



**Did She “ Ask for It?” Confronting
Rape Culture in Hend Hagazi’s
Normal Calm**

By

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Abstract

In her debut novel *Normal Calm* (2014), the Egyptian-American writer Hend Hegazi uses a simple but eloquent technique to explore one of the most offensive crimes against humanity: rape. Specifically, the novel depicts aspects of rape culture, a sociological concept coined by feminists which emphasises how societies tend to blame rape victims by asserting that they “asked for it”, through the experience of the main character, Amina, an Egyptian-American Muslim living in the United States with her parents. While studying science at a leading university, Amina is raped by one of her friends, Rami, another Egyptian-American Muslim. To investigate her tribulations as a rape victim, this article applies understandings obtained from rape trauma syndrome (RTS), which involves a cluster of psychological reactions occurring following rape. Through RTS, evidence of psychological and social trauma as portrayed in the novel are identified to engage more insightfully with the suffering and confusion of Amina, verify the validity of rape culture as a concept, assess whether Amina is able to confront the assumptions of rape culture, and finally attempt to determine whether Amina will ever achieve “normal calmness” in her life.

Keywords: rape trauma syndrome, Hend Hegazi, *Normal Calm*, rape culture, rape

The experience of being raped leaves the victim traumatised for a long time. Sharon Lewis defines rape as a “brutal attack against a woman, and always involves force and violence” (8). Recent statistics indicate “one out of every six American women has been the victim of attempted or completed rape at some point in their lives” (Denton28). Another study found that 13 percent of surveyed American women aged eighteen and older reported having been the victim of at least one complete rape (Thornhill and Palmer 1). These forms of sexual violence not only cause psychological and social trauma to the victim, but also to the victim’s family and friends because it reaches “further than individuals’ private lives” (Bevacqua 11). In Hend Hegazi’s 2014 novel *Normal Calm*, the effects of rape are revealed through the experiences of the main character Amina. Amina is an Egyptian-American Muslim living in the United States with her parents. She studies science at a leading university where she is raped by one of her friends, Rami, another Egyptian-American Muslim.

Despite the deep anguish that rape causes, it did not become a subject of political and social commentary in the United States until the nineteenth century (Bevacqua 19), when many female activists pointed out that “rapes were more often silenced, denied, minimized or condoned” because “rape was sorely missing a woman’s point of view” (Gavey 17). These activists argued and continue to argue that rape “is a crime that principally affects women” (Eriksson 3) and

that, therefore, "a woman's fear of rape affects her day-to-day decisions and reduces the quality of her life" (Lewis viii). Hegazi's novel depicts this fear in relation to rape in the words of Amina's mother, Ruwayda. When Amina is leaving home to go to school, Ruwayda warns her, "You're going to meet lots of new people, some good and some not good. But you can't give your trust to ANYONE, not even your roommate" (12). Moreover, Ruwayda adds, "And I know that eventually you're going to make friends, maybe even good friends with some of the boys at the school. Make sure you're NEVER, EVER in a room alone with any of them ... no matter how close you think they are" (13).

Furthermore, women all over the world are obliged to confront the assumptions of rape culture, a sociological concept coined in the 1970s by feminist scholars to shed light on the range of notions and behaviours that work to trivialise rape against women. These feminists argue that since "culture is considered everything a group of people thinks and does", it is easy for harmful elements, such as the "normalisation of sexual violence", of a culture to be "passed down" (Denton 9). Therefore, under rape culture, "men are encouraged to be sexually aggressive, and society judges them on their strength and potential for sexual conquest. Women are forced to see them as a natural threat" (Keyser 13). Rape culture thrives for many reasons, including "the representation of female characters in many films or TV programmes, the use of



certain types of women’s bodies in advertising, sexist jokes, and the normalization of heteronormative romantic types, or dynamic sexual encounters” (Fanghanel 12). Such social attitudes lead these feminists to conclude that “rape culture does not make men rape; rather, at its worst, it encourages men to rape by normalizing their action, and it enables those who do rape by making society (including political, social and legal institutions) condone or excuse their actions” (Inal and Smith viii).

There is evidence that rape culture has deep roots in the Middle East in general and in Egypt in particular. Middle Eastern women are stigmatised and blamed if they are raped and therefore victims of rape are often silenced. For example, because Egyptian societal attitudes hold that “sometimes a girl contributes 100 percent to her own raping” (Clinard and Meier 150), “ninety-eight percent of rape cases in Egypt go unreported” (Ghanin 30). Also, in some Middle Eastern cultures it is tradition to ask the rapist to marry the victim and this so-called compromise offers rapists the chance to avoid legal prosecution. Shortly after such a marriage, rapists usually divorce their victim and leave her “to face her grim future” (Ghanin 31). These same assumptions are found in American society. One study shows that “8 percent of females and almost one in three males (32 percent) agreed that ‘It would do some women good to be raped,’ and 4 percent of females and 17 percent of males agreed that most rape victims were ‘asking for it’” (Ward 41).

