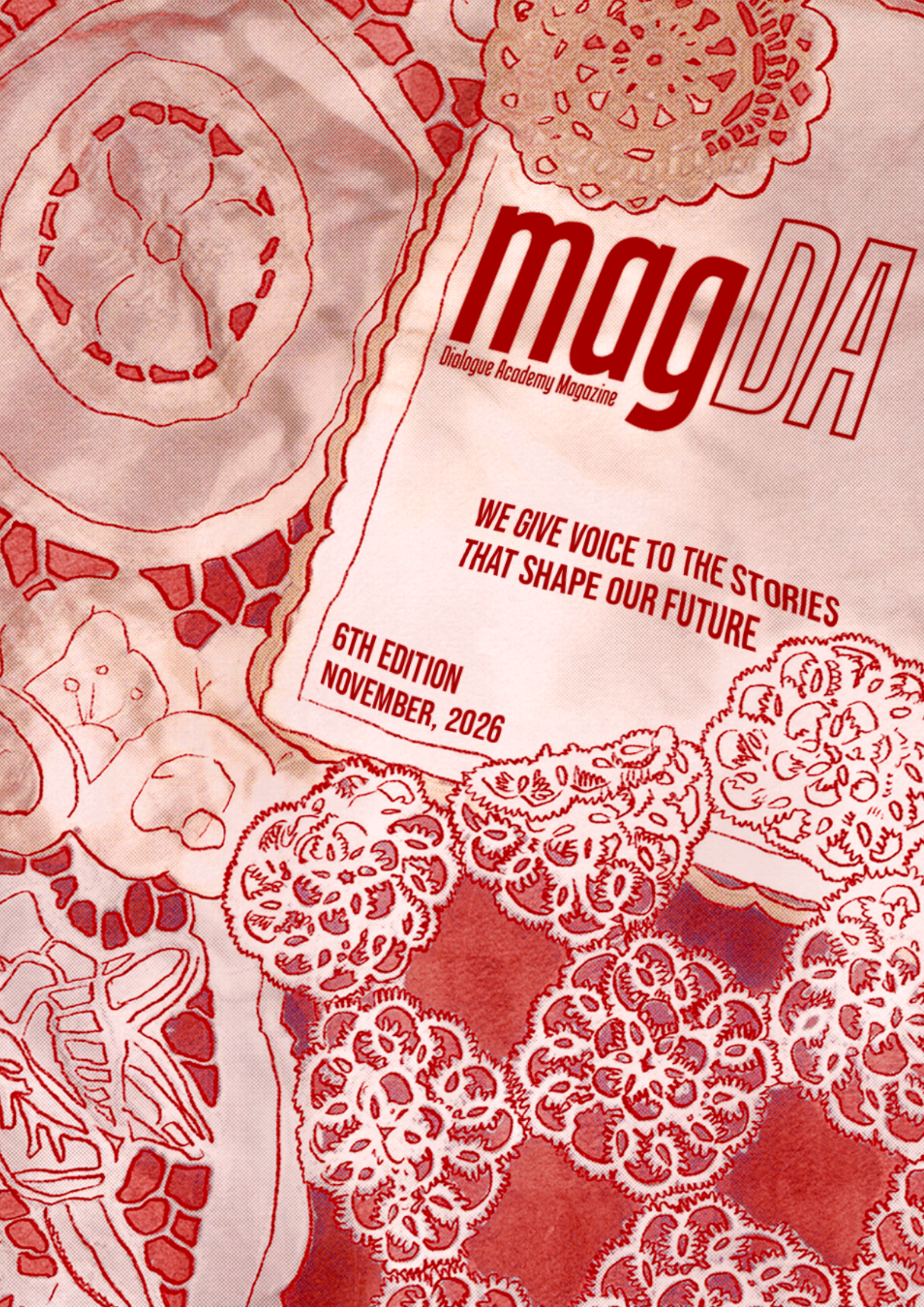

magDA
Dialogue Academy Magazine
WE GIVE VOICE TO THE STORIES
THAT SHAPE OUR FUTURE
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Editor's Note

Dear reader,

We inherit long before we know we're inheriting.
A story. A silence. A gesture. A way of loving, remembering, creating, or surviving. Some things are placed directly into our hands. Others live quietly within us, and we spend years wondering where they came from.

This sixth edition of MagDA follows inheritance to the places where it actually lives: a cezve lifted from the flame just before it spills over, a piece of lead dropped into water, a candle lit during a power cut, a house that will soon make way for a monument, a thread pulled through white linen. Across essays, articles, poems, illustrations, and photography, in more than one language, our contributors trace what is carried through families and communities, often through women's hands: hospitality and superstition, care and creative work, the histories we are taught and the ones we are not.

Again and again, these pages return to hands: the ones that stir, stitch, mend, write, and hold on. Not everything they pass down is gentle. Alongside tenderness come expectations, unpaid labor, silence, and grief, and several writers ask what it costs to carry them.

There is no single answer to what we inherit, and these pages don't pretend to offer one. What connects them is the moment of noticing, when we look at what's been handed to us and ask: What do I carry forward? What do I question? What do I make my own? And what ends with me?
They don't answer that for you. They invite you to look a little closer.

In strength and solidarity,
Aida Fejzullahu, Chief Editor, DA Alumnae 2023
Dardana Fetahu, Editor, DA Alumnae 2017

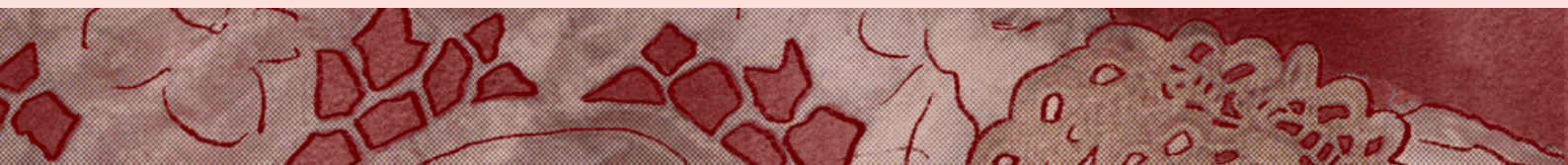


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How do you want your coffee?

Erta Berisha

The coffee is never for us.

By the time my father opens the front door, the cezve has already found its place on the stove. Guests are still exchanging greetings in the hallway while the bitter smell takes over the hallway and the coffee climbs up the rim. He lifts it just before it spills over, waits a moment, then returns it to the flame. Three times, always.

His father taught him that.

I never met my paternal grandfather. Everything I know about him has been inherited in stories told by my aunts, praises from my father and anecdotes my grandma would sit and tell me. I know he never let a guest leave without coffee, and that while neighbors debated politics, land, and whatever else was happening in Istog that week, one of his children was expected to have the coffee ready.

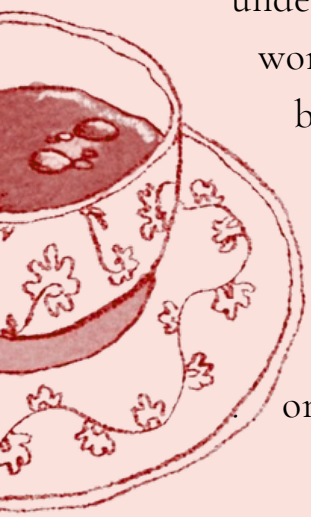
That was simply the ritual of afternoons in our home. Someone arrived, and the coffee was made. The tiny porcelain (filxhanë), white with faded flowers and thin gold rims, came down from the cabinet where they spent the rest of the year waiting. By the time the conversations ended, the coffee had long gone cold.



The first time my father asked me to make it, I reached for the cezve without thinking. No one ever showed me how much coffee belonged in the cezve or how long to wait before lifting it from the flame. The movements were already there, and so was everything else. I learned everyone's habits soon enough: my grandfather drinks his coffee with milk instead of water. My grandmother stirs in honey hers. My mother never wants sugar. My aunt grimaces every time someone hands her a cup that's too bitter. None of those preferences were written down, only learned as habits, passed down from one generation to the next.

