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THE #METOO SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECT

AND ITS POTENTIALS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION

Laetitia Thissen

Me too. Two simple but powerful words. They shook the world and brought the huge extent of sexual harassment into the open. Since its very origins, the impacts of the movement have been numerous and far-reaching. The expression “Me too” first came to be known in 2006 when grass-roots activist Tarana Burke, in an effort to create solidarity with and among victims of sexual abuse, especially among young black women from unprivileged backgrounds, began using it to promote “empowerment through empathy”. Although picked up and made visible by celebrities, it originated and remained deeply rooted in grass-roots movements to help all sexual assault survivors, and more particularly women of more vulnerable groups, telling them “you are not alone, this happened to *me too*”. #MeToo symbolises the voice of women breaking the wall of silence that surrounded the ubiquitous and so long tabooed sexual harassment across all ages, sectors and places. Through social media, the hashtag spread the movement all over the world inciting women of all backgrounds to share their stories of sexual harassment. Beyond the headlines, data show the far-reaching impacts of the #MeToo movement. Hundreds of women and men have filed harassment complaints, called hotlines and come forward with their own #MeToo stories. The European Ombudsman drafted a list of good practices based on a review of the anti-harassment policies in 26 EU institutions and agencies ranging from awareness raising, workplace risk assessment, regular policy monitoring to mandatory training, swift procedures and rehabilitation measures¹. There has been a clear link between the

1 “EU Ombudsman creates ‘good practices’ list to combat harassment” (2 January 2019), The Parliament Magazine, Retrieved from: <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/eu-ombudsman-creates-‘good-practices’-list-combat-harassment>

boost of the legal fight against harassment and the public focus on the issue². France, for instance, saw a jump of complaints by 20% for sexual harassment and by 17% for rape according to the French Ministry of the Interior³. However, these numbers do not reflect the actual share of victims as only one in eight victims report to the police⁴. Sexual harassment therefore remains a painful reality.

Based on the principle that social justice and gender equality are two inseparable values lying at the core a progressive Europe, the Foundation for European Progressive studies (FEPS) is strongly committed to continue its work towards the achievement of gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence. Through this pamphlet, it becomes evident that the alarm call sent out by so many women from across the globe resonates strongly with the history of women's rights, the EU Gender Equality core values and with the progressive fight for social justice. Gender equality is enshrined as a fundamental value of the EU in its Treaties. Beyond the existing EU legal basis, gender equality has always been and continues to be a constant fight for women's movements and the Progressive family to guarantee its application in practice. We want to draw attention to the striking historical links exist between the present and past feminist movements. The nature of the famous case of the women strike movement of 1966 in the Herstal factory (Belgium) – which led to the EU's formal commitment to ensuring gender equality (through the introduction of article 119 of Rome Treaty on equal pay) – shares strong similarities with the contemporary case of the #MeToo movement:

-
- 2 "New data on #MeToo's first year show 'undeniable' impact", NBC News, Retrieved from: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-data-metoo-s-first-year-shows-undeniable-impact-n918821>
 - 3 "Forte 'hausse' des plaintes pour violences sexuelles en 2018" (31 January 2019), Le Monde, Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/01/31/forte-hausse-des-plaintes-pour-violences-sexuelles-en-2018-selon-le-ministere-de-l-interieur_5417410_3224.html
 - 4 "Forte hausse' des plaintes pour violences sexuelles en 2018" (01 February 2019), L'Obs, Retrieved from: <https://www.nouvelobs.com/societe/20190201.OBS9465/forte-hausse-des-plaintes-pour-violences-sexuelles-en-2018.html>

- As autonomous women movements, both movements played a key role in bringing the spotlight to an issue too long overlooked;
- Both sent a strong symbol capable of striking the minds;
- Both provided a pivotal moment finally giving a human face to the women victim of unequal pay in the case of the 1966 female social upheaval, as well as to women victim of sexual harassment in the case of the #MeToo;
- Both marked a turning point when women refused to stay silent about their situation;
- Both completely transcended social classes from the working class to feminist intellectual spheres in the 1960s or to Hollywood stars in the more recent #MeToo case.

Despite their differences, there are close connections between these two key historical moments that truly helped echo the voice of women fifty years ago as well as today. Therefore, we hope this pamphlet will contribute to the realisation that it is high time for progressive actors to seize the current momentum to push for women’s right to live in a Europe free from old, sexist and patriarchal structures the same way back then determined lead actors – such as the Belgian lawyer Eliane Vogel Polsky – used the Herstal female strike as a hammer to shake the political agenda in the name of all women in Europe. Together with other feminist activists and movements, feminist voices advocated for women’s right and equal treatment by bringing the individual concerns to the EU level invoking article 119. Taking inspiration from the past and looking at the future with the new European Parliament legislature, which counts more female MEPs as ever before⁵, FEPS seeks to encourage progressive alliances to build bridges against the threat of gender backlashes and the threat

5 “Record number of women become MEPs – but men still dominate”(1 June 2019), The Guardian, Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/01/record-number-of-women-become-meps-but-men-still-dominate>

of de-democratisation across the continent⁶.

In the light of the above, this pamphlet collects contributions from gender experts and activists providing a mapping of the complexities of sexual harassment in Europe with a focus on the hashtag #Metoo social media campaign, in particular Twitter, as a tool to understand the differing degrees of change achieved and still needed across Member States to eliminate sexist and sexual violence, highlighting the potentials for change (and risks) and illustrating the force of bottom-up movements in shaping the desired change. This compilation is the result of a research project entitled “Minerva Project on Gender, Equality and Diversity” designed and implemented by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), in partnership with *Fondazione Socialismo*, with the support of the European Parliament and MetooEP.

The **first chapter**, co-authored by Giulia Zacchia, Marcella Corsi, and Fabrizio Botti (*Sapienza University* of Rome, Italy), examines the evolution of the hashtag #MeToo in Europe by looking at how the Twitter campaign against sexual harassment unfolded in selected EU countries, illustrating how they embraced and re-interpreted the #Metoo movement. It is the result of a two years process and a peer-review presentation at FEPS in November 2018. In **chapter 2**, Julia Garraio analyses the potentialities and risks of the socio-cultural translations of the #MeToo campaign arguing that cultural and social change always occurs in the context of a particular space and time by focusing on the German case where the local version of the hashtag was distorted and instrumentalised to defend far-right policies resulting in a backlash against the feminist movement. According to her, #MeToo’s major achievement lies in the way it popularised debates on gender violence and sexual harassment prompting the reversal of extreme underreporting in the EU. Finally, in **chapter 3** Jeanne

6 European Parliament (2018). Resolution of 13 February on experiencing a backlash in women’s rights and gender equality in the EU (2018/2684(RSP)). Retrieved from: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0111_EN.html

Ponté shares her personal experience in building up the collective *MetooEP* movement launched together with workers in the European Parliament to fight sexual harassment in the institution as a concrete reaction to the *#Metoo* making a strong case for the role of bottom-up initiatives in the fight against workplace gender discrimination. Finally, Zita Gurmai, President of PES Women, FEPS Vice-President and women's rights life-long advocate offers some **political conclusions** in the last chapter.

Echoing with several recent surveys we conducted on sexism and sexual harassment reminding us that political efforts urgently need to be stepped up two years after the social media shock-wave described above (see for instance 2018⁷ and 2019 FEPS surveys conducted with Fondation Jean Jaurès⁸), our ambition is to build on the repeated calls from women's rights organisations⁹ for more action to bring EU anti-harassment policies in line with the legitimate expectations of a post *#Metoo* society. Until now, as indicated by J. Garraio, *#MeToo* has been an “unprecedented historic moment” not necessarily for its achievements, but for the debates that it has triggered. In order to move beyond debates and to contribute meaningfully to gender equity and to eliminate gender-based discriminations, the post-*#MeToo* era now needs to focus on the strengthening of weak and insufficient legislative frameworks against harassment at the workplace. In this endeavour, Social Democrats can play a key role in bringing together all the relevant actors from workers to employers, trade unions and decision-makers to build strong alliances and implement solid tools and strategies addressing sexism and sexual violence at work. First and foremost, the Council of Europe Convention on

7 FEPS-Fondation Jean Jaurès Survey on Sexual Harassment in Public Spaces in Europe and the USA (2018) conducted by Ifop, available here: https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/en_finalversion_rapport_ifop-fjj-feps-19.11.2018_trev.pdf

8 FEPS-Fondation Jean Jaurès Survey on Sexual Harassment at Work in Europe (2019) conducted by Ifop, available here: https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/116268_rapport_feps-fjj_uk.pdf

9 See for instance the 2019 European Women's Lobby Manifesto, available here: https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/european_women_s_lobby_manifesto_2019_final_.pdf

preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul convention) has to be fully implemented and translated into strong EU legislation and policy frameworks ensuring its smooth implementation across all Member States. Moreover, the adoption of a strong and binding EU Gender Equality Strategy foreseeing a new EU Directive on Violence Against Women is essential to lead the fight to combat violence against women¹⁰. These formal and structural frameworks to eliminate gender discriminations and inequalities are the only way to foster a true cultural shift in a Europe where all women enjoy equal rights, including at the workplace. As encapsulated in the best-selling author Chimanda Ngozi Adichie's words¹¹: "Some people will say that a woman being subordinate to a man is our culture. But culture is constantly changing. [...] Culture does not make people. People make culture. So if it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we must make it our culture". Therefore, it is now time for Europe to spur this cultural shift. It is now time for Europe to make sure that no one is left behind. And it is now time for Europe to be feminist!

10 "A New Social Contract for Europe" (2019), Party of European Socialists, Retrieved from: https://www.pes.eu/export/sites/default/galleries/Documents-gallery/PES-Manifesto-2019_EN.pdf_2063069299.pdf

11 Chimanda Ngozi Adichie (2014). We should all be Feminists, Fourth Estate

The complexity of #MeToo: the evolution of the Twitter campaign in Europe¹²

Giulia Zacchia, Marcella Corsi and Fabrizio Botti

SUMMARY

Social media campaigns have an important role in raising public awareness to define the extent, the diffusion and the evolution of harassment and in developing social support for changes as a fundamental component of primary prevention strategies. The main findings of this chapter indicate that: a) the social media campaign engagement against sexual harassment is higher with its locally translated hashtag than the international version; b) the social media campaign is polarised between an individual, more introspective level of sharing experiences (such as in France with #balancetonporc) and a collective awareness, active grassroots movement at workplaces (such as in Sweden with #sistabriefen); c) in order to understand how to foster a positive social engagement encouraging survivors to speak and share their experiences and to embrace social support for change, the “sentiments” in social media deserve further attention.

12 This paper has benefited from comments by the participants to several events: i) the IAFFE 2018 session on “Public policies and gender inequalities” (June 20th, 2018, SUNY New Paltz, USA); ii) the conference “Endangered Bodies. Representing and Policing the Body in Western Culture” (October 8th, 2018, Lisbon, Portugal); iii) a seminar held in Rome, at Sapienza University (November 7th, 2018). All received comments have been taken into due consideration. Usual disclaimers apply.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace sexual harassment is one of the main evidences and manifestation of power imbalance in the workplace. It affects women and men across different industries and occupations. It remains pervasive and pernicious all around the world with no exception for EU countries. The European Parliament¹³ stressed that “*sexual harassment is a violation of human rights linked to patriarchal power structures that need to be reshaped as matter of urgency*”.

In this chapter, the role of social media is analysed by looking at the #MeToo campaign on Twitter. Through the lens of the identified dimensions of sexual harassment (the workplace environment and the social environment), we seek to understand the influence of different social environments, cultural “sentiments” towards sexual harassment and its common understanding in different EU countries on *how* the hashtag #Metoo (and its locally translated versions) were received in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden.

