**Harriet Gray and Anja K. Franck**

**Refugees as/at Risk: The gendered and racialised underpinnings of securitisation in British media narratives**

**Abstract**

It is well established in the literature that migration has become increasingly securitised. In this paper, we examine the racialised and gendered grids of intelligibility which make such securitising moves possible. Specifically, we argue that the securitisation of migration during the so-called EU ‘refugee crisis’ comes into being through intertwined and mutually dependent representations of racialised, masculinised threat, and racialised, feminised vulnerability, which are woven into the scaffolding of colonial modernity. We construct our argument through an analysis of relevant newspaper articles published in British newspapers between September 2015 and March 2016. As such, our discussions herein advance understandings of the dominant narratives through which the ‘refugee crisis’ has been understood. In addition, in highlighting the naturalised inequalities which underpin securitising speech acts, the paper also contributes to literature which seeks to add an improved understanding of power to securitisation theory.

**Introduction**

The spring of 2015 saw a dramatic increase in refugee arrivals to Europe. In media reports this event became known as the European “refugee crisis”, recognisable through images of refugees in overcrowded rubber dinghies, desperate people trying to cross the Western Balkans, and the iconic image of three-year-old Alan Kurdi’s body washed up on a beach in Turkey. While initial reporting centred on the vulnerability of those seeking protection, media representations would soon change their focus towards EU member states’ (lack of) ability and/or willingness to host the growing number of refugees: shifting the emphasis from refugees ‘*at risk’* towards refugees ‘*as risk’* to Europe’s security, culture and social fabric.

In this paper we examine the gendered and racialised logics through which refugees have been represented *as/at risk* in the reporting around the so-called “refugee crisis” in British newspaper articles. It has been convincingly argued elsewhere that migration has become increasingly *securitised* (see for example Bourbeau, 2011; Huysman, 2006; Ibrahim, 2005): capturing the gradual move of migration issues from the realm of ‘normal’ politics into the realm of security. Approached as a ‘speech act’ (see Buzan *et al.*, 1998), the notion of securitisation here encompasses an “intersubjective process” wherein different agents (securitising actors and audiences/elites and the public) come to a shared understanding around “the perceived seriousness of a threat … and the urgent need to mobilise all available recourses to curtail its development” (Karyotis, 2012, 392). In such processes, media frames play an important role (Vultee, 2010) and numerous studies have shown how news media (re)produce constructions of migrants as “enemies at the gate” (Esses, et al., 2013), who pose a threat to the physical safety, economy and identity of receiving countries in the ‘West’ (Innes, 2010). Interrogating the mediation of the current “refugee crisis” in Europe, scholars have further qualified how securitising frames may shift quite rapidly over time (Gruessing and Boomgaarden 2017; Chouliaraki et al., 2017), wherein notions of ‘victimhood’ and ‘threat’ function as “co-existing” categories (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017: 617) that can be effectively employed in debates around the un/deserving migrant/refugee Other (Goodman et al 2016; Holmes and Castaneda 2016; Holzberg et al 2018).

While the above scholarship has brought forward important insights on how refugees are discursively located as ‘victim’ and/or ‘threat’, our endeavour in this paper is somewhat different in that we do not frame the securitising ‘speech act’ visible in the media discourse as the pivotal point at which refugee bodies are discursively relocated from ‘the threatened’ to ‘the threat’ (see also Balzacq 2005). Rather, we seek to examine the gendered and racialised logics of coloniality *which make such securitising moves possible*. We thus urge caution in overemphasising the meaning of these moves and rather suggest that the apparently ambiguous ways in which refugees are “suspended between victimhood and malevolence” in media reporting around the crisis (c.f. Choulirarki and Zaborowski, 2017: 616) is rooted within a coherent set of gendered and racialised colonial logics, which are not new but rather woven into the scaffolding of colonial modernity (Moffette and Vadasaria, 2016). Our argument is that securitising moves, as they appear in media frames, are made possible by intertwined and mutually dependent gendered and racialised representations of refugeethreat *and* vulnerability, which are *familiar* rather than foreign to the designated audience (Balzacq 2005)*.* This perspective allows us to unpack how British media discourse comes to be characterised *both* by expressions of sympathy for the plight of refugees *and* by fear of those same refugees, often without much overt interrogation.

The article proceeds as follows. We begin with a discussion of our specific focus and methodology, and then sketch out the gendered and racialised logics that have been identified as characteristic of colonial modernity. We continue by charting the more overt representations of racialised feminine vulnerability and masculine threat which emerge in our sample of newspaper articles and which, we suggest, form the overarching grids of intelligibility underpinning interpretation of the events of the crisis in the media. We then focus on three phases of the narrative as it evolved over our sample period. The first phase, which we have termed “Refugees welcome,” stretches roughly from September to early November 2015, the second, “Paris changes everything,” from the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13th November 2015 to January 2016, and, finally, the “Sexual Jihad” phase began with reporting of the New Year’s Eve violence in Cologne and elsewhere. We conclude by reflecting on the implications of our discussions for understandings and responses to the European refugee crisis itself.

