

Columbia mattress protest sparks national response

BY BANNING WATSON
STAFF WRITER

In her quest for justice, sexual assault survivor Emma Sulkowicz has discovered that a mattress speaks louder than words.

Sexual assault is common on United States campuses, with a recent survey of undergraduate women published in the Journal of American College Health showing

that 19 percent experienced sexual assault while in college.

Sulkowicz, a senior visual arts major at Columbia University, reacted in a unique way by combining performance art and public protest.

"I think she's being brave," said Mark Dixon, assistant professor of art. "We've had an issue in our culture that says the survivors should be somehow ashamed

when it's the perpetrators who should be ashamed. The survivors are encouraged to protect their image by being anonymous and they are starting to defy that rule, and it's bringing sexual assault into the public eye in a powerful way — whether it's called art or not."

Her piece, which is also her senior thesis project, is titled "Carry That Weight." Sulkowicz

intends to drag her 50-pound mattress around campus until her alleged rapist, Jean-Paul Nungesser, is expelled.

Sulkowicz reported the rape to the police as well as Columbia's justice system, but Columbia has not taken disciplinary action against Nungesser despite similar assault claims from two other female students.

"There's a reason survivors choose not to go to the police, and that's because they're treated as the criminals," said Sulkowicz to The Columbia Spectator. "The rapists are innocent until proven guilty, but survivors are guilty until proven innocent, at least in the eyes of the police."

According to Robert Hornsby, associate vice president for media relations, Columbia has taken steps to address complaints of Title IX violations filed in federal court by 23 students targeting the university's policies on sexual assault.

"As the University has made clear in many different ways during the past month, major steps have been taken to enhance the gender-based misconduct policy and resources available to all Columbia University students," said Hornsby.

Despite these changes, Columbia students, and students around the nation, have begun to organize demonstrations in support of Sulkowicz and sexual assault survivors in general. These

demonstrations, billed as "Help Carry the Weight Together," are a recent development in response to Sulkowicz's project, and they seem to be picking up momentum.

Whether Guilford will hold similar demonstrations remains to be seen.

"My reaction to Sulkowicz's piece was that it was a very powerful community organizing tool," said Kristie Wyatt, head of the consent campaign at Guilford, wellness education coordination and community director for Shore Hall, English Hall and Pope House. "Whether Guilford demonstrates support through our own programming will depend on our consent committee and other student involvement. I am, however, looking into possible collaboration with a local school who hopes to bring Emma Sulkowicz to Greensboro."

Just like Columbia, Guilford has come under fire for its sexual assault policy in recent years and is currently under investigation by the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights for possible violations of Title IX.

"This is a difficult but important time for Guilford, especially as one of the more activist colleges on that (DOE) list," said Aaron Fetrow, former dean of students at Guilford. "Sexual assault is an important issue that has been ignored or intentionally overlooked at schools all over the country."



Columbia University students stand in solidarity with survivors of sexual assault on their campus at a rally on Sept. 12.

Forced out by violence, African immigrants cross to Europe

BY AUBREY KING
STAFF WRITER

The journey of any refugee starts in a broken homeland. Across North Africa and the Middle East, a variety of issues have pushed more and more people to migrate towards Europe.

"The increase (in immigrants) has been unbelievable," Ben Suleiman, head of an immigrant processing brigade in Libya, told IRIN News. "It seems like every time we deport 10 migrants, 100 come into the system."

Libya's proximity to Europe, combined with harsh economic hardship and violent unrest in and around it, has made it a hot spot for immigrants. According to the International Business Times, 25,650 immigrants crossed to Italy from Libya between January and April of this year.

From the conflict with Gaddafi to the civil war in the Congo, various problems have erupted through the region that caused this movement.

Impossible to forget, the violent outbreak of civil war around former Prime Minister Gaddafi uprooted thousands of Libyans. Recently, Sudan's split failed to bring peace to a country already torn by violence over valuable oil reserves.

In Israel, immigrants from elsewhere in Africa are locked out and refused aid. Some asylum-seekers are even unlawfully detained, according to The BBC. The refugees have begun to protest, but many must continue on toward Europe, often in harsh, dangerous ways.

More concerned with the destination than the trip, immigrant families board small, overcrowded and tipsy fishing boats. The crafts often meet trouble along the way, and early this September, 500 immigrants drowned when traffickers rammed their ship.

Two of the nine crash survivors testified that the traffickers destroyed their boat when the passengers refused to move to a new craft in the middle of the Mediterranean.

"We don't have confirmation of this account of alleged ramming," said U.N. Refugee Agency spokesman Francis Markus in an interview with The BBC. "That was given to Malta authorities by survivors, but we can't confirm it."

If they successfully make the crossing, immigrants come face to face with European nations whose reactions to the newcomers

have varied widely.

