

Xenophobia, misogyny and rape culture

Targeting women in cyberspace

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The present article explores the interface between online misogyny and xenophobia in the context of both socio-cultural factors which are conducive to verbal aggression against women and cyberspace's technological affordances. The former, as will be argued, can be linked to "rape culture", where the notions of rape and sexual violence are used not only as instruments of subjugation and domination, but also as tools to legitimize racial, ethnic, or religious hatred. In the case of the latter, anonymity, interactivity and connectivity will be discussed as factors which facilitate generating, amplifying and perpetuating hateful and aggressive content online. Applying the Media Proximity Approach (Kopytowska 2013, 2015a, 2018a, 2018b, 2020) and drawing on previous research examining online xenophobic discourses and hate speech, the article scrutinizes hate speech targeting female politicians, namely Angela Merkel, current Chancellor of Germany, and Ewa Kopacz, former Polish Prime Minister, for their pro-refugee stance and migration policy. Data-wise, the examples analyzed will be taken from the corpora comprising comments following online articles in *niezalezna.pl* (a Polish conservative news portal) and YouTube videos on migrants and refugees.

Keywords: misogyny, xenophobia, Media Proximity Approach, cyberspace, refugees, rape culture

1. Introduction

Not only are women more likely to become the target of gendered verbal violence, but the scale of such violence tends to be more extensive and its effects more intense. According to Mantilla (2013, 564–565), the following factors make such verbal aggression different from other forms of incivility: (1) the participation, often coordinated, of numerous people, (2) gender-based insults, (3) vicious language, (4) credible threats targeting women, (5) unusual intensity, scope, and

longevity of attacks, and (6) reactions to women speaking out. Technology has also played a crucial role here, providing both the platform for the attackers and access to the victims, and thus taking such violence to a completely new dimension. Hence, pointing to women's *precarity* in cybersphere (Butler 2009; Nussbaum 2012), which makes them more vulnerable to verbal aggression, KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018) call for a new interdisciplinary perspective on online misogyny, which would acknowledge the role of technologically-enabled discursive practices. It is not only language itself, they claim, but the processes of discourse production and consumption or, what KhosraviNik (2014, 2017a, 2017b, 2018) calls the techno-discursive design of social media, that should be examined as a factor facilitating the spread of online misogyny (see also Esposito, this issue 2021). Another problem is the fact that online verbal violence targeting women is often marginalized due to its fragmented and individualized character as well as social acquiescence, though, as argued by Richardson-Self (2018, 256), misogynistic speech is hate speech, "even when it is intradivisional (that is, when it targets only subsets of women)".

Responding to the above concerns, and positioning itself within the framework of Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) (KhosraviNik 2014, 2017a, 2017b, 2018), the present paper explores the problem of online verbal aggression directed at women. As my interest lies in the interface of misogyny and xenophobia, I will attempt to demonstrate how the former emerges alongside "cyber racism" (Jakubowicz 2017; Jakubowicz et al. 2017) or "platformed racism" (Matamoros-Fernández 2017, on the misogyny/xenophobia interface see also Kuperberg, this issue 2021). Applying the Media Proximization Approach (MPA, see Kopytowska 2013, 2015a, 2018a, 2018b, 2020) and drawing on previous research examining online discourses concerning migrants, refugees and hate speech they abound with (see Baider and Kopytowska 2017; Kopytowska and Chilton 2018; Kopytowska, Grabowski, and Woźniak 2017; Kopytowska, Woźniak, and Grabowski 2017), I will discuss examples of hate speech targeting women associated with or considered to support the Other – migrants, refugees, foreigners. Not only do these women receive strong negative evaluation, being regarded as promiscuous and traitors to the nation, but they are also likely to be publicly "sentenced" to severe punishment (typically in the form of gang rape). While any woman, irrespective of status, profession or position, can become a victim of online gender-based stigmatization, in the present article we will focus on verbal abuse targeting female politicians. I am interested in the socio-cultural factors behind incitement to verbal and physical violence, in particular in what has been termed "rape culture" (Brownmiller 1975), as well as the potential of cyberspace to promote and perpetuate such hostile misogynistic discourses. Additionally since, as already mentioned, online misogyny will be discussed in the context

of xenophobia and anti-refugee sentiments, I will demonstrate how the notion of rape is discursively used as a tool both to legitimize hatred and to punish and subjugate. Data-wise, the examples will be taken from two corpora compiled within the C.O.N.T.A.C.T. project (2015–2017) and comprising comments triggered by online articles and YouTube videos concerning migration and refugee crisis.¹ A description of the corpora will be presented in Section 5.1.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section will focus on the interface of technological affordances of the new media and networked aggression: Media Proximity Approach along with various dimensions of distance will be introduced here to explicate the dynamics of communication within cyberspace and online incivility. In order to expose a web of interconnections between perceptions of gender and nation, Section 3 will discuss the notions of heteronormativity, femonationalism and care racism. It will be followed by an overview of the concept of ‘rape culture’ and its manifestations in the media (Section 4). With technological and social factors facilitating the spread of online misogyny explained, I will proceed with online data analysis and discussion (Section 5) and the conclusions (Section 6).

