The virality of Norwegian guilt. How a story of male rape from Norway made international headlines

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ABSTRACT
When a young Norwegian man talked openly about being raped by a Somali asylum seeker and for feeling guilty about the rapist’s deportation, the news went viral not only in Norway, but also abroad. Several British and American tabloid newspapers as well as news and opinion websites from the UK, the US, Russia, Poland, Croatia and the Czech Republic reported about the Norwegian “politician” who felt “guilty” that Norwegian authorities sent his rapist back to Somalia. This article closely investigates the mediation of this story with a focus on how the emotion of guilt was staged in a national televised and digital media context in Norway before it reached the international tabloid media and opinion websites like Breitbart.com. It demonstrates how guilt functions as an affective nodal point at the intersection of many dimensions of identity, such as gender, sexuality, race, able-bodiedness, national identity, and political affiliation. The article also shows how a story of male rape from Norway facilitated an opportunity for tabloid journalists to rally against the Norwegian, and by extension, the European political Left, which they constructed as weak, feminine, and raped from behind by the very immigrants it seeks to protect.

In April 2016, a twenty-six-year-old Norwegian man, Karsten Nordal Hauken, made international headlines after talking openly about being raped by a Somali asylum seeker. Tabloid newspapers from the UK and the US, like The Sun (Cox 2016), The Independent (Worley 2016), Mirror Online (Mullin 2016), Daily Mail (Malm 2016) and The Daily Caller (Bennett 2016), as well as other international news and opinion websites like the far-right Breitbart (Lane 2016), the Coffee House Blog of the British conservative magazine The Spectator (Murray 2016), and the international television network funded by the Russian government RT (RT 2016) reported on how Nordal Hauken felt guilty when he learned that his rapist was deported back to Somalia after serving a four-year-and-a-half sentence in a Norwegian prison. In capital letters or put in inverted commas, Nordal Hauken’s guilt went viral. It popped on news feeds in the social media and provoked inflammatory reader comments such as despise, derision, and even hate.

In this article, inspired by Sara Ahmed’s work on diversity and her ethnographic method to track how texts move and/or get stuck (Ahmed 2004; Ahmed 2012), I embark on a journey to follow Nordal Hauken’s guilt around. Instead of focusing on the public reception of Nordal Hauken’s story through an investigation of the debate online, I go home to where Nordal Hauken’s mediated guilt literally comes from: a TV-series by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) entitled Jeg mot meg/Me Against Myself (Faldbakken 2016), in which he first shared his story in front of a national audience, and a column he wrote for the opinion website of NRK (Hauken 2016), and from where his story was further disseminated abroad. My decision to focus on these two texts rather than the debate online is double-motivated. First, I want to highlight the role of the media outlets in the virality of guilt. Second, it is my goal to recuperate that which the international dissemination of Nordal Hauken’s story disregarded and/or concealed. For not only did the international news and opinion websites mentioned above brush over the Norwegian TV-series, they also cherry-picked Nordal Hauken’s self-proclaimed guilt and run with it. As an ethnographer of guilt, I therefore take upon myself the analytical task to engage in close analyses of these two interrelated texts and point out how they are in a relation of dynamic juxtaposition with those published in the international media outlets. As I do that, I demonstrate how Nordal Hauken’s guilt became a “sticky” sign in Ahmed’s sense: the more it circulated and got repeated, the more it accumulated affective value by concealing associations to discourses of gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, race, nationality, and political affiliation. In this article, I make these associations explicit and
argue that guilt became an affective nodal point at the intersection of these many dimensions of identity. I also show how guilt facilitated an opportunity for aggressive voices to rally against the figure of the weak, immigrant friendly and gender-minded leftist whom Nordal Hauken was seen to epitomize. In line with the intimacy cultivated by the Norwegian TV-series Me Against Myself, as well as the personal tone in Nordal Hauken’s column, I choose to call Nordal Hauken by his first name, Karsten, and refer to his self-proclaimed guilt as ”Karsten’s guilt.”

