Women and Refugees in Twitter: Rethorics of Abuse, Vulnerability and Violence from a Gender Perspective

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Women and Refugees in Twitter: Rethorics of Abuse, Vulnerability and Violence from a Gender Perspective

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Abstract

In this unprecedented humanitarian crisis, women refugees are experiencing extreme vulnerability and violence, both during their journey and in the camps. Our objectives through this article are to analyze how women are being treated in the Social Media (images, discourses, social representations, or narratives). Data for this article were extracted from Twitter (with the help of Nodel XL Pro), from which we collected 1,807,901 tweets about "refugees", using this word as search strings in six different languages. One complete year was covered (starting at mid-2015). Our final dataset was composed of 862,999 tweets. Results suggest that women refugees are targeted just because of their gender. Women are constantly victimized and mistreated due to the perpetuation of a patriarchal outlook that justifies abusing women. We also found many discourses disseminated through Twitter that reject refugees based on disproportionate generalizations and stereotypes, and unfounded and radicalised arguments., using gender difference to feed racism and xenophobia.

Keywords: Gender; Patriarchy; Refugees; Social Media; Twitter.

Introduction

The dramatic situation of refugees today is clearly characterized by statistics. According to UNHCR, in 2015, forced displacement recorded 65.3 million people in the world, 21.3 million of whom were refugees. 98.400 were not accompanied and were separated minors from their families. Women and children represented an important part of these refugees. By 2015 women accounted for 47% of all refugees, and children under 18 accounted for 51% (UNHCR, 2016). Some of these statistics are also associated with terrible realities as continuous deaths and disappearances, and serious vulnerability and risk, especially for children. Risks such as separation from family, detention, sexual and

gender violence, exploitation, or physical and psychological damage (International Organization for Migration, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund, 2017).

According to CEAR (2016), vulnerability for women means physical violence, rape, economic exploitation, sexual harassment and poor health, particularly serious for pregnant women. Women are vulnerable not only during their journey, but also in the refugee camps. Indeed, women, children and the elderly are the segments of the population who suffer a greater vulnerability in these type of situations and armed conflicts.

It is particularly complex to find a satisfying and comprehensive solution for the situation of refugees. It is an unprecedented global humanitarian crisis, as has been acknowledged by UNHCR. This crisis includes a crisis of solidarity (UNHCR, 2016). The complexity of the problems associated with it are of different nature, which makes it difficult to handle: for instance, the issue of resettlement and relocation quotas to achieve a fair distribution among the diverse receiving countries, the vulnerability of refugees' asylum rights, or the slowness of procedures. Not to mention the constant allegations about the lack of compliance with human rights in different places and types of situations, the reality of States that do not accept more refugees, or the severe policy of border controls. Without forgetting the deaths and precarious living conditions in the camps (such as Calais or Idomeni) (Newland, 2016; UNHCR, 2016). The seriousness and scope of the situation helps to understand the important role of international cooperation today for solving this global crisis, to provide answers that facilitate possible ways to deal with the rights and needs of immigrants and refugees (Newland, 2016).

On the other hand, over the past years we have observed the difficulties of medium and long-term integration that immigrants and refugees confront in different societies, as well as the reactions and discussions that generate policies related to these populations, clearly visible in the latest electoral events in Europe and The United States. The tragic situation of refugees is not indifferent to citizens. Reactions in Social Media are frequently polarised, especially regarding the diagnosis of what is happening, as well as actions and

policies to adopt, both internationally and nationally. In today's world, especially in the so-called 'Western', with the advent of Web 2.0, participation is enhanced through social platforms like Twitter, with 319 million active users worldwide (Statista, 2017).

Much of the social reactions to the situation of the refugees are reflected in these media. High rates of internet penetration[1] along with the establishment of social networks, enable the rapid dissemination of news concerning refugees, and capture the attention of millions of citizens today. In the case of Twitter, which this article is based on, without being the platform that heads the ranking (that is Facebook), its contents are particularly important. In addition to serving as an interpersonal communication platform, it is a public source of information, and a key one for journalists, through which citizens are able to participate and follow important news, events, and social and political debates in real time (Weller, 2014).

1. Gender Discrimination and Perpetuation of Patriarchal Violence

As we mentioned above, female refugees are experiencing extreme vulnerability, both during their jorney and in the camps. So we decided to focus on their plight to ascertain their actual difficulties. As is well known, in conflictive situations or wars women of every age are the victims of sexual abuse and physical violence just because of their gender, and also as a psychological weapon to destroy them, and their families. Although we are dealing with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis (and not a war), unfortunately the same pattern is verifying itself. Women are victimized in really great numbers and not enough is done in order to prevent these horrifying practices particularly aimed against them.

