

# **Sexism - Cologne sex attacks: If feminists and liberals remain silent, xenophobes will write their own history**

Monday 18 January 2016, by [SHEVCHENKO Inna](#) (Date first published: 11 January 2016).

It took nearly a week for the news about the New Year's Eve mass sexual assaults on women in Cologne to appear in press and social networks. It took even longer for many to react, including myself. Despite the fact that the attacks of more than 100 women by a crowd of an estimated 1000 men occurred in the centre of a German city, the authorities had nearly no information about the horrific event, except that the victims described the attackers as men of "Arab and North African appearance".

To build reasonable opinions was even harder under the xenophobic sweepings of the right-wing groups who, as usual, reacted with nothing but hatred. Long before the facts were released, these commentators were already announcing their conclusions and even preparing their actions. Far-right populists of the Alternative for Germany movement called for the immediate deportation of migrants naming them criminals, and the fascists from Pegida took the square in Cologne with similar messages [[1](#)]. Moreover, similar reactions were shared by right-wing "gangs" in France, UK, Sweden, and in neighbouring Austria.

The right-wing, which remains a constant threat to the security and rights of European women with their sexist political agenda, suddenly appeared as women's defenders as a new occasion to bash refugees emerged. This coincided with the frightening silence of leftist politicians which led to ugly debates that were far from questioning women's safety and their rights, far from emphasising the importance of rape culture [[2](#)], even far from discussing the integration process of the refugees who often come from cultures with medieval patriarchal traditions.

The debates looked like a boxing ring: White men vs Arabic men. But why is this a surprise? The transformation of debates into political barking simply illustrates once again the deep-rooted ignorance to sexism and rape culture.

Before analysing the Cologne crimes against women, for a second, let's forget about migrants. About 36 per cent of women globally have experienced either physical or sexual intimate violence. Reports suggest that USA, UK, France, Sweden and Germany play a big part in these crimes.

Local polls in Germany state that 13 per cent of German women have experienced a form of criminal sexualized violence. Every year numerous complaints on sexual assault are registered during Oktoberfest, Germany's largest beer festival. And in the best traditions of sexism, the aggressors often escape any punishment since the law requires the victim to prove the act of violence with facts, and moreover, the victim is demanded to prove that she resisted.

You can be sure that often, female victims do not receive any support and are frequently suspected of having conducted "wrong" behaviour. Even after the mass sexual assault in Cologne, women were advised to follow a "code of conduct" by the city Mayor Henriette Reker [[3](#)], who also advised women to remain at "an arm's length" from strangers. How encouraging! In other words, in many

cases of rape and sexual assault in European countries women's behaviour is still questioned and often considered as a justification for violence. Well, unless, the aggressor is a foreigner, especially Muslim. Right, Pegida?

Nevertheless, let's come back to the Cologne assaults. As time passes, more information on the Cologne crimes is appearing so we can analyse this horrible violence against women that happened under the sparkles the New Years Eve fireworks.

As the Cologne police reports, they have now received more than 500 complaints, 40% of which relate to allegations of sexual assault [4]. On Friday, the interior ministry said Germany's federal police had identified 32 suspects, 22 of whom were asylum seekers, others were Germans, Serbs and one American. The German minister of Justice Heiko Maas has said he believes that the sexual assaults in Cologne were 'coordinated and prepared' ahead of time.

Even though it is still hard to understand how such a mass crime was organised, the latest information proves that among the aggressors of women there was a large group of refugees that arrived within the recent wave of migrants to Germany. Even though official reports and Germany's interior minister, Thomas de Maiziere, has confirmed that refugees commit just as many crimes as the local population, it is impossible, moreover dangerous, to deny that many refugees come from a culture fed by patriarchal norms and sometimes with religiously conservative anti-woman worldviews.

Refugee was never a synonym of "saint", in the same way that German, French or British is not. But let's never forget that among the Cologne aggressors were these few migrants, whom by committing these crimes against women, endangered and questioned the destinies of many, who simply seek a chance to survive and raise their children in democracy rather than Assad's or Taliban's dictatorships.

Therefore, to demonise all refugees because of the atrocities committed in Cologne would be a crime as well. We cannot allow ideologies to replace evidence.

We should start to pay attention to refugees as well as to ourselves. It's been reported that many migrant women are becoming victims of rape by their fellow male refugees in camps and have no protection from these assaults [5]. As with every criminal, the Cologne aggressors should be punished and jailed, whether they are Germans, Americans or Syrians.

Before it hits a wall, Europe should urgently develop an appropriate system of integration for new members in its society. This isn't the first wave of migrants to post-war Europe, and especially in Germany, where economy and society has already benefited from welcoming foreigners.

For the sake of its well-being, Germany has a responsibility to help one million new citizens to integrate, understand and enjoy the values of its democracy in the same way it educates each of its home born citizens.

It is important to face and understand that the responsibility for the committed crimes - and as a result the hatred towards all refugees - also lies on us, liberals, particularly those that Maajid Navaz once named "regressive left". The obsession with unnecessary political correctness and praise of multiculturalism by European liberals resulted in the ignorance of the issue of violence and particularly violence against women by the refugees.

Respect to religions became more important than respect to freedom of speech; multiculturalism and tradition became more important than feminism and equality. After the recent terrorist attacks, many leftists denied religion as a source of inspiration for the terrorists out of fear of feeding the far

right.

After the Cologne attacks many liberals, including feminists, preferred to remain silent because of the background of the aggressors, in order not to contribute to the racist speech. However, there couldn't be any better contribution than this one. This silence resulted once again in only providing space to the xenophobic reactions of the far-right horde.

The history of our time is being written right now. If we remain cowards and keep naming violence a culture or tradition and underestimate the necessity or possibilities of integration, we will write a shameful history. One in which those who flee their countries with hope will be deceived, and in which we will create similar problems to the ones that these refugees are already fleeing. If liberals stick to their current attitude, this history will be written by xenophobes and racists. Don't we already feel ashamed?

**Inna Shevchenko**

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**P.S.**

\* International Business Times. January 11, 2016 15:46 GMT 2,524:

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/cologne-sex-attacks-if-feminists-liberals-remain-silent-xenophobes-will-write-their-own-history-1537247>

\* Inna Shevchenko is leader of the feminist protest group FEMEN, which often makes headline news across the world for demonstrating topless.

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## **Footnotes**

[1] <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/far-right-pegida-group-hold-cologne-rally-wake-mass-sexual-assaults-1536349>

[2] See, available on ESSF (article 36986), [Sexism - Cologne attacks: Again women are told how not to behave, yet men aren't told how not to rape](#).

[3] <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/cologne-assaults-mayor-henriette-reker-mocked-asking-women-stay-arms-length-men-1536310>

[4] <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/cologne-sex-attacks-criminal-complaints-soar-516-40-linked-sexual-assault-1537105>

[5] <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/migrant-crisis-women-sold-sex-10-german-refugee-camps-1524515>