**Karsten’s story on TV: “share it with someone, no matter what it is”**

Karsten’s guilt traces back to the Norwegian TV-series Me Against Myself about eight Norwegian youth with mental struggles. Once a week for 3 months, they meet for televised group therapy together with celebrity psychologist Peder Kjos in a studio. They also keep a video blog in which they document their emotional ups and downs. Me Against Myself was a great success with the Norwegian public and it won the 2016 Taboo Prize offered by the Norwegian Council for Mental Health (Revheim and Strønen). Karsten is one of the eight participants in the series. His story is featured in three different episodes: Episode 5, in which Karsten comes out as a male rape victim in the group therapy session; Episode 6, in which Karsten gives us an insight into his drug addiction that he developed in the aftermath of the rape; and Episode 8, when Karsten opens up and tells his parents about his addiction.

Karsten’s story unfolds as a montage of clips from his video diary with clips from the therapy studio. Spatiotemporal consistency has lower priority. Clips of him from different therapy sessions are edited side by side despite the obvious temporal inconsistency (for example, he wears different clothes). In the video diaries entries, we move in and out of Karsten’s and his parents’ apartment and drive around in his car without always being able to follow the spatial and temporal transitions from one cut to another within the same scene. The logic that affords these breaches in temporal and spatial continuity is Karsten’s struggle to share his story: he is nervous to tell the other group therapy members about the rape and even more nervous to tell his parents about his addiction. Further, the narrative suggests that Karsten must come out as a victim of rape and a substance abuser if he is to move on with his life.

Episode 5 opens abruptly with a video diary in which Karsten introduces himself in a handheld close-up: “I don’t know what to say about myself. I am pretty normal in many ways, I think, and a little unusual in other ways [Takes a deep breath, leans against the wall, reestablishes eye contact with the camera]. What makes me unusual is that I am a man and that I have been raped. That’s what I’ll talk about. [Takes another deep breath]. Damnit,” he says shaken, yet maintaining eye contact with the camera. By confessing in front of the camera what his group therapy members have yet to hear, Karsten builds an intimate bond with the audiences and commits them to stay attune. This intimacy is punctuated through a series of six clips (five from his video diary and one from a therapy session) in which we see Karsten’s hesitation to share the same information with the group therapy members. “Next time I have to tell the others that I have been raped. I just have to do it. Have to spit it out. It is super scary,” says Karsten nervously in one of his video diary entries filmed in his car.

Half way through Episode 5, as the narrative hits the point of no return, Karsten is finally ready to confess to the others: “I have talked about this a lot, and yet it is still difficult to just say it. Because in 2009, I got raped [pause] by a man [breaths out, coughs] and I am heterosexual, so perhaps it made things [pause] I don’t know if it had made a difference, but after that life said stop. I started to abuse hash more and more, in some periods quite a lot, and stopped going to school, and in reality, I stopped participating in social things.” As Karsten comes out as a victim of rape in the therapy studio, the camera cuts back and forth from medium close-ups of him to the visibly affected members of the therapy group.

In the studio, he explains in detail what happened the night of 2 May 2009 when he was raped. He met the rapist on his way home from a party. He was a Somali asylum seeker in Norway who needed a place to sleep after he claimed to have missed his train. Karsten had had a project at the university about Somalia, was politically active in the Norwegian Socialist Left Party (SV) and had antiracist ideological convictions. This, he continues, made him respond to the Somali man’s plea by inviting him to sleep in his student flat. Once in the apartment, the man threatened Karsten, forced him to take methamphetamine and perform oral sex on him. After 5 hours of mental and physical abuse, Karsten managed to injure the rapist with a knife and escape the apartment. In the aftermath of the tragic incident, the rapist was caught and sentenced to four years and a half in prison, and finally extradited back to Somalia.

Following this confession, Karsten engages in a dialog with the rest of the therapy group and makes some important clarifications: “As a matter of fact, I have never felt any anger. Indeed, I also had big problems with making him personally responsible, because I understand so well the circumstances he came from. He is a product of an unjust world.” The response of the group is unanimously supportive: he receives credit and respect for being so brave as to share his story not only with the group, but also with the rest of the country. He also receives support for retribution (“I want to
travel down to Somalia. Fuck yeah, I will give him a lesson,” says Fredrik), advice to hold the rapist responsible for his own actions (“There are those who come from exactly the same place and do a great job in school, and get a job and family, and pay taxes, and do everything so well, sort of,” says Eirin), and admiration for his empathetic ability to think beyond his personal drama and continue to support the plea of refugees from war zones (“I get warm inside and think you are so great, I mean. Yes, I think you put it so well,” says Malin).

