

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Negotiating the “F word”— Croatian Women’s Movements and the News Media

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By applying qualitative thematic analysis to mainstream media coverage of three hashtag (online) feminist initiatives in Croatia— Prekinimo šutnju, #spasime, and Nisam tražila, this thesis explored how initiatives addressing gender-based violence were covered in the Croatian news media. Findings indicated tabloidized approach to the coverage, various forms of symbolic annihilation of women, personalization of movements, and avoidance of terms "gender and feminism" in the coverage. This master thesis contributes to the scarce existing research on online feminist activism and its media portrayals in Croatia.

Thematic analysis, Croatia, hashtag feminism, gender-based violence, Prekinimo šutnju, #spasime, Nisam tražila

NEGOTIATING THE “F WORD”– CROATIAN WOMEN’S MOVEMENTS AND THE  
NEWS MEDIA

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

2022

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2022

## Dedication

Ovaj rad posvećujem mojoj noni, Milojki Benko (1921- 2011), jer je uvijek bezrezervno vjerovala u mene. Hvala ti na podršci, ljubavi i hrabrosti. Zauvijek.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to express immense gratitude to my thesis committee members, it has been an honor to be taught and advised by all of you. My mentor, Professor Krishnan Vasudevan, who continuously supported me with his kindness, advice, and expertise; and professors Susan D. Moeller and Linda Steiner, for tirelessly helping me navigate through Merrill and academia.

Additionally, I would like to thank my partner Nikša, brother Tin, family, and friends for being by my side despite the social and geographical distances.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Women's movements in Croatia had all but vanished from the mainstream national conversation when in October 2018, leveraging digital platforms, women's movements and initiatives resurfaced, wanting to address the pervasiveness of gender-based violence<sup>1</sup>. Thousands of women shared their accounts of gender-based violence online, and tens of thousands listened and sympathized in "communities of conversation." While the proliferation of online women's initiatives in Croatia may be connected to global trends in hashtag feminism and digital activism (such as #MeToo), public concern (and often outrage) over reports and statistics regarding gender-based violence in Croatia, as well as horrific examples of violence against women may have also contributed to heightened women's online activism. As media's attention usually follows the public attention, mainstream media in Croatia turned their interest towards movements and their initiatives addressing gender-based violence. In this thesis, mainstream media coverage of three movements (Prekinimo šutnju, #spasime, and Nisam tražila) was qualitatively analyzed in order to gain insight into the ways media covers violence against women and the initiatives advocating against it. Articles from the five most popular online mainstream news outlets (Index.hr, 24sata.hr, Jutarnji.hr, Večernji.hr, and net.hr) (*Digital News Report 2021*, 2021) were analyzed in this thesis.

There is a continuous increase in violence against women Croatia; especially when it comes to domestic violence and femicide, which, according to the Gender Equality Ombudswoman Višnja

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis terms "gender-based violence" and "violence against women" will be used interchangeably as they are arguably synonymous within the Croatian context.



Ljubičić, doubled in the past two years (2021). “The system of prevention of gender-based violence, protection of victims and persecution of perpetrators does not fully fulfill its function,” (2021, p. 15) found the Ombudswoman in her latest report concluding that sin place to prevent femicide, as well as the persons close to the victim, fail to recognize the signals indicating that the victim’s life is endangered (ibid.).

In the environment of gender inequality in labor, pensions, healthcare, violence, employment, and social security (2021), and considering the context of retraditionalization as a form of return to the original values embedded in conservative views and patriarchy (Galic, 2018; Kuhar, 2013, 2015), women in Croatia started (mostly anonymously) participating in and supporting online movements and initiatives addressing their circumstances. Social media initiatives based on hundreds of traumatic accounts of various forms of violence against women generated mainstream media attention and coverage that initiated conversations on women’s positionality in the broader contexts of Croatian society. Given this background, this study examines how mainstream news covers women’s movements, and the members of women’s movements’ representation and articulation of their activism. Since there is a scarcity of scholarly research on contemporary Croatian women’s movements/ initiatives, their media representations, and digital activism, this master thesis was formulated to fill the recognized gaps and contribute to the collective academic knowledge.

Since 1978 and the establishment of a women’s division in the Croatian Sociological Society until now (2022), the women’s rights initiatives’ scene in Croatia has been vibrant. Still, the access to that scene has significantly grown in light of the affordances of the internet and, by

extension, social media, which allows for dislocated and asynchronous communication. Mendes et al. found that in 2014 feminists fully embraced “digital technologies and social media platforms to dialogue, network and organize against contemporary sexism, misogyny, and rape culture” (2018, p. 237). The year 2014 was significant in Croatia as well since it yielded the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women international campaign advocating against gender-based violence (Zelić, 2014). The 16 Days campaign, among other projects, introduced the #Prekinimošutnju (break the silence) initiative by the Croatian non-profit RODA, which invited women to share their negative and traumatic birthing and gynecological experiences (RODA, 2014b). That initiative successfully harnessed the social media affordances and invited women to share their negative birthing stories by sending in handwritten accounts of violence that were later shared on RODA’s Facebook page.

Between 2014 and 2022, several initiatives and campaigns advocating for women’s rights in Croatia were active<sup>2</sup>. While most of them, at least to some extent, utilized social media in their activism, in this thesis, the three most prominent hashtag feminist initiatives were analyzed (Prekinimo šutnju, #spasime, Nisam tražila). The three initiatives were chosen based on their

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<sup>2</sup> Including the yearly Night March for Women’s Rights held on March 8 since 2016 (2022), except 2021, due to the pandemic, This Morning I stopped (“#JutrosSamStala”) advocating for recognition of women’s “invisible” domestic labor (2021), One Billion Rising a protest against gender-based violence on Valentine’s day (Pariter, 2017a); initiatives such as “FemWiki Marathon 2018” to introduce more women’s voices, women’s rights gender equality and women’s biographies to Croatian Wikipedia (Pariter, 2018); #AuntiePeriod (#TetkaPerioda) research in regards to raising awareness of menstrual poverty in Croatia (Pariter, 2020); #DoYouKnowWhatTheyToldUs? (#znatelištosunamrekli?) campaign regarding sexism and gender-based discrimination in the labor market (Pariter, 2017b); #WomenInPublicPlaces (#ženeujavnomprostoru) to attract attention to the hostility women face in public places (VoxFeminae, 2020), Fierce Women (strašne žene) awards for women’s advocacy and accomplishments (VoxFeminae, 2022); #WhyAreWeQuiet (#zastosutimo) advocating for access to abortion and women’s right to decide about her body (n.d.); #IDidNotComeForward (#NisamPrijavila) regional initiative regarding the reasons why women sometimes do not press charges/file reports in regards of gender-based violence (VoxFeminae, 2021); Justice for Girls (Pravda za djevojčice) protest against the ways the state institutions treat survivors of sexual violence prompted by the release of five suspects for repeated rape, sexual exploitation, blackmail and physical and psychological abuse of a fifteen-year-old girl that lasted a full year (2019).

presence in the news coverage, as, in order to compile a meaningful enough sample for analysis sufficient number of articles had to be published on the movements.

In 2018, the #Prekinimošutnju (#BreakTheSilence) initiative organized by the RODA non-profit was reactivated by Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić (RODA, 2019). Then a member of Parliament, Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić, shared an account of a miscarriage she had experienced and gave a speech addressing unnecessarily painful procedures women are forced to undergo in the ER after they experience miscarriages ( *Telegram.Hr*, n.d.). Prekinimo šutnju resulted in over 400 handwritten notes by women sharing their gynecological traumas inflicted by the Croatian health system. The accounts of violence were shared on Facebook under the hashtag Prekinimo šutnju, read publicly and submitted to the Ministry of Health. Due to, among other things, Ninčević-Lesandrić's prominence, Parliament discussion that uncharacteristically focused on women's right to painless gynecological procedures, and harrowing accounts of violence women submitted, Prekinimo šutnju was heavily covered by the mainstream media for several weeks.

#spasime (#saveme) initiative establishment was prompted by a case of a father who threw four of his sleeping children off a balcony of their family home in 2019 (Vrabec, 2019). The Croatian public was stunned. Actress, producer, columnist, and feminist Jelena Veljača published a Facebook post regarding the incident and invited her followers to join her Facebook group to help organize a protest regarding the problem of violence in Croatia. Soon the Facebook group #spasime had over 33 thousand members, and numerous women shared their experiences with domestic violence as gender-based violence (in 63% of cases, women are harmed by domestic violence) (*Izvješće o radu*, 2021). Besides providing a safe space for survivors seeking advice

and empathy, #spasime organized an arguably successful protest within weeks of its establishment; furthermore, #spasime assembled a list of reforms they had requested the government to address to provide comprehensive protection to survivors of domestic violence.

Finally, Nisam tražila (I did not ask for it) started as a Facebook group organized in support of women experiencing sexual violence and sexism, at first, only in the public-facing professions. Its establishment was prompted by Serbian actress Milena Radulović, who shared her account of rape by a prominent Serbian drama pedagogue when she was 17 years old (Jasnić, 2021). As Prekinimo šutnju and #spasime, Nisam tražila was a Facebook safe space for survivors of gender-based violence, in this case, sexual harassment and assault. It was started by four alumni of the Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) Academy of Dramatic Arts- Ana Tikvić, Nadine Mičić, Matea Mavrak, and Asja Krsmanović (Super1, 2021). Many actresses and students from the Zagreb Academy of Dramatic Arts anonymously shared their accounts of violence in the group. Even if concealed, the perceived potential “celebrity factor” of the accounts of violence arguably resulted in overwhelming media coverage of the Nisam tražila initiative.

This thesis built on my previous research on women’s movements in Croatia and, among other things, aims to investigate previously recognized avoidance of usage of the term “feminism” in depictions of arguably feminist activities by both the mainstream media and the movements; hence, special attention was placed on the descriptors used to discuss the initiatives and their goals (Ujčić, 2020). This thesis aimed to contribute to the collective knowledge and understanding of the Croatian media portrayals of women’s movements and provide an in-depth

and locally contextualized evaluation of depictions of women's rights, gender-based violence, and initiatives trying to address that.

This master thesis will first provide a historical and contextual background of the women's movements in former Yugoslavia and Croatia. That will allow for more grounded and nuanced evaluations of today's movements, especially considering the strained relationship with feminism Croatia has since the 1992 Witches from Rio incident when prominent Croatian feminists faced a "trial by media" that ultimately expelled them from publishing their work in Croatia for years after (*Witches from Rio*, n.d.). Since social movements occur in a social context and not in a vacuum, Croatia's political and social context will be introduced to substantiate the framework of the emergence of the three movements as well as the Croatian media environment, its characteristics, and its challenges. The academic literature, policy papers, reports produced by governmental and non-governmental bodies, and statistical data provided a foundation for understanding the cultural and temporal context that the movements emerged within to ground research into the social reality movements stem from. This is particularly important due to the overwhelming number of personal accounts of experienced violence that "broke the silence" in 2018 (as part of the Prekinimo šutnju initiative, #MeToo was not active in Croatia at the time) but, in some instances, referenced the experiences from years and decades ago. Additionally, the insistence on the anonymity of accounts of violence could arguably be symptomatic of a social climate in which, for some reason (shame, fear, hostility...), coming forward with a full name is unacceptable or unwelcome. Therefore, some social and political context is necessary to provide a nuanced understanding of movement decisions, activities, campaigns, and activism coverage.

Methodologically, a qualitative thematic analysis was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the mainstream media coverage of the movements, it was also used for analysis of an in-depth interview with a movement member included in this research. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows for a more comprehensive and exhaustive study of the movements and the research questions drawn from the author's preliminary (and previous) research. Since the qualitative method permits the researcher to engage with the text as an instrument of research, it also allowed engagement with text, context, and subtext. Thematic analysis in this context fostered reflexivity, rereading, reevaluating, and immersive investigation of the text beyond the surface level. For a topic that is nuanced, under-investigated, and sometimes publicly disputed (especially when it comes to the quotidian forms of violence and sexual harassment), what is said, how, in which order, and what is left out can be explored more thoroughly using the qualitative approach.

This study develops upon literature about feminist histories to explain the social context in which feminisms emerge, literature on women's movements and initiatives, literature on feminist activism, digital activism, and relevant regional literature concerning the media environment and the media coverage of women. This master thesis was built on two streams of research literature: academic literature published in English and oriented toward the international, English-speaking audience, and academic literature in regional languages the author is fluent in (Croatian, Serbian, and Bosnian).

In this master thesis, the following will be discussed. First, a contextual chapter will be introduced to provide the reader with the necessary understanding of the Croatian media

environment and background of the three analyzed movements. Then, the literature review will cover the feminist histories in the region, already produced research on media representations of women in Croatia and the region, and research on online feminist activism. Then the research questions, thematic analysis methodology, and sample will be introduced. Further on, findings will be presented in three parts concerning media practices in movement coverage, then findings on various manifestations of symbolic annihilation of movements and movement members; finally, delineations of movements through personalization and strategic avoidance of feminism will be discussed. Findings will be followed by a discussion regarding the repercussions of findings and potential further research areas.

This master thesis was envisioned as an exploratory form of research. Although many pathways were considered throughout the formulation of this research, in the end, mainstream online news media coverage substantiated with one in-depth interview was chosen. Further researchers might consider a more in-depth analysis of initiative-produced content and materials, more in-depth interviews with movement members (as this thesis timeline and researcher limitations resulted in only one), and even an ethnographic engagement with movements and their initiatives (if the researcher finds the way for that to be done in an ethical and not extractive/exploitative way). Additionally, this topic might benefit from interviews with journalists and editors publishing stories about violence against women and even researchers embedded in newsrooms. Coverage produced by non-profit media organizations could also be valuable in understanding the media reporting about the initiatives, as could (quantitative or qualitative) research of coverage of initiatives beyond the single month since they first appeared. Hopefully, further researchers will consider all of the pathways enumerated above and find new ones to conduct meaningful

research on the subject of media coverage of women's initiatives in Croatia, feminism, and gender-based violence/violence against women.



## Chapter 2: The Croatian Context

The Croatian Context chapter will introduce relevant circumstances regarding the Croatian media environment and the three initiatives analyzed in this thesis. First, conditions contributing to the current Croatian media market will be considered to ground this thesis in the domestic media context. This section will touch upon financial hardships the Croatian media environment has been experiencing for decades, levels of professionalism and newsroom circumstances, a consistent lean towards news tabloidization and emphasis on scandal, as well as levels of trust in the media. Because media content, especially the content produced by the popular commercial news outlets analyzed in this thesis, is a result of media policies (market and newsroom) as well as of characteristics of the movements the media covered, the author chose to expand on the local media ecology at the beginning of this thesis.

After the media environment, this section will expand on the three initiatives researched in this thesis (Prekinimo šutnju, #spasime, and Nisam tražila). Since media representation of the initiatives was considered and analyzed in this research, a comprehensive understanding of initiatives' goals, activism, members, and relevant activity timelines will be introduced.

## Section 1: Croatian News Market Snapshot

While the method and data section of this thesis goes into the dates of data collection and the reasoning behind choosing the five news outlets analyzed in this thesis, due to characteristics of coverage recognized by the author, a more comprehensive description of the Croatian media environment will be briefly introduced in this section so that the interpretation of findings is more grounded in the Croatian media market and environment.

After the breakdown of former Yugoslavia, the Croatian economy was severely hit by both the war's destruction and the process of privatization of socialist property (transition and transformation into the market economy). In such an environment, in 1991, the Croatian tabloid era started with The Free(dom) Weekly (*Slobodni Tjednik*) (Vilović, 2003, p. 959). Vilović (2003), found that while the life span of *Slobodni Tjednik* lasted for less than two years, it served as an inspiration for further tabloidization of the Croatian media market (ibid.). Kalb defines tabloidization of the press as the “downgrading of hard news and upgrading of sex, scandal, and infotainment”(1997 as quoted in Esser, 1999, p. 292). Vilović found that the process of tabloidization in Croatia was marked by “simplification of hard news, “more illustrations and large photographs, and shortening of news articles” (2003, pp. 960–961). It was spearheaded by two still active Croatian political news through tabloid lens hybrids– *Globus* and *Nacional* (ibid.).

Characteristics of print media recognized by Vilović at the turn of the century remained relevant in the analysis of contemporary online news outlets, as most of the analyzed texts still displayed features such as articles written in a way that allows *quick and short consumption* and *long headlines* written to attract reader's attention by the *fore fronting of oddity* of an event and essentially delivering the *point of the article in the headline* itself (ibid). All of these features indicate a catch-all approach to journalism, where, to attract readership and advertisers, an infotainment approach to coverage is prioritized. The hybridization of news outlets as simultaneously emulating tabloid features along with "serious news magazine characteristics" is a feature present in the analyzed media sample 20 years after the publication of Vilović's evaluations of the Croatian news market.

A recent study done by Zagreb News Lab tried to answer the age-old question— What does the Croatian audience want? In their study, 1009 subjects of ages 18 and above were asked about their media habits, perceptions of the journalistic profession and media content they consume, and trust/distrust. The study showed that 24% of the respondents trusted journalists, with 38% being ambivalent and 34% disclosing they distrust journalists (Perišin et al., n.d., p. 5). In the age group between 18 and 29, 42.5% of the respondents said they distrust journalists. In the same age group, online outlets were the primary source of news for 51% of respondents, while in the other age groups, television prevailed (60.3%) as the daily news source, with the internet as the primary news source in second place with 48.1% of daily news consumption.

The 2021 Digital News Report by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2021) showed that when the online news consumption was broken down, by outlet Index.hr was (again)

the most popular news source, followed by 24 sata online, Jutarnji online, and net.hr (all covered in this study), with Večernji.hr at the seventh place. Simultaneously, the study by the Zagreb News Lab showed that 24 sata, the media of choice for 38% of weekly users, was by far, the least trusted media source in the News Lab sample.

Besides the crisis in media trust and the deepening lean towards media tabloidization, a crisis of journalistic (un)employment occurred in 2021. According to the premiere Croatian journalistic trade association, Croatian Journalists' Association (Hrvatsko Novinarsko Društvo), only 15% of the Croatian freelance journalists kept the same amount of professional engagements as before the pandemic, while 28,7% of outside contractors lost all of their pre-pandemic work (HND, 2020). While the sample of this HND inquiry was relatively small (164 respondents), most of the respondents (65%) were in the age group between 40 and 65 years of age, indicating that experienced journalists were first to get laid off, as they (among other things) cost much more to be employed compared to student journalists without similar experience. Croatian fact-checking news outlet Faktograf.hr found that according to journalists, 17% of news outlets experienced financial losses amounting to up to 75% of their revenue, while almost half of them reported their financial losses to more than 50% of their income. Additionally, in an open letter sent to the Prime Minister by the journalistic union (SHN) and the Croatian News Association, it was indicated that some journalists experienced pay cuts amounting to 50% of their income. At the same time, many “long-term freelancers” lost their jobs entirely (Vrsaljko, 2020).

Unfortunately, despite her best efforts, the author could not find the number of journalists within the Croatian population and relevant employment statistics that would help contextualize the data

provided by the professional organization and the union. Still, according to the Croatian Bureau of Employment, in February of 2022, 289 journalists were seeking employment, while seven employers published they are looking to hire journalists indicating that the supply and demand for journalistic jobs are severely disproportionate (HZZZ, 2022).

To the best of the author's knowledge, no scholarly publications dealt with the state of Croatian journalism in terms of employment, demographics in the newsroom, educational levels of ones hired, types of contracts, and wages. Still a series of interviews with editors, journalism professors, educators, and professional organizations was conducted by a Croatian non-profit news outlet known for in-depth investigative reporting, H-alter. Communications professor at the University of Pula, Croatia, Tijana Vukić published a series of ten interviews with stakeholders and policymakers in Croatian journalism. Some prominent interviewees (head of the Croatian Journalistic Association- Hrvoje Zovko and head of the Department of Journalism and Media Production at the Faculty of Political Science, Professor Tena Perišin) noted there's a decay in the quality of journalism connected to efforts of save money by increasing workloads and hiring more students instead of professional journalists as that is much cheaper for the employer<sup>3</sup>.

Zovko noted; "We can agree that this is ridiculous. First of all, it is not good for some media houses to hire students for a penny and to exploit them, so to speak, and then replace them with others. Such practices should be abolished. Not that I underestimate someone's knowledge, but in order to write at all, you have to go through some training" (Vukić, 2021a). He also added: "the media employs young and uneducated people, students without any experience, so of

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<sup>3</sup> The author is by no means trying to imply journalism students are inferior or incompetent, just that, with reduction of experienced journalists in newsrooms, there's more room for mistakes due to inexperience and lack of mentorship (among other things).

course, those who read, watch, listen to media content wonder what journalism has turned into” (ibid.). And concluded that for as long as employers continue to cut jobs and “expect that one person does 10 jobs” Croatian journalism will continue to decay.

Editor in chief of *Večernji list*, Dražen Klarić, on the other hand, noted that unfavorable economic conditions forced the newsrooms to rotate students instead of hiring professional journalists. “Unfortunately, the force of circumstances has forced many newsrooms to hire young people and change them quickly” (Vukić, 2021b). Due to her experience with educating journalists, Professor Perišin expressed frustration with the current state of affairs for young and professional journalists, as well as the overall quality of journalism “I am also saddened when our students come to the newsroom, so, according to the editor's order, their main task is to dig through the Facebook profiles of celebrities in order to find something spicy to publish on the [news] portal” (Vukić, 2021c). Perišin reiterated and emphasized the issue of the exploitation of journalism students as well as the employer’s refusal to allow students to maintain any form of work-school balance since they are hired to replace full-time journalists (ibid.).

The tabloidization, hand in hand with severe financial losses that were pronounced during the pandemic, but a persistent issue since the 2008 recession, along with heavy reliance on journalism students in the newsroom can arguably explain not only low media trust levels<sup>4</sup> but also the way all three of the movements were covered by the media.

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<sup>4</sup> For comparison, according to a Gallup poll conducted in 2021, 36% of Americans trusted the mass media, while 63% responded they had “not so much” or no trust in the media (Inc, 2021).

## Section 2: Movement Backgrounds— Prekinimo šutnju, #spasime, Nisam tražila

### Subsection 1: RODA and Prekinimo šutnju

The non-profit organization Parents in Action (*Roditelji u akciji*, abbreviated RODA) was founded in 2001 in Zagreb, Croatia; its establishment was prompted by announced reduction of maternity benefits. As its mission statement emphasizes, RODA is “a group of interested citizens committed to a dignified pregnancy, parenthood, and childhood in Croatia (RODA, 2015).

Commitment to parenthood, dignified pregnancy, and childhood is the core of most RODA activities; still, in this thesis, their initiative concerning gender-based violence and patients’ right to dignified and painless gynecological procedures will be the main focus.

RODA first engaged with dignified childbirth on social media in 2014 when an initiative, #osnaŽene (#empowered), was launched to invite pregnant people to share their “empowering and powerful” natural birth stories (RODA, 2014a). Persons who gave birth were invited to share photographs of their handwritten childbirth stories later shared on the organization’s Facebook page. This initiative resulted in 32 photographs of overwhelmingly positive birthing experiences. The formula of handwritten and photographed anonymous notes and recollections shared on social media (as well as with the media and policymakers in later initiatives) was first employed by RODA in 2014. However, the same strategy was revisited rather successfully later in November 2014 and 2018.

On November 25, 2014, RODA launched a thematic initiative as a part of a regional campaign, Sixteen Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women. Under the hashtag

#Prekinimošutnju (# Let's Break the Silence), RODA invited individuals to “share their *bad birth experiences*, as part of the process of *healing trauma* and as an *act of rebellion* against the traditionally ingrained attitude of not talking about the birth experience (bad) and that the only thing that matters is that the birth resulted in a healthy child” (emphasis added by the author, RODA, 2014b). Individuals were invited to share their anonymous, handwritten, and photographed birthing stories. The initiative resulted in meetings with the then Minister of Health, Siniša Varga, and inspections into the maternity wards (RODA, 2019); however, said inspection results were never made public.

#Prekinimošutnju initiative was revisited and made much more visible in October 2018, when Member of the Parliament Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić shared an account of her miscarriage and medical abuse that followed at the Parliament as a part of a Q&A during the vote of confidence for Minister of Health, Milan Kujundžić. In her speech, Ninčević- Lesandrić said the following:

“I recently ended up in the emergency room due to a miscarriage in the third month of pregnancy;... They tied my arms and legs and started the process of live curettage. No anesthesia, live. Scraping uterus, internal organ - live. It was the 30 most painful minutes of my life. I could tell you every second because it lasted an eternity. It is 30 minutes of humiliation for every woman out of the thousands of women who signed the petition and who experienced it. It is a humiliation for every woman who is now just lying on the gynecological table and humiliating every woman who will in the future, unfortunately, experience this. Is it not enough that a woman lost a child after the third month of pregnancy, and the emotional stress that comes with that, but she still has to go through being additionally butchered and destroyed at the emergency room?” (Ninčević-Lesandrić, October 11, 2018, on YouTube, 2018).



The then Minister of Health, Milan Kujundžić, immediately answered that the curettage is not done “like that” in Croatian hospitals and added that there must have been a “contraindication” because of which the MP had not been given an anesthetic. Upon her complaint of the violation of Parliament procedure, claiming that the Minister is lying by saying that anesthetic is always offered in such intervention, the president of the Parliament, Gordan Jandroković, commented: “you are bringing up something very intimate and putting me in an uncomfortable position” (2018).

Since Ninčević- Lesandrić referred to a petition RODA had already shared with the Ministry of Health, the initiative was reignited more forcefully than before. RODA received around 400 handwritten anonymized recollections of examples of gynecological mistreatments in four days. RODAs published the photographs in a Facebook album described: “Enough is enough! We decided to break the silence again. Every week, we receive stories about how they had a curettage, abortion, aspiration, episiotomy, or is the sutured perineum after childbirth. (...) Photos that arrive by Monday at 8 am will be taken to the Ministry of Health the same day. Invite friends, acquaintances, sisters, relatives so our experiences are shared and that together we can say loud and clear - THIS IS THE TRUTH!” (Prekinimo šutnju, 2018).

After publishing the photographs, RODAs read them at Saint Mark’s square, where the Government and the Parliament are located and took them to the Ministry of Health. Simultaneously, RODAs launched another action under the hashtag “Let’s Leave a Trail” (*#OstavimoTrag*). This initiative called for solidarity with survivors of gynecological violence by

leaving a red mark- a palm imprint in public places and sharing photos of said interventions on social media under the hashtag *OstavimoTrag*.

