

**Criminological Lessons on/from Sexual Violence**  
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**ABSTRACT:**

Feminist criminologists are well acquainted with how their research on sexual harms and gendered forms of victimisation may serve as powerful levers for punitive agendas. In recent years, culturalist interpretations of sexual violence have become key themes in debates on migration and integration in liberal welfare democracies, such as Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In this, complex issues of gender, ethnicity and power are involved, and the balancing of these, both analytically and ethically, poses a challenge to feminists in their attempts to contribute to social change. This chapter will, based on examples from debates in Sweden, present and discuss how argumentation about sexual freedom and integrity is enlisted in attempts to reinforce borders and ideas about dangerous Others, and outline how a fruitful meeting between criminology and feminism can advance the scholarship on sexual violence.

**KEYWORDS:**

1. Rape
2. Right-wing politics
3. Migration
4. Feminism
5. Criminology
6. Nordic countries

## Main Body:

### Introduction

In 2017, US President Donald Trump uttered the warning, 'You look at what's happening in Germany, you look at what's happening last night in Sweden. Sweden, who would believe this? Sweden. They took in large numbers. They're having problems like they never thought possible' (BBC, 2017a). This statement was made at a political rally in Florida and was part of an argument for his own proposed migration ban for people from Muslim-majority countries. While Trump seemed to take for granted that listeners would know something about what had happened in Sweden the night before, this statement baffled Swedes and resulted in hashtags #LastNightInSweden, #SwedenAttack and #IncidentsInSweden used sarcastically by Swedes and others as they posted pictures of mundane Swedish life on social media platforms.

These social media posts, as well as media commentary and politicians, pointed to the fact that nothing unusual had happened in Sweden the night before the Florida rally, and US and international media started to speculate about what President Trump may have had in mind. Shortly after, President Trump confirmed one of the theories in a Twitter post; he was referring to an episode of a Fox News programme, *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, that he had watched. This episode presented contemporary Swedish developments as bleak, as developments in which the rise in migration had resulted in a corresponding rise in crime and other social problems (Aftonbladet, 2017).

While nothing unusual had happened in Sweden the day before, and the claims made on the Fox News programme were easily refuted, the question of the relationship between migration and crime in Sweden continues to attract attention both domestically and internationally. Sweden has, for a period, stood out as a beacon of humanitarianism internationally and holds a self-identity marked by tolerance and generosity (Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2017). The claim that these traits had backfired and produced a national catastrophe would benefit not only those critical of this self-image but also right-wing populists and radicals in Sweden and beyond who use Swedish developments in anti-migrant and racist argument. This last effect is related to the way nationalism has appropriated particular political issues, crime being one of them.

This is a relevant background to the argument in this chapter, as it also relates to how Europe generally, and Sweden specifically, is experiencing a surge in right-wing populism and extremism (Eglitis, 2000; Kesinen, 2013). The relationship between migration and crime, particularly the extent and nature of sex crimes, attracts much debate in Sweden and is often highly polarised. In Sweden, as in most of Europe, the 'migration crisis' that started in 2015 created fears over whether the limit of sustainable migration was crossed. This was expressed in three distinct fears (as described in Barker (2018), for example). The first was that the large numbers of migrants arriving in Europe was leading to a collapse of infrastructure. The second was that the future of the welfare state was threatened. The third was that the social fabric and security of Sweden would disintegrate due to the high numbers of criminal acts, especially rape, being committed by migrants. We saw a shift in public discourse, a move from a public debate mainly informed by sympathy to one marked by fear about sexual violence (Lainpelto, 2019), and it is this fear I will examine closer in this chapter. Nationalist parties and organisations throughout Europe have

addressed issues of gender and sexuality in particular; on the one hand, they argue for a return to the traditional order of gender and sexuality, while on the other, they argue that gender equality norms and tolerance of sexual minorities are threatened from the outside (Mole, 2017; Sager and Mulinari, 2018). As I will describe below, this is not always manifested as a rejection of a feminist analysis of rape. Sometimes, as in the case of Sweden, feminist analysis is appropriated for nationalist purposes.

While my interest lies in the Nordic region as a whole, my main case here is Sweden, as registered cases of rape, migration and the temperature of debates are highest there among Nordic countries.

