

France: Mazan trial, rape as a political fact

Thursday 24 October 2024, by [THOS Aurélie-Anne](#) (Date first published: 21 September 2024).

The so-called ‘Mazan rape trial’ commenced in France in early September. Over the next four months, 51 men will be tried for the rape of Gisèle Pelicot, drugged by her husband Dominique Pelicot who also recruited these men on the internet. Aurélie-Anne Thos contextualises the events and the protests that followed. This article has been translated from French by Clément M. (*Content warning: sexual violence and rape*)

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What first comes to mind is the sociological composition of the accused. Their ages range from 26 to 73, they are firefighters, male nurses, butchers, councillors, pensioners... Together they make up a sample of ‘all men’. They are not ‘deranged’ nor ‘monsters’. They are socially integrated, married men with children. What they have in common are that they are men, they live in this area [Mazan] and they raped Gisèle Pelicot. These are ordinary men, who have all accepted the invitation of Dominique Pelicot to abuse a woman who was asleep. This disproves the reactionary narrative that rapists are only racialised men. They illustrate what we, feminists, have been saying for years: all men are not rapists, but all men can be rapists.

An emblematic case touching on all aspects of rape

This trial reveals even more about our society and rape culture as it addresses all aspects of rape. For example, [“chemical submission”](#) had previously been discussed only in relation to rapes committed with the party drug GHB, but this has now been widened because of this case and the non-profit group ‘Don’t Put Me to Sleep’ set up by Caroline Darian, the daughter of Gisèle Pelicot. This case has revealed the use of prescription anxiety drugs to commit violence.

This case also exemplifies the collusion between men committing sexual violence, since Dominique Pelicot helped other men to drug their partner, and in return benefited from the complicit silence of hundreds of men he had contacted.

It demonstrates the connection between sexual violence, intra-familial violence and incest. Dominique had drugged and photographed his daughter Caroline, and there is still an investigation into whether she was also a victim of rape.

Furthermore, the case illustrates the connection between sexual violence and child sexual exploitation, since several accused men kept child pornography on their computers. It also shows how issues of consent and women’s bodily autonomy lie behind sexual violence. Many accused men argued in defence of their acts that it was not rape since the husband of Gisèle Pelicot had agreed.

Finally, it showed how these men committed these acts with impunity, and even when presented with overwhelming material evidence as in this trial, they continue, again and again, to deny the facts.

The Mazan trial is a trial of rape as a social fact

Rape is a grave crime that however benefits from a unique special treatment: responsibility is always first sought on the side of the victim. Women are relentlessly suspected of being the cause of the rape they have suffered. They are suspected of being motivated by money or revenge, and if the women are racialised, their exoticisation is used to portray them as causing their rape.

But the case of Gisèle Pelicot is unprecedented in some sense: the facts are very well documented with videos, pictures, and reports from gynaecologists and toxicologists. The main protagonist, Dominique Pelicot, has admitted to having drugged her with heavy doses and having recruited men to rape her. Finally, Gisèle Pelicot is a 67-year-old white woman, with nothing that could be used to pretend she was guilty of these rapes.

Since it is not possible to attack the victim, explain these acts by 'moments of madness', or describe these men as 'monsters', then one has to face the real issues: deprived of all these smoke screens, what remains is simply the rape, the act itself, the violence in itself as a tool for domination. One of the lawyers of an accused man said that 'there is rape and then there is *rape*'. But this time, finally we will be able to talk about the intentions of rapists and open a debate about consent, rape culture and masculine domination at the social, political and legal level.

The time of rage

Everywhere, thousands of women are hanging on this trial, because there is something that resonates and echoes our history. We are waiting, scrutinising and monitoring this trial rather than simply following it because we can smell the trap. We know it is not simply about the 51 men accused in this trial. There were a lot more rapists, at least 83. We know that there was probably more sexual violence committed without videos or evidence. Finally, we know that there is everything else: the other victims, the other violence, the other rapists, everything else that is not usually talked about.



Demonstration in Paris on September 14 in support of Gisèle Pelicot.

We feel deeply that a historic moment is at stake: Gisèle Pelicot is no longer an anonymous victim, and Mazan is not a miscellaneous news item. We have invested it with political weight. We won't give up.

On Saturday 14 September, marches were organised in solidarity with Gisèle. More than 10,000 women marched. We must devote all efforts to building a massive movement against violence against women.

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P.S.

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