The goal of #Prekinimošutnju was to advocate for a change of medical practices that force women to undergo painful medical procedures and keep quiet about them. In an open letter to the Croatian PM, RODAs asked the government to create a “Women’s Health Action Plan for 2019 to 2021” (RODA, 2018). That Action Plan was envisioned to address women’s right to “information and co-determination on health procedures, to which they are entitled by law instead,..., [of being met with] with unnecessary pain, exposed to insults, contempt and humiliation;” and “unacceptable reactions to these events [gynecological violence] by some leaders of the most important Croatian health institutions and professional organizations” (ibid.). They criticized the failed mechanisms for women’s patient rights protection and expressed concern over their exclusion from upcoming inspections as “gynecologists want to solve this problem within a closed circle, without the involvement of other stakeholders from other professional circles” (ibid.). The Action Plan and further reforms RODAs called for were presented as crucial for protecting Croatian women’s Constitutional and human rights (ibid.).

RODA does not self-describe as a feminist organization. Their main emphasis is on parenthood, safe childhood, and pregnancy. Still, when it came to the “Let’s break the silence” initiative, the usually moderate tone of public communication was replaced with calls for action, subversion, intervention, and solidarity with the survivors of gynecological violence.

## Subsection 2: The #spasime Initiative

The *#spasime* (Save me) initiative started after a “father” threw four of his underage and sleeping children off a balcony of their family home on the small Croatian island of Rab. Croatian media and the public were rightfully upset over the incident because the family was already under surveillance by the child protective services, which, according to many, failed them (Šarić, 2020). Croatian producer, writer, actress, and feminist Jelena Veljača published her commentary on the case in the form of a Facebook post on March 1, 2019, along with an invitation to join a Facebook group *#spasime* she had just created (Veljača, 2019). Soon *#spasime* was joined by its now core members and co-founders Anica Tomić, Jelena Kovačić, Nerma Mehadžić, Ana Pecotić and Una Zečević Šeparović.

The Facebook group currently has over 53 000 members, while according to Telegram.hr, it collected 33 000 members in just four days after being created (Vrabec, 2019). The group soon turned into an initiative and organized a protest held on March 16, 2019, at the symbolic five to 12 (Croatian equivalent of the proverb high time) on King Tomislav Square in Zagreb. Smaller protests were held all over Croatia. The *#spasime* initiative joined forces with Solidarna (Solidarity) foundation and started a *#spasime* fund “to provide concrete and interventional care to victims of violence in the sense of economic, legal, psychological, medical, and housing assistance” (*Fond#spasime*, n.d.).

The closed Facebook group (administrators grant access upon sending a request to join) allowed violence survivors to share their accounts of domestic violence either by posting under their

names or anonymously. Discussion in the group is moderated under several guidelines group members must read (or at least encounter) before being able to send their request for group membership; they are as follows:

“1. We do not insult anyone. Insult is verbal violence, and we are an anti-violence group. We are aware that all the omissions in the system cause many of you to need to say everything, but please refrain from verbal and other violence.

2. We do not condemn victims of violence. In this group, we also have victims of violence who are particularly vulnerable. Comments are often seen - even here - that they are equally or at least partially to blame for not leaving the abuser. No one wants to be a victim of violence. Violent relationships are extremely complex, making it extremely difficult for victims to get out of them, especially when they have no support from either the environment or the system. If you do not understand, don't judge.

3. *We do not judge the parental capacity of mothers on the basis of household care and the like because such a worldview belongs to times when violence was acceptable, and we fight against it.*

4. We do not argue. Constructive discussion is always welcome but quarreling benefits no one. We are all here with the same goal, for Croatia to finally become a country with zero tolerance for violence, and only united can we achieve that (#spasime, 2019).

At the #spasime protest, the initiative presented a list of requests to the Government. Key requests included legislative changes (for domestic violence to be treated as a felony, not a misdemeanor), more inter-institutional cooperation in regards to support for survivors of

domestic violence, more education for first responders and persons working with survivors, integration of anti-violence education and violence prevention in school curricula, shelters for survivors of domestic violence in regions that do not already have them and a 24/7 SOS hotline for survivors of domestic violence (Novilist.hr, 2019). See Appendix for the full list of #spasime requests. After the protest, #spasime members were invited to meet with the PM, Andrej Plenković, along with ministers of sectors connected to domestic violence and the former President, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. On June 14, 2019, #spasime organized a benefit in order to raise funds for the #spasime fund; they collected 23 thousand Dollars at the event (Miletić, 2019).

#spasime never publicly stated they were concerned with violence against women, but rather domestic violence. Still, according to the Gender Equality Ombudswoman, in the Croatian environment, domestic violence is considered to be gender-based violence, as most of the victims of domestic violence are, in fact, women (2021, p. 72). Additionally, #spasime never publicly self-described as a feminist initiative, and they mostly maintained the neutral “violence is beyond political/apolitical issue” narrative.

### Subsection 3: The Nisam tražila Initiative

Serbian daily newspaper, Blic, published a breaking news interview with actress Milena Radulović on January 16, 2021. Radulović gave an in-depth account of how a prominent drama pedagogue and owner of a renowned drama school for children, *Stvar srca* (Matter of the heart),

Miroslav Mika Aleksić, raped her. Sexual violence she had experienced at the school started in 2012 when Aleksić was 61, and she was 17 (Jasnić, 2021).

After reading Milena Radulović's rape account, four graduates of the Sarajevo Academy of Dramatic Arts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ana Tikvić, Nadine Mičić, Matea Mavrak, and Asja Krsmanović, started a Facebook page, turned a Facebook group under the name *Nisam tražila* (I did not ask for it) (Barić, 2021). They wanted "to provide victims of violence with a safe space to give their accounts anonymously." Initially, the page intended to raise awareness of sexual harassment in "public-facing professions," but soon, women of all professions and backgrounds started to reach out with their harassment recollections. In an interview for the *Jutarnji list*, the movement founders said they never expected the page to become that popular, with thousands of messages and 36 thousand likes in just three days (Barić, 2021).

While Milena Radulović spoke about her experience in Belgrade, Serbia, the *Nisam tražila* movement was initiated by four women in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, due to linguistic and cultural similarity, as well as shared history under former Yugoslavia, the movement took root in Croatia as well. Under a name and hashtag, *Nisam tražila*, anonymous women and prominent public figures shared their sexual violence and trauma stories on Facebook in January and February of 2021. Recollections of gender-based violence from years and decades ago and more recent cases occupied the newly founded Facebook page and group and the region's mainstream and legacy media outlets.

In the first post on the *Nisam tražila* Facebook page, the four founders of the page wrote:

“This site is dedicated to all women who have experienced any form of sexual harassment because they are engaged in public affairs and are not yet ready to speak about it on their own behalf. We invite all women to share their experiences with us anonymously to draw attention to what they have experienced or are still experiencing and thus change the atmosphere in a society where any form of violence against women is tacitly approved, supported, and encouraged by prejudice that in some professions that behavior is acceptable. If I’m an actress, writer, musician, journalist, or in any other way a publicly exposed woman, that does not mean I asked for it! #You are not alone" (Nisam tražila, 2021).

While the intended users of the page were public figures, moreover “publicly exposed women,” the page soon overgrew its initial limitations and started publishing anonymous recollections of women (to the best of the author’s knowledge, two posts were made in the “male verb form” and therefore presumably speak of men’s’ experiences) from all backgrounds, ages, and occupations. The initial form of publishing was kept throughout, with authors publishing (primarily sexual) harassment recollections in quotation marks, with the country or city and country at the end of a post. Only one post was made under the survivor’s name, and that post was the post with the most likes, reactions, and comments found on the page.

In Croatia, students were especially vocal in their accounts of abuse experienced in academic settings. The Academy of Dramatic Arts in Zagreb created an anonymous model for students to come forward with allegations. At the same time, one of the professors at the Veterinary Faculty in Zagreb decided to protect students’ anonymity by putting his name on the complaint against one of his colleagues.

Unlike Prekinimo šutnju and #spasime, Nisam tražila was grounded in women's stand-alone subjectivity, explicitly recognizing sexual violence and harassment as gender-based and pervasive in the region. Nisam tražila produced the least amount of public-facing communication outside of publicly posting the accounts of the violence they have gotten and shared links to media stories covering the initiative and stories exposing sexual violence instances and legislation in the region.



## Chapter 3: Literature Review

### Section 1: Feminist Histories and the Status Quo

Jelena Batinic traced the origins of the women's movements on the territory of former Yugoslavia to the second half of the 19th century. Batinic found that in the period preceding World War II, multiple women's movements emerged, with some being supported by the government and the royal family of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Batinic, 2001).

In the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the first feminist movement emerged in 1978 as a response "to the one-party rule and paternalistic-socialist treatment of the so-called female question," and as a form of resistance to growing ethnonationalism in Yugoslavia (Jalušič, 2011, as quoted in Šinko, 2018, p. 45). Kunovich & Deitelbaum argued that the emergence of the women's movements in Yugoslavia was connected to the communists' continuous efforts to achieve "class equality" and, therefore, dismissal of "policies that promoted gender for the sake of establishing equality" (2004).

Yugoslavia was a polycentric political entity, and feminist organizations independently emerged in Belgrade (Serbia), Zagreb (Croatia), and Ljubljana (Slovenia); as a result of their cooperation "The Woman's Question: A New Approach" was the first feminist conference organized in 1978 in Yugoslavia (Batinic, 2001). The first formally registered feminist organization in Yugoslavia was a section in the Sociological Society of Croatia called "Women and the Society" (Šinko, 2018). After that, the Croatian feminist scene continued to grow with Svarun (1985), *Ženska*

*grupa Trešnjevka* Women's Group Trešnjevka (1986), *SOS telefon za žene* SOS Telephone for Women (1987), and *Autonomna ženska kuća* The Autonomous Women's House (1989), (2018).

Slavenka Drakulić, one of the founding members of Women and Society and one of the most prominent feminists and writers in former Yugoslavia, diagnosed “six deadly” (and contradictory) sins the socialist regime held against feminism (2020). It was seen as a capitalist ideology imported from the “West”; as being power-hungry, an activity for intellectuals and elites distanced from the working-class people; as dangerous for the regime, apolitical, narcotizing for women, and noninstitutional (Drakulić, 2020).

The nineties in Croatia were marked by the war that followed the breakdown of former Yugoslavia. At that time, pacifist- online and cyber<sup>5</sup> feminist organizations emerged (Anti-war Campaign, For Peace/Women,...) (Janković, 2009). During the war, mainly on the territory of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, rape and sex-based crimes were used as a tactic by Serb and Bosnian- Serb forces (Allen, 1996, p. 314). Such war crimes prompted many women to join the feminist movements due to humanitarian interest in helping the survivors, and many of them developed feminist subjectivities and interests through their antiwar campaigns and engagements (Janković, 2009). In 1994, the Women's Infotheque (*Ženska infoteka*) introduced a cyberfeminist educational project Electronic Witches (*Elektroničke vještice*), whose goal was to educate women on how to use and “hack” internet-based technologies (ibid.).

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<sup>5</sup> While both cyberfeminist and online feminist organizations operate online, the two significantly differ. According to Janković (2009) and drawing on Plant (1994) and RosieX (1992), the main difference between the two lies in the usage of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). While most women's organizations have some form of online presence (websites or social media), not all of them are cyberfeminist. Cyberfeminism involves subversion, irony, and hacking of online spaces with (radical) feminist reappropriation and feminist intervention, while usage of websites or social media as online message boards to announce meetings and activities should be seen as online feminism, hashtag feminism, etc., but not cyberfeminism.

Five Yugoslav feminists from the Socialist Republic of Croatia - Slavenka Drakulić, Rada Iveković, Vesna Kesić, Jelena Lovrić, and Dubravka Ugrešić (1992) were accused by the media of being traitors to the Croatian national interests during the war. They were called “rapists of Croatia,” in the notorious article published in 1992 in the weekly newspaper Globus (Batinic, 2001). At the time Globus and Nacional were two political weeklies known as “sensationalized press,” with high circulation, and questionable ethical practices (Vilović, 2003, p. 959). The women’s “media prosecution” was prompted by their opposition and lobbying against the 59th P.E.N. (International Association of Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists, and Novelists) being held in Dubrovnik, Croatia (Globus investigative team, 1992).

Amid war and nationalist discourses, the feminists critical of the war and Croatian actions in it were accused of “raping Croatia” because allegedly “[they] have significantly contributed to *concealing the truth* about sexual violence as an instrument of Serbian racist and imperial politics!” (emphasis added by the author Globus investigative team, 1992). In the imposed nationalistic dichotomy of “good Croats and Muslims” and “bad Serbs,” the five Croatian feminists (as their counterparts all across the former Yugoslavia) critical of “all genocidal rapes” (Kesić & Mladenović, 1993) were publicly lynched in the media for “a lack of patriotic sentiments.” They were called out for failing to acknowledge the ethnicity and religious backgrounds of the raped women and instead insisted on talking about “all women as victims of men’s war.” Additionally, Yugoslavian and Croatian feminist movements were described as “ladies [which] had serious problems finding a male partner, and even a real area of intellectual interest, so they chose feminism as their own “destiny,” ideology and profession” (Globus

investigative team, 1992) and as “a well-organized intellectual sect,” (ibid.). Even their appearances and romantic relationships were discussed along with the ethnicity of their partners to show their alleged anti-Croatian sentiments:

“The few among them who, despite their theoretical position and physical appearance, managed to find a life or spouse, chose something according to JUS: a Serb from Belgrade Rada Iveković, a Serb (twice) from Croatia Slavenka Drakulić and a Serb from Croatia Jelena Lovrić. It would be immoral [not] to mention that, when you look at it together now, *it is a systematic political choice* and not a random choice based on love preferences!” (Emphasis added by the author, ibid.).

This unsigned but slanderous and highly circulated article initiated a media frenzy series that lasted almost a year, ostracized the prominent feminists from the public, and in essence foreclosed their prospects for publishing in Croatia at the time.

The process of “retraditionalization,” a return to “original settings,” can be seen in the Croatian cultural and religious environment, discourses in the public sphere, and domestic and gender-based violence statistics after the breakdown of Yugoslavia (Kuhar, 2013, 2015). The Yugoslav Constitution of 1963 deemed religion to belong in the private sphere since the SFRY was primarily a secular state (Jakelic, 2010 as quoted in Kuhar, 2015). In an attempt to break away from “everything communist” and arguably to establish the national identity as it was prior to Yugoslavia, the process of retraditionalization occurred characterized by a “return to the nation’s true patriarchal culture, previously destroyed by the communist regime” (Kuhar, 2013, p. 6)

Since the first parliamentary elections in 1990, Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) has been in power in Croatia for 23 years. HDZ's Statute in the first article commits to promoting "Croatian national interests, patriotism and traditional, Christian Democrat and universal humanistic values" (Statut Hrvatske Demokratske Zajednice, 2018, p. 3). According to the Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2011, 86.28% of the population self-described as Catholic. Galić describes the Catholic Church in Croatia as a very active participant in social and political life since 1991, with religious education from preschool to high school, opposition to abortion and euthanasia, and a successful referendum initiative to define marriage as "an institution of a man and a woman" in the Croatian Constitution in 2013, (2018, pp. 214–215). Research by Galić and Nikodem conducted in 2006 showed that the educational system promotes patriarchy and androcentrism through the "socialization of religious influences and institutions" (2006, p. 97).

As in former Yugoslavia, in the retraditionalized Croatia, women are only nominally equal to men. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics on Men and Women report, in 2021, there are 51.5% of women in the Croatian population, i.e., 2,094,569 citizens (2021). They are represented in the parliament by 35 women who make up 23.17 members of the Croatian Parliament (Matijević, 2020). Four women serve as ministers in the Government, and they make up 20% of the composition (Vlada RH, n.d.). In the Supreme Court, women make up 34% of the membership (Vrhovni sud RH, n.d.). The academic sphere is constituted predominantly of men. Although the ratio of employed women to men at universities is 1: 1, when it comes to full-time professorship, women make up 37.5 professors (DZZS, 2021). The 2020 report by the Gender Equality Ombudsperson shows that the gender pay gap is around 13,3% and pensions 21,08% (2021, p. 36).

In an annual report for 2020, the Gender Equality Ombudswoman, in cooperation with the Croatian Ministry of Internal Affairs, found that 63,41% of victims of domestic violence were women, while 36,59% were men (2021, p. 72). Husbands were almost four times as likely to commit domestic violence than wives. In civic partnerships and relationships, men were 3.6 times more likely to be violent than women (2021, p. 72). Croatian Femicide Watch<sup>6</sup> found that for the fifth year in a row, "there is a high percentage of over 50% of women murdered by partners whom they were in a romantic relationship with" (2021, p. 73). Similar data were found in the years before the pandemic as well, in 2019, a total of 4,460 criminal offenses were recorded (a rise of 28% as compared to 2018). As in 2020, women made up a bigger portion of victims of domestic violence (78%) as opposed to men (2021).

However, it needs to be emphasized that the numbers and statistical data quoted above could be misleading since there is a known discrepancy between violence that happened and violence that gets reported and processed, still, from the available data, it is apparent that the primary victims of domestic violence in Croatia are women.

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<sup>6</sup> A body assembled from experts in fields of Police Directorates, Ministry of Justice, High Misdemeanor Court, Faculty of Law, Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth, and Social Policy

## Section 2: Reporting on and about Women

In her paradigm-shifting work on media representations of women on television and their symbolic annihilation, American sociologist Gaye Tuchman found that gender roles imposed on women in the media narrowed the scope of their perceived social roles and responsibilities (Tuchman, 1978). Symbolic annihilation in this sense is defined by Gerbner as “condemnation, trivialization or absence” (as quoted in Tuchman, 1978, p. 8). Additionally, Tuchman’s research showed, that television reinforced gender roles as men were perceived and portrayed as “instrumental leaders” outside the home, while women were trivialized and seen as “affective leaders” solving personal problems within the home (1978, p. 14). In conclusion, this study showed how cultural products with some lagging behind reflect social values and inform new generations on how to behave/what to expect while growing up (1978, p. 30). Although Tuchman's construct of symbolic annihilation emerged from the analysis of 1970s American television, scholars have meaningfully adapted it for the study of representation in several other contexts. In other words, the construct is a durable theoretical lens that transcends temporal and spatial constraints that allows for the critical analysis of representation in contemporary Croatian media. The concept of symbolic annihilation of women in the media, the perception of gender as binary and roles that reflect that, as well as the perception of women as bystanders instead of doers, and as “criers” more than experts remained pertinent.

In 2010 women’s rights activist and comparative literature researcher, Sanja Sarnavka published, “*Put do vlastitog pogleda/ A Road to One’s Outlook*” (Sarnavka, 2010). The book-length study of media and commercial portrayals of women provided relevant contextual findings confirming

Tuchman's notes on media representation of women. Sarnavka based her research mainly on multimodal qualitative analysis of the public television's (HRT) portrayals of women. She kept track of genres where women were invited/ permitted to speak, especially when it came to the hard news and primetime formats (*"Latinica"* and *"Otvoreno"*). Stereotyping and sexism were especially prominent in coverage regarding women (Sarnavka, 2010, pp. 88–89). After general evaluations of women's representation in the media, Sarnavka applied critical discourse analysis to 14 episodes of a political talk show (still running), "Otvoreno." In a total of 14 shows analyzed, 83 people took part in the discussion, out of which 13 were women" (2010, p. 138). Besides scarce invitations to speak (as experts), women were ultimately invited to participate only on topics not perceived as "hard news" (international relations, economy, labor laws, and legislature were still an "all-boys club"), indicating women still had limited opportunities when it comes to the commentary and discourses defining current affairs.

Croatian academia followed the pattern in line with Gerbner's "condemnation, trivialization and absence" (1978, p. 8) as forms of symbolic annihilation of women in their media scholarship. While some research was done on media portrayals and coverage of women in Croatian politics (in terms of fixation on their appearance and domestic situations/partnerships rather than politics), the ways that "everyday women" were covered or the ways that women's issues or initiatives forefronting them were covered have not been meaningfully explored.

According to Vesna Mimica, a veteran Croatian activist fighting violence against women and one of the founders of the first Croatian SOS hotline for domestic violence (2019), the first article discussing domestic violence from a survivor's perspective was published in *Svijet* (The



World) in 1984 (2020). According to Mimica's interview with Super1, in April of 1984, she wrote the first article discussing domestic violence and the ways "the system" handles it in former Yugoslavia in the women's magazine *Svijet*. The article ran along with an 8-question survey that hundreds of readers responded to. The article and later the reader's responses were published in Croatian, Slovenian, and Serbian media (*ibid.*).

To the best of the author's knowledge, no scholarly attention has been given to the case of Ljubomir Čučić. When it comes to domestic violence in Croatia, after independence, in 2003, that was the case that set off a public debate concerning domestic violence and the ways powerful individuals can manipulate the system in their favor. A prominent Croatian diplomat, and then president of the European House in Zagreb, Ljubomir Čučić, had not only beaten and psychologically tormented his then-wife—Magali Boers but also kidnapped their children and managed to manipulate local laws to his advantage (as Boers was not a Croatian citizen). The case gained public attention in 2003 when Boers gave an interview to *Nacional* (Bobanović, 2003), mainstream media and activists were following it until in 2009 Čučić was extradited to Croatia (he escaped to Germany to avoid imprisonment) and served his year-long sentence (Hina, 2009). This case was not meaningfully dealt with by the academia, and it goes well beyond the scope of this thesis in terms of its timeline, coverage, and lack of connection to a women's movement, but the author thought it was important to note it, as it showed that Croatian media did report on domestic violence 20 years ago. Similar to contemporary coverage, sensationalism and tabloidization were present in the coverage, as were ethically questionable practices with headlines such as "Let us know where Čučić took the children," (*Nacional* newsroom, 2007). Simultaneously they were publishing a feminist column by Vedrana Rudan

“An open letter to Mrs. Magali Boers Čučić, The Woman Who Fell Down the Stairs”(Rudan, 2003) speaking in support of not only Boers coming forward, but also highlighting the issue of Croatian women “falling down the stairs” as a euphemism for domestic violence and its prevalence.

A few years later, in 2005, Ana Magaš, a 27-year-old woman from Zadar was accused (and later found guilty) of killing her husband by using excessive force in self-defense. This case was exceptionally covered by the media since Lucijan Magaš came from a prominent Zadar family. Ana Magaš claimed that her life was endangered by her intoxicated and violent husband, Lucijan Magaš, so she stabbed him in self-defense. Magaš was sentenced to 9.5 years in prison, in an appeal that was shortened to 5 and after receiving a presidential pardon she had to spend 3.5 years in prison; for similar crimes, others (men) had spent up to 2.5 years incarcerated (2008). Due to the way regional media followed the case and the trial, as well as due to legal precedents it set with displays of exceptional misogyny and patriarchal beliefs regarding the young woman<sup>7</sup> Sarnavka and Kunac conducted a critical lingual analysis of the coverage.

Sarnavka and Kunac found that in regional outlets, especially, Zadarski Regional, coverage of the events displayed “obvious distortion of facts, failure to mention important information, and hatred against one of the protagonists. The patriarchal image of the world it presents doesn't allow for the possibility of thinking that a young woman (27 years old) could be a good wife and

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<sup>7</sup> Magaš's husband was upset as Magaš was allegedly seen dancing in a club with a man. In his ruling, the judge at the Zadar Court, Branimir Zorica, wrote Magaš “did not respect the injured party at all, or at least to a sufficient extent,” and that in this way she “insulted him, that is, attacked his honor and dignity,” he added she “provoked and sought conflict.” She, allegedly, did so by knocking on the door of her home in order for her husband to let her in after she returned from the club. An aggravating circumstance in the case was, according to Zorica, that as a mother Magaš “disrupted [the child's] normal childhood” (Jutarnji.hr, 2006)

mother if she likes to (and does) dance in a disco sometimes; doesn't allow the idea that she might have the right to go out alone, and, most importantly, doesn't offer the possibility of understanding the problem of domestic violence” (Sarnavka & Kunac, 2006, p. 276).

Adla Isanović analyzed gender representation in daily newspapers in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2006. In all of the countries covered in the sample stories, where women held a central position, were stories in entertainment sections, with culture in second or third place (Isanović, 2006, p. 62). Not surprisingly, professions seen as dominated by women were homemaker/parent and sex worker (2006, p. 65). When it came to expertise and primary sourcing, men were giving expert opinions in 89.2% of news pieces, while they were five times more likely to be the primary source of information in an article (Isanović, 2006, p. 64).

While regional differences between Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina grew as Croatia entered the EU, the gender roles and mediated portrayals of women did not follow the same trajectory. In 2017, Majstorović and Vilović published a mixed-methods analysis of the cover pages of *Večernji* and *Jutarnji list* to interrogate the portrayal of women on the front pages of the two Croatian dailies with national reach. Their findings showed that women were subjects of 13% of analyzed covers, while men accounted for 55% (2017, p. 17), additionally, women were featured in 17.5% of photographs, while men were shown in 66% (ibid.). They found women were featured most in entertainment, using stereotypization to portray them as the “weaker sex” or as mothers, this was recognized in “ 13% of texts and 12 % of photographs in *Jutarnji list* and 16 % of texts and 9 % of photographs in *Večernji list*” (ibid.). These findings go

in accordance with the symbolic annihilation of women by absence, trivialization, and in this case reinforcement of (re)traditionalized gender roles.



### Section 3: Digital Women's and Feminist Movements

After much consideration regarding delineations and various matrixes and approaches to defining women's and feminist movements (Gouws & Coetzee, 2019; McBride & Mazur, 2008; Schreiber, 2010, p. 18; Šinko, 2018) and regional and ethical repercussions of doing so without the consent of movements covered in this thesis, the author decided to make a judgment call to refer to them as social movements creating and coordinating feminist initiatives. As none of the movements publicly described themselves as feminists, the author chose to be more flexible with defining instead of imposing labels. This intervention still allowed for the temporary digital initiatives to be analyzed through the lens of so-called 'hashtag feminism,' without forcing strict matrixes of the English-speaking world's understanding of women's/feminist activism in regions where such matrixes may not be appropriate and on movements (in a long-term sense) that for one reason or another chose not to be associated with them either. As all initiatives covered in this thesis were active online and originated from the digital sphere, characteristics of online activism will be considered below. Simultaneously, attention will be paid to scholarship regarding the #MeToo, as throughout the sample for this thesis, parallels were drawn between the online initiatives in Croatia and #MeToo.