Episode 5 ends on an optimistic note. We are back in Karsten’s apartment: first, three shots of Karsten planting seeds at his kitchen table, one establishing shot and two medium close-ups, then a close-up of Karsten speaking straight into the camera, followed by a medium close-up of Karsten filmed from behind placing the seed beds in the window pain. It is dark outside. Inside the apartment, the light is cold and artificial, projected from a five-bulb lamp hanging above the kitchen table. The symbolic gesture of planting seeds and the sound track suggest, however, a new beginning. The entire scene is accompanied by extradiegetic music: the soft and harmonic tones of the Norwegian electronic band Røyksopp’s song “Forever.” Karsten’s voice is heard throughout the entire montage, bridging the cuts from the kitchen with the close-up of him speaking straight into the camera. He assesses the situation: “I feel a little relieved now [Pause. Extradiegetic music takes over, then the volume sinks down again] I want to feel that I am heading some place. Now, it is no longer just about reparation. Now, I have in fact started again where I have jumped off six years ago. I hope it is happening.”

The episode suggests that Karsten is closer to getting his life back. He has come out as a victim of rape and shared his story with the group, but he has yet to tell his parents about his drug abuse. After a close insight into his addiction in Episode 6, Karsten finally manages to talk to his parents midway in Episode 8. In a sequence of clips from his video diary, he talks about the immense relief he felt after the conversation with the parents: “What feels best is that I finally feel free. Ohhh… And it is so cool. I am sure that you can hear it in my voice now.” Immediately after, the camera cuts to a scene of Karsten on a motorboat on his way to go fishing. The sky is blue, the sun is out, Karsten is smiling from ear to ear for the first time in the series. The extradiegetic music undergirds the happy mood.

In the therapy studio, Karsten and the psychotherapist conclude:

**PEDER KJØS:** You had a story to tell. A story that is ugly to hear, right? And then I think it is not so big any longer. I don’t know.

**KARSTEN NORDAL HAUKEN:** I fully agree.

**PEDER KJØS:** It is a bit strange. Right now, this is what I think when I see you. I hope you feel the same. That this story is allowed to become a museum object.

**KARSTEN NORDAL HAUKEN:** I think so. Or in fact I know this is the case.

**PEDER KJØS:** And then you move on to other projects that are better to do than being the bearer of a story. At the end of Episode 8, Karsten has finally been able to share his story and can now move on. The first season of the TV-series Me Against Myself ends with a montage of each of the participants saying goodbye in a video diary entry followed by a white-on-black intertitle displaying the progress made by each of the participants in the series. Karsten gets to end the season and have the final words. “Trying to find some fine words to tell those of you who are watching until the end,” he says in a handheld medium close-up sitting on a couch. In the intertitle, the viewers can read: “Karsten has resumed his biology studies and gets high grades. He has not smoked hash since the filming ended.” Then, in a final medium close-up from the same sofa as in the cut preceding the intertitle, Karsten delivers his punch line: “The most important thing I can say is: share it with someone, no matter what it is.” He is composed, making regular eye contact with the camera.

As the oldest participant in the TV-series, Karsten is presented as a reflected person, both with regards to his own problems and the filming situation he is part of. In the therapy studio, when he presents himself as a male rape victim, he first insinuates that his sexual orientation (heterosexual) and the rapist’s gender (male) may have acerbated his trauma (“I am heterosexual, so perhaps it made things [pause]”). Before completing his sentence, he immediately arrests himself by dismissing the male rape myth that being sexually assaulted has anything to do with the sexual orientation of the male rape victim (“I don’t know if it had made any difference”). In the video diary, Karsten is often ambivalent about the role of the camera in documenting his mental struggle. At times, he is quite restrictive of what he is willing to share with the viewer. For example, in Episode 6, he takes us on a ride to find drugs and make alcohol supplies, yet turns off the camera as the drugs and alcohol start having an effect on him. “OK. See you on the other side,” he says and the screen fades to black. Other times, Karsten treats the camera as a reliable, intimate friend in whom he can confide before he is ready to share his story with the other therapy group members and his family. He commonly interacts with the camera by using the second person singular form of the personal pronoun. In Episode 8, returning home from his parents after yet another failed attempt to tell them about
his addiction, Karsten films himself in handheld close-ups and extreme close-ups as he enters his apartment: “Can you read my face? Nope, it didn’t happen.” By using direct address, Karsten increases the viewer’s engagement, making her into a trusted confidant. He is also acquainted with the legal aspects of filming. First, he jokingly asks his cat for permission to be filmed (“Do you mind that I film you?”). Then, in a conversation with a friend, he bitterly lists several bands whose music cannot be used in TV-productions (“It’s asshole artists like Red Hot Chili Peppers, Metallica, Led Zeppelin, The Beatles, Pink Floyd”).