2. Technological affordances and networked aggression

While enabling various forms of mediated interactions, information exchange, as well as constructive and collaborative activities, the technological affordances of cyberspace make it also an environment and a tool for generating, amplifying and perpetuating hateful and aggressive content of all kinds (KhosraviNik and Esposito 2018; Kopytowska 2015b, 2017). Alongside “cyber racism” (Jakubowicz 2017; Jakubowicz et al. 2017) or “platformed racism” (Matamoros-Fernández 2017), online misogyny has become a phenomenon attracting the attention of researchers, political actors, media practitioners and social activists. Jane (2016) points to the role of social media in the creation of “e-bile”. Others refer to this phenomenon as “digital technology-facilitated (DTF) violence” (Esposito this issue 2021), “mediated misogyny” (Vickery and Everbach 2018), “networked misogyny” (Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2016), “digitally facilitated sexual violence” (Powell and Henry 2017), “online slut-shaming”, or as a form of “technology-

1. The C.O.N.T.A.C.T. project (*Creating On-line Network, Monitoring Team and Phone App to Counter Hate Crime Tactics*, reportinghate.eu) coordinated by the University of Cyprus and co-financed by the EU Commission (grant no. JUST/2014/RRAC/AG/HATE/6706) focused on hate speech within EU and involved researching online hate speech and organizing training workshops for media, police, educators and students.

facilitated sexual violence” (Dragotto et al. 2020). Poland (2016, 251) sees cybersexism as the phenomenon which is rampant in online spaces, while Citron (2009) discusses “cyber harassment” as a uniquely gendered phenomenon, with women constituting the majority of targeted individuals.

Threats of rape and other forms of sexual violence occur parallelly to sexually degrading language reinforcing gender-based stereotypes (Citron 2009, 380; Megarry 2014). Examining verbal abuse experienced by women on Twitter, Megarry (2014) argues that this type of harassment should be recognized as “online sexual harassment”, and a form of excluding women’s voices from the digital public sphere. Powell and Henry (2017, 13) also perceive online sexual harassment as manifestation of “gender inequality, misogyny and sex discrimination, and the persistent acceptance and tolerance of rape-supportive attitudes and beliefs.”

New technologies and the discursive practices they enable facilitate the perpetuation of online misogyny in several ways. Situated within the Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) paradigm (KhosraviNik 2014, 2017b, 2018), and placing emphasis on the techno-discursive design of the media, Media Proximization Approach (Kopytowska 2013, 2015a, 2018a, 2018b, 2020) sees distance-related operations, encompassing several dimensions of distance – spatial, temporal, epistemic, axiological and emotional – as crucial. As argued by Kopytowska (2020), the “technological affordances” (Hutchby 2001) of digital media enable proximization both between selected aspects of reality and the audience (representational dimension) and among members of the audience (interpersonal dimension). The transgression of spatial and temporal boundaries (spatio-temporal proximization), made possible thanks to the techno-discursive design of digital media, not only brings Internet users closer to one another, enabling user-to-user interaction but also allows users to access various discourse spaces and become active co-producers of media content. MPA thus posits that interactivity and connectivity are possible thanks to distance reduction (proximization). This naturally translates into greater emotional involvement (emotional proximization). Connectivity among individuals with similar views, fears and, more generally, ideologies (axiological proximization), facilitates the creation of “filter bubbles and echo chambers” (KhosraviNik 2017a, 64), where similar attitudes, ideas and beliefs are confirmed and amplified, which in situations of conflict and threat often leads to what Kopytowska, Grabowski and Woźniak (2017, 68) call “discursive spiral of hate”. Technically, social media offer opportunities and indeed encourage (KhosraviNik 2018; Papacharissi 2015) the spread of emotionally loaded content in a way that cannot be controlled, which, in turn, can have considerable impact on collective emotions. Tadic et al. (2013), for example, point to “bursts of emotional messages that involve many users”.

Anonymity is also seen as factor likely to encourage incivility among Internet users (Santana 2014, see also Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2015, 2017; KhosraviNik and Esposito 2018). As posited by the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (Lea and Spears 1991; Postmes et al. 2002; Reicher et al. 1995), anonymity in online interactions has serious cognitive consequences. The reduction of social cues in online communication is said to make Internet users prone to various forms of anti-social behavior, such as flaming, trolling and other forms of online harassment (Fox and Tang 2014; Kiesler et al. 1984; Suler 2004). Additionally, individuals are more likely to express opinions they would not voice offline knowing that such opinions could be attributed to them (Hardaker and McGlashan 2015, 82). Deindividuation, experienced along with feeling anonymous, results in developing a strong in-group identity (Lea and Spears 1991). With gender cues being more salient, anonymous users are thus likely to interact in more gender-stereotypical ways (Postmes and Spears 2002). Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2017, 350) adds that intense negative emotions, namely states of anger and disgust, are also conducive to stereotypical thinking.

This paper argues that the interface of anonymity and incivility can also be analyzed in terms distance dynamics. Spatio-temporally, the victim is at the same time close (virtually accessible) and distant (as it is not a face-to-face interaction). The very act of performing violence, which is not only virtual but also not fraught with immediate consequences due to perceived anonymity may enhance disinhibition, triggering the outburst of strong emotions (emotional proximization). Stronger in-group identity and perceiving others in more stereotypical ways can be explained in terms of both epistemic and axiological distance. Online commenters will thus be more likely to defend what they see as their group's values and fiercely attack what, in their view, poses a threat to the integrity or status quo of this group (e.g. dominant white men) and what they attribute to the Other. The next section will discuss the sociocultural factors behind misogyny, including male dominance and its relationship with the cohesion of the nation.