The online space has long been seen as an opportunity for marginalized social groups to articulate their views, requests, grievances, and visions for the future without the gatekeepers they previously had to navigate around. Women were ready to participate in such usage of digital spaces early on. From the proto cyberfeminist mailing list "Faces" and the Old Boys Network cyberfeminist initiative in Berlin, Germany, in 1997 (Janković, 2009) to contemporary

transnational ‘hashtag feminist’ movements such as #MeToo (Mendes et al., 2018), SlutWalk (Carr, 2013), YesAllWomen (Thrift, 2014).

Mendes et al. found that, since 2014, feminists have embraced the “digital technologies and social media platforms to dialogue, network and organize against contemporary sexism, misogyny and rape culture” (2018, p. 237). While technological affordances should not be romanticized nor seen as equally available to all, it is undeniable that dislocated collaboration and the creation of “communities of conversation” (ibid.) were beneficial to feminist many initiatives. Such communities of conversation appeared in the forms of digital enclaved spaces used for “hiding counter-hegemonic ideas and strategies in order to survive or avoid sanctions, while internally producing lively debate and planning” (Squires, 2002), as well as in the form of hashtag anchored conversations regarding multiple axes of discrimination women face that were fostered by the world wide web.

The #MeToo campaign started in 1997 when Tarana Burke heard a 13-year-old girl’s account of sexual abuse she had experienced (Garcia, 2017). While Burke had been working with sexual violence survivors ever since almost ten years later, Burke gave her movement a name— #MeToo. On October 5, 2017, The New York Times published a story titled “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades” (Kantor & Twohey, 2017), featuring several women’s accounts of sexual harassment perpetrated by a then renowned Hollywood producer Weinstein; #MeToo was not yet connected to the case. Ten days later, the #MeToo movement gained widespread mainstream attention with a tweet by American actress Alyssa Milano (Starkey et al., 2019). Milano tweeted: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted, write

‘#MeToo’ as a reply to this tweet” (Milano, 2017) in order to spread awareness about the severity and omnipresence of the issue of sexual violence. Since then, there has been extensive research when it comes to #MeToo and its ramifications worldwide, in India (Pain, 2020; Starkey et al., 2019), Hong Kong (Tsui, 2021), Australia, United States, Japan (Starkey et al., 2019),...

Mendes et al. (2018) described #MeToo as a form of hashtag feminism in which hashtags are used to create and connect content (in this case, tweets) to “produce communities of conversation among disparate Twitter users” (2018, p. 237). The Reuters Institute Digital News Report for 2021 indicated that approximately 5% of Croatian used Twitter to get news (Newman et al., 2021), while internet databases placed the number of Twitter users in the Croatian population below 5% (datareportal, 2022). Although none of the three movements covered in this thesis has a strong Twitter presence (nor a Twitter account), all of the moments choose to feature a “#” in the name of their initiative. Moreover, they applied the hashtag feminism strategies on Facebook, as the Facebook search engine features an option to search any term (or hashtag), and in the cases of Nisam tražila and #spasime, Facebook groups were used as settings for “communities of conversation” among diverse users.



## Chapter 4: Research Questions

This section of the thesis will present a brief overview of the research that helped formulate research questions. The research questions deal with media representation of the movements and their initiatives and the term feminism in the coverage of the initiatives. Additionally, journalistic practices and professional approaches to initiative and movement coverage were considered.

These questions were informed by research done regarding media representations of women's initiatives in general, especially in regard to online feminist activism (Brugnoli et al., 2022; Mendes et al., 2018; Pain, 2020; Schreiber, 2010; Starkey et al., 2019); as well as the ways the Croatian media reports about women and gender-based violence (Bamburac et al., 2006; Majstorović & Vilović, 2017; Nirman Moranjak-Bamburać, 2013; Sarnavka, 2010).

Characteristics of the Croatian media landscape were also considered to analyze whether and how they may reflect in the coverage of initiatives and in regards to the locally specific relationship with feminism and feminist activism (Grbeša & Volarević, 2021; Hromadžić, 2013; Kovačić et al., 2019; Vilović, 2003). Said considerations informed the following research questions:

RQ1: What themes emerged in the news media coverage of the movements/ initiatives? This question aimed to understand themes present in the coverage of movements and their initiatives and evaluate what happens once the mainstream news covers the movement members and initiatives. Are their quotes treated as “expert” and capable of taking charge, or perhaps other sources spoke, “for/over them”? How were the accounts of violence treated within media texts?

RQ1a: What themes emerged from the selected interviews with movement members? This question sought to understand how the movements/initiatives understand their activism? What do they emphasize in their public-facing communication, and why? What do they think about their portrayals by the mainstream media?

RQ2: What themes characterized the journalistic practices in the coverage? Were the professional standards adhered to? What was sourcing like? In which sections of the outlets did the articles regarding initiatives appear? This question wanted to understand the professional treatment of coverage and journalistic practices, while RQ1 was more focused on the main characteristics of the coverage in regard to movements.

RQ3: Was feminism explicitly covered/ mentioned in mainstream and/or movement media? If yes, how? What was the context? How did the movement members describe the initiative's relationship with feminism? This question sought to understand how the media covered the initiatives regarding their activism and whether the media recognized said activism as feminist or labeled it something else, and if so, what was it?

## Chapter 5: Method and Sample

In this master thesis, a qualitative method– thematic analysis, as theorized by Braun and Clarke (2006), was applied to a diverse data set to evaluate the researched phenomena comprehensively. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data”(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). Braun and Clarke describe thematic analysis as “a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data”(2006, p. 82). Considering the data set chosen for this analysis, there was a necessity for a method that would permit just that, flexibility, and nuanced evaluations of texts.

This thesis aimed to understand media representations of women’s movement initiatives in Croatia by evaluating media texts and initiative participants’ accounts provided in an interview form, therefore a necessity for a ground-up approach to emerging themes that appear in the data corpus was recognized. Since thematic analysis and “theme emergence” could be seen as vague terms, clarification of the researcher’s understanding of themes is necessary. The method chosen for this master thesis is qualitative, and therefore the mere numerical number of occurrences of themes was not the deciding factor in the researcher’s evaluation of themes. This does not, by any means, mean that the researcher ignored the frequency of thematic emergence but that the researcher made judgment calls in determining the prevalence of a theme as it relates to the research questions the researcher is trying to answer (this approach is advised by Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher provided detailed descriptions of the themes detected across the data set to achieve transparency of the coding process; additionally, the researcher practiced reflexivity throughout coding and evaluating themes to ensure a rigorous process of analysis.

Braun and Clarke differentiate between the inductive and theoretical approaches to thematic data analysis (2006, pp. 83–84). Inductive is driven by data (similar to grounded theory), while the theoretical is guided by the researcher's interest in the analyzed area, "it is more researcher driven" (ibid.). In this instance, both approaches were combined since the research questions the researcher wished to explore were formulated based on the researcher's previous research and observations stemming from (her) already produced study (2020) and available literature, but an inductive analysis was applied and examined through existing theoretical lenses where possible.

The data were analyzed according to the six steps of thematic analysis Braun and Clarke propose (pp. 87-93). They advise that the researcher first familiarize themselves with the data by reading the whole corpus before coding. Second, the author can start analyzing codes and generating initial codes; then, the researcher should start looking for themes and reviewing them afterward. After theme defining and naming, the author proceeded to the final step, producing the report.

As indicated above, the sample chosen consisted mainly of news media coverage of the movements' initiatives within the selected timeframes (n=262). There are several reasons why the news media were chosen as the data corpus source (along with selected movement member's interview).

While the focus could have been exclusively on the movements/ initiatives, doing a deep dive on their activities and members throughout the years would cause several problems. One, movements and initiatives are short-term oriented; they pop up and disappear; by analyzing only their sites or mission statements without contextualizing them in the broader societal/media environment, the nuance of initiatives would be lost, and it is questionable whether there would be enough data to analyze the movements adequately in the first place. For instance, Nisam

tražila (I did not ask for it) is no longer as active (their last abuse account was published 7/18/2021), and the Facebook site mostly shares news links and no personal accounts. They were active for approximately two months, and their mission statements and organically produced content (outside of confessionals sent to them) are scarce. Without including the news media analysis in the description of the movement, a site with 37 thousand followers and 549 abuse accounts (accessed 10/10/2021) would be described partially and misleadingly.

Secondly, by describing the movements exclusively through the movement's eyes, we learn about the world as it sees it and about the movement as it sees itself (almost in a vacuum). While analysis of enclave spaces and their communication is valuable, the enclaves exist because they need refuge and safety from the mainstream (or within the mainstream) without a "hostile" mainstream; the movements would themselves be mainstream. The negotiation of women's movements and initiatives with the status quo and the media is the most appropriate way to understand what they are doing comprehensively. The public sphere as a space where challengers and upholders meet is a site of articulation and said articulation is passed to the public through the media as messengers and (co)creators of meaning.

After significant consideration, the researcher decided not to include the social media comments analysis (or digital ethnography) in this research although all movements and their initiatives were active, and some even originated from social media. This decision was made for three reasons. Firstly, the researcher has already conducted similar research and is hesitant to do it again, considering the horrific amount of hate speech she encountered and analyzed without reaching meaningful enough conclusions. Secondly, social media comments are organized by algorithms the researcher has little to no insight into, so what is displayed, prioritized, and omitted is arbitrary and opaque. Additionally, populations active in the comment sections and

their opinions do not equate to (reflect) the actual news media readers' views, just untransparently chosen information. With all three elements in mind, the author decided not to engage in social media comment section analysis in this paper.

Finally, social movements (presumably) want social change and social attention usually achieved by gaining mainstream media coverage (the more favorable, the better), but coverage, nonetheless. Their strategies are media-friendly (performances, press conferences, hashtags, social media usage, visual and guerilla interventions) and public-oriented goals. Due to all stated above, the choice was made to analyze the news media coverage. Since the research questions the author is attempting to answer in this thesis are underexplored within the Croatian context, the qualitative analysis approach was employed to shed light on an underexplored phenomenon. Here, the goal was not to do an extensive study but to provide an initial understanding that could inspire further research approaching the observed phenomena through different methods. The researcher believes that a quantitative analysis would not provide comprehensive enough results due to the specific local context and nuanced social relations.

## Section 1: Sample Collection

Two steps of sample collection were be incorporated into this thesis research:

### 1 News media data collection

The data set was collected in three time frames indicated below (Table 1). Data collected from five online news media outlets were analyzed. The news media outlets were chosen using two criteria, popularity, and perceived political orientation. According to the 2021 Reuters Institute's

Digital News Report for Croatia, Croatia's most popular online news outlets were *index.hr*, *24sata.hr*, *Jutarnji.hr*, *net.hr*, and *Dnevnik.hr* (Vozab & Perusko, 2021, p. 28). In the same report, Vozab and Peruško interrogated citizens' perceptions of media placement on the political left and right scale. The author evaluated the results and decided to replace *Dnevnik.hr*, an affiliate outlet of a commercial television station, Nova TV, with an outlet perceived as right-wing- *Večernji.hr* (number seven on the popularity scale). This intervention was made to allow for more diversity of opinion and coverage within the sample and therefore to deepen the understanding of the observed phenomena. During coding, the author took note of the outlet producing the articles so that inter-outlet differences can be considered when identified within the data corpus.

Initiative	First appearance	End of the data collection date	Number of articles analyzed
#spasime	March 1, 2019	April 1, 2019	65
Prekinimo šutnju	October 11, 2018	November 11, 2018	123
Nisam tražila	Jan 17, 2021	Feb 17, 2021	74
Total			n=262

*Table 1- News Media collection time frames for each movement and number of articles analyzed*

The collection of data from the outlets had proven to be relatively challenging, so the author was forced to collect data in three steps. First, a search engine was used in order to find articles about the movements and initiatives within the above-indicated timelines. The keywords such as initiative names, movement names, movement member names, "violence," "gender-based," and key terms specific to each initiative (curettage, clinical hospital center Split, anesthesia; domestic violence, protest, meeting, actress; actresses, actress, rape, harassment, sexual violence) were used. As the results were scarce, the author collected all the articles that appeared and then "followed" all the hyperlinks to other articles plugged into the ones initially found. By "following" the embedded breadcrumbs, the number of articles collected grew, but it was recognized that articles regarding the initiatives appeared in various sections of outlets (news, lifestyle, interview,..) that are not necessarily connected to one another; ultimately, the third step was introduced. As all outlets offered a search feature designed specifically for the outlet, a portion of the data was collected this way.

After collection, the sample was cleaned, as at first, it consisted of almost 350 articles. While it became apparent early on that "reporting on reporting" and "copy/paste reporting" were significant characteristics of the coverage (this will be discussed further in the Findings); still, articles that consisted entirely of screenshots of posts from only tangentially related public figures and articles that offered no editorial intervention whatsoever, or were not explicitly related to the movements were removed. That resulted in 262 articles analyzed in this thesis. All articles were saved in pdf form and stored by the author. Analysis was done on articles in Croatian to maintain the meaning integrity; later, excerpts used in the findings were translated to English by the author.



## 2 Interviews

The researcher set out to conduct up to six interviews with the movement members.

Unfortunately, despite much back and forth, Nisam tražila and RODAs stopped answering the researcher's emails, and therefore one in-depth interview with a #spasime member cognizant of the inner workings of the #spasime initiative was conducted for this thesis. While this interview cannot be considered a replacement for the remaining two initiatives, the researcher still chose to include it in the sample, as it offered insights into the #spasime movement activity planning and perceptions regarding their media coverage. The interview lasted 93 minutes and was held in Croatian on February 14, 2022, using the Zoom video conferencing platform. The author transcribed it and thematically analyzed it as the remainder of the sample; still, it was treated as "outside of the sample," and within the findings section, it was explicitly stated when data from the in-depth interview was used to contribute findings elaboration.

In light of full researcher transparency, the researcher wishes to disclose that within the sample of articles analyzed for this thesis, the researcher is personally familiar with five journalists that wrote 16 articles included in the sample. That amounts to 6% of the analyzed sample, and due to the nature of the thematic analysis that aims to rise above individual articles in order to recognize themes and patterns in reporting, the author does not consider this to be a meaningful conflict of interest that in any way deteriorated the integrity or findings' validity.

## Chapter 6: Findings

Thematic analysis yielded three major findings sections that will be discussed in this chapter: “Journalism and Reporting,” concerning professional practices noticed throughout the coverage and the ways they shaped reporting on the movements; Second “Talking About ‘Those’ Women,” regarding portrayals of movements and individual members as symbolically annihilated throughout the coverage; and finally, “Delineations” where portrayals and assigned delineations of movement activities will be discussed, as well as the usage (or strategic avoidance) of the terms “gender” and “feminism.”

The first theme, Journalism and Reporting, will try to answer how Croatian journalists and news organizations reported on movements, their initiatives, and movement members. This theme was grounded in literature and data describing the local media environment and resulted in several sub-themes connected to current hardships of the Croatian media market– namely: “Reporting on Reporting” concerning cross-outlet curation of content and “borrowing from the competition;” Facebook reporting describing how media outlets incorporate Facebook content into their coverage, closely connected “copy/paste” sourcing here first-hand sources were substituted with Facebook posts. The fractured nature of coverage was also discussed, as outlets chose to split relevant information into several articles, instead of publishing them all in one comprehensive and in-depth analysis. Since much of this theme dealt with tabloidization, spectacularization and celebrification of coverage (Hromadžić, 2013; Vilović, 2003), the dramatization of traumas women’s movements highlighted and addressed was also considered. The first theme helped elucidate a persistent lean towards tabloidization and infotainment in media coverage, but also raised questions regarding journalistic ethics, boundaries between journalism and content

curation/transcription, and ways such professional practices help constructive public conversations regarding various forms of violence against women, as opposed to solidifying the status quo and profiting from it. These questions will be addressed further, in the Discussion section of this thesis.

The second theme, “Talking About ‘Those’ Women,” was dedicated to understanding how women are represented throughout the coverage. It first used the concept of symbolic annihilation to discuss naming, misnaming, or not naming movements and activists, as well as their positioning within the text to establish their relevance and expertise in the coverage. This theme also took note of who got the credit for changes that occurred and discussions that were held after the movement forced their agenda into the public agenda. It showed that more often than not women and initiatives were presented as passive observers searching for their five minutes of fame, rather than as capable of driving change and creating public policies. This theme highlighted a hierarchy of expertise and relevance, on which movement members, regardless of their qualifications and efforts, did not seem to be allowed to take charge and ownership over topics they have articulated themselves but were instead symbolically and physically erased from the coverage. Further implications of this theme will be considered in the Discussion section.

The final theme deals with delineations. First of movements concerning one group or issue, but not another; then the delineation of prominent activists within the movements as power-hungry and profiting off their/another’s pain while simultaneously personalizing the whole movement; and finally, delineation of movements as resembling #MeToo, but not any form or type of

feminist activism. This theme is mostly concerned with the media's evaluations and containment of movements to certain individuals, professions, environments, or even rubrics (Show, Stars, Showbiz, ...) and the avoidance of the term feminism in the coverage and public-facing communication of the movements. The potential implications of such coverage will be analyzed further in the discussion section.

## Section 1: Journalism and Reporting

The first theme generated by thematic analysis of outlets' reporting on the three movements dealt with Journalism and Reporting. Professional practices regarding reporting on initiatives were indicative of tabloidization and "spectacularization" of the accounts of violence the initiatives put forward. Additionally, much of the reporting analyzed resembled content curation rather than journalism. Articles often had no original reporting but rather "reporting on reporting," characterized by essentially transcribing or paraphrasing the commercial and public television sources' statements. Reporting was often marked by fractured coverage, lack of meaningful context, and copying and pasting of Facebook posts made by prominent Croatian public figures. An approach to coverage that prioritized "drama and trauma" over comprehensive and holistic analysis was consistent with the media's tendency towards tabloidization and indicated, among other things, reliance on clickbait to attract readers. The findings in this theme could, to some extent, be seen as a result of challenging newsroom conditions as journalists, in some instances, published up to four articles a day.

### Subsection 1: “Reporting on Reporting”

One of the principal sub-themes in all three movement coverages was “Reporting on Reporting.” This sub-theme’s main characteristic was that media outlets actively reported on their competition’s reporting. Once a great scoop or a remarkable story gets uncovered (in any media environment), it is common practice that other outlets are going to report on it and take the investigation further. When reporting on competition happens, individual outlets can still choose to deepen the competitor’s coverage with their own investigation, sources, and efforts. Somewhat surprisingly, in Croatia, “Reporting on Reporting” did not occur in a form that sought to take a step further or a step in a different direction from the original “scoop” instead, “Reporting on Reporting” occurred by sourcing from other outlets without much context and sometimes even verbatim. Considering everything discussed above concerning the local media ecology, “Reporting on Reporting” does fit into the trifecta deteriorating the quality of Croatian journalism (tabloidization, lack of funding, inexperienced journalists); but it is also important to note that the outlets did “cut corners,” by “Reporting on Reporting” in coverage of all three analyzed initiatives consistently.

A prevalent way of reporting on reporting was evidenced, was through the sourcing practices at the outlets examined in this study. For example, one outlet would use a statement, a fragment of an interview, or a comment given to a competitor and just incorporate it into their own coverage, especially when it comes to statements given to commercial or public televisions. Scholars have articulated how who is sourced and how they are sourced can impact the ways audiences come to understand stories. Van Dijk argued that expert sources significantly “influence the way events

are interpreted and set the agenda for future debate” (van Dijk, 1991 as quoted in Rowe et al., 2003); meaning that sources chosen and repeatedly featured as experts can shape not only current but debates yet to come. Simultaneously with the “rise of the expert,” Boyce found that “there is the risk that the public, regardless of their knowledge or expertise, will be regarded simply as emotional and not knowledgeable” (2006). Therefore, the decision to feature one expert’s opinion over and over again by multiple outlets can have a long-term impact on the coverage of the issue, but what is more, choosing one expert while assigning activists and survivors with a less relevant “non-expert” role solidifies pre-established themes and frames, in this case, all over five outlets in the coverage.

One could call this “lazy journalism” or transcribing even, but considering that in some instances, the author noticed the same journalist publishing up to four articles a day (Kanić, 2021d, 2021c, 2021b, 2021a) or two articles in an hour and a half period (Bosančić, 2021b, 2021c), it might not be that surprising that the journalists due to their workload do not have the time to go out on the field. While that practice was noticed most during sample collection for Nisam tražila (in 2021), on the 24sata outlet, other outlets also showed patterns of “reporting on reporting.” Still, due to avoidance of usage of journalist’s names in the byline and opting for a “generic newsroom” authorship (Večernji.hr, Jutarnji.hr, Index Vijesti, and danas.hr), it is impossible to assess how widespread this practice of writing multiple articles a day by the same journalist is outside 24 sata.

When it comes to the “reporting on reporting” approach to news delivery, it usually shows a simple pattern of transcription of an interview or statement given by a person relevant to the

public discussion of a women's movement (mainly a minister, a public official, a public figure or entertainer; activists and movement members are not featured as often in this type of transcription- or mainstream news and current events coverage shows). "Reporting on reporting" was present either in the form of a transcribed statement used as part of an article or as constituting the entire article was used 69 times within the "cleaned" sample, which amounts to 24.73% of analyzed articles.

This practice and approach to news coverage is problematic not only because it narrows the scope of access to diverse information sources and opinions by recycling ones the competing outlet has already chosen but also because it disables critical inquiry as, arguably, a crucial part of journalism. Code of Honor of Croatian Journalists refers to critical inquiry twice within the first five articles (Articles 2 and 5), highlighting it as one of the top priorities in journalistic reporting (n.d.) as it enables the free flow of information, as well as the pursuit of the truth (ibid.). While theoretically and professionally critical engagement with sources is advised, that often did not translate to practice. For instance, in an article (PS-43, 24sata, 2021) published by 24 sata, an assistant to the Minister of Health was quoted from his appearance on a morning news show produced by the national broadcaster, the same happened with a two-sentence long statement by Ivana Ninčević- Lesandrić on RTL ( PS- 87, Hina, 2018), the minister's appearance on N1( PS-133, danas.hr, 2018) or an interview with the minister on HRT ( PS-110, Vecernji list, 2018). In such cases, by quoting somebody else's interview, journalists and outlets cannot ask follow-up questions and clarify statements. For example, in the original HRT interview, in the beginning, the minister says, "it is possible that the patients do not feel they have received the anesthesia because they do not feel the needle puncture" (M.M., 2018). The journalist leading

that interview does not ask the minister to clarify why patients who maybe did not see or feel the needle still experience pain while undergoing medical procedures (implying that anesthesia was not given or did not work during the procedure). So, the minister's statement is transcribed without critical engagement with what was said, first by the journalist conducting the interview and second by the journalist transcribing it as "reporting" while essentially doing content curation rather than journalism.

Reporting on reporting as a sub-theme was especially present with stories about Prekinimo šutnju, although it was featured with coverage of the other movements. While this sub-theme does not dig deeper into the question of who is quoted or whose statements are "worthy enough" to transcribe, it does show how journalists approach news gathering when it comes to women's movements and gender-based violence— as something that can be copied from someone else as they may not have enough time, attention, or willingness to "dig into the topic further" and seek out different sources/perspectives or just opportunities where a journalist has an option to follow up, fact check or ask their source for clarification.

## Subsection 2: "Copy/paste" and Facebook reporting

According to Napoleon Cat, a social media management and analytics tool, as well as Statista.com, over 60% of the Croatian population use Facebook (Napoleon cat, 2022; Tankovska, 2021), and the most active population are people between the ages of 25 and 34 (ibid.) Facebook is popular amongst government bodies and politicians as well. For example, the president's office publishes almost daily, as does the government. Initiatives covered by this



research were also active on Facebook, and both RODA and #spasime remained so to this day, while Nisam tražila reduced the publishing frequency compared to its peak times at the beginning of 2021. All media outlets analyzed in this thesis are active on Facebook as well, and considering the number of Croatians with Facebook accounts, which is not surprising.

Like elsewhere in the world, Facebook is an essential space for journalists and social movements to share information with audiences and followers. According to Grbeša and Volarević, Facebook's relevance as a new source in Croatia continues to increase, especially in television news and political information (2021). Kovačić et al. found that online outlets often copy/pasted social media posts in articles following the logic of “publish first, verify later” to increase engagement and expedite the production of texts published online (Kovačić et al., 2019, pp. 12, 15–16). Such practice indicates that, especially when it comes to online outlets, (hyper)production of content that outlets publish is prioritized, while “slower,” in-depth and long-form journalism is marginalized within the online media landscape in Croatia.

In light of the above-discussed quantity of Facebook users, the sub-theme “Facebook reporting,” closely connected to “copy/paste” journalism, emerged and manifested in two different ways. First, by using the anonymous accounts of violence collected by the movements as readily accessible sources of one-liners and soundbites that, due to their traumatic characteristics, can help drive clicks, and second, by using named accounts of prominent figures as a basis for whole articles without having to interact with sources, while still getting their “opinions.”

In one sense, the affordances of Facebook provide a space for the movements to document violence against women. However, those same accounts also provide source material for journalists to write stories. This source material was rarely scaffolded with editorial judgment but instead simply copied and pasted entirely, often with the grammatical and spelling errors found in the original text, sometimes even by merely embedding them into the articles (PS-4, 24, 100; SM- 94, NT-13, 85,...).

Similarly, in some instances, Facebook comments from underneath the articles posted by the outlets were also copy/pasted and published within “new” articles. The practice of usage of anonymous sources in journalism is not uncommon; for various reasons, sources might ask for their identities or identifying information not to be published. Harvesting anonymous accounts of survivors of various kinds of traumas takes away the ability of the person coming forward to control their narrative and choose the settings in which their trauma will be discussed (a Facebook group for survivors) as opposed to an online outlet using it as a clickbait or even sexualizing it. For instance, headlines like this: “Our actresses also spoke out: ‘Croatian director put his tongue in my mouth, he wanted sex in the toilet’” (NT-85, Bosančić, 2021) were in the show section. From this headline and placement within the outlet, it is not entirely clear that the topic of discussion is sexual harassment and violence. Similarly, in cases of gynecological violence where a single sentence from an anonymous source became the headline–““They jumped on my stomach. Both my child and I ended up disabled” (PS-65, 24sata, 2018)– this article does not deal with the specific case, nor its verification, it, in fact, buries it within the article along with many other decontextualized and unnamed accounts of violence arguably there to provide shock effect to the coverage more than to be engaged with beyond that.

Journalists can use anonymous accounts to protect individuals' well-being while reporting on sensitive issues or topics that could endanger their safety. As all three movements covered in this sample encouraged individuals to share their accounts of violence anonymously, a relatively safe space, almost an enclave, to share stories was provided to survivors. In such a safe space, individuals were able not only to share their experiences but also to offer advice or consolation to one another. However, when the harrowing accounts of violence are taken out of the "safe space" and shared by a news organization, they are decontextualized and re-contextualized into a setting that portrays them as untrustworthy or made up.