Furthermore, Nickie D. Phillips declares that "the concept of rape culture has entered into [the United States's] collective imagination effectively providing a cultural space for the notion that violence against women is often ignored" (2). For example, Americans often assume that "victims are responsible for their own rapes, or victims are sluts and are asking for it, or that no really means yes" (Oliver 12). Thus, victims are blamed when, for instance, "they [dress] provocatively, they [go] to bars, or they [do] not adhere to cultural gender norms" (Smith 148). Consequently, since rape-victim blaming is common in the United States, "those who have been raped suffer some sort of community rejection and punishment" (Messina-Dysert 1). As a result of rape culture, the American justice system has been unsupportive to rape victims. According to statistics published by America's largest anti-sexual violence organization RAINN (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network), "1000 rape committed in the United States, only 6 will result in conviction" (Inal and Smith viii). *Normal Calm* is rich with images of rape-victim blaming. For example, as soon as Amina's father knows about his daughter's rape he says, in a voice 'like thunder', to his daughter, 'You know of course that now no respectable Arab man will want to marry you?!' (40)

To explore the assumptions of rape culture, this article engages with insights derived from theorizing in relation to rape trauma syndrome (RTS), "a set of physical, behavioural, and



psychological reactions sometimes resulting from rape” (Taslitz 131) that were first described by nurse Ann Wolbert Burgess and sociologist Lynda Lytle Holmstrom in an effort to help rape victims survive. RTS is a type of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which develops as a consequence of trauma due to rape that may cause a “temporary loss of ability to cope with life situations related to overwhelming stress” (Beebe and Myers 922). This paper uses RTS as a framework to unpack Hegazi’s depiction of rape and to examine the many aspects of rape culture as reflected in the novel to verify the validity of rape culture as a concept and its effect on the characters of the novel.

Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS)

Since becoming a subject of study, rape has become the focus of many feminist studies addressing such questions as, “does rape result from men’s special-purpose psychology, and perhaps from associated non-psychological anatomy, designed by selection for rape, or is rape an incidental effect of special-purpose adaption to circumstances other than rape?” (Thornhill 12) Such studies have drawn varying conclusions; some argue “that the nature of the relationships between the sexes fosters rape. Others argue that it exists because of the rapist’s psychopathology. Still others claim it is because of how women dress, act, or behave” (Carroll 568). According to many theorists, rape proves that many societies

believe "the human male was a natural predator and the human female served as his natural prey" (Brownmiller 8). Due to these factors, it can be argued that rape involves "an angry and violent expression of the rapist's desire to dominate someone else" (Ledray 1-2).

From the 1970s onward, feminist studies have paid attention to the psychological effects of rape, recognizing that rape causes not only physical pain, but psychological trauma as well. Trauma has been defined as "any safety-threatening event that: 1) is sudden, unexpected or not normal in a person's experiences; 2) exceeds the individual's perceived ability to cope, and; 3) and disrupts the individual's mental and emotional functioning in a way that interferes with activities of daily living" (Atkinson 21). In 1974, Burgess and Holmstrom observed the symptoms "of 92 adult female rape victims seen in a hospital emergency room" (Frazier 672). They "termed the acute traumatic reaction of sexual victimization as the 'rape trauma syndrome'" (Petra 20). In 1983, Burgess published an article that "discussed in detail how RTS can be viewed as a specific example of PTSD, with rape as the stressor" (Cling 20).

A woman can be said to be experiencing RTS if "many of the symptoms are experienced intensely and at the same time" (Lewis 22). Moreover, "Some rape survivors may have none of the symptoms of RTS and others may suffer only a few" (Lewis 22).

RTS tends to affect victims in three ways. First, victims have noted that it can ‘demolish your beliefs and assumptions about yourself and the world, your sense of safety, trust, and invulnerability have been shattered, and that can make the world seen very chaotic and confusing’. Second, it can involve a ‘second trauma’ that ‘describes the daily re-injuring you receive from people’s insensitivity, lack of support, and flat-out rudeness about your trauma’. Third, it can lead to the victim engaging in “a type of ‘I’m a victim and nothing more!’ thinking. These outcomes lead to the “self-rejection and self-hatred that rape victims universally experience” (Atkinson 25-26).

