

**Rape in the Nordic Countries: Continuity and Change.
Edited by Marie Bruvik Heinskou, May-Len Skilbrei
and Kari Stefansen, Routledge (Open Access), 2020, 246
pp., £ 115 (hardback), ISBN: 9781138606517**

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It is safe to say that *Rape in the Nordic Countries* is a timely book. With discussions about criminalization of sexual violence and sentencing of individual perpetrators currently unfolding in the Nordic countries, this book nevertheless takes a step back and gives a broad, nuanced and analytical overview of sexual violence as a social phenomenon. The book includes quantitative and qualitative, historical and contemporary, collective and individual approaches to the topic and involves scholars from a wide and interdisciplinary spectrum of social sciences. Despite its nuance and regional focus, the book is not limited to an academic, nor a Nordic, audience. It offers important contributions and thoughts on sexual violence, for example regarding measuring prevalence, making methodological and ethical research choices, understanding its digital reality, or conceptualizing consent. In this review, I outline the main contents of the book and briefly discuss it based on two terms in its title: ‘rape’ and ‘the Nordic countries’.

After the introduction by the editors, the volume engages with a literature review (Bjørnholt). The review compares recent scholarly writings on the topic of sexual violence in the Nordic countries. Doing so, it innovatively bridges second and third wave feminist thinking, for example by using the ‘violence continuum’ as an analytical lens (see Kelly 1987, 1988a, 1988b). After this, the book continues to individual studies broadly categorized into four themes. The first deals with studying experiences of sexual violence. As such, it discusses: 1) consent in a Norwegian case study of a sexual subculture (Rosten); 2) unwanted sexual touching among young people in Norway (Stefansen); and 3) methodology when measuring the prevalence of rape among youngsters in Norway (Stefansen, Løvgren and Frøyland).

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The second overarching theme of the book is criminal legal conceptualizations of sexual violence. The book here investigates the changing protected legal interest of Finnish criminal law on rape during the past decades (Kotanen). Then, it looks at how Swedish criminal law has evolved in response to medial and public outrage concerning gang rape cases (Nilsson). The book goes on to explore how coercive circumstances for rape victims are taken into consideration by courts, particularly in Finland (Jokila and Niemi). The last chapter of the theme analyses how victims in criminal procedures are conceptualized in Denmark and Norway (Antonsdóttir).

The third theme of the book looks at perpetrators. Here, evolving constructions of alterity in a Swedish rape case are explored (Gottzén and Franzén). The theme also encompasses a narrative and situational analysis of three men's stories of sexual transgressions (Schierff and Heinskou).

The final theme investigates sexual violence in a digital context and evolving norms around sexuality and violence. Here, the book looks at how the digital sphere offers new avenues for perpetration and victimization of sexual violence, but also victim support. It analyses the meaning-making of sexual violence in the interview-based account of a young Norwegian man sentenced to over one hundred counts of rape perpetrated through digital means (Fransson, Martinsen and Staksrud). A second chapter aims to understand the enabling factors behind the practice of non-consensual sharing of sexual images among young people in Denmark (Harder, Jørgensen, Gårdshus and Demant). The final chapter explores how internet forums can provide a space for sharing experiences of sexual violence and for expressing collective support, based on an Icelandic case that predated #MeToo (Sigurvinsdóttir, Ásgeirsdóttir and Arnald).

Despite the centrality of rape and other forms of sexual violence in the book, its editors seem to resist common definitions. Some authors define their use of terminology, while others do not. This reflects multiple, partly contradictory, approaches to the topic. This multiplicity is, in my view, representative of the volume's analytical richness. Such richness can serve as a reminder in contemporary discussions that so often risk entrenching myths. Furthermore, as 'rape', rather than 'sexual violence', is a criminal legal term, the title brings my lawyerly mind to the definitory exercises of criminal law. In these exercises, actions and states of mind constitute sexual crimes or, formulated as *de lege ferenda*, what criminal law ought to encompass. Avoiding definitions of rape simultaneously means avoiding the normativity

of criminalization and the necessary line-drawing between allowed and prohibited. This is analytically meaningful, especially since the book does not shy away from new, digital arenas and other areas often considered as 'grey', where the meaning-making of consent and violence might pose novel questions and dilemmas. Void of a stifling normative gaze, the book is freer to explore the individual and structural levels of sexually violent behaviour, both looking at its perpetration and victimization.

A final thought that comes to my mind is the 'Nordic-ness' of the book. In my view, the book should be read as a comprehensive overview of innovative social science research on sexual violence in the Nordics, rather than a comparative study of how the Nordic countries address sexual violence and its socio-legal challenges. In other words, the Nordics provide a geopolitical backdrop for the chapters, rather than an analytical framework for further theorizing. In their introductory chapter, the editors highlight the fascinating and somewhat uneasy relationship between the Nordic welfare states' commitment to gender equality, the increasing numbers of reported rape in the region, and the turn of Nordic feminists to criminal law to achieve gender equality. While these themes are picked up by some of the authors, albeit sporadically, the tension between this triad in the Nordics could be worthy of further comparative exploration. Which feminist movements have turned to criminal law in their struggle for gender equality? How have claims been formulated by feminist civil society actors in terms of criminal law? How have legislators and legal doctrine responded to such claims? If consent is increasingly important to the definition of sexual crimes, how and why is it differently conceptualized in the Nordic legal systems? Like all good books, this volume inspires further research on the topic and invites the reader to write her own last chapter.

References

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Notes on contributor

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