Sexual Violence in Europe: A Refugee Problem?

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Abstract

The New Year's Eve attacks upon women in Cologne, Germany and the subsequent allegations against male migrants across Europe brings to light an important question. Are European women in danger from an influx of Middle Eastern men with different social, religious and legal values? Using available data on rates of immigration and sexual violence, and focusing specifically on Germany and Sweden, we show that there is no direct correlation between foreign migrant influx and national rape statistics in the two identified case studies. Based on these conclusions, we then ask, why have the attacks in Germany and Sweden gained so much media attention and resulted in rising hostility toward refugees. To address this question, we examine theories of women and nationalism, and the rhetorical use of the specter of rape to mobilize the masses. We conclude by theorizing that if concern for women's rights is only used as fodder for the flame against admitting refugees, the EU will both lose the crucial opportunity to prepare for future influxes of migrants and fall prey to dangerous ethnic divisions.
Sexual Violence in Europe: A Refugee Problem?

As reports of hundreds of women being groped and attacked on New Year’s Eve in Cologne, Germany began to permeate the world media rhetoric and questions concerning the role of migrants in sexual violence against European women has exponentially increased.1 Allegations of police cover-ups of sexual assaults by migrants have come to light in Sweden, casting a deeper caliginous shadow over migrant men. The anathematic term “rapefugee” is now predominantly utilized in both mainstream media and public discourse, further fueling the anti-immigrant rhetoric. A simple Google search of any European country and “rape” floods the screen with stories of violent migrant sexual assaults, demonstrating the mounting proclivity against migrants. Correspondingly, the open-arms posture towards migrants in many states, particularly Germany, is being challenged in the face of the refugee crisis; anti-migrant discussion and increasingly exacting and austere policy initiatives are increasingly dominating the European response to the refugee crisis. The use of this exploitative type of grandiloquence holds dangerous consequences for the EU as well as migrants, particularly when research points to a protracted and sustained crisis.

Given this hysteria, it merits asking whether there is in fact a significant correlation between increasing numbers of foreign immigrants and the levels of sexual violence against European women. As more and more foreign immigrants enter the European Union, are more European women being assaulted? And if not, what is driving the ascendancy of this belief? To investigate this question, we will specifically analyze data and qualitative evidence from Sweden and Germany, perhaps most affected by the migrant crisis, and accordingly, most fearful of sexual violence against women by immigrants. In the end, we will suggest there is no verifiable or substantial correlation between increasing numbers of migrants and sexual violence against women. In Germany, rape rates have not significantly changed as

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1 Fearful of provoking anti-refugee sentiment politicians and the media exercised cautious initial reporting of the Cologne New Year's Eve sexual violence. Following exposure of the assault The ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen) was bombarded with complaints and forced to issue an official apology.

2 The term “rapefugee” began trending on the social media website Twitter following the Cologne, Germany, NYE attacks and has since been adopted throughout Europe.
the number of non-EU refugees have entered the state; in Sweden, violence against women has been an
issue for several years. We therefore postulate that the attacks against women by immigrants are being
used in public disquisition, particularly by right-wing extremist parties, to appeal to conservative notions
of masculine responsibility for protecting a nation’s women and patriarchal beliefs in women’s
fundamental vulnerability, as well as women as symbolic bearers of the nation. While we acknowledge
that cultural differences and an effort to eradicate racism in European policies impact this issue, the use in
part of masculine nationalism to create migration policies within the EU will lead to a rise in right-wing
extremist policies and dangerous violence between ethnicities, notably against migrants.