**Focus and Method**

Investigation of the UK press coverage of the “refugee crisis” is interesting for several reasons. First, British newspapers are read by audiences all over the world: of the four newspapers we analysed - the Guardian, Telegraph, The Mirror and The Daily Mail - three are among the top 10 most read online newspapers worldwide (Radwanick, 2012). Second, reports suggest that the British press were the most polarised in their coverage of the “refugee crisis,” with the right-wing press showing outright “hostility towards refugees and migrants,” visible in a predominance of negative frames as well as in editorials pushing “Fortress Europe approaches” (Berry *et al*., 2015: 10). The British context itself, of course, is a particular one, which shaped the analysed articles in specific ways. Besides the general historic specificities of immigration in Britain (see Innes, 2010), the most salient factor was the referendum on whether the UK should stay a member of the European Union - the so called ‘Brexit’ referendum - which took place on 23 June 2016 and in which the UK voted to leave the EU. The spectre of the referendum arguably shaped much of the narrative on the refugee crisis which emerged from the British press, as immigration, from Europe and beyond, became the most significant issue in driving the vote to leave (Ipsos Mori, 2016). Similarly, the geography of the UK, as well as its non-membership in Europe’s passport-free Schengen area, plays a significant role in shaping the discourse, in particular in drawing attention to the so-called ‘Jungle’ camp in Calais where refugees and migrants lived while trying to enter the UK.

The four newspapers selected for our analysis represent the spread of political standpoints across the press: encompassing a right-wing and left-wing broadsheet (The Telegraph and The Guardian, respectively), and a right-wing and left-wing tabloid (The Daily Mail and The Mirror, respectively). As Berry and colleagues’ (2015) analysis suggests, there were, in some elements, significant differences between the views espoused by the different newspapers – the Daily Mail, for example, was much more likely to express outright animosity towards refugees than was the Guardian. Despite this, we chart similarities and shifts across the dominant narratives which emerge, to a greater or lesser extent, across all four of the newspapers analysed. Moreover, in pointing to the intertwined gendered and racialised logics which underpin representations of both vulnerable *and* threatening refugees, we draw attention to important similarities and co-dependencies which characterise both ‘pro-refugee’ and ‘anti-refugee’ narratives.

We used the Factiva database to search for relevant articles from the four newspapers published between 1st September 2015 and 31st March 2016. These dates were chosen to align with significant events in the EUropean refugee crisis: the death of Alan Kurdi on 2nd September 2015; and the signing of the EU-Turkey deal to end “irregular migration” from Turkey to the EU on 18th March 2016. Our search identified articles which contained at least one of the words ‘refugee,’ migrant’/’immigrant,’ or ‘asylum,’ along with some form of ‘protect,’ ‘safe,’ ‘security,’ ‘risk,’ ‘danger,’ or ‘terror,’ and also reference to ‘EU’ or to ‘Europe.’ These search terms were chosen to identify articles which focused on the EU refugee crisis in relation to the broad concepts of safety and security – whether of ‘Europe’ or of migrants themselves – in order to access representations of refugees both *as* and/or *at* risk. It is possible that the focus of our search terms caused us to miss alternative representations of refugees which did not focus on questions of safety and security. However, given the large number and range of articles that we found, we do not think that we missed significant numbers of articles. The original search found 2,679 articles, although a significant number were excluded for irrelevance on reading (for example, for being focused on refugees journeying to Australia rather than to Europe). Our analysis included news articles, features, and opinion pieces from both print and online versions of the newspapers. It is worth noting that the articles were not evenly distributed across the four newspapers: considerably more articles were found in The Telegraph and The Guardian than The Daily Mail and The Mirror, likely attributable in large part to the different lengths of the publications as well as their editorial stances and priorities. We did not conduct a quantitative analysis and, as such, the statements that we make about the newspaper narratives do not rely upon the number of articles within which particular framings appeared (for a quantitative account, see Chouliaraki et al., 2017). Rather we conducted an interpretive, thematic analysis to identify what we read as the most significant framings of refugees that emerged from the newspaper articles. In comparison to a quantitative content analysis, this approach enabled us to interpret the context and meaning with which particular frames were used, and to pay attention to both manifest and latent content (Joffe and Yardley, 2004: 57). Generally speaking, the frames which we read as the most significant appeared in multiple articles; however, we do not rest our interpretation of importance on quantitative measures and, indeed, we also discuss less common themes in several of the subsections.

**Analytical Framework: Gender and race as the scaffold of colonial modernity**

Drawing upon the work of, amongst others, Moffette and Vadasaria (2016), we approach media representations of refugees as/at risk as shaped by the discourses that are embedded in “colonial modernity,” which we understand as a project underwritten by the inseparably intertwined operations of gender and race. Moffette and Vadasaria analyse “colonial modernity” in relation to race, arguing that “‘[c]oloniality … is constitutive of modernity’ [Mignolo 2011, 3], and therefore ‘[m]odernity is racial’ [Hesse 2007, 643]” (Moffette and Vadarasia, 2016: Note 1; see also, among others, Appiah 1991; Said 1978; Spivak 1998; Quijano 2007). In their compelling analysis, Moffette and Vadarasia demonstrate that the failure of much of the literature on securitisation to properly engage with race constitutes a “serious oversight” (*ibid*.: 301), because the securitisation process itself “builds upon already established grids of intelligibility… [which are] intrinsically connected to the project of race” (*ibid*.: 293). They argue that while securitising moves may represent “a qualitative shift” in the “everyday governance of racialised individuals and migrants” (through being policed, criminalised and subjected to violence) (*ibid*.: 294), securitisation processes are “premised upon race as a mode of governing and knowing” (*ibid*.: 294). That is, it is *because* of the racialized logics which underpin colonial modernity that non-white populations come to be easily read and treated as threatening and violent (*ibid*.: 295), and, as such, the securitisation of non-white bodies as ‘threat’ is not “an actual shift from normal liberal politics to exceptional measures” (*ibid*.: 297). Rather:

we should aim to describe how the securitisation of immigration operates as a political technology that lifts the inhibition of racist violence that is always lurking in the shadow of racialized modern civility, allowing for an increase in anti-migrant violence while at the same time consolidating the fantasy of liberal tolerance and white civility.

