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INVISIBLE ARCHIVES:
MAKEDONKA – ORGAN OF THE WAF (1944–1952),
HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES AND CULTURAL MEMORY

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Annotation. Review of the collective volume “*Invisible Archives: Makedonka – Organ of the WAF (1944–1952), historical experiences and cultural memory*”, published by the Centre for Research of Nationalism and Culture (CINIK), Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, 2022. ISBN 978-608-66464-7-9.

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Studying the history of women is essential for understanding the socialist transformation of social relations in communist countries. By examining women's roles, rights, and contributions within these societies, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of gender relations and the challenges women face in both public and private spheres. Researching the history of women not only allows us to measure the impact of ideology and political systems

on gender dynamics, but also to unearth the everyday life of a bygone era. The appearance of the collective volume *Invisible Archives: Makedonka – Organ of the WAF (1944–1952), historical experiences and cultural memory*¹ attempts to fill a gap in the current historiography of the Republic of North Macedonia, by shedding light on the history of women and on gender relations in a broader sense. In this review, I will share my thoughts on the book whilst highlighting some key research vectors, that are missing from the edition but might prove fruitful in any subsequent research on the topic.

Researching the struggles and achievements of women under communist regimes offers valuable lessons for societies today, giving us plausible insights that increase our capacity to do a proper critical assessment of the effectiveness of different approaches to gender equality. In this regard, the collective monograph has a timely appearance on the academic landscape of the Republic of North Macedonia. Published in 2022 by the Center for Research of Nationalism and Culture (CINIK), Skopje, it saw its readers in the last year of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, and in the fourth year of the country's revitalized political efforts towards joining the European Union. In this regard, the collective volume is positioned to serve as a starting point for a wide spectrum of follow-up research on gender and identity, which is a crucial topic in every EU member state. This was well understood by the authors: Ivana Pantelić [ORCID [0000-0002-1286-563X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1286-563X)], Ivana Hadjievska [ORCID [0000-0002-0992-2859](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0992-2859)], Jana Kocevaska², Darko Leitner-Stojanov³, Manja Velichkovska⁴, Hristina Ivanoska⁵ and Jelena Milinković [ORCID [0000-0002-1792-7799](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1792-7799)], whose contributions to the edition discuss a plethora of topics.

The primary research unit of the book is the “Makedonka” magazine, issued by the Women’s Antifascist Front (WAF; hence in this review: AFŽ – *Antifašistički front na ženite na Makedonija*) – a mass Communist party-controlled organization, aiming to influence and transform women's lives in socialist Yugoslavia. The periodical played a significant role in various processes within society aimed at promoting women's involvement in political participation and mobilizing them for the immediate reconstruction of crucial infrastructure and facilities following the war. “Makedonka” also advocated for women's education and literacy, and encouraged

¹ HADJIEVSKA, Ivana; KOCEVSKA, Jana (eds.) *Invisible Archives: Makedonka – Organ of the WAF (1944-1952), historical experiences and cultural memory*. Skopje: Centre for Research of Nationalism and Culture (CINIK), 2022. ISBN 978-608-66464-7-9. Available from: <https://nevidliviarhivi.mk/pdf-category/texts/> [Accessed: 2024-01-20].

² KOCEVSKA, Jana [URL <https://mestozensk.org/index.php/en/artist-collaborator/jana-kocevaska>]

³ LEITNER-STOJANOV, Darko [URL <https://www.oew.ac.at/ihb/personen/leitner-stojanov-darko/>]

⁴ VELICHKOVSKA, Manja [URL <https://sko.academia.edu/ManjaVelichkovska/Papers>]

⁵ IVANOSKA, Hristina [URL <https://www.gendernet.info/profile/hristina-ivanoska-2/>]

women's economic independence by pushing them towards becoming industrial workers in possession of a monthly wage. The magazine promoted healthcare and social welfare policies, emphasizing the importance of cultural advancement and physical activities. All of these elements constitute a fundamental component of the social development package of all post-war European nations. However, in Eastern Europe (including Tito's Yugoslavia), they are categorized under the banner of Stalinism, a crucial aspect that is not explicitly addressed in the book.