If a journalist cannot verify claims and still publishes them in bulk, one after another as a patchwork article, context, and clarification get lost and, in many cases, replaced by usage of accounts of violence as "statements here for the taking," without accountability to survivors, movements or audiences. As this practice of publishing raises some valuable questions about journalistic ethics and approaches to reporting in Croatia, the Croatian Journalist Honor Council website has been consulted to check whether the public made any complaints regarding this type of reporting or reporting on any of the movements covered in this thesis in general. The researcher found that no such complaints have been made or discussed by the Council. Interestingly, to file a complaint regarding coverage, the person petitioning has to provide personal data (first and last name, email, phone number). They are published publicly along with the ruling of the Council. Because of that, it is possible that persons whose accounts were used as clickbait or sexualized decided against making a complaint, as in that case, their personal information would be made (more) public.

For instance, in the article (NT-192, danas.hr, 2021), the headline states: “PAINFUL TESTIMONIES OF WOMEN FROM CROATIA AND THE REGION ABOUT ABUSE: / ‘I was only 14 years old, he put his hand in my panties ...’”. In this article, the survivor’s account of violence comprising half of the headline and indicating child sexual abuse (something many would be interested in reading to protect children from predators); is not foregrounded in the article but buried within it after a “quick reminder” of the events in Belgrade, Serbia, explanation of the movement and four violence recollections (out of six copy/pasted into the article). In the article, child sexual abuse is not discussed, while schools and universities are mentioned as possible sites where violence happens; no in-depth information or context is given to introduce any of the accounts published in the article. With some of them pasted and later embedded from the Nisam tražila Facebook site (making them doubled), the accounts become more “padding” to make the article longer than a statement or content the journalist engaged with.

Interestingly, a freelance journalist working for Index.hr, Barbara Matejčić, traced the person whose account was used in the article above (NT-28 Matejčić, 2021). The survivor was, at first, willing to come forward with her name but then decided not to because: “I really want to do something and fight, I’m angry, but when I realize what could happen, how journalists will *drag me*, what the public will conclude and how *I make a sensation out of my trauma*, I hate it. I’m not ready to expose myself like that, it’s very scary,..., *And people are vultures*” (ibid.). In one of the rare positive examples within the sample on how to report on violence against women, Matejčić introduced several named sources beyond the anonymous survivor and provided resources available to survivors seeking support or advice. Still, the article was illustrated by a

photo montage of a young long-haired woman alone in the dark in front of the Zagreb Academy of Dramatic Arts. Such illustration choice taps into the territory of rape myths where only young women are sexually harassed in the dark allies by strangers, even though the survivor quoted throughout the article spoke about her experiences in brightly lit public or semi-public spaces with people she knew and interacted with.

By treating traumatic accounts as “free for all” because they are anonymous, especially with decontextualized coverage that does not offer any facts or data accompanying the accounts, survivors might be re-traumatized and/or discouraged from coming forward as the individual quoted above disclosed, but what is more such approach to coverage where multiple accounts are just taken from Facebook and placed one next to another dehumanizes the survivors and collapses their complex personhoods while simultaneously exploiting them, which is in direct conflict with journalistic ethics. Croatian Journalist’s Association Code of Honor Article 15 stipulates: “Special attention, caution, and responsibility are required when reporting on suicides, accidents, personal tragedies, illnesses, deaths, and violence...; in this case, the journalist is obliged to take into account the honor, reputation, and dignity of the persons she reports on” (HND, 2009). This approach to coverage “without coverage” (or at least substantial one) trivializes sexual violence, gender-based violence, and survivors’ experiences, while simultaneously profiting from reporting on said violence without even attempting to engage with its origins, repercussions, and manifestations. Similar patterns in reporting with copy/pasting accounts appeared in the Prekinimo šutnju campaign (PS- 2, 5, 24, 37, 77, 100,...), while #spasime, a campaign dealing with domestic and gender-based violence, published similar accounts of violence (personal accounts written by mostly anonymous survivors) that were not

covered in such way. Some posts were still copy/pasted (SM- 2, 27) but the coverage was more focused on the initiative's media-assigned spokesperson- Jelena Veljača, than the accounts of violence from the group.

Miloš argued that with #spasime, a conflation of mother and child subjectivities occurred where a woman was not perceived as a valid subject on her own by the movement and, following that reasoning, by the media as well (2021). The interview with one of the movement members familiar with strategic planning of #spasime communication disputed Miloš's claim and indicated that such conflation was not due to internalized misogyny, infantilization, and ignorance of the inherent value of a woman's life but a strategic choice to avoid backlash terms such as "feminism, gender, and gender-based violence" may cause in Croatian public discourse. While this specific strategic avoidance of feminism will be further elaborated on later in this thesis, the successful narratives of equivalency between women and children experiencing domestic violence might have contributed to the journalistic avoidance of trivialization and "scandalization" of anonymous accounts published in the #spasime group. Additionally, the Croatian Journalists Association Code of Honor does call for "special care" when reporting about children (Articles 19 and 20 HND, 2009). The social ecology might have also contributed to "more ethical reporting in this case," as the public was still reverberating with the outrage the case of the father throwing his children from the balcony produced.

In the coverage of the movements, all media outlets used Facebook posts made by Croatian politicians and prominent entertainers as the basis for whole articles. Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić, the MP who first spoke about her experience of inhumane treatment after a miscarriage, was

prominently featured in such a manner, with her Facebook posts being copy/pasted or embedded and used in articles as a substitute for statements/comments. That practice arguably shortened the journalist's time to draft questions and wait for her answers. Still, it also posed the issue discussed extensively above- "reporting on reporting"- where the clarification and follow-up questions, as strategies for obtaining, understanding, and verifying information were not applied (PS-19, 27, 28, 84,...).

Similarly, during the coverage of Nisam tražila, many prominent Croatian artists (mainly actresses and actors) published Facebook posts with their opinions on the Nisam tražila or personal experiences with violence and sexism within the profession. Such accounts were mainly copy/pasted verbatim, with on occasion added side notes explaining Nisam tražila as a movement of actresses and acting students. Narrowing the scope of the movement as tied to a single profession (although simultaneously accounts of violence regarding faculties, schools, dentists, elementary schools, and other public places where women exist were posted on the site) shifted the coverage to the personal experiences of prominent figures, rather than a social and arguably systemic issue. Such accounts of violence were usually covered in "hot, stars, and magazine sections" of news outlets designed to entertain audiences primarily.

In an article titled: "Disturbing announcement of a Croatian actress: The director invited me to his house and asked me to take off my clothes" (NT-24, Index vijesti, 2021), the article provides one sentence of context: "In the post, she provided support to colleagues from the acting industry who were sexually harassed, and described her extremely unpleasant experience with one director." In her Facebook post, Karmen Sunčana Lovrić spoke about sexual harassment and

sexual assault on two separate occasions by two separate men in positions of relative power– a director and an unnamed acclaimed older colleague. By covering her Facebook post on her “personal” Facebook page without context, data, and a reaction from the actress, her trauma was nothing more than a copy/pasted clickbait profiting from someone’s experience with sexual harassment and assault. Such “reporting without reporting” not only strays from the Codex of Honor but also minimizes the harm of sexual violence. By calling it “extremely unpleasant,” a euphemism supposed to describe sexual assault, and by referring to it in the title as an “inappropriate invitation,” not assault, the trauma is somehow minimized in severity and sexualized, especially since the visuals used to accompany her post featured a screenshot of her Facebook post with words “and now take your clothes off, like really seductively,” next to the photo of the young and conventionally attractive Karmen Sunčana Lovrić.

“Facebook reporting” as a surrogate for journalistic reporting was also used in the case of Dora Lipovčan. The actress spoke about sexual abuse and rape she had experienced as a child using her Facebook account. Unsurprisingly, all outlets covered in this thesis reported on her post with headlines such as: “Actress Dora Lipovčan: I was raped, and I kept silent about it for 15 years. It was too late” (NT-32); “OPEN CONFESSION OF ACTRESS DORA LIPOVČAN: / ‘I was raped, I was silent for 15 years before going to the police ...’” (NT-188, hot.hr, 2021). In the article (NT-188), one sentence of context is given to the reader- “After Serbian actress, Milena Radulović accused acting teacher Miroslav Mika Antic of rape, many women shared their stories, one of them being Croatian actress Dora Lipovčan” (ibid.). The article is published in the “hot” section of the outlet, and it twice fails to address the fact that both Radulović (17) and Lipovčan were minors. Reporting on them as “actresses” was used almost to justify the “hot”



section. However, they were not professional actresses at the time of sexual abuse; they were both school-aged girls. By providing minimal context or professional reporting, their experiences were minimized in severity and exploited for clicks, without even attempting to show “special attention, caution and responsibility” while reporting on violence survivors (Croatian Journalists Association Code of Honor Article 15).

### Subsection 3: Fractured coverage

Another pattern in reporting noted in the analysis was the “Fractured Coverage” sub-theme. It was characterized by the outlet’s preference to report one relatively straightforward chain of events as multiple short articles instead of publishing a longer article with all the relevant facts and sources. Current trends in journalism reflect a shift in audiences’ consumption of news, primarily using mobile devices (Molyneux, 2018). Adaptation to the move from desktop-first to smaller screens, as well as to increasing use of social media “news bytes” (a Tweet can contain up to 280 characters); resulted in the atomization of news stories into digestible bytes that can keep readers attention. Additionally, considering the persistent financial hardship Croatian media experience, the proliferation of bite-sized news could also be seen as beneficial to the outlets’ business model (Kovačić et al., 2019). However, this study is primarily concerned with how the strategy of bite-sized news and fractured reporting relates to coverage of violence against women and the movements trying to draw attention to the issue.

The practice of fractured coverage was especially prominent in the coverage of Prekinimo šutnju, where multiple articles a day were published regarding the same daily event. Considering the

already discussed challenges the Croatian media market is facing, and the mere number of articles these relatively small and understaffed outlets publish a day, a fractured approach to coverage seems logical to meet the publishing requirement and get more clicks and, subsequently, advertisement money. While this might seem logical on the production side of coverage, when it comes to the readers, the coverage they encounter is often decontextualized and not holistic. That means that an average reader with a moderate interest in the story and limited time in their day to consume online news might only be exposed to one aspect of the story while unaware of another. Articles written in such fractured ways usually did feature embedded hyperlinks the reader can follow to find out more about the events. They can even click on the hashtags at the bottom of an article and see all content “tagged” under a specific term. However, one could still argue that daily access to information regarding topics such as violence against women, domestic, or gynecological violence (or any other subject for that matter) should not resemble a scavenger hunt.

Additionally, all outlets feature advertisements throughout their sites; for instance, on Jutarnji.hr, upon clicking on the article, the reader is first greeted by two “straps” of advertisement covering roughly 80% of the site. After scrolling down, the strap containing promotions remains on the bottom of the screen unless the reader closes it, while the right-hand side of the screen, the last quarter if looking at the screen vertically, is constantly featuring ads. Additionally, ads are featured after every two or three paragraphs as embedded images featuring consumer products. While the outlet clearly marks advertisements and spaces within texts assigned to them as advertisements, because of so much space dedicated to advertising within the text and fractured coverage of events, the wholesome coverage of a story a reader can read without constantly

following hyperlinks to expand understanding, or avoiding advertisements is not something one can expect. Readers using browsers that disable ads or users with adblockers might not be constantly exposed to advertisements, but even when large gray boxes take up more space within an article than the facts or reporting do, the inclination of the outlet to monetize space rather than quality content is apparent. While this practice is especially noticeable in Jutarnji.hr, all outlets did feature advertisements on their websites and, to some extent, exhibited fractured coverage regardless of the number of ads featured.

The fractured coverage in terms of content presented to the readers can be best described using the example of Prekinimo šutnju and Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić.

October 15, 2018, Net.hr published four articles regarding Prekinimo šutnju and Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić's speech at the Parliament. All were published under the newsroom byline "Danas.hr" (PS-119, 129, 130, 139). These articles presented a sliver of coverage following the fourth day after the MP's speech. In an article titled: "Kujundžić ON CURETTAGE WITHOUT ANESTHESIA: / 'Sometimes we doctors rather choose a little pain, but a safe life,'" two sentences of context are provided prior to publishing the transcript of selected quotes from the interview the minister of Health had given to HRT (PS-139, danas.hr, 2021). The context provided characterizes gynecological violence as "painful testimonies of women from Croatian hospitals" and the miscarriage and the curettage without anesthesia as "shocking testimony." Two hyperlinks to other articles are embedded in the text, as well as the link to the interview on HRT; in total, this article consists of 203 words (including the headline) and one secondary source- the minister's guest appearance on HRT.

The article titled “NURSES SIDE ON THE PATIENT’S SIDE: / ‘We are ashamed to be part of the system. The hospital is not a barn, and women are not cows” (PS-130, danas.hr, 2018) reported on reporting 24 sata (PS-60, Bilešić, 2018) did with anonymous nurses reflecting on the issue of painful medical procedures done to women. The primary source for this article is an anonymous RN, or possibly more than one RN, which is unclear in both the 24 sata and the Net.hr article. Besides reporting on reporting, this article features a single perspective provided by nurse(s) and links to three other articles on the topic. It consists of nine short paragraphs and no original reporting (it has several grammatical errors and typos).

The third article was titled “SHOCKING CONFESSIONS FORCED THE STATE TO ACTION, INSPECTIONS STARTED IN HOSPITALS: / ‘It has been done before, so nothing has changed” (PS-129, danas.hr, 2018). This article draws heavily from a Jutarnji List article (PS-88, Turčin, 2018) where deputy minister Vili Beroš gave statements regarding previous inspection results in hospitals, as did Daniela Drandić from the RODAs. Unlike in the original article, Prekinimo šutnju is not mentioned. This article features no original reporting or first-hand quotes, links to three different articles, and fails to define the medical jargon used in the text.

The final article on the topic that day was: “NINČEVIĆ LESANDRIĆ: / ‘I did not see any anesthesia, and if I received it, then what kind of problem do we open?” (PS-119, danas.hr, 2018). The article is a transcript of an interview with Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić on the RTL nightly news. There is no original reporting, and it features three links to different articles.

All four articles analyzed in this section feature reporting on reporting, with no original reporting or sourcing done by the journalists. What is more, three of the articles feature one perspective of the story, usually with little or no context. Most of these articles could not stand alone and inform a reader of what is going on regarding Prekinimo šutnju, Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić, and the Ministry of Health. Additionally, terms such as curettage are not explained to the reader, who may not be a doctor (or a survivor), and therefore familiar with niche medical jargon. While net.hr did cumulatively feature the minister, his deputy, the MP, a member of the RODA initiative, and nurse(s), thereby offering a plethora of sources, those sources were a) microdosed and forwarded using four separate articles and b) gathered by somebody else, raising the question not only of wholesomeness of the coverage but also of originality and quality of the journalistic work the reader was exposed to when it came to a complex issue impacting a large portion of the population.

#### Subsection 4: Drama and Trauma

The final sub-theme discussed under the umbrella of journalism and reporting on women's movements is "Drama and Trauma." As Vilović noted, infotainment, scandal, tabloidization, news simplification, and shortening (2003) were recognized as still relevant to the Croatian online news media outlets reporting on women's movements.

The author kept track of descriptors used to characterize and depict all movements and initiatives. What was noted the most was the emphasis on adjectives and adverbs describing the

events as “catastrophic” and “horrible,” as well as a reliance on comparisons to natural disasters and mythological metaphors (the Pandora’s box).

Much of the analyzed sample consisted of relatively short articles or articles that greatly favored “copy/paste, Facebook and reporting on reporting.” In that arguably narrowed down and constrained approach to reporting, instead of “showing, not telling,” by using various sources, statistics, data, research, and all the other elements that characterize quality, in-depth reporting; many of the articles in this sample chose to use the “telling just telling” strategy by using a plethora of descriptors to depict the accounts of violence.

Hromadžić analyzed the spectacularization, tabloidization, and celebritization of politics in the media (Hromadžić, 2013). He found that, by creating spectacle out of covered subjects, media successfully turns political issues into deideologized events that serve only to bolster sales and further the capitalist interest of the media and consumerism amongst the audience (2013, p. 64). Hromadžić used the example of a corrupt former Croatian PM, Ivo Sanader, who faced trial for accepting bribes in the sale of the national oil company (INA) to Hungary (among other things), to illustrate the instrumentalization of spectacle and mediated gossip (Hromadžić, 2013, p. 71). He argued that by covering the trial in a trivial way with a focus on gossip and half-truths about the former PM’s watch collection, appearance, and personal life, the corruption that transpired, and the magnitude of charges against Sanader (and his political party) were upstaged by the spectacle that invited citizens to watch (and ridicule) more than to react. In such a media environment, argues Hromadžić, ideological issues are covered through a seemingly “apolitical lens” and therefore further capitalism and individualism over democratic participation. What is

more, Hromadžić found that by approaching the coverage through a seemingly deideological lens, sensationalized and even carnivalesque elements, the ridicule, and outrage overpower the political and ideological elements of the coverage, therefore reinforcing the status quo by making it entertaining and seemingly without an alternative, as the emphasis is placed on “fun/outrage” and not on reporting aspects of coverage.

As Majstorović and Vilović (2017) and Isanović (2006) had shown, entertainment sections were mainly dedicated to women within the print newspapers in Croatia and the region. That practice continued in 2021 when sexual violence experienced by women was ever so often within the “stars, lifestyle, magazine, hot and show” sections of online news outlets. During the initial sample collection, prior to cleaning the sample, the author found that out of 194 articles posted on the subject (Nisam tražila), 95 were featured in entertainment sections (48%).

Similar patterns can be observed in the coverage of all movements, especially Prekinimo šutnju. With Prekinimo šutnju expressions such as: “harrowing of women, *butchering* of women, *unimaginable pain*, disturbing and horrifying experiences, unpleasant experiences, women left *dying from pain*, most painful experiences in life, *humiliation*, and *harassment* of women in public health, incredible pain, terrible, sad, painful, *horror maternity ward*, this pain cannot be described in words, because organ scraping has nothing to compare with,” and many others were used throughout the coverage to vividly and gruesomely describe the procedures patients underwent. The accounts the patients shared were described in similar ways using descriptors and syntagms: “shocking stories, horror stories, *widespread horrors*, horrific testimonies, an avalanche of testimonies, the testimonies of these poor women are *frightening*, *shocking* and so

*sad, welcome to the Middle Ages avalanche*, horrific confession, shocking confession, and spoke about the most difficult and intimate experiences of *humiliation, pain and callousness* they have suffered in Croatian health care institutions, an avalanche of gruesome testimonies, ...” (PS- 1-135, NT-60).

In both instances, the descriptors arguably overpowered the coverage. The usage of such “loaded” descriptors and heavy reliance on anonymous accounts of violence outweighed the coverage of fallacies that allowed for such events to take place. In such a dramatization of traumas, elements of spectacularization occurred, and the proverbial forest became invisible from the branches of a single (traumatic) tree. This is not to say that no accounts of violence should have been covered or that journalists should not have reported on the events of gynecological violence and blatant disregard for patient’s pain, but that by placing so much emphasis on description, narration overwhelmingly overpowered exposition in coverage. Such journalistic practices made Prekinimo šutnju an issue based on gendered emotions/roles (of shock, horror, and outrage) rather than an issue where shock, horror, and outrage were the products of the way the medical system is set up and the way it reflects the political and ideological view of women and other persons undergoing gynecological procedures as deserving of pain, disrespect, and harassment without portraying them as capable of changing such a system. As Hromadžić argued, the issue of political responsibility and professional accountability became a dramatized spectacle where the clicks were gained. The readers were engaged (at least based on all the comments underneath the Facebook posts from news sites that all outlets were ever so eager to publish in their articles). However, the articles accepted the status quo and showed pity and resignation without acknowledging the possibility of the



movement or individuals challenging and improving (or worsening) said status quo. The usage of personal hardships as “trauma porn” to “report without reporting” or meaningfully engaging with the status quo was similarly present in coverages of #spasime and Nisam tražila, as well; those will be further expanded upon in the theme of analyzing reporting on women’s movements capability to bring upon change and not just grievances.

Articles often focused on the number of survivors coming forward with their accounts of medical violence with expressions such as “hundreds, thousands, women began to appear *en masse*, *hundreds of women gathered their courage*” (PS–1-135). Because RODA collected the original 400 accounts, and then persons who underwent similar procedures continued to comment and share their accounts of violence on social media, the exact number of individuals coming forward is near impossible to estimate. While media emphasis on the number of cases has been used to accentuate the magnitude of the issue Prekinimo šutnju was trying to address, further explanation of the meaning of the number was not explored.

One outlet collected all the RODA recollections from Clinical Hospital Center Rijeka, in Rijeka, Croatia (PS-103, Express, 2018); that article consisted of 10 separate accounts of violence copy/pasted one underneath another. Since they are transcribed from the RODA Facebook album, all of the accounts are anonymous, and the Hospital’s or expert opinion in the article (or any primary source) is not offered. Medical jargon in the accounts, such as CTG, episiotomy, follicle aspiration, endometriosis, epidural, etc... was not explained or defined to help the readers understand what procedures the survivors described. Numbers and statistics are undoubtedly relevant when reporting on any social phenomena that are widespread and have widespread

consequences, but when decontextualized and thrown around as “atmospheric,” rather than meaningfully engaged with they contribute more to the “dramatic aspect of the coverage,” than to constructive dialogue useful in democratic participation.

An interesting choice of words was made in the coverage of all movements, where the survivors’ accounts of violence were described as “*ispovijest*” and “*svjedočanstvo*,” which directly translated to English as testimony or a confession. The Croatian Language Portal (Hrvatski jezični portal) treats words “*ispovijest*” and “*ispovijed*” as synonyms and defines them as:

“1. rel. *a religious act of confessing one’s sins* to a priest in order to receive forgiveness after repentance and penance

2. a. *Open and sincere confession of what, especially personal mistakes* b. Literary work, narration of one’s experiences, story of one’s life, and mistakes [Confessions of St. Augustine]; history, memories

3. the architect’s *public manifestation of his religious belief; denomination*” (emphasis added by the author, *Hrvatski Jezični Portal*, n.d.).

“*Svjedočanstvo*” is defined as “the totality of general data that speak of the truth of what, etc., what testifies to its existence” (*Hrvatski Jezični Portal*, n.d.-a) and etymologically comes from the word “*svjedok*,” which translates to witness with common legal connotations of one who testifies in a court or a legal setting. Labeling accounts of violence persons coming forward described through a perspective of religion or law implies the understanding of such accounts of violence as “sinful” or potentially illegal. Since the individuals coming forward are mostly

victims/survivors of violence and not perpetrators, such characterizations of their experience are surprising but also indicative of journalistic recklessness or view of the persons coming forward as to blame for their experiences. Syntagms such as “horrific confession” or “shocking confession,” especially in headlines, implied there is guilt or sin in what was said rather than in what was done to persons coming forward. While this might seem like an insignificant and accidental choice of words and descriptors, the primary “tool” in the journalistic profession, especially in online outlets, is the written word. Therefore the linguistic choices made in reporting bear significance in defining the story, framing it, and creating a narrative around it, potentially one that victim-blames in a subtle but persistent way by describing survivors as making confessions (of sins they have committed) or by placing them in a trial setting where their accounts should be evaluated by a higher entity/court to determine their validity.

Natural disasters and even mythological parables were often used to cover the movements, especially once they were first becoming known to the public. For instance, the speech MP Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić held at the Croatian Parliament was repeatedly described as “starting the avalanche” (PS- 1, 13, 53, 56, 58, 65, 69, 77, 109, 122, 125, 138). The term “avalanche was used in coverage of #spasime (SM-34, 85, 86) and Nisam tražila (NT- 20, 60, 192, 179, 148, 151, 156, 136, 116). Wave and flood comparisons were also made (PS- 14, 68, 94, SM- 1, 51, 73, NT- 21, 42, 44, 114, 117, 152, 185). It must be noted that, although the wave is a descriptor often associated with feminism, in these cases, it was used as a signifier of a force of nature.

Additionally, Ninčević-Lesandrić (PS-62, Bilešić & Zagorac, 2018) and individuals coming forward, in general, were described as “opening Pandora’s box” (NT-87, Mrvoš Pavić, 2021). While these expressions could be characterized as something that carries great strength (and

therefore seen as a positive evaluation of the events that occurred), because avalanches, great waves, tidal waves, and floods are also exceptionally destructive, the question: “why are survivors coming forward are destructive and towards whom?” must be asked. With the opening of the “Pandora box,” a Greek mythological artifact containing “mystery and evil” (*Pandora | Myth & Box | Britannica*, n.d.) is a loaded term to be used to describe initiatives (and individuals) forwarding women’s rights by seeking an ending gender-based violence in its many forms. By using such evaluations, especially in regard to Ninčević-Lesandrić as the “avalanche-starter,” she is described as somebody who wants to wreak havoc and destroy, as avalanches (and mythical boxes) can be fatal to anybody unfortunate enough to find themselves in their way.

## Section 2: Talking About ‘Those’ Women

The theme “Talking About ‘Those’ Women” dealt with the ways movement members were presented (or not presented) in the media. This theme emerged from the recognition of several patterns of reporting about women active in the movements– misnaming and not naming, taking away credit from the movements, pitting women against each other in the coverage, and the analysis of columns published about the movements and movement members.

“Talking About ‘Those’ Women” built on Tuchman’s pioneer work on the representation of women in the media as rather passive than active, and mainly in roles that “locked them” into the private sphere and domestic labor. Similar coverage and treatment of women were noted by Isanović (2006) and Vilović and Majstorović (2017). This chapter sought to expand upon existing knowledge by focusing on women’s movements in the region, as well as the “everyday women” those movements sought to represent. Symbolic annihilation of women and movement members was the guiding concept for this theme, as the media, over and over again, presented women connected to the three movements as bystanders or incompetent to advocate for their causes. Symbolic annihilation detected in the coverage of everyday women contributed to the trivialization of the movements and causes they are advocating for, depicted women as non-experts but rather affective or emotional leaders, and in many cases erased women from the coverage entirely. These patterns of coverage were especially noted in the sub-theme “Nomen est Omen”- Naming, Misnaming, and Not Naming.

### Subsection 1: “Nomen est Omen”- Naming, Misnaming, and Not Naming

While the forms of symbolic annihilation defined by Gerbner and Tuchman consisted of “condemnation, trivialization or absence,” in the case of coverage of the Croatian women’s movement, annihilation was evidenced in three main ways: the ways in which women’s names were reported, the erasure of expert voices from within the movements and through photographic caricature.