The example of recent Swedish debates over the link between migration and sexual violence is a vantage point from which to reflect on the place of sexual violence research within criminology and the breadth of scope that exists for the improvement of criminology's ability to contribute to contemporary understanding. The Norwegian criminologist Kjersti Ericsson (2007) has expressed an apprehension, as a feminist scholar identifying the harms of sexual violence, of unwillingly benefitting broader punitive agendas. Her article has explored the relationship between criminology and feminism and how insights from the two disciplines challenge what is taken for granted in each of them. She describes their relationship as conflictual but potentially fertile; it is this potential I address here. I also build on an observation Jo Phoenix (2017) presented in her chapter, 'The Politics of Sexuality', in the book *Alternative Criminologies*—there is a lack of interest in and integration of sexuality in criminology. Others before her have argued similarly; of particular note is the work of Kathleen Daly and Lisa Maher in the 1998 book *Criminology at the Crossroads* in which they invite scholars to participate in reinvigorating the study of gender and crime by linking it to broad parts of the discipline and by exploring how gender intersects with other processes of inequality and meaning-making. Similarly, feminist scholarship has been appraised as too uncritical of alliances with state agendas and its reliance on criminal justice, instead of social justice, for a solution. Kristin Bumiller (2008) is one of those who warn against having a purely positive view of state-installed protective measures aimed at curbing problems associated with sexuality and gender. She warns against seeing such actions as inherently 'women friendly' and instead encourages feminist scholars to critically explore how these measures may be underwritten by normalising ideas about sexuality, gender and victimhood. How criminalisation relies on normalisation of particular relations, actions and responses is among criminology's specialties. Rape is a crime that many have characterised as taboo and silenced for many years, and such silencing has been interpreted as an expression of the acceptance of such abuse (see, e.g. Jordan, 2012). Today, it would be difficult to claim that rape is an unaddressed crime. While the reason that sexual violence was silenced in the past may be problematic and detrimental to society's ability to respond to it, the reason for its unsilencing today must also be explored and problematised. Rape and other forms of sexual violence have been put firmly on the agenda. This mandates our investigation into the reasons this is so, instead of considering it a blanket victory for feminism.

This chapter does not build on a careful empirical study; is it, rather, a theoretically oriented investigation of what seems to be at stake in contemporary debates about sexual violence. This is part of a larger project wherein I study contemporary understandings of sexual integrity and its relationship with power. For this particular chapter, I have sought to identify the most relevant

contributions to such an investigation, including Swedish and international scholarship on Sweden and the ongoing debates in Swedish media. I am interested in how sexual violence is debated and managed in Sweden, and I have taken inspiration from Carol Bacchi's (1999) 'What's the problem represented to be approach', which I have used when identifying the understandings that are taken for granted or left unproblematised in particular problem definitions. Following Michel Foucault (1979), Bacchi holds that the sociologically interesting point is not who 'invented' a way of looking at and approaching a 'problem' but, rather, how particular understandings become intelligible and operational—what is possible to think and say at any given time.

### **Contemporary developments in the regulation of sexual violence**

Matters of sexuality are highly contentious in many countries and have become key political issues, often expressing other underlying concerns (Bernstein and Schaffner, 2005; Boulila and Carri, 2017; Dutta and Roy, 2014). The historian Dagmar Herzog argues that this stems from developments that started in the late 1990s, and that this was the beginning of sexuality becoming 'burdened with enormous significance' (2011, p. 2). In such a climate, how can a meeting between feminist and criminological insights help us understand how sexual violence is addressed today?

Sexuality, gender and law is a powerful combination in our time (Stychin, 2003). Mariana Valverde has argued that, 'since the 1960's, most jurisdictions in the western world have witnessed heightened tensions around the use of criminal law to regulate sexual conduct' (1999, p. 181). During the last four decades, dramatic shifts have taken place in the ways sexuality is regulated, demonstrating that sexuality is not an autonomous realm but thoroughly political (Linnér, 1976, p. 282; Millett, 1970). This is a development that has entailed the decriminalisation of sexual acts that were once considered harmful to society and individuals, such as homosexuality, sex outside of wedlock and adultery, and the criminalisation of acts once considered unproblematic or at least outside the interest of the state, such as marital rape, prostitution and non-penetrative coercive sexual acts.