3. Protecting the nation: Heteronormativity, femonationalism and care racism

In their discussion of the interface of misogyny and the social system of norms and values, Baider and Kopytowska (2018, 8) point to the link between heteronormativity and the construction of sexuality in nation-building discourse (see also Motschenbacher 2013). Misogyny, they argue, can be seen as a consequence of heteronormativity and "masculinism", creating a "social environment which is conducive to male dominance, discrimination, sexual objectification, as well as

physical and verbal violence against women” (Baider and Kopytowska 2018, 9). Along the same lines, Richardson-Self points to both “certain forms of patriarchy-enforcing speech” (2018, 256) and “cis-hetero-misogynistic hate speech” (2019, 573). These kinds of speech have thus been discussed in the context of “hegemonic masculinity”, defined as the “configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (Connell 2005, 77; see also Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), or “aggrieved masculinity” (Kimmel 2013; Kimmel and Mahler 2003).

Subordination and sexual harassment become tools through which a male position can be asserted, confirmed and perpetuated within the (heterosexual) masculine hierarchies. While cohesion and purity of the nation have been perceived as deriving from a strongly heterosexual model of the family characterized by ethnic homogeneity, and thus key in the reproduction of the nation (Norocel 2010), the traditional, state-based security thinking has been associated with “masculinist, patriarchal structures” (Hoogensen and Stuvøy 2006, 210). In this way, both non-heteronormativity and challenging patriarchy (e.g. feminist movements) have emerged as a possible internal threat to the status quo of those who wield social and political power (see also Alam, this issue 2021). Another threat has been associated with the Other, who comes from abroad and differs from the local/mainstream in terms of ethnicity and religion (external threat). In this context, Baider (2018) discusses the interconnectedness of hostility towards non-heterosexuality and xenophobia in Cyprus, arguing that both homosexuality and cultural or religious “otherness” are perceived as threats to the core values of the nation. In a similar way, elaborating on Farris’ (2017) concept of “femonationalism”, Sager and Mulinari (2018, 149) explore the connection between right-wing xenophobic discourse and hate towards feminism and women embodying feminist agendas in Sweden.² The latter point to the centrality of the notion of *trygghet* (‘safety’) in discussions concerning “boundaries, bodies and belonging” and introduce the concept of “care racism”: “right wing xenophobic agendas are not articulated through discourses of hate towards the Others, but instead they are framed by notions of care and love for the family and the community. Female members of the SD are driven by a desire to care for the ones they understand as ‘Swedes’ who are in need of protection from the threats of those defined as outsiders” (Sager and Mulinari 2018, 151).³ Interestingly, as already mentioned, the threat is seen as coming not only from the outside (the Muslims) but also from

2. Kosnick (2015, 689) links femonationalism with the high degree of public support and media attention received by feminist and LGBTQ activists when they confront Islam as being homophobic, patriarchal and hostile towards women.

3. SD – the Sweden Democrats, a populist political party in Sweden with a nationalist agenda.

within (feminists) (see also Mulinari and Neergaard 2014).⁴ As regards the former, the Other can be seen as dangerous for women in both physical (e.g. physical violence against women from host country population, including rapes) and symbolic sense (perception of women's rights).⁵ Sager and Mulinari (2018, 155) argue that, while threats directed at feminists have strong racist undertones, feminist ideas are simultaneously used to demonise migrant men. Thus, care racism paradoxically helps to construct not only "the figure of the vulnerable (white) Swedish women but also of the threatening feminist" (ibid.). Ylä-Anttila et al. (2019, 6) demonstrate how Finnish women and children are presented as the most vulnerable members of society likely to become victims of violence perpetrated by "foreigners" and "illegal" immigrants. In her book on the "political sociology of the body", Phipps (2014) points to the "symbiotic relationship" between the neoconservative constructions of Islam and anti-Muslim prejudice, where "concern for women" becomes the pretext for Islamophobia. Along the same lines, Ahmed (1992) had argued that such "colonial feminism" was used to legitimize Europe's civilizing mission. Koulouris (2018, 750) also points to the link between misogyny and "far-right, white supremacist determinations". What all these studies clearly demonstrate is the connection between gender-motivated and Other-oriented violence, with traditionally defined male and female roles at the center of attention and with a clear division between us and them.

Online misogyny being the "reflection of offline patriarchal tendencies", as argued by Barker and Jurasz (2019, 97), has its manifestations in gender-based online abuse targeting female politicians. Rather than being focused on political views, verbal abuse, as they demonstrate with the case of Diane Abbott, the first black MP in the UK, has been gender-oriented (ibid. 101, see also Esposito and Zollo, this issue 2021). Barker and Jurasz (2019) point to concerns about hate speech and harassment faced by women voiced by the United Nations (ibid. 100) including observations concerning effects of violence against women in politics: "The aim of violence against women in politics is to preserve traditional gender roles and stereotypes and maintain structural and gender-based inequalities. It can take many forms, from misogynistic and sexist verbal attacks to the most commonplace acts of harassment and sexual harassment, much of it increasingly online, or even femicide" (UN General Assembly 2018, 5).