**The German Situation**

The Cologne attacks provide a platform from which to evaluate the proposed correlation between
the number of migrants in Germany and levels of sexual violence against women. By the 8th of January,
the German Federal Ministry of the Interior announced that 18 of the 31 known suspects in the Cologne
attacks were asylum seekers (Bundesregierung, 2016). Amongst existing tensions concerning Chancellor
Angela Merkel’s refugee policy, the attacks have fueled further anti-immigrant inclination within
Germany. Soon after the attacks, protests led by the anti-immigration movement known as Patriotic
Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (PEGIDA) clashed with police in Cologne (“Pegida and
police”, 2015). Since the Cologne attacks, PEGIDA and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party have
seen gained favor amongst German citizens, with PEGIDA holding large rallies and AfD polling
generously (McGuinness, 2016; “Anti-Islam movement”, 2016). The AfD has spoken in favor of certain
PEGIDA rallies, with AfD party leader Bernd Lucke stating the following: “Many people in Germany
have legitimate concerns about the spread of radical Islamic ideology, which promotes violence against
non-Muslims, robs women and girls of their natural rights, and seeks to require the application of Sharia
law” (Kern, 2014). An essential question, then, is if the concerns of the public and right-wing groups are
valid. Is Germany’s massive influx of refugees leading to an increase in sexual assaults against women?
To examine this question, we consulted the available data on the EuroStat database, of intentional
homicide and sexual offences data set and an immigration data set (2016). From these data sets, we pulled annual rape rates per 100,000 individuals and the number of immigrants admitted into Germany from non-EU countries. Figure 1 illustrates these few data points:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rape Incidents per 100,000 inhabitants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.01</td>
<td>9.52</td>
<td>9.31</td>
<td>9.94</td>
<td>9.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-EU Individuals Immigrating to Germany</strong></td>
<td>262,916</td>
<td>293,385</td>
<td>385,496</td>
<td>496,980</td>
<td>597,067</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown by the above data, Germany has been admitting large numbers of immigrants increasingly since 2009. Consequently, if the hypothesis that the number of immigrants is positively correlated with the level of sexual violence, the rape rates in Germany would show a pattern of increase beginning in 2008. However, this idea is not supported on two counts. First, an examination of the rape rates shows little change over the course of 6 years. Figure 2 illustrates this point:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.386</td>
<td>0.363</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>[9.062, 9.71]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The confidence interval indicates that we can be 95% certain that the true average of rape rates lies between 9.062 rapes per 100,000 individuals and 9.71 rapes per 100,000 individuals. Each annual rape rate within the given data set falls within this range, with the exception of 2012. During this year, the rape rate per 100,000 individuals spikes. However, in 2013, the rape rate falls to a low level within the confidence interval. This indicates that while there is an increase in both the rape rate and the number of immigrants entering Germany, there is not necessarily causation. If causation was present, the rape rate...
likely would continue to increase or stay at an elevated level as the number of admitted immigrants continued to increase in 2013. A simple linear regression of the number of immigrants entering Germany on the rape rate per 100,000 women shows a slight positive correlation between the number of migrants and the rape rate. The Figure 3 below shows the regression line plotted on the data points.

However, correlation between the number of immigrants and the rape rates is not statistically significant. The coefficient relating these two variables has a .705 p-value, which passes no accepted significance test. Additionally, there are several limitations to our data. First, the small sample size conflates the confidence interval. While we know that the true rape rate lies between the two given points, additional data would narrow this interval and allow us to more accurately determine the true average of rape rates. Second, the simple linear regression between the number of migrants entering Germany and the rape rate is highly limited in its sample size and does not include any constants; for example, we do not have data for other types of sexual assaults or data for the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. The results of these initial tests produce two conclusions: there is not enough data regarding the status and security of women and there can be no definite conclusion as to the relationship between rape rates and migrants. While a relationship between increased rape or assault rates and the number of migrants entering Germany cannot be disproven, it also cannot be confidently supported.
The Swedish Situation

Sweden, widely regarded as the one of the most generous nations on the planet\(^4\) (OECD, 2015), has done more per capita for refugees than any other country thus far.\(^5\) Yet following the ubiquity of the Cologne attacks, Swedish populist and right-wing propensity has imbued drastically. Swedish media has become deluged with accounts of “nonwhite rape” and “rapefugee” attacks, inciting public outcry\(^6\). The most eminent of these reports, was that of “refugee youth primarily from Afghanistan” at the ‘We are Sthlm’ Music festival. The sexual harassment of girls at the event following the Cologne attack, saw condemnation fall on the police and mass media who failed to report the incident. Assisting the shift in public attitude has arguably been the Swedish Police Force’s failure to report migrant assaults, pushing people toward previously reviled right-wing news outlets who report with limited facts, substantiation or corroboration, whilst inflating and sensationalizing grotesque assaults on someone's person.

Yet sexual assault and rape are by no means a new or rare phenomenon in Sweden. A 2010 study commissioned by the European Union and Amnesty International found that Sweden had the highest incidences of reported rapes in Europe and the second highest reported in the world (UNODC).\(^7\) This brought light to the issue and denunciation of Sweden, whose reported rapes have been rising substantially since 2003 and whose overall crime rate has risen exponentially for the past 40 years (Brottsförebyggande rådet, 2016).\(^8\)

However, the figures may not be as simple to interpret as first indication implies. In 2005 Sweden widened its sex crime legislation to be more expansive and encompassing of various sexual practices

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\(^4\) Statistics from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), show that Sweden has consistently hit or exceeded the 0.7% GNI target contribution.

