

Chapter 10
“I Didn’t Ask for It”
Balkan Women Vs. The Invisibility of Rape*
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Online initiative “I Didn’t Ask for It”¹ (*#nisamtrazila*) started in January 2021, motivated by a public confession of a young Serbian actress of being raped by a well-known Belgrade drama pedagogue. Soon joined by her female colleagues, an online platform was opened where thousands of women of former Yugoslavia took the opportunity to describe and report the various forms of sexual abuse to which they were exposed during their childhood, education and employment and whose perpetrators were person(s) they often knew and looked up to. As a belated Balkan version of the “Me Too” movement, the “I Didn’t Ask for It” initiative inherited a number of its attributes while displaying some new ones, dependent on the specific socio-cultural and political context and heritage of the region. The latter is in my opinion grounded in the complex permeation of the socialist attitude towards women’s rights and sexual violence, the unresolved traumas of mass wartime rapes and the contemporary experience of the threat to Balkan masculinity.

“I Didn’t Ask for It” did not only call for solidarity in the fight against gender-based violence, but by its very name suggested the necessity of addressing the epistemic (testimonial and hermeneutical) injustice to which victims of sexual violence are exposed, both given the individual’s inability to understand their own experiences and adversities, the institutional lack of confidence in the truth of their claims and the wider social entrenchment in conservatism and patriarchy. The women behind the initiative thus correctly assumed that the ensuing public backlash would be based on the accusation that women victims themselves were responsible and willing participants in the act of sexual violence, making their struggle to raise awareness of the phenomenon of sexual violence, a struggle unprecedented in former Yugoslav context, all the more important.

In this paper I will offer a feminist analysis of the evolution of the above-mentioned initiative (followed by a silencing backlash) and of the socio-cultural and political context that made it unique. I will concentrate in more detail on several aspects that seem characteristic of the “I Didn’t Ask for It”, which I consider to be consequences of the mentioned socio-cultural and political context of the region. These are the *resignation* and the need for *anonymity* of the victims, as well as the fierce response (*backlash*) of part of the public to the actions of the initiative itself and its leaders. Although I am aware that resignation, anonymity and backlash can be recognized in “Me Too” movement as well, I do not consider them to be its dominant features nor do I understand them to be connected to the same social phenomena. As a theoretical point of departure, I will utilize Simone de Beauvoir’s theoretical framework, especially her understanding of the myth of femininity and the ideas of complicity, solidarity, violence, and of sex and sexual autonomy. Beauvoir’s elaboration of the concept of ‘the Other’ serves here as an ontological foundation of the epistemic problem of not recognizing another’s experience, discussed through the theory of epistemic injustice by Miranda Fricker, as well as an explanation of the reasons why the victimization in the case of rape victims does not stop at the sole act of rape.

When using the term Balkans, I will primarily refer to the five ex-Yugoslav countries: Republic of Slovenia, Republic of Croatia, Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro where, in my opinion, the “I Didn’t Ask for It” movement echoed the loudest. I am aware that the term Balkans is often disputed, especially from the perspective of the citizens of the mentioned countries who, aware of its pejorative meaning, do not always appreciate being called Balkan people². Nevertheless, I chose this name for the geographical area and the

people who inhabit it not so much because of the brevity but to try to free the notion of its permanently negative connotations of primitive, tribal, warrior, wild and conservative. Although I am aware that in the context of the debate on rape, the attempt to rehabilitate the term Balkans is potentially doomed to failure, it is precisely in "I Didn't Ask for It" that I find elements on the basis of which it is possible to observe the term, the people and geographical area described by it with fresh, less judgmental eyes.

1. *Guilt and Otherness*

"The I Didn't Ask for It" or "Nisam tražila" Facebook page was launched in January 2021. It was initiated by four former female students of the Academy of Performing Arts in Sarajevo (Ana Tikvić, Nadine Mičić, Matea Mavrak i Asja Krsmanović), Bosnia, after hearing the shocking testimony of a Serbian actress Milena Radulović.³ Milena and several other women reported to the police that they had been sexually harassed and raped, some of them for years, by Miroslav Mika Aleksić, the influential acting teacher and owner of the acting school in Belgrade they attended. In this prestigious children's acting school officially called the "Matter of the Heart" one acting lesson cost up to 60 euros, which is a very high price in a country where the average monthly net salary in 2021 was 540 euros⁴. But the parents of Mika Aleksić's pupils did not object to the prices as they felt that the 'right values' were being passed on in his school. For example, the girls had to wear skirts and the boys formal shoes. Their hair and nails had to be neat, they had to read one book a week, went regularly to the theatre and every lesson they took began with the Lord's Prayer. When the female pupils did complain about Aleksić's inappropriate remarks and behaviour, their parents usually responded that his abusive methods serve to strengthen and prepare them for the cruel world of (primarily male) directors and producers. Mika Aleksić is currently charged with committing nine offenses involving rape and sexual abuse to the detriment of seven women, including one minor.⁵ He rejects all the charges and claims feeling not guilty.

As an integral component of conscience, guilt is an emotion caused by the belief of one's own wrongdoing. Feeling guilty means taking responsibility for another person's negative state or for harming another person.⁶ And while feeling guilty does not necessarily imply being truly responsible, it is also true that responsibility does not necessarily lead to a feeling of guilt. In other words, not all guilty *feel* guilty. Research shows that sex offenders are to a greater extent prone to distorting accounts of their offences, justifying their crimes or denying them as such.⁷ Although I am aware that denial does not necessarily imply a lack of feeling of guilt, some authors noticed that it is not unusual for sex offenders as a group to express a lack of guilt for their crimes or compassion for their victims.⁸ Paradoxically, sexual assault is probably the only crime in which major guilt is expressed not by the perpetrators but by their female victims. It is also a crime for which victims, in comparison to their offenders, are often blamed to the same extent (sometimes even more), by their partners, families, law enforcement and the wider public. To put it simply, the sad irony of rape is that it makes the guilty feel innocent, and the innocent feel guilty.