Shifts in the regulation of sexuality are also manifest in changes in definitions of acts that continue to be criminalised or crimes. Such shifts typically express changes in how a phenomenon is understood. Here the legal definition of rape is particularly relevant. There is a long history of reconceptualisation of rape. From being defined as a property crime men committed against other men (theft of 'their women's' sexuality, honour) (McGlynn and Munro, 2010), to being defined as a moral affront to the family and society. Today, rape is typically conceptualised as breach of the sexual integrity of the victim. After WWII, sex generally became more detached from the family in many countries, as sex outside of marriage, homosexual practices and contraception became more accepted at the same time as contraception became legal in more places and was more affordable and readily available. Sexual self-expression and self-determination, and the protection of them, became more important as a result, among other things, of this development.

How the problem of rape is represented at a given time is an expression of what is considered valuable. The integrity of the Victorian middle-class family was a central symbol of social order. The chastity of women was one of the safeguards of this value, and therefore sex taking place outside the family, such as adultery and prostitution, but also rape, were considered threats to the preservation of the family (D'Cruze, 2012, p. 35). This has been replaced by the value of the integrity

of the individual. While Sweden is perhaps more than other seen as collectivist in their orientation, Lars Trägårdh (2018) demonstrates that the Swedish social order is a thoroughly individual one where the individual's safety and wellbeing is ensured by the state, not the family.

### **Swedish debates on sexual violence and how to interpret them**

While sexual violence is a field in which activists have been especially successful in mobilising and establishing global instruments and platforms (Houge, Lohne and Skilbrei, 2015), it is important to understand national manifestations and versions. Sweden is particularly interesting in this case, as it is considered a driving force in shifting European and global agendas and also takes its global reach and impact into consideration when designing policies (Holmström and Skilbrei, 2017; Towns, 2002). Also, from a criminological point of view, developments in Sweden are particularly interesting. From the early 1980s onwards, calls were made for more and harsher laws on violence against women in Sweden (Lappi-Seppälä, 2012). Henrik Tham and colleagues (Tham, Rönneling and Rytterbro, 2011) have looked at the apparent paradox of Sweden, which is, on many counts, considered a country less punitive than most Western countries, something which makes it part of what is analysed as Nordic exceptionalism to the punitive populism going on elsewhere (see, e.g. Pratt, 2008). Yet, in Sweden, sexual violence is addressed in a way that seems to make it an exception to the exception (Tham, Rönneling and Rytterbro, 2011). Laws on sexual violence and gendered harms have multiplied since the late 1990s, thresholds for what is criminalised has been lowered, and punishments have become harsher. These changes have been argued for as instrumental in improving society's ability to address acts considered harmful, but also as a way to better communicate and change social norms to do with sexuality and gender generally. To use Criminal Law to express norms and 'send a signal' about desired futures for Sweden is not only considered legitimate but also serve as an independent and powerful argument in favour of law revisions (see, e.g. Kulick, 2003; Liinason, 2018; Skilbrei and Holmström, 2013). The broadening of definitions of sexual violence in the last decades has lowered the threshold for punishment, and this is something that has attracted international attention. Don Kulick has noted that, despite Sweden's reputation as sexually liberal, the country has 'some of the harshest sex laws in the world' (2003, p. 201). With this he refers to the criminalisation of acts committed against persons, but also acts that criminalises acts related to sexuality considered harmful to society. That Sweden's definitions of sex crimes and the related thresholds are different from those in many other places was thematised in the international attention given to the case against Julian Assange, who has been accused of rape and sexual exploitation in Sweden (see, e.g. BBC, 2012). While Assange is said to have concluded that Sweden is 'the Saudi Arabia of feminism' (Lykke, 2017: 131), feminist activists and politicians often point to Sweden's success in securing women's rights and protections (Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2017). Still, it is sometimes presented as a paradox that countries with high levels of gender equality, such as the Nordic countries generally, and Sweden in particular, continue to see high levels of several forms of violence against women (see, e.g. Gracia and Merlo, 2016).