13 European Parliament Report on measures to prevent and combat mobbing and sexual harassment at workplace, in public spaces, and political life in the EU (2018/2055(INI)), Retrieved from: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0265_EN.html

THE DIMENSIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

More than one in two women in Europe have been sexually harassed at least once since the age of 15¹⁴. Amongst them, 32% declared that the perpetrator was a superior, colleague or customer. The share of survivors goes as high as 75% for women in professions requiring qualifications or in top management jobs and 61% in the service sector. Moreover, 35% of harassed women never denounced the violence they have suffered, and only 4% reported the incident to their employer or the police. Numerous studies also demonstrate that more than half of working women describe experiencing “sexually harassing behaviours” at work, but less than 20% of these women actually associate the experience with “sexual harassment”¹⁵. Due to the normalisation of sexist and sexual violence (even amongst women), the persistent low social awareness and the insufficient channels for survivor’s support, cases of sexual harassment remain vastly underreported.

Although the problem is widespread in all EU countries, the legislation enacted to address the issue varies across the EU, reflecting the social and cultural differences in Member States. At the EU level, the European Equal Treatment Directives¹⁶ provide a common definition of harassment – and specifically sexual harassment – seen as a form of discrimination “*where unwanted conduct related to the sex of a person occurs*” or “*where any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, and of creating an intimidating, hostile,*

14 “Violence against women: an EU-wide survey” (2015), European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Retrieved from: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf

15 Magley, Hulin, et al. 1999; Magley and Shupe 2005

16 2000/78/EC and 2000/43/EC, 2006/54/EC

degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”¹⁷.

The ETUC Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work¹⁸ provides a clear taxonomy defining the various forms of sexual harassment as follows:

- can be physical, psychological and/or sexual;
- may be performed by one or more individuals;
- may be one-off incidents or more systematic patterns of behaviour;
- may take place amongst colleagues, between superiors and subordinates or by third parties such as clients, customers, patients or pupils;
- can range from cases of disrespect to criminal offences.

Drawing on the final report on the implementation actions of the ETUC Framework Agreement¹⁹ and on the idea that sexual harassment has its roots in gender stereotyping and sexism, we contextualise our analysis and reframe the concept of sexual harassment as composed of two dimensions, which are interconnected with a two-way causal relationship: the work sphere and the social environment sphere.

As graphically summarised in Figure 1, we consider the **workplace harassment** dimension (physical, psychological and/or sexual) but also the **social behaviour dimension**, which influences perceptions of harassment, both in terms of size and normalisation of

17 definition of 'sexual harassment' 2006/54/EC

18 <https://www.etuc.org/fr/node/3171>

19 <https://www.etuc.org/en/framework-agreement-harassment-and-violence-work>

violence. The social sphere has a direct influence on the environment where harassment is perpetuated, mainly due to:

- weak and insufficient legislative frameworks for governments, employers, companies and trade unions;
- labour market gender inequality and inequity (i.e. vertical²⁰ and horizontal²¹ gender segregation) ;
- absence of awareness campaigns.

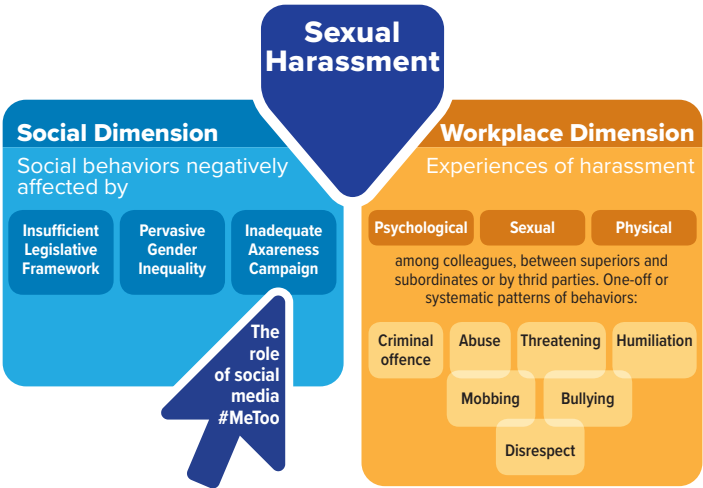


Figure1: Mapping the dimensions of harassment

Social media has played an important role both in raising public awareness to define the extent, the diffusion and the evolution of harassment and in developing social support for changes as fundamental component of primary prevention strategies. The European Parliament resolution of 26 October 2017²² on combat-

20 the concentration of women and men in different grades, levels of responsibility or positions.

21 the concentration of women and men in different sectors and occupations.

22 2017/2897(RSP)

ing sexual harassment and abuse in the EU goes in this direction, stressing the importance of **welcoming “initiatives such as the #MeToo movement that aim to report cases of sexual harassment and violence against women; strongly supports all the women and girls who have participated in the campaign, including those who denounced their perpetrators”.**

Based on the Eurofound (2015) ranking of EU countries addressing workplace sexual harassment, their policies and procedures in place at company level and the prevalent social awareness of the issue, we focus our analysis on:

(A) Sweden due to its long-standing and relatively systematic policies to prevent and tackle gender-based violence and harassment. The country’s relative high level of awareness leads to a higher share of workers reporting violence and harassment.

(B) Italy and Spain due to their low levels of violence and harassment reporting by workers combined with the low levels of social awareness.

(C) France and Germany due to the societal growing concern about the relevance of violence and harassment at work combined with the lack of social awareness of the malpractices and abuses.

Admittedly, the country case selection is concentrated in “Western” European countries because these are the ones where the MeToo social media campaign took up most strongly and where it proved the most powerful in attracting attention on the question. Whilst we must acknowledge the structural reasons preventing women in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from speaking up the same way, the grasp of #MeToo has been relatively poor in the region although women from the region are not spared from the underlying problem of gender-based violence. In Hungary, the campaign was confined to liberal and cultural circles, in Poland the hashtags

#JaTez (#Metoo in Polish) and #Metoo quickly faded away in the media, in Romania and Slovakia the movement remained limited whereas in Croatia the media attention focused on anti-feminist reactions and no real movement appeared²³.

Therefore, the country case selection criteria rests on a balance between countries which experienced a strong social media campaign around #Metoo on the one hand and which present different degrees of tools and policy frameworks combatting sexual harassment on the other hand.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT: FRANCE, GERMANY, ITALY, SPAIN AND SWEDEN IN COMPARISON

EU regulation has enabled some degree of consistency in the legislation of Member States addressing sexual harassment²⁴. However, **significant differences in emphases and approaches among countries due to the multiple dimensions of harassment persist**. Most Member States regulate violence under general criminal, civil and administrative laws but the general obligation on the employer to ensure health and safety under all aspects related to work is less developed.

In all five European countries considered in our analysis, sexual harassment is specifically mentioned in national legislation²⁵. Only

23 "#metoo in the East? Women's rights in south-Eastern and Eastern Europe" (8 May 2019), Open Democracy, retrieved from: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/international-civil-society-week/metoo-east-womens-rights-south-eastern-and-eastern-europe/>

24 Harassment is mentioned in the national legislation of 17 European countries

25 Women, Business and the Law Report (2018). World Bank

in Germany sexual harassment is not a separate criminal offense. Instead, it is considered under the generic category of libel and slander²⁶. Moreover, in the five countries considered, national laws also regulate the employers' responsibility to prevent and act against sexual harassment.

Table 1: World Bank's Protecting Women from Violence Scores

	PROTECTING WOMEN FROM VIOLENCE SCORE	Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	Is there legislation on sexual harassment in education?	Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	Are there civil remedies for sexual harassment in employment?
Spain	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sweden	80	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
France	60	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Germany	60	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Italy	60	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓

Source: World Bank (2018).

In Sweden, the Discrimination Act²⁷ clearly defines sexual harassment as a conduct of a sexual nature in working life that violates the dignity of a job seeker or an employee. It also applies to schools and university colleges. The law requires the employer to prevent harassment as far as possible and to render victimisation unacceptable. Furthermore, employers must have a system in place for

26 Libel: A published false statement that is damaging to a person's reputation; a written defamation. Slander: The action or crime of making a false spoken statement damaging to a person's reputation.

27 Chapter 1, Section 4 and Chapter 2, Section 3

detecting and correcting unsatisfactory working conditions, problems of work organisation or deficiencies of cooperation, which may cause violence. Employers also need to take countermeasures as soon as signs of harassment are detected (e.g. conducting special investigations with the objective of improving work organisation). Finally, the employer must provide employees survivor of harassment with adequate help and support.

In Italy, the definition of sexual harassment, close to the EU definition, has been introduced by the “Code of Equal Opportunities”²⁸ as a form of discrimination related to unwanted conduct, of a sexual nature, expressed in any way which violates, or is intended to violate the dignity of an employee or which creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment. In Italy, harassment is assimilated to mobbing and stalking. Harassment is therefore considered a crime, included in the section of the criminal code regarding *crimes against moral freedom* establishing that “*it is a criminal offence, punishable with imprisonment ranging from six months up to four years, to continuously threaten or harass another person to such an extent as to cause a serious, continual state of anxiety or fear, or to instil in the victim(s) a motivated fear for his/her own safety or for the safety of relatives or other persons linked to the victim(s) by virtue of kinship or emotional relationship or to force the victim(s) to change his/her living habits*”. Harassment is defined as a continuative and systematic pattern of behaviours. Moreover, according to the principle of equality provided by the Italian Constitution, employers must prevent and punish sexual harassment occurring in the workplace, adopting all necessary measures to guarantee a safe working environment, in which everyone’s dignity is respected and promoted.

In Spain, the Criminal Code dedicates a chapter to sexual harassment, stating that in a situation of labour, teaching or hierarchical superiority “*whoever solicits favours of a sexual nature, for them-*

28 Law no. 198 of 11 April 2006, Article 26.2

selves or for a third party, within the setting of a continuous or usual work relation, teaching or service provision relation, and by such conduct causes the survivors a situation that is objective and seriously intimidating, hostile or humiliating, shall be convicted of sexual harassment and punished with a sentence of imprisonment of three to five months or with a fine from six to ten months”²⁹. Moreover, sexual harassment is covered in Spanish legal frameworks Constitution (i.e. the right to physical and moral integrity) and in several labour laws:

- Workers’ statute establishing the ‘right of all workers to physical integrity’ and ‘respect for privacy and dignity’³⁰;
- Prevention of occupational risks³¹ establishing workers’ right to an effective protection on health and safety at work;
- Equal opportunities, non-discrimination and universal accessibility for disabled people³²
- Equal treatment of women and men³³

In France, sexual harassment is a criminal offence. It is defined as “*the imposition on a person, of repeated remarks or behaviour of sexual nature that impairs her/his dignity because of their degrading or humiliating character, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive situation*”³⁴. There are three legal frameworks addressing harassment at work: the Labour Code, the Criminal Code or the Civil Code.

29 Article 184

30 Article 4.2

31 Law 31/95

32 Law 51/2003

33 Organic Law 3/2007

34 Law no. 594 of 2012

- The Labour Code lays down that harassment by any person aimed at obtaining sexual favours for him/herself or for a third party is prohibited³⁵. It also lays down an obligation to prevent sexual harassment³⁶ for employers, who must take all the necessary provisions to combat sexual harassment.
- The Criminal Code³⁷ clamps down on the crime of sexual harassment, based on the existence of a relationship of authority and power. Contrary to the case of moral harassment, the perpetrator of sexual harassment can only be a hierarchical superior.

In Germany, the 2006 General Equal Treatment Act³⁸ mentions sexual harassment when an unwanted conduct of a sexual nature takes place with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of the person creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

The comparison shows that in all analysed countries there is an **increasing attention to codify the concept of sexual harassment on a legislative level** and to **clearly define the employers' responsibility of preventing and fighting sexual harassment**.

GENDER IMBALANCE IN LABOUR MARKETS AND POWER STRUCTURES

Sexual harassment stems from gender stereotyping and sexism giving rise to further forms of normalisation of gender-based violence.

35 Article L1153-1, 1/5/2008

36 L1153-5

37 Article 222-33

38 Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz Section 4

Therefore, another key area of analysis is the presence and intensity of gender imbalances in society. We concentrate our analysis on two aspects closely connected with sexual harassment:

1. **Gender gaps in the workplace** (i.e. equal access to the labour market, employment segregation and fair working conditions³⁹),
2. **Gender imbalances in power** (i.e. equality in decision-making positions across the political, economic and social spheres).