The belief that nothing wrong has been done, whether based on the attitude that there was no sexual assault or that there is nothing wrong with sexual assault as such, has its foundation in the social understanding of women and of femininity, that is, it is based on the specific ontology of gender, described by Simone de Beauvoir. In her book *The Second Sex* [1949] becoming a woman is described as a constant lifelong process of alienation or of *othering*, imposed on women by men (and, sometimes, by other women through the act of complicity), with violence as a frighteningly effective way of keeping said process alive. *Othering* is an integral part of defining oneself through identifying what oneself is not,⁹ and as such it is not reserved just for the relations between men and women: "Village people view anyone not belonging to the village as suspicious "others." For the native of a country

inhabitants of other countries are viewed as “foreigners”; Jews are the “others” for anti-Semites, blacks for racist Americans, indigenous people for colonists, proletarians for the propertied classes.”¹⁰ By its very nature, *othering* is not only the establishment of a difference but also of a hierarchy between the One and the Other, whereby the Other is always understood as a lower ontological category, the bearer of weaker values, *the object, the inessential*. Influenced by Hegel and by anthropological findings of Levi Strauss on the emergence of human culture through the establishment of contrasts, dualities and oppositions Beauvoir concluded that human society does not rest on friendship and solidarity: “a fundamental hostility to any other consciousness is found in consciousness itself; the subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object.”¹¹

The process of making a person *the Other* is in most cases reciprocal, resting on a kind of dialectic of relations in which those who dominate become dominated and *vice versa*. Even if there is no real reciprocity the ones being dominated can often separate, move away, escape, building their strength in separation, solidarity, common culture and mutual experience. But not women! Women are the only Others, claimed Beauvoir, who do not remember anything but oppression, their Otherness being from the beginning of history immutable, *absolute*.¹² She concluded that women were historically incapable of changing their social status and imposed ontology, being passive and complicit. She reasoned that women “lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit that could posit itself in opposition. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and unlike the proletariat, they have no solidarity of labor or interests.”¹³ Although she criticised women’s resignation Beauvoir, while writing *The Second Sex*, couldn’t help being resigned herself.¹⁴ She did not see real opportunity for rebellion in women’s condition, believing that change was possible only if it suits men’s interests.¹⁵ Even her early views on feminism were based on the understanding that it is not an autonomous movement, but an instrument in the hands of (male) politicians.¹⁶

Making a person (or a group) the Other is not just a matter of proclamation but of action as well, with violence being the most convincing way of making others *Others*, “because violence done to another is the clearest affirmation of another’s alterity”¹⁷. The mechanism of *othering* through sexual violence is perhaps best explained by Dianna Taylor by referring to the phenomenon of sexual humiliation “as a manifestation of the relationship one has to oneself”¹⁸. Influenced by work of Avishai Margalit, Taylor concluded that humiliation comes as a deliberate consequence of violence, making victims see and understand themselves through the eyes of the perpetrator. Sexual violence is, hence, a humiliating behaviour that violates self-respect and denies the freedom of becoming in the future other than what one currently is. “Humiliating behaviors and conditions deny this capacity to become otherwise specifically by treating humans as nonhuman—as not worthy of freedom—while seeing them as subhuman; by extension then, being humiliated is the experience of being treated and seen in these ways”¹⁹. The tragedy of humiliation is not just in treating a human as a non-human but also in a way it makes that particular human see and treat themselves as non-human as a consequence.

The use of violence becomes not just a tool for acquiring and maintaining a dominant position, but of proving who deserves to be higher on the human scale, who becomes a subject and who stays something less than a subject, who deserves to be human and who is reduced to the *not (yet) human*²⁰. This masculinist ontology is followed by a masculinist epistemology implying the interpretation of reality in such a way that it serves to maintain existing gender power relations. Or in the words of Beauvoir: “The representation of the world as the world itself is the work of men; they describe it from a point of view that is their own and that they confound with the absolute truth.”²¹ In such a world, women, because of their many alleged defects and inadequacies, should be dominated, ruled, exploited and, when unruly, punished.

Such an epistemology, on the one hand, obscures the vision of men who, as a consequence, do not question the origin of their privilege. On the other, it often silences women, making them complicit, devoid of solidarity with other women and slow in recognizing the need for a social change, the need for a revolution.

Exemplary for this patriarchal representation of the world is the rape culture or a form of cultural environment in which sexual violence is tolerated, normalized or even glorified, where victims are blamed and men are obliged to confirm their masculinity through sexually aggressive behaviour. In such an environment even when violence is recognized as such, it is individualized and reduced to the pathology of both the perpetrator and the victim. In other words, at the wider social level violence against women, especially sexual violence, is still not recognized as a systemic, structural and all-pervading problem and sometimes it is still not recognized as a problem at all. The consequences of this are also evident in the usual understanding of the act of rape which in order to be considered as such must include force and active resistance. This does not only undervalue the right and capacity of women to say ‘no’ but also ignores all the intricacies of the power relations between men and women that make the use of physical violence for rape to happen unnecessary²². In other words, in contemporary patriarchal societies, where men more often than women hold financial, political and social power, women do not need to literally be held at gunpoint in order to feel pressured, coerced and forced against their will. Not recognizing that fact is the worst form of cynicism.

In Balkan languages the word for rape usually contains a word “sila” meaning “force”—signifying that sexual intercourse in which there is no use of physical force or threat of it cannot be considered a rape. Consequently, in Bosnia and Herzegovina,²³ Montenegro,²⁴ and Serbia²⁵ rape is still limited only to sexual violence under coercion and direct threat of assault on the victim or another person, which deviates from the definition given by the Istanbul Convention, namely absence of consent.²⁶ In Croatia,²⁷ the difference between rape and sexual intercourse without consent was abolished in 2019, while in Slovenia this took place two years later, in 2021.²⁸

2. Resistance and Resignation

Two days after Milena Radulović went public, on January 18th, Facebook page “I Didn’t Ask for It” opened with a hashtag #*Nisi sama* or “You Are Not Alone”. Four administrators invited women to anonymously share their similar traumatic stories in order to draw attention to what they have experienced and thus change the atmosphere in a society where any form of violence against women is enveloped by prejudice and tacitly approved, supported and encouraged. Although at the beginning among the first to speak were the actresses and women who had been working in the public eye—journalists, musicians and politicians—over the span of 24 hours the site became a place of testimony of many, uniting women from once war-torn countries. What happened next was described by the media and the very initiators of the Facebook page as an opening of a Pandora’s box²⁹. In just two days the site published a large number of shocking testimonies of sexual harassment and rape, whose victims were mostly girls and women, perpetrators were usually men in positions of power, the violence often took place during high school or college, sometimes even within educational institutions, and it often had a status of a public secret. Everybody knew about it and didn’t do anything about it.

As evidenced so far, “I Didn’t Ask for It” is more or less an extension of the global “Me Too” movement, sharing the characteristics of online platform, certain spokespersons, as well as substantial media support and sympathy, culminating in institutional changes and law reform. But it also displayed some specific traits, dependent on the socio-cultural and political context and heritage of the region that are grounded in the complex permeation of the socialist attitude towards women’s rights and sexual violence, the unresolved traumas of mass wartime rapes and the contemporary experience of the threat to Balkan masculinity. Three specific

features that I will discuss in more detail are *the resignation, the anonymity, and the backlash*. While the resignation will be the topic of this subchapter, more will be said about anonymity and backlash in subchapters that follow.