Sweden is internationally renowned for its high degree of gender equality and a strong allegiance between civil society and the state has been instrumental in ensuring that gender equality is continually placed high on the political agenda and to establish sexual violence as a key concern of the state. As in several of the other Nordic countries, women's issues have become the state's issues in an especially effective way in Sweden (see, e.g. Nousiainen and Niemi-Kiesiläinen, 2001, p. 14),

and the countries have been marked by what the Norwegian political scientist Helga Hernes (1987) termed 'state feminism'. The debates I study are sometimes distinctly Swedish, and sometimes they serve as an example of broader developments, particularly for the Nordic region. While the countries in the region share many characteristics, there are also reasons to treat Sweden as a special case. Gender equality norms are most institutionalised in Sweden (Borchorst, 1999; Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2017), and compared to its Nordic neighbours, Sweden's perspective on gendered power as structurally based is particularly strong (Borchorst, Christensen and Siim, 2002). Included in this is the continued existence and even mainstreaming of 'more confrontational variants of radical feminism' (Holst, 2018, p. 109). This means that in public debates about rape and its aetiology, it is common to refer to men's relative power over women in society.<sup>1</sup>

There are two contemporary debates on sexual harms in Sweden that are particularly relevant to feminism and criminology because they address the relationship between power and sexuality in different ways. Firstly, there is the #metoo movement and similar Swedish social media movements, which has directed attention towards male domination and entitlement. This movement demonstrated how common it is to be sexually victimised or harmed. This has been a powerful debate in Sweden. Several alleged perpetrators have been named and shamed in public, something that has had grave consequences for individuals and institutions. The second strand of debates is about how one can appropriately understand rape, and this is what I will concentrate on here. Rape appears in two different problematisations. One offers a feminist analysis of rape as an expression of gendered power. Such a perspective first and foremost analyses sexual violence as gendered—as something that happens to women *because* they are women (Carmody, 2003; Alison, 2007). In this analysis, rape is construed as an attack on a group rather than as a sexual act (Brownmiller, 1975). The position that rape is an expression of men's power over women, and that an assault committed against one woman is also an assault of and a threat to all women, has been strong in within Swedish feminism. While there is now more recognition of the fact that men can also be subjected to rape and that women can also be perpetrators, the main focus is on how rape is related to men's power over women in a structural, cultural and individual way, and several Swedish legal revisions have been introduced with active representations of rape as a form of men's violence against women (e.g. the Swedish Government, 2018).

While sexual violence typically is interpreted as a result of men's power over women on a structural, cultural and individual level in Sweden, there is also another interpretation that has gained momentum in the last two decades (Heber, 2014): 'During the 2000s a parallel crime policy discourse to that on men's violence against women emerged: the criminality of immigrants' (p. 413). In Sweden, as in many other European countries, there have been fears that newly arrived young Muslim men subject girls and women to sexual violence.

The issue of rape was high on the political agenda in Sweden throughout 2018. The first reason was that as a response to an increase in cases of rape reported to the police and challenges in prosecuting rape, Sweden changed its rape legislation with the intention of preventing rape and

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<sup>1</sup> However, as Linnea Wegerstad (2015) has argued, while law revisions have been advocated on the grounds that society needs to combat gendered power structures, criminal law as an institution, and therefore the wording of acts and their implementation, has retained an individual focus.

improving its prosecution. The second reason was that the increase in cases of rape reported to the police was claimed by right-wing populists and others to be due to an increase of young male migrants to Sweden. While such concerns and cultural explanations of sex crimes committed by migrants had already been key to populist and radical right movements in Sweden during the increases in migration, but also with attention to events, such as the one in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015, that mainstreamed such concerns and interpretations (Lainpelto, 2019). Something that has influenced the pull such debates have had in the last few years is that the right-wing political party the Sweden Democrats has increased its support and representation considerably. After the 2018 election, it holds 62 out of 349 seats in the Swedish Parliament. The Sweden Democrats typically state that they challenge established truths and speak against 'political correctness', and in this case, they argue that they are among the few who dare to tell the truth to the Swedish population about the relationship between migration and crime.

At the core of the debates are conflicting claims of knowledge and claims that knowledge is being suppressed. The problematisation of rape as linked to migration may even have increased the support for the Sweden Democrats in the 2018 general elections. Only a few weeks before the election the public television station, SVT, aired a documentary in the highly acclaimed series *Uppdrag granskning* on the link between rape and migration. This documentary addressed the fact that the state of knowledge about rape in Sweden is presented differently and interpreted differently among different groups. Some rely on the crime statistics and state that there has been a dramatic increase in the last decades and that this is due to newly arrived migrants. Others argue that there has not been an increase in rape, only in reporting. The documentary included a clip of the Swedish Minister for Employment and Integration, Ylva Johansson, talking to the BBC in 2017. This interview was given in a context where Johansson was confronted on *BBC Newsnight* with the increasing levels of reported rape in Sweden. She responded, 'We can see that the level is going down, and going down, and going down', a statement she would later have to retract (The Local, 2017). In a period when crime statistics showed a steep increase, that a Swedish politician still argues that rape is declining perhaps gives us an idea of what is at stake—both the reputation of Sweden as a gender equality haven *and* that migrants are not more likely to commit rape than Swedes. That she was caught in a lie, of course brought fuel to the fire for groups and individuals opposing migration to Sweden.