Karsten’s televised story has many layers: rape and gender, trauma and addiction, relief and empathy, responsibility and power, trust and skepticism, (self) mediation and vulnerability, ambivalence and trust. It underlines the benefits of sharing one’s own vulnerabilities with others and showcases Karsten as a reflected and brave young man who manages to “archive” his story, stop numbing himself with drugs and alcohol, and move on by pursuing his university education. How did a national televised story about personal courage and responsibility turn into a tabloid international news report about Norwegian guilt? To answer this question, we need to continue our journey, this time in the digital media.

**Karsten’s story in the digital media: guilt enters the scene and takes over**

On 6 April 2016, two days after the official release of *Me Against Myself*, Karsten wrote a column for NRK’s opinion website, NRK Ytring (Hauken 2016). The timing of the publication was by no means accidental. Entitled “I Was Raped by a Man,” Karsten’s column became an integral part in the marketing of the TV-series and was written to explain, criticize, and persuade. Guilt is a prominent theme in Karsten’s column, explicitly named already in the leading paragraph: “I am a heterosexual man who was raped by a Somali asylum seeker. My life fell apart, but now I feel guilty about him being sent out of the country.” As Karsten builds his arguments, it becomes evident that guilt for him is a group-based moral emotion motivated by privilege in two respects: the privilege of being a “lucky” rape victim and the privilege of being Norwegian. He first presents his own case as a “success story” when compared to what other rape victims have to endure. He writes positively about his experiences with the health, forensic and judicial system, and mentions his initial relief and joy when he learned that the rapist was extradited after serving four years and a half in a Norwegian prison. He then ties this privilege of being a “lucky” rape victim to the privilege of being Norwegian. It is this double privilege that makes Karsten feel guilty about the Somali man’s fate: “I was the reason that he [the Somali man] could not be in Norway anymore, but instead had to be sent to an uncertain future in Somalia. He has already served his sentence in prison. Should he now be punished again? And this time much harder?”

Later in his text, Karsten explicitly constructs Somalia as a country ridden by war and deprivation, and the Somali man as a product of these dire circumstances. In contrast, it is implied that Norway is affluent and peaceful, but also revengeful and even patronizing, like when Karsten personifies the Norwegian state into “an enraged father confronting its child’s attacker” and implicitly compares himself to a vulnerable child. Unlike the Norwegian authorities, which sent the rapist out of Norway, Karsten remains committed to help refugees, including those with his rapist’s background. He ends his column by pledging allegiance to an unfair world, rather Norway: “Ultimately, I am a human being first, and not a Norwegian. No, I am a part of the world, and the world is unfortunately unjust.”

The logic that sustained Karsten’s televised story was the struggle to share a traumatic story (rape) and/or be open about an addiction (alcohol and cannabis). The proposal advanced was that being open to share helps. “Share it with someone, no matter what it is” was Karsten’s punch line that wrapped up not only his televised story, but also the entire first season of *Me Against Myself*. In the column, the logic that sustains Karsten’s argumentation is the struggle to respond responsibly to global injustice. The proposal this time has changed to “We have to help,” as Karsten’s last subheading in the column puts it. We, Norwegians, should help young men who struggle (like Karsten), and we should help refugees (like the Somali asylum seeker). Guilt is the moral catalyst that enables this kind of reasoning.