In general, the vulnerability of women increases in situations of violence, chaos and lack of respect for inviolable human rights, the first one being the right to human dignity that public authorities

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[1] Penetration rates of 76,6% in Europe (30 December), and of 88.1% in the US (Internet World Stats, 2017).

shoud protect and oblige everybody to respect. But we need to remember that this is intimately related to how women are discriminated against at a global scale. In our globalized world, women continue to be subjected to significant gender discrimination that hinders their growth as human beings, and strongly restrict their opportunities both in education and career development: opposition to their education, exclusion from legal powers or inheritance of land/property, difficulties to access qualified work, etc. Just one clarifying example: In 2015, 54% of girls still had no access to primary education (Entreculturas, 2015), which is a clear indication of the kind of discrimination that is being perpetuated in our contemporary world. Sadly, women and girls are nowadays subjected to ill-treatment and neglect worldwide, as an evidence of the ubiquity of gender discrimination.

Indeed, the roots of these discriminatory practices can be traced back to the way in which our contemporary societies are still influenced by a patriarchal and androcentric system that denies basic rights to women, and places them in extremely physical and psychological hardship and dependence. This gender inequity leads to their social and political disenfranchisement and under-representation. The conventional patriarchal outlook is based on a traditional gender division of labor and separate gender roles, in which women are relegated to the domestic sphere and the family unit, while men occupy the public domain providing economically for the family. Following the so-called "sexual contract" coined by Carol Pateman (1988), women agree to their subordinate status in exchange for security and protection.[2] Therefore, women are granted neither autonomy nor agency, since it is the patriarch who exerts control over the family and is responsible for all decision-making.

Male dominance, and especially male sexual coercion towards women, are undoubtedly at the core of the patriarchal system of

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[2] For an updated revision of these concepts, see Vrushali Patil's "From Patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment of How Far We Have Really Come" (2013).

domination from ancient times,[3] and constitutes one of the most visible results of the way in which women are seen as objects, even sexual objects, that can be used and abused with impunity. So women's objectification and subordination are crucial to ensure a patriarchal structure. Patriarchy, as any form of oppression, attempts to "naturalize" this view basing it on women's alleged physical and intellectual inferiority. Moreover, women's mistreatment is justified because of their inability to protect themselves. Cruel realities such as sexual violence and rape, gender violence, genital mutilation, forced pregnancies, human trafficking or sexual slavery are all supported by a patriarchal ideology that condemns women to ostracism and severe suffering and pain.

As Bell Hooks contends,

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence (2004: 18).

In fact, sexual violence impacts both men and women, but "99% of people who rape are men" (Serres, n.d). Geoge Lakoff talks about the "war on women" (as cited in Serres, n.d). Both men and women should be trained to end this violence, especially men "need to challenge other men on their patriarchal and sexist ideas/actions". Negative media coverage of sexual violence fosters this even further, for example how media coverage insists on the ways in which it will impact the sexual predator's life, not the victim's (Steunbenville case as a paradigmatic case).[4] Thus, it can be concluded that there is a certain social permissivity concerning sexual violence that is not

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[3] A classic reference is *The Creation of Patriarchy* by Gerda Lerner (1986), where she argues that male dominance is not "natural", but the result of a historical process springing from an early gender division of labor that sustained a power structure that granted men control over women in Mesopotamian society in the second millennium B. C.

[4] See "Patriarchy Dominates Media's Steunbenville Case" by Carl Gibson. 19 March 2013. http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/304-justice/16544-patriarchy-dominates-medias-steubenville-coverage (Access: 19 May 2017).

registered in other areas of gender conflict, and social media has also to be trained in detecting and preventing gender violence and erradicating negative stereotypical designation of women. In fact, social media is a key actor in this combat against gender discrimination due to its great influence in contemporary society.

And our critical attention should also be directed to how gender oppression accentuates other oppressions based on other identity factors. People who are considered as the "others" along gender, ethnic, national, religious lines are often targeted as subjects of violence, so women refugees are victimized on account of the combination of all these determining factors. It is the fear of difference coded in negative terms, and it clearly affects both men and women, but again women are visualized as different because they are forced to subject themselves to specific clothing codes (hijab, burka, etc.).