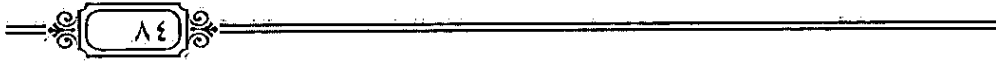
RTS attempts to identify the psychological symptoms that occur with some victims, “...but does not describe every single case. Victims’ reactions to rape vary” (Savino and Turvey 233). RTS indicates that a rape victim may experience two subsequent phases, namely “the acute phase and the long-termed one” (Lynch 401). The acute phase “is marked by major life disruption and disorganization” (Amar and Burgess 25), since victims develop “responses such as flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, guilt, shame, as well as denial and attempt to disconnect the self from the reality of the abuse” (Ogendengbe 24). In the long-termed phase, which begins two or three weeks after rape (Frazier 672), the victim may develop symptoms such as “fears and phobias, increased emotional liability, increased motor activity, and intrusive thoughts” (Amar and Burgess 25). Some of the victims “are never able to move from

the acute phase to this second phase without help” (Ogendengbe 24), while others can gain control over their lives (Carroll 580).

Normal Calm and RTS

While Burgess and Holmstrom were able to divide RTS symptoms into “an acute and long-term recognition process that occurs at an actual or attempted sexual assault” (Amar and Burgess 25), the “specific definition of RTS used in different studies var[ies]. Thus, there has been some confusion as to what RTS is, and what symptoms are likely following a rape” (Cling 19). Besides, researchers have developed RTS “for the purpose of treatment concerning the behaviours and symptoms which may follow sexual assault” (Bronitt 50). In 1991, Mary P. Koss and Mary R. Harvey divided psychological reactions following rape into four phases of response: “(1) *anticipation*, or the earlier recognition of danger, (2) *impact* of the event and its immediate aftermath, (3) *reconstitution*, or attending to basic level consideration and outward adjustment despite ongoing symptoms, and (4) *resolution*” (Resnick and Indelicato 241). These four phases of RTS are used in this paper to examine Amina’s suffering and confusion and, furthermore, verify the validity of rape culture as a concept.

Amina’s Anticipatory Phase



Amina’s rape takes place early in the novel, so Hegazi exerts noticeable effort to give her readers a glimpse of Amina’s pre-crisis personality. For example, she is portrayed as self-confident, which helps her be outwardly proud of the fact that she belongs to a minority group. For example, the omniscient narrator explains that Amina’s choice to wear a *hijab* indicates that “she knew that covering made her a walking representative of Islam and all Muslims” (6). Amina is portrayed as living a normal life before her rape; the narrator explains that she always says, “We need to be grateful for what we have because so many people have so much less” (11). Moreover, she is intelligent— her school chooses her to give a speech during her class’s graduation party. Amina’s intelligence enables her to undergo an anticipatory phase which describes an individual’s behaviour before a sexual assault. RTS theorizing suggests that some rape victims, before an assault, may determine that the situation they are in is “potentially dangerous” (Petra 21). When Amina first meets Rami, she demonstrates some of this anticipation in the following passage: “something about the gleam of his eyes told Amina that he preferred partying to studying” (20).

On the night of Amina’s rape, Tariq, another Muslim friend, drives her and some mutual friends, including Rami, to the cinema. After the movie, Amina invites them to her apartment for a cup of

coffee. Only Rami accepts her invitation. Amina feels that something wrong is about to happen:

Amina was torn; on the one hand, she trusted Rami completely ... he was like a brother to her. But on the other hand, she knew it was inappropriate for her to have a guy friend over while she was all alone. She was hoping one of the girls or Tariq would say something to Rami and save her from embarrassment, but they just said their good nights and walked away. Hesitantly, Amina opened the door and let Rami inside. (29)

Amina's case shows that Ruwayda was wrong in believing that "home is a safe place, and that a woman can escape rape by avoiding dark alleys" (Lewis 20). Ruwayda's belief is clear in her words, "Never walk through the campus at night alone. We read in the handbook that the school has a service of providing escorts for people who do not want to walk alone at night, take advantage of that" (13). On the contrary, the scholarly evidence shows that "rape can happen anywhere and anytime" (Lewis 20), and "the majority of rapes occur in a location familiar to the survivor, often in the home" (Guckenhimer 581). Amina's rape shows that "rape can take place between people who have a variety of types of prior relationships" (Projansky 8). Debra Guckenhimer reiterates this point: "even though the majority of rapes are perpetrated by someone known to

the survivor, women are taught to fear strangers and feel safe with men who are familiar” (581).