Karsten’s column on NRK Ytring was shared on social media, among others on Facebook where it got my attention. When the tone of the discussion in the comment field on NRK Ytring became too inflammatory, the NRK-moderators decided to shut down the debate. Yet, this did not put a stop on the dissemination of Karsten’s story. Within a couple of days, international tabloid digital press and other news and opinion websites like Breibart.com reported on the case from Norway (Bohnenblust; Mogen 2016). As already pointed out in the introduction, in the international coverage, it was Karsten’s guilt that made the headlines, literally speaking. The international news reports cherry-picked Karsten’s guilt and ran with it, while Karsten’s call for global justice fell on deaf ears. It is also noteworthy that the large majority of the international digital press mistakenly presented Karsten as a Norwegian politician rather than a student with a political affiliation to the
Norwegian Socialist Left Party.28 Also, Breitbart.com (Lane 2016), the Russian government funded RT (RT (TV Network) 2016), and The Spectator’s Coffee House blog (Murray 2016), wrote that Karsten was anally raped, with Breitbart and RT highlighting the anal penetration already in the title. This piece of information, however, is in contrast with what Karsten explained in the Norwegian TV-series. Describing the rape scene in Episode 5 in Me Against Myself, Karsten in fact underlined that he managed to injure the rapist and escape his apartment before being anally raped. Yet, in the viral dissemination of Karsten’s guilt, journalists like Breitbart’s and RT’s automatically assumed that Karsten’s rape equals anal penetration.

Moreover, writing for the Coffee House blog of The Spectator, the conservative and Islam-critic author and commentator Douglas Murray goes as far as to showcase Karsten’s guilt as representative of a new psychosocial phenomenon. After drawing a brief parallel to a female activist, who was allegedly gang-raped by Sudanese immigrants, but who chose not to report her rapists because of her political convictions, Murray concludes:

Everyone now knows the term ‘Stockholm syndrome’, used to describe hostages who take on the perspective of their kidnappers. Perhaps the Hauken case could be used to coin the term ‘Norway syndrome’, an affliction that causes rape-victims to feel concern over the prospects of their rapists? There certainly should be a term. Because I suspect we’re going to need one in our vibrant and exciting future. (Murray 2016)

What started as a Norwegian TV series about mental struggles and the importance of being open ends up as a headline in a conservative British magazine showcasing “the Norway syndrome.” This deviant journey that witnesses the virality of guilt necessarily needs a closer investigation.

Guilt at the intersection of gender, sexuality, race, able-bodiedness, nationality and political affiliation

Rape is a crucial factor in the rapid and infectious dissemination of Karsten’s guilt. If one looks closer at the discourse of rape, one finds that guilt and rape are partners in crime. Sexual assault crisis and support centers write on their websites that guilt is in fact a common reaction after being raped, with many victims undeservingly blaming themselves for their actions and/or lack thereof. Moreover, American sociologists Julia Schwendinger and Herman Schwendinger (1980) point out that guilt “is reinforced by the people the victim comes in contact with following the members of the family, hospital personnel, the police and others in the criminal justice system” (10). After interviewing and counseling female rape victims, Schwendinger and Schwendinger debunk the rape myth that a victim’s sense of guilt automatically comes from her belief that she was willingly compliant in the assault. Instead, they bring attention to the social forces that install into women what they call “a false sense of guilt” and which plays a key role into women’s decision not to report the assault. Among others, Schwendinger and Schwendinger write about the social stigma and the chauvinistic legal standards that female rape victims anticipate.

Since Schwendinger and Schwendinger wrote their article in 1980, things have changed. In the Norwegian context from which I write, arguments about the victim’s complicity in the sexual assault are oftentimes arrested by the gender-minded Norwegian public opinion. Yet, rape remains a social stigma and the rape reporting rates are disturbingly low. According to a study conducted by the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS) in 2014, only 11% of the victims report the rape to the police (Thorensen and Hjemdal 2014). Asked to choose one of thirteen possible explanations for not reporting the rape, two thirds of the sexually assaulted women participating in the Norwegian study answered “other reasons,” attesting to the researcher’s difficulty in solving the low rape reporting rate conundrum (ibid). On the other hand, the next two most given reasons for not reporting the rape were a belief that it could not help much, followed by a feeling that the victim could not take much more humiliation (ibid).

Eight out of ten cases of rapes reported to the Norwegian police are not prosecuted (the total number varies between 75–81%), while the perpetrator is found not guilty in every fourth trial (Aarnes, Østli, and Jaquotot 2015). This means that the odds of being punished for committing rape in Norway are worryingly low: only one out of one hundred rape cases ends in the conviction of the rapist. The NKVTS study also shows that the prevalence of rape is 9.4% in Norwegian women and 1.1% in Norwegian men, while perpetrators of sexual abuse are almost exclusively men (ibid).