The first among distinctive features of the “I Didn’t Ask for It” movement, especially in the beginning, was the pervasive feeling of resignation. Many women confessing their stories could not help but feel resigned to the situation they were in. In Beauvoir’s opinion resignation naturally follows women’s life path and their historical situation of profound powerlessness³⁰. “I Didn’t Ask for It” women often told their stories not as a form of rebellion but as a form of an emotional discharge, a confession or even a tired lament. Their pervading attitude was that nothing can or will be done, they just needed to be heard and voice their trauma to somebody who will understand³¹.

And although resignation could be understood as universal to all women under patriarchy, there is a form of resignation in the Balkans that has its own precise socio-historical rationale. I believe it comes as a consequence of failed expectations following initial enthusiasm after major social changes. It should be kept in mind that the Balkan area is historically marked by many political upheavals and ethnic conflicts, among the most shocking of which are the last ones that took place in the 1990s, when socialist Yugoslavia disintegrated and nation states were established. From its very beginning in 1945 ideologues of socialist Yugoslavia (The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) led by Josip Broz Tito and inspired by the texts of Friedrich Engels³² emphasized the role of women in building a new supranation.³³ Prominent in the fighting ranks of the People’s Liberation Army and organized into the powerful Women’s Antifascist Front (WAF), women represented a group whose support was of crucial importance for the political and social establishment of Yugoslavia. That is why Tito, while addressing them in his famous 1942 speech at the First Conference of WAF, said that women “here today, once and for all, have a right to establish one fact: that this struggle must bear fruit for the women of Yugoslav nations and that no one will ever be able to snatch this expensive fruit from their hands again!”³⁴ In the years that followed, Yugoslavia made a huge leap in the fight for women’s rights, constitutionally granting them equality. This also included provisions guaranteeing equal pay for equal work, employment protection, and protection of the interests of mothers and children.³⁵ The right to abortion has been included in the Constitution in 1974,³⁶ just one year after a famous decision of the U.S. Supreme Court to include the same right in the Constitution of the United States. In 1953 WAF was dissolved and Tito’s speeches little by little changed their focus from being on warriors and heroines to mothers and wives, locking Yugoslav women within the sacred walls of the family. In the decades that followed, women’s calls for more substantial social transformations were silenced by the endless postponement of solving women’s issue in the name of dealing with those related to class³⁷.

Although initially favouring socialism, Beauvoir eventually realized that to change their condition, women did need a separate feminist movement. Of course, the rejection of the socialist solution did not push her toward accepting capitalist system, which she believed did not allow for true gender equality:

Once inside the class struggle, women understood that the class struggle did not eliminate the sex struggle. It’s at that point that I myself became aware of what I have just said. Before that I was convinced that equality of the sexes can only be possible once capitalism is destroyed and therefore—and it’s this “therefore” which is the fallacy—we must first fight the class struggle. It is true that equality of the sexes is impossible under capitalism. [...] Just look at Soviet Russia or Czechoslovakia, where (even if we are willing to call those countries “socialist”, which I am not) there is a profound confusion between emancipation of the proletariat and emancipation of

women. Somehow, the proletariat always end up being made up of men. The patriarchal values have remained intact there as well as here. And that—this consciousness among women that the class struggle does not embody the sex struggle—is what is new. Yet most women in the struggle know that now. That’s the greatest achievement of the feminist movement. It’s one which will alter history in the years to come.³⁸

Blaženka Despot, one of the most important Croatian feminist philosophers, spoke in a similar vein, believing that the basis of socialism is the constant postponement of solving the “women’s question”, always being placed on the historical timeline behind the resolution of the class question³⁹. What some critics also noticed is that the socialist states often lacked the very ideology on which they supposedly rested — the socialist one. Croatian feminist philosopher Gordana Bosanac understood Yugoslav political system as paradoxical in nature, defining its main feature to be the forced proclamation or inauguration of something that did not yet exist.⁴⁰ In other words, socialism in Yugoslavia never truly existed, it was aggressively proclaimed before it was actually realized which is why the real socialism, as understood and described by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, never existed in Yugoslavia. The final solution of women’s issues was thus not in socialism, let alone in its propaganda illusion. Gender equality itself was an instrument of that illusion. Socialist Yugoslavia promised gender equality, proclaimed it, although it was not implemented or lived in the true sense of the word, and then gave up on it, especially on gender equality in the intimate, private sphere. Unlike socialist philosophers like Fourier or Engels, unlike Beauvoir, Yugoslav ideologues refused to recognize that the battlefield for women was also within the family. The latter can be seen in the fact that, for example, in Yugoslavia marital rape was never actually considered a rape.

Despite the above, it should be pointed out that socialist Yugoslavia introduced important changes in the lives of women, primarily concerning their education and employment. Unfortunately, these interventions proved to be rather unimportant during country’s disintegration in the 1990s. Whether at that particular moment women forgot about Yugoslavia’s contribution to changing their social position or whether it was more important for them to side with men in the fight for national freedom, it is difficult to say with certainty. What I remember from those times was a deep disappointment with Yugoslavia and an enthusiastic expectation of promised times of political and economic freedoms carried on the wings of national identity. Although what followed brought with it positive trends, it also brought negative ones, or in the words of Mitja Velikonja:

However, notwithstanding its many unquestionably positive developments, the post-socialist transition also opened a Pandora’s box of unexpected troubles. On one hand, the transition resulted in the long anticipated pluralization of societies in all respects—social, political, economic, and cultural. On the other hand, this was inevitably accompanied by a series of negative processes and events, including the demolition of welfare state, the introduction of what might be called turbo-capitalism, the rise of social injustices, repatriarchalization, retraditionalization, clericalization, and nationalist conflicts. Not one post-socialist country, not even the most successful, was spared such negative consequences, their malign effects varying only in intensity.⁴¹

Unfortunately, economic transition marked by crime and the return and restoration of traditional values which threatened to stop the modernization processes started in Yugoslavia, especially in the war-stricken countries⁴², caused disappointment and resignation among a large part of the population. It seemed as if nothing had changed or matters even got worse. Women of the “I Didn’t Ask for it” still cannot count on the institutions that should provide help and protection against sex crimes, such as legal institutions and social welfare centres.

3. *Anonymity and Epistemic Injustice*

Most of the women describing their stories did not want to identify themselves or the perpetrators, sending their testimonies to the Facebook page administrators through private channels. They claimed anonymity had provided them with a safe space for communication, protecting them from public judgment. It also allowed them to reveal the deep shame they felt and the helplessness they suffered, feelings that are caused by the sexual assault, but are also dependant on the cultural determinants of femininity so vividly described by Beauvoir.

Through publishing women's testimonies, "I Didn't Ask for It" helped women to understand their trauma. In other words, women chosen anonymity not only as a shield against public mistrust, but in a way against mistrust in themselves and their own capacity to understand and describe what happened to them. Many women did not initially believe that they were actually raped which is not surprising considering that they lived in a culture in which rape is surrounded with misconceptions and silence. What apparently contributed to their confusion was not only the cultural understanding of rape but also the social understanding of the rapist himself.