(*ibid*.: 297)

In our reading of British newspaper reports we follow Moffette and Vadarasia in arguing that securitising narratives should not be read as *ruptures* in response to extraordinary circumstances but, rather, as the product of narratives which are integral to the modern colonial European project. Recognising the intersectional formulation of oppressions based on race *and* gender (as well as sexuality, class, and other axes of social identity) which has been identified by Black feminist and feminist post-colonial scholars (see Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; see also Henry, 2017), we trace the gendered and racialised images of threat and of vulnerability through which refugees come to be read as/at risk.

Feminist postcolonial scholars have described how projects of colonial modernity rely upon orientalist fantasies of the “other” formulated through representations of gendered identities, gender relations, and gender (in)equalities. Within these fantasies, ideas about differences in relations between men and women across particular cultural spaces have been integral in symbolically defining the identity and the character of nations and their borders: in defining “the limits of *national* difference and power between *men*” (McClintock, 1993: 61, emphasis in original). Nationalist and colonial politics have been characterised by gendered and sexualised portrayals of the other as ‘backwards’ and the west, in comparison, as the space of civilised modernity and of progress: by “portrayals of enemy men either as sexual demons, bent on raping nationalist women, or as sexual eunuchs, incapable of manly virility” (Nagel, 1998: 257; see also Ahmed, 1992: Scheibelhofer, 2012: 320-21). Women, also, emerge from colonial narratives in diverse ways which have been used to justify and to perpetuate oppression. In colonial narratives, racialised women have often been approached as uniquely vulnerable and in need of rescue from their ‘oppressive’ cultures – a construction most iconically captured by Gayatri Spivak’s observation that the colonial project has been justified by the notion that “white men are saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak, 1998: 297; see also Ticktin, 2008: 880). In other cases, most notably in relation to enslaved Black women in the US (and in the legacies which persist beyond the formal system of transatlantic slavery), racialised women have been framed within dominant (white) culture as particularly strong and masculine, lacking in modesty, sexual purity, and innocence, and thus they have been denied access to the labels ‘vulnerable’ and even ‘woman’ (Collins, 2000: 82; Hoagland, 2007; hooks, 1982).

While racialised oppressions have drawn upon varied representations of gender, it is intertwined ideas of racialised masculine threat and racialised feminine vulnerability which we identify as underpinning securitising narratives in contemporary British media discourse. These representations have a long history, but have taken on renewed vigour in the post-9/11 era; in particular in relation to the majority Muslim and/or Arabic cultures from which many refugees coming to Europe have fled. Numerous scholars have highlighted the role which such narratives have played in legitimating contemporary violence. Abu-Lughod, for example, discusses the simplification and the instrumentalisation of Afghan women’s oppression under the Taliban for the purposes of justifying the post-9/11 invasion (2002: 784; see also Cloud, 2004). Similarly, Bhattacharyya (2008) explores the linkages drawn within dominant discourse between (Muslim) men’s perpetration of terrorist violence and of sexual violence; in Zalewski and Runyan’s words, “the neoliberal international policy establishment” has perceived “a relationship between men’s “uncivilised” behaviour towards women as connected with “uncivilised” acts of terror” (Zalewski and Runyan, 2015: 445). Such narratives serve both to close down the moral space for dissent against the ‘War on Terror’ (Shepherd, 2006: 26), and come together such that ideas about gendered oppression and sexual violence become a “discourse of border control” which defines the parameters of European nation-states as well as “who is included and who excluded, culturally, racially, and legally” (Ticktin, 2008: 864; see also Cloud, 2004; Grewal, 2003; Zalewski and Runyan, 2015: 452). Through these narratives of “masculinist protection” (Young, 2003), not only is female agency erased but, also, “the notion of *male* vulnerability [becomes] essentially unimaginable” (Myrttinen, *et al*. 2016: 8, emphasis in original; see also Carpenter, 2006).

It is in this context instructive to note how the notion of “culture” has come to perform some of the productive work of “race” in such discourses (see Barker, 1981; van Dijk, 2001). As Ibrahim argues (2005: 165), the systems of classification that link migration to threat/vulnerability are not merely based on notions of *biological* differencebut also, and increasingly, on *cultural* difference. Here the “inferior cultural practices, attitudes and values” of migrants and refugees take centre stage (Every and Augostinos, 2007: 413), and become “the primary means for marking those who are deemed a threat” (Holmes and Castaneda, 2016: 18). While this helps us forefront how racist discourses are key to securitization processes, Moffette and Vadasaria (2016: 294) also urge caution in conceiving of racism through the “prejudice and negative attitudes that stem from ‘pseudo-biological culturalism’.” This conceptualization, they argue, “fails to engage with the modern colonial project of the nation – the object of securitization in this context – as a project already informed by interconnected genealogies of race” (*ibid*). For our analysis, this is important for the ways in which it illuminates how the amplication of ‘cultural differences’ in media frames should not be read as separate from but rather integral to colonial modernity.