I learned the word mikpritje years after I already learned its meaning.

It lived in my fathers habit of putting the coffee on before anyone asked. It lived in knowing a guests preference before they spoke. Looking back, I don't think my family was ever trying to safeguard our hospitality as an Albanian tradition specifically. They were, in a way, protecting a means of seeing other people. The coffee was only the language they used to speak it.
I think that's what I inherited. Not the coffee pot, not three careful boils, nor a recipe. I inherited the instinct to notice and ability to understand that honor is practiced, one ordinary gesture at a time. I wonder how much of who I am arrived like that, before I knew it belonged to me.



Maybe that's how heritage survives.

Children spend years watching the people they love act until one day they start doing the very same things.

Small Magic: Inherited Ways of Negotiating Reality

Dea Džankovic

I remember being handed a small lead figurine in a dark room. I was told to place it under my pillow for the night, and afterwards to throw it into a body of running water without looking back. The woman sitting across from me did not explain what she was doing. She simply prepared the water, placed the piece of lead into a pan above my head, and began salivanje strave (molybdomancy), a practice used across the Balkans to diagnose and cleanse fear, unease, and harmful influences believed to have been cast upon a person.

Growing up in Sandžak, I remember sitting in darkened rooms where older women took upon themselves the task of healing. I remember the lowered voices, the seriousness of the moment, the almost inaudible invocations, the smell of herbs, and the distinct sound of molten lead hitting water.

I remember the strange mixture of fear and comfort: the feeling that something unseen had been acknowledged and that, through this process, it could be released.

Years later, I returned to these practices not as someone searching for proof of whether they worked, nor as an anthropologist attempting to document a disappearing tradition. I returned as an artist.

I come from a multi-ethnic family and was not raised within a single religious tradition. I inherited fragments instead: memories, customs, gestures, and ways of seeing the world. Perhaps because I stood outside a clearly defined spiritual identity, I became interested in forms of knowledge that existed between categories, practices that were neither entirely religious nor entirely secular, neither officially recognized nor completely forgotten.

The hands that carried knowledge

Much of women's healing knowledge in the Balkans was never preserved in the places where knowledge is usually kept. It lived in kitchens, backyards, conversations between women, and in the bodies of those who knew how to perform a ritual, when to perform it, and which words to speak.

The healer was often a neighbour, grandmother, or simply a woman known within her community for her knowledge of herbs, prayers, rituals, and signs. Her authority came not from a certificate, but from trust and recognition.

She could be simultaneously respected and ridiculed, sought out in moments of illness, fear, infertility, grief, or uncertainty, while the knowledge she carried was dismissed as superstition or folklore.

During my research, I turned to ethnographic and anthropological materials, collections of folk literature, and old publications such as Raskovnik, searching for traces of these practices. What I found was a world in which healing was rarely separated into the categories we use today.

Plants, words, gestures, prayers, objects, seasons, places, the body, and the invisible were part of the same system of relating to reality.

This became particularly clear to me through basme: oral healing formulas existing somewhere between poetry, prayer, incantation, and therapeutic practice. Their words do not merely describe reality. They attempt to act upon it.

The formula is not simply recited. It is performed, often through repetition, gesture, touch, herbs, objects, and specific conditions. A basma does not explain suffering. It addresses it. Its language performs the movement it describes: separation, cleansing, restoration.

This understanding of language as action is one of the reasons these traditions feel so close to my own artistic practice. I have always been drawn to repetition, gesture, transformation, cleansing, repair, and collective release. Only much later did I begin to recognize that some of the artistic instincts I considered entirely my own belonged to a much older vocabulary.

This realization became one of the foundations of my current interdisciplinary poetry project Male Magije (Small Magic), which brings together poetry, research, oral tradition, and fragments of women's healing knowledge. The title refers to something small: not spectacular magic, but intimate acts embedded in everyday life. A word spoken quietly. A piece of bread carried close to the body. **A thread tied around something. A prayer whispered at a threshold.** I am interested in what happens when these fragments are not preserved as museum pieces, but allowed to enter another language.

My recent song Basma is one such attempt. Its lyrics are:

Prizivam sve mađije,	**I call upon all the magic,**
velike i male,	**Big and small,**
veštice i vile,	**Witches and fairies,**
aždaje i ale.	**Dragons and monsters.**
Dozivam sve mađije	**I summon all the magic**
koje su zaspale,	**That has fallen asleep,**
sve što mi je uzeto	**Everything that was taken**
sada da mi vrate.	**Now let it return to me.**
Prizivam sve mađije,	**I call upon all the magic,**
od planine do čaršije,	**From the mountain to the streets,**
da oteraju vradžbine,	**To drive away the spells,**
od mahale do kapije.	**From the mahala to the gate.**
Prizivam sve mađije,	**I call upon all the magic,**
idi sad i nađi me,	**Go now and find me,**
idi sad i nađi me,	**Go now and find me,**
idi sad i vrati me.	**Go now and return me.**

I wrote the song as a kind of contemporary invocation, calling back everything that has been taken, forgotten, or put to sleep. In the video, hands move through water, wood, grass, and landscape. I was not trying to recreate a traditional ritual. I was trying to understand what it means to inherit its logic: to call something into being through words, repetition, gesture, and intention.

What happens to knowledge when it disappears?

The more I research these practices, the more I think about what is lost when knowledge that was carried through women's bodies and relationships disappears from everyday life. We often imagine inheritance as something tangible: a house, a piece of land, a family object, a name. But what happens when what is inherited is a way of relating to reality?

The women who carried these practices did not necessarily think of themselves as spiritual practitioners.



** Srills from the music video Basma (2026), direction by Dea Džanković, camera by Anya Ilchenko and Dea Džanković, animation by Jelena Prljević.*

They were women within communities who knew how to make a tea, tie a thread, interpret a sign, say a prayer, perform a basma, cast lead, or recognize when someone needed help. Their knowledge existed because it was needed, and because someone had entrusted it to them.

Today, many of these practices return to us through very different languages: wellness, spirituality, self-development, alternative healing. Sometimes they are transformed into products, stripped of their local histories and communal relationships and repackaged as individual experiences to be purchased.

I am not interested in deciding whether the old practices were true and the new ones false. Nor do I think we should romanticize the past. These traditions existed alongside poverty, patriarchy, fear, and hardship. But they also contained forms of care and knowledge that allowed people to negotiate experiences for which there were no easy explanations.

The question for me is what happens when that knowledge is either forgotten or turned into a commodity. Perhaps we do not need to return to the past. Perhaps we need to learn how to listen to it differently.

Through Small Magic, I am searching for fragments of that inheritance: not a lost truth, but traces of a conversation between those who came before us and those who are still learning how to listen.

What we inherit is not a fixed answer. Sometimes it is simply a pair of hands, a few words, a gesture repeated three times, and the knowledge that, even when we cannot control reality, we have always found ways to negotiate with it.

When Memory Changes Address

Donjeta Rexhbogaj

I learned that our home would be demolished. The municipality of Peja informed us that, according to a new urban plan, our home would need to be removed so a nearby historical monument could be made visible. Compensation had been approved. A replacement house had been secured. We were given a timeline. We would remain in our current home for another year.

There was no sense of urgency in the conversation, no drama. And yet, I remember thinking how strange it was to receive this news after I had just finished writing about the house the first time, about its silences, its layered memory, its unfinishedness (Rexhbogaj, 2025). I had finally tried to understand what it meant to grow up in a space that was never fully mine. And now, before I could reach any kind of conclusion, the house itself was being taken away.

The house my father bought in the early 2000s, after the war, was small and ordinary. Sunlight filled the kitchen. There was a fig tree in the backyard. It was meant to be a new beginning. After years of effort and living far from school and work, the house promised something simple: a normal life. My father painted it, cleaned it, redecorated it with care. He wanted it to feel like ours. He wanted us to grow up without looking over our shoulders.