2. Objectives

Our objectives through this article are to know in general terms how women and gender are treated in social media, and particularly in Twitter. Specifically, we are interested in exploring how the image of women is viewed in the discursive context of refugee crisis. Once identified the main argumentative lines related to women or gender issues in connection with refugees (for example, if there are some topics present or absent), we are interested in going into detail about imageries, discourses and social representations spread across Twitter. What are the narratives and arguments transmitted to the audience through social media? Is there some kind of pattern? What issues are given special relevance? Do some messages distort and overload public discourses? Likewise, we want to know by means of this article the importance and orientation of these discourses in order to ascertain their polarity, if they entail emotional components, if they are positive or not for women, what dimensions they have and if these dimensions are associated with classical stereotypes of gender, etc.

Needless to say, knowing the diversity of imaginaries, social representations and discourses in the society with regard to gender and women, in this case disseminated through Twitter, and their implications, is one of the key aspects to promote integration, coexistence and the formulation of policies in the European context, as well as to help to design policies for the intervention of different actors (non-governmental organizations politicians, activists and *media).*

3. Methods

3.1 Building the Refugees Dataset: Data Collection, Filtering and Data Processing

Data for this article were extracted from Twitter, from which we collected 1,807,901 tweets about "refugees", using this word as search strings in six different languages (English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish). We mined data for this article during mid-December 2015 to mid-December 2016 with the help of NodeXL[5]. The extraction of tweets for this article began after the Paris Attacks. One complete year was covered. During that period, samples were collected every day.

Our final dataset, which did not include retweeted messages, was composed of 862,999 tweets. The initial extraction produced a very long list of tweets, including mentions and retweets (RTs), which were deleted for this analysis, considering that a retweet repeats the content for discourse analysis. Even though retweets give a better idea of the dissemination and scope of a tweet, the original tweet allows for a better identification of different and diverse discourses without this distortion (Gualda and Rebollo, 2016). In future works, more focused on the scope of tweets we will recover this information. A majority of tweets included pictures or links to URLs.

As the goals for this article are to go deeper into Gender and Women's situation in our dataset about Refugees, data were also

[5] NodeXL: https://nodexl.codeplex.com/.

filtered in order to get the tweets that explicitly considered aspects connected to Gender or Women. This filtering process was done following several steps. First, from the refugees dataset comprising 862,999 tweets without RT, we extracted a list of different words included in the tweets. This task was done with the help of Atlas ti software[6]. A list of more than one million different words and signs was the result. This list included the number of times each word was repeated in the refugees dataset of tweets. In a first round, based on these figures, we elaborated a ranking of words, and we manually revised all the words that were repeated 50 times or more. All the words connected to Gender and Women were saved. In a second round, we looked for all their equivalents in the six languages considered, in order to check if there were some other words, or mispelled ones, repeated less than 50 times. These words were also saved. A first codebook, based on the words around Gender and Women issues included in the 862,999 dataset, was built (it was an inductive process, evolving around crucial concepts in Gender Studies about Women).

The third step, again through Atlas ti, was classifying, coding and categorizing. For this, we built a Codebook, and used the advanced *Autocoding* tools in Atlas ti, following the classical steps of Qualitative Analysis in Sociology supported by this kind of software. The main focus to organise and classify the information was thematic in order to discover the different topics and nuances that linked refugees and gender issues on Twitter. Other investigations categorize and classify tweets by using a semi-automatic coding method with a dictionary, as in Casas, Davesa y Congosto (2016).

Tweets about refugees connected to Gender were around women, girls and young women, pregnant ones, refugiadas, women as part of a family (mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, wives). Other significant words sometimes directly connected to women were, for instance, rape (in general), statutory rape (sex with somebody underage), gang-rape, children rape, Cologne attacks or rapes, or violence against women. Other words in the refugees dataset also

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[6] Wordcruncher procedure, ATLAS ti: http://atlasti.com.

referred to feminism, sex, prostitution, trafficking, mistreatment or abuse. There were also others such as burka, hijab, veil or burkini, that connect with issues of religion or terrorism. Though some of these words are generic, they somehow can be referred to women. For instance, "children" or "abuse" could allude to girls and boys. For this reason, they were included in the final dataset in order to be able to analyze the connections between Gender or Women and Refugees.

Figure 1 – Refugees Dataset: Process of extraction of tweets, filtering and processing

Process	Dataset mid-Dec 2015- mid Dec-2016
Extraction of tweets. Search criteria: 6 languages	1,807,901 tweets
Filtering RTs	862,999 tweets
Extraction through Atlast ti of a list of different words included in the dataset with 862,999 tweets	More than one million words and signs
Filtering words by Gender and Women issues (manual revision)	76,919 keywords and derivatives
Classification, creation of a codebook, coding, and categorizing. Autocoding by Atlas ti	Retrieval of tweets thematically connected to Gender and Women issues

Source: Authors.

