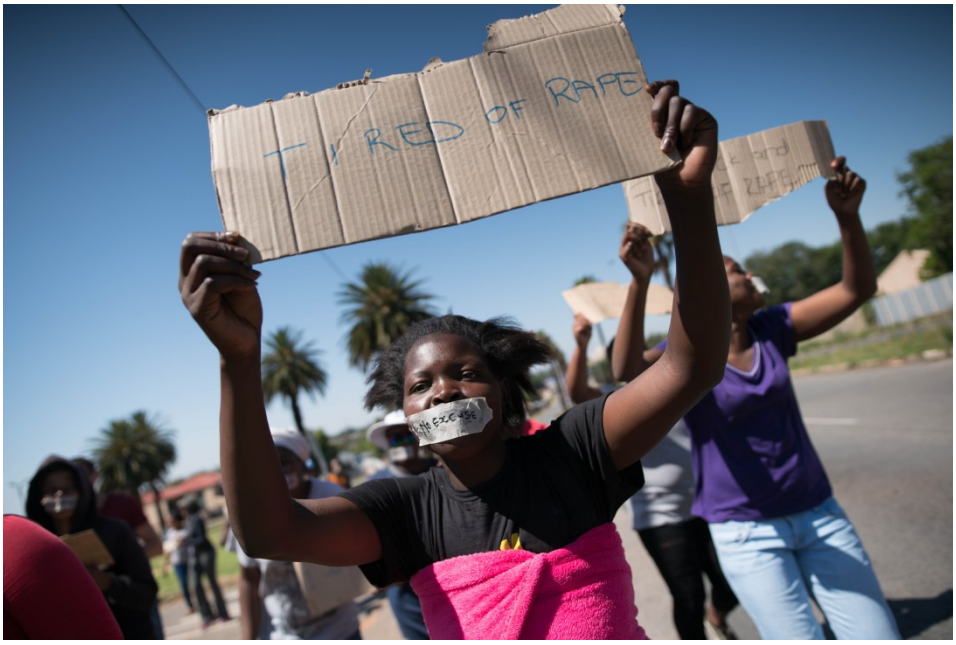
> and survivors it would, healing would come easier (Second interview, phone, 23 May 2020).
> Tanya[18]: I really hope that...in a generation or two from now people will...have to think hard about what is rape again and... [Rebecca: Mhmm] things like- that would make me happy...if it could be like that, I'll be very happy. And if I can- in my generation get to a point where, when things like this happen to women...they feel free [Rebecca: Mhmm] ...to...report it...[Rebecca: Mhmm] to see justice being done [Rebecca: Mhmm]...and to feel that...there's a society around them that will embrace them [Rebecca: Mhmm] (Second interview, coffee shop, Johannesburg, 5 May 2019).

Both Buhle and Tanya articulate how the contemporary context creates barriers to "healing" and "justice" for womxn who have been raped. They reflect on how shame is a central affective barrier as womxn are made to feel "unworthy" and "unnormal" and they do not feel "free to report" rape. This echoes other research, which has shown how womxn who have been raped are shamed (Fleming & Kruger, 2013; Gavey, 2005; Gordon & Riger, 1989; Womersley, et al., 2011). Here, Buhle and Tanya express the pain and the struggle that 'surviving' rape entails. It is in response to this pain and struggle that they imagine a different kind of society – one in which "healing would come easier" and in which womxn who experience rape will be "embrace[d]".

Alongside this, Tanya also articulated a hope for a society in which rape is unimaginable. I argue that these are examples of hope intertwined with despair (Thaler, 2019). It is in recognising and explicating the current situation of survival as untenable that Buhle and Tanya are able to articulate a need for transformation (Eagleton, 2015). Their notions of "healing", "justice" and being "welcomed" and "embraced" are constituted in relation to the current configurations of pain, shame, silencing, alienation and isolation produced by rape. In gesturing towards hopefulness Buhle and Tanya do not banish their despair (Mayes & Holdsworth, 2020), nor do they embody a hope that escapes from the present (Zaliwska & Boler, 2019). In fact, it is the acknowledgment of past and present pain, despair and horror that comes to circumscribe the possibilities of a different future (Thaler, 2019). While both Buhle and Tanya present (hopeful) imaginings of a different society, they simultaneously construct this alternative society as a distant possibility. Tanya's reference to "in a generation or two from now" suggests that shifting social conditions in relation to rape will be a long process. This comment points to the entrenched and normalised nature of sexual violence in South Africa and how this constrains opportunities for hope. The hopelessness of the present recalls Jamie's comment, mentioned above, which evokes the relentless of sexual violence: "Like 'ah fuck is this shit ever gonna end?". This hopelessness is entangled with a broader state of hopelessness, about the lack of meaningful change that has taken place in

[18] Tanya described herself as: "I've had a vary varied career. So I worked in… in IT and I've worked I've now recently started e- I've started my er being a lawyer… White, Afrikaans-speaking, I am financially comfortable. I'm extremely determined...I never stay down...I'm *extremely* resilient… I'm...I-or-I think...I'm the type of person that people like to take to war with them. Um...I'm dependable… but I'm also adventurous. I'm a pioneer...um...I *love*...breaking moulds I love enabling people...I *love* people. Um...I like helping people. Um...I'm a *strong* personality".