Inter Parliamentary Union studies carried out in 2016 and 2018 also demonstrated that sexism and gender-based violence heavily affect female parliamentary

4. The interface of gender equality, migration and racism is discussed by Wetherell and Potter (1992 cit. in Sager and Mulinari 2018).

5. For the physical and symbolic threat connected with immigration see Baider and Kopytowska (2017).

workers. The 2018 study on 123 women from 45 European countries, who were either MPs or parliamentary staff members demonstrated that 85.2 per cent of female MPs surveyed experienced psychological violence during their term of office, 46.9 per cent received death threats or threats of rape or beating, 58.2 per cent fell victims to sexist attacks on social networks, 67.9 per cent were the target of comments concerning their physical appearance or based on gender stereotypes, 24.7 per cent suffered sexual violence, and 14.8 per cent suffered physical violence (IPU 2018, 1). The results of these studies seem to corroborate Cole's (2015, 356) discussion on "disciplinary rhetoric" targeting women speaking out in public, in particular social media. The concept itself originating in Foucault's (1977) work is used by her to conceptualize the abuse experienced by women in online discourse. Even though Cole (2015, 356) focuses on "women acting in the digi-feminist network" who, "being an easily identifiable target" are singled out by trolls, I argue that this concept of "disciplining women" (p. 357) could well be used to refer to any female figures salient in public discourse and perceived as a threat to the status quo of the dominant male figure or the cohesion of the nation. The following section will be an attempt to explicate the motivations behind incitement to sexual violence, including rape, against such women.

4. Rape culture and its manifestations in mediatized world

Pervasive during conflicts throughout history, rape and other forms of sexual violence have come to be seen as the dominant weapon of war used strategically to secure power and dominance (Sitkin et al. 2019). Theoretical perspectives on motivations behind rape, its function and implications vary, including those that perceive it as a political act aimed at "male domination and female degradation" (McPhail 2016, 316; see also MacKinnon 1994) or an instrument of social control (Brownmiller 1975, 391). Several researchers have pointed to the need to acknowledge the complexity of strategic sexual violence, along with both biological and structural factors behind it (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013, 2018; Kreft 2020).

Insights into the socio-cultural dimension of rape offered by Brownmiller in her *Against our Will* (1975) became a powerful stimulus and contribution to theorizing on the concept of "rape culture", applied in discussion on various discourses, mediated and non-mediated interactions and public spaces. Buchwald et al. (1993, vii) understand rape culture as a "complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. In a rape culture, women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks, to sexual touching, to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism

against women as the norm". As already mentioned in the previous section, there is more to sexual assault than just physical violence itself. Socially constructed gender roles and expectations, involving male dominance, along with issues of power and control are factors of no lesser importance. Kalra and Bhugra (2013, 246) argue that "sexual violence can result from a misogynist attitude prevalent in a culture". This observation naturally leads us to discourse, with its both constituted and constitutive nature. Not only does it reflect such misogynistic attitudes and the resulting violence, but it can also legitimize them or even become, as I would call it, a "violence performance tool". Jane (2017) discusses the evolution of "Rapeglish" from what she calls a sub-cultural dialect of what can now be considered a mainstream online lingua franca.

Man's sexual dominance constitutes one of the most frequent subjects in hate speech against women, manifested in offensive adjectives used to humiliate (e.g. "whore", "slut" and "bitch") and demeaning sexualized comments and rape threats (Citron 2009). In this sense, Barlett et al. (2014) studied tweets making reference to the word "rape", concluding that out of around 100 thousand instances of the word used in English from UK-based Twitter accounts around 12 per cent appeared to be threatening. In the same study out of around 131,000 tweets including the word "slut" or "whore", 18% were identified as generally misogynistic and 20% as abusive. Discussing the language surrounding sexual aggression on Twitter, Hardaker and McGlashan (2015, 89) pointed to the frequent co-occurrence of "rape" with a number of threat lemmas as well as the fact that women were in most cases the target of threats, both literally and grammatically (ibid. 91).

Another important concept in this context is that of "cyberrape", interpreted in at least two ways. It was first described by Dibbell (1993), who focused on the rape in a multi-player computer game called LambdaMOO where players use avatars to interact with one another. The fact that avatars were used to interact sexually raised serious questions about the boundary between the real and the virtual, along with the psychological consequences of the latter, and triggered a debate on the ethical and legal issues of such virtually performed actions. This phenomenon has, however, also been discussed – under the name of "virtual rape" – in the contexts where perpetrators use technology to make victims perform sexual acts online. Harduf (2019) provides several examples of what he calls "rape by words" or "communicative rape", e.g. the case from 2011 in Israel, when a 69-year-old male was accused of rape; the man posed as a doctor and persuaded a minor to penetrate herself over the phone. Discussing this and other similar online cases, Harduf (ibid.), highlights the potential of cyberspace to enable and facilitate sexual offensiveness, mentioning, for example, the possibility of simultaneous written communication. Following McKenna (2007), Harduf (ibid.) argues

that “[p]sychologically, it might be easier to threat [sic] someone by written words than by one’s own voice; to blackmail another; and perhaps to violate another’s sexual autonomy”. This brings us back again to the claim that with spatiotemporal distance being reduced, making the victim “accessible”, lower identifiability and thus sense of responsibility of the perpetrator may lead to higher disinhibition. Disinhibition is also enhanced, as already mentioned, by the “non-physical” or “bodyless” character of the interaction.