In a later BBC News segment, this apparent disjuncture in how the situation in Sweden is presented was noted: 'Two contradictory narratives. They can't both be true. So, what's really going on?' (BBC, 2018). The truth is that it is difficult to assess the extent of rape and whether the increase in reported cases represents an increase in incidents.

There is indeed a very high increase in reported cases of rape in the last ten years in Sweden.<sup>2</sup> Sweden tops international statistics on rape and sexual harassment (which made Former UKIP leader Nigel Farage call the third-largest city in Sweden, Malmö, 'the rape capital of the world' (BBC, 2017b)). Figures for reported rapes are repeatedly debated in Sweden, and debates are typically highly charged. As was the case in the STV documentary mentioned above, figures are either taken at face value or not afforded value. Criminologists have taken part in Swedish debates about rape in

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<sup>2</sup>[https://www.bra.se/download/18.5484e1ab15ad731149e3a81c/1490859029793/Sammanfattning\\_anmalda\\_2016.pdf](https://www.bra.se/download/18.5484e1ab15ad731149e3a81c/1490859029793/Sammanfattning_anmalda_2016.pdf).



crime statistics. Their main contribution has been to point to how the lower thresholds in Sweden compared to elsewhere means that more cases count as rape there and that a high awareness of rape in Sweden makes it easier to report rape than what is the case in many other countries. That the figures continues to rise, is taken to mean that awareness is also increasing from year to year, as well as being an effect of the fact that Swedish rape laws change every few years. These are valid concerns, and sexual offences are considered particularly vulnerable to bias in reporting (Tonry, 2014). There is indeed reason to caution against accepting statistics as the whole truth about the extent of rape in Sweden. However, when debaters and scholars refuse to relate to the figures and does not contribute to a discussion about what the reason might be if they are representative of a change in the extent of rape, it fuels the Sweden Democrats' argument that the Swedish population is misled and that researchers are 'ideologically motivated' to do so (e.g. in *Sverigedemokraterna*, 2017). Also, the dismissal of the figures are not always qualified. Rather it appears as based on assumptions. Sometimes they are dismissed as non-representative without discussion or documentation, as when it is stated that high rape figures are due to the greater likelihood that people in Sweden will report rape (e.g. Edgren, 2019, p. 44). To remedy what they present as ideologically charged research, the Swedish Democrats have even issued their own report with an overview of research (*Sverigedemokraterna*, 2017).

### **Complicit constructions**

Knowledge about rape becomes highly significant in battles over the interpretation of the reasons for sexual violence: if it increases even though society at large has become more gender equal, an interpretation of sexual violence as a result of the lack of gender equality loses explanatory power. Therefore the controversy over the relationship between migration and rape is not all about numbers. It is also about whether migrants commit rape for different reasons than Swedish-born men. As mentioned above, fears in many European countries is that 'they', that is migrants from Muslim majority countries, are sexually violating 'our' women and girls. Research in diverse contexts has demonstrated that the sexual integrity and value of women is linked to the integrity, value and identity of the nation, in times of both war and peace (Baaz and Stern, 2013; Ericsson, 2011; Rahbari, Longman and Coene, 2018). Inger Skjelsbæk (2001) identified three ways of conceptualising sexual war violence that resonate with perspectives on peace-time sexual violence: essentialism, structuralism and social constructionism. While essentialism points to biology and society as determining how men subdue and violate women as an expression of male right, conceptualising sexual violence as structural entails a more culturalist interpretation of sexual violence as something that happens, among other things, as a strategy to dominate another ethnic group by violating 'their' women—targeting women because they are women from a particular group. The third conceptualisation is of sexual violence as something that happens to both men and women and is due to individual and situational factors. Masculinity and femininity bind the acts that can be done by whom, but it is not an expression and normalisation of men's power over women or a group's power over another group.