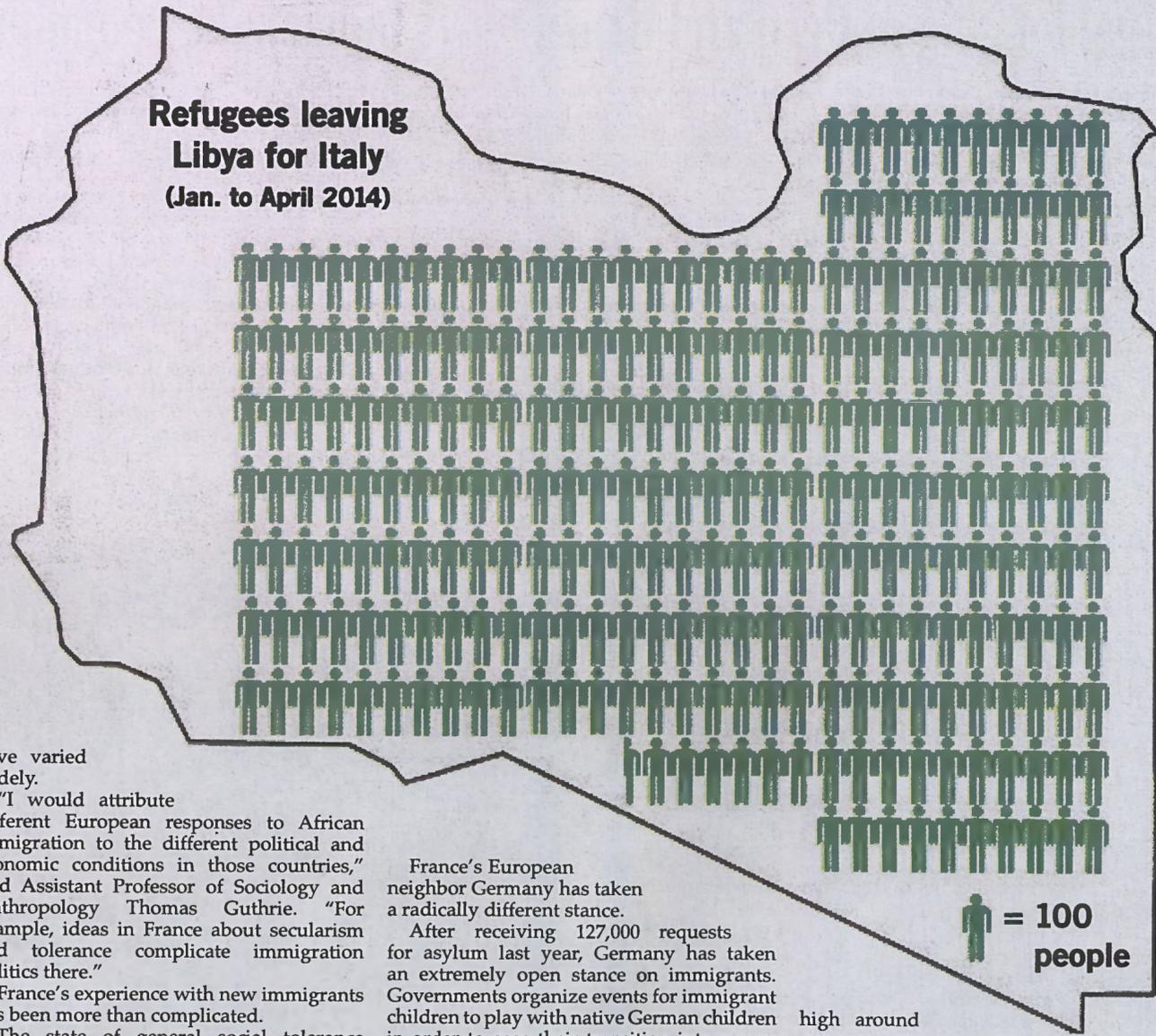
"I would attribute different European responses to African immigration to the different political and economic conditions in those countries," said Assistant Professor of Sociology and Anthropology Thomas Guthrie. "For example, ideas in France about secularism and tolerance complicate immigration politics there."

France's experience with new immigrants has been more than complicated.

The state of general social tolerance in France means many of the country's citizens grow upset when immigrants from anywhere refuse to adopt French customs.

"France used to own Algeria," said Assistant Professor of Political Science Robert Duncan. "And after the bloody civil war fought there for independence, the French developed an identity that looked down on anything not Gallic."

Refugees leaving
Libya for Italy
(Jan. to April 2014)



France's European neighbor Germany has taken a radically different stance.

After receiving 127,000 requests for asylum last year, Germany has taken an extremely open stance on immigrants. Governments organize events for immigrant children to play with native German children in order to ease their transition into a new culture.

"Children of immigrants are often treated like interpreters for family because they learn German more quickly," said Gloria Amoroso, co-founder of immigrant education group kein Abschied! in an interview with Reuters. "They grow up fast, so this is a way for them to be kids again."

Support for the German approach seems

high around campus.

"I can understand countries like Britain, that suffer from overpopulation, not wanting more people to come into the country," said Early College junior Yasmine Byungura. "But at the same time, I really think countries that can should take in these people and give them food and shelter for as long as they can."

Alex Morales/Guilfordian