But the house had a life before us. I learned that early on, when I asked my father who had lived there before. He told me the former owner's name - Misura and that he now lived in Belgrade, with his two sons. That was all. The rest I imagined myself: the boys playing where I later did, the way they might have left, whether they had time to say goodbye.

The house was legally ours. But it carried traces that did not belong to us, a child's sticker inside a closet, an old key no one knew how to use, electricity bills that still arrived with another man's name on them. The house was our shelter, but belonging took time. And even then, it was somehow incomplete.

Over the years, my family settled into the space. We argued, celebrated, burned food, cried, worried about exams. The fig tree bloomed every summer until we had to cut it down to expand the house. At the time, it felt practical, even necessary. Growth requires space. I did not yet know how often removal would accompany growth in my life.

First time writing about the house, I described it as something both mine and not mine. I tried to make peace with that contradiction. I wrote about inherited memory, not only our own, but also the memory of those who left and those who stayed silent. I thought that was the unfinishedness I was meant to carry.

After I wrote the story, the decision came to demolish the house.

This time, unfinishedness became something else. It was no longer just about the past, or about people I would never meet. It became physical and immediate. The house would disappear, not because it was unwanted, but because another kind of memory needed space to be seen.

A historical monument nearby would finally be visible. **Public remembrance required private removal.**

I did not feel anger. I did not protest the decision. I understood the logic. But understanding does not prevent loss; it only gives it a shape. For the first time, I began living in a house I knew would soon no longer exist. Every ordinary moment; cooking, sleeping, opening windows, gained a quiet temporariness. I stopped wondering who had lived there before me. I started wondering what traces of me and my family would remain.

The municipality offered us a replacement house in the same neighborhood, just three or four houses uphill.

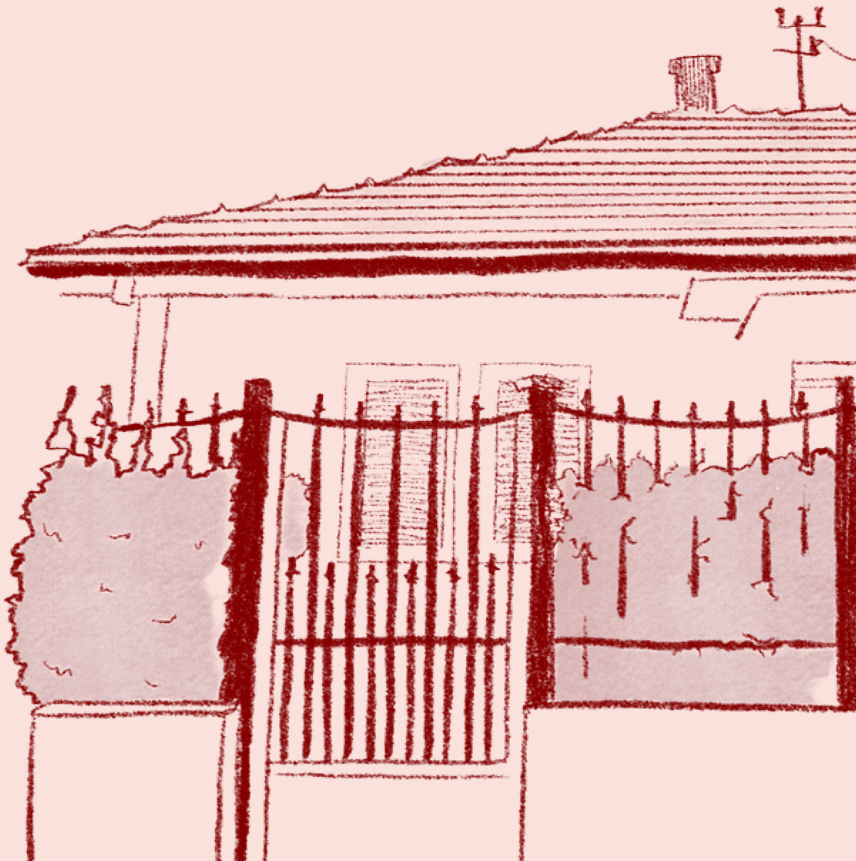
We accepted. The new house had once belonged to an Albanian family

The irony did not escape me. After years of living in a home layered with someone else's absence, we were moving into a space that felt more familiar, and yet, the move itself was another shift. We were not leaving unfinishedness behind. We were relocating it.

The new house is solid and functional. It promises continuity. But it does not erase what came before. The old house will soon be gone, and in its place, the history of Haxhi Zeka's Mill will become more visible. I do not oppose this. I only wonder what kinds of memory are allowed to remain invisible, the quiet, domestic ones, carried in everyday objects and routines.

Unfinishedness, I am learning, is not always something to resolve. Sometimes it is something you live with because resolving it would mean simplifying a truth that refuses to be simple. I could demand closure, insist on finality. Instead, I find myself choosing to carry the ambiguity, not as a burden, but as a form of honesty.

Soon, the once house with the fig tree will be demolished. The walls that held more memory than I will ever know will be gone. The space will look different. People will pass by without knowing what once stood there, what lives were lived quietly inside, what questions were never answered.

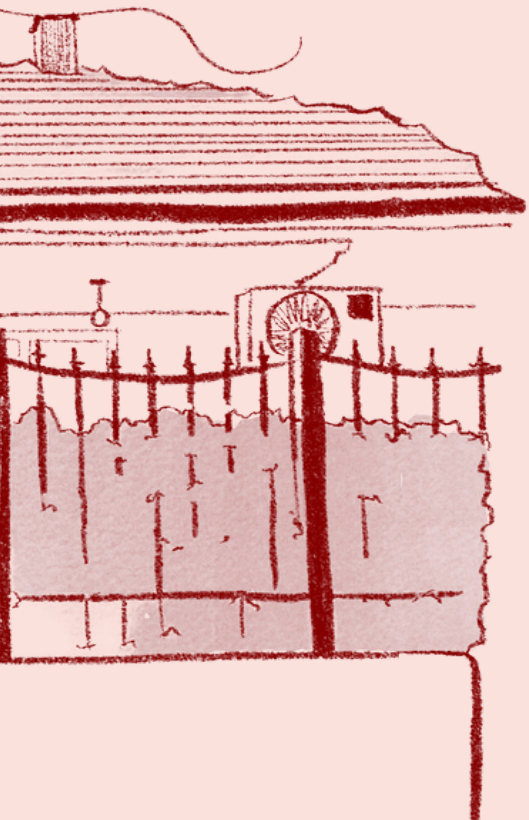


But unfinishedness will not disappear with the rubble. It does not belong to the house alone. It belongs to the space between memory and loss, between what is preserved and what is erased. It moves with us - from one home to another, from one generation to the next.

Some stories remain unfinished not because they were abandoned, but because they refuse to be simplified. They resist closure. They demand to be carried, not resolved.

We will leave this house soon. I will live somewhere else. A monument will stand where my childhood once unfolded. And still, unfinishedness will remain - not as something I am trying to fix, but as something that has shaped how I see, remember and live.

This is what inheritance became.



The care we inherit

Eriona Hoti

Being a woman often comes with expectations long before adulthood begins.

In many societies, girls are introduced early to responsibilities that are considered essential for their future roles within the family. They learn to help their mothers, care for others, cook, clean, and prepare for a life in which their worth is frequently measured by how much they can give of themselves. If they fail to meet these expectations, the blame rarely falls on the social norms that created them; instead, it is often directed toward another woman, usually their mother, who is seen as having failed to teach them properly.

Beyond responsibility, being a woman requires patience. The desires, needs, and priorities of others often take precedence over her own. From a young age, women are socialized to care for others before caring for themselves, internalizing a vision of womanhood rooted in service, sacrifice, and responsibility.

This inheritance is rarely spoken about. It is not written into wills, passed down through family heirlooms, or celebrated as part of cultural heritage. Yet, it is transferred from one generation of women to the next with remarkable consistency: the expectation to carry the emotional, physical, and mental labor that keeps families functioning.