Given the dark numbers in the rape statistics, the shock factor in Karsten’s story runs high. First, his televised coming out as a male rape victim is “shocking” and “brave,” to use the words of the other participants in the group therapy, because Karsten is such an exception to the rule: he gives a face to the 1.1% Norwegian male rape victims and the 11% rape victims who report the sexual assault.

Second, Karsten is one in one hundred rape victims whose case ended in the rapist’s conviction. He also received a compensation of 400,000 Norwegian crowns from the Norwegian state. In Episode 6 in Me Against
he opens up by speaking directly into the camera in a frontal close-up: “Try imagining that you have had a traumatic experience and that you sit at home full of post-traumatic stress and start doing drugs. Then, suddenly, one day, 400,000 crowns are transferred to your account. What do you think happens then?” The irony behind his question, denoted also by Karsten’s tone of voice, is obvious: the compensation Karsten received from the Norwegian state only exacerbated his post-traumatic stress by financing his overconsumption of food, alcohol and cannabis. For what Karsten needed was not money, but help, which he allegedly receives by participating in the NRK TV-series.

Third, if Karsten’s sexuality (heterosexual) and political affiliation (Norwegian Socialist Left Party) are shortly mentioned in the TV-series, his strong sense of global responsibility is foregrounded. In response to the reactions of the other group therapy members, Karsten talks about the importance of solidarity with migrants who come from war-torn countries such as Somalia: “I find it difficult to think that he [the rapist] is evil. I have always been like this, for better or worse. I judge people based on the circumstances they come from and I think it is good that we [Norwegians] take in people from war-torn regions.” In the TV-series, discourses of gender, openness, disability and global responsibility plow the ground for Karsten’s guilt, while sexuality, race and politics lure in the horizon. It is first in the column written for NRK Ytring that guilt becomes explicitly named and nationalized. Here, Karsten’s guilt is framed as Norwegian, and implicitly White: a moral emotion engendered by the privilege of being ethnically Norwegian and by the importance to help others in war-torn areas.

In an attempt to measure White guilt in the US in the 20th century, American psychologists Janet K. Swim and Deborah L. Miller (1999) define White guilt as a collective emotion created by a double awareness: the awareness of unearned White privilege and the awareness of racism (500). Also in the field of social psychology in the US, the findings of two studies conducted by Aarti Iyer, Colin Wayne Leach and Faye J. Crosby (2003) show that White guilt is self-focused, rather than focused on the welfare of the harmed, and predicts support for affirmative action programs aimed at compensating African Americans. Moreover, distinguishing between conservative and liberal beliefs among their informants, Iyer et.al argue that “liberalism did not appear to play a substantive role in the association between guilt and compensation” (128).

When compared to these studies in the US, Karsten’s guilt evinces a specific characteristic of Norway post 1989. In the early 1990s, as the Norwegian oil and gas production started to generate significant national revenues, Norwegian politicians made peace and conflict mediation as well as development aid into hallmarks of Norwegian foreign policy (Tvedt 2009). This strategic political move, which allowed Norway to claim a place in global politics, was culturally sustained by an understanding of Norway as a regime of goodness and a compassionate state (Gullestad 2007; Tvedt 2009; Witoszek 2011). Contemporary Norwegian film and literature became important arenas to exercise compassionate citizenship. For example, the trope of suffering manhood became very popular in the beginning of the 2000s, with Norwegian audiences being encouraged to feel with White men with a psychiatric diagnosis (Dancus 2013). Also, the privilege of being Norwegian started to be coded more and more as a moral obligation to help others in need (Oxfeldt 2016).