\(^5\) Sweden has the highest proportion of asylum seekers per thousand inhabitants: at 8.4, compared with 1.2 for the EU as a whole. Stats from Euractive.


\(^7\) In 2010 Swedish Police recorded the highest number of rape offenses, at 63.5 per 100,000 inhabitants. This is second globally to Botswana with 92.9 per 100,000. It should be noted that many countries do not submit rape statistics. Sourced: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Crime-statistics/Sexual_violence_sv_against_children_and_rape.xls

\(^8\) Statistics available from Brä, The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, an agency under the Ministry for Justice.
which had previously not been considered rape. The formation and implementation of this broad
definition could therefore account for an increased number in recorded incidents of rape. Moreover,
Swedish law uses ‘extensive counting’ when reporting rape and as such counts every instance of rape
separately, even if committed by the same accused on the same day (Amnesty International, 2010),
arguably producing higher figure than countries using less extensive reporting criteria.

Yet, media and social outlets continue to consociate increasing levels of sexual violence and the
arrival of “nonwhite” refugees. As Hoffer demonstrates in his article ‘Crime Statistics as Constructs: The
Case of Swedish Rape Statistics’ (2000), Sweden's 1996 figures-- that is before the 2005 broadening of
the law-- were 18.2 per 100,000 compared to the EU’s average of 6.6 per 100,000. These statistics then
question the credibility of public correlation between migrants and rape increase, as well as the dramatic
increase in reported rape post 2005.

To determine the viability of the proposed correlations between migrants and sexual assault rates,
the Eurostat immigration data set for Sweden and rape rate data from the Swedish National Council for
Crime Prevention (Brå) was consulted. Figure 4 below indicates the number of non-EU immigrants
entering Sweden per year and the annual number of rapes from 2008 to 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual Reported Rapes</strong></td>
<td>5,446</td>
<td>5,937</td>
<td>5,960</td>
<td>6,532</td>
<td>6,324</td>
<td>6,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-EU Individuals Immigrating to Sweden</strong></td>
<td>81,973</td>
<td>82,335</td>
<td>77,589</td>
<td>74,378</td>
<td>81,040</td>
<td>89,406</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown by the data, Sweden has been admitting a consistent number of refugees since 2008, with slight
periods of variation. Unlike Germany’s case, it is more difficult to determine if the Swedish rape rate is
correlated with the number of admitted immigrants. However, the 95% confidence interval shown in
Figure 5 indicates that the rape rates for the years 2011 and 2012 exceeded the range in which the true
average of rape rate lies from 2008 to 2013.
Yet, the increases in rape rates do not follow increases in the numbers of refugees admitted. The initial spike in rapes in 2011 was also a year in which the number of immigrants admitted decreased from the previous year. Relatedly, in 2012, the number of migrants admitted grew, but the rape rate decreased from the 2011 figure of 6,532 rapes to the 2012 figure of 6,324 rapes. In other words, the expected correlations between the rise and fall of rape and immigrants entered are not evident in the data.

The basic linear regression shown in Figure 6 also shows that instead of a positive correlation between the number of immigrants and the rape rate, there is an apparent negative correlation. However, an in-depth glance at the statistical significance of this correlation shows there cannot be confidence in this apparent negative correlation. The 0.269 p-value fails any standard statistical significance tests, thereby indicating that again, as seen in the German case study, neither a positive correlation nor a negative correlation can be supported by the available data. Moreover, the lack of ethnic reporting of either victim or perpetrator of any crime in Sweden merely adds to the disproportionate male migrant postulation by nationalist groups, that said individuals are responsible for nearly all sexual assaults.
against Swedes. There is of course a noted concern that legitimate fears are silenced or labelled xenophobic, however the fact remains there is no statistical evidence to support an exponential change in Swedish sexual violence statistics with an increase in refugees.

**Women as the Bearers of the Nation**

As demonstrated in the cases of Germany and Sweden, a definitive relationship between rape or assault rates and migrants cannot be confidently supported nor rejected. Why then, might public sentiment and right-wing extremist groups be drawn to the Cologne attacks and to the “We are Sthlm” festival assaults in Sweden? What is it about sexual aggression against women that angers large swaths of people?