Rape victims in the United States not only endure many forms of violence, but, according to the assumptions of rape culture, they are also “blamed for inciting violence against them. Certain types of clothing, consuming alcohol and drugs, and being at particular locations are some examples of “reasons” that a woman can provoke a man into raping her, according to rape culture” (Guckenheimer 581). However, Amina is a *muhajaba* – that is, she is covered. As a result, “a lot of the students she was meeting for the first time in high school were hesitant to get to know her. They figured she belonged to some cult, or was some kind of religious fanatic” (5). For Amina, “covering was a subtle but firm way of respecting herself as well as demanding respect from those around her” (6). Even Amina’s best friend Kayla, who is not a Muslim, knows “Amina didn’t drink and she would never offer to take Amina to a bar; she respected her friend’s beliefs more than that” (12). In addition, Amina once says to Kayla, “But really, covering is so freeing. You’re free from people disrespecting your body, you’re free to speak your mind and *hijab* commands people to listen” (120). Thus, Hegazi portrays Amina as being a *muhajaba* to directly confront some of the victim-blaming myths and discourse faced by women across the world, such as “the belief that women’s behaviour brings on rape (going out at night unescorted, for example) and that

they secretly crave rape" (Bevacqua 10). This is clear in Hegazi's words about Amina:

Anyone who saw her, especially, who'd never met a Muslim before, would automatically think of her as a model of Islam and her actions would be seen as some form of her devotion to her religion. It was a heavy load for her to bear, but she accepted the responsibility, everyday asking God for patience and guidance. (6)

Amina's Impact Phase

One of Amina's most important characteristics is her independence and her ability to take care of herself. However, after her rape, Amina loses these qualities and Hegazi portrays her personality as the opposite of what it had been before. This is clear during the impact phase, considered "the most severe phase of RTS" (McGrath 254) because it involves the psychological reactions of the victim both during and after the assault (Petra 21). As with other rape victims, Amina suffers from fear and anger during the assault. She is afraid of Rami, but at the same time angry because of her inability to push Rami away:

She kept struggling, but he was too strong. Nothing she said or did was having any effect on him. He had managed to bring her to the floor and quickly he had torn off her clothes. She had been trying to fight him off for several minutes, but her body was getting weaker. She began to cry. A few minutes went by, and then it was all over. Rami got up off of her,



adjusted his clothes, and walked out of her apartment, leaving her cold, alone and crying on the floor. (31)

Most rape victims, immediately after the rape, react in ways that may seem irrational. Often, there is “a constant feeling of being dirty and wanting to shower” (Projansky 9). After Rami leaves, Amina “tried to wash away his smell, his grip, his breath. But she couldn’t; her body remembered what had just happened too vividly, and all she could do was hope her tears would be able to cleanse her mind from the horror she had just experienced” (33). Furthermore, following the assault, she finds herself unable to report the crime. Merriel Smith emphasises that “many victims cannot or do not press charges against their attackers” (ix) because “police must interrogate each case completely, which can be very difficult for a victim who has just been through a traumatic experience” (Carroll 586).

Before her rape, Amina is depicted as having a close relationship with her parents, Ruwayda and Osman, and with some of her friends. She dedicates her speech at her high school graduation party to all parents: “And when we fall – and **eventually**, we will – your advice will be gently appreciated. And when we succeed – and eventually, we **all will** – well, that success is dedicated to you” (9). She also describes her close college friends, Loyal and Sahar, as being “like sisters” to her (19). But after the rape she has difficulty expressing her true feelings. According to RTS, in the hours following a rape, victims develop reactions which

can be divided into two types: expressive reactions, where victims are able to show their emotions, or guarded reactions, where victims are unable to show their emotions. Victims can change from being expressive to guarded or vice versa, and "can even interchange between the two depending on several parameters" (Turvey 231).

Amina reacts in a guarded fashion since she is able to "reveal [her] victimization to no one" (Bevacqua 5). For example, she is unable to express her true feelings to her parents, because their reactions to the rape suggest that she should take responsibility for the attack. Her father says, "You did this to yourself! How could you let a strange man into your apartment?!?! Haven't we warned you about this over and over?! ... You were careless and you disobeyed us, now you're paying the price!" (40) Her mother mentions that she has nightmares, leading Amina to conclude that her 'mother blames [her] for what's happened to her' (218). It could be said that her parents see the rape "as an inevitable result of women's sexual liberation" (Raphael 41).

