

Crimes and Corrections: Bride Burners, Corrective Rapists, and Other Black Misogynists

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“Saying these attackers must rot in jail is not good enough. We need the death penalty because we have frequent reports of lesbians being attacked and gang-raped and these dogs roam around freely in the neighbourhoods while these women live in fear.” Ndumie Funda¹

On June 13, 2011, Ndumie Funda, a self-identified black lesbian from the township, called for the death penalty against those who commit “corrective rape,” commonly defined as the sexual assault of a lesbian with the stated intention of ‘correcting’ her sexual orientation. The death penalty in South Africa has an ugly history, having always been racially specific in its implementation (primarily against blacks) and in its support (primarily among whites). Proudly abolished by the post-apartheid government in 1995, the issue has survived only in the manifestoes of right wing groups, mostly white in their membership, who support the imposition of the death penalty against what they depict as a post-apartheid crisis of crime (citation needed). This year, however, Funda, the founder of Cape Town NGO Luleki Sizwe, brought an unusual voice in support of state executions. Through the agitation around corrective rape, suddenly, black lesbian activists and the Freedom Front seemingly find common ground.

This standpoint piece argues that activism around corrective rape has often been politically and philosophically problematic, even when calls for the death penalty are not involved. To my mind, the problems surrounding this issue begin with the term itself. The “corrective” portion of “corrective rape” refers to the alleged motivations of the perpetrator, and this desire for correction is usually glossed as being a belief that the exposure to heterosexual intercourse, even under conditions of coercion, would “correct” the deviant sexual orientation

of a woman presumed to be lesbian. To some extent, this terminology is only as problematic as its purported explanation.² It would be quite reasonable, for example, to affirm that these sorts of attacks are correctional in that they punish those who challenge dominant ideas of gender and sexuality. This is, unfortunately, rarely the message that gets repeated.

The deployment of the term “corrective rape” has several repercussions. Placing these attacks within a particular narrative of curative mythology determinatively genders the perpetrators and the victims, with, I would argue, unfortunate and sometimes bewildering effects. For example, Wikipedia, that masterpiece of collective global common sense, defines “corrective rape” as “a criminal practice, whereby homosexual individuals, both lesbian women and gay men, are raped by persons of the opposite sex, sometimes under supervision by members of their families or local communities, purportedly as a means of ‘curing’ them of their sexual orientation.”³ I am not aware, however, of the last “corrective rape” reported of a gay man by a woman, although articles on corrective rape document attacks on gay men by other men.⁴ The gendered structure of the “corrective rape” discourse renders every corrective rape victim a woman. When many of these victims were killed precisely because of their contestation of the category “woman,” it is ironic, if not tragic, that they should find themselves firmly enshrined as women in the well-meaning condemnations of their deaths.

This term, moreover, has acquired geographical specificity, being used almost exclusively to describe attacks in the African continent, and particularly in South Africa. It is used, moreover, exclusively for attacks on black women by black men.⁵ We have, as a result, a particularly invidious racist mythology at work. This mythology, to be clear, is not that of those who believe, “Raping a woman can make her heterosexual.” The mythology to which I refer, rather, is the repeated assertion that “Black South African (men) believe that raping a woman can make her heterosexual.” Certainly, rapists often provide their own accounts of their motivations for the assault, and certainly many of the attacks on black lesbians in the last decade have been accompanied by a “corrective” discourse. Yet the repeated mention of this supposedly cultural belief is mystifying, if not pernicious. One “corrective rapist,” Thato Petros Mphiti, for instance, claimed in his confession that Eudy Simelane was raped “because we did not find any money in her possession.”⁶ The BBC, however, solemnly declares: “On the streets of Johannesburg, it is easy to find men who support the idea of ‘corrective rape.’” Their evidence becomes

a quotation from one Thulani Bhengu, age 35, who says: “When someone is a lesbian, it’s like saying to us men that we are not good enough.”⁷ Through the British Broadcasting Corporation, one South African man’s admission of feeling inadequate becomes “support [for] the idea of ‘corrective rape.’”