Like "Me Too," "I Didn't Ask for It" questioned at least two widespread prejudices about perpetrators of violence. The first is that the perpetrators of sexual violence are mostly unknown people lurking in dark corridors and alleys, crazed predators and hardened criminals. Even though statistical data show that sexual assault usually involves a perpetrator known to the victim,⁴³ the pervasive belief about unknown rapists negatively affects the way women understand and describe their own experiences of sexual assault. It also allows perpetrators to renounce guilt for what they have done (believing that it was not rape but, for example, seduction), and the public to assign blame to the victims instead of condemning the culprit. The second prejudice is that sexual abusers are always people from the margins of life, lonely and unloved individuals without erotic or any other capital. "I Didn't Ask for It" revealed that the truth is often diametrically opposite, exposing not the abusers' lack but often the surplus of charm; and not the impotence but the excess of social power, which is often accompanied by underserved privileges and assumptions of rights over other human beings. Women who dare to stand up to such men, both during the act itself and during a potential trial, are not only faced with this mentioned excess of power but also with their own lack of it, manifested in the tendency of the police and the judges to disqualify their opinion and experience.

Here I would like to recall Miranda Fricker's useful notion of epistemic injustice referring to those forms of unfair treatment that "relate to issues of knowledge, understanding, and participation in communicative practices."⁴⁴ Mentioned forms of unfair treatment include exclusion, marginalisation, distrust and systematic distortion and misrepresentation of somebody's accounts, meanings and opinions.⁴⁵ Epistemic injustice means silencing women rendering them invisible, inaudible or less authoritative in communicative practices.

In her book *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* Fricker differentiated between hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice claiming testimonial injustice occurs when a hearer attributes lesser credibility to someone's testimony due to prejudices on the basis of speaker's gender, race, or sexuality.⁴⁶ Although testimonial injustice is manifested in numerous aspects of public and private life, it acquires its most harmful qualities precisely in the courts. In the Balkans, as in the rest of the world, victims of sexual assault are forced to defend and justify themselves in and out of the court more often than victims of other crimes. Testimonies by women are also frequently disqualified on the basis of common misconceptions about women's nature such as—they are born to be sexually dominated—or—when they say 'no,' they actually mean 'yes.'

For many Balkan women anonymous speech was the first cautious step after years of silence. And when they finally made it they were painfully aware that many will not believe

them and that the violence will go unpunished, since the bearers of injustice were not only sexual abusers, but the police, judges, family members, social welfare centres, all those who deal with victim blaming instead of with crime. Furthermore, in a world where rapists are portrayed as unknown monsters from the margins of society, the criminal actions of teachers, professors, mentors, idols are not only difficult to explain to the police and lawyers, but also to themselves. And this is where hermeneutic injustice comes into play.

According to Fricker hermeneutical injustice occurs when a “gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences.”⁴⁷ In other words, hermeneutical injustice pertains to obscuring or marginalizing certain experiences making them difficult to understand or explain for those who experienced them⁴⁸. Denial of epistemic authority and interpretative resources as a crucial element of systemic discrimination that women suffer is most obvious in cases of sexual violence and abuse. In her book Fricker gave the example of Carmita Wood, a woman who quit her job in the seventies because of the sexual harassment she endured from her work colleague, nuclear physicist and director of the Cornell University Laboratory of Nuclear Studies Boyce McDaniel. In times when the term “sexual harassment” was not publicly accepted Carmita had difficulties explaining reasons for her resignation, deeming them personal, and as a result was denied unemployment benefits.⁴⁹ After many years of being tormented by shame and discomfort, she had the same problem in describing and interpreting her own experience, which can still be seen in many women of the “I Didn’t Ask for It” movement. Most of them told their story years after their violent experience, deeply horrified by the growing public attacks on Milena Radulović for not reporting on time. The fight for having one’s own marginalized experience acknowledged thus becomes a provocation of the dominant group’s experience or, in the words of Charles W. Mills:

It is not a matter of an innocent misunderstanding or gap, but of a misrepresentation generated organically, materially, from the male perspective on the world, motivated by their group interests and phenomenologically supported by their group experience. And depending on how pivotal this misrepresentation or non-representation is to the preservation of the status quo, its reformist naming or renaming will be vigorously resisted by the system’s male beneficiaries.⁵⁰

Silencing and marginalization of women’s experiences took a particularly dark turn in the Balkans during the wars of the 1990s, when mass war rapes took place. During that period the female body became a battlefield over which biological tactics of warfare, nationalist retaliation and misogyny were applied.⁵¹ In Bosnia alone between 25.000 and 50.000 people⁵²—mostly women—were exposed to sexual abuse and rape. Because of the war and because of the events that followed, Balkan women know that in this part of the world rape goes unpunished and that the victims are often rejected by their families and forced into silence by their own nations. War rapes did not just victimize women, they also provoked a strong patriarchal sense of shame that awakens when something considered property was being defiled. In this same patriarchal sense, nations were ashamed as well, especially in the cases of rape camps where women were held until the late stage of their pregnancy so the children would inherit their father’s ethnicity.⁵³

During the wars and in its aftermath, Balkan women were forced, some of them in a suicidal act of complicity and at the cost of their own humanity and sanity, to hide their triple or quadruple victimisation or their multiple *othering*. They were victimized as girls and women living in a world that disparages their experiences and imposes on them distorted views of their own reality, victimized as casualties of war when they were raped, mutilated and killed, victimized after the war when they received almost no institutional help, victimized when,

because they were raped, their families turned their backs on them, victimized because in the end they were forced to remain silent so as not to embarrass their country. In the meantime, their voices were taken over by their nation states, usually for a political purpose of gaining power and leverage, which is why many women do not trust those who pretend to speak in their name and which is why many women choose to stay anonymous when they speak until this very day.

4. Backlash and Balkan Masculinity

A few days after it was launched, the “I Didn’t Ask for It” Facebook page was falsely reported and blocked which is why “I Didn’t Ask for It” Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/httpswww.nisamtrazila.org/>) and web page (<https://www.nisamtrazila.org/>) were opened providing women with new areas of testimony. By that time social media backlash had strengthened considerably, dominated by intimidating, vulgar and misogynistic attacks. The first of these attacks appeared immediately after the public testimony of Milena Radulović and came down to the infamous infinitely repeated sentence which rape victims are often faced with – ‘you asked for it!’⁵⁴. Also, due to frequent attacks on women for not reporting their attackers at the end of 2021 the Twitter initiative “I Didn’t Report” started off, as part of which 15.000 posts were written in just the first two days.