Annihilation in relation to women’s names appeared in two primary forms: the misspelling of names and the complete erasure of expert but “non-famous” movement members’ names from the coverage. Additionally, reliance on a first-name basis in the coverage of women was noted, especially as it relates to former Croatian woman president Kolinda Grabar- Kitarović and Jelena Veljača (#spasime). The coverage of Prekinimo šutnju, and especially Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić, was exemplary of annihilation by inaccurate and misspelled naming practices.

The member of Parliament, Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić’s last name is written with a hyphen between the two last names, which is visible on the MP’s social media handles as well as on her official Parliamentary website. Croatian orthography recognizes dual interpretations when it comes to hyphenated last names consisting of two words. The consensus between the line of thinking that advocates for abandoning the hyphen and the “pro-hyphen” advocates has not been reached. However, the law regarding personal names (*Zakon o Osobnom Imenu - Zakon.Hr*, n.d.) clearly states that hyphenated or not, the form of last name an individual declares to the state is their legal name. In her work on the subject of hyphenation, considering morphological and legalistic approaches, Croatian linguist Maja Glušac concluded: “writing a hyphen in a surname

is a matter of personal choice [of the name-carrier]” (2015, p. 34). Glušac analyzed how the media go about writing women’s last names (as women are predominantly opting to keep their last name and add partners after marriage) and found that “overall, the general tendency to omit the coupling prevails. However, the more popular and represented a person with a double surname with a conjunction in the media, the more often his /her double surname appears in the official form” (Glušac, 2015, p. 36).

Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić brought the topic of curettage and women’s right to painless medical procedures back to the public agenda in 2018 with her speech in the Parliament and reignited the RODAs’ Prekinimo šutnju campaign. Her last name was repeatedly spelled without the hyphen. Her last name is only spelled correctly in one instance (PS-72, Jandrijević Tomas, 2018) within the sample. Interestingly, in that article published by Jutarnji list, Ninčević-Lesandrić was referred to as “Lesandrić, Ninčević Lesandrić, and Lesandrić-Ninčević” within the span of only several paragraphs. This inconsistency in naming Ninčević-Lesandrić, or rather a consistency in misnaming her, is especially curious considering Ninčević-Lesandrić’s Facebook posts were embedded, copy/pasted, and even screenshotted and used in dozens of articles. As her social media accounts all feature her last name hyphenated, it often occurred that next to her hyphenated Facebook post, her unhyphenated last name would be present in the text showing lacking journalistic attention to details if one considers the last name accuracy of a key source a detail (PS-84, 19, 28, 35,...).

Ninčević-Lesandrić was elected to the Parliament in 2016 as a non-party representative of MOST, a right-leaning centrist political party originating from Dalmatia, the coastal

geographical and historical region in the far south of Croatia best known for tourism. At the time, she was 33 years old, making her one of the youngest MPs. Ninčević-Lesandrić was elected as a representative of the 10th Constituency from the southern part of Split-Dalmatia County and Dubrovnik-Neretva County in the far south of Croatia. The mainstream media covered in this sample are mainly centered around the capital, and therefore although locally prominent, Ninčević-Lesandrić became nationally known after she engaged with Prekinimo šutnju.

The fact that Ninčević-Lesandrić was relatively unknown, even to political pundits, could explain the initial referring to her by the media as “Mostovka,” meaning a woman member of the MOST party, but through repeated referral to her as Mostovka, her name was not only buried in the coverage and omitted from the headlines but also continually spelled incorrectly. Beyond journalistic accuracy, this practice can also be seen as a form of annihilation where a key woman in the story is not referred to by her name or referred to using an inaccurate “version” of her last name, therefore, minimizing her importance in a topic (gynecological violence) that she was the first one to bring up in the Parliament. Although mistakes and typos can happen, Ninčević-Lesandrić was not misnamed once but rather throughout the sample consisting of 135 articles. Such practice is indicative that this was not a mistake but rather a pattern in reporting about the MP that did not deem her last name important enough to be accurately spelled.

What is more, by referring to her as “Mostovka,” not only her experience and political momentum are taken away from her and placed in a political party but given to a party consisting of 77% of men at the time. Because she was relatively inexperienced, if compared to other MP’s, by referring to her in such inaccurate ways (either through the party or by the misspelling of her



last name), Ninčević-Lesandrić was presented as not important enough to take notice, arguably sending the message that she should not be taken seriously as a woman in politics, as she is some “Mostovka,” or some version of her last name “Ninčević, Ninčević Lesandrić, Ninčević-Lesandrić, Lesandrić-Ninčević, Lesandrić, Lesandrić Ninčević,” “who cares?”. Said inaccuracy can be especially harmful to persons who wish to continue their political careers or progress further on the ladder (to Ministers, PMs, Presidents, and other high offices) as recognition is an important aspect of democratic elections where dozens of candidates can compete for the same spot. Finally, since all outlets covered in this analysis publish online, they are not limited by physical paper and format as traditional newspapers are; that is why the practice to “abbreviate” the MP’s last name or to substitute it with “Mostovka” should be seen as a form of annihilation rather than as journalistic brevity in reporting.

The symbolic annihilation of Ninčević-Lesandrić was evidenced in text and through images. While it is customary practice to use photographs of politicians that are featured in articles, especially considering tabloidization trends discussed above where, according to Viločić, photos become larger and heavily relied on throughout coverage, in the case of Ninčević-Lesandrić, photos chosen were often unflattering. Images showing dissatisfied Ninčević-Lesandrić pursing her lips or grimacing were often used, especially during the period when the Split hospital contested Ninčević-Lesandrić’s allegations of the painful curettage. After the MP’s speech in the Parliament, Deni Karelović, head of the Clinic for Women’s Diseases and Obstetrics at University Hospital Center in Split, where the MP experienced the painful procedure, spoke out to rebuttal claims made by the MP. Karelović disclosed the personal health information of the MP without consent to persuade the public that the MP was overreacting and conveying false

statements to the public. In the back and forth between the head of the Clinic and Ninčević-Lesandrić, the publication Index.hr used images of Ninčević-Lesandrić holding her head and looking worried/distracted at the Parliament (see Images 2 and 3), while the outlet 24 sata and Index.hr chose the unflattering images of Ninčević-Lesandrić while pursing her lips (see Image 1). Throughout the Prekinimo šutnju coverage, men were presented as stoic in images indicating authority and control (looking straight into the camera, not making grimaces, in body positions that are “common” rather than on the verge of humorous), see images 4 and 5.



*Image 1- (PS-36, 28, 27, 19) Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić caught on camera making an unflattering facial expression.*



*Images 2 and 3- (PS- 18, 17, 57, 45,46, 63, 123, )Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić looking down and outside of the picture frame, holding her head with her hand. Both gestures could indicate concern.*



*Image 4- left- (PS-51)- screenshot of Deni Karelović published in the 24sata outlet, accompanying the article “Painless births exist only in cheap American movies.”*

*Image 5-right- (PS-11)- photograph featuring the Minister of Health Milan Kujundžić used in index.hr outlet coverage*



Images 1, 2, and 3 were primarily used during the coverage of “he said, she said” back and forth between the head of the Gynecological ward at the Split Hospital and an HDZ member, Deni Karelović, and the MP Ninčević- Lesandrić. Karelović accused the MP of lying and repeatedly told the public that the MP had received the appropriate anesthesia. In an article titled “Representative Ninčević Lesandrić received local anesthesia?” (last name not hyphenated) (PS- 36, 24sata, 2018) a declarative sentence that is punctuated with a question mark was used in the headline to question whether Ninčević-Lesandrić received appropriate medication or not. Image 1 was used underneath, showing Ninčević-Lesandrić pursing her lips in an exaggerated, almost caricature way, looking displeased in the Parliament.

The combination of headline and photograph chosen to accompany it, in this case, creates a multimodal meaning unit questioning Ninčević-Lesandrić's truthfulness, as well as whether she should even be taken seriously. No article covered in this sample concerning Prekinimo šutnju showed a man photographed in an unflattering way, along with the misspelled name in the headline, especially while questioning the truthfulness of his claims.

The absence or exclusion of representation, like caricatured or incorrect naming, is a form of annihilation that was prevalent in the coverage of #spasime. In essence, #spasime advocated for revisions in the criminal code that would introduce harsher punishments for perpetrators of domestic violence (as it was often treated as a misdemeanor) and better intersystem communication to support survivors of domestic violence more comprehensively (for details see Appendix). Although the unofficial spokesperson for #spasime and the initial organizer of the initiative, Jelena Veljača, made continuous efforts to name all the initiative members (this can be heard and seen in her multiple statements and interviews in video form that some of the outlets featured as "Facebook lives<sup>8</sup>"), the names of all initiative members made it to an article once (!) (SM-91, Carević, 2019). Such erasure deems movement members' labor invisible and disposable, as their expertise, time, and emotional investment into answering thousands of messages and moderating the Facebook group while organizing a protest is not conveyed to the public. Moreover, said erasure hinders the movement's ability to build a reputation and integrity based not only on celebrity but also on effort, care, and expertise invested into building the movement. Ultimately, it makes the requests forwarded by the movement less credible and

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<sup>8</sup> As the #spasime protest was a sizable event, some outlets sent multimedia journalists to cover the protest by, among other things, employing Facebook live coverage. Such coverage uses Facebook's feature of live (immediate) footage broadcast to the outlet's Facebook account to provide video as well as textual information from the field. In Croatia, it is usually used to cover "out of the ordinary events" i.e., protests.

harder to advocate for in public, as the movement is covered as one person's project rather than a collective thought through the initiative.

The article that does name all the initiative members is featured in the Showbiz section, subsection "*Estrada*" (the Stage) of *Večernji list*; Jelena Veljača is five times referred to as "Jelena," using her first name. While there is no explicit rule in the Croatian Journalists' Association Code of Ethics (HND, 2009) that would say that a first-name basis in Croatian journalism is inappropriate for persons over the single-digit age, by writing simultaneously about a Facebook group concerned with domestic violence that has 40 thousand members (the article states this in the headline), and using the first name of one of the organizers, Veljača is simultaneously infantilized, belittled and her accomplishments are minimized. First-name basis indicates informality, and it was never noted in this sample when it comes to men, yet a woman who helped organize a massive protest and an initiative addressing domestic and gender-based violence was not granted such respect. It could be argued that due to the "Showbiz" section where the article was published, the style of writing is expected to be more relaxed and entertaining; one could also argue that there is little relaxation and entertainment involved in domestic and gender-based violence and a 40-thousand-member Facebook group trying to address it. By classifying violence against women as entertainment, the relevance of the subject is signposted to the public, and it indicates that such violence is a subject here to entertain. Such an approach to coverage means that audiences that do not frequent the entertainment section of the outlets may not even be informed about the issue and let alone its potential solutions. However, more importantly, it sends the message that gender-based violence is not a severe social issue but rather a women's personal (entertaining) problem she should "just figure out."

On top of rarely naming members of the #spasime initiative (Anica Tomić, Jelena Kovačić, Nerma Mehadžić, Ana Pecotić, Una Zečević Šeparović, Jelena Veljača); even when initiative members are explicitly visible in photos featured within articles, the women are not named. For instance, soon after the successful protest, the #spasime initiative was invited to meet with both the president and the PM, accompanied by relevant ministers when it comes to domestic violence. At the meeting with the president, five #spasime initiative members were present. In an article titled “Kolinda and Jelena Veljača arrived at the meeting with the same hairstyles” (Sm-5, M., 2019), the president is referred to by her first name in the title; as discussed above, the prime minister— Andrej Plenković— is never referred to as “Andrej,” but the first woman president in Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović [hyphen present in the article] is referred to on a first-name basis. The article is featured under the “magazine section” and preoccupied with the hairstyles of Veljača and Grabar-Kitarović, who both had buns. While the article states in the lead that #spasime initiative members met with Grabar-Kitarović, only Jelena Veljača is named. A photo from the meeting is also included in the article where the five initiative members are all standing next to the president and looking right into the camera, yet none of them is named, although their faces are visible and easily recognizable. From the article, it is impossible to deduce why these six women met as the article is preoccupied with what the women were wearing rather than what they were talking about “Veljača wore black high-waisted pants, a baby blue shirt, a black blazer, and flat moccasins, while Kolinda chose a red tweed jacket that she often wears. Unlike Veljača, Kolinda decided to wear high heels” (Sm-5). The president is repeatedly referred to as “Kolinda,” Veljača is referred to as Veljača, but presented through the prism of personal style and hairstyle, while the other initiative members are erased. Such coverage of a meeting

concerning domestic and gender-based violence not only trivializes an important topic but also forecloses #spasime's ability to position itself as an expert on the topic of gender-based violence, as the members are not even named, and let alone introduced as individuals capable of addressing said issues. While this article's publishing in the "Magazine" section could arguably explain the focus on the personal style as that is what "gender roles" impose women are interested in, but as women might also be interested in gender-based violence, as violence endured overwhelmingly by women, it is unclear why the "fashion and hair" focus was chosen in the coverage. Articles regarding that meeting were present in all outlets, but none named all of the five initiative members photographed beside the president (other than Veljača, an actress and producer familiar to the Croatian public).

The publication Index.hr published four articles about the #spasime meeting with Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. None of them feature the names of the initiative members (Sm-2,3,4,5), two of them are focused on fashion and hair (the new hairstyle of the president's aid– Sm-2); all feature the president on a first-name basis. The report from the meeting in the "News" section of the Index.hr site uses synecdoche as a figure of speech where the part is taken as a representative of the whole (in this case, Veljača as the whole #spasime). Veljača is photographed shaking the president's hand, while other initiative members are neither mentioned nor seen in this case. Already discussed, reporting on reporting is used. Veljača's statement to the national broadcaster (HRT) is quoted in the article, while any original reporting is absent. That means that the most read online outlet in Croatia, Index.hr, decided that the event was not relevant enough for the public to send a reporter to cover it in person but instead chose to recycle the competition's reporting indicating that this was not a priority.

## Subsection 2: Credit where credit is (un)due

In her work on the symbolic annihilation of women, Tuchman introduced the distinction between instrumental and affective leaders. Instrumental leaders were mainly men, going to work outside the home to “get things done,” while women were seen as affective leaders guided by emotions while leading within the confines of their homes (1978, p. 13). Building on the framework of affective/instrumental leadership in gender roles representation in the media, the sub-theme “credit where credit is (un)due” was recognized. It is concerned with portrayals of movements and their capability to bring about change, and it took a particular note of whether the movements and movement members are portrayed as “leaders or observers” when discussing violence against women, as well as with who gets the credit and the most recognition for agreed upon or requested reforms.

The meeting #spasime initiated with the PM, Andrej Plenković, was covered to a much greater extent than the meeting with the president. That might be because the prime minister has far greater power in creating laws and policies, while the president’s role is more symbolic. In the news coverage of the movement members’ meeting with the prime minister, their sartorial choices were not addressed, and the coverage was featured in the hard news sections of the news outlets.

Entman and Rojecki (1993) analyzed ways in which The New York Times and Time magazine framed the Nuclear Freeze movement in the United States in 1979. They found that journalists from said outlets “tended to delegitimize public participation in organized political movements”



(Entman & Rojecki, 1993, p. 172) and instead chose to side with the government line while knowing that popular support and some members of the expert elite were in favor of freezing Soviet and US nuclear proliferation. Ultimately, as scholars have pointed out, reliance on official sources, while portraying the movement experts as “fringe” actors or, in the Croatian case deeming them invisible, can contribute to the normalization of the state’s opinions on a subject as the “only right way to go.”

A meeting between #spasime and selected government officials occurred after the successful protest organized by #spasime, only 16 days after the #spasime Facebook group was formed, and the initiative formally started to articulate their requests towards the Government. As Veljača stated in a Facebook post, the main concern for starting the Facebook group was growing domestic violence, namely the case of a father who threw four of his sleeping children off a balcony of their family home. The family was under the social services’ supervision, and many found that the system had failed them. Therefore, the main topic of the meeting was #spasime’s proposals for systemic changes that would holistically address domestic violence. In an article titled “Plenković: Penalties for domestic violence will be increased” (Sm-13, HINA, 2019), the PM is given the prime position to speak on the conclusions of the meeting and the next steps the Government intends to take. While the PM is politically the most influential person in Croatian parliamentary democracy, and therefore he is the person setting new laws in motion, realistically, he could have set laws in motion even before the initiative was formed, the protest was held, and the “father” threw his children off a balcony. Therefore, by choosing to center the PM and the Minister of Legislature to be the only people quoted after the meeting, the announced changes in

laws are attributed to them, although they originated from the protest and the initiative's list of proposed reforms.

What is more, in said article, the initiative members are misgendered and referred to as “predstavniCI,” although the meeting was attended only by (unnamed women) “predstavniCE.” Since default in the Croatian language is still to use the male form as the norm, that would not be so surprising, but the article features a picture of the PM shaking hands with a row of unnamed women members of the initiative. In this article, initiative members are not named or heard; they are seen as a row of unnamed women standing turned with their profiles to the camera, while the PM, the only clearly recognizable person in the photo depicting five women and the PM, is portrayed as the handshaking, problem-solving, blessedly smiling “man on the mission” to change the domestic violence penalties. #spasime is portrayed as a prop instead of a protagonist capable of initiating and anchoring change. In this case, the usage of official sources distorted the reality, as it allowed the appropriation of the movement's reforms without effectively reporting on the concerns and actions of women bringing the reforms forward.

Similar coverage of the said meeting was present with the outlet 24 sata and Jutarnji list, Večernji list, and net.hr, where Jelena Veljača is the only initiative member named and quoted after the meeting. She is only quoted once at the end of the story. She is reported to have said: “We will do it passionately, and we will not let you [persons who entrusted #spasime with their accounts of violence] down,” she said.” (Sm-42, 52, 58, 88). Because one of the articles featured an embedded Facebook live video from the press conference after the meeting (Sm-42, Krnetić, 2019), the author was able to hear everything Veljača said after the meeting. Veljača emphasized

that the initiative informed the Government about their requests, that they agreed upon deadlines to adhere to requests, that members of #spasime are going to be appointed to some committees working on policy changes, and that #spasime will keep the Government accountable. Finally, she said, “We will do it passionately, and we will not let you down” as a conclusion, rather than the entirety of her short statement. By choosing to focus on the latter, without quoting the accomplishments #spasime achieved at the meeting, #spasime is portrayed as an affective leader, an emotional observer. “We will do it passionately” and “we will not let you down” were emotional categories of a statement focused on logistical achievements, but that part did not make it to the article.

At the meeting, reforms introduced by #spasime had been agreed upon, and the deadlines for their execution had been set; for instance, a 24/7 hotline for survivors of domestic violence, safe houses for survivors in the regions that at the time had none, amendments to the minimal punishments for perpetrators, more education about preventing and recognizing violence in school curriculums, and treatment of domestic violence as a felony, not a misdemeanor. All of these reforms had been requested by #spasime (see Appendix). However, while these changes would not have occurred had it not been for #spasime, the reporting presents the progress as a result of state action, but more precisely, the action of men. The women’s contributions are only evidenced in one quote. However, the women are not given credit; instead, the quote implies that the women have not actually achieved their goals and will employ emotional courage to keep pushing for change.

Surprisingly, Prime minister Andrej Plenković, and his Chief of staff, Zvonimir Frka Petešić, attended the #spasime protest in Zagreb's Tomislav Square on March 16, 2019. The protest was criticizing the Government and various ministries due to the ways governmental bodies fail to protect survivors of domestic violence. As said system was under the control of the PM, it was unexpected for him to come to the protest. While the PM said to the journalists that he came as a concerned citizen, considering the presence of his aide and the security, as well as the fact that the PM cannot “just stop” being a PM for an afternoon while attending a public event, questions were raised on whether his attendance was a calculated move (NT- 77, 86, 34, 59). While the columnists and opinion writers questioned the PM's motives, articles focusing on the PM's attendance still ran along with protest reports (NT- 58, Hina, 2019).

At the protest, outlets reported on a statement the PM gave regarding his plans to combat and address domestic violence. The goals the PM had set resembled the requests #spasime had put out ahead of the protest, so the author decided to create a table that compares the two sets of goals (see Table 2 in the Appendix).

During the protest coverage, the outlets did not compare PM's goals with #spasime requests, and therefore similarity between the two went unnoticed, although it could be argued that much was in common between the two sets of plans. Such coverage presented the PM as a problem solver and an “ideas man,” ready to address domestic violence. He was depicted as a “doer” who attends the protest on a Saturday afternoon and thinks of policies to address the current situation, with the ownership of the policies attributed directly to him and his government.

By simply quoting the PM's "ideas" without acknowledging their resemblance to the #spasime requests, as well as by continuously emphasizing the PM's attendance of the event, the #spasime initiative was featured as an "affective leader," while the "instrumental leadership" of getting things done was still assigned to a man, in this case, the PM. By attending the protest, the PM helped decontextualize it from a protest against poor systemic (governmental) responses to violence into a protest concerned with violence as a general phenomenon that self-occurs and is not systemically or politically impacted. What is more, by appropriating the goals of the protest (and going unnoticed/unchecked), the PM was reported on as not only a concerned citizen but a leader capable of solving the issues the women were yelling about from the protest stage, but unable to solve once the protest ends.

When it came to the Nisam tražila initiative, the initiative members were often named in the coverage. What might have contributed to that is that unlike RODA and #spasime, Nisam tražila had four immediately publicly named founding members— Matea Mavrak, Ana Tikvić, Asja Krsmanović, and Nadine Mičić, all graduates from the Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Academy of Performing Arts. Mavrak, Tikvić, Krsmanović, and Mičić, were often featured in the coverage using the phrase "four actresses from the Sarajevo Academy of Performing Arts," without explicitly naming them (NT-17, 18, 29, 31, 194), besides conflation of identities of Mavrak, Tikvić, Krsmanović, and Mičić, under a common denominator limited to their profession, this syntagm is factually incorrect, as only three movement members are actresses, while Asja Krsmanović holds a degree in dramaturgy from the same Academy of Performing Arts. Furthermore, in the only original interview with the four founders of Nisam tražila in this sample, Matea Mavrak, Ana Tikvić, Asja Krsmanović, and Nadine Mičić are referred to as

“girls” (*djevojke*) (NT-16, Pauček Šljivak, 2021). According to the Croatian language portal, the term ‘*djevojka*’ (the singular form of “*djevojke*”) has four potential meanings:

“1 a young woman who is no longer a child.

2 a woman who is not yet married [still a girl]

3 a female person in relation to the guy with whom she is in a love affair [his girlfriend]

4 the one who helps in the house, the housekeeper” (*Hrvatski Jezični Portal*, n.d.-b).

Used in relation to four grown professional women who had just successfully launched a regional campaign to raise awareness on behalf of survivors of sexual violence, the term “*djevojke*” is an unfortunate descriptor at best and a charged term based on traditional gender roles (esp. meanings 2 and 3) at worst, used to infantilize and minimize the four women’s accomplishments and efforts.

Unlike #spasime and Prekinimo šutnju, Nisam tražila was not explicitly focused on policy changes in Croatia; they did not call for protest actions and interventions in public spaces as the other two movements did. The reasoning behind such a decision may be because the movement emerged at the height of the pandemic and lockdowns in the Balkans (early 2021), but also because the movement founders focused more on raising awareness of the quotidian nature of sexual harassment and violence, at first in the public-facing professions, but soon in all spaces where women exist. Additionally, as all four of the movement members live in Sarajevo, logistically, it would be more complicated for them to start petitioning for legislative change in all three countries where the group was active (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia) at the same time, during lockdowns. It is possible that, because of that, Prekinimo šutnju was often referred to without referring to its founders. Additionally, while the #spasime coverage at least

featured one member, Jelena Veljača, and during Prekinimo šutnju, Ninčević-Lesandrić and, to some extent, Daniela Drandić were featured as sources in the coverage, Nisam tražila was used more as a previously discussed repository of traumatic experiences to copy/paste into articles. The founders of Nisam tražila were the least quoted activists among the three initiatives, and they were presented in the coverage more by using their decontextualized headshots than as expert sources to speak on issues regarding sexual harassment and violence. The outlet Jutarnji list published an interview with the four members as a story featured in the “lifestyle” section (NT-116, Barić, 2021) and their weekly lifestyle publication for women (NT- 145, Bebek, 2021). However, beyond that, Nisam tražila was treated more as a self-emerging phenomenon (implying that the accounts of violence collected themselves and that the Nisam tražila group “digitally materialized out of thin air”) or a phenomenon curated by Milena Radulović (whose account of violence experienced by Mika Aleksić did trigger the establishment of the group, but Radulović had no operational role in the Nisam tražila movement organization); than like a carefully moderated group publishing accounts of violence while providing survivors with contacts for therapy or emergency legal advice.

When it comes to policy changes RODAs and #spasime were advocating for, the Government is the body most capable of putting them in place and enforcing them. In that sense, instrumental leadership (as well as the perception of expertise) is on the Government’s side by default. Still, there is a substantial difference in reporting on women advocating against violence against women as individuals who “feel horrible about it” and individuals who feel however they want to feel and still advocate against it with grit, determination, ideas, and solutions. While all initiatives used first-person accounts of violence to obtain public attention, along with those

accounts (as exemplary of affectivity), both RODAs and #spasime offered solutions (instrumental leadership). Both called for firm government reactions and policy changes and requested a seat at the proverbial table where they could advocate against instances of violence. This subtheme showed how more often than not that the reporting on advocacy focused on affectivity rather than presenting the instrumental leadership capabilities of initiative members, therefore relegating them to the harmful gendered stereotype of observers rather than creators of change.

### Subsection 3: Women v. Women

Many have noted the broader lean towards spectacularization in the media; in the Croatian context, that lean is characterized by an infotainment approach to news coverage that prioritizes conflict and drama over comprehensive, in-depth coverage (Grbeša & Volarević, 2021; Hromadžić, 2013; Vilović, 2003). When tabloid tenets are used to inform the public, salacious tropes such as the catfight are used to garner eyeballs. However, such coverage misrepresents the truth and, more specifically, is used to make a joke out of women and their important concerns.

Both Sisco & Lucas, (2015) and Dow, (2003), noted that in competitive environments (presidential elections and beauty pageants), women are covered by the media in ways that “put them” against one another. Pitting women against each other taps into gender stereotypes of women as disagreeable or “hysterical” and “out to get one another,” in Croatia there is even a



relatively common proverb, “woman is a wolf to another woman,”<sup>9</sup> to show how women are each others’ greatest enemies. Such coverage adds a layer of drama and scandal to the articles and fits into Hromadžić’s notion of media spectacle or even carnivalesque.