Domestic work is a significant part of this inheritance. While often dismissed as ordinary household tasks, cooking, cleaning, organizing, and caring for family members form the invisible foundation upon which societies are built. Feminist scholar, Silvia Federici, has described domestic labor as one of the most pervasive forms of unpaid work sustaining economic systems. Yet, despite its importance, it remains largely undervalued and taken for granted.

At the same time, boys are frequently raised under different expectations. They are often spared from learning many domestic responsibilities because there is an underlying assumption that someone else, first the mother, later the wife, will take care of those needs, and these differing expectations shape not only childhood experiences but also adult lives.

Marriage and motherhood introduce new layers of responsibility for women. From the moment a child is born, mothers are expected to become the primary caregivers, responsible for their children's health, development, education, and emotional well-being. Many women adjust their professional ambitions, personal goals, and daily routines around these expectations. The labor involved is not only physical but emotional, requiring constant attention, support, and availability.

Besa Gashi's experience illustrates how motherhood can reshape not only a woman's daily responsibilities, but also the trajectory of her professional life.

"*I had to sacrifice my professional career to take care of my two children. At the time, caring for them became my priority, and I felt that I had to put my own professional ambitions aside... and I did so.*" she said.

The burden of care does not end with children.

Women are frequently expected to become the emotional anchors of their households, providing support for partners while managing the countless tasks necessary to sustain family life. They coordinate schedules, organize finances, prepare meals, maintain households, and ensure that the needs of others are met. In many cases, they are also assumed the responsibility for caring for elderly parents and extended family members.

Besa was one of the cases.

"While I was raising my children, I also had to take care of my father-in-law. It was another responsibility I had to carry alongside caring for my family," she said.

This accumulation of responsibilities carries consequences.

The constant balancing of multiple roles affects women's mental health in profound ways, such as chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, difficulties concentrating, and reduced opportunities for social engagement are common outcomes. The expectation that women should manage everything without complaint often leaves little room for acknowledging their own needs.

She later said that she went through tough times for an average of two years with all these responsibilities on her shoulders.

"It was a difficult period in my life. For almost two years, I was constantly trying to balance all of these responsibilities, and I eventually realized that I needed to make space for myself too. I needed to slow down, take a step back, and focus on my own well-being," she added.

Contemporary culture further reinforces these pressures. Women are expected not only to be devoted mothers and supportive partners but also successful professionals, attentive daughters, ideal homemakers, and individuals who meet ever-changing standards of beauty and self-improvement. These expectations are often contradictory and, in many cases, impossible to fulfill simultaneously.

As a result, many women learn to prioritize everyone else's well-being above their own. Self-sacrifice becomes normalized, even celebrated, most of the time. Acts of care are treated as expressions of love rather than labor, making it difficult to recognize the unequal distribution of responsibilities within families and communities.

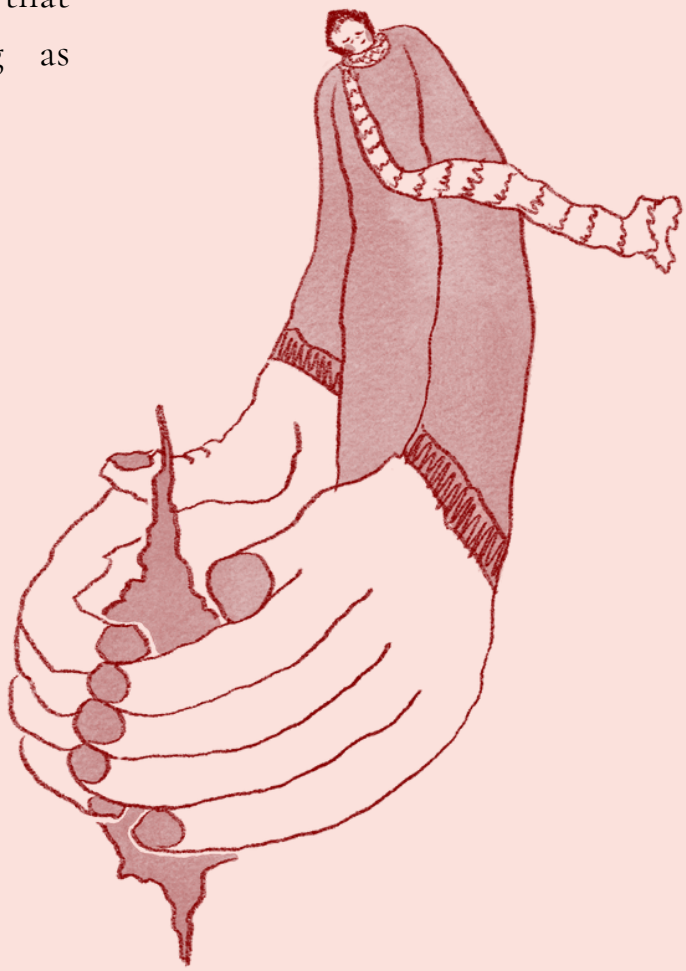
Research has shown that the challenge of balancing paid work and family responsibilities creates significant emotional and psychological strain. Women are often caught between caring for children while at once supporting aging parents, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the "sandwich generation." Positioned between the needs of younger and older generations, they carry an immense and often invisible burden.
Historically, women's well-being has rarely been a priority. In part, this is because many women have become skilled at hiding their exhaustion, presenting resilience even when overwhelmed.

Recognizing this silent inheritance is not about rejecting care. Care is one of the most valuable contributions to human relationships and communities. The problem arises when care is expected from women by default, when it is unevenly distributed, and when those who provide it are left unsupported.

A more equitable society requires acknowledging care as work, sharing responsibilities more fairly, and creating conditions that allow women to care for themselves as well as for others. It requires access to mental health services, supportive policies, and a cultural shift that recognizes women's well-being as essential rather than secondary.

The burden of care should not be an invisible inheritance passed unquestioned from one generation to the next.

Perhaps the most important question we can ask is not what women are willing to sacrifice for others, but why sacrifice remains one of the primary legacies we continue to leave them.



Take these inherited hands as your own

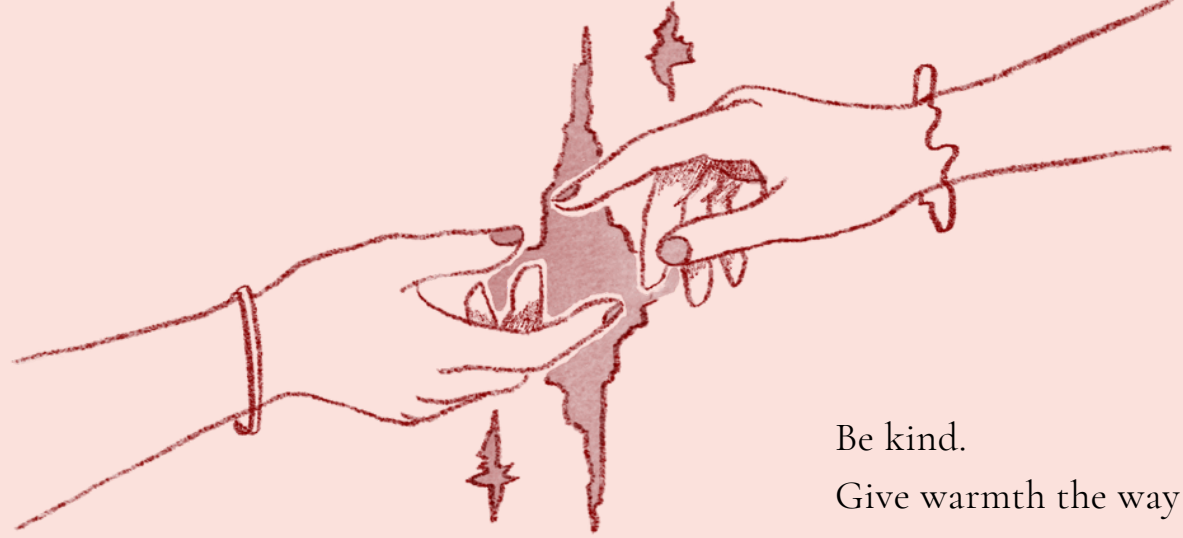
Rilind Sadiku

If you saw the younger you, what would you say to 'em?
A smile.
That's how the conversation would start.
No words. Only silence.
A long hour silence.
the type of silence that prevails during dinner when father's there,
Unfortunate one might say, little do they know that's the way we communicate for the silence speaks louder than words.