Perhaps one answer is the role of gendered relations; for example, Amnesty International's 2008 report concluded that “deeply rooted patriarchal gender norms” of Swedish family life and sexual relationships are a “major societal flaw” and a reason for the continued prevalence of violence against women in Sweden (Amnesty, 2008). The gender relations which provide the foundation of these “deeply rooted patriarchal gender norms” have permeated society and politics throughout history. For thousands of years, the roles and status of men and women have been defined and reified by the state. Two crucial elements of the chronicled roles of females involve the moral honor of women and their role as reproducers of nation. The transition from monarchy to republic in ancient Rome, the basis from which modern society gains much of its rudiment, gives a useful example of the desideratum for moral honor which women have been historically assigned. The fall of the Tarquin monarchy in ancient Rome was sparked by Sextus Tarquin’s rape of Lucretia. Sextus, a Tarquin prince jealous of the virtue of Collatinus’s wife, forced himself upon Lucretia after threats of death and dishonor. Soon after, Lucretia summoned her husband and father and recounted Sextus Tarquin’s acts. “Although I acquit myself of the sin,” she declared, “I do not free myself from the penalty; no unchaste woman shall henceforth live and plead Lucretia’s example” (Livius, n.d.). Using this violation as the final outrage against the Tarquin monarchy, Collatinus and other established the first consuls of Rome. To all who read Livy’s account of Roman history, the death of Lucretia instills the sense of honor and historical pride associated with the valour and sexual purity of Lucretia. This account, along with many others, propagated the approximation
that the integrity and moral honor of a woman is integral to the honor of relationships, families, and even nations.

Women’s roles as reproducers of nations has developed in a similar fashion. Women were long excluded from political activity and land rights in Europe. During the Industrial Revolution, the separation of men’s spheres and women’s spheres of influence were further defined and separated. Petersen explains that as economies shifted from households to larger industries, women were further excluded from political spheres and new economic spheres. “As ‘family’ and ‘work’ were separated, gender identities were reshaped to conform to bourgeois ideologies of respectability: woman/femininity as care-taking, affective, responsible homemaker, and man/masculinity as hard-working, responsible employee” (Petersen, 1992). Certainly, the Industrial Revolution was not the first instance in which women were relegated to domestic duties and the home. Simply, it was another defining moment in which the gender roles defined by McClintock were solidified. The home and responsibilities within it illustrate the gender roles mentioned by McClintock: “biological reproducers of the members of national collectivities...reproducers of national groups (through restrictions on sexual or marital relations)...as symbolic signifiers of national difference” (pg. 2) These roles, combined with long-time restricted access to equal political and economic participation, lead to the following conclusion: “Women are typically construed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency” (McClintock, n.d., pg. 2).

Some of the most poignant averment that women are viewed as the bearers of the nation lies within the use of rape as a tool in war. Rape as a weapon is by no means a new phenomenon, history is saturated with the use sexual violence against women. Examples of rape during warfare stretch as far back as the Old Testament in the Bible⁹ and the conquests, to the modern conflicts in Bosnia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Pratt et al, 2004). Arguably, the continued and pervasive use of rape spanning the ages is due to its effectiveness. Yet, rape in and of itself has no physical, strategic gravity for

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⁹ “For I [God] will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses looted and the women raped…” (Zechariah 14:2) The Old Testament.
a group. Why then, is rape employed in war? The violent sexual assault of women in war is efficacious in instilling fear, blame and long term psychological trauma in the victim, as well as expending domination over the assaulted society (Gottschall, 2004; Shanks & Schull, 2000).

It is widely held amongst scholars that rape is not about the sexual act but is rather a means of exerting power, humiliation and even terror on the victim and population (Falcon, 2001). “When rape is employed instead of a bullet, the weapon continues to wield its power beyond the primary victim, while the battlefield may be the body, but the target is civil society” (Clifford & Slavery, 2008). Given the extensive and sustained consequences of rape to both the victim and to civil society, it is perhaps clear to comprehend exactly why stories of sexual violence against a national by an outgroup or foreigner, evoke rage and seize public attention.

War rape conceptualizations have moved from the “by-product of war” theory to a “strategic employment” theory (Buss, 2009). The United Nations Commission on Human Rights defines war rape as “a deliberate and strategic decision” (Farwell, 2004) and in doing so brings to bare not only the indisputable victim impact but the psychosocial consternation on the whole populace. The theory of rape as a weapon is then a useful tool when evaluating exactly why sexual violence is either utilized in conflict, inciting fear, or saturated in media publications, concocting issue provocation.

When considering the lack of substantial correlation between foreign migration and rape statistics in the case studies, but the exhaustive media coverage of limited attacks, followed by inevitable public outrage, the theory of rape as a weapon of war is indeed helpful in identifying some of the root causes of this acrimony. The act of rape as a weapon is intended to instill shame within the victimized culture, to violate the security of the bearers of the nation and to prevent a nation’s continuation. It could be argued that as such, there is no superior political tool, nor even any greater genuine fear than attacks of such a nature, as they threaten the very vessel of society.