South Africa since the birth of democracy and the promise of 'better lives for all'. Buhle and Tanya's hopes for a different future, entangled with the pain of the present, echo the demands of those protesting against rape and other forms of gender-based violence in South Africa.



"Women from Durban Deep, Johannesburg protest against gender-based violence and police inaction in December 2017". Photo by Shaun Swingler (permission granted to re-produce image) https://www.groundup.org.za/article/forgotten-mining-town-where-rape-normal/

Performing hope

For many womxn to talk about rape is a difficult and painful experience. In my interviews there were frequent silences and whispers as my participants struggled to share their violations (Helman, 2022). Within a context steeped in shame, as Buhle describes above, to come forward to talk about rape, to share painfully despite past experiences of dismissal and denial, is to perform hope. As Terry Eagleton (2015) has argued, "hope is not simply an anticipation of the future but an active force in its constitution" (p. 84).

> Faith[19]: Some people are also in my position. It might be a boyfriend or someone else [Rebeccca: Mhmm] […] ja so I know that for someone who would listen to my story or read my story they would probably be encouraged that you don't, it

[19] Faith described herself as: "Well I'm thirty years old. I'm mother of two. My first girl is th- turning thirteen now and the other one is turning seven. But I live by myself i- here in Cape Town, my kids live with my mom in Zimbabwe. So um I work for a company that we… um they got contracts o-of new houses and they ma- let them out […] and part-time I also do I'm a nanny […] I'm well I'm a black girl, woman. Um… I'm from Zimbabwe. I speak Shona and… I go to church, part of the time I go to church but I'm I'm a Christian".

> doesn't, it d- it's it's not about the relations that you have [Rebecca: Mhmm] with someone else. If someone did that kind of thing to you it is still rape [Rebecca: Mhmm] you know? [Rebecca: Mhmm]. It doesn't matter who who who who did that to you [Rebecca: Mhmm] you know? (Second interview, coffee shop Cape Town, 12 May 2019).
>
> Bianca[20]: Shit there was a 17-year-old girl... who went through all of this um... who... who did e- I went through that alone... and... I don't want that for... for other people [inhales] (First interview, Bianca's house, Cape Town, 22 August 2018).

Here both Faith and Bianca articulate the hope for social responses to rape that are different from those that they experienced, in a similar way to Buhle and Tanya above. This performance of hope is linked to a desire to disrupt shame and silencing. Since the rapist was her ex-husband, Faith articulates how the myth that rape is perpetrated by strangers (Abrahams & Jewkes, 2010; Gavey, 2005) limits the support that womxn receive when they are raped by someone that they know. As Bianca recounts, she did not tell her family about the rape and so had to cope unsupported. Here she reflects on how she hopes that other womxn will not have to experience their rapes alone, as she did. Bianca's articulation of "shit" is full of both pain and rage, mourning her 17 year old self. This rage and mourning reverberates with that expressed by those involved in the #RememberKhwezi, #RUReferenceList and #TotalShutDown and #AmINext interventions. Thus, Bianca and Faith's hope for something different emerges within the context of pain, shame and rage. This is a hope which recognises the ongoing difficulties of articulating the harm that rape wreaks. It is a hope which acknowledges the ongoing power of shame to blame and responsibilise womxn for being raped. It is a hope with mourns the isolation and lack of support that rape produces.

Faith and Bianca do not merely articulate hope for a different future but they *perform* this hope. In the face of shame, denial and dismissal, to come forward to share one's experience of violation is a hopeful act, which demands care and empathy both within and beyond the interview. For Bianca, Faith and many of the other womxn I interviewed, hope is performed through resisting shame and silence, in the act of daring to share despite these negative possibilities. It was through these hopeful acts, entangled with mourning, rage and refusal, in which womxn engendered care towards themselves in (re)articulating the locus of the violence and shame that had been inflicted upon them. It is these performances of hopeful love and care, which have evoked a sense of hope in me. In sharing their painful stories, the womxn I have interviewed hope to give hope to other womxn; a hope that they are not alone, that the rape is not their fault, a hope that places of support, love and rage, in

[20] Bianca described herself as: I'm doing my internship for to register with the [Health Professions Council of South Africa] as a research psychologist… I used to model and sometimes I miss that a lot. Um mainly because of the money [laughs][…] I'm a white female. I come from a er middle-class family. Um, English but I was raised in a fairly um conservative Afrikaans area […] So ja it sort of like that was that was very interesting growing up s- um identifying as a feminist".

which the pain and shame of rape can be worked through, can be found or created.