3.2 Discourses and Microdiscourses Analysis and Twitter

Discourse analysis is a method of social research based on different techniques of textual, contextual and interpretative analysis. Its general objective is to improve our understanding and knowledge about social reality, social structure and ideological constructions, analyzing the relationships between language, social and cultural context and relationships between subjects (Ruiz, 2009).

In the case of Twitter, the discourses disseminated by this social media can be considered microdiscourses by its limitation to 140 characters (Gualda, Borrero & Carpio, 2015), which forces to condense the messages but without losing their meaning, sometimes with the help of *hashtags* or with pictures and URLs that support the messages. This characteristic of Twitter makes possible a formal semiotic analysis of the text, according to the rhetorical resources it

contains: verb tenses, lexicon used, rhetorical figures (metaphors, comparisons), deictics, etc. focusing our attention on the form as well as the content (Ruiz, 2009). Tweets lack the complexity and richness of more structured messages, such as those that can be found in online blogs or forums, thanks to the well-known 140 characters constraint.

Another characteristic of Twitter that enables an analysis of contextual discourse is the development of conversations through RTs and Mentions. In this case, the conception of intertextuality defended by Foucault (1973) is very clear, which maintains that the meaning of the discourse is related to other discourses with which it dialogues, either explicitly or implicitly. In Twitter, sometimes these conversations are not direct between some subjects and others, there may be no response and it is not guaranteed that someone will read the message, but these are transmitted publicly to an audience (especially followers) and are accessible to anyone. Discourses are also constructed on both the social context of that moment and other discourses external to social media, due to the increase in use of Twitter as a backchannel to follow events developed in the real world. Other times discourses in Twitter are based on virtual participation on real events, which provides participants with a parallel communication channel to exchange comments about what is going on (Lippizi et al., 2016). Therefore, the development of these conversations not only impacts the social media, but can transcend to the general public.

At the interpretive level, these discourses are susceptible of being analyzed and interpreted as ideologies, positions, points of view, identities of the subjects, and also as sentiments, with respect to the events about which they speak. This interpretation is characteristic of Bourdieu's analysis, which takes into account past history and the position in the social structure of participants in social interaction (Martín, 1997). Discourse would reflect the subject's *habitus*, that is, its discursive competence, derived from its membership in a particular social group and from the social experience conditioned by that belonging (Bourdieu, 1991).
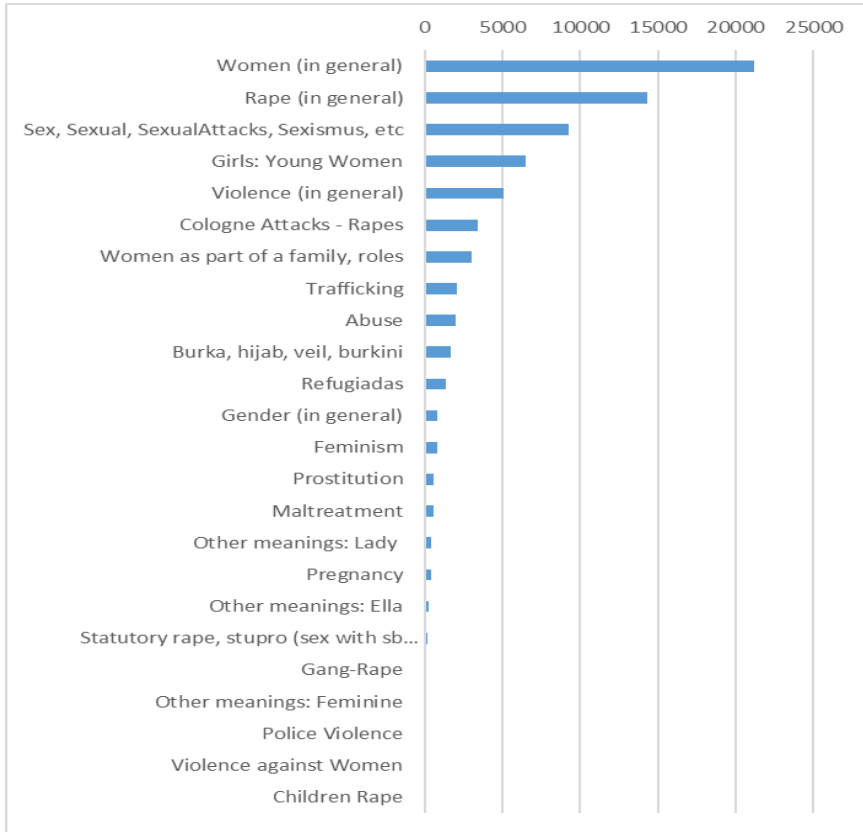
4. Results