Amina finds herself unable to discuss the assault with her close friends either. She explains to her mother, "They're still great friends, but things are difficult now. They've offered to help, to listen, to do whatever they can to make this whole experience less painful, but I find it hard to really talk to them. I think I don't want to burden them. I definitely don't want to depress them" (41-42). In short, Amina undergoes what Burgess and Holmstrom refer to as

‘silent rape reaction’, in which “some victims deny and repress the incident until a time when they feel stronger emotionally” (Carroll 581).

Amina is an expressive victim only in front of her friend Kayla, who after finding out about the rape, “was a ball of fire. She wished Rami were standing in front of her so that she could castrate him” (34). Hegazi explains why Amina is expressive only to Kayla: “Kayla had been Amina’s closest friend since elementary school. She knew Amina better than anyone else; she could tell what she was thinking simply by looking in her eyes. They were connected in a way that didn’t really exist anymore between friends” (99-100). In brief, Kayla is the only person who believes in Amina’s innocence. Kayla’s dialogue proves this assertion: “You didn’t do anything to deserve that! You didn’t act inappropriately and you didn’t ‘ask for it!’ This was an evil act that he committed ... and you were the victim. You didn’t deserve that” (35). Kayla’s words are “therapeutic”, and consequently Amina feels relieved in her friend’s presence. Kayla’s support makes Amina feel that maybe “she hadn’t deserved it. Maybe her friend’s anger over what happened proved her innocence” (35).

Amina’s suffering during her impact phase is exacerbated due to a rape culture that encourages her parents to blame her for the assault. Amina in turn feels guilty which causes “additional victimization or ‘second rape’” (Messina-Dysert 1). This second

rape stage involves social stigma for victims and thus plays an important role in keeping victims silent about rape, especially in particular cultures (Westmarland and Gangoli 1). In Arab culture, a woman’s rape “brings dishonor to the victim’s family, even if the circumstances are beyond her control” (McGrath 251). This is why Amina says to her friends Layal and Sahar that Rami has “ruined my future, the way everyone sees me ... He’s ruined my life” (36). It is obvious now that, in relation to the rape, Amina “experiences feelings of anxiety, guilt and fear” (Terry 195).

During this phase, Amina tries to understand the rape and comes to believe that her bad judgment affected her safety. However, Hegazi gives evidence that Amina and her family had taken steps early on to ensure her own safety; in fact, Hegazi portrays Amina’s parents as being overprotective. For example, before leaving for school, Ruwayda gives her daughter many pieces of advice about how to protect herself. Amina accepts such advice and states, “my parents drive me crazy ..., but something about being home makes me feel safe” (17). She believes that, if she follows her parents’ advice, nothing will harm her. Hence, she makes friends only through the Muslim Student Association, becoming friends with Sahar, Layal, Tariq, and Rami. Amina’s parents encourage her to rent an on-campus apartment instead of sharing an apartment with Sahar and Layal because they “were still

weary that the girls lack of parental guidance would have negative effect on Amina” (28).

Moreover, after the rape Amina feels “safe being at home” and “for the first time since her childhood, Amina appreciated her parents’ overprotective nature and their concern for her well-being” (39). Despite this feeling, she decides to leave her home and visit her extended family in Egypt in order to overcome her feelings of shame. However, her suffering increases when she discovers that “life in Egypt and the Egyptian culture was different in so many ways from the American culture she was raised in” (47). In response, she develops another characteristic RTS reaction in feeling that she is no longer worthy of marriage – she says to her mother, “Sorry, mama. My trip’s over ... and no prospective husbands” (51).

Amina’s Reconstitution Phase

Most of the changes in Amina’s personality take place during this phase, which is typically the longest. In some cases, it lasts for years. In addition to feelings such as anger, depression, guilt, anxiety, and helplessness, many victims “identify anger; have altered cognitive schemes; experience safety, trust, power, and esteem; enjoy intimacy; and develop resilience” during this phase (Resnick and Indelicato 241). Amina experiences many of these feelings and thus, she has difficulty accepting the idea of being

engaged to or intimate with a man. Thus, when Sherif, an Egyptian architect who works and lives in Chicago, proposes to her, she becomes unable to confess her feelings to him; especially after he says that his family refuses "to believe I can find a good Muslim girl in the States, and they're convinced the longer I'm a bachelor, the harder it'll be for me to marry" (53). She believes that she will not be accepted among his family. Thus, the idea that someone is interested in her makes Amina feel uncomfortable around Sherif. His interest brings her "back to right after her rape, when she remembered that Rami had seemed normal for three years, then he'd just attacked her" (61).