While political disagreements are more than expected, as political parties arguably exist as an antithesis to one another, public disagreements are also often covered by the media. However, in the case of Jelena Veljača (#spasime), coverage of her disagreement, or even commentary, on the behavior of two prominent women in politics (Grabar-Kitarović and Murganić) was covered as a “catfight.” Such coverage corresponds to the media’s coverage of feminists, and Veljača often publicly described herself as such (before and after #spasime, but not during) as combatant and “exacerbating conflict” (Sisco & Lucas, 2015). Additionally, Susan Douglas has described catfight as a (news) media spectacle “propagating the notion that successful women can’t get along with each other; they “clash,” “butt heads,” and “fight” particularly over scarce resources: attention and decent men,” with media coverage turning adult women’s agency into “high school drama” (Douglas, 2010, as quoted in Palczewski, 2015). The catfight coverage was noted when it came to the media’s representation of relationships between the first ladies (Laura Bush, Nancy Regan, and Hillary Clinton), as well as between two powerful African American women, then First Lady Michelle Obama and talk show host and entrepreneur Oprah Winfrey (ibid.). It indicated that women in positions of power (especially Black women) are represented in the

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<sup>9</sup> A variation on the Latin proverb “*Homo Homini Lupus (est)*,” which originally translates to “a man is a wolf to another man,” to illustrate hostility amongst humankind by implying men prey on one another allegedly it was first used by Plato, and later reintroduced by Thomas Hobbes (*Homo Homini Lupus*, n.d.). The iteration singling out women rather than humankind, is relatively common colloquially and criticized in feminist linguist circles in Croatia (Puljiz-Šostik, 2011)

media as angry, competitive, and disagreeable rather than competent to do their jobs (functions) pragmatically.

In coverage of the #spasime initiative, its founding member Jelena Veljača was asked to directly comment on the public positions held by the controversial minister, Nada Murganić. Murganić was a contested minister, as she once described a case of domestic violence perpetrated by a prominent HDZ member (a party she is a member of) as a “family thing,” saying verbatim, “that is how it is in a family” (Index vijesti, 2020).

After the #spasime protest, held in Zagreb on March 16, 2019, in the wake of the #spasime initiative emergence, Jelena Veljača said: “the minister should feel terrible because the victims of violence address her [Veljača] on social networks, and not the system that should protect them” (NT-87, Vecernji list, 2019). In the article, Veljača’s statement is described as an “attack on the minister.” When asked about it on the public broadcaster, HRT, the minister responded that she feels for the survivors as she has been working in the system for 38 years and that she welcomes everybody who tries to raise awareness regarding domestic violence. Outlets net.hr, Večernji, and Index featured a transcription of the minister’s guest appearance on HRT in their coverage and used it to promulgate the comment-response relationship between Veljača and Murganić as a catfight between the two. In the article “Minister Murganić replied to Jelena Veljača” (NT-12, R.I., 2019) , the minister’s and Veljača’s headshots are placed one next to another, with the minister photographed frowning toward Veljača, whose photo from a red carpet is shown, and she is smiling while looking directly at the camera. Such positioning of the women’s

photographs is reminiscent of a boxing match poster with two fighters, each on their own side of the screen, showing antagonism towards one another.

What is more, Veljača's commentary on the system and its flaws were presented as a personal disagreement between the two women, not as a criticism of the quality of an individual's work and as a possibility for cooperation and problem-solving. In the quoted interview, the minister says: "I would really say that I support every initiative and this media space that they have occupied will certainly be good for all of us who have the same goal - greater protection and prevention of violence. I would especially like to point out that in today's two-hour conversation, the representatives of this initiative saw that it was easy for us today to show that we, from different departments, had already been working towards some of the solutions they have presented" (ibid.). She even added that Veljača has a right to comment and that "as for the statement of Ms. Jelena Veljača, I have been in the system for 38 years, everything she said and all the suffering of these women is close to me" (ibid.). Nevertheless, in an article by 24sata (NT-33, 24sata, 2019) the headline is written in a way to produce conflict between the two women—"Murganić replied to Veljača: I have been in the system for 38 years." Although any conflict between the two is professional rather than personal, this headline made it seem as if Murganić is establishing her authority and power over the movement rather than making statements in an agreeable tone. Moreover, the minister recognized the importance of #spasime's work and expressed empathy with the survivors of domestic violence; still, her remark was interpreted as a condescending attack on Veljača. While coverage that emphasizes the conflict between stakeholders (especially when they are women) is not a unique characteristic of tabloidization, by presenting Veljača and Murganić as "enemies," nuance and complexity of the issue are sacrificed

to artificially produce conflict that ultimately helps get clicks while simultaneously dismissing the severity of the issue at hand.

Similar coverage occurred after the President's absence from the #spasime protest. In an article titled: "Jelena Veljača after the protest: I was disappointed by the president" (NT-16, R.I., 2019), Veljača's interview on N1 television the day after the protest is transcribed (reporting on reporting), and Veljača talks at length about fallacies in the current system, how to address them, the Istanbul convention ratification, the success rate of other protest initiatives in Croatia (especially one concerning education reform), to finally speak on the subject of the President's absence. She says, "It seems to me that her, at least symbolic, support would be needed. She didn't show up, I'm absolutely sorry. We invited all the politicians, and in that sense, I am very disappointed. I hoped that she, as a woman, would come to support the initiative" (ibid.). While the topic of perception of women in politics as instant advocates for women and/or feminists is a discussion beyond the scope of this thesis, the choice to emphasize the conflict between the two women rather than constructiveness is a sub-theme reappearing in coverage of Jelena Veljača.

The same article was featured on 24 sata (SM-36, 24sata, 2019), with the exact transcript and almost the same headline, quoting Veljača's remark on the President's absence from the #spasime protest- "Kolinda disappointed me because she didn't come to our protest for the victims," only this time the President was referred to on the first name basis. Another article followed up on this "conflict," "KOLINDA APOLOGIZES AFTER NOT COMING TO THE #SPASIME PROTEST: / 'I had private obligations'" (NT-71, danas.hr, 2019). The lead of the article was focused on Veljača calling out the President for not attending the event: "after actress

Jelena Veljača, one of the organizers of Saturday's #spasime protest, said that the president disappointed her with her absence, President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović said today that she was prevented from coming due to private obligations, writes N1," (ibid.). Beyond reporting on reporting, Veljača's disappointment and "calling out the President, was, in fact, a minor element in the overall interview used to create artificial conflict. Finally, after meeting with the president net.hr published an article headlined: "JELENA Veljača AFTER THE MEETING WITH KOLINDA: / 'Plenković was more specific" (NT-76, danas.hr, 2019)<sup>10</sup>. That article accentuated the comparison between the productivity of the two meetings as personal matters, where Veljača is inadvertently portrayed as choosing the PM over the President. What Veljača actually said, according to HRT (this article is based on reporting on reporting), is: "We have discussed potential models, as we are aware of her authority over our requirements, and we will try to find a model in which she will publicly support what we are doing. As for yesterday's meeting with Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, it was more concrete for us, much more important in more concrete issues, and we found goodwill there - that is my personal impression." While Veljača spoke about the limitations of the presidential role and capacity to create policy change, the coverage focused on personal relations and compared the usefulness of the persons Grabar-Kitarović and Plenković rather than functions, seemingly creating a dispute between the two women.

The woman v. woman sub-theme with Veljača featured characteristics of tabloidization and infotainment but also artificial disagreements between women. By focusing on existing or non-existing squabbles between the women, the meritum of the issue gets pushed aside. However,

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<sup>10</sup> Reporting on the president on the first name basis, while the PM is again described using his last name.

what is more, the movements' capability to attend to the issues they are forwarding is portrayed through the prism of strained interpersonal relationships rather than competence. This not only feeds into the stereotype of "combatant and hostile feminists" but also, in the case of #spasime, portrays them through Veljača as impossible to work with, and let alone achieve cooperation with the government and public officials and therefore advocate for survivors.

#### Subsection 4: Who comments?

In the "who comments" sub-theme, the author took note of columns published about the three initiatives to understand whose voices were featured and what those voices were saying. To analyze this specific sub-theme, the author operationalized the construct of paradigm repair in journalism as a form of maintenance of a particular outlook or belief system on the level of the profession (Hindman & Thomas, 2013). Paradigm repair is usually observed as a set of practices the journalistic profession employs once the paradigm gets out of its equilibrium and the profession attempts to make amends to return to the equilibrium that was disturbed (ibid.).

Although professional behaviors and practices in journalism may not be explicitly connected to movements speaking about violence against women this thesis is concerned with, one could argue that there is a certain consistency when it comes to reporting on women and women's initiatives, in general, that is traceable throughout the scholarly engagements with Croatian media reporting on women (Bamburac et al., 2006; Majstorović & Vilović, 2017; Miloš, 2021; Sarnavka, 2010). What is more, the movements, either explicitly (in the case of Nisam tražila) or implicitly (#spasime), called out the media as profiting off of women's trauma or as not sensitized enough on how to report on violence survivors and systemic fallacies. By challenging

the status quo, movements challenged the media to position themselves in response to the movements' claims and requests. In order to analyze the media response and resetting of the equilibrium, the author traced 23 columns.

While it could be argued that by thematically analyzing the reporting as a whole (columns, opinions, and news), the author could establish the media's treatment of the three movements. Since much of the sample for this thesis consists of "reporting on reporting," "Facebook reporting," and "copy/paste journalism;" and columns are usually original work produced by a single newsroom, the author wanted to pay special attention to those aspects of coverage in order to gain a deeper understanding of the outlet's positioning towards the challenges to the professional paradigm the movements posed.

Columns written during the heightened media attention towards Prekinimo šutnju did not explicitly mention the RODAs. Virtue signaling was prominent with men commenting on the Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić's speech in the Parliament, with gender stereotypes employed to appear as allies to women. For instance, explaining what the President of the Croatian Parliament would have done if "he was a real man" (PS-22, Knežević, 2018); or gender-stereotyped explanations of men's reactions to painful procedures such as an instinct to cause physical harm to somebody in an attempt to protect women "forgive them, dear women, for being a little grumpy, but that was in good faith, to show themselves as protectors...." (PS-10, Maštruko, 2018). In both PS10 and PS22, the authors engaged with Facebook comments to say that not all men are "like that" and deserving of "hate" social media is putting on them (PS-10). They

condemned women advocating for abortions always to be done without painkillers (PS-22) to signal they are not like “other men.”

In the column titled “Terrible health care rather than liberalization?” The author argued that “we” have the healthcare “we” deserve because liberalization and privatization of healthcare is still not a popular option, the “we” living with the consequences of the current healthcare is everyone, although only persons experiencing painful gynecological procedures were coming forward (PS-10). Another column dealt with the healthcare system and its “communication issue” in hospitals, arguing that much of the pain the patients experienced could have been alleviated with better communication (PS-108, Rimac Lesički, 2018). In this column, published by the usually right-leaning Večernji list, the option of painless gynecological procedures was not even considered, but rather it was argued that “doctors are only people,” “they can make mistakes,” and that good communication may help the procedures be less painful. While informed consent is undoubtedly important, it is still unclear what kind of magical word can make the scraping of the uterus without anesthesia less painful. In her analysis, the columnist claimed, in a victim-questioning manner, that there are only two ways the Prekinimo šutnju will end: 1) with distrust towards the medical system because of rare anomalies; 2) distrust for the survivors due to the number of people coming forward. Option 3) that the system changes and addresses the pain adequately was not considered.

While the non-opinion pieces rarely engaged with abortion and access to abortion, two columnists did engage with the said topic (PS-44, 68). Because in Croatian, miscarriage is literally translated to “spontaneous abortion,” while termination of pregnancy by choice is



“abortion,” the word abortion was often mentioned but rarely related to the termination of pregnancy by choice. Still, one columnist warned against men deciding on women’s rights, especially as it relates to access to abortion (PS-44, Klauški, 2018), while another noted that there is a suspicious absence in the accounts of violence that relate to terminations of pregnancies and noted that most discriminated against groups in Croatia are “Serbians, gays and women” (PS-68, Pavić, 2018). The same author, Snježana Pavić, offered heavy criticism of how the investigation of the Ninčević-Lesandrić account was handled by the Split hospital and the authorities (PS-85, Pavić, 2018).

Unlike the Prekinimo šutnju, where the RODAs were barely mentioned, and the accounts of violence, public readings, and submission of those accounts to the Ministry were overlooked, #spasime was covered and mentioned frequently and was polarizing amongst the commentators. Two 24 sata columnists openly expressed support and invited their readers to join the protest (SM- 30 Šimleša, 2019, 44 Andrassy, 2019). Four out of the seven columns dedicated to #spasime mentioned the PM’s appearance at the protest was a form of hypocrisy, or an attempt of cooptation, as the PM was “protesting against himself” (SM-34, 83, 84, 86). The competence and motivations of Jelena Veljača were continuously questioned by the Večernji list columnists (SM- 83, 84, 85, 86) but also defended by Andrea Andrassy, 24 sata (SM-44), arguing that Croatians are spending too much time worrying about marital status, occupation, income and address of Veljača, and too little protesting or helping organize the protest.

Criticisms of Veljača as a synecdoche for #spasime were executed on two fronts. First, by pitting women against women, or in this case, feminists against feminists, where columnists argued that

Veljača “stole” the spot at the negotiating table from “real” feminists, experts, and advocates against domestic violence (SM-83,85). A Večernji list columnist went so far to say that the PM chose to meet with #spasime because they are easier to manipulate than the “real experienced feminists” (SM-85, Kovačević Barišić, 2019). Beyond condescending, this author furthered the notion of limited numbers of seats for women around the “negotiating table,” portraying #spasime as “stealing” the spots instead of questioning why there is not a “bigger table” (ibid.). Similarly, but with more malice and condescension, then right-wing political pundit and a professor at the Faculty of Humanities, now a member of Parliament for MOST, Nino Raspudić, attacked Veljača ad hominem (SM- 83, Raspudić, 2019). He described her as a “dictator,” “Facebook manager of welfare and family department,” “actress from soap operas inviting people to protest the topic she had never shown any interest in before,” “a person engaging in a farcical coup d’état and subjugation of government,” a person who dares to call out the President for not coming to the protest, “a self-proclaimed manager of someone else’s suffering,” a person with “no qualifications and legitimacy.” Raspudić went as far as to argue that Veljača will lose interest and jump to some other topic “tomorrow,” as she is “not serious about this one,” and therefore, she is, in essence, “*degrading institutions and devaluing the issue.*”

On a similar conservative note, but without “naming names,” another Večernji list columnist compared feminists and chauvinists “as both tell women what to do” (SM-84, Mijić, 2019). He commended #spasime “for keeping radical ideology out of the protest,” as domestic violence is a concern for all, “men, women and the *Church.*” Mijić described feminists as “professional activists” who gatekeep domestic violence by advocating only for feminist women. Finally, he concluded, highlighting the women’s importance in procreation, “there is no life and family

without women, and therefore Croatians have no future without them either. He made a remark regarding “pop icons who sell fashion as the great wisdom of life,” and invited readers to rise above such sentiments, and while alluding to Veljača and her feminism, he chose not to call her out by name.

In the columns concerning #spasime, Jelena Veljača is treated as a synonym for “#spasime.” Her (perceived) flaws are therefore extrapolated to #spasime. This erases the other #spasime members and their fields of expertise and is also used as an excuse to mark the whole initiative as opportunistic and inexperienced yet taking the space away from “real experts.” By forcing the narrative towards Veljača’s flaws and the PM’s hypocrisy, the reason why thousands of people gathered all over Croatia- domestic violence, was shoved aside and engaged without nuance or constructiveness, showing clear patterns of personalization of a movement rather than engagement with the movement’s goals.

Nisam tražila resulted in most coverage and columns written about it compared to the other two movements. Like Prekinimo šutnju, accounts of violence Nisam tražila helped collect were commented on, but Nisam tražila’s engagement in collecting them and creating a safe space where they can be shared was often overseen. Instead, the focus was placed on the President’s (Zoran Milanović) controversial comments regarding “two types of sexual harassment survivors” and on the social climate more prone to victim-blame and predator-protect than vice versa.

Index.hr published an article titled “Milanović became the leader of the Croatian coalition of misogynists” (NT-2, Duhaček, 2021). In said article, the Croatian President is criticized for his

“macho barking” and advised to consult feminist literature “Butler and Lorde” to understand discrimination against women more in-depth. The author invites everybody to “side with women” and calls out all the different examples of sexual violence emerging in Croatia at the time (University of Zagreb and the public television). Similar but less feminist theory grounded, criticism was present in the Jutarnji list (NT-143, Godeč, 2021) where the President’s usage of “street language” is condemned as “justifying sexual violence, silencing the victims” and displaying “bullying characteristics. Unlike (NT-2), where the Nisam tražila members are at least named, (NT-143) does not engage with the movement in any capacity, although the President’s comments on the accounts of violence were prompted by the Nisam tražila accounts becoming public.

Večernji list approached the Nisam tražila from three separate angles. One condemned the University of Zagreb rector and professors for enabling sexual harassment of women students (Nisam tražila is not mentioned here) (NT-157, Kovačević, 2021). The second recognized Nisam tražila and the number of accounts and complimented the Dean of the Academy of Dramatic Arts for a prompt and appropriate response to accounts of violence (NT-156, Jursić, 2021) . Still, the author expressed concern over the potential “witch hunt” and “puritanism” if the investigations go “too far.” Cathérine Deneuve and French actresses opposing #MeToo are mentioned to forward an argument that “rape is a crime, but courtship is not.” the author condones ‘light sexual harassment,’ such as “touching a woman’s knee, attempting to “steal” a kiss and talking about intimate things at a business lunch.” The final Večernji list column on the subject (NT-152, Rašović, 2021) recognizes the role Nisam tražila played in starting the conversation about

sexual harassment in Croatia and goes to great lengths to explain how sexual violence has nothing to do with feminism, as it is a “problem of all women” and not just feminists.

Croatian feminist veteran and one of the “witches from Rio,” Slavenka Drakulić, also wrote on the subject of *Nisam tražila* and sympathetically concluded that, although it is crucial to speak about sexual violence in the “region,” without “naming names” there will be no punishment for the perpetrators, nor justice for women (NT-144, Drakulić, 2021). Jelena Veljača (#spasime) commented on *Nisam tražila* as a columnist for the *Jutarnji list* and focused on Milena Radulović’s account of violence and the ways that arts can become a breeding ground for predators hiding behind their “genius” (NT-109, Veljača, 2021).

In another example of virtue signaling, this time by usage of rape myths, Jergović wrote about “our society’s instinct to protect rapists from victims” (NT-66, Jergović, 2021). Throughout the text, the only one on the subject published on 24 sata main site (miss7 is an affiliate targeted towards women, and it featured two columns- NT- 18,105) signaled allyship with survivors by perpetuating gender roles and rape myths. It called for empathy with survivors by the usage of the “put yourself in their shoes” logic where men were invited to imagine being raped by a “big man” in a dark alley, perpetuating the myth that rapes usually occur by strangers in dark spaces. At the same time, women were described as immediately familiar with the fear of rape, while those women who questioned other women were described as “women with the imagination of male rapists or with darkened imagination.” Such calls for empathy through imagining oneself in a rape (myth) scenario in order to illustrate the importance of trusting the women not only served as an allyship proclamation without the necessary knowledge even to be an ally but also created

an image of rape as the only form of sexual violence that happens only to women in dark places by aggressive men, therefore, narrowing the scope for awareness Nisam tražila was attempting to challenge and rise through the initiative.

This sub-theme showed that, even when the systemic challenges of Croatian day-to-day journalism (discussed in Findings 1) are bypassed, as columns in Croatia are published weekly, usually by individuals who do not simultaneously write non-opinion pieces, similar approaches to talking about the three movements appear. Movements are not credited for the initiatives they have forwarded; they are personalized and presented as accomplishments of a single person and not a group of experts; their competence to solve the issue they are advocating for is questioned, and in some cases, the exact issues movements are advocating against are reinforced. While some columnists side with the movements and against the status quo, even the well-intended allyships easily slip into a dismissal of feminism, the perpetuation of rape myths and gender roles, diminishment of patients' pain by calling for "better communication," advocating for "keeping the light harassment" while condemning rape, pitting women against women in attempts to elevate the "real experts,"...

### Section 3: Delineations

The final theme detected in the coverage emerged from the sample itself and the author's recognition of conflicting approaches in media representation of Croatian women and the initiatives. This findings section was substantiated with the data obtained from an in-depth interview with a #spasime initiative member that the author had conducted as part of this thesis research. This theme arose from the author's analysis of the media's inclination to essentially sanitize the women's movements' efforts and depoliticize them. Hegemonized coverage that ultimately diminished the initiatives' potency was detected throughout the sample. Because delineations were traced across the coverage as a 'symptom' of minimizing the severity of violence against women and the presence of feminism in the initiatives' actions, this theme focuses on practices put in place to allow such delineations to occur.

During the analysis, the author noticed that the coverage highlighted certain aspects of the movements' requests, leaders, characteristics while lessening (or erasing) the importance of others. Entman argued that media reporting, as seen through the prism of framing theory (and beyond), can be described as an interplay between *selection* and *saliency* (Entman, 1993, p. 52). That means that journalism has the power to select and elevate or draw attention to issues or voices while also silencing others and reducing their saliency. These characteristics of journalistic coverage are critical, as, throughout the coverage, the selection was made to make the personal characteristics of movement members more salient (and even reported on the initiatives as their personal vanity projects). In contrast, the other movement members and even missions were deemed significantly less relevant. The selection of personal traits of movement

members as more important than the initiatives, women coming forward with their accounts of violence, feminism, and broader circumstances regarding gender relations contributed to coverage of gender-based violence as entertainment or a personal issue (or project) of a single prominent person rather than a severe social issue. This practice transpired regarding two different coverage characteristics, and therefore, it was divided into two connected but distinct sub-themes. First, dealing with the personalization of the movements through connecting them to one prominent woman and then covering them as an extension of that woman's personality and career. Second is a perplexing duality between comparisons to #MeToo while refusing to address the feminist aspects of the movements and feminism in a broader sense.

#### Subsection 1: Personalization

Van Zoonen & Holtz-Bacha, (2000) traced the rise in the importance of political candidates' personalities in elections in Germany and The Netherlands to the late 1950s' when television entered election and political debate coverage. However, the introduction of commercial television amplified the importance of individual politicians' characteristics through insistence on human interest stories and the rise of the infotainment approach to news coverage. Kaase (1986) defines *personalization* of politics as "the closest association of political programs and aims with central political actors and their reduction to them, and therefore, in the long run, the reduction of politics to the actors" (as quoted in Van Zoonen & Holtz-Bacha, 2000, p. 46). Later in her research, Van Zoonen (2006) found that personalization of politics and celebrity politics usually have unfavorable consequences for women competing in the political arena "because of its inbuilt and extreme polarization of femininity and politics" (van Zoonen, 2006, p. 299).



Similar conclusions stemmed from the study done on Italian politicians in the period between 2006 and 2021, where personalization and gender stereotypes were detrimental to women, as leadership was shown as a “masculine function,” while reporting on women focused more on appearance and their bodies (Brugnoli et al., 2022).

Although none of the movements covered in this analysis ran in any type of elections for public offices, the personalization of politics theory should still be considered to explain approaches to coverage of movements noticed by the author. Not only did all movements put forward requests that attempted to intervene and revise either concrete laws (as #spasime did) or practices in the institutions (Prekinimo šutnju, Nisam tražila), but they were also active in the political (public) sphere through their advocacy for change. That is why, even though the movements and their members were not politicians in the conventional sense of that profession, they should still be seen as “vortex” political actors along with other non-governmental and single-issue organizations, movements, and initiatives active in the Croatian public sphere.

Personalization in the case of #spasime and Prekinimo šutnju was noticed as a form of synecdoche where Jelena Veljača, a #spasime member, and prominent producer and actress, would be used as a synonym/euphemism for the #spasime movement and all its members. Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić, on the other hand, was not used as a synonym for RODA, but she was treated as synonymous with the Prekinimo šutnju initiative conceptualized and kept active by RODAs. Nisam tražila was sometimes referred to as Milena Radulović’s movement, although Radulović, as far as the author was able to research, played no formal part connected to the Nisam tražila movement.

Chapter 2, to some extent, covers how personalization is used in media coverage of Veljača's engagement with #spasime. As noted above, symbolic annihilation through not naming and expropriation from credit for proposed changes occurred in the coverage of #spasime.

Additionally, like the "Who comments" and "Women v. Women" sections had shown, Jelena Veljača was arguably the central figure of the coverage of #spasime, and #spasime was often referred to as Veljača's personal project without the help of others worth mentioning, let alone experts. The perceived negative aspects of Veljača's (in)experience, uncooperative ways, and hostility spilled over to the movement's coverage.

By not naming the other members of #spasime and reporting on #spasime as a personal project of Veljača, #spasime's media coverage was linked to Veljača's personal and professional life beyond her activist role. During an interview with one of the movement members cognizant of the inner workings of the protest preparation and #spasime development, the source said she was "fine" with being presented as nameless for as long as the requests the initiative put forward were met and fulfilled. Due to the high level of preparation that goes into organizing a protest, putting together the protest program, and the list of requests for the Government, the source expressed that she did not notice or pay attention to whether her name was present in the coverage, mainly because her goal was never to "become famous," but to address the issues and help survivors navigate a complicated and often hostile system. Most importantly, due to the high levels of posts and Facebook messages the movement had immediately received, the source highlighted that the member names in the press were the least of her concerns as she had spent up to 17 hours a day answering Facebook messages and moderating the #spasime group.

The movement member interviewed for this thesis disclosed that other movements and organizations in the field were hesitant to trust #spasime's intentions and severity of commitment to addressing the issue of domestic violence. This skepticism towards the initiative could be explained as a result of coverage that failed to acknowledge any personal accomplishments and qualifications of movement members other than Veljača. The interviewee added that she believed it was hard for the movement to establish trustworthiness as the media did not take the initiative seriously. Veljača was reported on as "organizing a protest between two shopping trips" (and similar prejudice regarding actresses) and not as a well-meaning individual willing to use her platform for a positive cause and face the backlash it brings her way. The movement member thinks #spasime has made a name for themselves as a well-meaning and serious actor in the Croatian women's movement scene, but it took almost three years to get there.