Hoping with others

For all the womxn I spoke to, rape operated as an act of dismemberment, which cut them off from their bodies, their sense of themselves, as well as their relationships with others. The shaming and blaming, that they experienced made them feel in many moments that the rapes were their own fault. Yet, as I have shown above, the interview operated as a space in which they could re-member themselves, and tell different stories about the causes of their violations. In this way, the grip of the present was loosened (Eagleton, 2015) and a different future was made possible.

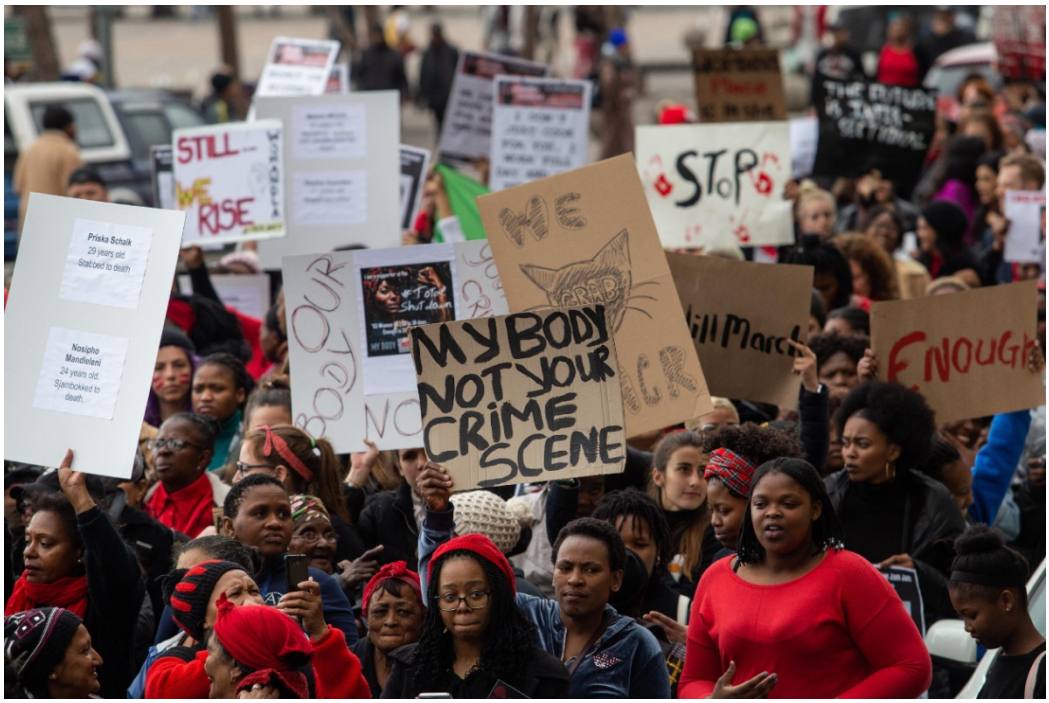
> Camille[21]: as like women sharing information and sharing personal experience... [Rebecca: Mhmm] feel like that is you know like it's a really, it's a really important connection and it's a really important way of understanding our-ourselves through other people [Rebecca: Mhmm] and other people's experiences and that is like the essential humanity (Second interview, coffee shop, Cape Town, 22 May 2019).
> Refiloe[22]: And also as we're doing this interview you know I'm just sitting here thinking about it, as much as you're doing this interview to get like individual experiences and [inhales]... but you made me sort of like... I- I'm able to understand in the broader... social context [Rebecca: Mhm. Mhmm] You know [inhales] you know I-I'm able to sort of like from a moment stop saying 'me me me me me' [Rebecca: Mhmm] that this happened to me me me me [inhales] but also to understand it from a broader social perspective [Rebecca: Mhmm] that as much as this is my experience [inhales] but this is also your experience. This is something that we [inhales] we-we've gone through you know. It might have been at a different place, [Rebecca: Ja] at a different time but it somehow we share common experiences [Rebecca: Ja] and that's liberating [Rebecca: Ja]. For me I'm finding it very very liberating. I know that [inhales] now onwards I don't have to think about it as something that is shameful [Rebecca: Mhmm. Ja]. I don't have to think about it as something that is just an individual experience [Rebecca: Ja, that belongs to you. It doesn't belong to you] That is ja. [Inhales] Ja (First interview, hotel, Pretoria, 10 December 2018).