As a result, Amina works to stop herself from being attracted to Sherif. She is afraid that he will leave her as soon as he knows about her rape. Sherif feels her hesitation and so decides to arrange a romantic proposal. He wants to make her happy by doing something unexpected since he knows that "In the Egyptian culture, women don't expect romantic, get down on one knee, 'proclaim my-love-to-you' proposals. For them, 'having a suitor ask her father to marry her was as romantic as any woman could expect" (81). Therefore, he proposes in a very romantic way and says:

I never thought I would love anyone the way I love you. I thought I would marry the girl my parents pick out for me, and I'd go through life just like everyone does ... content but normal ... calm. You make me happy and you bring out all

the passion I have inside. I don't think I can go through this life without you by my side. Will you marry me? (79)

After the proposal, Amina feels confident again. She becomes sure that Sherif “loves [her]” and that “he’s going to understand” her past (85). Despite these feelings of reassurance, the shame and stigma surrounding rape prevent Amina from confessing to him that she was raped. This same shame and stigma lead Amina’s mother to decide that it would be a good idea to take her to a doctor to “fix what happened,” because she believes that “if Sherif finds out on your wedding night that you’re not a virgin, he’ll divorce you. It’s that simple” (85).

Amina undergoes a second trauma, which is often “caused by ignorance, cruelty, burnout, misunderstanding, and other peoples’ personal issues with the subject of rape” (Atkinson 25-26). This second trauma is triggered when Amina is shocked by Sherif’s reaction to news of her rape, “When she was finished, she wiped the tears from her face, wishing Sherif would cross the table and take her in his arms. She wanted to hear him say, ‘I’m sorry. I wish that had never happened to you’” (88). Hegazi’s makes the effect of Sherif’s reaction very clear:

Her experience with Sherif had made her much more jaded and apathetic to the world. She was convinced that happiness was a mirage people believed in just to keep from feeling miserable. She went about her days, studied for finals, and ran

her errands, simply because that was what was expected of her. She forgot how to laugh, how to smile; she was broken.

(90)

Rape culture emerges as the main reason behind Amina's second trauma because Sherif, who had admired Amina's "discipline and determination, even inspired of the fact that she was living independently of her family" (63), finds himself unable to believe her innocence. Rape culture also encourages Amina's parents to believe that "she would never be married due to her 'condition'" (95), and thus they blame her for driving Sherif away. These events and the resulting blame lead Amina to say to Kayla, "I had my few days of anger and sadness, but I know everything happens for a reason. And all I can do now is pray that God heals my broken heart and gives me strength to forgive Sherif for having broken it. I think that's what God was trying to tell me, throwing him back in my face again" (116). Therefore, she decides not to look for love, having "finally conceded to her parent's way of thinking that no respectable Arab man would want her now. So, her choice was to focus her energy into her career. Four years at one of America's top universities would not be put to waste" (95). It is obvious now that Amina suffers from "a permanent emotional wound that can never heal. Sometimes for years, the victim of a rape may feel empty, valueless, unlovable, and frightened" (Atkinson 14).

Due to her second trauma, Amina becomes able to express anger more freely. Her anger emerges after Sherif becomes engaged to her friend Layal. Hegazi writes, “Amina was too emotional. She had done such a good job of forgetting Sherif – she convinced herself of that anyway – but in either case, she had managed to move forward. Seeing him again awakened in her a loneliness and anger that she had put to rest” (115). Amina’s second trauma reaches its peak when she meets Rami. When she sees him she thinks, “Should I run? But to where? Should I tell security? But what could I say? This isn’t real. Wake up!!! Wake up, Amina! You’re dreaming!!” (189) Hegazi adds, “She remembered every detail, as though it were all happening to her again. She felt his tight grip on her, she felt him tear off her clothes” (190). This memory makes her feel insecure and afraid, and to question herself at the deepest level, “Do I need to take my revenge ... whether by my own hand or legally? Or are you just telling me I can’t escape my past? No matter how far I think it is ... Or do you want me to forgive?” (192) Hegazi adds:

Her body was still shaking. It was a mixture of fear, sadness, but mostly anger. Anger at what Rami had put her through two years before, anger at having to see him again, and anger that she hadn’t taken her revenge right there. She was mostly angry at herself that she hadn’t done any of the things that her mind planned all those months ago in case he returned.