Seeing sexual violence as a collective act is not unfamiliar to feminist scholarship on sexual violence. The radical feminist position on rape understands it as an attack not only on individual women but on all women. This resonates with how right-wing politics talk of rape, and they also assumes that rape is due to patriarchal traditions (Lainpelto, 2019, p. 131). However, instead of arguing that

patriarchy is all invasive in today's Sweden, they argue that migration from patriarchal societies is what is behind the increasing numbers of registered sex crimes in Sweden.

In both problematisations, male dominance over women is what is considered the cause of rape and they share a representation of rape as an act of violence more so than sex. Also, when right-wing debaters blames patriarchy, but places its origins outside of Sweden, they signal that Sweden already has sufficient gender equality. This understanding is not solely the invention of right-wing politics. Mainstream Swedish debate often presents Sweden as a thoroughly modern project, and gender inequality and the associated phenomena are considered alien to it (Liinason, 2018; Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2017). Several scholars have analysed how a broad range of actors have an interest in presenting Sweden as a gender equality haven, and a key component in this has been to construct acts related to gender and sexuality considered problematic as stemming from outside of Sweden or committed by 'outsiders' (Gould, 1999; Kulick, 2003; Towns, 2002). As gender equality and the protection of sexual integrity has been established with consensus as absolute Swedish values (Kulick, 2003; Liinason, 2018; Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2017), rapes committed in Sweden need to be construed as exceptions or something performed by non-Swedes, as not to shatter domestic identity and the international image. In this way, gender equality is equated with 'Swedishness' (Jeziarska and Towns, 2018; Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2017). The Sweden Democrats have in this way aligned with the ideals of gender equality and the need to take sexual violence seriously, and, as such, have 'hijacked the gender-equality agenda for non-equality purposes' (Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2017, p. 12). Because 'to be a Swede is to be gender equal' (Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2017, p. 4), and as rape exists due to a lack of gender equality on a structural, cultural and individual level (Tham, Rönneling and Rytterbro, 2011, p. 593), it is possible to construe rape and rapists as 'un-Swedish'.

Although the Sweden Democrats now have a large following and real political pull, they have a limited ability to affect Swedish policies directly. They are not in government and the other political parties in Parliament have a shared interest in keeping them at a distance. Still, the way representatives from the Sweden Democrats and other right-wing debaters address migration and sexual violence is something that can affect the debate climate and policy developments more indirectly. Gabriella Nilsson (2019) has analysed the trajectory of debates leading up to the 2018 introduction of a consent-based rape law and argues that rape cases that reached headlines were typically committed by migrants and/or in localities often associated with migrants, and this helped drive the argument that the way the Criminal Code defined rape was not sufficient in light of developments. As mentioned above, the claim that rape was on the rise, was an argument in favour of changing the definition of rape in 2018, an argument put forth by the same government that Ylva Johansson represented when she said that the figures were on the decline. Right-wing politicians and activists on the one hand, and the majority of parliamentarians on the other, in this case shared the assumption that rape was on the rise and a sense of urgency; something had to be done about it. Their proposed solutions, however, diverged. While right-wing politicians and activists postulated that the solution is to curb migration to Sweden and possibly deport people already there, the government argued that a new definition in the criminal law would communicate norms and ideals better than the old definition and therefore prevent rapes. Migration was not addressed as a reason for the need to shift the way Swedish authorities communicated the harm of rape.

Criminologists are familiar with calls for law and order being driven by what the public assumes to be true about crime. Public outcries over crime, especially sexual assault, are known to be channelled towards calls for new laws and stricter punishment (Houge, Lohne and Skilbrei, 2015), but in the last years, in Sweden and beyond, the call is for stricter immigration control to curb crime. This is the case when debaters, instead of calling for harsher criminal laws to curb rape, call for the reinstatement of border control and deportations, as in the case of Sweden. These are mechanisms mandated in the Aliens Act, not the Criminal Code. That calls for more punishment have come to be replaced by calls for border control is evidence of a move towards what Juliet Stumpf (2006) terms 'cimmigration,' the way punitive criminal justice goals and instruments merge with administrative migration law and technologies; they become more similar in their manifestations and mandates, and thus they serve the same goals.