The gender gap in access to labour markets⁴⁰ varies across the five countries under consideration. Sweden presents the smallest gap while the largest gaps are present in Italy and Germany. In Italy, France and Germany, women's activity rate is lower than the EU average. Considering the full-time equivalent (FTE⁴¹) employment rate, Italy reports the lowest rate for women with 30%, while in Sweden this rate is 57%. The EU average for the female FTE employment rate is 39.6%.

Gender segregation at the workplace is visible not only looking at the share of women in managerial positions (**vertical segregation**) but also at the participation of women and men in the traditionally

39 data by Eurostat, EU LFS, 2015 and Eurofound, EWCS, 2015

40 Following the domains of the last Gender Equality Index by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2017), the access to labor market is proxied by the activity rate as a crude measure of the decision to participate in the labor market and the rate of full-time equivalent (FTE) employment that, taking into account the higher incidence of part-time employment among women, compares each worker's average number of hours worked with the average number of hours worked by a full-time worker.

41 A full-time equivalent, sometimes abbreviated as FTE, is a unit to measure employed persons or students in a way that makes them comparable although they may work or study a different number of hours per week. The unit is obtained by comparing an employee's or student's average number of hours worked to the average number of hours of a full-time worker or student. A full-time person is therefore counted as one FTE, while a part-time worker / student gets a score in proportion to the hours he or she works and/or studies. For example, a part-time worker employed for 20 hours a week where full-time work consists of 40 hours, is counted as 0.5 FTE. The workforce of an enterprise, activity, or country etc. can then be added up and expressed as the number of full-time equivalents.

feminised sectors such as education, human health and social work activities (**horizontal segregation**). With the exception of Sweden, all analysed countries demonstrate a level of vertical segregation higher than the EU-28 average. Horizontal segregation points to a higher proportion of women in education, human health and social work activities in Sweden and France while it is lower in Spain and Italy. In all the five countries women suffer from higher vulnerability than men because more women are employed with temporary contracts exposing them in turn to a higher risk of sexual harassment in some cases. Moreover, women from all the five countries under study face higher difficulties to benefit from flexible working time arrangements, which are essential for the reconciliation of working and family duties.

Sexual harassment is one of the main evidences of gender imbalance of power visible from the lack of female participation in decision-making positions across the political, economic and social spheres⁴². Looking at the political, economic and social power as gender (in)equality sub-domains, Sweden showcases the most balanced structure of “women’s power”. Nevertheless, the sphere of economic power is still heavily male-dominated across the five countries. Spain features the lowest share of women in the domain of economic power in the largest listed companies. Similarly, the economic power and social power is male-dominated in Germany. In France, female visibility in Parliament is lower, but the country features the highest share of female members in a national Central Bank. Finally, Italy reports on average the lower indexes across all the three domains of power with the only exception in research funding organisations’ decision-making positions.

42 Based on EIGE data on the sub-domain of political power (representation of women and men in national parliaments, government and regional/local assemblies), of economic power (proportion of women and men on the boards of the largest nationally registered companies that are listed in stock exchanges as well as of national Central Banks), and of social power (share of women in decision-making positions in research-funding, media and sports organisations, which holds a symbolic importance in shaping social norms).

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA. FROM EMPATHY TO AWARENESS TO ACTION: THE #METOO CAMPAIGN

The original purpose of “Me Too”, when activist Tarana Burke used it first in 2006 on Myspace, was part of a grassroots campaign to promote “empowerment through empathy” among women and girls of colour, who have experienced sexual abuse, particularly within underprivileged communities. As Burke explained in her later “Me Too” documentary, the 2006 movement was essentially about survivors supporting survivors. It was about community healing and community action for young and vulnerable women.

Actress Alyssa Milano changed and expanded the purpose and the focus of “Me Too” when she encouraged the spread of the hashtag #MeToo as part of an awareness campaign in order to reveal the ubiquity of sexual abuse and harassment. After the public revelations of sexual misconduct allegations against the film producer Harvey Weinstein, Milano tweeted on the 15th of October 2017: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write #MeToo as a reply to this tweet”. **The genius of the hashtag #MeToo on social media lied in its capacity to illustrate the huge extent of the problem and the ubiquity of sexual harassment and assault.** It shed light on how many people have experienced these events themselves in the workplace. Herewith, **the focus of “Me Too” changed, moving from empathy to awareness, from vulnerable to all women, from violence against women to a specific kind of violence in the work place (i.e. sexual harassment).** From 2017, what really emerged from the campaign is the alarming evidence of gender power imbalances in workplaces and the subsequent abuse of power at work in all the economic sectors. From then, millions of people started using the hashtag, countless numbers of individuals from all over the world came forward, sharing their personal stories or endorsing their support to this viral online

movement. It spread to dozens of different languages and it has come to mean different realities to different people with different backgrounds and ethnicities. In many places, **local equivalents of the international #MeToo campaign were created⁴³: #balancetonporc in France (“#DenounceYourPig”), #quellavoltache in Italy (“#ThatTimeWhen”), #yotambien in Spain (“#MeToo”), #sistabriefen in Sweden (“#TheFinalBrief”)** to cite just a few examples from Europe. **The timing and the reaction of the local equivalents of #MeToo is a first social thermometer to measure the awareness, social engagement and status of gender inequality in labour markets and the degree of gender-based imbalances in the structure of power at work in different countries and industries.**

For example, **while in France the movement #balancetonporc was very focused on individuals, the movement in Sweden** (whose most evident local hashtag was #sistabriefen for the communication industry) **aimed mainly at gathering women into mutually reinforcing economic sector.** It grouped them in a structural route in order to sign a series of petitions demanding change against sexual harassment and gender imbalance within specific industries. Moreover, while the main focus of the French and Swedish campaigns was to provoke change, looking for a more equal future, the tweets posted by women in Italy had a much stronger personal focus sharing past experiences and challenges faced when reporting sexual assault to their families, colleagues and the police.

The international #MeToo campaign as well as the Italian #quellavoltache and the Spanish #yotambien launched by the lawyer Estefanía Palomino released an emotional wave of testimonials by women around the world, comparable to an online group therapy aiming not to leave the survivors alone and blamed. By contrast, the French answer, #balancetonporc took it a step fur-

43 More information: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/10/metoo-balancetonporc-yotambien-women-around-the-world-lash-out-at-harassment/>

ther. The hashtag #balancetonporc was launched on 16 October 2017 by Sandra Muller, a New-York-based French journalist, with the aim of inviting sexual harassment survivors to name their perpetrators. Muller started the campaign with a tweet she naming the man who addressed her with obscene language: *You have big breasts. You are my type of woman. I will make you come all night.* In response, women in France have swamped social media with hundreds of stories of aggression, assault, and harassment. The #balancetonporc movement has been heavily criticised in an open letter published by the French actress Catherine Deneuve and more than 100 other French women from the entertainment industry in the newspaper *Le Monde* on 13 January 2018.⁴⁴ The letter argues that the #MeToo and the #balancetonporc movements have gone too far by publicly denouncing private experiences and have created a totalitarian climate. They claimed that “rape is a crime. But insistent or clumsy flirting is not a crime, nor is gallantry a chauvinist aggression”. According to the letter, the #MeToo and #balancetonporc movements instead of empowering women served the interests of “the enemies of sexual freedom, of religious extremists, of the worst reactionaries” and of those who believe that women are “separate beings, children with the appearance of adults, demanding to be protected”.

France is not the only country witnessing a backlash against the international calls for change epitomised by #MeToo. There were extremely virulent reactions by the Italian press when the Italian actress and director Asia Argento revealed that she had been raped in 1997 by US producer Harvey Weinstein. As a reaction to the Italian public scorn and sceptical reaction to women denouncing abuse, the blogger Giulia Blasi launched the hashtag #quellavoltache on twitter on the 12th of October 2017, three days before Alyssa Milano’s first #MeToo tweet. It was created to raise awareness on the sexist culture that justifies and minimis-

44 “Nous défendons une liberté d’importuner, indispensable à la liberté sexuelle”(9 January 2018). *Le Monde*. Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/01/09/nous-defendons-une-liberte-d-importuner-indispensable-a-la-liberte-sexuelle_5239134_3232.html

es violence and blames survivors, especially when they decide to denounce the abuses as Asia Argento. The Italian activist Lorella Zanardo explains that the Italian public reaction is rooted in a strong sexist culture, influenced by the media tycoon and former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, whose commercial TV networks have participated in shaping Italian society for three decades, creating a culture where it is accepted that a woman is used as a decoration, desirable object, dancing provocatively, never uttering a single word. In this stubbornly patriarchal society with a strong prejudice against women, #quellavoltache aims to define harassment as an endemic phenomenon of Italian society, seen as so “normal” that many women find it difficult to recognise it as such. The hashtag seeks to break the wall of *omertà* (code of silence) that condemns a woman survivors of harassment at work to silence, shame and guilt. To quote Laura Boldrini, former president of Italy’s lower house of Parliament, the #MeToo movement “in Italy certainly hasn’t had the same impact” since women fear the repercussions of speaking up⁴⁵. The movement even caused public apathy and the survivors have been virulently attacked in the news media. Therefore, **the #MeToo and its local equivalent has had a far lesser positive impact in Italy than in other European countries.**

By contrast, the experience in Sweden differs completely. The Swedish social media campaign made a strong impact on real life towards changing pathological workplaces. The local hashtags were set up very quickly. At first as “secret groups”, i.e. people could only join if personally invited by other members. The virtual groups were organised by women in the sectors of law, politics, technology, unions, journalism, dance, sport, construction, communication and more. The groups managed to use their industry-specific expertise to help each other. For example, when some women shared stories of harassment in the commu-

45 “In Italy, #MeToo is more like ‘meh’ ” (16 December 2017). The New York Times, Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/world/europe/italy-sexual-harassment.html>

nication industry, facing backlash from employers for speaking out, those from the legal industry group were able to help. In return, women from the communication industry could help, guiding others in the writing of press releases, talking to the media, and answering difficult questions. The most widespread hashtag in Sweden was #sistabriefen (#TheFinalBrief) launched on 28 November 2017, calling for change within the communication industry. The Swedish journalist Elin Ahldén, one of the initiators of #sistabriefen, clearly explains the shared conviction of the #sistabriefen movement, that it is only the beginning of a greater change. “Of course it’s about preventing sexual assault and rape in the workplace, but it’s also about shifting a norm⁴⁶”.

In Germany, the #MeToo campaign has also been instrumentalized by far-right activists to amplify xenophobia in Europe and to promote European white supremacists against migrants and refugees. This has been the case with the “120 decibels” campaign, a reference to the volume of most pocket alarms carried by some women as a defence device against abuse and violence. It first appeared on Twitter on 30 January 2018 with the hashtag #120dB. The movement against gender-based violence perpetuated by migrants is an attempt to normalise hate against immigrant and refugees presenting women as the victims of both migrant sex crimes and of wrong immigration policy.

Although the evolution of this phenomenon in terms of its diffusion, reaction and social engagement still deserves further attention, confronting the different national #MeToo campaigns provides a comparison of the different general contexts and reactions in Europe.

46 #MeToo: 'We're shouting in unison, because that's what Swedes do (November 2017). The local SE, Retrieved from: <https://www.thelocal.se/20171129/metoo-were-shouting-in-unison-because-thats-what-swedes-do>

#METOO: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In our research, we conducted a content analysis of individual tweets with the specific hashtags. We investigated the tweets via #MeToo in different languages, and its local, European equivalents (*#balancetonporc*, *#quellavoltache*, *#yotambien*, *#sistabriefen*, *#db120*). Through a comparative analysis of Germany, Spain, France, Italy and Sweden, we focused on the different levels of social engagement in the #MeToo campaign against sexual harassment, on the specific sub-topics addressed by individual tweets and, in particular, on how individuals label harassment, gender identity, the #MeToo movement and feminism.