From this perspective, Karsten’s guilt is not so much triggered by an explicit awareness of racism in Norway (like it is the case with White American guilt), as by socio-political and cultural discourses that construct Norway as a regime of goodness and a compassionate humanitarian power. While development aid finds support to various degrees in the entire political spectrum in Norway, the Norwegian Socialist Left Party (SV) has been particularly adamant about a generous donor politics corroborated with a welcoming asylum politics. In the aftermath of the arrival of large numbers of migrants and refugees in Europe in 2015 and the beginning of 2016, other Norwegian political parties have adopted a much stricter approach to coping with the influx of migrants and refugees coming from the South. SV, on the other hand, has held the same political course despite the fact that the party has experienced a decline in support. When Karsten begins his column on NRK Ytring with a politically charged question (“How is it to be a young socialist, feminist and anti-racist, and raped by a Somali man?”), he consciously taps into the national image that Norwegian politicians are so keen to advocate abroad, and which SV keeps on reminding their political counterparts and public opinion of at home: Norway has the moral obligation to help refugees. In a heated political climate that asks Norwegians to constantly revise their generosity, it is evident that Karsten’s political affiliation plays an important role in the association between guilt and compensation (Karsten’s final pledge in the column is “We have to help”). The debate on the NRK Ytring attests to this, as many of the responses focused on the rapist’s immigrant background and Karsten’s political affiliation rather than on the taboo of being a male rape victim.

In the English-speaking tabloid media, guilt is further politicized to the point that it becomes global in scope as well as homophobic and poisonous in nature. Murray’s term, for example, “Norway
syndrome,” is unmistakably political and global. To Murray, “the Hauken case” is symptomatic not only of the entire political Left in Norway, whom Karsten is seen to represent in his so-called occupation as a Norwegian “left-wing politician.” Through the analogy to the female activist who did not report her gang rape, Murray puts a political diagnose that targets immigrant-friendly leftists in the Western world. What is more, the insistence on the anal rape on Breitbart, RT and The Spectator is indicative of the ridicule and homophobia with which male rape victims report being met by the public, as well as by the police and health personnel (Bitsch 2014; Bråthen 2015; Johansson 2013; Senneset 2015). In the international coverage of Karsten’s story, the discourses of gender and sexuality sneak in once again, but this time to serve a political agenda. Karsten becomes the symbol of a weak and feminized Left who is sodomized by the very people it seeks to protect. Its vulgarity aside, Murray’s argument is politically poisonous in so far it attests to racist, misogynous, and homophobic attitudes repacked as political differences between a weak, feminine socialist Left and a strong, manly conservative Right.

Conclusion

One of the key concepts developed by political theorists Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (1985) is the nodal point, which they define as a central, privileged signifier that binds together a web of certain meanings into a discourse. In the words of Mouffe (2008), nodal points “fix the meaning of institutions and social practices, and articulate the ‘common sense’ through which a given conception of reality is established.” The dissemination of Karsten’s story from Norwegian national TV to a Norwegian opinion website and further to international tabloid media, attests to how guilt functions as an affective nodal point at the intersection of many dimensions of identity. Gender, sexuality, race, able-bodiedness, national identity, and political affiliation inflate the affective value of guilt and contribute to its viral propagation in the infectious mediascapes.12 My discussion shows how Karsten’s guilt is produced as an effect of its circulation, to use Sara Ahmed’s formulation (2004, 120). The more it circulated, the more it stuck to the collective body of the European political Left, whose representative Karsten Nordal Hauken was seen to incarnate. The farther politically Right Karsten’s guilt got, the more aggressive and vulgar it became, referencing a poisonous alloy of the figures of the male rape victim, the migrant rapist, and the weak, feminine Leftist.

Notes

1. In the title, The Sun (Cox 2016), Mirror Online (Mullin 2016), and Daily Mail (Malm 2016), capitalized the word “GUILTY,” while The Independent (Worley 2016), Breitbart (Lanc 2016), RT (2016) put the word “guilt[?]” in inverted commas.

2. Almost 580,000 watched the first episode of Me Against Myself live on NRK’s main channel or online, a surprisingly high number that exceeded even the director’s and producer’s own expectations (Stapnes 2016).

3. The Council for Mental Health hands in very year the Taboo Prize to a person, organization or enterprise who through words or action contributes to dismantling prejudices about mental health, breaks taboos, promotes integration, thoughtfulness and openness about mental health.

4. “Jeg veit ikke hva jeg skal si om meg sjøl. Jeg er ganske vanlig på mange måter, tror jeg, og litt uvanlig på andre måter. Det som gjør meg uvanlig er at jeg er mann og er blitt voldtatt. Det er det jeg skal snakke om.”