**Overarching grids of intelligibility**

***“If it was women and children… on their own, I wouldn’t mind”***

Gendered and racialised representations of vulnerability and threat form the basic grids of intelligibility through which events of the ‘refugee crisis’ are interpreted in our sample of newspaper articles. Refugees as vulnerable subjects in need of protection, sympathy, and support appear to some extent throughout all phases of our sample period, and overwhelmingly, these representations are centred on images of women and children. In some cases, it is just children, in particular, unaccompanied children, who are represented as uniquely vulnerable (e.g. Gentleman 2016 [Guardian]; Reid 2016 [Mail]; Young 2015 [Telegraph]), but in general representations of vulnerability centre on “womenandchildren” (Enloe, 1993: 166), on pregnant women, and, in some cases, the elderly and disabled. So ubiquitous are such representations that these groups seem to be used as a shorthand for refugee vulnerability (see for example: Myers, 2015 [Mirror]; Shute, 2015 [Telegraph]; Rowley, 2016 [Telegraph]).

The vulnerability of “womenandchildren” is further reinforced by the implication that their suffering and death is *especially upsetting*. Articles seeking to emphasise the horror of the situation refer not just to *deaths*, but to the deaths of *women and children*: “Four babies, two children and four women were among the dead” (Smith, 2015 [Guardian]; see also Stevens, 2016a [Mail]). Similarly, articles emphasise the poor conditions endured by refugees along their journey by highlighting the fact that women and children are among those who must endure them: “Fearing that temperatures could soon dip as low as -20C […] the charity [Save the Children] runs a shelter here, where women and children can spend the night in the warmth and receive thick socks and raincoats” (Rowley, 2016 [Telegraph]). It is worth noting here that the focus on refugee women which we identify in this time period does not mean that these subjects are ‘given voice’ in the articles – rather, they largely appear “as abject bodies unable to participate in public discourse” (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017: 622) – as symbols of vulnerabilty and pity in need of ’saving.’

Representations of refugee men as vulnerable emerge less strongly from the material (see also

Pruitt *et al*., 2018: 694-695). When they do appear they are most often representations of injured, disabled or elderly men: “Beside her hobbled 22-year-old Mahmoud from Damascus, struggling on a pair of crutches because of his injured legs” (Graham-Harrison & Henley, 2015 [Guardian]). We also found some representations of refugee men as *family me*n - in particular, but not only, as fathers - who must bear their families’ physical vulnerability and cope with their own emotional vulnerability in relation to their families; as in the story of a Syrian man who “breaks down in uncontrollable tears” when he speaks of his wife and children left behind (Shute, 2015 [Telegraph]). Some articles also referred explicitly to the vulnerabilities which men and boys experience *as men*, such as the threat of forced recruitment into armed groups:

it’s the boys, from the age of about eight and up, who are most likely to be turned by Islamic State into ‘cub’ fighters - or killed. That’s why they are so vulnerable, and so intent on reaching safety out of the country.

(Afzal, 2016 [Mail])

However, this narrative was not one which emerged strongly from the articles. Indeed, we also found articles which not only failed to recognise forced recruitment as a gendered form of vulnerability - perhaps reflecting an idea that men who flee war rather than fighting exhibit a ‘failed masculinity’ – but that *themselves* called for the conscription of male refugees into fighting groups:

especially while we are still seeing young men in the streams of refugees heading to Europe, an urgent programme should be begun to organise and train men currently living in the refugee camps surrounding Syria. They should be motivated and armed, with our help, to fight for their villages, towns and cities. It may sound harsh, but some of their blood should be shed in the attack on Isil before we even consider committing British ground troops to combat in the region.

(Dannatt, 2015 [Telegraph])

While the dominant narratives generally merely omitted references to single, able-bodied adult male refugees in their depictions of vulnerability, there was also a strong tendency towards overt rejection of these people from the category of the vulnerable through the depiction of such subjects not as *threatened*, but as *threatening*. Describing the so-called “Jungle” camp in Calais, one article for instance highlights how neighbouring residents speak of being “terrified by the presence of hundreds of men living rough, just yards from their front doors” (Mulholland, 2015 [Telegraph]). Another juxtaposes imagery of “desperate families” and frightening single men, referencing the statement of a female British resident in the Greek Island of Kos:

 “If it was women and children and families on their own, I wouldn’t mind, but my fear is that there will be a lot of single young men roaming around, walking between the camp and the village.”

(Squires, 2016 [Telegraph]; see also Brooke and Allen, 2015 [Mail])

Similarly, while some articles express sympathy specifically for young unaccompanied boys (Reid 2016 [Mail]), others draw clear lines between vulnerable male children and threatening male adults and express mistrust about who falls into which group: “[C]ertain “child” asylum seekers turn out to be over six feet tall with stubble, like the “15-year-old” Somali youth who stabbed a young Swedish social worker to death” (Pearson, 2016a [Telegraph]).