There were also clickbait headlines describing rape as a ‘sex scandal’ or ‘affair,’ articles problematizing the personal history of women who spoke about sexual violence or writing complete fabrications, as well as fake news and conspiracy theories aimed at discrediting the victims. And this is where again Simone de Beauvoir comes to mind, especially regarding the case of Djamila Boupacha. Beauvoir described the case in her *Le Monde* article starting with a famous sentence: “The most scandalous thing about a scandal is that you get used to it.”⁵⁵

In her article on this young Algerian woman who was tortured and raped by members of the French army in 1960 in order to force a confession about her activities as part of the Algerian National Liberation Front, Beauvoir suggested the idea that rape is a punishment for woman’s claim to legitimacy. Sexual violence again becomes a tool directed against all those women who do not agree to be just flesh and reduces them to that same flesh. Those who dare to engage in public affairs, who dare to be seen – actresses, politicians and journalists—are especially detested, since they call into question the gender norms and myths of masculinity and femininity as strictly separated.

The idea of the impropriety of women's work and activities in the public space is well reflected in famous Croatian dictionaries of the foreign words, where public woman and prostitute are regularly defined as synonymous⁵⁶. In this context, actresses are particularly interesting. Simone de Beauvoir considers actresses to be the ones who are eternally exposed to moral reproach, but who, freed from dependence on men, manage to realize their humanity through their own profession. „By realizing themselves as human beings, they accomplish themselves as women”.⁵⁷ Perhaps that is precisely why the initial attack by many (mostly anonymous internet men but also women) on Milena Radulović was so vicious, jumping to conclusions about the innate promiscuity of actresses, their hunger for attention and money, and the rejection of men (in this case Mika Aleksić) when no longer having any use for them.

In an essay *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita syndrome* Beauvoir tried explaining the reasons French public disliked the beautiful and talented actress. Like in the Djamila Boupacha story, Beauvoir in essay on Brigitte Bardot identified the collapse of the myth of femininity understood as a force of nature, sexual and instinctive, childish and capricious and, at the same time, submissive to the patriarchal morality and power. The said collapse happened primarily in the movies of Roger Vadim where Bardot is shown rejecting those “safe values, vain hopes and irksome constraint”⁵⁸. There she refused passivity, immobility and complicity, in a word, accessibility. As a consequence, in her real-life Brigitte Bardot was forced to face hate and

boycott, and her public image had to be beautified with the stories of her purity, honesty and love for country. Balkan actresses face the similar destiny but with the reversed image. It is not the movies that make them despised but their public personas, which are fundamentally different from the angel-devil-prostitute characters played in the Balkan movies. Balkan actresses are young, emancipated and educated women often looking, living and thinking in an unconventional way, not asking permission for their choices. In a culture where an actress is still sometimes considered to be just a step from a prostitute, women who choose that career choose to not go with the flow, to be passive, immobile, complicit and accessible. And that is what irritates many.

The strong backlash on the Balkans should also be put in context of the strengthening of nationalism and religious extremism accompanied by the already mentioned renewal of tradition and patriarchy in gender relations after the fall of Yugoslavia. The result was the emergence of a specific patriarchal capitalism on the European semi-periphery. The re-patriarchalization of gender relations during the last thirty years has brought again the enthronement of family values, serving as a justification for severe sanctions against those women who do not want to live by the rules. Again, we should recall Beauvoir's claiming: "Because man is sovereign in this world, he claims the violence of his desires as a sign of his sovereignty."⁵⁹

Women finding their voice in "I Didn't Ask for It" threatened some of these freshly restored myths thus provoking a backlash. One of them was the myth of family as a sacred community headed by a righteous father whose function and power are then transformed into the professions of priests, doctors and teachers. The idea that perpetrators of sexual violence were men playing the role of holy fathers, has shaken not just the established understanding of sexual violence but the established justification of power over others by alleged moral superiority of the ones holding the power.

Another development took place that we can characterize as a crisis of the myth of Balkan masculinity. It is true that Balkan masculinity was historically deeply connected to nationalism, militarism and sexism but it is also true that in the words of Marina Blagojević:

"Transition" has produced a situation in which the largest number of men are those who do not enjoy patriarchal dividends, or enjoy them to a small extent. Both men and women have been largely instrumentalized in the "war transition" project and represent the "losers of the transition". There is a gap between hegemonic masculinities, the models of masculinity that dominate the media, and which are key to re-patriarchalization and re-traditionalization, and the real life of the vast majority of men.⁶⁰

Blagojević claimed that in the Balkans today, there is a gap between hegemonic masculinity, that is, the model of masculinity that dominates the media and popular culture, which is an ideological key to re-patriarchalization and re-traditionalization processes, and the real life of men, which is not characterized by privileges or power. In other words, Balkan men have been *othered* as well. Ironically, their othered status did not make them necessarily sympathetic to women, especially not to those educated, privileged, and socially networked women who were the only ones who dared to tell their stories non-anonymously. The attitudes of many men reminded of the old socialist criticism of feminism as too Western and bourgeois, distant from the problems and struggles of working class (women)⁶¹. That is why just by the very fact of similarity with "Me Too," "I Didn't Ask for It" provokes negative sentiments which, on the one hand, bring to mind the socialist intolerance of the feminist struggle, and on

the other hand, represent the spiteful resistance of the “European backward periphery” against the rich and privileged West and its values.

5. *By way of a Conclusion*

When Simone de Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* (originally published in 1949), as already indicated, she was not fully convinced of the strength of the women's movement and women's solidarity, believing that the history of *otherness*, the history of observing oneself through other people's critical and negative eyes stood in the way of sisterhood. Her attitude is not surprising, since *The Second Sex* was created immediately after the Second World War, when the voice of the suffragettes had long been forgotten and the new feminist wave had not even begun. Paradoxically, it was her book that gave impetus to new women and new articulations of injustices that affect women, among other things, injustices that take place in the private and intimate sphere of existence. This is precisely why she so enthusiastically wrote about feminists in the seventies describing them as those who should and could change the world for the better, giving feminism priority over all other political theories that promised to change women's social position.

The justification of her faith in female collective strength was shown by the "Me Too" and then "I Didn't Ask for It" movements. Of course, what certainly facilitated their creation and maintenance were the new technologies of communication and social engagement enabling the connection of the traditionally disconnected – women confined to the domestic sphere. When it comes to the Balkans, women have not only crossed the borders of their own households, but also the barbed borders of their own national states, where intolerance and hatred reigned until recently. What "I Didn't Ask for It" made possible was that women, recounting their own experiences and their own pain, no longer viewed themselves through men's eyes but through women's eyes, identifying with other women and finding togetherness, solidarity and strength in that.