The publication commences with a foreword by Ivana Pantelić, in which she addresses the creation of the AFŽ by the Communist party of Yugoslavia. She correctly links it to the Soviet “Ženotdel”, serving as the model being followed by the Communist party of Yugoslavia (CPY). However, Pantelić is rather vague on the very nature of the “Ženotdel”, which is a Party-controlled mass organization, whose main task is to subjugate the society and thus to ensure the longevity of the totalitarian system, just as any other Party-controlled mass organization under Stalinism. Pantelić's foreword is followed by an introduction to the volume, written by Ivana Hadjievaska and Jana Kocevaska. It gives us an overview of how “Makedonka” came into being and shares details on how the process of research went. Although it is acknowledged that the magazine “*remained closely linked to the needs of the state*” (p. 35), the introduction falls short in giving the characteristics of this state, which is a (pre-)totalitarian one following closely the Stalinist doctrines in state and nationhood building. This disclosure (or even – “disclaimer”) should have held a central part in the introduction to the volume, since Tito's implementation of Stalinism acts as the social conjunctive (and thus – connotative) nexus, in which the magazine appeared.

The aforementioned omission in the introduction puts high expectations towards Ivana Hadjievaska's section of the book, ambitiously labelled “*Political history. ‘Political advancement of women’: forms of political participation of women in socialist Macedonia (1944–1953)*”. Unfortunately, her pages also do not mention totalitarianism (nor Stalinism, nor the Yugoslavia-specific Titoism), nor do they attempt to define the type of society, in which “Makedonka” appeared. Another weak point in her analysis is the lack of clarification how socialism advanced in the newly established statehood formation of Yugoslav Macedonia; thus, the reader remains with the impression that socialism there happened overnight. And this is not true, since socialism itself is a complex system that involves the corresponding socialist political, social, and economic relations in society, which require a considerable amount of time to establish. Democratic Federal Macedonia (2.VIII.1944 – 31.I.1946) featured a (pre-)totalitarian society that was not even “socialist”; it had a Party-subjugated capitalist economy, where membership in the Communist party (or in the Party's mass organizations) was a sign of political loyalty to the new regime

and a precondition for an individual to be able to work in enterprises and manufactures, all of them under communist control. Also, the Party-controlled mass organizations were far away from encompassing the whole society; they gradually increased their geographic and demographic reach in the first years of the communist regime.

The same critique pertains to the section of the book authored by Jana Kocevská, which is also ambitiously labelled "*Social relations: Healthcare and nurturing care policies on the pages of Makedonka*". Since the chapter has "*Social relations*" in its title, one expects to find there a clear emphasis on the command-administrative way in which the Party managed basically all the processes within society. Instead, the reader is left in the dark regarding the very nature of the (pre-)totalitarian society and the communist regime. In Kocevská's analysis, the most striking part is the lack of Titoism-aware nuancing of "voluntary" work; the reader remains with the impression that this hard unpaid work was indeed voluntary, but in totalitarianism the word shall be at least put in brackets, since the refusal of participating in "voluntary" actions might lead to repression. Thus, all these "voluntary" actions do not display some form of (post-)revolutionary enthusiasm, but rather the political and command-administrative power the Party managed to accumulate and deploy successfully. Even though Kocevská successfully manages to showcase the advancements in healthcare and nurturing care in the first years of the communist regime, the omitted analysis of the social relations under totalitarianism renders her contribution biased, or even more – as a form of paltering.