To analyse the #MeToo social campaign we collected the Twitter posts (from October 2017 to April 2018) containing the #MeToo hashtag and some other European local hashtags: *#balancetonporc* for France, *#quellavoltache* for Italy, *#yotambien* for Spain and *#sistabriefen* for Sweden⁴⁷. We collected a total of **2,174,787 posts** from **1,203,564 Twitter users**. We considered only the publicly shared posts and we analysed all the meta-data associated with the post. The geographical origin of a post was proxied by the language used because tweets cannot be geo-tagged. In other words, if a post is written in Italian, it is assumed that the author comes from in Italy or lives there.⁴⁸

The highest number of tweets and users that tagged the #MeToo recorded in this study (if we exclude the tweets in English) is in France, while the lowest is in Italy (table 2). Looking at the local hashtag, the highest usage was recorded in France where the hashtag *#balancetonporc* has been shared in 114,283 tweets and by 49,183 tweeters.

47 We obtained data about the tweets using a Python-built application programming interface (API).

48 The *#yotambien* hashtag gathered support from across the Hispanic world, not only in Spain but in Latin America too. But, to be clear, for us those tweets refer to Spain.

Table 2: #MeToo on Twitter from October 2017 to April 2018

	Total No. of posts	Total No. of users
Total	2,174,787	1,203,564
Languages		
English	1,705,214	721,970
French	117,404	50,936
German	53,405	19,447
Spanish	44,320	26,194
Swedish	38,021	12,421
Italian	18,069	9,388
Local hashtags #		
#MeToo	2,048,092	847,229
#balancetonporc	114,283	49,183
#yotambien	7,237	4,965
#sistabriefen	336	149
#quellavoltache	9,048	3,831

The evolution of the interest in the #MeToo campaign was similar in all the analysed countries, i.e. from the first tweet by Alyssa Milano on the 15th of October 2017 until the end of April 2018 (figure 2). The only exception can be noted in Sweden, which recorded a peak in November 2018, that is when the local hashtag #sistabriefen emerged, highlighting the different effect of the Swedish social media campaign. In the four other languages, the evolution of the salience of the campaign followed the main stages of the international (mainly North American) social media campaign in English. There are two main peaks in January and March 2018. In January, numerous actions raised awareness on the #MeToo phenomenon, for instance: the launch of the *Time's Up* campaign, celebrities wearing black to honour survivors of sexual abuse during the Golden Globes Awards, the unprecedented Women's March organised in New York. Meanwhile, the Deneuve letter in France

inflated the social debate in Europe. In March 2018, another peak in interest is observed and coincides with the 2018 Oscar ceremony when celebrities turned up in black again but also with the unprecedented “feminist strike” in Spain where over five million female workers stopped working under the slogan “If we stop, the world stops”.

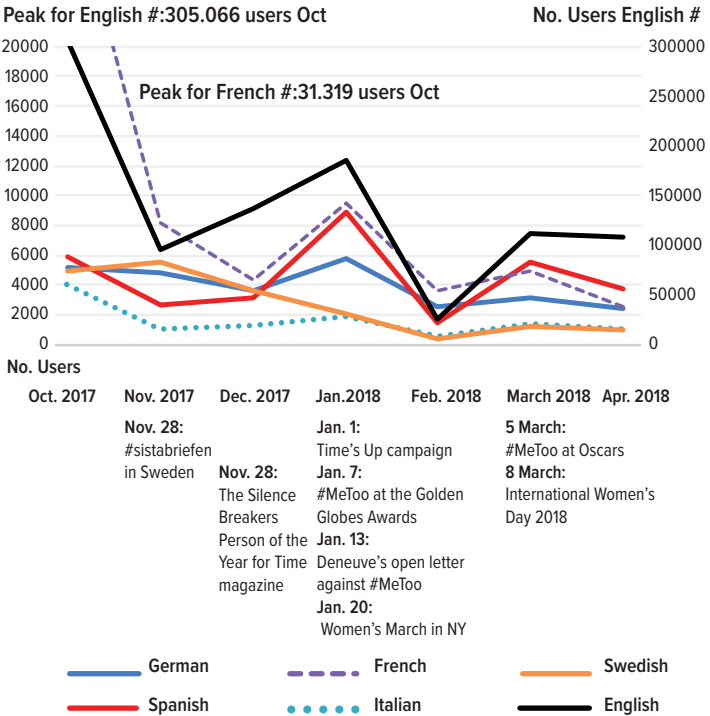


Figure 2: Evolution of interest in #MeToo by language, October 2017-April 2018

Given the viral nature of the hashtag MeToo, how did the related tweets engage other Tweeters?⁴⁹ On average each #MeToo post collected 7.28 likes and has been retweeted 3.37 times (see Table 3). #MeToo tweets in Swedish collected the highest average number of likes (7.67), while those in Italian received the lowest amount (4.73). **Local hashtags collected a significantly higher engagement:** the tweets published under the Italian hashtag #quellavoltache for example, received almost twice as many likes (8.63) than the Italian language tweets under #MeToo. The same applies for Spain and France too.

#MeToo-related posts are socially engaging and therefore it is not only important to consider the quantitative but also their qualitative coverage. The textual analysis⁵⁰ points to **differences in the #MeToo campaign between an individual and more introspective way of sharing experiences, as in France, and a collective awareness and active grassroots movement at workplaces in Sweden. Furthermore, there is a difference in places where gender-based violence occur. In Sweden, the workplace is clearly identified as the main point of reference, while in Italy violence in the household and workplace are used interchangeably. Moreover, the identification of women as “victims” is evident only in Italy and Germany.**

49 For this purpose, we computed statistics about the social engagement such as the number of “likes” these tweets received, number of times a tweet from this dataset is retweeted and the number of hashtags attached.

50 We looked at the most frequent words used in the posts in the different languages. Then, we focused on three main words: “women”, “harassment” and “feminism” in order to grasp how the #MeToo tweets label these concepts. We computed pointwise mutual information (PMI) using twitter as a data source. PMI defines the relation between two words. We analysed the content of the tweets, in all the different languages considered here, to identify how women are perceived, in terms of background and personal characteristics of experiences and of reactions to harassment. We also identified the most common concepts and words connected with the term “harassment” and “feminism”.

Table 3. Local social engagement with the #MeToo campaign (average values)

# by language						
	English	French	Spanish	Italian	Swedish	German
likes	7.33	4.92	5.17	4.73	7.67	6.52
retweets	2.7	3.2	2.79	2.59	2.53	2.32
hashtags	2.4	2.76	1.94	2.36	1.86	2.28
#MeToo and Local #						
	#MeToo	#yotambién (ES)	#balancetonporc (FR)	#quellavoltache (IT)	#sistabriefen (SE)	
likes	7.28	6.41	5.80	8.63	3.88	
retweets	3.37	4.42	3.97	3.00	1.21	
hashtags	2.31	1.98	3.20	2.35	2.69	

Finally, the sentiment analysis⁵¹ of the collected #MeToo tweets shows that, among the hashtags considered, the tweets labelled #yotambien are those which expressed the most positive emotions compared to #balancetonporc and the international #MeToo (table 4). Considering that Spain has the highest level of legal protection against gender-based violence, a female activity rate higher than the average EU-27 and low horizontal segregation, this hints at the close interconnections between the two dimensions of sexual harassment in figure 1 (p. 16), namely: insufficient legislative framework, pervasive gender inequality and inadequate awareness campaign.

Table 4: *Sentiment distribution for Twitter posts (%)*

		#MeToo	#balancetonporc	#yotambien
Strong negative	0	0	0	0
	1	74	84	48
	2	23	15	51
	3	1	1	1
Strong positive	4	0	0	0

51 Sentiment analysis or opinion mining is the computational study of people's opinions, sentiments, emotions, appraisals, and attitudes towards entities such as products, services, organisations, individuals, issues, events, topics, and their attributes. To measure the type of sentiment on twitter, we used a deep learning technique, a powerful machine learning technique that learns multiple layers of representations or features of the data and produces state-of-the-art prediction results. For example, driverless cars use "deep learning algorithm". It helps the car to differentiate between pedestrian, lamppost, traffic signals etc. It learns from image, text or voices. Models are trained by a set of labelled data and neural network that has many layers. Along with the success of deep learning in many application domains, deep learning is also popularly used in sentiment analysis in recent years specifically to extract sentiments from social media posts. We applied deep learning for Sentiment Analysis of the tweets labelled with the hashtag #MeToo, based on Tree-LSTMs model. We had to restrict the analysis to the tweets in English. Each tweet has been associated with a score from 0 to 4: 0 indicates a strong negative attitude, 2 neutrality, 4 strong positive sentiment. The deep learning model we used considers a full representation of the tweet (and not just the single words). The sentiment depends on how words create the meaning of tweets. For example, the model has learned that 'funny' and 'witty' are positive, but the following sentence is negative: "This movie was neither funny, nor witty". The sentiment analysis underlined a general negative sentiment in the posts that used the hashtag #MeToo. Therefore, it is more interesting for our analysis to consider the "positive sentiment" in the tweets because it represents a positive social engagement in the campaign both in the direction of encouraging survivors to speak and share their experiences and to embrace a social support for change.

CONCLUSIONS

In a time of deep polarisation in society, #MeToo can offer possibilities for engaging in dialogue, for articulating related aspirations for social change. It is about establishing alliances in fighting rape culture and sexism transnationally and forging spaces for common combats. Above all, it is about bringing the public to discuss issues of gender equality and sexual violence. Social media campaigns have an important role in raising public awareness to define the extent, the diffusion and the evolution of harassment and in developing social support for changes as a fundamental component of primary prevention strategies.

Several key findings emerged from this research. Firstly, the international version of the #Metoo found many locally translated equivalents, which spurred higher social media campaign engagement compared to the international albeit original version. Secondly, the content analysis of the tweets reveals a polarisation of the #MeToo campaign between an individual and more introspective level of sharing experiences, as in Italy and France, and a collective awareness and concrete actions in order to change the status quo, as in Sweden (e.g. petitions, group complaints, class actions, etc.). Thirdly, the sentiment analysis of the #Metoo tweets indicated that positive or negative emotions are directly correlated with the positive or negative social and workplace dimensions of sexual harassment. In other words, insufficient legislative frameworks, pervasive gender inequalities and inadequate awareness campaign are closely connected.

This chapter illustrated that despite the overseas origins of the #MeToo movement, Europe embraced and re-interpreted it, although quite differently according to the underlying sexual harassment dimensions, namely the social environment and the workplace dimensions, in each country.

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Challenges and Backlashes of #MeToo: the case of Germany

Júlia Garraio⁵²

SUMMARY:

Burke's 2006 "Me too" and the 2017 #MeToo are both part of a long feminist tradition of women organising themselves to combat rape culture, fight for the empowerment of women and denounce the judicial system for allowing so often the impunity of sexual violence and the pervasiveness of sexual harassment. Both result from and interact with larger societal tendencies into which they introduce new dynamics. Hence, the European translations of the 2017 #MeToo operate as part of a broader spectrum of agendas with which they inevitably interact. In this chapter, J. Garraio analyses how the movements' deep embeddedness in wider aspirations and local agendas entails the potential of the movement for social change but also the risk of having it interacting with anti-emancipatory agendas and being appropriated by them. The author illustrates her argument by focusing on the German example where the local version of the #MeToo was distorted and instrumentalised to defend far-right policies resulting in a backlash against the feminist movement.