The above cases clearly demonstrate that technology, including the affordances of digital communication, has brought in new possibilities for the perpetuation of rape culture. Further, I would like to argue that these possibilities have emerged from the multidimensional transformation of distance between perpetrators and victims, along with changes in proximity vs. non-proximity dynamics and their impact on the aggression-empathy interface. With reduced spatiotemporal distance, potential victims have become readily “available”. At the same time, their “bodylessness” in virtual reality has contributed to an increased emotional desensitization of the perpetrator. Thus, it could be argued that the effect is similar to the phenomenon referred to by Chouliaraki (2008) as “the spectatorship of suffering” and discussed by Kopytowska (2014, 2015c). Just as the viewers of graphic content are provided with the “possibility of on-site witnessing” while, at the same time, remaining “at a safe distance” (Kopytowska 2015c, 14), so are the perpetrators and observers of online sexual aggression.

In the present paper, it is argued that such technology-related aspects of digital communication, while often underrated in research on online misogyny, are no less important than those pertaining to social attitudes, shaped both historically and politically (as discussed in Section 3). The following section with the analysis of corpus data will provide examples of online violence against women in power (and thus seen as challenging male dominance) and supportive towards the Other (and thus perceived as threatening the status quo and cohesion of the nation).

5. Xenophobia and violence against female politicians: A case study

5.1 Data and methodology

To examine abusive language targeting female politicians in the context of xenophobia we analyzed two corpora compiled within the C.O.N.T.A.C.T. project (2015–2017) focusing on xenophobic hate speech in the context of the refugee crisis (Kopytowska, Grabowski and Woźniak 2017; Kopytowska, Woźniak and Grabowski 2017) against two female politicians with a pro-refugee stance: Angela

Merkel and Ewa Kopacz. Merkel has served as Chancellor of Germany since 2005. She has often been described as the leader of the European Union (Vick 2015), the most powerful woman in the world (Forbes 2019) or the leader of the “free world” (AFP 2016). In late August 2015 as a result of Merkel’s pro-refugee policy, nearly 1.1 million asylum seekers entered Germany. Kopacz, currently a member of the Civic Platform political party and a member of the European Parliament, was the Marshal of the Sejm (2011–2014), the Minister for Health (2007–2011) and the Prime Minister (2014–2015) of Poland. In 2015 she was ranked by *Forbes* magazine as the world’s 40th most powerful woman. Considering it a sign of European solidarity, in September 2015 she agreed to admit 2000 refugees to Poland as part of the EU relocation programme.

The corpora comprised Internet users’ comments submitted in response to press articles on immigrants and refugees published by *niezalezna.pl*, a Polish right-wing online news portal (henceforth ‘CNPL’), in January-February 2016, and comments triggered YouTube videos (henceforth ‘CYTB’) uploaded in March-April 2016; the size of the study corpora is 68,977 and 34,498 words, respectively. We used in-built search engines on both websites in order to identify – by keying in the search word *uchodźcy* ‘refugees’ and *imigranci* ‘immigrants’ – and further retrieve relevant articles, videos, and related comments. Both corpora under scrutiny were tagged and parsed using Sketch Grammar for Polish developed on the basis of the tagset of the IPI PAN Corpus of Polish implemented into the SketchEngine software (Kilgarriff et al. 2014).

The analysis consisted of two parts. First, to identify discursive manifestations of online misogyny, representations of and references to the two female politicians were examined. The SketchEngine concordance tool was used to analyse “Kopacz”, “Merkel”, and “Makrela”⁶ lemmas in relation to their immediate context in CNPL and CYTB corpora. The second part of the analysis focused on the *gwałt* (‘rape’) lemmas – “wordforms that are related by being inflectional forms of the same base word” (McEnery and Hardie 2012, 245) – and their co-occurrence patterns.

5.2 Results and discussion: Merkel and Kopacz – Between demeaning sexualized comments and incitement to violence

Two hundred and fifty-one (251) occurrences of “Merkel” and 85 of “Makrela” were found in the CNPL corpus, along with 255 and 31 in the CYTB corpus, respectively. For “Kopacz”, 80 occurrences in the CNPL corpus and 98 in the

6. The nickname used to refer to Angela Merkel based on sound similarity and meaning “mackerel” (a common name applied to a number of different species of pelagic fish).

CYTB corpus were identified. While the quantitative difference here may indicate greater hostility towards the German politician, the strategies of verbal sexual abuse targeting both women are the same. In both cases derogatory terms, including those with sexual connotations, as well as incitement to sexual violence can be identified. Additionally, both politicians are deemed traitors who should be punished for their alliance with the Other.