Hello.
A simple expression.
One you'd say to a stranger.
yet, that's what would be the icebreaker
How are you? Long time no see
As if this was just a normalcy
To go back to the person you used to be
sitting down, looking at the mirror
with the same posture as the men who came before you,
is it really ME?

Observe.
Since day one
overwhelmed by a reality imposed on you
"You'll be a doctor, cause I couldn't be one!"
each conversation reaching the same conclusion:
A future set before you were even born
Never fitting in the puzzle but breaking parts of it,
Pressure mode on, family knows it all
Figured it out all by now?!

No space for change
Here's the plot twist
What you called knowing was only what they had given you to know
You left the very place you thought you knew the smell of flija layers,
roasted peppers in the autumn air,
the only way of living as a man
shaped by an outdated masculinity
To discover a whole different world
And unlearn what you once called truth



Slow down.
Let the time do its thing
One step at a time
Look back and see how far you've come
Appreciate.
Love yourself, give yourself some credit

For love starts within you
the caressing hands of grandma helping you escape father's rage for your wrongdoing,

the way mother mended torn clothes from your falls, These are inherited hands, long before they were yours
Aim high.

Those same hands that mended torn sleeves at night, whose dreams were shattered before they even existed, whose eyes filled with tears for every achievement of yours, Look how far they've carried you already

Imagine where they'll take you next

Be kind.
Give warmth the way she did,
secretly giving you a piece of fresh baked bread "Hajde me gjyshen mos t'sheh kerkush"
the world rewards kindness in the most unexpected ways after all, "saber selamet"

All the talk, and you still don't answer back?

Is this what you call one sided love?
Can you even hear me from back there?!

Maybe you don't need to answer
Maybe getting this off my chest is more than enough Don't you worry as with time
everything will be alright

Until next time,
little me,

Take these inherited hands as your own, Hope that one day ou'll set yourself free.

The Historian's Craft: A Word or Two on (Women's) History and Those Who Write It

Branka Blizanac

when I say historian, and history, do women come to your mind?

In occupied France during World War II, the historian Marc Bloch was writing his testamentary work on historical methodology, titled The Historian's Craft. As a member of the Resistance writing in the midst of war, he reflected on the role of the historian and how the interpretation of past reality is inevitably bound to the decisions the historian makes in their own time: we are not passive and objective observers; we are craftspeople, and the craft of our trade is historiography. The book actually starts with a simple question that a young boy asks his father: 'Tell me, Daddy. What is the use of history?'

As a history student, this was one of the most significant books for me. But it was not the first. Long before I read it, my younger self in high school had read several books written by women scholars about women's movements: and my world changed. First, I discovered the literary historian Stanislava Barać, reading in her work about the rebellious women in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia who built a feminist counter-public sphere through the press. Then came historian Ivana Pantelić and her Female Partisans as Citizens: Social emancipation of female partisans in Serbia, 1945-1953, which incorporated oral history methodology – conducting interviews with women revolutionaries and examining their lives after the revolution, to my younger self's absolute delight.

In those two books, I was tracing references and citations, finding my next reading list: historians Ivana Dobrivojević Tomić and Sanja Petrović Todosijević, an amazing art historian Ana Panić, and many other women scholars whose work became my primary reading.

This was my feminist education before I ever took gender studies courses, before I read other books at the University. It is important to say that this shaped my direction, leading me to enroll in history in the first place. That sense of discovering something unknown, yet fierce and fundamental, has stayed with me ever since that very first book. Looking back, my case is, on one hand, somewhat of an exception, as I was fortunate enough to meet women who guided me toward the right titles, which I devoured in one breath. I was... just a girl trying to find answers to the same question that the boy asked his father and was lucky enough to stumble across the right pages.

On the other hand, there is something in my journey of discovery that forms a paradigm of its own.

doctor's diagnosis: amnesia

To return briefly to the historian from the beginning, Marc Bloch. Together with his colleagues, the pioneers of the Annales school of historiography, he wrote that the subject of history is human society. If we accept this as the definition of history, the question arises: why is such a massive piece of history missing from most general education – the piece that concerns half of human society: girls, young women, and women throughout all of past time? We remember Nefertiti and Cleopatra, we might remember some of the wives of Henry VIII, but do we know that at the outbreak of the French Revolution it was women who marched on Versailles, or that the February Revolution began with a women's uprising? Regionally speaking, how much do we learn about women in the Yugoslav Anti-Fascist movement, and how much will young girls sitting in classrooms ever hear about them? To know not only that they fought for their right to vote, but also, how it felt for them to do so for the first time in their life?

Women's history sometimes feels like sifting flour through a sieve: rediscovering, over and over, what has been forgotten. The writer Dale Spender wrote about this phenomenon and asked an intriguing question – does it make a difference in our lives if we do not learn about the history of the women's movement? In her answer, she stated: "Yes. It means we believe that we are alone, that we have started a protest that no one before us has ever begun, that we are constantly plagued by doubts that we are vulnerable, without role models, without experience or guidance... Great strength and great joy can be gained from knowing that... many women before us thought the very same things about male power as many women do today."

Put even more simply and directly, our problem has a diagnosis, and it was provided to us like a doctor's answer by the historian Karen Offen: the greatest enemy of feminism today is amnesia, not the lack of history.

space-time and historical continuum

At the time when the major student protests and university blockades began in Belgrade, I moved to a wonderful part of the city, full of old villas and historic buildings. Aside from going to the blockaded faculty, attending the plenary meetings of students, and joining the defiant street marches (where we were protected in equal measure by our male and female peers wearing green vests) I spent those days reading once again. This time, the book truly suited the occasion: it was the autobiographical writings of one of those rebellious anti-fascist women from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a future Partisan and, after the war, the first woman to hold a ministerial position in a Yugoslav government, Mitra Mitrović.

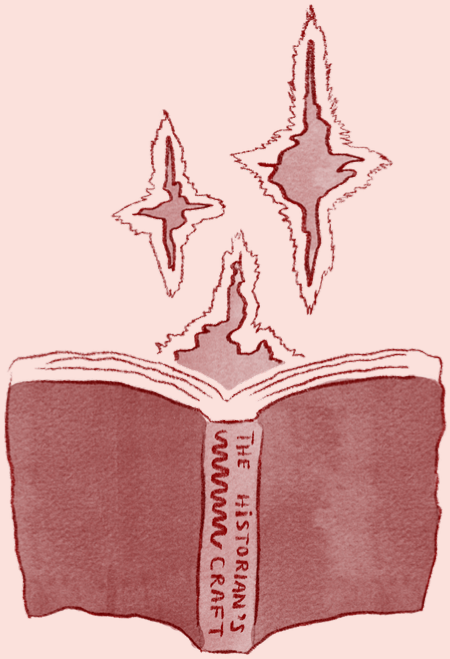
In these writings she recalls how her own rebellion began with the student protests of the 1930s. Throughout her written work, a single idea emerges: her rebellion was never solitary, but collective one. And crucial to that collective strength was that very act of women stepping forward – Mitra alongside her comrades.

One day, returning from a protest and walking through the streets of my new neighborhood, I realized I was on the very same street where the young Mitra Mitrović had lived. I walked further, and across a few blocks, I traced the route where she had described her movements, the covert tasks she carried out, protests she was attending. The exact same streets, the exact same historic buildings. History was all around me.