The condemnation of corrective rape in the international media fetishises the corrective motivation, and it thus feeds into multiple, highly problematic discourses. By explaining spectacular incidents of violence through a purportedly African mythology, “corrective rape” naturalizes such violence, as well as the misogyny and homophobia involved in it, by rendering it a function of cultural belief of “African men”. The prevalence of “corrective rape” is often explicitly attributed to “African culture”—its homophobia, its patriarchal structure, its crisis of masculinity—with little acknowledgement that these attributes are hardly unique to Africa.⁸ By ascribing to the African men who perpetrate such violence a supposed belief in sexual peculiarity, “corrective rape” perpetuates a long-standing belief in African sexual perversion.⁹

It might seem my own perversion to focus here on the ways in which the condemnation of these attackers for “corrective rape” is racist *against the perpetrators*. Certainly one can discuss the racism inherent in “corrective rape” with respect to the consequences for the victims. The Triangle Project, for example, has criticized online campaigns against corrective rape for dehumanizing its victims: “Once again black women in Africa are being cast as voiceless victims, as voiceless faces.”¹⁰ Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy, and Moletsane, similarly, draw attention to the perils of rendering black lesbians “synonymous with a certain form of victimisation” (Mkhize et al, 2010:36) and caution against the sensationalist impulse of media coverage of (black) lesbianism.¹¹ My concern, however, is with the racism through which the perpetrators are depicted, which has serious consequences for African activism and for the African continent.

The emphasis upon these extreme incidents of violence easily bleeds into a popular narrative of a crisis of crime in post-apartheid South Africa, one which tends to focus on the brutality of the townships and the black nature of violent crime.¹² Even a measured, collaborative, and carefully authored report such as that from the HSRC turns to the language of war and conflict when describing these incidents: speaking of “complex climates of violence,” the authors equate such a context to “life within a war zone.” (20) These militarising metaphors produce the conceptual conditions under which a progressive agenda begins to merge with a conservative one, each calling for

more policing, harsher sentencing, and the increasingly extensive exercise of state power.

The discourse around corrective rape produces the figure of the “corrective rapist”: an African man, of uncertain education, mired in sexual ignorance, who believes somehow that his penis, forcibly applied, can cure lesbianism. It is no wonder, then, that campaigns against corrective rape argue for the solutions usually applied to black men everywhere: imprisonment. The change.org online petition launched in early 2011, which attracted over 170,000 signatures worldwide, calls for corrective rapists to be imprisoned for a minimum of 25 years.¹³ One mythology of correction, purportedly deployed against black women, thus becomes the occasion to justify another form of purported correction, the punishment of black men. The most telling evidence of the racism inherent in much of this discourse might be found not only in the presence of this cultural explanation for the sexual violation involved, but also in the *absence* of *any* explanation of the horrific forms of torture and murder that often accompany these attacks. The violence of the corrective rapist, it seems, needs no explanation. Might it be because he is African?

The emergence of the term “corrective rape” within the LGBTI movement in the early twenty-first century suggests another backdrop to its discursive consolidation. Within contemporary LGBTI discourses, particularly as they emerge out of global public health funding in Third World contexts, a certain multiculturalist impulse to respect diversity collides with a certain identitarian belief in the power of naming. This produces, in the context of global liberalism, a fetishistic belief in the culturally specific name. This might be most obvious in the case of identity markers: same-sex behaviour may be universal, but it does not always take an identitarian form. Global LGBTI activists and researchers have consequently often sought to deploy culturally specific terms, from *bakla* in the Philippines to *hijra* in South Asia, to respect local variations while retaining the existing model, which is premised on the idea of “the homosexual.” In the Indian context, this has led to even the resuscitation of monikers so culturally specific as to be irrelevant to the phenomena they are then tasked to describe – and a seemingly endless extension of that list of letters.¹⁴

The institution of culturally specific names thus comes into operation when the specificities of a particular, usually Third World, context prove inassimilable to the existing, usually First World, model. They operate as a form of explanation that implicitly affirms the exceptionality of the

context which is being explained. They operate, thus, to cover that which is remaindered; that which is not already legible and comprehensible within the existing vocabulary from elsewhere. In South Asia, this remainder is transient same-sex sexual behaviours, produced as inscrutable remainders by a global LGBT discourse that tends to assume, *a priori*, a Foucauldian subject of sex.¹⁵ In South Africa, in contrast, the inscrutable remainder is the dramatic violence to which queer South Africans are often subject, rendered incomprehensible within a global LGBTI discourse that tends to divorce homophobic violence from a broader socioeconomic, historical, or even patriarchal context. The horrors of “corrective rape” are considered separately from the generalized crisis of violence, particularly sexual violence, within which they occur. Without this context, they seem to demand an additional explanation, one which a mythology of correction is called upon to provide.