The aforementioned criticism set aside, the pages written by Ivana Pantelić, Ivana Hadjievská and Jana Kocevská, are rich on information and make clear the importance of the topic being discussed. The scientific contribution of these three initial sections of the book shall not be underestimated, since they give a solid backbone on which further research can be done. Even though under the veil of Titoism, the emancipatory role of the AFŽ is clearly stated by the authors, together with the long-term de-patriarchalization potential the mass organization held. Furthermore, positioning the AFŽ as a place for communication amongst women that increases their self-confidence, is something which shall always be highlighted as a factor of significant importance for the advancement of the society. The three sections also possess the merit of guiding the reader towards comprehending the intricate nature of social processes and the diverse perspectives that should be considered when examining the activities of (AFŽ-organized) women in Tito's Yugoslavia. The authors managed to discuss a plethora of topics, clearly showing how during the years between 1945 and 1953, radical changes occurred in the position of women in society and the family. The Yugoslav constitution granted women equality with men, equal pay, and a spectrum of social benefits for mothers and children; thus the AFŽ was at

the forefront in implementing these rights into the everyday practice. It is shown to the reader how “Makedonka” aimed to unite all women in the realization of AFŽ’s goals and presented the ideological image of the new socialist Macedonian woman as a politically conscious citizen involved in building the state. The authors of these first three sections agree on the thesis that while the magazine cannot be defined as feminist due to the characteristics of the socialist society, it still promoted the political advancement of women. It is also acknowledged that in the 1950s, women’s political participation declined due to a change of the state’s policy towards them. Thus, the concept of an emancipated woman shifted towards that of an enlightened contemporary woman – a key finding that is crucial to possible follow-up (post 1953) research on the topics raised by the book.

The fourth section of the collective volume is written by Darko Leitner-Stojanov, who analyses the evolving themes on education within “Makedonka”. By scrutinizing the propaganda package in the magazine, Leitner-Stojanov manages to track the shift of the Party’s understanding of the place women shall have in the Yugoslav society. One of the key aspects of his analysis is the division between women as subjects of change and women as torch-bearers of change. The readers of the magazine (i.e. AFŽ-organized women, and women in AFŽ-held reading groups) were considered agents of transformation, responsible for the successes and failures of the campaigns, while women activists and teachers were portrayed as propagandists of said transformation. Instead of simply championing the Party’s propaganda in the magazine, the author also inclines the reader towards understanding that the Party is at the forefront of all that happens within the society. This is most obvious inside the question, which also serves as one of his contributions’ headings: *“Literacy campaigns: cultural and educational advancement and gender emancipation or a party-political mobilization?”*. The predominantly positive impression of Leitner-Stojanov’s work is further complemented by the fact that he even stressed one of the peculiarities of the communist system, where a unity between education and propaganda is observed.

The following section of the book is written by Manja Veličkovska, who analyses the literary aspects of “Makedonka”. The positioning of her contribution right after Leitner-Stojanov’s is a successful one, since she explores the intertextual, subversive, and propagandist narrative strategies in the literary contributions published in the magazine. Veličkovska found that these narratives aimed to create solidarity with female fighters in the war; thus to articulate the cultural shock caused by women’s new social roles in the post-war period, where the new society champions women’s emancipation by opposing religious, patriarchal, and class hegemonies. Even though she doesn’t analyse the historical and social conditions that shaped the

outlook of the said propaganda, her contribution offers a splendid in-depth dive into the connotative nexuses of the Party's agitation package towards women.

The next and final section of the collective volume is dubbed “artistic research”, conducted by the visual artist Hristina Ivanoska. Her contribution to the volume is provocative, as it explores the vibrant realm of *experiencing femaleness*, where sexuality and emancipation are intertwined to showcase women's empowerment and liberation from long-standing taboos. Ivanoska's work digs into culture, emotions and artistic interpretation to unravel the complexity of desires, unveiling a more inclusive and authentic understanding of *being a woman*. She positions emancipation, (self-)expression, empowerment, sexuality, inclusivity, (self-)discovery and autonomy on a common plane, thus forming a formidable counter-narrative to the patriarchal society. The visual artist's contribution to the collective volume could only benefit, if an analytical text was present alongside the artistic findings; without it, interpreting Ivanoska's work is solely in the hands of the reader, which may or may not be fruitful. While still in the realm of artistic interpretation and emotions, one is tempted to question how compatible is the communist regime (and authoritarian regimes in general) with *experiencing femaleness*?