In contrast to representations of “womenandchildren,” single, able-bodied and young refugee men cannot be recognised as vulnerable and in need, as they are too readily identified as a threat by their racialised maleness. In relying upon this narrative strategy, the newspaper discourse (re)produces the deeply-rooted gendered dichotomy between threaten*ed* and threaten*ing* racialised subjects, andobscuresthe possibility that male bodies, too, are weak and breakable in the face of war, of intense cold, of the ocean. That is, reflecting the insights of feminist post-colonial scholarship sketched out above, we see how the overarching grid of intelligibility which informs press coverage of the refugee crisis relies upon the assumption of racialised women as innately vulnerable and in need of paternalistic protection and, on the other hand, of racialised able-bodied men, in particular those without family ties, as suspicious and threatening.

The gendered and racialised logics identified above form the basic understanding that underpins the ‘refugee crisis’ narrative in the British press. However, *how* these logics came to be (overtly and covertly) employed in interpreting the unfolding events and in representing refugees as/at risk requires a somewhat closer reading of the evolving reports throughout 2015 and 2016. In the following sections, therefore, we take a closer look at the newspaper articles across our sample period, and identify three ‘phases’ in the dominant representation of refugees, which we entitle “Refugees welcome,” “Paris changes everything,” and “Sexual Jihad.”

**Three ‘phases’ of newspaper narratives**

***“Refugees welcome”***

The dominant narrative in the newspaper articles from September, October, and the early part of November 2015 largely reflects compassion towards the refugees (see also Chouliaraki et al., 2017; Goodman et al, 2017). Sympathy for their plight swelled across much of the world after pictures of the body of three-year-old Alan Kurdi, who drowned attempting to reach Europe along with his five-year-old brother Galib and their mother Rehana, were published in multiple media outlets. Articles in this period tell with sympathy the story of the Kurdi family and its tragic destruction; describing the “pain” and the “emotional scenes” at the family’s funeral, and stating that “The devastating image of little Aylan [sic] … has come to symbolise the human horror of the refugee crisis” (Duffin, 2015 [Mail]). In this phase, the dominant narrative reflects broad support and sympathy for the plight of refugees under the slogan “Refugees welcome” (e.g. Pidd 2015 [Guardian]), expressing sympathy for those “who have endured so much” and had “no choice” but to flee their homes (Said, 2015 [Telegraph]).

Reflecting the orientalist fantasies of (some) racialised women as innately vulnerable outlined above (e.g. Abu-Lughod, 2002; Spivak, 1998), representations of refugee suffering during this phase in the reporting skew towards a focus on women. Images of families, of the disabled, and of mothers cradling their children abound. In some articles, family identity is used to draw empathetic connections between the refugees and ‘us’: “I am a mum, and certainly I have been sleeping with my children in my bed with me because I just can’t imagine not having their little warm chubby arms around my neck” (Addley & Gani, 2015 [Guardian]). This is further reinforced through critical reporting of the perceived failure of European governments to respond properly to the crisis (Thornton, 2015 [Mirror]; Rossington *et al*., 2015 [Mirror]). Europe is accused of “slamm[ing] its doors” in the face of vulnerable refugees and Eastern European nations, in particular Hungary and its Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, come in for the harshest critique. Several articles, particularly in the Guardian, describe Orbán as “hardline anti-immigrant” (Traynor *et al*., 2015 [Guardian]), and his government as “xenophobic” (Kingsley 2015 [Guardian]). His remarks are described as “incendiary” (Traynor, 2015 [Guardian]), and his border fence – the “razor-wire” of which is repeatedly referenced (e.g. Traynor, 2015 [Guardian]; Graham-Harrison & Henley, 2015 [Guardian]; Kingsley, 2015 [Guardian]) – as “controversial” (Graham-Harrison & Henley, 2015 [Guardian]).

It is important to note, however, that not all of the articles published between September and mid-November 2015 expressed support for refugees. Articles in the Daily Mail, in particular, buck this trend with a markedly ‘anti-refugee’ stance; indeed the Mail published pieces in this period which explicitly objected to the way many people have “succumbed to a surge of emotion” around the refugee crisis (Hastings, 2015 [Mail]). In some examples the Mail was rabidly anti-refugee: an article published as early as September, which foreshadowed many of the gendered narratives of threat which appear in later phases of our analysis, scathingly mocked the “idiocy” of the “gormless Twitter generation” for showing compassion to in-comers; many of whom, in writer Richard Littlejohn’s hyperbolic terms, are “intent on trying to murder us” as well as to “insist [women don’t] leave the house unless [they’re] wearing a full burka” and to ban alcohol and pork (Littlejohn, 2015 [Mail]). It is worth noting that Littlejohn’s rhetoric here, in contrast with the dominant, women-focused narrative of this period, assumes the refugee subject to be male. This culturist narrative was mainly concentrated in the Mail at this time; however it did also appear in some of the other papers in a less hyperbolic form (e.g. Porter, 2015 [Telegraph]). Moreover, while the Mail was notable for its representation of refuges as (racialised and gendered) threat even in this early stage, the other newspapers did communicate narratives which resisted the dominant ‘refugees welcome’ trend in various ways: expressing concern, for example, over the sustainability of public services (e.g. Hartley-Brewer, 2015 [Telegraph]; McKenzie, 2015 [Guardian]); the harm caused by people smugglers (Squires, 2015 [Telegraph]); and, in a subordinate narrative, that would-be terrorists might enter Europe amid the flow of refugees (Akkoc & Hall, 2015 [Telegraph]).