The personalization of Veljača as the movement was especially visible in some of the columns published by the outlets, where Veljača was depicted as incompetent and opportunistic (SM-83,85- Mijić, 2019; Raspudić, 2019), and outrage was expressed over the "fact" (unwarranted assumption) that now "our policy changes are being left to actresses" (SM-85,86- Kovačević Barišić, 2019; Rašović, 2021). The prejudicial view of actresses as incompetent, deceiving, and stardom-hungry remained visible in the *Nisam tražila* coverage as well. However, more importantly, it set the tone of the coverage of the movement by immediately placing it into "showbiz and stars" sections rather than among "hard news." While celebrity sections of the news publications should not be diminished on the basis that they are for women, and they can be valuable in terms of addressing women's issues in a more comprehensive and in-depth matter;

in the cases of #spasime coverage, the entertainment section was used almost as an excuse for superficial and incomplete (fractured) coverage. What is more, by assigning #spasime a “showbiz status” based on presumably Veljača and her celebrity, #spasime was rendered invisible to members of the public who consume the news but are not interested in ‘showbiz sections.’ That means that due to the ways news sites are structured, citizens who relied on front pages of “hard news” sections of their preferred outlets for relevant information were not exposed to articles speaking about #spasime, and subsequently domestic and gender-based violence. Showbiz sections target women readers, which means that some members of the public already presumably less informed about the nuances of gender-based violence (and the ones more likely to perpetrate it) were the ones less likely to come across it on their news feeds. This is not to argue any type of casual relationship or media effects, but to acknowledge that by assigning topics such as #spasime into celebrity sections, members of the public not interested in celebrity topics are less likely to be exposed to such news.

By equating #spasime to Jelena Veljača through personalization, Veljača’s traits were transferred to the movement. In the enchanted circle of personalization, Veljača was the person most publicly connected to the movement, so the movement was continuously being covered as a personal “celebrity” movement. Therefore, without the celebrity (or prominence) factor, the movement would be less covered (as with Marija Dadić’s petition for anesthesia in the ER). However, with the celebrity factor, the movement is determined by the celebrity figure, with non-celebrity members left out of the coverage and with coverage focused more on celebrity than policy.

With coverage that failed to address Veljača's sole ownership of the movement, and with commentators and columnists helping to fortify such notions, instead of questioning them, the idea of #spasime as Veljača's "brand/product" was perpetuated throughout the coverage. That enabled not only the narrative that this is a "celebrity affair" but also that because of that and Veljača's formal education in "mere" dramatic arts, it was bound to fail and be a disservice to people coming forward with accounts of domestic violence. Because Veljača was portrayed as out for fame and incompetent, by relation, the initiative must be the same, if not worse.

Similar but different patterns of coverage emerged with Prekinimo šutnju and Ivana Ninčević-Lesandrić. After the speech in Parliament describing the inadequately medicated curettage/vacuum aspiration, Ninčević-Lesandrić was celebrated for her exceptional courage and avalanche-starting abilities. While Findings 1 and 2 go into detail about naming and misnaming Ninčević-Lesandrić, visual representations of the MP and the dramatization and scandalization used to present the harrowing accounts of violence persons undergoing gynecological procedures experienced, the dichotomy between "Curettage Affair" and "Prekinimo šutnju" will be considered through the lens of personalization. It is important to note that Ninčević-Lesandrić has not publicly disclosed any formal association with RODAs, although her speech in the Parliament did reignite the Prekinimo šutnju campaign.

After Ninčević-Lesandrić's speech, Prekinimo šutnju campaign run by RODAs started collecting the handwritten accounts of gynecological violence experienced by women in order to share them with the public and the Ministry of Health. Simultaneously, the internal investigation started at the hospital in Split, where the MP had undergone the curettage/vacuum aspiration she

spoke about in Parliament. These two sets of events were covered as one, equating Ninčević-Lesandrić with Prekinimo šutnju, although, Prekinimo šutnju existed since 2014 when women spoke about negative experiences with childbirth. In 2014, the campaign resulted in inspections in hospitals throughout Croatia, but those inspections were never made public. Additionally, but with more limited results and media coverage, another woman, Marija Dadić, spoke out about her negative experience with a miscarriage and having to undergo the cleaning of her uterus twice (!), as she was “uncooperative” the first time she experienced curettage without appropriate medication. The second time Dadić was given anesthetics, she asked for (PS-78, Plivelić, 2018). After Marija Dadić experienced curettage without anesthesia at the Petrova hospital in Zagreb, Croatia, in 2017, she took it upon herself to alert the public about the practices she was exposed to. She published her account of violence on the Government’s Facebook page, wrote emails to the Office of the President, the Government, and the Ministry of Health, and launched a petition still active online that was signed by 5521 people to date (accessed in March 2022, Dadić, 2017) (PS-78). Still, after the speech the MP delivered in the Parliament, Prekinimo šutnju was tied to Ninčević-Lesandrić, rather than RODAs or Dadić, who were still mentioned in the coverage (Dadić significantly less than RODA) but not to the same extent. Dadić’s petition and emails/Facebook posts alerting the Government and the president directly contradict the minister’s claims in the Parliament that the Ministry, under his rule, had not been aware of such violations. Still, Dadić’s statements, although indicative of at least factually questionable statements by the minister, were rarely present in the coverage (PS- 78, 98, 100,102, 103, 109, 110, 113). While Večernji list ran most articles featuring Dadić (six), four featured a video of Dadić (PS-98, 100, 110, 113) without any context of her account provided beyond her two-minute-long summary of what had happened. In that video, Dadić discusses her experience with curettage and withholding

of appropriate anesthesia, but her attempts to alert the public and public officials are not mentioned. Instead of covering Dadić as a person trying to intervene in the system and show systemic fallacies, her “harrowing testimony” was used as emotional padding, rather than an example of her taking the initiative and behaving like a “doer,” and not as an “emotional watcher.”

Although the media could have covered the Prekinimo šutnju initiative with a focus on RODAs, especially Ivana Zanze, Branka Mrzić Jagatić, and Daniela Drandić, who were ones bringing the accounts of violence to the Ministry and publicly addressing the topic as well as collecting accounts and providing support to survivors, Ninčević- Lesandrić was the central figure of the coverage. Along with the Prekinimo šutnju coverage, “Curettage affair” coverage started. The back-and-forth between the minister of health, head of the Clinic for Women’s Diseases and Obstetrics of the Clinical Hospital Center Split, Deni Karelović, where the procedure in question took place, and Ninčević-Lesandrić was covered to establish the facts surrounding Ninčević-Lesandrić’s procedure. By focusing the coverage on Ninčević-Lesandrić, Prekinimo šutnju was personalized and tied to, in this case, a single political figure. This approach provided the media with a “scandalous, dramatic and traumatic” conflict to follow in accordance with the tabloidization practices the media outlets covered in this thesis were keen to lean on in their coverage. Additionally, Ninčević-Lesandrić’s political status allowed for the legitimacy of her claims to be questioned as politically motivated. Karelović, an HDZ member, called out MP Ninčević-Lesandrić (PS-51, 80) for participating in the “political retaliation of MOST” because Ninčević-Lesandrić did not speak out earlier but waited until the vote of confidence was held, adding a level of conflict, politicization, and personalization to the coverage.

Beyond politicizing the MP's miscarriage, the "he said, she said" between the MP and doctor Karelović was covered almost like a tennis match. Karelović was adamant in calling out the MP for being a liar, and Ninčević-Lesandrić was adamant in defending her claims. The doctor persisted in "fact-checking" the MP's statements by disclosing Ninčević-Lesandrić's personal medical information beyond what she had disclosed in her speech, a.k.a. by breaking doctor-patient confidentiality and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)<sup>11</sup>. In order to show that the MP experienced vacuum aspiration, not curettage due to her "small pregnancy," medical jargon corrections were done by Karelović in his media statements. For instance, the Split doctor was quoted saying that Ninčević-Lesandrić's arms and legs were not tied, but that her "legs were fixated," as the hospital does not own handcuffs (PS-86, 91). Such "corrections" were used not only to discredit the MP but also to question the truthfulness of all the people she had inspired to come forward, as well as to reframe the issue from the field of unnecessary and discriminatory pain inflicted on women and people undergoing said procedures to the field of the MP's (and subsequently patients') unfitness to determine and describe what procedures were done and whether they were painful since the difference between curettage and vacuum aspiration<sup>12</sup>, as the public was continuously warned, is significant and the MP was not aware of it.

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<sup>11</sup> In 2020, Karelović and the Clinical Hospital Center Split were found guilty of "grossly violating" the MP's rights (*Slobodna Dalmacija - KBC Split izgubio spor u 'slučaju kiretaža'*, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> A study by Jayashree et al. published in the International Journal of Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology found vacuum aspiration to be "more effective and rapid office procedure and (was) associated with less blood loss, shorter duration of hospitalization when compared to dilatation and curettage" (2018, p. 1), and therefore better for overall patient health.



While the doctors and hospitals were being given the benefits of the doubt and sympathy, such sympathy was not extended to hundreds of women sharing their accounts of harrowing unmedicated procedures. Even harm that Ninčević-Lesandrić had allegedly inflicted on the medical system by inciting “lynching” of doctors in the media coverage (PS-51, 24sata, 2018) was discussed. Such comments implied that doctors’ reputations were more important to protect than the patients undergoing exceptionally cruel forms of preventable gynecological violence, inflicted (purposefully or by omission) by a system set in place to alleviate pain.

As RODAs invited women to share their experiences anonymously, Ninčević-Lesandrić’s case was even more prominent since others featured location and year while still not providing enough specificity to be verified. At one point, Večernji list published an article featuring an anonymous source from the Clinical Hospital Center Split who claimed a lawsuit for defamation would be filed against Ninčević-Lesandrić, as well as against a Dubrovnik woman who (under her own name) shared her sister’s experience at the Dubrovnik hospital (PS-112, Rimac Lesički, 2018). While neither of those lawsuits was pursued, the mere possibility that course of action was considered against the only two women who made accounts public under their own names might indicate why other women stayed hesitant to come forward with their names.

A similar statement was given by the health minister, who, when asked about the 400 accounts of violence, said: “I have said a hundred times, the law is the same for everyone; it needs to be analyzed and seen. Wherever there is guilt, it should be sanctioned, *as well as those who reported people who did not make mistakes*” (PS-125, danas.hr, 2018). As one of the biggest hospitals in Croatia and the minister himself spoke publicly about lawsuits against women

coming forward and women making false allegations, it may not be surprising that Ninčević-Lesandrić was the face assigned Prekinimo šutnju. Since such high ranking, public officials were threatening lawsuits against an MP, a high ranking official with access to legal immunity for the spoken word, as well as an above-average paycheck, persons with a lesser extent of legal and financial protection may have been even more hesitant to connect personally to the movement by disclosing their names. That may have reinforced the media incentive to personalize the issue to Ninčević-Lesandrić.

Finally, findings the Ministry published after the inspection further personalized Prekinimo šutnju. They connected it to the MP by disclosing the following to the public: “Because 400 complaints were anonymous, and many contained neither the time of the event nor the name of the health facility, targeted inspections could not be carried out on them. After one signed complaint, the Ministry of Health conducted a procedure according to the legal regulations” (PS-79, HINA & Raknić, 2018); that single signed “complaint” was Ninčević-Lesandrić. Her complaint was found to be unwarranted as the only oversight, according to the inspection, was inadequate communication with the patient. Additionally, the inspection “estimated that 401 complaints over more than 15 years (the oldest complaint dates back to 1983) is a relatively small number. However, the Ministry of Health believes that a single complaint is too many” (ibid.). The inspection of colleagues that oversaw their colleagues’ work was done in all seven big clinical hospital centers in Croatia. According to the Croatians Doctors Chamber, in 2021, there were 334 practicing gynecologists in Croatia (Croatia’s deficit of OBGYNs is 104 for the system to function appropriately)(HLK, 2021), so the OBGYNs doing the inspection were likely to be familiar with persons whose work they were overseeing. Still, that is impossible to know as

the inspection members were not made public. Additionally, complaints were raised by Ninčević-Lesandrić and RODAs, arguing that the inspections were incomplete because the patients were not asked for their accounts and because colleagues were overseeing colleagues. There was no meaningful reporting that interrogated the reasoning for a) not contacting Ninčević-Lesandrić, and b) for allowing peers to evaluate peers' work without civilian or public oversight was found within this sample. That means that the experts deemed the only signed complaint to be substantially unwarranted, while the other 400 complaints were seen as statistically marginal (a claim not engaged with by the media) and not compelling enough for a meaningful change of practices to be introduced, other than, for the principle of informed consent (already in place) to be based on "better communication."

The "Curettage affair" was used almost as a euphemism in reporting for the chain of events that could also be called "did Ninčević-Lesandrić lie and exaggerate?" that ultimately, according to the inspection, showed that Ninčević-Lesandrić was not telling the truth. By dismissing Ninčević-Lesandrić's case as a "miscommunication," all the other accounts of gynecological violence were dismissed as equally unconvincing because a) the inspection did not find any need for a meaningful change of practices; and b) because Prekinimo šutnju cases were treated by the media as synonymous with its media assigned "frontwoman"—Ninčević-Lesandrić.

Unlike with #spasime, where the movement was seen as an extension of Veljača's personality but still able to get a seat at the table with public and governmental officials, with Prekinimo šutnju neither an initiative by a respected, long-running organization (RODA) nor Ninčević-Lesandrić, did not get a seat at the table where decisions are made. Although RODAs met with

the minister at the beginning of the initiative when the accounts of violence were delivered, at the point when inspections determining the future practices of pain management for persons experiencing termination of pregnancies or painful gynecological procedures were made, “impartial and unnamed experts” chose to reinforce the status quo, while women were (unsurprisingly) left to watch decisions about their bodies being made for them. In this sense, personalization was used in coverage of a (woman) politician as an excuse to dismiss Ninčević-Lesandrić as power-hungry at first and an exaggerator later on, and with her Prekinimo šutnju was dismissed as an equally exaggerated cry by women who “cannot handle a little discomfort and pain.”

Personalization was not a prominent feature with coverage of Nisam tražila. Several factors could help explain why Nisam tražila was, in this sense, an anomaly within the sample. First, Milena Radulović, the first survivor of Mika Aleksić to come forward, was not widely known to the Croatian public, as she is relatively young, and none of her work was screened in Croatia. Second, similarly to Radulović, the “Nisam tražila four” (Matea Mavrak, Ana Tikvić, Asja Krsmanović, and Nadine Mičić) were equally unknown to the Croatian public. Third, while not much coverage from the field was present in Prekinimo šutnju and #spasime, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was arguably exceptionally hard for journalists to travel to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to do any “boots on the ground” coverage. Fourth, as persons coming forward to speak about their experiences in the Nisam tražila group were anonymous, there was no prominent person in Croatia to personalize the coverage with. While it could be argued that the dean of the Academy of Dramatic Arts (ADU) in Zagreb was heavily featured throughout the coverage as a “woman on the mission to save the students from sexual harassment,” still, due to

the size of ADU and the scope of Nisam tražila that bypassed the single unit of the University of Zagreb, Franka Perković Gamulin, was neither famous nor powerful enough to provoke personalization of the movement to her. Finally, as the coverage of Nisam tražila was so often assigned to the “stars and showbiz” sections, the depth of coverage did not ask for a figure to “attach” the movement to because the accounts of violence were “scandalous, dramatic, and traumatic” enough to stand on their own and provide material for infotainment and tabloidized content.

The sub-theme of personalization dealt with the phenomenon of movement personalization and attachment to a single prominent public figure. It showed that, while personalization allowed for coverage to be simplified and grounded in “telling the story from a human interest,” it was also used to diminish movements by treating them as a “single person” instead of a collective of diverse people speaking out for (mostly anonymous) women and persons undergoing gender-based violence executed by perpetrators, but reinforced by the systemic shutting of a “blind eye.” Personalization of movements not only reduced their nuances, complexities, expertise, and capabilities, but it also allowed for minimization of the scope of the coverage to a single public figure while alienating the same individuals on whose behalf said public figures were speaking out and the issues that said movements were there to address. Such coverage separated reporting to “less important sections of show and stars,” where the hard news aspect of coverage was replaced with gossip-like reporting on women while gender-stereotyping them as incompetent, overly sensitive, conniving liars and, by extension marking the movements as the same. While criticism of movements and analysis of their policies, requests, and capabilities should be as integral to coverage as well as scrutiny of the status quo and alleged systemic gender-based

violence, the scrutiny the movements were facing was focused on characteristics of the media-assigned famous leader while comprehensive analysis of movements and the phenomena they are advocating against was left out along with expert movement members addressing them.

## Subsection 2: The first, second, and third Balkan's #MeToo and the "F- word"

The first, second and third Balkan's #MeToo sub-theme focused on the continuous comparisons of all three movements to the global #MeToo movement that originated in the US but spread worldwide. This sub-theme will interrogate the Croatian movements and #MeToo comparisons that were detected in the coverage to understand what was #MeToo used to describe, assigned to mean, and represent in the Croatian media to justify its usage continuously and consistently throughout the coverage of the movements in order to create certain delineations of the movement. Since #MeToo is an online feminist movement, the comparison to #MeToo will be interrogated further as outlets were comparing all the movements to #MeToo, but not covering them as "feminist movements." This sub-theme will try to address the readiness to describe movements as similar to #MeToo, while simultaneously being hesitant to describe them as the "f word" (feminist).

Mendes et al. (2018) described #MeToo as a form of hashtag feminism in which hashtags are used to create and connect content "produce communities of conversation among disparate Twitter users" (2018, p. 237). Although none of the three movements covered in this thesis has a strong Twitter presence (nor a Twitter account), all of the moments choose to feature a "#" in the name of their initiative. Moreover, they applied the hashtag feminism strategies on Facebook, as

the Facebook search engine features an option to search any term (or hashtag), and in the cases of Nisam tražila and #spasime, Facebook groups were used as settings for “communities of conversation” among diverse users.

While all of the movements were described by the media as “THE Balkan’s #MeToo,” or as #MeToo finally reaching the Balkans, without acknowledging that two other movements were also described as the “#MeToo finally coming to our back yard.” #MeToo was used in the coverage to connect the local movement(s) with the global events, depending on the author and the outlet, coverage had overwhelmingly positive or negative pro-Western characteristics. Since all “Croatian #MeToos” happened in a relatively narrow time span of just over three years, the choice of association with a global movement rather than the local one (Prekinimo šutnju or #spasime) is particularly interesting.

“There in America #MeToo caused an earthquake, which was mildly felt all the way up to us;” and, “a hallmark of a new wave of female self-awareness fueled by the #MeToo movement” (PS-68, Pavić, 2018) wrote a Jutarnji list columnist while describing Prekinimo šutnju and criticizing the healthcare system as misogynous. “Women started the Croatian version of the #MeToo movement these days, but not because of sexual harassment, but for a dignified medical service” (PS-80, Jureško & Krnić, 2018), wrote Jutarnji list journalists. A columnist for Index.hr wrote: “the last few weeks or even just days, we have witnessed the emergence of the authentic Croatian #metoo movement, but unfortunately also its rapid disintegration. Our #metoo was not about sexual harassment (although there were elements of that in some stories) but about humiliating and harassing women in public health” (PS-10, Maštruko, 2018). Prekinimo šutnju

was the movement least compared to #MeToo, presumably because the other two movements were made prominent by actresses, as was #MeToo. Still, in the three comparisons to #MeToo, positive evaluations of #MeToo were published, describing it as women speaking against medical/gynecological violence.

With #spasime, #MeToo was a common reference used to describe the movement. “3/16/2019 The day Croatian #metoo was born” (Sm-62, Badanjak et al., 2019), and similar announcements of the “Croatian #MeToo” were present in commentary as much as in non-opinion pieces. In a column arguing that the government chose to meet with inexperienced “actresses” because they are easier to manipulate, positive evaluations of #MeToo were still present “Let’s be clear - it’s not bad if the magnetism of popular faces mobilizes citizens and encourages them to social action, which is still in its infancy. An example is the global MeToo movement and the avalanche it caused” (Sm-85, Kovačević Barišić, 2019).

Among the three movements, Nisam tražila was the most similar and arguably most compared to #MeToo, especially at its nascence when actress and survivors of Mika Aleksić first started to come forward. “The #MeToo movement against sexual abuse of women and girls has finally rolled in the region,” applauded one columnist (NT-2, Duhaček, 2021), “painful testimonies are arriving at any moment, so a new version of the global MeToo movement seems to be emerging in the region,” concluded net.hr (NT- 195, danas.hr, 2021). The terms “regional #MeToo” and “Balkan’s #MeToo” (NT- 85, 110, 111, 117, 116) were used repeatedly, primarily as positive evaluations of both #MeToo and Nisam tražila.



A Večernji list columnist, on the other hand, focused on the need to prevent a witch hunt from happening (like in the case with #MeToo) that the French actresses led by Catherine Deneuve vehemently opposed (NT-156, Jurasić, 2021), using #MeToo as a cautionary tale warning the Nisam tražila not to slip into “puritanism.” Amid Nisam tražila, Jutarnji list ran an interview with a British libertarian anti-feminist commentator, Ella Whelan, titled “The voice of a new generation of public intellectuals: The #MeToo movement has done nothing positive for women” (NT-136, Kolega, 2021). The article offers condemnations of #MeToo delivered by the journalist and interviewee, respectively. In the lead, survivors coming forward are described as “Hollywood toaletoids,” a wordplay that could mean both people who wear a gown (*toaleta*) or people who resemble a toilet (*toalet*). The article goes on to offer a worst-case scenario of the Prekinimo šutnju repercussions for the survivors and feminism while dismissing patriarchy and the relevance of feminism nowadays: “The blackest scenario is this: the experiences of these young girls and women will exploit several trained fanatics who will do their best to interpret their scars, not as a result of individual vultures of deranged psychopaths, but as a war medal of ubiquitous, evil patriarchy. The consequence of such an understanding of these unfortunate events could only be a further decline in the importance of feminist thought in society” (ibid.). #MeToo is described as “doing more harm than good” and “a moral panic.” At the same time “modern” feminism is seen as “petty, conservative bourgeois whim,” and as infantilizing women.

Whether with positive or negative connotations, #MeToo was a comparison continuously used throughout the coverage to describe and associate Croatian (regional) movements with the global social movements, but #MeToo is not just a “social movement,” it is a feminist one. Weather

described as “hashtag feminism,” “digital feminist activism,” “online feminist activism,” or any other iteration to describe a social movement that gained momentum online by talking about sexual harassment and sexual violence inflicted on (predominantly) women, therefore, allowing to center the “private” in public, to gain momentum to challenge the political. #MeToo engaged with what Sarah Banet-Weiser (2015) refers to as politics of visibility, “the collective articulation of oppressive experiences, such as sexual violence, challenges social norms that silence and excuse such experiences and, when successful, undermines the structures of inequality those norms support” (as quoted in Clark-Parsons, 2021). Like in the pre-internet era when feminists challenged the social norms and gender roles by making the private political, in the hashtag feminism era, similar tactics are applied, although the setting where those challenges and interventions into the status quo occur moved online. While #MeToo did start on Twitter, it did not end there; it had material repercussions for its participants and “audiences” (Clark-Parsons, 2021; Mendes et al., 2018). By choosing to associate Prekinimo šutnju, #spasime, and Nisam tražila with #MeToo, unprompted by the three movements themselves, the media chose (knowingly or unknowingly) to associate the three movements with a feminist movement without describing the three movements as feminist.

One explanation for the journalistic avoidance of labeling initiatives as feminist could be that they took initiatives' language and self-descriptions and published them as offered. Still, since none of the movements self-compared to #MeToo either, it was a journalistic choice to align movements with #MeToo and not with feminism. The appropriateness of comparing the initiatives with any other initiative, idea, ideology... could have also been addressed directly by asking initiatives for statements that contextualize their activism and self-identification. Still,

presumably due to all of the professional challenges mentioned in Chapter 1, such clarifications and movement self-positioning towards feminism and #MeToo were not addressed by the coverage.

The second part of this sub-theme, and simultaneously an answer to RQ 3, deals with the avoidance of the “F-word.” The F-word in question is not profanity but avoided as if it were—feminism. In simplest terms, feminism can be defined as the “belief in, and advocacy of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes expressed especially through organized activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests” (Feminism Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster, n.d.). While the waves of feminism and development of feminism go well beyond the scope of this thesis, it is essential to note that all initiatives covered in this thesis did engage in advocacy of “political, economic, and social equality” in order to advance women’s position within the Croatian social ecology. In an interview with one of the movement members cognizant of the inner workings of #spasime, the author of this thesis asked the interviewee whether she considered #spasime a feminist movement. She immediately said yes, explaining how she considers herself and the movement to be feminist. As the movement never chose to identify as feminist explicitly and publicly, the interviewee’s response was surprising. The movement member elaborated, saying that the movement made a conscious decision to avoid expressions such as “feminism, gender and gender-based” in their public-facing communication. They were aware that the three expressions mentioned above could cause a backlash as they did during the ratification of the Istanbul Convention<sup>13</sup>, so they chose to avoid them altogether to

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<sup>13</sup> The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, “is based on the understanding that violence against women is a form of gender-based violence that is committed against women because they are women.” (*About the Convention*, n.d.). During the process of its ratification in Croatia, many conservative catholic initiatives were actively protesting its

maintain the focus of discussion on their goals and requests towards the government. The interviewee disclosed that, in the beginning, all of the public statements they had released and all the interviews Jelena Veljača had given on the topic were vetted by the core members, as they had to unanimously agree before putting them out. The member added that they wanted the public to look at the #spasime agenda as beyond political, as universal for all Croatian citizens, and therefore to avoid alienating the right side of the political spectrum, a decision was made to avoid the “F word” cautiously. As the movement still actively spoke out about domestic violence, and domestic violence in Croatia is usually inflicted on women (women accounted for 63.8% of victims of domestic violence (Dujmović, n.d.), the interviewee expressed that they were more than aware of said statistics, but still decided not to use the expression “gender-based violence.” First, because of the potential backlash over the term gender (“*rod*”) as opposed to sex (“*spol*”), which is still contested among many Croatians, and second, because the initiative members found that the term “gender-based” (“*rodno uvjetovano*”), which in Croatian translates to “gender-determined” is overly complex jargon to use in everyday conversation and might cause more confusion than provide information in the public discourse. The movement has cooperated with prominent feminists since their founding and continues to do so; Sanja Sanavka (quoted in this thesis and a former president of a feminist organization B.a.B.e.) is even a member of their foundation council, but in their public-facing communication, #spasime maintained the ideological neutrality, as their priority was cooperation with all constructive actors who could help bring upon change.

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use and understanding of gender by creating websites dedicated to “unveiling the truth” about gender ideology (*Istina o Istanbulskoj*, n.d.), and a relatively large protest was held in Zagreb in the wake of its ratification (*Prosvjednici Na Trgu Poručili: Zastupnici, Zaustavite Ratifikaciju! - Večernji.Hr*, n.d.) in March of 2018.