The epilogue to the collective volume, written by Jelena Milinković, should have probably been the introduction to the said one. Unlike her colleagues from the first two sections of the book, who simply mention the existence of Agitprop, Milinković clearly stresses the importance of the communist party department. The researcher argues that “*‘Makedonka’ belongs to the agitprop period, and in this context, it is yet another example of the socialist cultural modelling, that is, it is an implementation of the politics of agitprop, based on the belief that there cannot be any progress for the country without culture*” (p. 267). This explanation elevates a nation-building argument, but unfortunately obscures a different possible one: ensuring the viability of the regime. That said, Milinković is the only one from the authors collective that mentions the magazine's engagement with building different communist leader personality cults, especially Tito's one. The researcher even goes a step further by stating that the cultural model is heavily influenced by the communist party, and that it is an agitation and propagandist one; thus “*it was not of particular importance who performed the role of the editor formally*” (p. 267). This clear emphasis on the role of the Party deserves admiration, and putting personality cults and Agitprop at the forefront of the reader's attention, signifies Milinković's awareness of the characteristics of the totalitarian model, imported from the USSR to Tito's Yugoslavia. Even though Milinković is writing the epilogue to the edition, she positions there one of her findings, which shows a clear intertwining between the establishment of a new socialist women's culture and socialist children / pioneer one.

And this clearly shows how the Party utilizes the unlimited political power it possesses towards ensuring eternity to the regime. The predominantly positive impression of Milinković's pages shall be placed next to Leitner-Stojanov's contribution, who also refrained from paltering the reader for the very nature of the communist system.


In conclusion to this review, the overall impression of the collective volume is a mixed one. The book is positioned to serve as the backbone of any follow-up research on the raised topics, but the reader is advised to proceed with caution and by adhering to the established academic principles of critical reading. Although the book manages to state the importance of the themes discussed, and even though it offers a solid amount of information in different fields of social history, refraining from clearly stating the characteristics of the totalitarian system casts the veil of (un)intentional paltering over the researchers' work. The volume's pages try to convince the reader that AFŽ faced limitations and discontent due to directives from the Party and decisions made by men, hindering women's efforts and the effectiveness of the organization. Positioning men and women in a dichotomy, is something which is often found in research that follows the methodology of gender studies, but the reader shall consider it unnecessary, since it only manages to prevaricate the real reasons behind the aforementioned claim. While gender-based stereotypes and discrimination are something that plagues even nowadays societies, the real reasons behind AFŽ's shortcomings stem from the communist system, which is a totalitarian one, and it is common knowledge that in totalitarianism the main driving force is fear. AFŽ is a weapon in the hands of the Party towards establishing the communist regime and insuring its longevity. The values that AFŽ is promoting are those of developed countries, where women and men have equal rights and obligations in the society. However, AFŽ (i.e. the Party) is enforcing these values by following the Stalinist model. It's striking that the book doesn't address these issues; it doesn't even mention words like fear, totalitarianism, Titoism. Thus, I argue that the lack of scrutiny towards the very nature of the system in which the target audience of "Makedonka" lives, inevitably hinders the authors' efforts in their quest. Another issue that is overlooked is the establishing of a new national identity for the majority of the population of Yugoslav Macedonia. Even though that national identity is not within the scope of the book, ignoring the topic inevitably refrains the authors from investigating it. Furthermore, the inclusion of the aforementioned topic would have made it impossible to avoid addressing the issues regarding the totalitarian society, as these two themes are intricately intertwined in the case of Yugoslav Macedonia.




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АРХИВИ НА НЕВИДИМИТЕ:
МАКЕДОНКА – ОРГАН НА АФЖ (1944–1952),
ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ОПИТ И КУЛТУРНА ПАМЕТ

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