Whereas the intentions behind the usage of culturally or regionally specific names might be laudable, its operation is, through this remaindering process, precisely one of containment. By making available culturally specific terms for an existing global discourse, the process of regional naming does not challenge the global episteme but consolidates it. It operates, thus, as part of an essentially colonial knowledge project: difference is delineated only so that it can be contained. The term “honour killing,” for instance, which in common usage is culturally but not regionally specific, delineates a specific set of murders which are directly motivated by perceived threats to family honour. It, however, is applied almost exclusively to Islamic and/or South Asian communities, as though familial murders within other communities are somehow not related to the co-imbrication of patriarchy and social status. Within feminist thought and scholarship, both within and outside of the academy, these culturally specific terms feed into a knowledge economy of Third World expropriation.¹⁶ From honour killings in “the Arab world” to corrective rape in South Africa, from female genital mutilation in north Africa to bride burnings in South Asia, the aspiring feminist can travel the world using only concepts like “patriarchy” and “gender violence,” still primarily derived from First World contexts, as her guide. Through the fixation on particularly dramatic forms of women’s violation, this litany of geographically specific oppressions occasions the expression of intense affective solidarity. This catalog of horrors, moreover, demands in its very semantic constitution the most unequivocal forms of condemnation.¹⁷ With each click of an online petition, transnational feminism becomes “Eat, Pray, Love”: an affective

journey of individual growth and affirmation, not a political or intellectual engagement (let alone a collective one).

Such condemnation, moreover, is easily co-opted by the foreign policy imperatives of First World states. The ascription of particular forms of homophobia to the Third World often operates as a practice of “homonationalism,”¹⁸ wherein the vocal presence of gay and lesbian life within a First World nation becomes the justification for imperial behaviour towards nations deemed (excessively) homophobic. Regardless of how much homophobia there may or may not be within that First World context, the espousal of a certain amount of support for LGBT persons within the nationalist project, combined with that nation-state’s emphatic denunciation of homophobic behaviour in other nations, operates to validate the original claim. By denouncing homophobia elsewhere, the homonationalist asserts its moral credentials, thus containing any critiques of its domestic policy on LGBTI persons. In this process, South Africa becomes more famous for corrective rape than for its enshrinement of LGBTI rights in the Constitution, and the United States, which does not grant such rights, continually voices its diplomatic concern about corrective rape.

The specific forms which violence takes is both regionally and culturally variable and worthy of our attention. However, given the structural inequalities of global discourse, even in avowedly progressive fora, the deployment of culturally and regionally specific terminology can often perpetuate the logic of racism and colonialism. This article, thus, is an intervention into what Uma Narayan termed “death by culture,” within which cultural explanations are frequently used to explain violence against Third World women though they are not used to explain violence in First World contexts. I diverge, however, from an earlier brand of feminist analysis which critiqued these tendencies through a call for ever-greater contextualisation. Through the reinsertion of these phenomena into their particular locations, it was argued, the apparently exotic would become explicable and accessible to meaningful feminist activism.¹⁹ The imperative, however, to “always contextualise” overlooks the basic conundrum of contextualisation. Context is not simply pre-existing and self-evident, but rather something which is constituted in one’s search for it. The emergence of site-specific terms such as “honour killing” and “corrective rape,” for instance, are precisely the product of well-intentioned attempts at contextualisation, attempts which, however well intentioned, replicated the inequalities of global knowledge production.

Viewed from the North or the West, Third World contexts seem to generate an endless variety of culturally specific problems and conditions, problems with which we then struggle, predictably, always in relation to our own exceptional status. The subtitle of this paper uses “black” advisedly, in a deeply South African sense, to suggest that even our contexts of violence are not simply the particularised subset of an already existing white mythology, always explicated as aberrations from an existing norm.²⁰ Instead, however, of abdicating transnational feminism in favour of ever more local approaches, I want to suggest that the difficulties of the global (and the local) might be better navigated through an emphatically South–South conceptual analysis. What might we learn from looking East and South, not North and West, to understand the specificities of gender-based violence?

