

Cologne: attacks against women are the product of patriarchal domination and play into the hands of anti-immigrant racists.

On the night of 31 December in Cologne – but also in other towns in Germany, Austria, Finland and Switzerland – groups of men encircled hundreds of women over several hours (Close to 900 reports of assaults were received up to 25 January for Cologne, more than 100 in Düsseldorf, 150 in Hamburg, more than 170 in Frankfurt, etc.) and, acting collectively, stripped them of their personal belongings (stealing phones, bags and so on) and, in at least half the cases, sexually assaulted them. The compact crowd gathered inside and outside the central station was made up of young men, mostly immigrants from the Maghreb and the Middle East.

According to their testimonies, the women were petrified by the massive presence of the aggressors. They were surrounded and couldn't escape the horde of attackers. Here, a small group of Syrian refugees protected a woman. There, other women went to the police, who didn't help them because they were rapidly overwhelmed by the scale of what happened. Later the Cologne police tried to cover up the facts, following the usual instructions from their management to not talk about crimes committed by refugees. The attacks did not appear to be planned or coordinated, even if contact between "gangs" was a possibility¹. On the contrary, it looks like packs of men mutually encouraged each other in the use of force, without any restraint, any inhibition, without anything stopping them.

¹ See: "*Cologne, le révélateur d'un échec d'intégration*" ("Cologne reveals a failure of integration"), *Liberation* 22 Jan 16. It describes life in a largely Maghrebian neighbourhood of Düsseldorf. http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2016/01/22/cologne-le-revelateur-d-un-echec-d-integration_1428390

Ordinary male violence and something more

Despite their previously unseen characteristics², these events first of all looked like ordinary male violence – just like in the home, at work, in public transport and on the street – something experienced as part of the subordination of women everywhere, although certainly with varying intensity and forms. Secondly, these acts were committed largely by men coming from archaic patriarchal societies where women are objectified (like in the so-called developed countries) and privatised by individual males (which is more the case in the more backward countries) to assure the function of reproduction, and assigned to live in a domestic cage.

Those who don't bend to this deadly immobilisation are considered as disgraced women, sexual objects to degrade and punish. These men shut up in the misery of sexual segregation are not the oppressed but rather the oppressors, steeped in foul conceptions and relations towards women. There were also among them some long-established immigrants operating in the social and sexual enclaves of the periphery of the citadels of capital, where girls regularly pay a high price for the worsening of social relations.

² A question mostly of scale, because in all the major "festivals" across the world (the Bayonne carnival in France, the Rio carnival, Mardi Gras in New Orleans etc.) we can see this kind of thing happening but at a much lower level.

Sexual misery, social segregation, migration and Tahrir Square

If not all migrants are attackers, women living in Germany and Europe more generally are not the only ones subjected to outrages by these men. Let's remember the thousands of women migrants on the path to exile who are subjected to sexual violence by their travelling "companions", and their husbands who pimp them out to pay the smugglers. To this we can add the violence of cops, customs officers and transit centre guards. The comparison with what happened in Tahrir Square or in Tunisia – where women were humiliated and raped during the movements of social and democratic revolt, in 2011, – is limited³.

There the attacks were directly political, in a moment of much more elevated conflict, where women were going out sometimes for the first time into the public sphere and where there was a visible and organised Islamist movement.

That said, the men who gathered on the evening of 31 December potentially constitute one of the social bases of Islamofascism for which the question of women is a major issue. The macho and reactionary conception of "*impious woman, fair game*", defended by the violent political Islamists can even serve to justify these kind of events. "*The events of the New Year were the fault of the women, because they were half-naked and wearing perfume. It's not surprising that the men wanted to attack them. [dressing like that] pours oil on the fire*", said the Salafist imam of Cologne, Sami Abu-Yusuf, on the TV channel REN TV⁴.

But he wasn't alone to blame women. In a minor key, on 6 January the mayor of Cologne, Henriette Reker, advised women to keep "*an arm's length from strangers to avoid problems*"⁵

3 See our pamphlet: *EGYPT: a historic compromise over an attempt at democratic insurrection*, October 2011.

4 <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/diagola/blog/210116/cologn-e-elles-ont-ete-violees-parce-qu-elles-sont-moitie-nues-et-mettent-du-parfum-dit-l-imam-sami-abu>

5 <http://www.france24.com/fr/20160106-henriette-reker-bras-armelaenge-twitter-cologne-agression-sexuelle-gare>

Still pre-political, the events of that night also have the character of everyday attacks against proletarians. First of all there are the robberies, which can only be committed by scum without ambition or class consciousness, products of the relegation of part of the unemployed into clandestinity or criminality. Subsequently, by their function of feeding the heinous discourse and behaviour of populist and xenophobic formations (which are also against women and gay people) calling for vengeance and the organisation of neighbourhood militias, this leads to the closing of borders, the expulsion of immigrants and, in some countries, to the forfeiture of nationality and the loss of rights.

The rebound from the sexist attacks seriously harms migrants

A growing part of public opinion in Germany is therefore less and less favourable to allowing in migrants. Therefore these attacks take hostage the foreigners who find themselves squeezed between racist aggression⁶ and measures strengthening the state, such as being made to hand over money as a deposit on integration, and assimilation under threat of deportation.

On their side, the women of Germany can't expect anything from the law and the state in the immediate future because the criminal law does not protect women who don't obviously resist a sexual assault⁷. Only a response of direct and collective defence, by women first of all and with men radically opposed to patriarchy, could have reversed the situation.