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INTRODUCTION

Following the sexual abuse allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, actress Alyssa Milano initiated the hashtag #MeToo, encouraging victims of sexual harassment to tweet about their experiences “to give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem”. As it became known, the phrase “me too” goes back to 2006, when grass-roots activist Tarana Burke, in an effort to create solidarity with and among victims of sexual abuse, especially in the context of young black women from unprivileged backgrounds, began using it on MySpace to promote “empowerment through empathy”. Both moments – Tarana Burke’s 2006 “Me too” movement and the 2017 #MeToo – are part of a long feminist tradition of women organising themselves to combat rape culture, fight for the empowerment of women and denounce the judicial system for allowing so often the impunity of sexual violence and the pervasiveness of sexual harassment. As expressions of wider feminist aspirations for social change, both result from and interact with larger societal tendencies into which they introduce new dynamics. Hence, the European translations of the 2017 #MeToo operate in the larger time and as part of a broader spectrum of agendas with which they inevitably interact. These processes of translation are inevitably transformed and framed by the specificities of each cultural-historic background. The fact that this propensity for transformation through translation is deeply embedded in wider aspirations and local agendas entails the potential of the movement for social change but also the risk of having it interacting with anti-emancipatory agendas and being appropriated by them. This chapter will address precisely some potentialities as well as risks that can be observed in the process of translating #MeToo in Europe. The last part will focus on Germany by expanding the analysis of the hashtag #120db.

2.1. #METOO: ENTHUSIASM AND DILEMMAS

Despite of the enthusiastic media response to #MeToo as an opportunity to raise awareness to and combat sexual harassment and abuse, there were also cautious reactions among feminists. Consider, for instance, the “mixed feelings” expressed by Dubravka Zarkov and Kathy Davis in their January 2018 editorial for the feminist review *European Journal of Women’s Studies (EJWS)*.⁵³ Their concerns revolved mainly on the issues of the “social locations of the perpetrators and victims” and their “media visibility”. Arguing that agency is more than individual initiative, but a “*practice* that is instrumental for social change”, and advocating grass-roots activism and transforming institutions that frame sexual violence “as a collective issue facing all women”, Zarkov and Davis (2018) were apparently apprehensive regarding the achievements of #MeToo as a “platform for individual women who were confident enough to stand up and powerful enough to be heard.” Voicing some discomfort with the “trials by media” “where individual men are publicly ‘blamed and shamed’ for actions for which they often suffer severe consequences, and before having a chance to defend themselves”, they alerted to the risk that “making a person (especially the accused) visible” might be mistaken for “making the problem visible”.

EJWS’ editorial touches key issues that underlie some of the main points of criticism that have been raised against the 2017 movement. Among them the fact that the first people to use it were white, wealthy women, more precisely Hollywood celebrities. Since the origin of the phrase “Me too” goes back to the black activist Tarana Burke, but it was actress Milano’s hashtag that went viral, some activists feared that its context in terms of ethnicity, class and gender might reinforce white privilege and

53 Zarkov, Dubravka; Davis, Kathy (2018), “Ambiguities and dilemmas around #MeToo: #ForHowLong and #WhereTo?”, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, volume 25: 1, 3-9, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1350506817749436>.

erase the role of black women as agents of anti-rape initiatives.⁵⁴ As Catherine Rottenberg summed up,⁵⁵ many voices mainly on the left feared that the movement might “easily become part of a neoliberal feminist discussion, which ultimately individualises and atomises each person who uses the hashtag while disavowing the socioeconomic and cultural structures shaping our lives”, thus omitting “the women who are perhaps most vulnerable to violence - sexual or otherwise - such as immigrant, domestic workers, and low-income women of colour”. Hence, the efforts by many activists, including by its initiator Tarana Burke, to re-centre the MeToo discussion on women working in economically disadvantaged sectors.⁵⁶

Another issue briefly touched upon by the EJWS’ editorial, which would become a strong point of contention, refers to the danger of the media becoming a surrogate of the legal system, with the risk of having rumours and defamation replacing due judicial procedures. Woody Allen’s case is part of this discussion. The allegations against him for the sexual assault of his en seven years of step daughter back in the 1990s, which had not been corroborated by two judicial investigations, became devastating for his career in the aftermath of #MeToo. The acclaimed feminist writer Margaret Atwood also galvanised some media attention due to her signature on a 2016 petition calling for an independent investigation into the firing of a British Columbia professor accused of sexual harassment by a student. Her op-ed “*Am I a bad feminist?*” (*The Globe and the Mail*, 13 Jan 2018),⁵⁷ where she argues for the need of dealing with allegations of sexual harassment in the legal

54 Angela Onwuachi-Willig examines this issue in “What about #UsToo?: The Invisibility of Race in the #MeToo movement”, *The Yale Law Journal*, volume 128, 18 Jun 2018, <https://www.yalelawjournal.org/forum/what-about-ustoo/>.

55 “Can #MeToo go beyond white neoliberal feminism?”, *Al Jazeera*, 17 Dec 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/metoo-white-neoliberal-feminism-171213064156855.html>.

56 See, for instance, the discussion “High-Profile Women Break the Silence on Sex Assaults, But Low Wage Workers Still Vulnerable to Abuse”, *Democracy Now*, 7 Dec 2017, https://www.democracynow.org/2017/12/7/high_profile_women_break_the_silence.

57 <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/am-i-a-bad-feminist/article37591823/>.

system, is a response for the backlash that she received from feminists in the context of #MeToo. According to several critics, the wave of allegations against powerful men, the sometimes sensationalist media coverage of high-profile cases, the propagation of allegations through social media without any legal corroboration, and the damaging consequences for some of the accused, risked discrediting the movement as a “witch hunt”.⁵⁸ In a recent interview, Burke warned precisely about an “unwavering obsession with the perpetrators – a cyclical circus of accusations, culpability, and indiscretions” as an outcome of a culture “prone to fixate on high drama”, and called for the movement to shift its focus back to survivors and invest in survivor-support programs.⁵⁹

Long before the polemic “Deneuve’s letter”,⁶⁰ there were voices on the other side of the Atlantic fearing that #MeToo might derail into moral panic, practices of policing sexuality and, as some accusations involved homoeroticism (see actor Kevin Spacey’s case), the promotion of conservative and anti-LGBT agendas.⁶¹ Critics alerting to the risk of instrumentalisation by diverse anti-emancipatory agendas became louder in the context of specific high-profile cases.

58 See, for instance, the debates in Sweden following the suicide of Benny Fredriksson: Darek Scally “High-profile death prompts backlash against #MeToo in Sweden”, *The Irish Times*, 30 Mar 2018, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/high-profile-death-prompts-backlash-against-metoo-in-sweden-1.3444849>; “You can break a person”: Widow of #MeToo witch-hunt victim blames campaign for husband’s suicide”, RT, 1 Aug 2018, <https://www.rt.com/news/434820-me-too-suicide-sweden/>.

59 Liz Rowley, “The Architect of #MeToo Says the Movement Has Lost Its Way”, *The Cut*, 23 Oct 2018, <https://www.thecut.com/2018/10/tarana-burke-me-too-founder-movement-has-lost-its-way.html>.

60 “Nous défendons une liberté d’importuner, indispensable à la liberté sexuelle”, *Le Monde*, 9 Jan 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/01/09/nous-defendons-une-liberte-d-importuner-indispensable-a-la-liberte-sexuelle_5239134_3232.html.

61 See, for instance, Masha Gessen “When does a Watershed become a Sex Panic?”, *New York Times*, 14 Nov. 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/when-does-a-watershed-become-a-sex-panic>.

Tariq Ramadan's affair⁶² figures among the most contentious so far in part because, contrary to the majority of powerful men in the spotlight of the #MeToo era, the allegations against him were followed by a judicial process and, what is rare, his detention during the course of the investigation. Many prominent voices from academia, journalism, decolonial activism and cinema launched an open letter to expose, what they claimed, was a process fraught with errors and inconsistencies, a failure of the French judiciary system and sign of its anti-Muslim bias.⁶³ Some accused the coverage of the case of being Islamophobic⁶⁴ and pointed out to the way the whole affair was being handled as a political character assassination.⁶⁵ Furthermore, allegations of instrumentalisation of #MeToo to "*get money from rich men*" have also been recurrent, especially in the US. The allegations of rape against football star Cristiano Ronaldo by an American woman⁶⁶ have been met in his home country, Portugal, largely with disbelief in part because, back in 2010, lawyers settled a confidential agreement between the two sides with the payment of a large sum of money.

In order to better grasp the emotional reactions and the backlash against #MeToo generated by the cases of some celebrities, one has to look not only at the problematics inherent to "*trials by media*", but also at the anxiety, among some sectors of society, of having one emancipatory agenda (gender equality) potentially discrediting another one. The heroisation of certain celebrities

62 It is the biggest repercussion of the #MeToo movement in France: the influential Swiss-born academic Tariq Ramadan, a professor of contemporary Islamic studies at Oxford University, has spent the past nine months on remand in prison after two French women accused him of raping them in hotel rooms in Paris and Lyon. See more here: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/31/tariq-ramadan-admission-sparks-fresh-row-over-claims>

63 "Appel international pour une procédure juste et équitable", 14 June 2018, <https://frdptr-cjpm.e.nationbuilder.com/>.

64 See, for instance, Hamid Dabashi, "The Harvey Weinstein of Islam – anyone?", Al Jazeera, 24 Oct 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/harvey-weinstein-islam-171023080753676.html>.

65 See, for instance, Khaled Abou El Fadl "On the Tariq Ramadan affair", Al Jazeera, 31 Jul 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/tariq-ramadan-affair-180722140955000.html>.

66 "Cristiano Ronaldo's Secret", Spiegel Online, 19 April 2018, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/der-spiegel-football-leaks-exclusive-cristiano-ronaldo-rape-allegation-a-1143910.html>.

as embodiments of positive values is a key element here. For instance, Ramadan, a most influential Muslim intellectual, world-wide famous as a strong critic of the French *laïcité* model and of islamophobia in Europe, is widely praised as a scholar who has been relentlessly fighting for the empowerment of Muslims in Europe, while football star Ronaldo, son of a cleaning woman from one of the most deprived regions with the highest inequality in Portugal, Madeira, is regarded in his home country as the hero of a “rags to riches” narrative. In sum, though one should not dismiss the legitimate willingness by the public to scrutinise such high-profile investigations nor ignore the sexist tones that pervade the comments of some of supporters of the accused (specially in social media), one has to consider as well how, among large sectors of the population, public figures such as Ramadan and Ronaldo embody positive liberating agendas which are perceived as being incompatible with the social imaginary around rapists and sexual aggressors.

2.2. #METOO: A WORK IN PROGRESS

As this brief and random overview of the debates and criticism around #MeToo exposes that what started as a call to end the culture of silence around sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace, immediately conflated, converged and intersected with broader discussions regarding different forms of sexual harassment, abuse and rape. Therefore, it would be enriching to broaden the previous chapter’s twitter analysis by examining how #MeToo articulates and interacts with other hashtags and movements from the same period that address sexual violence, such as the Spanish #cuéntalo (tell it). In the context of widespread indignation over the April 2018 sentence in “la manada” gang rape (the accused were found guilty of sexual abuse, but cleared of rape charges because the victim did not fight back), women started sharing their stories of sexual abuse in Twitter and demanding legislation more

suited to combat gender violence and sexual crimes.⁶⁷ On one hand, the loud protests by Spanish women against what they perceived as endemic sexism in the judicial system were emboldened by #MeToo and the dynamics it had created to give visibility to stories of sexual abuse through social media; on the other hand, #cuéntalo created its own dynamics and became itself a source of inspiration in other countries. The hashtag was used by women in Latin America and the Caribbean to denounce the high levels of gendered violence in their countries.⁶⁸ Concerning Portugal, women's mobilisation around #cuéntalo and #MeToo pervaded Portuguese public debates after a controversial verdict cleared of rape charges two men, who had had sexual intercourse with a woman in alcoholic coma, stating that there had been an "environment of mutual seduction" in the disco where the crime occurred.