In the meantime, “I Didn't Ask for It” got a substantial institutional and individual attention on a transnational level, gaining substantial support from many. The Bosnian Agency for Gender Equality has announced that in 2021, crisis centres for victims of rape and sexual violence will be opened in major cities⁶². Academies and colleges in Balkan countries formed various platforms for students to report abuse or harassment. In just a few days first reports have been made naming the abusers and by the end of January there were hundreds of them. Public campaigns, lectures and educational videos were launched and blogs, open letters to governments and thousands of newspaper articles were written. Balkan women are now at a time when the burden of action shifts from women's groups to law enforcement and to concrete steps taken by conventional political and legal institutions to eliminate or alleviate the problems of sexual violence in the Balkans, institutions that are traditionally slow and patriarchal.

Despite the unfavourable odds, “I Didn't Ask for It” made a great step by successfully connecting women from countries that are still healing the wounds of war. It was through social networks that they found a way not only to connect, but also to give meaning to their painful experiences through mutual support and understanding⁶³. Today, their voices are no longer sad but angry, calling for changes to the petrified and unjust patterns in the patriarchal Balkan societies. At the same time, they also reveal a certain level of maturity that the mentioned societies have reached, which is also reflected in the institutional readiness to implement certain changes, however small and insignificant they may seem at times, as well as in the open support of many men. What should also be noted is that the “I Didn't Ask for It” movement, like “Me Too.” in one way or other spills over into all pores of society, changing and renewing it.

Although there is still a lot to be done in the Balkans, it is promising that its ideas are slowly spreading, encouraging women's testimonies not only in the area of sexual violence but

also regarding reproductive rights, domestic violence, unpaid work and the like. By finding their voice through solidarity and compassion, Balkan women not only freed themselves from their own trauma but also from their own ontological otherness, *becoming women* this time on their own terms.

* This paper presents the results of the Institute for Philosophy project "Croatian Women Philosophers in the European Context", which is financed by the Croatian Science Foundation under the number UIP-2017-05-1763.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/NisamTrazila/>. For additional information see: Samira Trešnja, "Nisam Tražila: Four Girls Who Fought against Gender-Based Violence," *Balkan Diskurs*, January 12, 2022, <https://balkandiskurs.com/en/2022/01/12/nisam-trazila-initiative/>; Aida Sofić Salihbegović, "The Balkans Face Their #Metoo Moment – DW – 02/07/2021," *Deutsche Welle*, February 7, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-balkans-face-their-metoo-moment/a-56469884>; Đurđa Radulović, "How Facebook Became the New Feminist Battleground for #MeToo in the Western Balkans," *The Calvert Journal*, June 21, 2021, <https://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/12875/feminist-facebook-groups-fighting-change-memes-western-balkans>; Lepa Mladenović, Milena Milojević, and Mina Damjanović, "Balkan Women Uprising against Sexual Violence," *CSSP Civil Society Strengthening Platform*, February 1, 2021, <https://cssplatform.org/balkan-women-uprising-against-sexual-violence>; Dolores Cvitanin, "#NisiSama: The Constructive Role of Social Media in Supporting the Ex-Yugoslav #MeToo Movement," *International Public Policy Review*, February 27, 2021, <https://ippr-journal.com/2021/02/27/nisisama-the-constructive-role-of-social-media-in-supporting-the-ex-yugoslav-metoo-movement/>; Marion Dautry, "'You Are Not Alone': Balkan Women Seize #Metoo Moment," *France 24*, January 27, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210127-you-are-not-alone-balkan-women-seize-metoo-moment>; Ivan Fischer, "Serbian Rape Testimonies Spark Regional Women's Movements," *Brussels Morning Newspaper*, February 5, 2021, <https://brusselsmorning.com/serbian-rape-testimonies-spark-regional-womens-movements/10463/>.

² The specific centuries-old Western-European imagery of the Balkans as a backward periphery inhabited by fratricidal tribes, due to which it could never be anything other than not-quite-Europe, has been described by numerous authors, among whom the work of Maria Todorova deserves perhaps the greatest attention. See for example: Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1-37; "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2501301>. Consequently, such a perception of the region has had a negative impact on its inhabitants, who refuse to identify themselves as the Balkans. See for example: Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries, *The Balkans: A Post-Communist History* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 16. Authors claim that they "are fully aware that the words 'Balkan' and 'the Balkans' are heavily laden with multiple cultural meanings, connotations and stereotypical images, that some of these meanings and images are quite rightly considered to be demeaning, condescending, derogatory or at best ambiguous, and that the terms 'Balkan' and 'the Balkans' are therefore by no means fully accepted by this peninsula's inhabitants".

³ Milena Radulović described her terrifying experiences in an interview with journalist Ivana Mastilović Jasnić, who published parts of it on January 16, 2021, in the Serbian daily newspaper *Blic*. Ivana Mastilović Jasnić, "Poznata mlada glumica Milena Radulović: 'Silovao me učitelj glume Miroslav Mika Aleksić kad sam imala 17 godina,'" *Blic*, January 16, 2021,

<https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/milena-radulovic-miroslav-mika-aleksic-optuzbe-silovanje-seksualno-zlostavljanje/5fj8cgv>.

⁴ Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. *Statistical Release: Average salaries and wages per employee, January 2021* (April 26, 2021), distributed by Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2021/HtmlE/G20211080.html>.

⁵ Milica Stojanović, “Renowned Serbian Acting Teacher Detained over Rape Claims,” *Balkan Insight*, January 19, 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/01/18/custody-urged-for-serbian-acting-teacher-accused-of-rape/>.

⁶ Mica Estrada-Hollenbeck and Todd F. Heatherton, “Avoiding and Alleviating Guilt through Prosocial Behavior,” in *Guilt and Children*, ed. Jane Bybee (San Diego: Academic Press, 1998), 216.

⁷ See for example: Harry G. Kennedy and Donald H. Grubin, “Patterns of Denial in Sex Offenders,” *Psychological Medicine* 22, no. 1 (1992): 191; Chris Jackson and Brian A. Thomas-Peter, “Denial in Sex Offenders: Workers’ Perceptions,” *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health* 4, no. 1 (1994): 21–23; Jill S. Levenson, ““But I Didn’t Do It!”” *Sexual Abuse* 23, no. 3 (2010): 347–349.

⁸ See for example: Lorenne M. Clark and Debra J. Lewis, *Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1977), 105; Madhumita Pandey, “My Mother Is A Goddess”, “I Am an Inmate Here”: Male Prisoners’ Attitudes Towards Women and Their Perceptions of Culpability from Delhi Prison, doctoral thesis (Cambridge: Anglia Ruskin University, 2018), 219-225, https://arro.anglia.ac.uk/id/eprint/704101/1/Pandey_2018.pdf.

⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, , trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), https://files.libcom.org/files/1949_simone-de-beauvoir-the-second-sex.pdf, 26-32.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 27.