The phenomenon of corrective rape in South Africa might be elucidated through the analogous experience of gender-based and culturally specific violence in India, epitomized in two tropological phenomena: “bride burning” and “dowry death.” Just as the African trope of the “corrective rapist” gains traction and circulation because it draws on older mythologies of black men as pathological, primitive sexual predators, so too the South Asian trope of “bride burning” draws its weight and influence from the older colonialist preoccupation with sati, or the immolation of a woman on her husband’s pyre at his death.²¹ Drawing, once again, on Wikipedia as the repository of the dominant global episteme, we find the following definition: “Bride-burning is a form of domestic violence practiced in India. It is not the same as ancient and long abolished (formally abolished in 1829) custom of Sati, where widowed women were forcefully placed on a burning pyre of the dead husband (usually a man in his old age) and burnt to death.”²² As Wikipedia’s juxtaposition of this (very recent) form of domestic violence with an almost mythical form of ritualised sacrifice attests, the fiery exoticism of both sati and bride-burning has frequently elided the specificity of each phenomenon.²³ This image of highly flammable Indian women is a comical one, yet it recurs in the global literature on violence against women, if not in explicit references to sati, instead in “a curious connection made between violence and Hindu women’s relationship to fire.” (Kapur 110) The term “bride burning” foregrounds the event of the burning, separate from the context of (domestic/familial) violence within which it occurs, offering a cultural explanation instead of a contextual one. By utilizing the term “bride,” moreover, and drawing upon a continued western fascination with sati, the term then reinscribes these incidents of

violence within a sacrificial logic, producing *satis* in rhetorical if not literal terms.

The other term frequently used for these incidents is “dowry death,” which has had a rather different career in both global and domestic discourse. The mobilization of the “dowry death” or “dowry murder” trope in the mainstream movement in India, particularly in the 1980s, offered a dramatization of existing domestic violence issues that were otherwise ignored. The spectacular resonance of actual deaths from dowry harassment (as opposed to domestic violence, which in some contexts was implicitly accepted) became nationally relevant because of its consonance with middle-class concerns. This mobilization, however, was deeply invested in semantics. It involved an intentional redefinition of ordinary deaths as “dowry deaths,” an alliterative term that holds within it the constant allegation of murder. Through the terminology of dowry death, what was once understood as a routine kitchen mishap, for example, became a possible instance of patriarchal violence. In 1986 the term “dowry death” took on particular legal meaning and consonance through an amendment to the Indian Penal Code, Section 304B, which said:

“(1) Where the death of a woman is caused by any burns or bodily injury or occurs otherwise than under normal circumstances within seven years of her marriage and it is shown that soon before her death she was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband or any relative of her husband for, or in connection with, any demand for dowry, such death shall be called “dowry death” and such husband or relative shall be deemed to have caused her death.”

The definition of “dowry” here was referred back to existing legislation,²⁴ and the crime of “dowry death” was assigned the penalty of imprisonment for a minimum of seven years and a maximum of life.

This term, like any, is not without its problems. By linking death with dowry, the term has enabled an easy collapse of both illegalities, resulting in muddled discussions of dowry, a traditional practice, as though it were always linked to murder,²⁵ and an over-emphasis on the role of dowry in domestic abuse.²⁶ It has also, however, foregrounded the role of dowry, one of the many intersections of property and patriarchy, in the deaths, suicidal or homicidal, of women soon after marriage, enabling both the increased visibility of that nexus and the prosecution of those who perpetrate its worst abuses. A semantic correction, thus, becomes a societal correction.

Despite my extended critique of the use of culturally and regionally specific terminology for Third World violence, the dominance of that epistemological model for understanding violence elsewhere, even *within* the so-called progressive movement, suggests that our best hope for action lies, not in the debunking of such terms, but in their careful definition and deployment. I am sympathetic to those who wish to avoid the term “corrective rape,” but it is simply too late to ignore its resonance. Rather than abandoning the phrase, we might utilise the term’s circulation and currency for our own ends. The BBC recently asked if homosexuality were un-African; we might ask, more productively and more insistently, if “corrective rape” is really (South) African. Such semantic conditions, in theory, would change the genealogy of concerned discourse generated from the North, linking the lighter skinned attackers of Brandon Teena, for example, to their rather darker local equivalents.²⁷