By generating space to articulate experiences of sexual abuse, #MeToo and related hashtags contributed decisively to produce and popularise a language to speak in public about the complexities of sexual violence and to address with empathy the so-called "grey zones", thus creating solidarity with women who traditionally tended to be blamed or at least be considered partially responsible for the abuse and violence they suffered. The two court decisions are emblematic examples of verdicts that resonate with moralising discourses about "risky behaviours that contribute to rape" (e.g. consumption of alcohol, accepting the company of strangers at night). It was precisely this subtext that caused such widespread outrage in Spain and Portugal. This openness to re-examine the concept of consent and its embeddedness in broader power structures and cultural imaginaries is present from the very beginning of #MeToo. For instance, the tenuous lines between agency

67 "#Cuéntalo: the hashtag women are using to tell their stories of abuse", *El País*, 30-04-2018; https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/30/inenglish/1525091693_227611.html; Gina Benevento "Spain MeToo moment: #BelieveYou", *Al Jazeera*, 8 May 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/spain-metoo-moment-ibelieveyou-180508094155579.html>.

68 Tom Phillips, "#Cuéntalo: Latin American women rally around sexual violence hashtag", *The Guardian*, 3 May 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/03/cuentalo-latin-american-women-rally-around-sexual-violence-hashtag>.

and submission/oppression, or rather the limits and constraints of consent, frame actress Asia Argento's testimony about her sexual encounters with Weinstein. Certainly, the "grey zones" emerging from her account attest for the backlash against her, namely in her home country, Italy, where she was often discredited as behaving like a prostitute; however, testimonies like hers have also been fuelling sophisticated discussions about the complexity of sexual violence and exploitation.

MeToo's strength and potential to contribute for social change lies precisely in its openness and flexibility to connect with other cases, its nature as a work in progress, as an inspiration which can be reclaimed and transformed by activists worldwide to fight for gender equality and generate alliances. Activists and politicians seized the public impact of #MeToo and cases such as the above-mentioned court decisions to call attention to the problems of legal prosecution of sexual crimes and to demand the adoption of legislation according to the 2011 Istanbul convention.⁶⁹ In fact, **#MeToo's major achievement so far is precisely the way it popularised debates on gender violence and sexual harassment, how, by addressing with empathy such a wide range of situations** (rape, sexual abuse and exploitation, sexual harassment, daily sexism, encompassing the many "grey zones" in-between), **it contributed to the creation of a context prone to negotiate social change.** In sum, a context to reverse the situation of extreme underreporting of sexual harassment in the EU observed in the 2014 FRA survey quoted earlier. In a recent interview, Tarana Burke pointed precisely at the possibilities opened by the impact of the 2017 hashtag: "If #MeToo didn't go viral last October, I would still be marching around with my little "me too" T-shirt on and trying

69 See Amnesty International report Europe: Right to be free from rape – overview of legislation and the state of play in Europe and international human rights standards, 24 November 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/9452/2018/en/>. In Portugal, one of the countries pointed by AI for having outdated rape legislation, the socialist government is currently planning, with the support of at least two other parties (BE and PAN), to reform national legislation according to the Istanbul convention.

to get people to talk about it, trying to make a difference.”⁷⁰ In the same interview, she spoke of #MeToo as an **“unprecedented historic moment” not necessarily for its achievements so far, but for the debates that it has triggered**: “We have never confronted sexual violence in this way in this country. We’ve never taken a step back to listen, to really understand the effects of sexual violence, from sexual harassment to rape and murder.”

2.3. THE GERMAN CASE

Cultural and social change always occur in the context of a particular space and time; local agendas, specific events and cultural traditions have been framing #MeToo and determining how its translations converge, connect and interact with other agendas and movements. Regarding hashtags such as #cuéntalo, there is clearly a fruitful convergence of #MeToo with a movement which contributes to the same combat for gender justice; however, other local appropriations of #MeToo suggest frictions and possible instrumentalisations that may end up by damaging the potential of the movement. Such risks can be observed through an example from Germany, for instance.

As the previous chapter correctly pointed out, the German hashtag that is closer in time to #MeToo is #120db (January 2018). Its promoters produced a video “Frauen wehrt euch! 120db” [Women defend yourselves! 120 decibels], which immediately went viral among anti-immigration sectors in Germany and abroad. The video resonates with well-established aesthetics, discourses and tropes of feminist anti-rape discourse that are much present in the Metoo campaign: talking about sexual abuse from the perspective of the victims; denouncing widespread silence around the pervasiveness of sexual abuse and society’s unwillingness to combat rape culture; the performance of rape-victims’

70 KK Ottesen, “#MeToo founder Tarana Burke reflects on the movement — and the reckoning”, 6 Nov 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/metoo-founder-tarana-burke-reflects-on-the-movement--and-the-reckoning/2018/11/02/c17c31e4-cbd7-11e8-a3e6-44daa3d35ede_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.334fbeb420eb.

suffering as a step opening up for a defiant attitude of resistance; the construction of sisterhood through women's experiences of violence under patriarchal structures. However, in the 120db video these familiar feminist topics are culturalised to fit a dichotomy that postulates victims of sexual abuse as European (white) women and sexual violence as a product of foreign patriarchal cultures that oppress women and which, according to the women speaking in the video, are threatening German society through immigration. In Germany, the names Mia, Maria and Ebba, which are repeated throughout the video, are immediately identified as victims of violence perpetrated by asylum seekers: 15-years old Mia was stabbed to death by her ex-boyfriend in Kandel in early 2018; Maria (Landburger) was the victim of a rape-murder case by an asylum-seeker in Freiburg 2016; Ebba (Åkerlund) was a 11-years old girl who was killed in a terrorist attack in 2017. Had the aim of the video been the denunciation of sexual violence in German society, the name Ebba would not have been included and instead other names would have been added. The aim of the video, however, is not to address the whole spectrum of sexual violence nor to show empathy with all victims of sexual violence. That would have required listening to empathising with asylum seekers and migrants who had experienced sexual abuse. The video focusses solely on violence perpetrated against German white women by some asylum seekers and migrants in an effort to depict all migrants as potential rapists, and to conceive sexual violence as a product from abroad, as an import and a side-effect of Chancellor Angela Merkel's immigration policies. Therefore, many voices saw in the video "120db" not an attempt to fight sexual violence and sexism but a racist agenda, which, relying on the much-entrenched phobia of the immigrant as potential rapist, capitalised on the #MeToo moment to promote anti-immigration policies.⁷¹ Produced by the German Identitarian Movement (Identitäre), 120db defends policies that are at

71 See, for instance, "#MeToo von Rechts", Tagesschau, 01-02-2018, <https://faktenfinder.tagesschau.de/inland/metoo-von-rechts-101.html>; Maria Luzia, "Rechter Feminismus=Rassismus+Neosexismus", der Freitag, <https://www.freitag.de/autoren/maria-luzia/rechter-feminismus-rassismus-neosexismus>; Nina Mast, "Far-right activists and alt-right trolls are using #MeToo movement to bolster their xenophobia", Salon, https://www.salon.com/2018/02/11/far-right-activists-and-alt-right-trolls-are-using-the-metoo-movement-to-bolster-their-xenophobia_partner/.

the core of the program of the German far-right political party AfD. #120db is an emblematic expression of “femonationalism”. This concept was coined by Sara R. Farris to examine the links between feminism and right-wing nationalism in contemporary Western societies and the exploitation and co-option of feminist themes by anti-Islam and xenophobic campaigns. By depicting Muslim men as oppressors of women and as such as a danger to Western societies, these anti-immigration groups have been instrumentalising gender equality to promote racist rhetoric and policies.⁷²

The video proves how the co-option of feminist topics by racist agendas results in a backlash against the feminism associated with #MeToo. The video acknowledges its tense relation with #MeToo: it does not present itself as part of the movement, but rather as its rival. By claiming that “#120db is the true #MeToo against the true [threat]’ for girls in Europe”, the video accuses #MeToo of not addressing the “real” danger facing European women. #MeToo is referred to only in the English subtitles, the German original mentions another hashtag, #aufschrei (*ye/p*, i.e. a quick, sharp bark or cry)⁷³. Hence, the video tries to reach out to two audiences: the English subtitles are aimed at an international one which is familiar with #MeToo, while the German voices reach out to a German speaking audience that was exposed to the debate generated by the 2013 hashtag #aufschrei prior to #MeToo. In fact, though a historic examination might identify #120db as a local expression of #metoo, the German hashtag that is closer to #MeToo, both in its nature and its aims, is #aufschrei. It shares a similar context of enunciation, namely women with a privileged access to the media denouncing sexual misconduct by powerful men. #aufschrei was initiated by a group of feminists calling women to share their experiences of sexual violence and daily sexism. The tweet coincided with the publication of an article by journalist Laura Himmelreich

72 Sara R. Farris (2017), *In the Name of Women's Rights. The Rise of Femonationalism*. Duke University Press.

73 “#120db ist der wahre #aufschrei gegen die wahren Bedrohungen für Frauen in Europa”.

on the magazine Stern accusing a prominent politician of sexual misconduct,⁷⁴ thus triggering a heated debate in Germany about the pervasiveness of sexual violence and sexism in society.

Though #120db is a far-right response to #aufschrei, the major feminist initiative that it opposes to and attempts to replace as “the voice of women” is a more recent one: #ausnahmslos. *Gegen sexualisierte Gewalt und Rassismus* [translated: #Without exception. Against sexualised violence and racism].⁷⁵ In the aftermath of the moral panic generated by the sexual assaults in Cologne in the 2015/16 New Year’s Eve, some feminists linked to #aufschrei (e.g. Anne Wizorek), created #ausnahmslos, a hashtag that resonates with broader feminist efforts and social engagement resisting the culturalisation and political instrumentalisation of the Cologne assaults and sexual violence more broadly.⁷⁶ The massive dimension of sexual assaults in some German festivities (e.g. Oktoberfest) and the poor record of German law and tribunals in preventing and punishing sexual crimes were often invoked to resist readings of sexual violence as an Arab/Muslim phenomenon. #ausnahmslos stands for a German feminism which combats sexual violence regardless of the origin and ethnic identity of the aggressors and which denounces as racist those who only address it when aggressors are perceived as being “others” and “from abroad”. #ausnahmslos shares the key principles of #MeToo and #aufschrei (gender justice and the combat against sexual harassment and sexual violence), but through a rhetoric that displays its awareness of the risks of having feminist struggles being appropriated by racist agendas in contemporary Germany (and Europe).

74 Laura Himmelreich, “Der Herrenwitz”, Stern 5/2013, <https://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/stern-portraet-ueber-rainer-bruederle-der-herrenwitz-3116542.html>.

75 <http://ausnahmslos.org/>.

76 See, for instance, “#ausnahmslos: Der Aufschrei nach Köln”, Spiegel online, 11-01-2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/web/ausnahmslos-kampagne-von-feministinnen-nach-koeln-a-1071504.html>.

In the context of the German debates about Cologne, the tendency to depict sexual violence belonging to another cultural context cannot be disconnected from the claims made by police, politicians and media that the events during the New Year's Eve resembled the massive sexual assaults by groups of men in demonstrations in Cairo in the aftermath of the "Arab Spring" (the phenomenon of "taharrush gamea"). The first news about Cologne already made the link with Tahir Square.⁷⁷ In early January the German Federal Criminal Police Office said that the phenomenon "taharrush gamea" had just been imported to Germany.⁷⁸ In early February, Cologne's new police chief linked the assaults to practices from the countries of origin of the perpetrators.⁷⁹ In early June, an internal Federal Criminal Police Office report confirmed that most perpetrators were North African and had arrived in Germany during the European "refugee crisis". However, the report stressed that most asylum seekers in the country, especially those coming from Syria, did not engage in criminal behaviour. The report established a link between Cologne and sexual assaults in Cairo ("taharrish gamea") and India ("Eve teasing"), but it attributed the assaults foremost to lack of police presence/intervention, group dynamics in a context of alcohol and drugs and frustration among perpetrators (lack of future perspectives and chances of being granted asylum).⁸⁰

Many voices criticised the use of the Arab word "*taharrush gamea*" to refer to the events in Cologne as a way of othering sexual violence and of avoiding to address the events in

77 See, for instance, Anete Dowideit; Kristian Frigelj; Tim Röhn, "Plötzlich spürte ich eine Hand an meinem Po", Die Welt, 04-01-2016, <https://www.welt.de/vermischtes/article150593304/Plotzlich-spuerte-ich-eine-Hand-an-meinem-Po.html>.