¹² *Ibid.* 28.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* in 1949, just four years after the Second World War and fourteen before Betty Friedan’s famous book *The Feminine Mystique* that breathed new life into the American and then the global feminist movement. The historical moment in which she wrote her book was marked by the recovery of a post-apocalyptic world in which the struggle for women’s rights was almost forgotten or at least postponed. Later, in the 1970s and on the wings of the second wave of feminism, Beauvoir relinquished her resignation, believing in the importance and power of the feminist movement and giving it priority over other political forms of struggle for women’s rights. See for example: Filosofi för Gymnasiet, “Simone de Beauvoir,”.

¹⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 182. See, also, for example the next section: “For the most part, women resign themselves to their lot without attempting any action; those who did try to change attempted to overcome their singularity and not to confine themselves in it triumphantly. When they intervened in world affairs, it was in concert with men and from a masculine point of view.” *Ibid.*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁸ Dianna Taylor, “Humiliation as a Harm of Sexual Violence: Feminist versus Neoliberal Perspectives,” *Hypatia* 33, no. 3 (2018): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12427>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Here I am referring to the Western philosophical tradition starting with Aristotle, then Thomas Aquinas, Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and all the way to Otto Weininger that considers women to be morally and intellectually inferior to men while reserving only for them the full status of a human being. Of course, historically, not only women were condemned to such a fate since large number of people were not considered human in the true sense of the word, thus justifying the need to manage and exploit them.

²¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 196.

²² Of course, it should be kept in mind that this specific form of violence should not be viewed exclusively through the lens of male perpetrators and female victims. In addition to women, the victims of patriarchal violence are often other men (boys, queer men or men who do not conform to the strict framework of hegemonic masculinity, etc.), and the perpetrators of violence can be both men and women. However, for the purposes of this work, I concentrated on male sexual violence perpetrated on women (since this was the reason for the creation of the "I Didn't Ask for It" movement in the first place), while not intending to minimize or deny other forms of violence.

²³ Vladana Vasić, "Krivična djela seksualnog nasilja u pravnom sistemu Bosne i Hercegovine [Criminal Acts of Sexual Violence in The Legal System of Bosnia And Herzegovina]," in *Krivična djela silovanja i ostalog seksualnog nasilja u Bosni i Hercegovini*, ed. Vesna Pirija (Sarajevo: Sarajevo Open Centre, 2017), 29; "Review of Criminalization and Prosecution of Rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Submission to the Un Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences", Amnesty International, accessed March 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/EUR6324572020ENGLISH.pdf>.

²⁴ "Montenegro Sigi 2019 Category - Gender Index," OECD, accessed August 26, 2022, <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/ME.pdf>. The same document claims that although spousal rape is recognized under article 212 of the Civil Code of Montenegro, marital rape is not subject to ex officio prosecution but only to private litigation.

²⁵ Dakić, Dušan, "Silovanje bez prinude?" *Otvorena vrata pravosuđa*, January 17, 2022, <https://www.otvorenaravosudja.rs teme/krivicno-pravo/silovanje-bez-prinude>.

²⁶ Recognizing social context and power relations that allow for the possibility of sexual violence without the use of coercion or threat as well as a possibility of victimhood without active physical resistance, Istanbul Convention requires only the absence of consent for an act to be considered rape. See: "The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence," Council of Europe, May 5, 2011, <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>.

²⁷ Anja Vladislavljevic, "Croatia Toughens Penalties for Domestic and Sexual Violence," *Balkan Insight*, November 5, 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/25/croatia-toughens-penalties-for-domestic-and-sexual-violence/>.

²⁸ "Slovenia Redefines Rape to Focus on Consent, Not Violence," *Total Slovenia News*, May 6, 2021, <https://www.total-slovenia-news.com/politics/8233-slovenia-redefines-rape-to-focus-on-consent-not-violence>.

²⁹ The opening of a Pandora's box is a formulation that runs through numerous articles, whereby the evils that came out of the famous mythological box refer not just to the testimonies of abuse but also to the response of part of the audience to these testimonies, exposing deep social misogyny and sexism. See for example: Tamara Zablocki, "Žene koje su otvorile Pandorinu kutiju," *Urban Magazin*, September 2, 2021, <https://www.urbanmagazin.ba/ispovijesti-prezivjelih-zene-koje-su-otvorile-pandorinu-kutiju/>; or, "Ukazuje li pokret 'Nisam tražila' na

općeprihvaćenu mizoginiju u našem društvu?” *Klix.ba*, January 21, 2021, <https://www.klix.ba/magazin/ukazuje-li-pokret-nisam-trazila-na-opceprihvacenu-mizoginiju-u-nasem-drustvu/210121127>, with the caption: “The page ‘I Didn't Ask For It’ was launched on January 18. Then Pandora's box was opened and every day there are more and more posts on this platform in which women and girls anonymously talk about the sexual violence they have experienced – both verbally and physically”.

³⁰ “One of their typical features is resignation. When the ashes of Pompeii’s statues were dug out, it was observed that the men were caught in movements of revolt, defying the sky or trying to flee, while the women were bent, withdrawn into themselves, turning their faces toward the earth. They know they are powerless against things: volcanoes, policemen, employers, or men. ‘Women are made to suffer,’ they say; ‘it's life—nothing can be done about it.’” See: Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 728.

³¹ Here are several examples from the web page <https://www.nisamtrazila.org/>: “Why am I writing all this? To make it easier for me [to do it] anonymously. And I would like to tell you that there is no adequate punishment for abusers. And if they were sentenced to thousands of years in prison, if they rolled over in their graves for hundreds of years, it wouldn't be enough. Nothing will compensate for my mutilation. [...] Who and in what way will pay for my lost, cut, mutilated, painful heart? Who will give me back my years and in what way? To erase horrors? Make me normal again? The system makes fun of us with funny stories how sometimes abusers are punished. And society... society stones us as much as the abuser. A never-ending circle.” (<https://www.nisamtrazila.org/svjedocanstva/nisamtrazila-pria-531>); “In short, I feel emotionally disabled because I try to forget everything ugly and in that way I miss so many beautiful things. I feel guilty because he is still working and probably has another victim. I feel helpless because I already tried to tell someone twice, but both the teacher and my mother turned a deaf ear to my words. I'm just not brave enough and capable enough to report him myself. Even if I report him, I would be to blame before the system, he would get away with it because after eight years I have no evidence, and even if he ended up in prison, thanks to the system, he would get out before he was locked up.” (nisamtrazila@org/svjedocanstva/nisamtrazila-pria-546);

³² Among those the crucial one being *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and The State* From 1884. See: Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Chippendale, N.S.W.: Resistance Books, 2004).

³³ Ana Maskalan, “Place of Women’s Rights in Supra-Nation-Building: Comparison of Socialist Yugoslavia and the European Union,” *Croatian Political Science Review* 59, no. 2 (2022): 43-49.