Throughout that entire walk, I kept thinking about that inevitable historical parallel: about my female peers at our blockaded Faculty of Philosophy who recognized the need to introduce a 'Women's Block' into the student self-organization – a dedicated section for lectures and activities, bringing together female students and professors alike; about myself, walking back from a protest down the very same street as Mitra Mitrović; about the women scholars thanks to whom I had known about these female Partisans since high school. All came to one single conclusion.

If we are continually rediscovering history all around us, fighting this amnesia, what emerges as the common thread? I believe that thread is – the defiance.

last question: a cultural memory, politics of memory or a manifesto of memory?



The significance of historical consciousness regarding this continuity is undeniable. Sheila Rowbotham writes that an awareness of women's past mobilizes us in the present. Looking at the future, one question remains – how do we build this consciousness, and what role should we assign to it? The simple institutional imperative of inserting women into historical chronologies during school history lessons does not seem enough.

When I reflect on historical knowledge and its function in the present, I often return to the concept of cultural memory – as a framework broad enough to describe the memory which is not individual, but a collective one.

To turn back to men for a moment, sociologist Todor Kuljić, writing about the memory of the left, critiques the concept of cultural memory. Instead, he proposes another idea - a manifesto of the left's memory – where, in place of archaeological memory, he suggests an action-oriented memory: one that, just as Rowbotham noted for women's history, calls upon us to mobilize in the present. That is exactly how my younger self felt while reading all those mentioned titles - as if something fiery was growing within her, something broadening horizons and opening landscapes of resistance. I feel that same fire at women's protests, walking in the very same footsteps as Mitra Mitrović and her comrades, whom historiography was written about.

It is precisely for this reason that Stanislava Barać, in the very first and so poignant sentence of her latest monograph, captures women's defiant past: **Our experience is revolutionary.** And indeed it is so: wherever we are in the world, being a woman and reading about our predecessors, carrying their works and legacy within ourselves like a manifesto – means holding the new political potential.

And it is up to us, within the bounds of our own crafts, to preserve the memory and orient it towards action and movement. For one day, a young girl might ask her mother to explain to her what the use of women's history is. And an answer would mean nothing less than a transgenerational revolution: a girl growing up knowing about the history of defiance.



"Although I didn't inherit her cooking skills, I inherited her love. She knows I don't eat just any kind of pite, so she always makes me a smaller pan with cheese, just for me. Hopefully, with time, I'll inherit her cooking skills too!"



Donarta Fetahu

Inherited Hands

Absa Umeri

I spent years believing
my hands belonged to me.

The small scar beneath my thumb,
the paint trapped beneath my nails,
the way my fingers hesitate before
touching anything fragile—

I called them habits,
because no one told me
that habits are often
the oldest language a family speaks.

Some things survive
without asking permission.

Not photographs.
Not houses.
Not even names.

Only the quiet decisions
a body keeps making
long after everyone
who taught them
has disappeared.

Sometimes I catch myself
holding a cup
with both hands,
as if warmth
could escape.

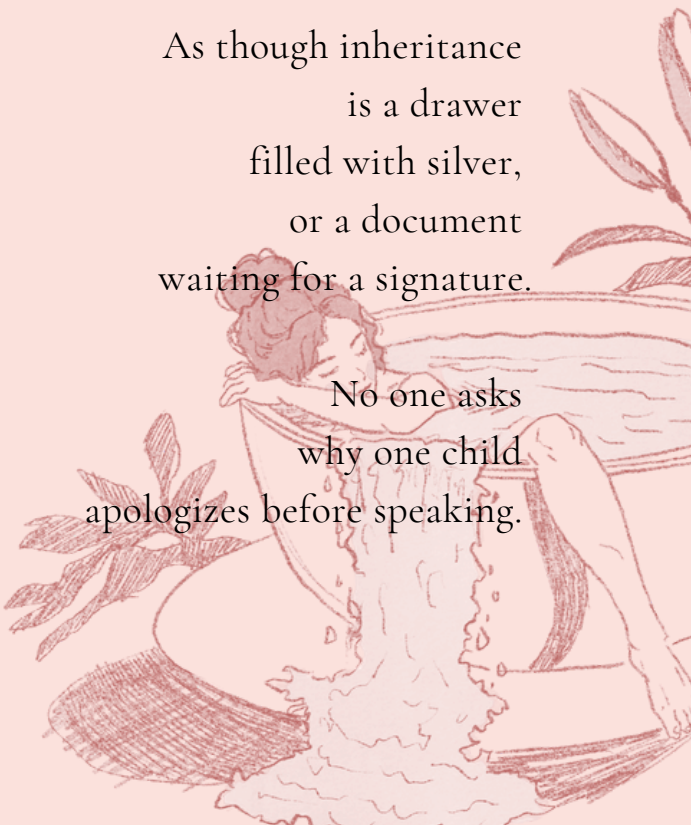
I have no memory
of learning that.

It arrived with me.
Like rain knows
where the earth has already opened.

People ask
what we inherit.

As though inheritance
is a drawer
filled with silver,
or a document
waiting for a signature.

No one asks
why one child
apologizes before speaking.



Or why another
cannot walk away
without turning around one last
time.

Those things travel farther.

I think
every family leaves behind an
invisible craft.

Some teach their children how to
build.

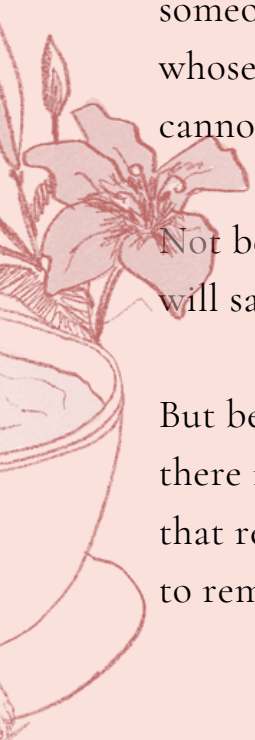
Some teach them
how to survive.

Some become so fluent in silence
that it begins
to answer for them.

And then,
once in a while,
someone is born
whose hands
cannot stop making.

Not because making
will save the world.

But because
there is an ache
that refuses
to remain unnamed.



So they stitch.

Or carve.
Or write.
Or paint.

Until the table is covered with proof
that something gentle managed to
outlive
everything that tried
to make it disappear.

Perhaps
that is the only inheritance worth
keeping.

Not blood.
Not history.

But the strange refusal to let beauty
end with you.

And if these hands
belong to anyone
before they belong to me,
I hope they recognize what they
became.

Not perfect.
Not healed.

Just finally allowed
to make
what they had been carrying all
along.

My Grandmother Embroidered. I prompt.

Ivana Jankovic

There is something strangely comforting about watching someone's hands create.
A grandmother pulling a thread through white linen. A potter shaping wet clay. A photographer adjusting the focus before pressing the shutter. An architect sketching the first lines of a building. A designer moving rectangles across a screen until, suddenly, they make sense.
The tools change.
The gesture doesn't.
For as long as we have existed, we have tried to leave traces of ourselves in the world. Sometimes in fabric. Sometimes in stone. Sometimes on paper. Today, increasingly, on screens.
Every act of creation is evidence that someone stopped.
Stopped walking.
Stopped scrolling.
Stopped rushing.
Long enough to notice something worth remembering.
Worth preserving.
Worth bringing into existence.
Maybe creation has always begun the same way.

Not with talent.
But with attention.

We often tell the history of humanity through inventions. Through the wheel, the printing press, the steam engine, the computer, artificial intelligence. We remember the tools because they changed what people could do.

Far less often do we ask what never changed.

Perhaps creation has never really been about the tools.

Perhaps it has always been about the need. The need to leave the world slightly different than we found it.

What We Really Inherit?

My grandmother embroidered.
Not because embroidery was her passion, but because it belonged to the long list of things a woman was simply expected to know. Cooking. Sewing. Knitting. Preserving. Mending.

These were not hobbies waiting to be discovered. They were responsibilities waiting to be fulfilled.

When we look back at those hands, it is tempting to admire only the beauty of what they made. But beauty was rarely the purpose.