78 Martin Lutz, "Das Phänomen 'taharrush gamea' ist in Deutschland angekommen", Die Welt, 10-01-2016, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article150813517/Das-Phaenomen-taharrush-gamea-ist-in-Deutschland-angekommen.html>.

79 "Cologne attacks 'not organized': police chief", The Local, 12-02-2016, <https://www.thelocal.de/20160212/cologne-attacks-were-not-organized-police-chief>.

80 Kristian Frigelj, "Polizeiversagen bestärkte die Kölner Sex-Täter", Die Welt, 07-06-2016, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article156038699/Polizeiversagen-bestaerkte-die-Koelner-Sex-Taeter.html>.

the larger context of sexual violence in German society, i.e. the word was seen as a strategy of racialising rape, a rhetoric that was contributing to the wave of racist attacks following the sexual assaults and ultimately could legitimise legislation that facilitated deportation and restricted immigration.⁸¹ There were however some intellectuals and feminists from North African countries who spoke about possible similarities and continuities between the events in Cologne and violence against women in North African countries. For instance, the Egyptian feminist Miral Al-Tahawy argued that the assaults in Cologne's New Year's Eve and in the Arab Spring were no coincidence, but a symptom of a sick society⁸². According to her, in Egypt, women's bodies had become a surface for the marginalised to take revenge against social injustice and deep inequality. She also blamed political Islam for normalising the oppression of women. Other voices from North African countries include the Algerians Kamel Daoud and Marieme Hélie-Lucas, who contributed to *Der Schock – Die Silvesternacht von Köln*, a collection of essays about the New Year's events. The volume was edited by the prominent and controversial German feminist Alice Schwarzer, a very vocal critic of political Islam, who in the aftermath of the assaults, linked Cologne to Cairo, arguing that they were a product of a specific brand of Islam, Islamic fundamentalism.

One can easily see how the arguments linking Cologne to Cairo, especially when advanced by intellectuals and feminists from North African countries, could fuel the racialisation of rape and the othering of certain forms of sexual violence as an import. Should we therefore dismiss these voices as “useful fools” who inevitably end up playing the game of the far-right? Their argu-

81 See, for instance, Alex Shams “Neither Taharrush Gamea nor Sexism are Arab ‘Cultural Practices’”, The Huffington Post, 21-01-2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/alex-shams/sexism-isnt-arab-cultural-practice_b_9022056.html; Ricarda Drüeke, Die TV-Berichterstattung in ARD und ZDF über die Silvesternacht 2015/16 in Köln, Berlin 2016.

82 Miral Al-Tahawy, “Der Frauenkörper ist das Ziel eines Klassenkampfes”, Spiegel Online, 15-02-2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/frauenrechte-und-islam-sexuelle-gewalt-als-symbol-der-krise-a-1075021.html>.

mentation is not unfamiliar to research about “rape culture”, a key concept of feminist theory which was coined in the 70s to examine the pervasiveness of sexual violence in American society, i.e, to identify which socio-historical aspects make sexual violence possible in a certain context. These North-African intellectuals do not engage in orientalist approaches to Islam, their analysis tends to be situated in political and economic tensions that shape contemporary north-African societies (deep frustration resulting from economic deprivation, lack of future perspectives and deep resentment fuelled by continuous foreign intervention). The pertinence of their analysis to explain the sexual assaults in Cologne can be contested by a wide range of arguments; however, labelling them bluntly as Islamophobic ignores their complexity and the non-Eurocentric background of their authors. The problem with the discussion in Germany (and Europe) derives from a current political environment where such arguments are immediately racialised, simplified, appropriated, distorted and instrumentalised by anti-immigration voices. Discussions of sexual violence have certainly been complicated by the way the racist prejudice of the foreigner as a carrier of a threatening sexuality has been fuelling far-right propaganda. However, the risks of instrumentalisation should not prevent us from listening and working closely with feminists, activists, intellectuals and scholars from North-Africa as partners in combating sexual violence and toxic masculinities transnationally.

In a time of deep polarisation in society, MeToo can offer possibilities for engaging in such a dialog, for articulating related aspirations for social change: not by stigmatising racialised groups as having a propensity to rape, thus fuelling racism and making sexual violence invisible as such, nor by avoiding the difficult examination of the socio-cultural elements which, under certain circumstances, may contribute to the occurrence of sexual violence among certain individuals in certain contexts. It is about establishing alliances in fighting rape culture and sexism transnationally and forging spaces for common combats. Above

all, it's about bringing the public to discuss issues of gender equality and sexual violence. Because, as Tarana Burke recently reminded us, the need to continue this conversation is as urgent as ever: *“Culture shift doesn't happen in the accusation; it doesn't happen in the disclosure. Culture shift happens in the public grappling with these questions. Because nobody has firm, definitive, perfect answers.”*⁸³

83 See footnote 18.

Bringing grassroots activism into the fight against sexual harassment in the European Parliament: the MetooEP Movement

Jeanne Ponté

SUMMARY:

Has MeToo lived up to its full potential? The short answer is no according to Jeanne Ponté. Today, MeToo movements are facing the most challenging obstacle: moving forward. This is exactly why she took strong action inside the European Parliament to shed light on a silenced reality and to create a counter-power end the culture of silence, to stop blaming the victims, and to change the existing structures. In this chapter, she shares how her experiences with sexual harassment within the EU institution lead her to launch MetooEP, a group of workers of the EP from different political groups, nationalities, ages and work positions with the ambition to fight against sexism and sexual abuse in the European Parliament. Ponté was attributed a Special Award of good administration by the European Ombudsman for the various MetooEP actions – ranging from a petition calling to end harassment and abuse in the EP, a blog collecting anonymous testimonies to a pledge for candidates asking for commitment to actively fight sexual harassment – evidencing that there is a need for strong grassroots activism to advance gender equality.

The future depends entirely on what each of us does every day; a movement is only people moving. – Gloria Steinem

INTRODUCTION

A strong wake-up call came from everywhere in the world - be it in the private or public sector, as well as in representative institutions - in echo to the MeToo revolution and in answer to the media attention to gender equality that it generated.

Many strong statements and condemnations against inappropriate behaviour were made, that some pretended to have just discovered. Testimonies came from famous actresses in Hollywood or from workers in the textile industry in India, or, or much longer ago, from nuns of the Catholic Church.

The political world, as the heart of decision making and *per se* synonymous with power imbalances and competition is, naturally, not deprived of its share of scandals. If looking for a common denominator in politics between national, European or international levels of action, or between political groups, frontiers or even age, one can identify the normalisation of sexual harassment as an persistent and common trait.

Everywhere and in every language, the expression “Women’s voices are breaking free” popped up when talking about sexual harassment. This however wrongly suggests that women were not free to speak up until now.

This expression is depreciative, for a woman, for a citizen, and for an activist on gender equality.

Women were always free to speak up or not. What has changed is that ears are now ready to listen and to accept those multiple voices and testimonies of sexual abuse.

But, could we say that MeToo has yet lived up to its full potential? The short answer is no.

Today, MeToo movements are facing the most challenging obstacle: moving forward. Awareness is good, but action is better. The fight against sexual harassment and abuse should be a shared goal and a priority for all. However, inventing a new paradigm, changing mentalities across the world and making structures that have never been put into question, evolve is a long path, potentially full of frustrations.

In this chapter, I will share my experience in the European Parliament.

Shedding the light on a silenced reality and becoming a counter-power

When my contract started in the European Parliament as a parliamentary assistant working in a mainly masculine environment in July 2014 - I was working on all the files related to industries, research and energy - I suddenly realised that I was cumulating a double penalty: being young and being a woman.

I was tired of listening to all the excuses used to justify sexual harassment such as “it was just a joke,” “you are being too sensitive”, “it only happened once,” “this is about cultural differences” or even worse, resignation, “Jeanne, Politics work like that, you need to get used to it”. I decided to start, two weeks after my contract began, writing down in a notebook that I called *Petit cahier de notes sexistes au Parlement* (“*Little sexist notebook in the Parliament*”), all the testimonies that happened to me and my colleagues.

What is dangerous for victims of sexual harassment is not a particular place. It is the silence and resignation they experience.

Sexual harassment in politics is a hidden reality and an open secret where new workers are briefed by older workers on whom to avoid in the lift, for example.

Shedding light on a reality that was silenced and not taken seriously enough was, aged 24, the project I started in the most natural way possible: writing, in order not to get used to it, to bring attention to it, and to fight back.

In October 2017, my notebook, its 70 testimonies, and I became famous. From then, my daily work life at the European Parliament changed and is now mostly dedicated to the fight against sexual harassment.

I will not lie by saying that the first weeks were not comfortable, but backlash and resistances drove energy. As expected, some non-scrupulous journalists did everything in order to get names and crunchy stories. I can't count the number of times I arrived in my office and discovered unknown people looking into my desk in order to steal the notebook. In order to protect the victims, I decided to keep the notebook in a safe space at home and, as an added precaution, to never to give any names.

Coming from France, I still remember with pain and shame the scandals regarding Dominique Strauss-Kahn or Denis Baupin and how despite the attention of journalists nothing happened, leaving the victims and the workers with no solution to a structural problem. The choice of not publicly giving names was also a strategy which created indraught, I was repeatedly asked: *“Jeanne, could you tell me if my name is in your notebook?”*

Another type of pressure I received in response to my media attention was that I was asked to protect the “image of the European

Parliament”. Of course, sexual harassment is not a specificity of the European Parliament, but the 28 different nationalities, the diversity of work contracts - with some precarious ones - the turnover of trainees, the three workplaces, the long working hours, and the thin difference between what is private and what is work-related create a fertile ground for sexual harassment.

Making the European Parliament more aware and responsible of the specificities of sexual harassment and asking for change inside the institution was a tool to build a constructive role model for other institutions to follow.

The last difficulty, and surely the most impacting one, was the dozens of testimonies of sexually abused workers that I have received.

These testimonies showed that the official data of the European Parliament on sexual harassment (only one case in 4 years) did not reflect reality. Something was clearly not working well in the victims’ perception of the structures in place. Victims didn’t feel safe enough to come forward to the Institution.

It was time to collectively end the culture of silence, to stop blaming the victims, and to actively change the existing structures.

Actions speak louder than words: changing the perception

The international Women’s day 2018 led directly to the creation of MetooEP, a group of workers of the European Parliament coming from different political groups, nationalities, ages and work positions with the ambition to fight against sexism and sexual abuse in the European Parliament.

For its first event, the MetooEP movement launched a petition calling to end harassment and abuse in the European Parliament. In one day, we collected 1000 signatures of workers of the Institution. It reinforced the movement’s conviction that there was

a need for grassroots activism related to gender equality.

In October 2018, my notebook converted to a digital version, as the MetooEP blog was created⁸⁴. By collecting anonymous testimonies, the blog was a safe space for workers, to encourage them to speak out and to realise that certain behaviours were not acceptable and that they were not alone. In less than one month more than 40 anonymous testimonies of sexual harassment were collected, uncovering cases of abuse of power and grossly inappropriate behaviour including sexual assault that happened inside the building, in events, offices and EP missions.

Let's drop the masks

From October 2017 until now, under the MetooEP pressure, Politicians of the European Parliament supported the adoption of 3 concrete measures to combat sexual harassment in the workplace: the commissioning of an external assessment on the situation of harassment in the European Parliament; the implementation of a mandatory training on respect and dignity at work for all, including politicians; and the creation of a 'one-stop-shop' dealing with harassment complaints, composed of independent experts such as doctors and lawyers. However, today those measures still need to be implemented.

Besides the frustration and the incomprehension, MetooEP fights in order to know who is blocking these new and progressive measures. It campaigns for the implementation of these measures to make this institution keep its word on its commitments. As a collective movement, its members organise conferences, participate in events, arrange numerous meetings with all the Vice-Presidents of the European Parliament, the leaders of all the political groups, and the President of the European Parliament. Politicians are encouraged to follow the movement's indications and to vote in

84 See more here: <https://metooep.com>

favour of amendments in different committee reports, through presence in the media, and we have proudly organised the first demonstrations of workers inside the Parliament.