She hadn't kneed him in the groin over and over until even the thought of children was impossible for him. She didn't slide a knife across every inch of his face leaving him as deformed on the outside as he'd made her feel on the inside. She hadn't spit on his face and told him that he was a disgrace to masculinity and to mankind. (191)

Amina's Resolution Phase

In the resolution phase, victims learn "to accept and cope with the abuse" (Terry 195). Amina reaches this phase after Kayla introduces her to Mazin, an Egyptian-American dentist. Amina at first is unable to accept the idea of being introduced to someone as she has protected herself from becoming hurt by shutting herself off from any perceived danger. She does not "want to be disappointed again" (158). Despite describing Mazin as having a "friendly face" and "always smiling, even when he wasn't" (162), he seems to be like "most of the Arab men she knew" (174), and this distresses her. For example, he does not like to go to the movies or to eat outside. He likes to spend his free time at home. He does not like malls. Thus, on the one hand, she feels "very comfortable around him, as though she'd known him for years" (163), but, on the other hand she is unable to love him and thinks to herself, "He has a good job, good relationship with his family, and he seems kind. He definitely has a good sense of humour, And, I need to be honest, I'm enjoying being

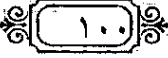
here. But something's missing" (165). Amina's fear increases as she grows closer to Mazin and eventually agrees to marry him. She is afraid of telling him the truth about her past:

How did I let it get this far? How did I manage to make it all the way to my wedding day without confessing to Mazin? I know that if he rejects me I'll have no chance of finding anyone who will accept me. But why does that matter to me? I'm not in love with him, so why has the chance of losing had such an influence on me?" (309)

Amina reaches the end of her resolution stage and gains self-confidence as she experiences Mazin treating her well. Mazin's thoughtful conduct allows her to “come to terms with her situation, she'd finally accepted the fact that she would marry a man she did not love. She did so, however, with the knowledge that he was a kind man who would always respect her, and a hope that love would grow between them” (227). Amina's understanding here shows that she still thinks of herself as unsuitable for marriage and love. However, when she tells Mazin about her rape, he does not reject her – he shows genuine sympathy and understanding. He says, “What happened in your life before, is the past. You don't have to tell me. But I'm glad you did. I mean, I'm glad you trusted me enough to tell me. Thank you” (269). He adds, “I am so sorry you had experienced something so horrendous. It makes me mad for you” (315) and “I knew you. I knew you were an honest, kind, good

person, who tries to follow God's path. And that's who I wanted" (315). At this moment Amina begins to regain her dignity and says, "Really? You're too good for me, Mazin. You're just too good. So why can't I fall in love with you?" (269)

Amina's case shows that "recovery from rape trauma takes longer than recovery from other types of crime and crises" (Amar and Burgess 26) because it took her three years to work through the self-numbing effects of the rape from which "the rapist hopes to gain a sense of his own power and worth, to take from the woman what he does not already feel in himself" (Ledray 1). In doing so, she had to confront and overcome the prevalent assumptions of rape culture and reach a resolution stage. Thus, Amina at last becomes sure that she is not guilty and that she is not to be blamed. Consequently, the relationship between her and her parents returns to normal. For example, Amina's father tells Mazin about the rape and how it has made Amina a miserable person. He also adds that Amina is an honest person and that she will find the right time to confess the rape to him. This proves that Osman finds it in himself to confront and overcome the reactions to his daughter's rape which he had learned from rape culture. Ruwayda confesses to Amina that she had been avoiding her "because you are my reminder that I failed. I failed to protect you. A mother is supposed to protect her children from evil. I failed to protect you. I failed as a mother" (222). Thus, Amina's newly developed self-respect created a



context in which her parents no longer had to see Amina as a victim and themselves as a failure but allowed them to relate again as parents and daughter. Furthermore, Amina also succeeds in shedding her feelings of hatred toward Sherif. She realizes that she only hates “herself for not being prepared to see him” and “that she was still unable to respond when she saw him” (267).

Finally, Amina becomes able to allow herself to love her husband, as recognized in a specific feeling that guides her, “She felt a normal calm, sitting there with him as the Ocean spread out before them” (320), and, “as she stood there in front of him, she was overcome by an overwhelming sense of calm. Passion or not, this was the right man” (316). Moreover, Amina is portrayed as a person who has always been opposed to the assumptions of rape culture, as evidenced in her words to her mother, “Mama, I’ve heard this all from you a thousand times, starting when I was six! I know all this stuff. And I’m not careless enough to let any guys into my room. And before you go on, I know to make sure I lock the door at night and not to talk to strangers” (13). Amina adds, “Mama, I DO know them because I’m practically living with them. They’re good Muslim girls, mama ... You have to get over this idea that girls living away from home are promiscuous drug addicts” (22). Thus, while Hegazi wants to show “that rape myths – prejudicial, stereotyped and inaccurate perception of sexual violence – are prevalent in patriarchal societies and that the tendencies to blame



and denigrate women are at the core of these misperceptions" (Ward 38), she does not conclude that women themselves are either to blame, are asking to be raped, or are unaware of the dangers posed in certain situations. Instead, she demonstrates that women are permanently at risk, both immediately and over the longer term, in cultures where rape culture assumptions are prevalent.