In recent history, Europe witnessed the appallingly brutal, systematic rape of thousands of women during the Bosnian War (Diken & Laustsen, 2005; Olujic, 1998). With these heinous acts raw and embedded into the consciousness of the collective European mind, it is quite imaginable that sensitivity
toward the European bearers of the nation is considerable. As a result, these memories and the underlying threat they pose, provide a dexterous tool to be utilized against target outgroups. Together, the idea of women as bearers of the nation, and the related, historical foundations of moral honor, create a dangerous situation. The presence of these notions within society, regardless of how infinitesimal, provides a mechanism for capitalizing on a woman's sexual assault, exploiting shame within another culture. In turn, this type of weakness and vulnerability breeds fear of any outgroup who has or may defile the bearers of the nation. In the cases of Germany and Sweden, select members of a suspected outgroup--i.e. refugees--have committed violations against European women. Certainly, this is not some type of concerted effort amongst all refugees to “overtake” the European continent, nor arguably the utilization of strategic weaponry rape. Nonetheless, right-wing groups and individuals with reservations against refugees now have the opportunity to play to the ancient fears, reinforced by recent history, held by many European citizens.

**Limitations and External Considerations**

It should be noted there are numerous limitations to our research. A substantial lack of data relating to sexual assault, rape and ethnicity of both victim and perpetrator, as well as the exclusion of additional, interactive factors present serious limitations to both correlation and causation of incidents. The conducted research on any correlation between immigrants and rape statistics highlighted considerable shortfalls in data concerning the physical security of women. The Eurostat Database provides no sexual assault statistics for Sweden and several other European countries, including Belgium, Romania, Denmark, Ireland, Portugal, and Slovakia. This poses a problem, not only for researchers but also for individuals who are actively trying to find reliable information. The deficiency of data assertedly contributes to the inability to determine any type of correlation between increasing numbers of immigrants and rape rates. The difficulty in authenticating or adequately disproving the claimed connection between “nonwhite” immigrants and European sexual assault undoubtedly lies in the exiguity of statistical data and the lack of a comprehensive database.
Additionally, there are several external factors that must be accounted for in future studies concerning any correlation between immigrants and rape rates. Valerie Hudson, professor at the Bush School of Public Service at Texas A&M University and author of *Sex and World Peace*, has suggested that the sex ratios of incoming refugees pose a problem for Europe. 66.26% of migrants coming into Europe through Italy and Greece in 2015 were males and Hudson denotes that “years of research has shown that male-dominated societies are less stable, because they are more susceptible to higher levels of violence, insurgence and mistreatment of women” (2016). In response to Hudson, The Economist analyzed the impact of refugees on the sex ratios of EU countries. Their research shows that the sex ratios of largely populated countries like Germany will not be affected by incoming refugees, whereas smaller countries like Sweden, Norway, Hungary and Austria will be (The Economist, 2016). Does Hudson’s research, then, suggest that the most recent attacks against women in Germany and Sweden are the effects of a larger sex-ratio and gender balance problem?

Another issue that must be prepended in future examination of the subject is the cultural divergence between incoming immigrants and home nationals. Posolutely, there are many differences in the role of women in Western culture and Middle Eastern and Islamic culture. As such, the prevalence and use of integration programs should be examined in all European states admitting refugees.

**Conclusion**

Ergo, whilst there are no verifiable correlations between numbers of immigrants and rape rates, it is crucial to consider why the various sexual attacks in Germany and Sweden have evoked emotionally-charged responses from the general public and right-wing parties. The heretofore mentioned barriers to the research question indicates the absolute necessity of a comprehensive sexual violence database within Europe, whilst demonstrating the benefits of ethnic data reporting. It is argued were more adequate and extensive statistics available, investigation into a correlation, or lack of, between immigrants and rape would be better attained.

Nonetheless, whilst a relationship between increased rape or assault rates and the number of migrants entering either Germany or Sweden, cannot be disproven, it also cannot be confidently
supported. Therefore, theories such as women as bearers of the nation, in conjunction with the historical and increasingly asymmetric, systematic use of rape against nations provide an alternative hypothesis as to why migrants have become perceptively associated with sexual assault in Europe. The historically based role of women as the bearers of nations combined with the admission of a large, distrusted outgroup has allowed right-wing parties to paint refugees in an increasingly negative light. Given the expected protraction of migrants in the coming years, the EU must support further and expansive data collection on the physical security of women, in order to foster accurate reporting and analysis in pursuance of an adequate solution.
References