The sympathetic narrative that nonetheless dominated media reports during this phase relied on the overwhelming depiction of refugees as vulnerable, and particularly as “womenandchildren” whose need for paternalistic protection was being failed by the governments of Europe. That is, drawing on the feminist post-colonial scholarship outlined above, the focus on female refugees enables their positioning as symbols of vulnerability who need to be ‘saved’ by the heroic Western subject (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Spivak 1988; Ticktin, 2008). However, as the refugee crisis developed the emphasis of the reporting shifted, and its focus on women - and therefore on the vulnerability of refugees - receded.

***“Paris changes everything”***

On 13th November 2015 a set of coordinated attacks were staged in Paris. Four terrorists detonated suicide vests at locations across the city including outside the Stade de France, and several others opened fire with assault weapons at bars, restaurants, and the Bataclan concert hall. Responsibility for the attacks was claimed soon afterwards by ISIS. In the aftermath of these events, there is a notable shift in the narratives which dominate the newspaper reports of the refugee crisis: reflected in the assertion by German politician Markus Söder, quoted in multiple articles, that “Paris changes everything” (e.g. Hall, 2015 [Telegraph]).

Specifically, reporting came to be dominated by the fear that would-be-terrorists are slipping into and across Europe under the cover of the movements of refugees. Immediately after the Paris attacks, there were reports that a Syrian passport found near the body of one of the alleged terrorists had been used to cross into the EU via Greece (e.g. Safi, 2015 [Guardian]). While later reports state that the passport was likely to have been fake or stolen (Graham-Harrison, 2015 [Guardian]), the concern that one or more of the attackers may have “posed as refugees to enter Europe before carrying out the atrocities” (Foster, 2015a [Telegraph]) made a lasting association in the newspaper discourse between the arrival of refugees in Europe and threats to security (Goodwin, 2015 [Telegraph]). While this narrative was, as noted above, present to some extent before the Paris attacks, from mid-November onwards the refugee crisis comes to be more or less *automatically* linked within the newspaper discourse to the threat of terrorism (see also Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017: 621), so that they come to be framed as “twin” issues: the “twin terrorism and refugee crises facing Europe” (Tisdall, 2015 [Guardian]; see also Worth, 2015 [Guardian]; Hope *et al*., 2016 [Telegraph]).

Given this connection, the dominant narrative which emerges in this time period - in particular in The Telegraph - calls for a tightening of border controls (Holehouse and Samuel, 2015 [Telegraph]; Foster, 2015b [Telegraph]). The articles assume a need for careful screening of refugees (Lomas 2015 [Telegraph]), cite European leaders’ demands for a strengthening of the EU’s internal and external borders (Foster *et al*., 2015 [Telegraph]), and issue grim warnings about the potential risks of lax borders (Telegraph, 2016). In general, the articles do not blame refugees themselves but state that terrorist organisations are “exploiting” the refugee crisis by using it as “a Trojan horse” in which to smuggle operatives into Europe (Coughlin, 2015 [Telegraph]). As such, while the narrative frames ‘genuine’ refugees themselves as blameless, the overwhelming story is that, unfortunately, the risks of allowing refugees unchecked into Europe may be too great: “no sane person would welcome a stranger into their home without first being assured the newcomer meant their family no harm” (*ibid*.).

In dividing ‘genuine’ refugees from those using the crisis as cover to enter Europe for nefarious ends, this narrative has continuities with our previous phase of analysis, in that the image of the vulnerable feminised refugee persists. This representation, however, is overlaid with representations of the in-comers as (racialised, masculinised) threat. The figure of the threatening terrorist which is constructed in the newspaper discourse is implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, both male and racialised. Some of the articles draw overt links between the racialised maleness of the refugees and the terrorist threat: “With every month that passes, thousands more mainly young Muslim Arab men continue to pour into Europe – with Islamic State making determined efforts to smuggle as many of their jihadi fighters across our borders as possible” (Bradley 2016 [Mail]); most, however, simply assume the maleness and racialisation of perpetrators of terrorist violence. In contrast, Hasna Aït Boulahcen, a woman killed in a police shoot-out in the days after the attacks, was described as “Europe’s first woman suicide bomber” (Sawer & Samuel, 2015 [Telegraph]) before subsequent reports suggested that she had not in fact been wearing an explosive device at the time of her death. The fact that reporting of Boulahcen’s death was centred on the fact of her femaleness - on her “glamorous” looks and on how, in perpetrating violence, she had “defied every feminine instinct” (Jones *et al*., 2015 [Mail]) - but that, conversely, the articles do not generally comment on the maleness of other terrorist suspects, of course, speaks to the normativity of the connection between (racialised) masculinity and violence. That is, recalling the feminist postcolonial scholarship outlined above (e.g. Spivak 1998; Abu-Loghod 2002; see also Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011), while an emphasis on racialised female refugees in the initial phase of reporting functioned as a shorthand for vulnerability, the shift in emphasis towards racialised male refugees in this phase became a shorthand for threat.