We might learn, further, from the instrumental value of “dowry death” in Indian legislation. Whereas “dowry death” refers to a subset of deaths which may have been murders originating in demands for dowry, “corrective rape” might be used to refer to rapes which are accompanied by extraordinary forms of violence, torture, and assault. Every rape is arguably corrective or punitive in its impulse, but not every rape involves stoning, stabbing, or other forms of torture. Such a redeployment of the term would still include many if not all of the attacks on black lesbians, yet it would abandon the insistent focus on the alleged motivations of the perpetrators and the alleged sexuality of the victim. By disavowing the fascination with alleged mythologies of correction, this redefinition would mark its distance from discourses of racial pathology, perversity, and primitivised homophobia. It might emphasise, instead, its proximity to crises of social insecurity, patriarchy, and violence. The crime of corrective rape, finally, might be legislated with attentiveness to the primary challenge of the South African legal context: not a paucity of laws, but a paucity of implementation. The agitation around corrective rape, accordingly, might prioritize the demand for a more prompt, and not simply more punitive, state response.

I am not, finally, in favour of the classification of “corrective rape” as a hate crime, on both semantic and strategic grounds. A long, rich, and influential body of feminist scholarship has positioned rape as an instantiation of patriarchy and heterosexism, arguing that rape is often if not always motivated in part by misogyny. Rape, corrective or otherwise, is the violent

instantiation of a patriarchal logic within which women's bodies are not their own. Whether in sexual practice or in childbearing, women's bodies are understood to belong, not only to particular men – husbands, fathers, boyfriends – but also to a larger social order which is enforced, frequently, by both men and women. In this sense, every rape is corrective, disabusing its victim of her belief in personal autonomy and subordinating her violently to the patriarchal dispensation of power. Consequently, given the incidence, the motivations, and the effects of sexual assault, feminists have argued that rape should be understood as a hate crime, one motivated by bias on the basis of gender and seeking out women as a targeted group.

The intended classification of only “corrective rape” as a hate crime, however, stands in uneasy relation to this feminist legacy. Such classification, as a hate crime on the basis of sexual orientation, would institutionalise a distinction between sexual orientation and gender which is problematic in both political and philosophical terms. Victims of corrective rape are not simply attacked for being homosexual. They are attacked, rather, for being homosexual *women*, evidenced in part by the targeting of lesbians who are non-conforming in their gender presentation. Under these circumstances, the separating out of corrective rape from ordinary rape ignores both the material conditions of these persons' victimisation and the political solidarities that can produce substantive change. It would be wonderful if no women were raped to “correct” their sexual orientation, but it would be even more wonderful if no one were to be raped at all.

Endnotes

1. Quoted in Nicholson, Zara. “Lesbian in Nyanga stabbing attack.” *Cape Times* 13 Jun 2011.
2. See, most recently, Melanie Judge, “Changing the Language of Prejudice” *Mail and Guardian* 12 Jun 2011.
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corrective_rape
4. The HSRC report notes that “some personal narratives of rape and assault suffered by black lesbians include mothers, aunts and female ‘friends’ as complicit perpetrators. The actual rapes and murder are, however, committed by men.” Mkhize et al. 2010 *The Country We Want to Live In* Pretoria: HSRC Press: 49.
5. The issue of racial specificity, moreover, is rarely discussed in the research. One report, for instance, does note the possibility of this curative or corrective discourse crossing racial boundaries, yet it does so only in a parenthetical remark: “(This is not to say that men and boys of all racial groups who rape white lesbian women might not have similar motivations; this remains to be explored.)” Mkhize

et al. 45.