4.1 Diverse Presence of Women & Refugees in Twitter

Diverse discourses, imaginaries and social representations of Gender and Women are common in the discursive context about refugees in Twitter. In terms of number of tweets, after filtering the repeated tweets (RTs), we found explicit references to Gender or Women issues in near 10 per cent of tweets out of 862,999 that were analysed. Different ideas or topics about Gender and Women emerged in the messages and conversations that we found in Twitter, some of them in the most negative side (see Figure 2).

When talking about refugees, people tend to refer to Gender issues in Twitter through different keywords. Near 60 per cent of tweets on Gender issues in our dataset allude explicitly to *women* (27,6%), *rape* (18,6%), or *sex* issues (12,1%). In the first case, it is very common to find tweets including words explicitly referred to Gender such as *women, mujeres, frau, mulher, femme, female, dona* or *donna* in connection to refugees. Additionally, women are usually depicted in the traditional roles as part of a family in many tweets: *Women as part of a family, roles* - Mother(s), madre(s), mütter, mutter, mama, mom, hija(s), daughter(s), grandma(s), grandmother(s), sisters, wife, compañera. These tweets in general reinforce traditional ideas about gender roles assigned to women and their dependent status in relation to men as authority. Especially they are regarded in their condition of mothers or about to be (pregnant women-embarazadas), or as wives or partners to men. In all cases, the emphasis is placed on how women are in need of protection by men, repeatedly insisting on their vulnerability. Thus, women are denied any kind of agency or autonomy, and they only find meaning within the conventional family structure headed by a patriarch.

Figure 2 - Number of words in tweets about refugees

Source: Authors, from Refugees Dataset (mid-December 2015-mid-December 2016).

Something similar happens with regard to the word *rape*, that is also frequently associated in our tweets with refugees. In fact, one of the most disseminated hashtags in our dataset combines the words *rape* and *refugees*, in different languages, even working as a negative motto towards refugees: *#raperefugees*. We will refer to that issue in more detail in another section, as different but complementary meanings can be found in Twitter around words like rape, rapist, etc. In the third case, there is a great variety of different meanings around the word "sex", if we consider all the words including this lemma and its derivatives. Some examples associated to rape or sexual violence are *Sexattack, Sexcrime, Sexdelikte, Sexgangster, SexGewalt*,

Sextrafficking, SexualAbuse, Sexsklaverei, etc., while in other cases it is possible to find a focus on denouncing *Sexismus* or *sessismo*[7].

4.2 Stupro, Gang-rapes, and other kinds of violence

If we revise the complete list of topics in which there is a connection between refugees and Gender in Twitter, tweets on *stupro, statutary rapes or children rapes* strongly contribute to develop very negative images about refugees. Some hashtags or words as *Kindervergewaltingung, Childrape, StopChildAbuse* or *StopChildRapeIn Turkey* work as a breeding ground to encourage fear towards refugees. In some tweets a generic use of *children* (other times *adolescents*…), etc., without a direct specification of gender (*girl, boy*) is found. Other times the tweets also contain clear references to women. Some examples follow:

- *Estupro como pagamento e arma de terror? Pode, desde que na África (ou na Europa, se feito por refugiados). Usar turbante? Não passarão*
- *"Adolescente sofre estupro coletivo em campo de refugiados na Grécia #StandWithLula #ForaTemer*
- *Si scrive #rifugiati si legge parassiti-invasori-stupratori https://t.co/2yhMitGIdw*

Source: Refugees Dataset (mid-December 2015-mid- December 2016), from https://twitter.com/.