The discourse that assumes the refugee crisis and the threat or terrorism as “twin” issues is not, of course, complete or homogenous – some articles, for example, make the point that most terrorism is “home grown” (Sherlock, 2015 [Telegraph]). However, even amongst those which lament the tightening of Europe’s borders there is often a feeling that it is more or less inevitable: “It’s natural and human, when under threat, to want to seal the borders” (Guardian 2015). Moreover, the counter-narrative is overwhelmed by the volume and the urgency of calls to close the borders to refugees in the pursuit of security from terrorism.

***“Sexual Jihad”***

On 31st December 2015, numerous incidents of mass sexual harassment, sexual assault, and theft took place in European cities including Helsinki, Zurich, Salzburg, Hamburg, Düsseldorf and, most notably, Cologne. According to the newspaper reports, between 500 and 1,000 men aged between 15 and 35 gathered outside Cologne cathedral for New Year’s Eve celebrations, before surrounding women in groups of 30 or 40 and groping and/or mugging them (Connolly, 2016a [Guardian]). As of the 8th of January, police in the city had received around 120 complaints, including two of rape (Pearson, 2016b [Telegraph]). It was widely reported that the attacks in Cologne were carried out by “up to 1,000 men of Arab or North African appearance” (*ibid*.). Although the articles admit that it is difficult to know whether these men were recent arrivals into the country - and, indeed, it was later reported elsewhere that only three of those arrested were recent arrivals from Syria and Iraq (Mortimer, 2016) - it was widely assumed that many of them were. In the aftermath of these events, the rhetoric of the newspapers moves towards a focus on an apparently unassailable cultural difference between refugees and their European hosts. While such narratives do, as we note above, appear throughout the sample period, after Cologne the representations of cultural difference become much more commonplace and accepted, and tend to centre mainly on gender roles and gender ideologies; with ‘Europe’ portrayed as a ‘modern’ space of gender equality, and the culture of the refugees derided as innately misogynist and, therefore, ‘backwards’ (see Holzberg*, et al*., 2018 for similar findings from Germany).

The New Year’s Eve sexual violence is explained largely through gendered narratives of ‘culture,’ based on the assumption that the refugees “come from cultures that do not respect the rights of women or gay people,” and “don’t understand that sticking your hand up a woman’s skirt is unacceptable” (Pearson, 2016c [Telegraph]); that the attacks represent “the tectonic plates of two civilisations coming up against each other with earth-shattering consequences” (Daily Mirror, 2016). These “migrant sex attacks” (Stevens, 2016b [Mail]) emerge as different from ‘normal’ sexual assaults, which might be “merely opportunist, as much criminal as sexual in nature,” perpetrated “by young men who were drunk or high”; and instead are explained by their being perpetrated by those from “a very different, male-dominated culture” (Woods, 2016 [Telegraph]). As such, concern appears about the future implications of importing such “cultural misogyny” (White, 2016 [Guardian]) and of the “social and religious chasm… between the general population and its growing ethnic minority” (Woods, 2016 [Telegraph]) which seems to exist as a result. As the following extract demonstrates, the idea emerges that, given the strength of the patriarchal norms embedded the cultures which refugees are thought to bring with them, such violences are largely *inevitable:*

If you are doctrinally commanded to cover up your women, then the sight of lovely, blonde Michelle, uncovered and happily self-confident, provokes temptation, and this makes you angry. That anger is not directed where it should be – at yourself or at a belief system that forbids a woman to behave as she pleases – but at the temptress. In order for male pride to be salvaged, the temptress can be humiliated and terrorised, thus restoring power and dominance to where it properly belongs – the man.

(Pearson, 2016b [Telegraph])

In this narrative, the events of Cologne come to represent “the first of many battles in a new clash of civilisations” (Pearson, 2016b [Telegraph]). Indeed, an article published in the Daily Mail in February suggests that the “culture of misogyny” brought by the refugees already means that, “in Europe,” young women “can no longer enjoy the same basic freedoms – a night out on the town without being attacked by mobs of men – as previous generations” (Vine, 2016 [Mail]). As such, women’s wearing of “mini-skirts and micro-shorts” on the streets of German cities is described as “defiant,” and as an act of resistance: “we’re going to party – otherwise they just win” (Foster, 2016 [Telegraph]).

Moreover, the events of Cologne come to be interlinked in this discourse with those of Paris and with the refugee crisis more broadly. That is, much as the refugee crisis becomes “twinned” with terrorism in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, after the events in Cologne misogyny and sexual violence are also plaited into this narrative, an association most succinctly encapsulated in the phrase “sexual jihad” (White, 2016 [Guardian]). Cologne’s February Rose Monday Carnival, for example, is described as taking place against a threatening “backdrop of mass immigration, January’s sex attacks and the threat of Islamic terror” (Connolly, 2016b [Guardian]). Reports begin to mention accusations of sexual assault made against terror suspects (Huggler, 2016b [Telegraph]), framed as “fuelled by a clash of cultures” (Malone, 2016 [Mirror]). That is, reflecting Zalewski and Runyan’s (2015: 445)

work cited above, the notion of Muslim/Arab masculinity as characterised by the interwoven “uncivilised” acts of sexual and terrorist violence comes to the fore in this phase of reporting.