### **Conclusion**

I argue that the way sexuality and its regulation are talked about offers criminologists insights into broader developments as 'Debates around sexuality often serve as a barometer of more generalised social tensions – in times of economic and cultural flux, sex may become an easy and frequent target of campaigns for state regulation' (Bernstein and Schaffner, 2005, p. xiii; see also Estrada, Pettersson and Shannon, 2012). While the empirical link between migration and sexual violence is weak or difficult to study, we should consider what kind of uneasiness is expressed through the insistence that rapes are mainly committed by migrants. The Swedish society has undergone radical changes due to high numbers of asylum seekers and later family unifications, and it is not surprising that this is something that rattles some Swedes.

The case also exemplifies the challenges criminologists face operating in controversial policy fields where debaters cherry-pick evidence and where taking precautions mean that researchers are accused of cowardice or propaganda. The case of Sweden also offers an example of how possible arguments and policies are limited by the polarised nature of the debate. In the debate climate like the one I have described here, it is very difficult to partake in debates about rape without at the same time providing ammunition to right-wing politicians and activists. Uneasy alliances are not unfamiliar to feminism. Feminists have for a long time pushed for stricter and more punishment for sex crimes. In Sweden, as in many other places, debates on crime and crime policies often revolve around sex crimes, and such debates are particularly heated. The topic bridges public and personal concerns and national and transnational matters, and fears over negative developments can be appropriated for various causes, such as punitive agendas and anti-migrant sentiments. For criminologists, the field of sexual violence thus represents an example of developments in other fields regarding the normalisation of a punitive agenda and how policy development is marked by the heavy impact of victims' organisations, as well as its changing definitions that lead to shifting boundaries between acts considered acceptable and not acceptable (Tham, 2012).

The polarisation of the debate, but also the tendency to place the responsibility for sexual violence outside one's own group or nation, is something that may work against seeing rape as something that concerns all, happens in all milieus, and has its main reasons in shared structural, cultural and individual condition. As mentioned, the #metoo movement, and similar national manifestations, has been particularly strong in Sweden. This is a movement that sheds light on sexual exploitation and

abuse of power committed in working life by powerful men. The power of these men is not only gendered, but builds on positions, age, networks and class, and is dependent on a culture of silence around the crimes of the powerful. While the #metoo movement has played out in a way that has served to emphasise that Swedes commit rape too, and, as such, it offers critical potential vis-à-vis the powerful 'gender equality myth' (Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2017), it at the same time visibilises that it is not gender in itself that is to blame. In the same way that the #metoo movement has directed attention towards the crimes of the powerful, it has been criticised for first and foremost concerning itself with violations committed against white middle- or upper-class women (Gill and Orgad, 2018). Swedish feminism has typically been universal in the sense that feminists work from an assumption that all women face similar problems and would benefit from similar policies, and this implies an insensitivity to the diversity of situations women are in (de los Reyes, 2017). This is very different from how rape generally is discussed, where a main theme is whether young migrant men, often asylum seekers or irregulars who recently have arrived in Europe, are doing most of the crimes or not, and the cases that attract media attention is typically ones where the victims are vulnerable and marginalised (Nilsson, 2019).

The perpetrator is in one strand of contemporary debates presented as 'just like us' (a powerful Swede) and, therefore, a dangerous perpetrator hiding in legitimate institutions and roles; the other version of the perpetrator is that he is 'not like us', and therein lies the danger. These two figurations of 'the sexual predator' are very different and invite very different responses. While both problematisations are probably stronger in Sweden than in neighbouring Denmark and Norway, sexual violence and harm is also represented in these countries in similarly polarised ways: as crimes of the powerful or crimes of the marginalised. What remains unproblematised in this is a broader spectrum of sexual violence, how it also takes place in the private sphere and that it is also something committed by 'Medelsvensson', a Swedish term for 'your average Joe'. Directing the attention and fear towards the margins, the upper and lower strata of society, crimes that take place in the public sphere of work or by 'the stranger' hides the fact that rape also takes place within intimate relationships and the private sphere (Taylor, 2019).

These and other consequences of the structure of the debate and of how perpetrators and victims are presented in public debate, point to a need for criminologists to place the issue of sexual violence at the centre of the discipline, not as a topic in the margins or thought to be only for 'feminist criminologists'. In the multidisciplinary study of sexual violence and of the policies that address it, criminology has an important role to play. While it is easy to turn to criminal law and migration policies to address contemporary concerns, criminology's understanding of the link between power and punishment and between power and representation offers a useful counterbalance.

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