Still, in one of the rare academic articles that dealt with #spasime, written by Brigita Miloš, #spasime is personalized as a celebrity feminist initiative and described as featuring and reinforcing “the hidden premises allowing for a semantic interchangeability of women and children are deeply rooted into the cultural/gender Croatian scripts. The ideas of incomplete human capability, intellectual deficiency, and vulnerability, the necessary for guidance, supervision or control are applied to both women and children” (2021, p. 212). Miloš argues that through the conflation of subjectivities of a woman and a child, or of a mother and a child (if seen through the patriarchal gender role of women as mothers), #spasime displays a “blind spot” and inadequacy to advocate for women because of their inherent value as human beings regardless of their parental status and as separate from children. Additionally, although the intervention into the public discourse and spreading awareness about domestic violence are seen as positive features of #spasime, Miloš argues that “the rescue fund is possibly doing more harm than good” (2021, p. 213) because it provides support to victims on an individual basis without solving the systemic nature of the violence they had experienced and the systemic failures that enabled it.

The “blind spot” of this analysis is twofold. First, due to its failure to meaningfully engage with the movement, their capabilities, strategies, and accomplishments are condescended upon and seen as accidental rather than planned and strategized around in order to address the issue at hand subversively rather than achieve rhetorical purity of feminist intervention; and second, in an all or nothing approach to structural changes. Miloš describes #spasime as potentially detrimental as it is “state-approved feminism” and because it “lacks an epistemological as well as operative apparatus that would adequately address the problems it allegedly aims to resolve or to advocate”

(2021, p. 223). In an approach that implies an all or nothing logic, the author fails to acknowledge that while the Croatian women are waiting for a feminist reform that will deconstruct and rebuild systems that deal with gender-based violence (and gender inequality), a realpolitik approach to the system can still be beneficial, even when a “celebrity feminist” appointed as a spokesperson for a “populist feminist movement” is advocating for it.

Although none of the movements publicly described themselves as feminist, and the media reporting steered away from the “F word,” some discussions and mentions of feminism were still present in the coverage and will be considered below.

In the coverage of Prekinimo šutnju, feminism was not discussed, #MeToo was referenced, but the term “feminism” was not detected in the coverage. This could be because RODAs self-describe as a parental advocacy group, representing parents of all genders, and not explicitly women experiencing gynecological violence. However, the Prekinimo šutnju initiative was focused on precisely that aspect of their advocacy. Additionally, Ninčević-Lesandrić and RODAs were vocal when it came to supporting persons who experienced miscarriages and gynecological mistreatments. However, they never openly advocated for or addressed the group of people undergoing abortions by choice. In an interview with Večernji, Ninčević-Lesandrić stated that while she opposes a complete ban on abortions. Still, she acknowledged the “doctors’ right” to the appeal of conscience<sup>14</sup>, as well that “one should always try to prevent it [abortion] by educating but also by talking to the patient” (PS-113, Kovačević, 2018). The reasons above

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<sup>14</sup> The reason why persons deciding for an abortion often struggle to find a medical institution where they are performed; in 2020, 27% of Croatian providers did not perform abortions due to “appeal of conscience” or the pandemic (zenskasoba, 2020)

might help explain why Prekinimo šutnju was not discussed in the media as “feminist.” Still, it is significant that it was referred to as an iteration of the #MeToo since that placed “Prekinimo šutnju” into proximity of hashtag feminism without engaging with its feminist aspects, or shortcomings for that matter.

During the #spasime coverage, on the other hand, several mentions of the term feminism were noted. In the article “Jelena Veljača did a great thing for all of us. Like it or not” (SM-2, Duhaček, 2019), the author featured quotes from the prominent women’s rights activist Sanja Sarnavka who offered positive evaluations of the #spasime initiative. She participated in the protest as a “security guard”<sup>15</sup> and disclosed that she advised #spasime when asked. Sarnavka is quoted saying the following when it comes to the feminist aspects of #spasime:

“The well-known activist for women’s rights points out that #spasime (#SaveMe) as the name of the initiative is not feminist, but that it may be positive given the prevailing attitude in Croatian society that “citizens have a distance from everything that is more ideologically colored.” She also reminds us that she took part in the Night March for March 8<sup>16</sup>, which she points out as another extremely positive initiative, but also that “no one from the government appeared because these ultra-Croats perceived it as anti-Croatian and too leftist” (PS-2).

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<sup>15</sup> In Croatia, protest organizers have to account for a certain number of (mostly volunteer) civilian “security guards” to keep the protest peaceful, although police must also be informed of a protest and are usually present at protests as well.

<sup>16</sup> A yearly march for women’s rights held on March 8, usually at night/dawn.

Sarnavka, similarly to the initiative member interviewed for this thesis, recognized that strategic avoidance of ideology, and feminism, may be beneficial for feminist initiatives trying to reach mainstream support.

A columnist for *Jutarnji list*, Snježana Pavić, addressed the name discussion of the initiative referenced above: “or should the action have been called so sacrificially, pathetically, submissively. And would everything have gone differently if the organizers had dyed their hair brown. With a blue-purple strand” (SM- 54, Pavić, 2019). While talking about hair color, Pavić addressed a common stereotype of how an activist (feminist) should look– “ugly, bra-burning, man-hating, angry,” as Courtney E. Martin described in *The New Statesman* (2021), and similar physical traits that allow women to be perceived as a “serious feminist.” Pavić repeated that point once again, criticizing feminists for being sticklers for names instead of actions and requests– “That is why #spasime (#saveme) is not a message to victims to sit passively and wait for help, as the name of the action has been criticized by some feminists. But an appeal to all of us that we are responsible for the weakest, for those who have no one to protect, and who are not yet able to stand up for themselves.” (ibid.). In this column, feminists were condemned for their criticisms of #spasime and the women running it. Here #spasime is implicitly referred to as feminist but not explicitly described as such.

*Večernji list* columnist, Mate Mijić, came closest to describing #spasime as feminist. In his column equating feminism and chauvinism, feminists are described as hypocrites: “however, there is room in the media only for professional activists who, in the manner of guilds, license proper women and share licenses to deal with this issue. Women who do not share feminist



views are not women for them, and it has not yet happened that they publicly stood up for them when these were victims of chauvinism” (SM-84, Mijić, 2019). Although #spasime is not described as a feminist initiative in this column, the author still chose to dedicate half of his column to dismissing feminism and feminists while arguing that domestic violence is a beyond political issue. The choice to discredit feminism, almost in a preventive manner, although the movement had not acted in an explicitly feminist manner, moreover it was seen by some as not feminist enough by using a passive name, goes to show how sensitive the Croatian media and social ecology is to feminist (resembling) initiatives and interventions in the public sphere.

Feminism was discussed in regard to Nisam tražila as well. Beyond already mentioned feminist literature recommendations for president Milanović (NT-2, Duhaček, 2021), Nisam tražila was discussed by one of the columnists in Večernji list as a movement that has nothing to do with feminism. “Women should be told out loud that they are not guilty and that they are not alone, despite those who hate feminism; although this story has nothing to do with feminism, but with a zero-tolerance rate of sexual abuse, the beginning of the end of predators that deprive women of dignity, soul and body” (Nt-152, Rašović, 2021). The author draws a delineation to argue that sexual and gender-based violence (as sexual violence is referred to in the column as targeting primarily women) is not a feminist, but a broader social problem, as for some unknown reason, an issue cannot be both. In such delineation, feminism is seen as capable of addressing a narrower scope of issues that do not include gender-based violence. In an attempt to portray the issue as “crucial,” the columnist explicitly chose to describe it as non-feminist, to arguably emphasize its beyond ideological relevance. While this has been a strategy employed by #spasime in order to achieve strategic goals, from the column published in a right-leaning news

outlet, it is hard to tell whether the author had the same thing in mind (beyond political support for survivors), wanted to dismiss feminism and its relevance in addressing the gender-based violence, or something third.

Since Jelena Veljača (#spasime) is a columnist for the Jutarnji list, she wrote about social media's beneficial impact on feminism in relation to Nisam tražila.

“It's time, it seems to me, for someone to say publicly what social media has done for all of us. Feminism has gained a lot with the emergence of social connections of this kind. The image, which at one point was undeservedly and unjustifiably bad for the whole ideological movement, was reversed in large part due to the fact that women connected in a way that was impossible for them before Facebook and Twitter because they traveled, read the news, met new people” (Nt-110, Veljača, 2021)).

In her column, Veljača not only aligns with feminists using the “we” form to discuss the ideological movement but also offers a positive evaluation of hashtag feminism/ online feminism/ propelled by social media. She refers to #metoo, #spasime, and Justice for girls<sup>17</sup> and online feminisms as conducive to women's understanding of sexual violence as a collective issue while allowing them to heal together and organize further actions. In the column, Veljača explicitly marks #spasime, Nisam tražila, and #MeToo as feminist initiatives propelled by social media and here to support the survivors, raise awareness and, as a byproduct, recuperate feminism's disgraced face.

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<sup>17</sup> An initiative similar to #spasime, “the reason for the protest was the case of rape of a minor in Zadar, i.e., the release of five suspects for repeated rape, sexual exploitation, blackmail and physical and psychological abuse of a fifteen-year-old girl that lasted a full year” (Patković, 2019).

This sub-theme followed two separate but connected phenomena that occurred in the media coverage of the three movements. Using an approach of “nameless naming,” media chose to align the three Croatian movements with a global feminist movement while, in most cases, ignoring the fact that #MeToo is a global feminist movement, not just a global movement. There has been a proliferation of hashtag activism for various causes from #Kony2012 to #BlackLivesMatter, #ArabSpring, #TakeAKnee, #FridaysForFuture, and #FreeBritney,... and still, the media chose to equate the three movements with a feminist one. While this could be explained by the similarity in the mere logistics as women spoke about experiences online and used hashtags to create online communities of conversation, the meritum of movements was still similar to #MeToo— violence against women, in Croatian cases domestic, sexual and gynecological but violence against women. Therefore, the media’s choice to compare the movements with a feminist one without using the “f-word” to describe the movements is perplexing. Because this thesis did not include interviews with journalists, editors, and columnists and did not analyze the media coverage of #MeToo in Croatia, it is challenging to estimate whether the Croatian media was aware that #MeToo is a feminist movement. Still, when mentioned, the media treatment of the term feminism is helpful in understanding what meanings are assigned to it and how that may contribute to the media (and public) discussions and considerations regarding women’s movements and initiatives.

The usage of the “F-word” in the cases above yielded two delineations of feminism that should be considered. First, on an individual level addressing the question of who is a feminist and how do they behave? On an ideological level, what is feminism, whom does it concern, and what does

it address? The answer to the first question can be detected within this sub-theme as based on appearance “brown hair, purple strand,” education “not an actress,” personal traits “trained fanatic,” “professional activist,” “guild member licensing solutions for domestic violence,” “a hypocrite and the same as a chauvinist,” stuck on the wrong thing in semantic criticism of #spasime (SM- 54, Pavić, 2019). When it comes to evaluations of the feminist ideology and scope of interest, feminism is described as “recovering its unrightfully disgraced face through social media,” “obsolete and outdated,” “has nothing to do with violence against women and domestic violence,” “hypocritical and advocating only for other feminists,” “petty, conservative bourgeois whim,” “declining in importance.” Both levels describing feminism/feminists do have a lean toward negative evaluations of feminism and feminists, indicating that #spasime and Sarnavka may have been right in claiming that strategic avoidance of the “f-word” is beneficial to feminist movements as it shields them from negative associations with feminism carries in the analyzed sample (and presumably beyond).

## Chapter 7: Discussion

In the discussion section of this thesis, the repercussions of the findings will be considered and expanded upon. Additionally, the limitations of this thesis and potential further research areas will be considered.

RQ1 aimed to understand themes that emerged from the media coverage of the movements in order to evaluate how the movements and their initiatives were presented in the media. As media coverage does not happen in a vacuum but rather in a complex system of commercial, professional, and audience relations, Croatian media market characteristics were considered in relation to the media coverage to address RQ2 that sought to investigate professional practices detected in the coverage.

The data suggested that tabloidization, noted by Vilović (2003), was still one of the core characteristics of the coverage two decades later. Moreover, enabled by the online nature of all five outlets, fractured coverage relying on Facebook reporting, reporting on reporting, and copy-paste reporting was a prominent overarching theme throughout the coverage. Such coverage, along with repeated placement of articles regarding gender-based violence in the entertainment sections, indicated the medias' evaluation of movements and their goals as not impactful enough for comprehensive "hard news" coverage, but rather that the topic of gender-based violence is entertaining. While the scarce adherence to journalistic codes of ethics and honor (HND, 2009) could be seen as a result of already discussed reliance on student-journalists and journalists used to cover entertainment rather than politics, legislature, and policy, the newsrooms' choice to

assign novice or inexperienced journalists to the subjects rather than to assign more seasoned or experienced ones was indicative of treatment of movements as of secondary importance. The overarching approach in the journalism analyzed for this study was characterized more by “drama and trauma.” In many cases, content curation, rather than journalism, resulted in exploitative and emotionally charged coverage that often failed to meaningfully engage with and address the movements and the concerns and requests they had attempted to put forward.

Such market state and pressure to publish (one journalist often published more than one, sometimes up to four articles a day) resulted in incomplete coverage that, rather than first-hand sources, used experts chosen by other outlets and created an echo chamber for established voices. Those practices foreclosed new voices and experts while relying on already established governmental and status quo affirming sources while delegating little space to movements. That meant that often, as symbolic annihilation of women in the media suggests, women’s movements were relegated to serve as affective leaders, emotional screens, and observers even when they were the ones pushing the issue at hand toward the focus of the public agenda.

As seen in the sub-themes concerning (not) naming women and claims to credit for one’s work, members of women’s movements analyzed in this thesis, as well as women coming forward with their accounts of violence under their names, are treated in ways that indicate symbolic annihilation in forms of absence, misnaming, doubtfulness in their competence and intentions and truthfulness of their accounts of violence. In such an environment, movement members appear in two scenarios: a) as photographed faces in the background rarely invited to speak and share their expertise with the public or claim success for the initiatives they had started, and b) as

personalized figures covered a synecdoche for the movements they are a part of, but not their entirety. Scenario a) binds movement members to the background and precludes the mostly volunteer women, from recognition for their work in the public sphere (as experts and advocates for victims and survivors). It contains them in the semi-public sphere, where they advise and provide emotional and logistical support to survivors in their spare time while dealing with nuanced, delicate, and intricate work of providing information, comfort, and content moderation, without public recognition. The scenario b) ties movements to a particular public figure and their reputation. Beyond the erasure of movement members, this approach creates a false equivalency between the movement and a person that easily slips into celebrity and gossip to capitalize on the movement member's fame rather than engage with the subject at hand. Such reduction of the scope of coverage overlooks the movement's capabilities and requests while ironically covering the movements and ultimately results in criticism of the public figure as inexperienced enough to spearhead a movement while reducing the movement to said public figure.

Journalistic practices can be seen as indicative of the social climate towards gender-based violence. While this thesis does not attempt to establish media effects nor measure them, the approach to gender-based violence as dramatic entertainment rather than a profound social issue can hardly be considered an environment inviting survivors to come forward and name their abusers, especially under their full names. As expressed by a source changing her mind regarding coming forward (NT-28, Matejčić, 2021) and seen in hundreds of unnamed accounts of violence, in a heteronormative retraditionalized patriarchal environment, disclosing names can be a risk not many would be willing to take.

When gender-based violence (gynecological in this case) in Croatia was considered through the prism of the media, sub-themes detected in the coverage of survivors or the movement were—symbolic annihilation, reliance on established experts, reporting on reporting, and personalization of the movement—altogether creating a perfect storm for dismissal of women. RODAs, as advocates for gynecological rights and experts in the field, were marginalized, featured at the bottom of articles, and presented as observers without an option to claim ownership of their advocacy; Ninčević-Lesandrić was presented as Prekinimo šutnju, and then when the inspection dismissed her account, her honesty and intentions were questioned, as well as her expertise to evaluate her pain. Marija Dadić, an activist in her own right, was presented as an emotional resource rather than a survivor who tried to warn all stakeholders of the flaws in the system she had experienced and fought to fix. In the case of Prekinimo šutnju, despite “an avalanche” of accounts of violence, women were still featured as emotional leaders rather than as both survivors and experts capable of creating change. This finding is significant because it shows how any of the four scenarios of Prekinimo šutnju involvement in advocacy against gender-based violence may be resolved. On an initiative level, as a helpful resource for collection of accounts but as a policy and inspection observer; for a person coming forward with an anonymous account of violence as a recontextualized and decontextualized trauma, taken from a safe space to be covered in a lump of other traumatic experiences dismissed without resolution, cohesion or explanation; for public figures, as trial by the media where their experience will be evaluated and seen as a desperate and insincere attempt to gain attention, and for named individuals coming forward as retraumatization without acknowledgment of ownership or expertise on the cause. In all four cases, women (and other individuals undergoing said procedures who were entirely erased from the coverage), regardless of their effort and



expertise/experience, were still covered as affective and emotional leaders, observing how discussions about their bodies were framed and reframed without them.

This sample included only popular online outlets, and it cannot speak to the overall coverage of all Croatian news media, including the political weeklies, print newspapers, nonprofits, less popular outlets, commercial and public television, radio, and other forms of journalism, the data and findings collected are still significant. As the outlets chosen are the most popular in the country, they can help illustrate what an average person consuming news online was exposed to when it comes to gender-based violence in Croatia. A further study dealing with the said topic might benefit from including journalists and editors in the research, as they may provide valuable context on how journalists perceive coverage of gender-based violence and the movements advocating to stop it.

Although all of the movements initially agreed to participate in this research, in the end, only a member of #spasime was interviewed for this thesis, while others stopped answering the researcher's emails, trying to establish dates for interviews. This predicament made RQ1a arduous to answer, as one interview cannot speak for three movements. Additionally, #spasime and Nisam tražila used their social media groups more as safe spaces for survivors, offering them opportunities for advice, collective healing, and catharsis, and less as sources of movement-created content, thematic analysis of said data was unproductive. Still, with the recognition that one interview can hardly speak for three diverse women's movements, the data collected in that interview did contribute to the author's understanding of the ways Croatian women's movements structured and planned their public-facing activities. In the interview for this thesis, #spasime

member explicitly spoke about strategic avoidance of “everything [phrases, terms, public figures, rhetoric] that smells like feminism” in their initiative’s public communication to prevent public rejection of the initiative. The awareness of backlash that terms such as feminism and gender may provoke in the Croatian public sphere resulted in not only strategic avoidance of feminism but also in the collective review of all initial public statements given to the media to ensure that the topic of gender-based violence does not face the consequences for “poor wording.” What is more, due to movement awareness of the media’s “yellowness,” as the movement member put it while describing tabloidization, the movement did initially strategically appoint Veljača to be the one to deliver their messages publicly, as she was the one most prominent and therefore most likely to get the media coverage. Although, when asked to reflect on the lack of naming and recognition of other movement members, the subject said that for as long as the topic of domestic violence (violence against women) was covered in the media, their names in the coverage did not matter, later she did say that recognition for her unpaid emotional labor, often followed by burnout would not be to waste.

With strategic avoidance of “feminism” in their public-facing communication, calculated reliance on Veljača’s social capital, and a successful protest in Zagreb, #spasime attracted media and governmental attention. Said attention came with criticism for being “not feminist enough,” “state-approved activists,” “easily manipulated,” “stealing seats at the table,” “incompetent for the task at hand,” and “too close to feminism,” resulting in an arsenal of criticisms from all ideological positions and political beliefs, that seemed to agree in one mostly- these are not the people we want to advocate against domestic violence. While constructive criticism of any movement, initiative, and social phenomena should be welcome in the public sphere, criticisms

based on prejudice and not facts, while addressing something as crucial as domestic (gender-based) violence, do signal the media's perception of the subject as unworthy of proper research, criticism, and journalist investigation. By basing criticism on Veljača (or any prominent figure), or a profession (actresses), the focus of coverage moves from the issue at hand and focuses on the person at hand (or a sliver of society) and trivializes the domestic violence by turning it into coverage relegated to gossip sections, with little or no context and data, and turning the opportunity to speak about a prominent issue in Croatia into a "celebrity affair," while blaming Veljača for engaging with the said issue for fame. In this sense, movements are faced with a double-edged sword, they can distance themselves from prominent public figures, use "feminist rhetoric" and risk not being given any media space at all, or they can embrace the "celebrity factor" and risk being featured as "celebrity affairs" rather than as initiators of something that concerns all of Croatia. #spasime chose the latter and faced symbolic annihilation of movement members and portrayals that deemed the movement incompetent, as an observer of social change rather than initiator and, as intruders appropriating spaces that belong to "real activists." Taken as a whole, this indicates that the barrier to entry into spaces where gender-based violence is discussed is higher than the level of scrutiny and analysis that is devoted to gender-based violence. Paradoxically, the level of public discussion dedicated to gender-based violence rose. However, the level of meaningfully researched news present in the outlets analyzed in this thesis remained the same, indicating that the Croatian online outlets were, for various reasons, more likely to participate in the symbolic annihilation of women than in informing the public about violence against women.

RQ3 was concerned with feminism, mainly how it was discussed if detected in the coverage. The Croatian media repeatedly compared the three movements with a hashtag feminist movement—#MeToo but failed to acknowledge #MeToo as feminist. Such coverage raised compelling questions regarding what counts as feminism, who counts as feminist, and in which contexts does feminism appear in the coverage. None of the movements mentioned feminism in their public-facing communication (nor #MeToo); so, the movement and media understandings of feminism were interrogated.

#MeToo was used as a catch-all descriptor for the three women's movements, regardless of the specific aspect of violence against women they were trying to address. As used in the Croatian public sphere, #MeToo was gutted of its feminist undertones and underpinnings while simultaneously celebrated as women's awakening/"avalanche" in the region. Such evaluations of #MeToo and #spasime, Prekinimo šutnju, and Nisam tražila indicated either failure to comprehend feminist movements in the social media environment or potentially strategic avoidance of feminism as more harmful than beneficial for the movements at stake. As Croatian activist for women's movements succinctly put it (SM-2, Duhaček, 2019): "*the prevailing attitude in Croatian society [is] that "citizens have a distance from everything that is more ideologically colored."* In this case, though, more ideologically colored is synonymous with feminism and combatting gender-based violence, indicating that advocating for women's rights is still a topic not welcome in the public sphere.

#spasime member interviewed for this thesis self-identified as feminist and described #spasime as a feminist movement; still, in #spasime's public communication, the "F-word" was avoided at

all costs. That judgment call was made due to the fear of backlash terms feminism and gender might attract to the #spasime mission. Understanding feminism as dangerous while discussing gender-based violence indicates not only strategic avoidance of feminism by arguably feminist movements but also of the “reputation” feminism holds in the country. This thesis engaged with timelines of development and rejection of feminism in the Croatian public sphere in the literature review, and evaluations of feminism as still unwelcome in the Croatian public sphere remained accurate. Moreover, whether real or perceived, backlash over the meaning of feminism in the public sphere made the #spasime movement change its narrative and disguise aspects of the movement that wanted to explicitly address gender-based violence by reframing it as domestic violence. In a social-linguistic power struggle over “feminism” and “gender,” women as persons most affected by gender-based domestic violence were relegated to the background of the movement, trying to advocate for them without naming them explicitly. Such radical avoidance of gender and feminism can, at its core, be seen as strategic avoidance of women’s issues in the public sphere while advocating for greater protection of women’s rights within criminal justice and social services.

The dichotomy between women’s rights and feminism marked the coverage as well as the movement’s representations of themselves in the coverage; in accordance with Kuhar’s (2013, 2015) understanding of retraditionalization as a return to the perceived original settings of the Croatian society marked by women’s symbolic and systemic annihilation from the public sphere, even when women’s rights and violence against women are being discussed, or “solved,” in order to gain governmental and public support, without the “F-word” backlash.

While this thesis focused on media coverage of women's movements and the movement's public-facing communication, the broad topic of women's activism in Croatia and Croatian feminism could benefit from further investigation into the topic. Namely, women's rights activists could provide further insights into the social environment and their negotiation of the "F-word" while attempting to negotiate policy and social change. Additionally, journalists could provide valuable information on the ways coverage was structured and produced when it came to said movements. Additional qualitative research of media coverage beyond a month per movement could help trace the narrative, and its changes as movements become more established. Finally, a broader socio-linguistic investigation into the terms "gender" and "feminism" and their usage in the public sphere beyond the movements could be of paramount importance while discussing women's rights and movements in Croatia. While all of the above were beyond the scope of this thesis, I would like to invite further academic (and journalistic) involvement with said topics to meaningfully engage with Croatian women's movements in ways that promote knowledge and understanding rather than silence, symbolic annihilation, and prejudice, because that is the recognition that Croatian women and initiatives deserve.

## Appendix

The PM	#spasime initiative
“He mentioned as the first goal the strengthening of prevention, i.e., prevention of violence”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Continuous interdepartmental cooperation on the prevention, sanctioning and public condemnation of domestic violence, in accordance with the already signed Agreement on Cooperation for the Prevention and Suppression of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women;”</li> </ul>
“then providing support and care for victims more than today”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Organization of mandatory professional and periodic education and sensitization of all officials and employees who come into contact with children and victims of violence in their work on how to act in such cases, early recognition of signs of violence”</li> <li>- “Non-institutional support to shelters and counseling centers that should be understood as an integral part of the victim protection system, financially supported and included in multisectoral teams in individual cases of violence”</li> </ul>
“strengthening all institutions involved in this problem, both social welfare centers and when a word about the police, judicial bodies, health, educational institutions, and their financial and capacity building.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Continuous interdepartmental cooperation on the prevention, sanctioning, and public condemnation of domestic violence, in accordance with the already signed Agreement on Cooperation for the Prevention and Suppression of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women:</li> <li>- Ministry of Justice</li> <li>- Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy</li> <li>- Ministry of Health</li> <li>- Ministry of Internal Affairs</li> <li>- Ministry of Education and Science”</li> </ul>
“He cited sensitization as the fifth goal, i.e., "effort towards the public” (NT-58)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Mandatory and urgent inclusion of education on domestic and gender-based violence in the education system”</li> </ul>

The PM	#spasime initiative
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Organization of a comprehensive state educational campaign zero tolerance for violence, with emphasis on the obligation of each individual to prevent and report domestic violence” (NT- 39)</li> </ul>

*Table 2: PM proposals and #spasime requests compared to show similarities between the two, with #spasime disseminating theirs to the public first, ahead of the event*



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