Other tweets also allude to rapes, but including other dimensions, as in the *gang-rapes* case. Though comparatively they are not very frequent, some tweets associate refugees to the idea of gangraping. We found more references in German than in other languages, through words as: *Gruppenvergewaltung; Gruppenmissbrauch, Gruppensex, Gruppenverbrecher, Massenvergewaltigung, etc*. In theory, most of the times gangrapes are referred to women, though several times words as women, girl, mädchen, niña… are not found in the tweets. Also, other ideas about raping in the refugees dataset of tweets are brought through the Cologne events, that are very

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[7] There are also other different meanings around *sex* and *refugees* that we do not have space here to explore.

recurrent in Twitter as *CologneAttacks, CologneAssaults, CologneRape, CologneSexualAttacks, Kölnattacks, etc.* In this case, we found many tweets connecting Rapes to Refugees through Cologne events, even one year afterwards. These ideas clearly do a disservice to the image of refugees.

- *WARUM les ich davon NIX in DEUTSCHEN Medien? 9 Irak Muslime Flüchtlinge gangrape deutsche Frau in Wien.Gibt ASYL?LOL https://t.co/AawjP5aoCe*
- *#swedenrapists is anyone doing anything to stop all the shit thats happening to Sweden? #Muslims #refugeecrisis #refugees #gangrape #murder*
- *Gangrape by FIVE Afghan"refugees" now on trial in Sweden. Victim was a boy. Sweden has not yet learnt to be multicultural. #svpol #migpol*

Source: Refugees Dataset (mid-December 2015-mid- December 2016), from https://twitter.com/.

Apart from rapes, childrapes, sexualattacks, sexabuses, or gangrapes, other ideas about sexual violence, and abuses are common in the tweets that connect women and refugees. Again, though sometimes violence is alluded in general terms, and by the concrete words that are used, violence does not have to do explicitly with women or sex (for instance, *#violencepoliciere*), other times tweets show a clear chain of generalized arguments that may suggest that any refugee is a raper, or a potential gangraper. Fortunately, other tweets try to fight against hate to refugees or immigrants in general. In summary, talking about violence and refugees in Twitter bring us very different and opposed type of discourses and imaginaries.

- *RT @Tentuil: #Syrian #Muslim "#Refugees" Bring "Culture Of Rape And Violence" To #Germany https://t.co/brO4TCciRb #ParisAgreement https://t…*
- *Protecting female #refugees from #gender based#violence remains a complex problem*
- *https://t.co/s3Z4Q6kNlp #humanrights #womensrights*
- *#Listen to the stories of #Refugees. Refugees are fleeing violence and persecution. They want… https://t.co/UFWwEKgXmm*
- *The Other Face of #Jihad https://t.co/9JINQKEW0Q #Cologne #Germany #Refugees #Migrants #Immigration #Terrorism #SexualViolence #Islam*

Source: Refugees Dataset (mid-December 2015-mid- December 2016), from https://twitter.com/.

On the other side, refugees in Twitter are also associated to prostitution, human trafficking, mistreatment and abuse, and other forms of violence, as we argued in the introduction. There is a huge quantity of tweets denouncing the vulnerability of minors. These tweets do not always distinguish gender explicitly, but gender is evidently included in them. Some hashtags are representative: *#ChildTraffickingMustStopped, #EndChildMarriage*. Others present also the terrible face of organs traficcking, sexual slavery or human trafficking. Though sometimes tweets are not completely explicit in their relationships to women, Gender studies prove that women are the main sufferers here, and especially girls, the most vulnerable group too.

RT @DailyMailUK: Fears child refugees have been trafficked into prostitution or slavery after disappearing from council care https://t.co/F…
Teen refugees in Athens turn to prostitution to survive. The report by @ArwaCNN that ripped my heart wide open: https://t.co/59w0e3S6HT
Libya's refugees: "It's what we'd call slave trading, it's forced prostitution, mass rapes." https://t.co/6M1JNa1gog"

Source: Refugees Dataset (mid-December 2015-mid- December 2016), from https://twitter.com/.

There is a great amount of tweets reporting mistreatment to refugees. Texts included in the tweets normally do not have a focus specifically on women. They tend to allude to refugees in general, but pictures that accompany them are more inclined to show victimized images of women, and girls. There are also lots of them showing pictures of refugees in camps, borders, etc. explaining that refugees in general were mistreated in different countries or in concrete borders or places: Turkey, Hungary, Australia, France, Denmark, borders in Serbia, borders between Macedonia and Greece, the Center for Temporary Stay of Immigrants (CETI) in Melilla, etc. These tweets talk about the mistreatment suffered by refugees, and insist on the responsability of public authorities, pointing out a discourse around European mistreatment and abandonment of refugees. Some tweets specifically address the importance of giving special support to women and girls.