The very name “Makrela” is interesting here as it is a pun on the surname of the Chancellor and the word *makrela* (‘mackerel’) denoting a species of fish which is quite popular in Poland. The term, already dehumanizing, is used in the CYTB corpus with the adjectival modifier *śmierdząca* (‘stinky’) or *zdechła* (‘dead’). Other adjectival modifiers used with “Merkel” in both corpora can be grouped into those referring to physical features, such as *thusta* (‘fat’) or *ślepa* (‘blind’), mental characteristics, such as *psychiczna* (‘psycho’), *obląkana* (‘insane’), or evaluative adjectives expressing contempt and disgust, e.g. *cholerna* (‘damn’), *pitolona* (‘frigging’). Her physical appearance is also targeted with expressions like *kurdupel* (‘shrimp’) or *Gruba Berta* (‘Big Bertha’). The latter, being the nickname of M-Gerät, the German light naval cannon used during World War I, has an additional meaning, granted the context in which commenters attribute to this female politician the intention to destroy Europe. Merkel is also addressed in the CNPL corpus as *komunistka* (‘communist’), *nazistka* (‘Nazi’), *lewaczka* (‘leftie’) or *Adolfina* (‘Adolphne’), the female equivalent of the male name Adolf, with obvious connotations. While these labels may express political criticism, other terms express strong negative attitudes: *idiotka* (‘idiot’), *kretynka* (‘jerk’) or *obląkana Anielcia* (‘insane little Angela’). The latter, being the Polish diminutive form of the name Angela is meant to express a condescending attitude. So is the term *mamusia* (‘mommy’), ironically assessing her refugee policy or the term *ciocia* (‘auntie’) used with reference to both Merkel and Kopacz, as in *Ciocia Merkel i ciocia Kopacz już podjęły decyzje* (‘Auntie Merkel and auntie Kopacz have already made decisions’). Adjectival modifiers of “Kopacz” are much less frequent and diverse and include *podła* (‘lousy’), *zasrana* (‘shitty’) or *pierdolnięta* (‘fucked in the head’). She is also referred to as *polski reptile* (‘Polish reptile’) and addressed as *stara baba* (‘old woman’), e.g.: *Ty stara babo weź ich sobie do domu podła Kopacz* (‘You old woman, take them [refugees] home, you lousy Kopacz’).

What is particularly interesting from the point of view of the analysis and the phenomenon of rape culture is a whole group of sexually offensive words used to refer to (as can be seen in Examples (1) and (2)):

- (1) *ta kurwa kopacz szmata zajebna dziwka niech ich za swoje utrzymuje* ('Let this whore, Kopacz, slut and fucking bitch, finance their [refugees] living with her own money')
- (2) *Polskie dzieci chodzą głodne, dorośli nie mają pracy, a kurwa Kopacz sprowadza zarazę z Afryki na nasz koszt* ('Polish children are hungry, adults don't have jobs and this whore, Kopacz, brings the plague from Africa at our cost')

or address the two politicians (3–9), including *kurwa* ('whore'), *zdzira* ('slut'), *suka* ('bitch'), *dziwka* ('hoe'), *szmata* ('slut') or *pizda* ('cunt'). Not only are the comments meant to humiliate and verbally subjugate the women, but they also contain threats, as in (6) and (7). With the hostility towards refugees which can be clearly seen (e.g. in the dehumanizing plague metaphor or terms like "donkey-fuckers"), the pro-refugee stance and policy of Merkel and Kopacz become the basis for denouncing them as traitors and prostitutes. At the same time, acts of violence are stereotypically attributed to refugees (3) and the modifier *islamska* ('islamska') is used with reference to Kopacz (6).

- (3) *Kopacz będziesz mieć Solidarność jak Arab ci upierdoli łeb lub pierdolnie ci kulkę i usłyszysz Allah Akbar ty chora pojebana pizdo* ('Kopacz, you will have Solidarity if an Arab cuts your head off or puts a bullet into your head and you will hear Allah Akbar, you sick fucked-up cunt')
- (4) *kopacz ty sprzedajna suko won z Polski* ('Kopacz, you venal bitch, go away from Poland')
- (5) *kopacz ty głupia kurwo daj się wydyć osłojebcom* ('Kopacz, you stupid whore let the donkeyfuckers fuck you over')
- (6) *Kopacz ty suko islamska, kiedyś nasze drogi się zejdą* ('Kopacz, you islamic bitch, we will meet one day')
- (7) *merkel zapłacisz za to ty kurwo !!* ('merkel, you will pay for it, you whore')

Some of the comments contain incitement to killing and violence; importantly also sexual violence, including rape. Hanging is "recommended" as punishment for "treason", that is, acting against the interests of one's own nation and supporting the Other (8–9).

- (8) *Powiesić kurwę za zdradę, a nie się pierdolić w lewacką demokrację i gender-tolerancję* ('This whore should be hanged for treason, instead of talking bullshit about leftist democracy and gender-tolerance')
- (9) *a ta komunistyczna suke Merkel to bym za j.. nie za cyce powiesił !!!* ('I would hang this communist bitch Merked by her b... not tits!!!')

“Rape”, associated with immigrants and refugees, is also referred to, often as something that could make the women involved change their mind and political decisions (10–12).