Women against migrants? No, women against patriarchy, migrants against racism and all proletarians against capital and class society

Among the various elements of civil society, the polarisation between "women" and "migrants" led to ideological contortions in all camps while the real situation was unambiguous.

6 See : <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35280386>

7 See : <http://www.slate.fr/story/112615/scandale-cologne-alle-magne-durcir-droit>

The fear of being accused of racism, colonialism or “islamophobia” has become a dominant political driving force among numerous organisations of feminists and the left of capital.

This is produced under the combined effect of the political work of the Islamofascist fringes of anti-racism and the third-worldist perspective of fighting imperialism, which denies the existence of oppression and exploitation in the less developed countries. The attacks in Cologne certainly had something in common with political Islam, which is always willing to support hatred of women – just like all the other religions which have made women the slaves of men.

To implicitly accept that a situation of oppression automatically leads to a reactionary response on the part of the migrants, is just pure and simple racism. The specific oppression which the migrants are victims of cannot justify some of them turning into abusers of women. The attempt to avoid stigmatising anyone leads to a denial of reality.

In this context, the slogans of “*neither racism nor sexism*” put forward by women and migrants in Cologne shows the way, against the completely bourgeois questions of “*integrate or expel*” and counter to speculations about the clash of civilisations. There is only one community that’s worthwhile, **the human community** which today is negated by class division and the domination of capital.

Communism opens up the possibility of radically suppressing the material bases of women’s oppression. But their oppression will not mechanically disappear with capitalism. The class in movement will have to overcome masculine resistance in a fully conscious way.

The proletarian revolution must be tied up with a social revolution in relations between individuals which is capable, by socialisation of the means of production, of overcoming the sex division of labour, ending domestic servitude, ending childbearing as servitude, entrusting child-rearing to society and freeing the female mind and body.

Some important points

Let’s restate a few important points relating to the “woman question”:

- The oppression of women is closely related to the natural division of labour of the reproduction of the species. Childbirth is its objective foundation. This division is one of the premises of the social division between manual and intellectual labour, of the creation of social hierarchy.
- The natural division of labour of the reproduction of the species is congealed in the elementary social structure of reproduction (then of production) which is the family, the clan, the tribe etc. The means for reproducing the family is the same as for any other social structure: violence. A violence exercised over women, the first “asset” of man, the first manifestation of the reification of a human being. A violence made sacred by religion.
- Women have almost always engaged in two types of activity: the concrete and non-socialised work within the family of reproduction of the species (childbirth, education of children, being a sexual and affective object for a man, domestic labour to maintain the household) and social labour side by side with men, husbands or not.
- Capitalism has taken steps towards the destruction of the family by mobilising women into social labour on a scale incomparable with that of other class-divided societies which preceded it. Capital has transformed part of domestic labour into social labour (mechanisation and externalisation of many elements entering into the natural reproduction of the species; the explicit socialisation of women as a sexual object by prostitution and implicit by the assimilation of the sexual life of women to that of alienated men; education of children partly delegated to the state).

- But capitalism does not destroy the hard core of the oppression of women: the subordination of childbearing to the work of reproducing the species and the reification of the female body by men. Although shaken, the family, whether single-parent, recomposed, scattered, etc., reforms and restructures itself ceaselessly on this basis. As capitalism develops, the family progressively ceases to be a productive structure and becomes stripped of some reproductive functions. But the natural division of labour in the reproduction of the species continues in the negation of the female body, its reification and its transformation into a commodity for men, as well as in the raising of children.

- The socialisation of women by wage labour is not, in itself, a guarantee of emancipation from male domination. On the other hand, this socialisation reinforces the ranks of the proletariat quantitatively and qualitatively. Qualitatively because it introduces within itself the question of the relation between men and women (or more correctly of woman to man). But to pose the question of the oppression of women in the framework of wage labour does not necessarily imply its resolution. Women are far from having the same conditions as men, including in the waged workforce, without even mentioning that the demands of women for equality with men in wage labour can take the alienated form of reward for attachment to wage labour (with, for example, the objective of a presence in the hierarchy).

- The qualitative and quantitative reinforcement of the proletariat within capitalism is useful to the cause of women only if it manifests itself in independent struggle against capitalism as well as against all class societies AND against male domination. This is not straightforward as can be seen from the history of the modern proletariat.

- The proletarian revolution cannot deal with the woman question as if by magic. It must be linked to a social revolution of relations between individuals which is capable of a frontal assault on the hard core of the oppression of women, entrusting childbirth and child raising definitively to society and freeing the emotions and the bodies of women from male sexual dictatorship.

- Women therefore have every interest in the proletarian revolution happening. But their liberation depends on them, their strength and their capacity as a sex impose their needs, including on the revolution. The dialectic which will be set up will in no way be obvious and inevitable. On the contrary it's a safe bet that it will provoke an angry response from men as individuals who are not yet fully socialised. The new person will be born from the struggle of women, all women.

- The struggle of women is constant in class societies. For too long channelled into the domestic sphere, for all that, the resistance of women has not been weak and has often taken the radical form of a permanent war of the sexes.

In the 1960s and '70s, experiences of autonomisation in relation to the male world grew rapidly. Some groups of women tried to socialise private domestic labour through struggle. All these precious experiences ended in failure or in brief and/or partial advances. The road of isolationism practised by separatist movements also revealed itself as poor and restricted.

Women aspire to a reunified world where men are no longer a threat to them and where their sexuality and their sentiments can be expressed without limits. This is why they must take the side of the revolutionary proletariat, and found an egalitarian and uncompromising solid alliance with the aim of a common liberation. To do this, their own independent organisation (neither opposed, nor separated, we have to say) will prove indispensable once again.