- *Los #refugiados y solicitantes de asilo en #Turquía son víctimas de maltrato y detenciones arbitrarias, denunció Amnistía Internacional.*
- *A vile act of terror which will only result in the maltreatment and abandoning of the refugees who have already lost everything. #Brussels.*

Source: Refugees Dataset (mid-December 2015-mid- December 2016), from https://twitter.com/.

In the case of abuses, when they refer to *SexualAbuse* is especially used to underline the idea of some countries or authorities abusing refugees. That is the case of Turkey, as has been reported by several organizations (i.e. International Amnesty) or by other users in Twitter. We found several denunciations on Turkey's abuses at deporting refugees (*Amnesty accuses #Turkey of abusing, forcibly deporting #refugees https://t.co/6TXLRz30Ra /@HDNER*). A similar circumstance is reported about the Bulgarian or the Macedonian Border Police in Twitter, etc. (*Bulgarian Border Police Accused of Abusing #Refugees https://t.co/FdI183yUQr, RT @Fotis_Filippou: #Bulgaria govt must investigate allegations of abuse against #refugees & #migrants by police https://t.co/sC5YORObnH ht…; RT @Zarkica: Report from #balkanroute 24.12- #Macedonia police beaten up #refugees, abuse continues to #refugeesviaBulgaria https://t.co/w…*).

Other messages connecting the idea of abuse and refugees in Twitter have to do with ChildAbuse (as before), or unaccompanied children and teens abuse, and the claim of Human Rights in this area (*Rape and Child Abuse Epidemic in German Refugee Camps https://t.co/HMp5LHHdFP Muslims trash refugees #Flüchtlingsunterkunft #Flüchtlinge; RT @rjstrikers: #ChildRights #HumanRights #Refugees #ChildAbuse #auspol #ICC @UNICEF @UNrightswire @IntlCrimCourt https://t.co/x0sKgbPCoD; RT @FUBARrockchick: People fleeing war, human rights abuses No one should have to rescue babies out of cold water. #refugees*). Also, LGBTI are reported to face abuse and homophobia in some European refugee centres as well as women:

- *Sexual abuse and/or rape of female #refugees during their journey to #freedom Via @GreekAnalyst https://t.co/fodhZ6pX58.*

- *14% of #women #refugees sexually abused – report https://t.co/1FgMEG9V0I via @newvisionwire @SpeakerRyan @POTUS @SenThomTillis #refugees #immigration #WakeUpAmerica.*

Source: Refugees Dataset (mid-December 2015-mid- December 2016), from https://twitter.com/.

4.3 Building the Hate to the "Others": Sexual Abuses to Girls and Burka as Representatives of Discourses against Muslims and Islam.

Some of the most frequent words connecting refugees and women in Twitter are referred to young women, especifically girls, and their equivalents *niñas, mädcken, ragazza, filles,* or*meninas.* In this case, there is an important tendency in Twitter to associate girls with rape, or sexual abuse. Social representation of refugees frequently link the religious aspects, not so common in previous words or discursive contexts. "Muslims" (refugees) appear in these discourses as responsible for the rape or sexual abuses directed to girls, as a horrible event to be avoided.

- #Germany #Rape of a young #Girl in #freiburg. #refugees rape girl in Germany. https://t.co/0FW7fBZzzo via @DMF_Info
- #Migrants sexually harass German School Girls, Mayor: "Don't provoke them!": https://t.co/aPaDNBeDAC - #Flüchtlinge #refugees
- Muslim women KNOW PRIMITIVENESS of muslim males - LOL!Refugeeswelcome idiot German girls DONT! HAHAHA! #Flüchtlinge https://t.co/1LR1dU7lhc
- Get the fuck out of my country if you want to rape girls! #rapeFugees #kiel #Fluechtlinge https://t.co/XxFeTt7cmh

Source: Refugees Dataset (mid-December 2015-mid- December 2016), from https://twitter.com/.

Another important set of tweets that connects women and refugees also ties women, refugees and religion through the *burka*, the *hijab*, the *veil*, or the *burkini*. In this case, most of the tweets that were found clearly reject these pieces of clothing associated to Islam, but also, in the Western cultures, intepreted as a privacy of freedom for women. Several tweets or hashtags completely reject refugees by

these clothes: *BanBurka, BantheBurka, Burkaverbot, Burkiniverbot,* are clear examples of this.

4.4 *Anti-refugees Rethoric and the Exaggeration of Threats: RapeRefugees*

The association between *rapes* or *rapists* and *refugees* is common in Twitter, and has international dimensions through the dissemination of the hashtag *#RapeRefugees* at international level, in tweets written in different languages that explicitly reject refugees. We found several variations of the same idea promoting hate towards refugees through other words or hashtags as, for instance, *RapeFugees, RapeEpicdemic, stoprape, stoprapefugees, swedenrapists, Rapefest, RapefugeesNotWelcome, RapeJihad,* etc.