Utility was.
Expectation was.
Survival was.

Women's creativity existed long before society learned to recognize it as creativity. It lived quietly inside everyday life.

Inside carefully stitched flowers.
Inside handwritten recipes.
Inside clothes repaired one more time instead of thrown away.

Inside work that was expected, necessary, and therefore almost invisible. The hands created.

Whether anyone called it art or not.
Today, something remarkable has changed.

Many women spend their evenings learning pottery.

They learn embroidery from YouTube tutorials.

They paint.
They carve.
They restore old furniture.
They take photographs.

They write stories no one asked them to write.

Curiously, many of the things that once symbolized obligation are returning as leisure. Not because we have forgotten history, but because history changed us.

The activity stayed remarkably similar. Its meaning changed completely.

Freedom changes the meaning of creation.

When creation is no longer tied to expectation, it becomes an expression. When it is no longer required, it becomes chosen. And perhaps that is why it becomes meaningful in an entirely new way.
What happens to us when creation becomes a choice instead of an obligation?

What happens when we no longer make things because survival demands it, but because something inside us still does?

Why do people who spend entire days behind screens willingly choose activities that are slow, repetitive and inefficient?

Why does a hand-shaped ceramic cup feel different from one bought in a store?

Why does a photograph we took ourselves stay with us longer than hundreds we scroll past every day?
Not because they are objectively better.



Because they contain evidence of presence. Of time.
Of intention.

They remind us that creating is not only about producing something.

It is also about becoming someone.
The Freedom to Mean Something
Every generation inherits different tools, but the same human desire: to leave the world slightly different than they found it.
Our grandmothers did it with needles. Others did it with books. Some with cameras. Some with laboratories. Some with code. Some with movements that changed societies.

The medium has never been the inheritance. The desire has.
For a long time, we assumed that freedom meant freedom from work, but perhaps we misunderstood. Perhaps one of the greatest forms of freedom is the freedom to create without having to justify why.

To paint badly.
To write poems no one will publish.

To knit a scarf when buying one would be easier.

To make photographs that never leave our hard drive.

To build something that exists for no reason other than the simple joy of having brought it into the world.

The greatest freedom women have inherited is not the freedom to create. It is the freedom to choose what their creation will mean.

To some, it will become a profession.

To others, resistance.

To others, healing.

To others, research.

Motherhood.

Architecture.

Photography.

Music.

Science.

Or a ceramic cup that sits quietly on a kitchen shelf, reminding its maker that not everything valuable needs to be efficient.

Maybe this is what we inherit.

Not our grandmothers' stitches.

Not their recipes.

Not even their craft.

We inherit their unfinished conversation with the world.

Each generation simply continues it in its own language.
Freedom did not give women creativity.
It gave them ownership over it.

Before we had names, there was war

Çlirimtare Janazaj & Arianit Kukleci

"Babies are said to inherit more than just the genes of their parents. Through chemical and hormonal release within the mother's body, they are said to "feel" whatever a mother does. Pondering over this idea, we realise that inheritance does go beyond the material holding; one inherits feelings and identities." - *Vivette Glover*

What is inheritance, one may ask themselves?! A broad question indeed; however, what is inherited goes beyond that. It goes to the way we feel, speak, and at times, think. As a saying goes, "A child is like a blank CD"; they record everything and incorporate it into their way of life. Through two personal voices and two intertwined stories, we will try to share a bit of glimpses of love that we, as post-war children, have recorded and inherited within us during these years of life

Here, we'll try to reflect on the experiences that shaped us, feelings of sacrifice, endurance, and hope, as well as the ways in which the legacy of war continues to live within our everyday lives.

While for some in the world, time may split in two between before and after Christ, to me, it's a time split between pre-war and post-war. Maybe it has to do with the correlation that after the war ended, the century also changed, and with it, for us, a new era was ushered in. However, from a personal perspective, we would not have a definitive answer.

To be completely honest, I am not fully aware of when I first became acquainted with the notion of war. If, for some, that is something learned in school, for me, it feels as if I was born with that notion already within me.

For some who were born while the war was still raging, they were born into it.

No fancy welcome-home parties, even though, until late, we did not have such a notion within our culture. There was still a form of celebration when a newborn was first brought into their house. Such was the beginning for me, being brought back from the hospital to the house of my dad's cousins, since our house and the kulla (traditional stone tower houses in Kosovo, historically used as family homes and defensive structures) were both burnt. However, what does one do when there is no house to go back to?!

Being run away from their houses, some born while fleeing, some in refugee camps, the feelings of fear, sadness, and uncertainty are carried within me, though some say newborns do not remember. Parents who carried within them the burden of trauma, sacrifices, and pain did their best not to expose us to the harsh reality of war.

However, growing up, a child still has questions. Why does the house still have the blackened signs over the roof? The wall cracks on the facades and the burned-down kulla, which was never rebuilt.

Questions roaming a child's mind over why that is. How come so many houses have the same signs?! Though small in age, the reality of coincidence on all of them is hard to swallow. What are the dark forces giving nightmares at night? Since war, at that time, did not have a face, a name, or an identity. They were only dark forces of destruction, like a big dark cloud of destruction, doing its best to destroy everything in its path. The TV speeches over the martyrs who sacrificed everything, the lives of children with dreams and hopes lost, never to be completed. Harsh realities for a child to comprehend.

And again, for most of my childhood, they had the face of the dark cloud haunting my dreams. Within the passing of years, you start learning more about history and why the names of so many peers correlated so much with the meanings of freedom and resistance. The echoes of your people's sacrifices and resistance are carried within their names as proof of a reality of resilience. The peers with names the same as their dads, who were not there to cherish each other after sacrificing everything so their child would live in freedom.

I still remember Independence Day, that cold February day, standing in front of the TV, waiting for independence to be declared, still not fully aware of what that meant. However, the joy on my mom and dad's faces and the smile in my grandmother's eyes said it all. A map of sacrifices engraved in her wrinkles, giving hope that better days were within reach.

Though saddened at first by the harsh reality of the past, it does grow within one a cocktail of feelings, such as pride over heritage and the past. It consolidated within me a feeling of respect and responsibility over the land we stand on. The urge within one to love and cherish your country. To take the flag in your hand from where generations before us left it and carry it further, in hopes that generations after us will carry it further.

As for me, I remember the first time I was called the girl of war. I did not know what those words meant. I did not know that a single phrase would later determine so much of my life, how I understood myself, how I experienced the world, and how I would eventually make sense of the reality I had inherited.

As for me, I remember the first time I was called the girl of war. I did not know what those words meant. I did not know that a single phrase would later determine so much of my life, how I understood myself, how I experienced the world, and how I would eventually make sense of the reality I had inherited. Growing up, I was surrounded by stories. Stories that appeared almost every time my family gathered together, especially when there was no electricity at home, when the room was lit only by a candle and everyone slowly began remembering. They spoke about the war as if they were trying to piece together fragments that had never really left them. As a child, I listened carefully, but those stories felt distant, almost like they belonged to another century. I never imagined that I was, in fact, part of them and that I had been born in the middle of that chaos, born in a refugee camp. For many years, this was simply a fact

I knew about myself, a sentence that existed somewhere in my family history, but without fully understanding its meaning.

Yet, as I write these words for the first time in this written piece, I am realizing the weight of that beginning in a completely different way. It suddenly became real to me that I was one of hundreds of children who were born in displacement, entering life in a reality shaped by uncertainty, fear, and survival. Before I could understand the world, the world I was born into was already carrying the consequences of war.



This realization brings a different kind of emotion, a recognition that my story is not separate from the stories of those who lived through displacement, but is one of the many stories that emerged from that collective experience.

When the war ended, my family returned to Kosovo, but they did not return to the life they had once known. There was almost nothing left. They had to start over, rebuilding their home, their everyday routines, and their sense of normality from the very beginning. In many ways, I feel that I was raised alongside that reconstruction. My childhood was shaped not only by what my family managed to rebuild, but also by everything they had lost.