6. Mphiti attributes this idea to Khumbulani Magagula and claims that everyone agreed to this reasoning. See Mphiti's confession in *The State v. Thato Petros Mphiti* (CC 434/08)
7. Fihlani, Pumza. "South Africa's lesbians fear 'corrective rape.'" BBC News, Cape Town. 30 Jun 2011. Accessed online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13908662>
8. See, for instance, Adian Prinsloo's assuredly well-intentioned and astonishingly problematic article, *Perpetrators of Corrective Rape: Uncertainty and Gender in the 21st Century*. *NGO Pulse* 6 Jul 2011. Available online at <http://www.ngopulse.org/article/perpetrators-corrective-rape-uncertainty-and-gender-21st-century>
9. This discourse was also notable in early coverage of "African AIDS," which blamed high HIV prevalence on "so-called traditional practices such as 'dry sex' or 'witchcraft.'" Hunter, M. 2010 *Love in the Time of AIDS: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010: 10.
10. The Triangle Project. "Online Corrective Rape Campaigns and Petitions." Available online at <http://triangle.org.za/news/2011/02/online-corrective-rape-campaigns-and-petitions>
11. "media interest in the violation of black lesbians is motivated as much by the 'sensationalist' aspect of the crime (rape happens so frequently that only 'interesting' rapes are likely to be covered by the media) as by any genuine concern.... In a context in which part of homophobia involves the overt sexualisation of lesbians for heterosexual men's consumption, and one in which violence is both glorified and exoticised by vast swathes of media discourse..., public discourse on the violence meted out against black lesbians runs the risk of being simply 'the scandal of the day,' a source... of voyeurism rather than outrage." Mkhize et al, 2010;29
12. "Given the proclivity to pin lawlessness on young black men... the 'fact' that violence is highly enclaved plays into a mass-mediated view of the townships as breeding grounds of brutality." Comaroff, J, and J. L. Comaroff. 2006. Figuring Crime: Quantifacts and the Production of the Un/Real. *Public Culture* 18.1 : 216.
13. <http://www.change.org/petitions/south-africa-take-action-to-stop-corrective-rape>
14. See akshay khanna, 2007. Us 'Sexuality Types', *The Phobic and the Erotic*, eds. Brinda Bose and Subhabrata Bhattacharya (Kolkata: Seagull Books, Ashok Row Kavi, *Kothis* Versus Other Msm: Identity Versus Behaviour in the Chicken and Egg Paradox, *The Phobic and the Erotic*, eds. Brinda Bose and Subhabrata Bhattacharya (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2007).
15. In the sense of how Foucault describes the contemporary (twentieth century) sexual episteme, in which the subject understands himself as somehow importantly constituted through his desires in general and his sexual desires in particular.

16. I diverge slightly from the position that this is grounded purely in an economy of the exotic, though I am generally sympathetic to arguments that “there is a premium on ‘Third-World difference’ that results in greater interest being accorded those issues that seem strikingly ‘different’ from those affecting mainstream Western women. The issues that ‘cross borders’ then become the ‘Third-World gender issues’ that are taught about and studied ‘across the border,’ reinforcing their ‘iconic’ and ‘representative’ status as issues.” Uma Narayan, “Cross-Cultural Connections, Border-Crossings, And “Death by Culture”: Thinking About Dowry Murders in India and Domestic Violence Murders in the United States,” *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) 100.
17. My argument is more focused on semantics than on knowledge production as such, but I second the caution that Multicultural education cannot be seen as a simple task of replacing ‘ignorance about Other cultures’ with ‘knowledge,’ since problems of the sort I am talking about are precisely not problems of ‘ignorance’ per se, but problems related to understanding the ‘effects’ of contexts on issues, and of decontextualised, refracted, and reframed ‘knowledge.’
18. Jasbir Puar, 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
19. See, for instance, Chandra Mohanty’s influential argument in “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses.” *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 61-88.
20. This sense of “black” extrapolates upon the term as it is used in the Black Consciousness movement, most famously exemplified in the writings of Steve Biko. See Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004).
21. The Oxford English Dictionary defines sati as, first, “a Hindu widow who immolates herself on the funeral pile with her husband’s body,” and second, “as the immolation of a Hindu widow in this way.” The first usage cited in the OED entry is 1786. The practice is outlawed by the British government in India in 1829, though it continues to occur, more in fiction than in fact, with one particularly controversial sati, Roop Kanwar, in Rajasthan in 1987. An extensive account of the nineteenth-century debates can be found in Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). For a more twentieth-century account, see “The Subject of Sati” in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women* (London: Routledge, 1993). Brief if insightful analysis of the discursive constitution of sati under imperialism can be found in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1999). The conclusive account of the
22. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bride_burning
23. “The historic association of sati and ‘Indian culture’ and ‘Indian women’ results today in a metonymic blurring of sati with dowry-murder, generating a confused composite of ‘burnt Indian women’ variously going up in flames as a result of ‘their Culture.’” Narayan 101.
24. Specifically, section 2 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (28 of 1961).

25. Narayan 108.
26. Ratna Kapur, *Erotic Justice: Law and the New Politics of Postcolonialism* (London: The Glasshouse Press, 2005) 112.
27. Brandon Teena, a 21 year old transman from rural Nebraska, USA, was raped and murdered in 1993. This attack became famous through the Hollywood film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), which garnered an Academy Award for Hilary

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