[21] Camille described herself as: "Um I'm four percent South East Asian, according to 23andme, and like two percent African. So I'm like super white. And my family is like half Afrikaans, half English. I grew up speaking English, just [inhales] all the privilege, middle-class, private schools. Um… always just had… like a really [exhales]… I guess protected life but also like lots of opportunities, never doubted myself, never doubted my ability to do what I want. Um… very sexual and sexually active. I've slept with like 40 partners and sex is something that I really enjoy and you know have a good time with […] I'm so straight [both laugh]"

[22] Refiloe: "I'm the oldest child, which means I'm also the oldest um granddaughter. [Inhales] Er I was brought up by my grandparents in a very very very small village. But then er coz my parents has me when they were very young [laughs] […] I'm currently doing my PhD in criminology […] I identify as what a black female […] I think middle-class ja. Middle-class ja […] I date guys".

Here both Camille and Refiloe reflect on how, through sharing experiences of rape, these "individual" experiences of rape were re-conceptualised as fragments of a much broader social and political problem (Alcoff, 2018; van Schalkwyk, 2018). Camille reflects on how the sharing of experiences enables alternative humanising understandings of rape. As Refiloe reflects here, the sharing of experiences within the interview (in which both she and I shared aspects of our experience) allowed her to disrupt her own sense of individualised responsibilisation and shame for 'having been raped'. These are examples of refusals of dominant understandings of rape. They show how sharing stories can provide opportunities for solidarity, which disrupts the alienation and isolation that rape produces (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2016).

The interviews operated as a space in which my participants and I engaged in attempts to repair and extend our 'worlds' in hopeful ways (Fisher & Tronton, 1990). These are hopeful repairs and extensions in the face of dehumanisation and silencing. These are collective acts of "re-membering, practicing hopefulness that… reconfigur[e] possibilities for the future, finding possibilities to endure" (Flint, 2020, p. 59). This is reflected in my own sense of hope that remained in the wake of this research about rape. It was also reflected in other moments that extended beyond the research. After participating in the research project, Buhle contacted me to say she had established a space for womxn in her community to come together and share their experiences of rape. In our second interview, Tanya told me how, following our first interview, she spoke openly for the first time about her experience of rape in her church in the hope that this would disrupt the silence about rape in this space. These are acts of solidarity, which hope with others, in the face of denial, dismissal, silencing and shame. They demonstrate how hope is both constituted by and of the social.



"About a thousand women march against gender based violence in Cape Town, South Africa" on 1 August 2018. Photo by Ashraf Hendricks. © 2016-2020 GroundUp.
https://www.groundup.org.za/imagegallery/photo/1099/

Conclusion

In proposing a socio-political conception of hope in the wake of rape, I have sought to situate hope within endemic sexual violence in South Africa. This conception of hope is an attempt to wrest hope from the narrow confines of mainstream psychology (Malherbe, 2022). Rather than reproducing a psychological conception of hope which responsibilises individuals to feel hopeful, promoting adjustment to the harmful conditions of present sexual violence, a critical, social-political conception of hope holds together moments of hopelessness, mourning, rage and refusal. This is a hope enmeshed with the hopelessness and pain of the present, without foreclosing the possibility of a less unequal, less unjust, less violent future (Thaler, 2019). This conception of hope recognises the ongoing struggle to 'survive' rape, amidst persistent victim-blaming, shaming and silencing. This conception of hope recognises that while the pain of rape may persist, womxn who have been raped are not 'irreparably damaged', fixed in positions of victimhood. As Laura Halperin (2015) powerfully writes:

> hope exists in attempts at resistance, however futile these attempts may be or seem. It exists in the sharing of painful individual collective historias (histories and stories) and in the remembrance of harm in order to move past it and seek to rectify it. Remembering in these narratives doesn't just consist of recollecting the

past; it entails recalling the past so as to remember it, giving it new shape in order to move forward towards a less harmful world" (pp. 3-4).

These are small, powerful acts of hope, which chip away at the isolation, shame, and pain in the wake of rape. This is a hope which refuses dominant narratives of rape, and through this refusal different possibilities of relating, both to the self and to others, are kindled. Through solidarity and hoping with and for others, the womxn I interviewed both demand and begin to construct a different future.

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