Perspectives and new fights

In just a few months, MetooEP has gained quite a lot of political influence and media attention. However, not much has really improved yet for the victims of sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual assault in the European Parliament. Notwithstanding, the committee dealing with harassment did not receive any complaints on sexual harassment.

Still, the training “Respect and Dignity at work” is not mandatory for politicians who invoked the freedom of mandate.

Still, the movement is faced with resignation influencing peoples’ mindsets and contributing to the persistence of gender inequality and sexual violence against women.

Still, not enough men are involved in this fight for equal treatment and gender equality.

Still, some political groups, mainly the right-wing political groups, are not creating a space to listen to victims.

Still, the issue of sexual harassment is not treated with the same importance in Spain or in Bulgaria.

Still, #Metoo needs to find its legal translation.

Still, more work needs to be done on inclusion at large.

This is why, MetooEP decided to launch a pledge destined to the candidates, asking them to sign and commit to actively fight sexual harassment and implement the measures listed above. We started

this campaign before the 2019 European elections and continue to hold the now newly elected officials in place accountable at the EU level and beyond. MetooEP aimed for the fight against sexual harassment to become a crucial political campaign element across all EU Member States. The movement wants elected representatives who do not think this is only a “women’s issue” but also to mobilise workers, like those involved in the movement, from national assemblies to political parties, in order to create a virtuous circle to change the structure. Today, the old saying “*talk the talk, walk the walk,*” is still truer than ever. European citizens can be sure that MetooEP will hold them to their word and will request them to act accordingly, not only during the political campaigns but also once in office.

The power of collective solidarity

By being independent, by not having any limits, and by acting in solidarity, MetooEP became a substantial counter-power. Its goal is to make sure gender equality inside the European Parliament is on the agenda, but much remains to be improved. This is empowering and it makes me proud of all the people involved in lifting this topic into the spotlight and of the Movement I have created.





I _____ pledge that if elected as a Member of the European Parliament for the mandate 2019-2024, I will commit to:

- **Actively combat**, prevent and denounce sexism and sexual harassment and never remain silent or never accept any justification for such acts;
- **End the culture of silence** and the prevailing tendency to blame the victims of sexual harassment instead of the perpetrators;
- **Never accept the excuse** of immunity as a reason for impunity and ensure dissuasive sanctions for acts of sexual harassment;
- **Enrol in the Parliament's training** on Respect and Dignity at work and push to make the training mandatory both for MEPs and staff;
- **Fight for** the creation of one accessible, effective and fully independent structure to deal with harassment in the European Parliament;
- **Actively protect all workers** of the European Parliament, especially those with precarious contracts;
- **Support the implementation** of the resolution on combatting sexual harassment and abuse in the EU (P8 TA(2017)0402), the establishment of a strong Gender Action Plan and an EU directive on combatting violence against women;
- **Promote the idea** that gender equality is not only a women's issue, but a goal that concerns everyone;
- **Ensure that the European Parliament sets** the example and leads the way in setting standards to combat sexual harassment and ensuring a safe working environment for everyone;
- **Disseminate and advocate** for any good practises from the EU level to be implemented by national Assemblies/Parliaments and by my own political party;

Name, Party, Signature and Date

MetooEP Pledge ahead of the EU elections in 2019

Zita Gurmai, FEPS Vice-President and PES Women President

Being a feminist entails supporting each other in the fight for gender equality. This act of solidarity experienced a historical turning point with the zenith of the #MeToo-movement two years ago and its diffusion all over the globe. One may wonder why it is still a topic after having discussed and analysed it so extensively for two years?

The answer is simple: violence against women and sexual harassment are still endemic. As long as this doesn't change, women will continue to shout out "me too". The outcry for justice and the wave of solidarity represent an important peak in the history of the feminist struggle. Even more so at a time when the Putins, Trumps, Bolsonaros and Orbans are the faces and acting heads of a more and more conservative and anti-democratic world order. Fortunately, this only makes us women shout louder. #MeToo still inspires people to take the streets to condemn gender-based violence and to denounce the perpetrators. Social media sheds light on new stories such as the case of Emine B. who got brutally stabbed to death by her husband in Turkey or the destiny of Lucia, the 11-year-old girl who was forced to give birth after being raped, to cite just a few. Every case has its own circumstances, but they have one important truth in common: The necessity and the urgency of action.

It is not only crucial to have a platform to speak, break taboos and show that women do not stand alone, but also to harvest the fruits of this new era. It is time for those of us who have decision-making power to address this difficult issue and to make systemic changes to help our societies to heal. In this context, political action is

irreplaceable. In the European Union (EU), not only do we have to propose concrete measures to translate the movement into political action, but we also need to implement the existing policy proposals in front of us to tackle the multiple forms of violence that women suffer every day, including sexual harassment. That is why it is essential that the EU ratifies the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women as soon as possible, as the Social-Democrats have been requesting for the past years. With the right political will, we can expect dramatic changes far beyond a hashtag.

There is so much more to accomplish in order to transform the present age into an era of equality! Today, women still earn 16% less than men on average across the EU; women only represent 39% of the elected Members in the European Parliament and 24% in national parliaments across Europe; women still carry 73% of unpaid care and domestic work across the world, one in three women is a victim of sexual violence and still too many women have to undergo unsafe, underground procedures and treatments due to the lack of legal grounds and acceptance letting them decide about their own bodies.

Sadly enough, today, we witness certain actors in the EU, who are content with the smallest common denominator, or are obstructing – if not degenerating – progress when it comes to gender equality and women’s rights. This growing anti-women, anti-feminist and anti-democratic forces instrumentalise gender equality issues to deconstruct the European project.

This is why we, as Socialists and Social-Democrats, fight for a feminist Europe. It stands for preserving the achievements, prioritising gender equality and women’s rights and continuously elaborating new progressive policies for further empowerment. Clearly, this is what women demand from us and from the EU. It is time for a strong EU Gender Equality agenda that will grasp the spirit of the momentum we are in. That’s the only way forward that can guarantee a prosperous society that works for everyone.

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GURMAI, Zita

Zita is the President of Party of European Socialists. She has been active in Hungarian and international women's movements since the early 1990s. In 1995, she became involved in the women's section of the Hungarian Socialist Party, after which she was elected President of the organisation in 2001. One of her first major initiatives as President was to launch the "Women for Change" movement, often referred to as "yellow scarf movement", which was successful in advocating the introduction of gender quotas in the Hungarian Socialist Party. Zita was instrumental in establishing and directing three foundations (Women in Public, Our Future, the Europe of the new Millennium Foundation and the Real Equal Opportunities Foundation) in Hungary, which seek to improve gender equality in different areas. She plays an important role in the activities of the Central and Eastern European Network for Gender Issues which was set up in 1998. The mission of the network is to assist progressive women from socialist and social democratic parties and NGOs in organising and promoting gender equality campaigns and initiatives. Elected MP from 2002-2004, Zita worked on the Hungarian Parliament's Committees on European Integration and Foreign Affairs. In the first European elections that included 25 member states (June 2004), Zita was elected Member of the European Parliament. During the 2004-09 term, she was Vice-President of the Parliament's Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee and a member of Regional Development Committee. In 2009, she was re-elected as MMEP and appointed Vice-President of European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee. Amongst other activities, Zita also promotes gender equality and women's rights in the Global Progressive Forum project. Since April 2018, she serves again as Member of Hungarian Parliament.



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Jeanne is a legal expert and gender equality activist. As a political advisor at the European Parliament working for Gender equality and Employment/Social affairs committees from 2014 to 2019, she was keeping a notebook documenting testimony of sexism. She has contributed since October 2017 to attracting International and European media attention to sexual harassment in the European Parliament by instigating the lifting of a taboo in a place where structures of power are rarely questioned. In March 2018, she launched a movement of workers coming from different nationalities, political backgrounds, and contracts at the European Parliament in order to make the fight against sexual harassment a crucial political campaign element. Jeanne runs a blog denouncing sexual harassment within the European Parliament (www.metooep.com) in order to help victims find solidarity. Since then, she is fighting to put gender equality at the top of the European agenda. Jeanne is a graduate in European Law from the College of Europe (LLM European Law Voltaire promotion 2013-2014) and recipient for the best pleading at the European human rights moot court competition. In June 2019, she received on behalf of the MeTooEP Movement a Special Award of good administration attributed by the European Ombudsman.



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LIST OF CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS

Foundation for European Progressive Studies

FEPS is the leading progressive think tank at the European level. FEPS establishes an intellectual crossroads between Social Democracy and the European project. As a platform for ideas and dialogue, FEPS works in close collaboration with progressive and Social Democratic organisations, and national foundations and think-tanks across Europe and the World. Its main purpose is to nourish fresh thinking through research, dialogue, seminars and its magazine, the Progressive Post, as well as through other publications and interactive public events.

More information: <https://www.feps-europe.eu/>

Fondazione Socialismo

Fondazione Socialismo was established in Rome in 2018, on the initiative of a group of socialist militants and thinkers in the continuation of the work of the former *Associazione Socialismo* over the past decade. *Fondazione Socialismo* intends to promote knowledge about Social Democracy and the socialist movement at the Italian and international levels. In particular, it seeks to promote initiatives to deepen and spread the historical, idealist, economic and social knowledge of the Italian and international socialist movement in its endeavor of building and renewing society and its citizens. This objective is pursued through the promotion of cultural and socio-political initiatives feeding into the cultural, social, scientific and economic progress of Italy, with particular attention to the formation of the individuals as much as the collectivity, placed at the center of the social experience and of political life.

More information: www.fondazione-socialismo.it

MeTooEP

MeTooEP is an initiative of workers of the European Parliament working in the political or the administrative field. They believe that the EP must hold exemplary standards of good employment and citizenship and thus contribute to the fight against sexual harassment. Sexual Harassment occurs in every workplace, including the European Parliament. MeTooEP however refuses to get used to sexual harassment and categorically rebuses the normalisation of abuse of power. When one person faces sexual harassment in the European Parliament, everybody is at risk. This is why MeTooEP does not personalise testimonials

More information: <https://metooep.com/>

Minerva Lab

“Minerva - Laboratory on diversity and gender inequality” at the Department of Statistics of Sapienza University of Rome was established in order to contribute to scientific research on gender equality and equity using both qualitative and quantitative methods, and to develop collaborations between scholars. The laboratory carries out multidisciplinary research activities promoting the cooperation between different research fields, from economics, law, history, sociology, demography and statistics. The strength of “Minerva” is the ability to mobilise experiences and skills thanks to a networks of experts (researchers, practitioners and local administrators) created by the staff involved in numerous research and awareness projects over the years.

More information: <https://web.uniroma1.it/labminerva/en>

#MeToo has been an unprecedented historic moment not necessarily for its achievements, but for the debates that it has triggered. In order to move beyond debates and to contribute meaningfully to gender equity and to eliminate gender-based discriminations, the post-#MeToo era now needs to focus on the strengthening of weak and insufficient legislative frameworks against harassment at the workplace. The alarm call sent out by so many women from across the globe resonates strongly with the history of women's rights, the EU Gender Equality core values and with the progressive fight for social justice. Therefore, this pamphlet seeks to contribute to the realisation that it is high time for progressive actors to seize the current momentum to push for women's right to live in a Europe free from old, sexist and patriarchal structures. By collecting contributions from gender experts and activists, it provides a mapping of the complexities of sexual harassment in Europe with a focus on the hashtag #Metoo social media campaign, in particular Twitter, as a tool to understand the differing degrees of change achieved and still needed across Member States to eliminate sexist and sexual violence, highlighting the potentials for change (and risks) and illustrating the force of bottom-up movements in shaping the desired change. This compilation is the result of a research project entitled "Minerva Project on Gender, Equality and Diversity" designed and implemented by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), in partnership with Fondazione Socialismo, with the support of the European Parliament and MetooEP.

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