Conclusion

In *Normal Calm*, Hegazi portrays Amina as a character who is robbed of her innocence, an experience that subsequently continues to haunt her. As a result, Amina changes from a person who believes that she is strong enough to leave her parents' home to a reclusive, self-hating person. Such feelings are depicted carefully by the omniscient narrator who knows every single feeling or thought the heroine undergoes. This accuracy of the omniscient narrator results from Hegazi's portrayal of Amina as a minority – an Arab-American Muslim who was born and raised in the United States. Thus, Hegazi's cultural background enables her to expose a very serious crime in a very conservative style. Moreover, the writer has ensured that cultural complications are set aside through having the rapist as well as the victim come from the same cultural background: they are both second generation Egyptian-Americans, as is the man Amina is eventually able to come to love. This focus prevents the use of different cultures to explain the rape, and offers



support to the claim that rape is common among people of all ages, cultures, classes, and appearances

Normal Calm also depicts many images of rape culture to support the fact that rape is one of the most significant types of violence against women and it causes severe trauma in survivors. The novel also lends support to the view that rape is a crime in which the abuser usually succeeds in avoiding jail sentencing as a result of an unjust legal system. Amina’s reactions show the insidious effect of rape on its victims that helps explain, along with the assumptions of rape culture, why only a limited number of rape crimes are reported to police.

Applying RTS theorizing to *Normal Calm* is an attempt to show how accurately an author can depict the range of emotional reactions that occur following rape in fiction. Moreover, it explains why it takes time to recover from sexual assault and that such recovery allows victim to regain control over their lives by rebuilding their self-confidence. RTS theorising also plays an important role in showing that certain cultural assumptions concerning rape, specifically that women tend to act in ways that encourage it and that they are at least in part to blame for it, can be powerfully confronted and exposed through courageous fiction.

Normal Calm seeks to provide a true account of rape culture and rape victimization. Hend Hegazi shows herself to be a writer capable of courageously raising such issues and being prepared to confront the assumptions of rape culture. Her novel shows how far

women are victimized with the idea that rape is something that they are somehow responsible for if it happens and which they should have prevented, and for which they should blame themselves if it happens, with the men responsible managing to evade responsibility while many women continue to live in constant fear and far beyond normal calmness. By portraying Amina as being a rape victim who is finally able to conclude that she is not to be blamed for the harm that occurs to her and that she did not "ask for it," Hegazi shows that Amina has become able to cope with the expectations of her society and to gain control over her life. Thus, *Normal Calm* is a message to all rape victims not to permit the assumptions of rape culture to dominate their lives, through seeking to challenge and confront how rape and rape victims are commonly viewed.

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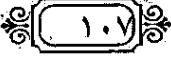


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الملخص باللغة العربية :

هل هي مذنبة؟ دراسة ثقافة الإغتصاب في رواية هند حجازي الهدوء الطبيعي

تتناول الكاتبة الأمريكية ذات الأصول المصرية هند حجازي في روايتها الأولى الهدوء الطبيعي قضية الإغتصاب وكيفية التعامل مع هذه القضية في المجتمع العربي بأمريكا حيث يتم التعامل مع المرأة علي انها هي المسؤولة عن حدوث تلك الجريمة البشعة بحقها وذلك من خلال الشخصية الرئيسية "أمينة" والتي يتم اغتصابها من قبل أحد زملائها بالجامعة مما يجعلها تعاني من تدني مكانتها في المجتمع. هذا بالإضافة إلى ما تعانيه من ضغط والديها اللذان يظنان أيضا أن "أمينة" لها مسئولية في حدوث تلك الجريمة.

يقدم البحث تحليلا لحالة الصدمة التي تعرضت لها البطلة من خلال تطبيق متلازمة صدمات الإغتصاب وهي مجموعة من ردود الفعل النفسية التي عادة ما يمر بها ضحايا الإغتصاب وذلك في محاوله لمعرفة ما اذا كانت "أمينة" ستستطيع التغلب على صور ثقافة الإغتصاب تلك والوصول الى حالة من الهدوء الطبيعي في حياتها أم لا.

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