- (10) *MAM NADZIEJE ZE PANIĄ MERKEL ... TEZ ...ZERZNAŃ W TYŁEK* (‘I HOPE THEY WILL ALSO FUCK MS. MERKEL IN HER ASS’)
- (11) *może merkel musi byc zgwałcona przez muzułmanów aby zrozumiała ...*(‘maybe Merkel must be raped by Muslims to understand...’)
- (12) *Wysłać tam Kopacz z koleżankami! Potem przez rok by się po piździe nie mogła podrapać ;) mają wielkie dupska niech im się nadstawią* (‘Kopacz with her friends should be sent there! They could not scratch their cunts for a year ;) they have big asses so they should stick them out for them [refugees]’)

Interestingly, rape is not only advocated as a form of punishment, but also mentioned with reference to, as postulated by some of the commenters, unfulfilled sexual desires (13–14). Additionally, comments are made about Kopacz’s and Merkel’s appearance and attractiveness (12–14), as well as other women with similar views (12).

- (13) *Merkel jest stara brudna a zawsze chce dla siebie czarny chuj do dupy* (‘Merkel is old and dirty and always wants a black dick in her ass’)
- (14) *Pewno MAKRELA Nie ma kogo gwałcić bo biali barykadują się w domach, walić Makrelę ! 'Piękna" Adolfina tylko na to czeka.* (‘Makrela surely has nobody to rape as the whites barricaded themselves at homes, fuck Makrela. “Beautiful” Adolphine is waiting for it’)

One more aspect which should be mentioned here is that of humiliation. The intention behind rape, whether physical or virtual, is not only to subjugate but also to humiliate a female victim. One way in which this is done in the comments is by calling for Merkel or Kopacz to be gang raped. Another way, however, is insinuating that they desire to be raped, not being able to satisfy their sexual needs in a different way, or even not deserving anything better than that.

5.3 Rape and the Other

Two hundred and ten (210) occurrences of the *gwałt* (‘rape’) lemma were found in CYTB corpus and 247 in CNPL corpus. Attributed to the Other – refugees and migrants – “rape” serves as a dividing line between “us” and “them”, the West and the rest, Christianity and Islam. We are civilized and cultured, while they are primitive and brutal, with no moral values and no respect for women and human life in general, as the following examples demonstrate:

- (15) *ISLAM TO SEKTA mordy gwałtu i niewolnictwa !* ('Islam is a sect of murder, rape and slavery !')
- (16) *To jest bezprawnie oblężenie Europy przez dzikusów którzy gwałcą Europejki.* ('This is the lawless siege of Europe by savages who rape European women.')
- (17) *Będąc islamistom – zabijasz i gwałcisz wszystko co "niewierne" lub "zniewolone" wliczając kozy :) ('Being an islamist you kill and rape everything that is "infidel" or "enslaved" including goats:))*
- (18) *Już niedługo Polskę posiadą Islamiści którzy będą gwałcić kobiety dzieci kozy psy wszystko co się rusza paląc nasze kościoły i żądając SOCJALU I DARMOWYCH MIESZKAŃ !!!* ('Soon Poland will be conquered by Islamists who will be raping our women, children, goats, dogs and everything that's alive, burning our churches and demanding SOCIAL BENEFITS AND FREE ACCOMMODATION!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!')

Rape is seen as an integral part of the Other's religion, taken for granted as a cultural denominator. It is associated with the primitive (16), weapon of religious war (17), as well as uncontrollable sexual urges (18). Importantly, just as propensity for rape is attributed a priori to all Muslim refugees, so is the fact that they do not distinguish between women, children or even animals as objects of their sexual acts (epistemic and axiological proximization). Additionally, performing these acts by them is presented as current (17), habitual (17) and imminent (18) (temporal proximization). The metaphor of invasion (16) underlines intentionality behind rape, which is seen as a tool of subjugation and weapon of mass destruction. Hence, "axiological urgency" emerges: they pose a threat to our lives and our values which we need to defend (see Kopytowska 2015a, 143; Kopytowska and Grabowski 2017, 67).

Adjectival modifiers of "rape" in both corpora – *zbiorowy* ('gang'), *rytualny* ('ritual'), *brutalny* ('brutal') – highlight the collective character and recurrence of such practices as well as their brutality. Word sketches and concordances show clear patterns as regards victims of such rapes: *kobiety* ('women') and *dzieci* ('children'). These are very often preceded by an adjective *polskie* ('Polish'), *chrześcijańskie* ('Christian'), or possessive adjectives *nasze* ('our') or *twoje/wasze* ('your'), the latter being used when commenters are trying to persuade others to adopt an anti-refugee stance. Two interesting points can be made here. First, as shown by deixis ("our"), women (and their bodies) belong to the nation (see Baider 2018; Baider and Kopytowska 2018, 8–10) and thus have to be protected:

- (19) *Proszę was, zatrzymajcie tych terrorystów, nie pozwólcie, aby gwałcono nasze kobiety i obcinano nam głowy bo jesteśmy biali.* ('Please, stop these terrorists. Don't let them rape our women and behead us just because we are white')

- (20) *No i sie im bardzo dziwie ze chcą w Polsce uchodźców. Czy chcą gwałtu na naszych siostrach matkach dziewczynach a nawet babciach??* ('And I'm really surprised that they want refugees in Poland. Do they want rapes on our sisters, mothers, girlfriends and even grandmas?')