In contrast to the reporting in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, the gendering of these narratives is significantly more explicit, as the threatening subject is clearly and overtly depicted as male, and moreover as male and *young* (see Pruitt, *et al*., 2018). This maleness, moreover, is explicitly racialised – it is not men in general who are positioned as a sexual threat to women, but men from “conservative cultural backgrounds in the Middle East and north Africa” (White, 2016 [Guardian]). Indeed, the dominant narrative avoids drawing any connection between the sexual violences perpetrated in Cologne and those which are endemic in the experiences of so many women across Europe. For example, while we find complaints about the lack of robust legal protection and punishment in relation to these violences (e.g. Huggler, 2016a [Telegraph]) it is telling that they do not connect their discussions to the similarly low rates of legal punishment for all sexual assaults across Europe (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Similarly, while we find outrage after the Mayor of Cologne reportedly proposed that young women should regulate their behaviour so as not to be subject to attack - and this *is*, of course, outrageous – several of the articles connect this to failures to prosecute cases of sexual abuse in Rotherham and Rochdale “by gangs of mainly Pakistani origin” because of an alleged concern for cultural relativism (Pearson, 2016b [Telegraph]; see also Afzal, 2016 [Mail]; Vine, 2016 [Mail]) rather than, for example, to the multiple times that British police forces have faced criticism for victim-blaming anti-rape campaigns that similarly call upon women to change their behaviour to avoid violence (see, for example, Everyday Victim Blaming, 2015; Gander, 2015). Moreover, while we found some concern that refugee women are made vulnerable by being forced to sleep “surrounded by groups of men” (Ghouri 2016 [Guardian]), the dominant focus of outrage appeared in relation to the victimisation of *white* women - of “lovely, blonde Michelle” (Pearson, 2016b [Telegraph]) - in a discourse which clearly reflects the colonial fear of racialised sexuality (Nagel 1998: 257).

Indeed, in contrast to the earlier phases which emerge from our analysis, from January onwards narratives about refugee *women* largely dissapear and their vulnerabilities, previously at the foreground of the narratives, retreat from view. That is, the idea that racialised women need to be ‘saved’ from their oppressive cultures and from the hardships of their refugee journeys recedes into the background in the face of the more immediate concern for the ‘saving’ of ‘our’ women. Refugee women, who were previously held apart as a particular group in need of support, are now reabsorbed into the threatening (masculinized) mass of ‘refugees’ writ large. In these narratives, that is, these acts of sexual violence come to stand in for differences and relationships of power between masculinised national identities (see McClintock, 1993: 61; see also Nagel, 1998: 257; see also Ahmed, 1992: Scheibelhofer, 2012: 320-21). As such, and recalling Ticktin (2008: 264), it is unsurprising that this narrative once again connects to border security (Pearson, 2016d [Telegraph]; Wright, 2016 [Mail]). Again, it is important to note that this shift in the narratives which takes place after the events of New Year’s Eve is neither homogenous nor neat, and that some articles continue to express sympathy for refugees at this time. However, these counter-narratives are overwhelmed by representations of (masculinised) refugees as sexually threatening and as terrorists; as the racialised masculine ‘other’ found in justifications of colonialism.

**Concluding remarks**

In this paper, we have explored the intertwined gendered and racialised representations of vulnerability and of threat which have framed images of refugees coming to Europe in British newspaper reports. These representations, we have argued, are neither new nor surprising, but rather which reflect the logics underpinning colonial modernity. As such, while we can certainly speak about the securitisation of migration in response to the “refugee crisis”, it is important to bear in mind that ‘extraordinary’ responses to particular circumstances are made possible by the ‘ordinary’ ideas about vulnerability and threat that ground dominant ways of understanding the world (Mofette and Vadasaria, 2016). Moreover, we have illustrated that the violences which underlie contemporary modernity are not only formulated through ideas about racialised *threat*, but also about racialised *vulnerability*, and, moreover, that these representations of racialised vulnerability and threat are formulated through gender. These underlying racialised and gendered logics form the framework through which contemporary events are made sense of within dominant discourse. As such, they inform the ways in which policy responses to contemporary events are formulated.

The gendered and racialised grids of intelligibility that we have identified in this paper, in other words, *matter* in important ways to people’s abilities to find safety, because they inform the ways in which global events come to be interpreted and responded to. Specifically, we argue that the dichotomous framing of gender and of vulnerability which characterises much of the media discourse and the failure to recognise that *all* people seeking to cross into Europe in this way are subjects at risk, albeit in diverse and intersectionally mediated ways, contributes towards an end result in which it becomes difficult to recognise the vulnerability of this mobile population writ large. That is, while it is certainly important to recognise the gendered nature of challenges facing displaced populations, positioning (all) women refugees as *uniquely* vulnerable has here enabled the obscuring of the vulnerability of (all) refugee men. When the focus of the reporting shifted from female to male refugees with the events of Paris and of Cologne, it was a relatively easy move to assume the threatening nature of refugees as a group*,* because male vulnerability had been obscured from the outset. As such, the pervasive imaginaries of intertwined (racialised, feminised) vulnerability and (racialised, masculinised) threat through which refugee bodies appear as/at risk serve to legitimate responses to the crisis through which both male and female refugees are made unsafe.

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