³⁴ Tito, 1942, as cited in Vladimir Čerkez, *Bosanski Petrovac u NOB: zbornik sjećanja*, volume 4 (Bosanski Petrovac: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR-a, 1974), 7.

³⁵ “Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia,” World statesmen.org, accessed September 3, 2022, article 24, <https://www.worldstatesmen.org/Yugoslavia-Constitution1974.pdf>.

³⁶ “Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia”, article 191.

³⁷ It is worth noting that in the 1980s, the weakened political commitment to women's human rights was replaced by an activist one, since various feminist groups became involved in Yugoslavia at that time. In 1982, 33 years after the publication of the original book, a translation of *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir was published in Serbia. Unfortunately, the Croatian version was created much later – in 2016. For Serbian version see: Simone de Beauvoir, *Drugi pol*, trans. Zorica Milosavljević and Mirjana Vukmirović (Beograd:

Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1982). For Croatian version see: Simone de Beauvoir, *Drugi spol*, trans. Mirna Šimat (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2016).

³⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, “Interview with Simone de Beauvoir: The Second Sex 25 Years Later,” by John Gerassi, *Society*, Jan-Feb 1976, accessed September 3, 2022, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/1976/interview.htm>.

³⁹ “Dogmatic and Stalinist Marxism carried out a vulgar reduction of the ‘women's question’ to a class question. With this reductionism, the ‘women's question’ is not even raised, because the problem of women's equality is viewed from the point of view of what is ‘now’ possible and ‘later’, that is, its complete solution in a classless society”. Blaženka Despot, *Žensko pitanje i socijalističko samoupravljanje* (Zagreb: Cekade, 1987), 109.

⁴⁰ She coined this phenomenon *inaugural paradox*. See: Gordana Bosanac, “Još jednom o nazivlju političkog iluzionizma: inauguralni paradoks,” *Philosophical Investigations* 38, no. 1 (2018): 186–187, <https://doi.org/10.21464/fi38114>.

⁴¹ Mitja Velikonja, “Lost in Transition,” *East European Politics and Societies* 23, no. 4 (2009): 537, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325409345140>.

⁴² It should be taken into account that the phenomena described here are not absolutely identical in all the Balkan countries discussed in this paper. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, each country went its own way, and it cannot be claimed that the transition processes were equally (un)favourable everywhere. Also, while Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were actively at war, Slovenia and Montenegro suffered the consequences of wars and war casualties to a significantly lesser extent. Despite this, common political and economic heritage, culture and similar languages, as well as mutual population fluctuations make certain comparisons and conclusions applicable to the “I Didn't Ask for It” phenomenon.

⁴³ Stephanie L. Schmid, “Date Rape/Acquaintance Rape,” in *Encyclopaedia of Rape*, ed. Merrill D. Smith (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 54-56.

⁴⁴ Ian James Kidd, Jose Medina, and Jr Gaile Pohlhaus, “Introduction to The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. (London: Routledge, 2019), 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*.

⁴⁶ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 91.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁸ Consider the next sentence published on a Twitter page #Nisam Prijavila (*I Didn't Report*): “Neither groping nor grasping at school #I Didn't Report because I didn't know how to talk about it, what the problem really is, how I really feel and what needs to happen to stop it. The story about those things was solved by parents with books about how babies are born, but it was not discussed at school”. Milica Jovanović (@PlaceSoft), Twitter post, 26 December 2012, 9:52 a.m., <https://twitter.com/PlaceSoft>.

⁴⁹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 150.

⁵⁰ Charles W. Mills, “Ideology,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. (London: Routledge, 2019), 105.

⁵¹ Here I deliberately do not distinguish between the usual interpretations of the reasons for war rapes, and I am more focused on their consequences. For an interesting discussion on the reasons see: Jonathan Gottschall, “Explaining Wartime Rape,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 41, no. 2 (2004): 129–36

⁵² Cindy S. Snyder, Wesley J. Gabbard, J. Dean May, and Nihada Zulcic, “On the Battleground of Women's Bodies,” *Affilia* 21, no. 2 (2006): 189.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵⁴ Here are some of the comments following the original article from January 2021 on Milena Radulović's case (Mastilović Jasnić, "Poznata mlada glumica,"): "Rape is rape only if it is reported on the same day or the next day at the latest. It is now fashionable that almost all actresses were raped, but once upon a time, that is something completely different. You are not going to get a role – he raped me. No money – he raped me"; "Careful with that. After all, these are professional actresses."; "So why have you been silent until now? For 8 years, you gave him the opportunity to abuse other girls as well"; "The girl chose to become famous in this way. Rape can be once, but not more. Stupidity!!!"; "Now, this is not paedophilia, the girls were older than 14, and rape requires force or a serious threat.... This (if it's true) looks more like an old man taking advantage of the fact that he is smarter and more experienced than young girls."; "If someone had stolen her cell phone, she would have reported it, for rape she was silent. Or else the parents played the main role in keeping quiet in order to get a shortcut to success, i.e. the price of success.";

⁵⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, "Pour Djamilia," *Le Monde*, June 1, 1960, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1960/06/02/pour-djamila-boupacha_2092987_1819218.html.

⁵⁶ See for example: Bratoljub Klaić, "prostitucija [prostitution]," in *Rječnik stranih riječi A - Z* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice Hrvatske, 1986), 1102; Želimir Domović, Šime Anić, and Nikola Klaić, "prostituirati se [to prostitute]," in *Rječnik stranih riječi: tuđice, posuđenice, izrazi, kratice i fraze* (Zagreb: Sani-Plus, 2002), 1176.

⁵⁷ Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 835.

⁵⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome*, (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1972), 26.

⁵⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 445.

⁶⁰ Marina Blagojević, "Muški identiteti i nasilje na Balkanu," *Zeničke sveske - Časopis za društvenu fenomenologiju i kulturnu dijalogiku*, no. 17 (2013): 100.

⁶¹ Here, I draw attention to the atrocious statement of the Croatian President Zoran Milanović, who claimed the following about sexual abuse: "When actresses who don't get out of bed for less than five million dollars complain about it, I don't really see it as something I should be interested in. When this is done by women who are employees, officials, mothers or younger colleagues at the Academy, that's a problem". See: *Petrinja: Milanović o optužbama za seksualno zlostavljanje na fakultetima*, YouTube, HINA multimedija, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFgWkodTvIA>.

⁶² Unfortunately, at the time of writing this paper, not a single centre was open. In addition to the usual financial reasons, the cause should also be sought in the COVID-19 pandemic, which further slowed down numerous political and social processes.

⁶³ Here I pay attention to the topic of political mobilization, which is covered in a chapter by Elaine Stavro and her take on Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of women's participation in political activism (Elaine Stavro, "The Role of Affective Reflexivity in Political Mobilization", *Simone de Beauvoir: A Toolkit for the 21st*).

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