Those who comply with cultural norms and expectations, including heteronormativity and masculinism, are seen as dependent, vulnerable and thus deserving protection. Those who do not are deemed "sluts" or "whores" and thus not only disrespected but oftentimes singled out for punishment. Second, rape becomes either a threat to "our" lives and values or punishment for acting against these values (see Section 5.2). As shown in Example (20) the former may belong to different generations. Sometimes even the whole nation – us – may be presented as a victim (axiological and emotional proximization):

- (21) *A teraz oni nas okradają, porywają, gwałcą i mordują.* ('And now they are robbing us, kidnapping, raping and murdering')

Importantly, as in the example above, rape is then mentioned alongside other crimes, just as "rapists" is only one of the roles simultaneously attributed to the Other (21–23).

- (22) *nie wpuszczamy terrorystów, sadystów, gwałcicieli, morderców, rasistów i tych jebanych kozojebców rządnych naszej krwi i cierpienia* ('We will not let in terrorists, sadists, rapists, murderers, racists and these fucking goatfuckers desiring our blood and suffering')
- (23) *oni robią co chcą nikt ich nie kontroluje rabują, okupują pociągu, nawet gwałcą małe dziewczynki!!!* ('They are doing what they want, they are occupying trains, even raping little girls')

Temporal proximization is important here: rape has happened, is happening and is likely to happen again in the future. Space-wise, it is not clear either where the rapes mentioned have taken place – in Germany or elsewhere in Europe – but they are predicted to happen in Poland. There is thus continuity of the threat across time and space (spatio-temporal proximization) as the following examples demonstrate:

- (24) *Mordują masowo chrześcijan, gwałcą kobiety zabijają dzieci, podkładają ładunki wybuchowe.* ('They mass murder Christians, rape women, kill children and set explosives')
- (25) *Wykastrować ich pszymusowo, czarno to widzę będą gwałty na kobietach w biały dzień na sirodku ulicy* ('They should be castrated obligatorily. I see it in gloomy colours, women will be raped in broad daylight in the middle of the street.')

- (26) *Będą palić, gwałcić i mordować w imię Allacha.* ('They will be burning, raping and murdering in the name of Allah')

While the threat is seen as continuous and imminent, violence (including sexual violence) is presented as either intentional, strategic and religion-motivated or, paradoxically, uncontrollable, sex-driven and animalistic. Rape then is described as a weapon and a tool to conquer and destroy "white Europeans" or the result of a sex drive which has to be satisfied in any way possible (e.g. by raping animals or cars). While in the former case (27) it is meant to evoke fear and anger, in the latter (28) it is about the feeling of disgust.

- (27) *stąd te masowe gwałty żeby szybko naprodukować beżowych* ('hence these mass rapes to quickly produce the coloured')
- (28) *Islamista gwałci samochód, chcecie takich w Polsce?* ('An islamist is raping the car. Do you want such people in Poland?')

As the examples above show, rape is perceived as a threat to the security and integrity of "our nation". Being a physical threat, it also undermines "our" values, such as respect for women or the ability to control sexual behaviour. Associated with the Other, in this case Muslim refugees and immigrants, it serves to evoke hostility towards them, along with the self-defensive (verbal) violence. From this point of view, attempts to accept the presence of the Other are thus seen as attempts to welcome the enemy, or more specifically the Trojan horse. If such attempts are made by women who exercise power in the political sphere, they are doubly unacceptable. Not only are they against the interests of the nation(s), but they also undermine local white men's dominance.

6. Conclusions

Misogyny and xenophobia, along with verbal and physical aggression tied to them, are not new problems. They have existed across time and space and manifested in various forms. They have been appropriated by groups and individuals for various social and political purposes. Linked to preserving the status quo of the dominant group and deeply embedded in cultural patterns, they have been used to vilify and show contempt for any departure from the norm as well as for the Other, by definition considered a threat to cohesion and integrity of the group. "Body politics" has played an important role here. Sexuality, related to it, has been shaped and regulated by public policies and discourses. Gender violence has frequently been crucial in constructing nations and conducting wars, e.g.: World War II, the 90s' Balkan war and the genocide in Rwanda (1994).

The present article has explored the interface of misogyny and xenophobia in the context of online discourses concerning refugees and migrants, in particular Germany's and Poland's acceptance of them during the 2015 refugee crisis, and the role that the two female politicians, Angela Merkel and Ewa Kopacz, played in this process. I have examined this interface at two levels, namely in terms of what KhosraviNik (2014, 2017a, 2017b) calls the techno-discursive design of the media and socio-cultural patterns of heteronormativity, masculinism and rape culture. The Media Proximity Approach has been applied to explain the potential of cyberspace to enable, amplify and promote verbal aggression, including misogynistic hate speech. Changes in distance dynamics (involving interactivity patterns and anonymity), it was argued, have made potential victims of such aggression more accessible to perpetrators and vulnerable to the attacks. They have also allowed the latter to make the attacks more coordinated and more dehumanizing.

In addition to the affordances of digital media, sociocultural factors have been discussed here as conducive to online misogyny, in particular to a rape supportive culture promoting patterns of male dominance, which along with heteronormativity undermines women's subjectivity and independence. Women's bodies and sexuality are then appropriated by the nation which imposes its norms and expectations on them, transforming women into either vulnerable objects of care and protection or, if norms are not adhered to, objects of humiliation and contempt. In this context, "care racism" and misogyny seem to be interestingly interrelated. The same nation that swears to fight for the safety of its women is ready to expose some of them to punishment in the form of sexual violence to force them into submission.

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