



#REVIEW: One Hour in Paris: A True Story of Rape and Recovery, Part 2 of 2

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This post marks the second part of our special review section on [One Hour in Paris: A True Story of Rape and Recovery](#). Check out the first part [here](#).


Karyn L. Freedman's book *One Hour in Paris: A True Story of Rape and Recovery*



presents the autobiography of a woman whose past, present and future is altered by the experience of rape. Sharpened by pain and terror, the single hour that comprises this experience is eternally elongated through the ongoing resurgence of memory, affect and sensation.

Freedman successfully documents “the enduring emotional, cognitive and psychological consequences of trauma” (p. vii), offering a model for phenomenological research on experience, memory, pain and transformation.

Freedman’s work is comprised of a prologue and five chapters. The tone of the work is set by the prologue. Just as Elie Wiesel’s narrative offers testimony of the Holocaust, the rape of Karyn Freedman serves to make the stories behind the numbers in an ongoing “war against women” (p. 115). Making every effort to be an honest witness, Freedman meditates upon the nature of truth and fact, and their complex relationship to memory, especially the memory of trauma.

The five chapters that follow detail the life of the author through an array of overlapping chronologies defined by temporal flow, a passage from ignorance to understanding and a movement from silent suffering to active testimony. If the first chapter recounts the experience of rape in graphic detail, chapters two and three offer an equally visceral account of the resurgence of this experience through panic attacks triggered by evidence, trial, blood tests and intimacy. Therapy provides a catalyst for the third chapter’s realisation that the private pain of sexual violence must be made public. This realisation ultimately leads the author to Botswana, where, in the fourth chapter, she spends three weeks working with the staff members and affiliates of an NGO that supports wartime victims of sexual violence. Freedman’s story closes with a decision to publish an account of her experience and the coincidental transformation of the anniversary of her rape to the anniversary of buying a house with a trusted life partner. 

From a youthful interest in Holocaust literature to the acquisition of a PhD in philosophy, Freedman claims to have used abstractions and intellectualisations to disassociate. Perhaps, as a result, her work remains decidedly untheorised.



Whereas the absence of theory or analysis prevents the reader from escaping the immediacy of Freedman's experience, it also disables productive links and denies more nuanced discussions of pain, trauma or sexual violence.

For example, in finding solidarity with the women and children of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Freedman sees rape as systemic of the larger structural violence enshrouding women. Dismissal of male victims denies the use of sexual humiliation and violence as a means of torture enacted upon either gender and severs the reader's ability to perceive anxiety, insecurity, shame and sensory overload that define Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as belonging as much to the perpetrator of violence as to their victims.

Arthur Kleinman (2006) cautions that the diagnosis category of PTSD may enable therapist and patient to ignore the ethical resonance of events. Indeed, Kleinman's attention to unsettled and dislocated moral frames could illuminate Freedman's observation that traumatic events "can also change the way we see ourselves, and our place in the world, by calling into question some of our core assumptions about our fellow human beings" (p. 109). Likewise Veena Das' (2007) exploration of the ways two Indian women struggle to resume ordinary life after the experience of extraordinary violence could strengthen Freedman's assertion that "in order to break free from the hold of the memory of a traumatic experience you have to first live in it" (p. 95). Finally, while marvelling at the resilience of Congolese women who have no recourse to formal western-style therapy, Freedman makes no attempt to explore the resources that these women do have available at the interface of biology and culture, exemplified in the edited volume *Pain and its Transformations* (2007).

Having taken the position of witness and advocate, Freedman raises important questions regarding the definition of rape and concerns surrounding the structural inequalities in which sexual violence is embedded. Despite its shortcomings, Karyn L. Freedman's *One Hour in Paris: A True Story of Rape and Recovery* remains a powerful narrative.



In recreating experience, it offers understanding, insight and courage for those women who, like Freedman, have been traumatised by sexual violence and who seek the alleviation of pain. One Hour in Paris also offers a primary source for researchers seeking to understand the experience of pain from a subjective position.

References

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