5. All the translations from Norwegian into English from the TV-series are mine.

6. “Neste gang må jeg fortelle til de andre at jeg ble voldtatt. Jeg må gjøre det. Må bare pøse det ut altså. Det er kjempeskummelt.”

7. “Jeg har snakka mye om det, men det er alikevel vanskelig å bare si det. Fordi i 2009 så ble jeg voldtatt av en mann og jeg er heterofil, så det gjorde kanskje... Jeg vet ikke om det hadde vært noe bedre, men etter det så sa livet stopp. Jeg begynte å misbruke hasj mer og mer, i perioder ganske mye og slutta å gå på skolen og slutta å delta på sosiale ting egentlig.”

8. “Jeg har egentlig aldri følt noen sinne i det hele tatt. Jeg hadde også veldig store problemer med å holde ham personlig ansvarlig egentlig, for jeg ser så godt omstendighetene han kom fra. Han er et produkt av en urettferdig verden.”

9. “Jeg har lyst til å dra ned til Somalia. Jeg skal faen vise ham.”

10. “Det fins jo de som kommer fra akkurat samme plass og gjør det skikkelig bra på skolen og får seg jobb og familie, og betaler skatt og gjør alt kjempesvært bra liksom.”

11. “Jeg blir helt varm inni meg og tenker på at du er så grei på en måte. Ja, jeg synes det var fint.”

12. “Jeg føler meg litt lettere nå. Jeg har lyst til å kjenne den følelsen om at nå er jeg på vei noen steder. Nå er det ikke bare reparering lenger. Nå har jeg faktisk begynt igjen på der jeg hoppa av for seks år siden. Det åpent jeg det skal skje.”

13. “Det som kjennes best det er at jeg endelig føler meg fri. Åh... Og det er så digg. Jeg helt sikker på at du kan høre det i stemmen min nå.”

14. PK: Du hadde en historie å fortelle. Det er en historie som er fælt å høre, ikke sant? Og så synes jeg at den ikke er så stor lenger. Jeg vet ikke. K: Helt enig. PK: Det er litt rart. Så som nå det er det jeg tenker når jeg ser deg nå. Jeg håper det føles sann for deg. At den historien kan få lov til å være et museumsgjenstand. K: Jeg tror det. Eller egentlig så vet jeg det. PK: Og så kommer du deg videre med andre prosjekter som er bedre å holde på med enn å drive å være bærer av en historie.
“Prover å finne på noen fine ord å si til dere som ser på helt til slutt.”

“Karsten har tatt opp igjen biologistudiene og får høye karakterer. Han har ikke røykt hasj siden opp- takene sluttet.”

“Det viktigste kanskje jeg kan si er del det med noen, uansett hva det er.”

“OK. Vi ses på den andre siden.”

“Klarer du å lese ansiktet mitt? Nei, det ble ikke gitt.”

“Er det greit at jeg filmer deg?”

“Det er en heterofil mann som ble voldtatt av en somalisk asylsøker. Mitt liv falt i grus, men nå føler jeg skylde for at han ble sendt ut av landet.”

“Det var jeg som var grunnen til at han ikke skulle få være i Norge, men heller bli sent til en svært usikker framtid i Somalia. Han hadde jo allerede sonet sin straff i fengsel. Skulle han nå bli straffet på nytt? Og denne gangen mye haderere?”

“en illsint far [som] konfronterer sitt barns overgriper.”

“For jeg er et menneske først, og ikke en nordmann. Nei, jeg er en del av verden, og verden er dessverre urettferdig.”

“The Independent was the only example I could find which did not refer to Karsten Nordal Hauken as a ‘politician’ (Worley 2016).”

“Prøv å se for deg at du har opplevd en traumatiske hendelse og du sitter hjemme et år etterpå full av posttraumatiske stress og begynner et rusproblem og så plutselig en dag kommer 400.000 kroner inn på kontoen din. Hva tror du det skjer da?”

“jeg synes det er vanskelig å tenke at han er ond. Sånt har jeg aldri vært, på godt og vondt. Jeg ser folk ut ifra omgivelserne kommer fra og jeg synes det er bra vi tar imot folk fra områder med krig.”

“Hvoran er det å være ung SV’er, feminist og antirasist, og voldtatt av en somalisk mann?”

“Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) uses the term ‘mediascape’ to account for the global flow of images and strips of reality across national and cultural borders.”

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Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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