RapeRefugees, and similar short words or hashtags, condense a mixture of meanings that go from fear of refugees as potential rapists, worry for the potential risks for girls and women, but sometimes also children (all of them vulnerable). The discourse is very simplistic, direct and pernicious. Countries of reception are in danger, and the blame is on refugees. These fears lead to the threats that refugees bring, oversized or exaggerated in the discourses, play a role in the justification of racism, and also as a justification of border controls, closure, and repatriations (*RapefugeesNotWelcome, stoprape, stoprapefugees).*

All of us, they seem to argue, have to feel fear as we are confronting a dangerous phenomenon that spreads like an epidemic. *#RapeEpidemic* clearly shows this idea. That rhethoric underlines overexaggeration.

There is also the classic discourse confronting *we* and *they*. The following argument is recurrent: We cannot welcome Muslim (under the assumption that all refugees are Muslim), because they want to rape *our* women.

Finally, apart from the promotion of hate to refugees in general oversizing the negative messages, many tweets (by anonymous users) use a very aggressive and injurious

language, over-loaded with hate to refugees and immigrants, which is clearly expressed in the emotional use of adjectives, saturated on the offensive side. In the end, the way in which rape is used in tweets function as a clear justification of racism.

Conclusions

Twitter, as a Social Platform where different people and organizations publicly interact, has become a sort of social thermometer that allows us to explore social reality, or at least a part of it. With regard to the connections described between refugees and women in Twitter, we have found a diverse reality that goes from the public support to refugees, to an agressive rejection of them. The last one unfortunately based on disproportionate generalizations and stereotypes, and unfounded and radicalised arguments, that simplifies the complexity of reality. If for international organizations refugees are forcibly displaced from home as a result of conflict or persecution (UNHCR, 2016), and need humanitarian help; for others, refugees are described as brutal to the extent that are considered responsible for different types of rapes and abuses. We have seen in tweets related to the rejection of refugees the justification of racism due to the violations of *our* women. The aim of these tweets is not to make a feminist denunciation of the violence suffered by women and of a patriarchal culture of rape that transcends borders, but to divert attention from sexual aggressions to women refugees to color, origin, class or religion of the aggressor, using gender difference to feed racism and xenophobia.

Specifically, in the case of women refugees, it is obvious that they are victims of sexual violence and abuse, especially girls and young women, thus suffering a double discrimination because of their condition as women and migrants (and even a third one because of their ethnic origin and religion). Many tweets denounce situations in which these women must face greater danger during the trip and in the camps of refugees, mainly related to the sexual abuse. Results suggest that in this unprecedented humanitarian crisis women

refugees are targeted just because of their gender. Women are constantly victimized and mistreated due to the perpetuation of a patriarchal outlook that justifies abusing women. It is about time to do definitively away with women's objectification and subordination that condemns women to so much suffering and violence. Racism and sexism as oppressive systems nurture each other.

This overall current picture of rejection and hate makes us think that there is an enormous work to accomplish in Europe and in other places in the world to promote and build pacific coexistence among people with different beliefs and cultures, always under the umbrella of the respect for norms, individual freedoms and basic human rights. In addition, it is necessary to confront the patriarchal structuring of societies that continues to foster gender discrimination, and to create alliances among individuals and organizations that fight for full equality regardless of gender or ethnicity, etc.

Nevertheless, we are not naive, and we know that this historical moment is very complicated in order to achieve such a goal, as extremist and radicalized ideologies are all over the place, which is clearly reflected in the messages of many tweets. Terrorist attacks suffered in this century decisively do not help to promote pacific coexistence as they prove difficult to understand by population. Polarization and emotions derived from such brutality contribute to the development of fears, the feelings of being under continuous threat and vulnerability, and the increase of groups and political parties that benefit from it, especially in the far right, as we are witnessing in different countries in Western Societies.

Despite the bleak picture, building a culture of peace and social justice is worth the effort. It is equally important to reinforce clear messages to people about the clear existing differences between groups such as refugees, immigrants, or terrorists, frequently distorted by racist discourses that treat refugees and immigrants as scapegoats of different problems of our societies. And finally, to challenge the patriarchal and sexist tenets of our societies to achieve full equality and to combat gender discrimination and victimization.

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