Looking back, I realize that I inherited both the resilience to begin again and the invisible weight of a past that continued to exist long after the war had ended.

It took years before I started asking questions. I wanted to understand where I came from, why certain silences existed, why some memories were repeated over and over while others remained untold. Through conversations, research, and listening, I slowly understood what it meant to be born in a refugee camp, into uncertainty, into a reality marked by bombs, displacement, fear, and survival

Although I have no direct memories of the war itself, I have always lived with its presence. That is perhaps one of the most difficult things to explain about intergenerational trauma. Trauma does not disappear when a war ends. It changes its form. It is carried through stories, silences, fears, behaviors, and everyday routines.

It becomes part of the emotional landscape of those who come after. Even those of us who never witnessed the violence firsthand often grow up learning its language before we fully understand its meaning. In many ways, we inherit not only memories but also the emotional weight attached to them.

Living in a post-war country like Kosovo means that the past is never entirely in the past. It exists in monuments, family albums, empty chairs at gatherings, missing photographs, anniversaries, interrupted conversations, and the everyday reminders that continue to shape our lives. From the moment we were born, we were introduced to this inheritance. We do not choose it, yet it became part of how we understood safety, belonging, identity, and even hope.

As the ones born during the war, we gradually began feeling that we carried a responsibility we had never consciously chosen. Sometimes it felt collective, something shared by an entire generation that inherited a fractured society. Other times it felt deeply personal, as if we owed something to the stories that existed before us. We often found ourselves asking what our role is as the generation that grew up in the aftermath. What do we do with everything we inherited? Do we simply carry it, or do we try to understand it? Do we remain silent, or do we create spaces where these experiences can be remembered, questioned, and passed on with honesty rather than fear? We still do not think there is a single answer. But we know that acknowledging this inheritance is where everything begins. Because what we inherit is not only trauma. We also inherit resilience, memory, responsibility, and the possibility of transforming painful histories into understanding. Perhaps that is the quiet task of our generation not to escape the past, but to confront it with empathy, to give it language, and to ensure that what shaped us does not remain invisible.

Living with Memories We Never Lived

Orialda Dajko

What do we inherit when nothing is written down?

A silence at the dinner table. A story told only once. A candle lit during a power cut. A prison sentence never fully explained.

Some inherit houses, photographs, or family heirlooms. Others inherit memories they never lived through themselves. They receive fragments of the past through stories, gestures, rituals, and silences pieces of history passed from one generation to the next, shaping identities long after the events themselves have ended.
For young people in Albania and Kosovo, the past often arrives this way. Not as direct experience, but as inheritance.

Leonora, born in the late 1990s in Mirditë, grew up with a family history that was rarely discussed openly.

"We have very little, or almost no, part of it as part of our identity. My parents don't talk about communism. Even when I asked, they told me about it as something very distant, almost without feeling. My grandfather spent five years in prison for a very small reason. I don't know if they don't want to remember because it's too painful, or because they want to leave it behind and move forward."
What Leonora inherited was not only a family story. It was also the silence surrounding it. The prison sentence became part of her family's history, yet much of it remained unspoken. The absence of memory became its own form of inheritance.
Perhaps Leonora's parents are not distancing themselves from the past because it no longer matters, but because it matters too much. Their silence may be an attempt to prevent pain from becoming an inheritance of its own.

becoming an inheritance of its own.

In Albania, many young people encounter the communist past through fragments like these. Family conversations often stop short. Questions remain unanswered. The memories exist, but they are not always shared.

Mateo from Shkodra was raised in a family where the past was rarely spoken about. It was as if his parents had no life before becoming parents, as if their story began with his own birth. Yet he sensed that something remained unspoken beneath their silence.

“Even when my parents talk about the dictatorship, they often do it among themselves, like an adult conversation.”

For many young people in Albania, the past exists behind a partially closed door. They catch pieces of conversations, names, and events, but rarely the full story. The silence surrounding the communist past can feel both protective and restrictive. It may spare younger generations from painful memories, yet it also leaves them wondering about the experiences that shaped their families

In these cases, inheritance is not only made of stories that are told, but also of stories that remain untold.

In Kosovo, the inheritance of memory often takes a different form. Stories are repeated more openly, and reminders of the past are woven into everyday life.

Era remembers a simple object that connected her to experiences she never lived herself.

“A simple candle, lit by my grandmother when the electricity went out, became a bridge between the painful past and our family. Through her stories, we learned about the war—not in school, but at home, in the glow of that candle.”

For Era, the candle was more than an object. It carried a story. Every time it was lit, it opened a space for memories to surface. A power cut, a family gathering, an everyday object any small detail could become a reason to speak about the past. Through these moments, stories of war were passed down naturally, woven into daily life rather than confined to history books or commemorations. Memory was inherited not only through words, but through ordinary rituals that connected one generation to the next.

Erta, from Drenica, struggles to identify the moment she first learned about the war.

"I don't remember when I first heard about the war because it feels like I grew up with it. Before we could write, we recited poems about it. Even on Teacher's Day, we connected our words to the war. We know the events, but often not the details. That's why I feel a responsibility not to forget."

Her words reveal another form of inheritance: responsibility. Some inherit stories; others inherit the duty to carry those stories forward.

Yet inherited memory is not always simple. It can connect generations, but it can also shape how societies understand themselves. The stories that are repeated become part of identity. The stories that remain untold leave gaps that younger generations must navigate on their own.

Besimi, from Pristina, reflects on this tension. *"In every Albanian family, there is someone who participated in the war. Without passing on that pain, our people would disappear. But memory can go in two directions. If we turn it into peace, we move forward. If we turn it into hatred, war creates only new memories of violence."*

His observation highlights a central question: what do we do with what we inherit?

Memory is never passed down unchanged. Each generation interprets it differently, deciding what to keep, what to question, and what meaning to give it. The inheritance is not only the story itself, but also the responsibility of carrying it forward.

None of the young people I spoke to inherited the events themselves. They inherited fragments: a candle, a prison story, a conversation overheard from another room, a poem recited at school, a silence that lingered across generations.

Yet these fragments continue to shape how they understand themselves and the communities they belong to.

The question, then, is not whether we remember or forget. It is how memory is inherited through stories, silences, and gestures and what each generation chooses to do with what it receives.



MagDA Cover

The embroidery used in this illustration was made by my mother during her youth and was part of what she carried with her when she joined my father's family in 1998. She learned the practice of making these patterns from her own mother, connecting three generations through a practice passed down within my family. It made me think of how some relics of the past never really leave us; they remain with us physically but also continue to shape the way we understand where we come from. While growing up, I was often told that I inherited my creativity and my appreciation for different forms of art from my mother.

In this sense, I saw the embroidery not only as an inherited object but also as a way of accessing a part of her life and creative identity that I did not experience myself. By translating my mother's embroidery into an illustration, I wanted to bring this inherited object into the present and connect more deeply with the experience behind it. Rather than simply reproducing its motifs, I wanted to carry forward what they represent, themes such as memory, creativity, transition, and the artistic potential that can survive even when it has not been given space to flourish



Beyond the Frequency of a Radio

Lura Xhelili

Broken radio, why do you sing? Why do you turn unknown voices into estranging screams? Why do you turn a person into a non-person? Why do you push the wave farther and farther away, and then, without warning, pierce the innocent ear with the noise of a locomotive?
Broken radio, why do you groan? Why do you mix up the languages of this world? Why do you make my words unclear and heavy? My brain cannot process them.

Broken radio, why do you spit out only venom, with slanderous voices, with news as black as hell?

Broken radio, why can't you stop? Why do you bring back my memories, the wanderings of childhood? Why do I always find you delighted? Do you maybe travel into the past, and bring the old voices back into this hell?

Broken radio, can you hear me? Can you take me back in time, so I become small once more, entirely small, a child, there in the corner of the yard, playing as I always did, beside the multicolored flowers, following the scent that speaks?
Broken radio, can you hear me, or perhaps you refuse to take orders from me!

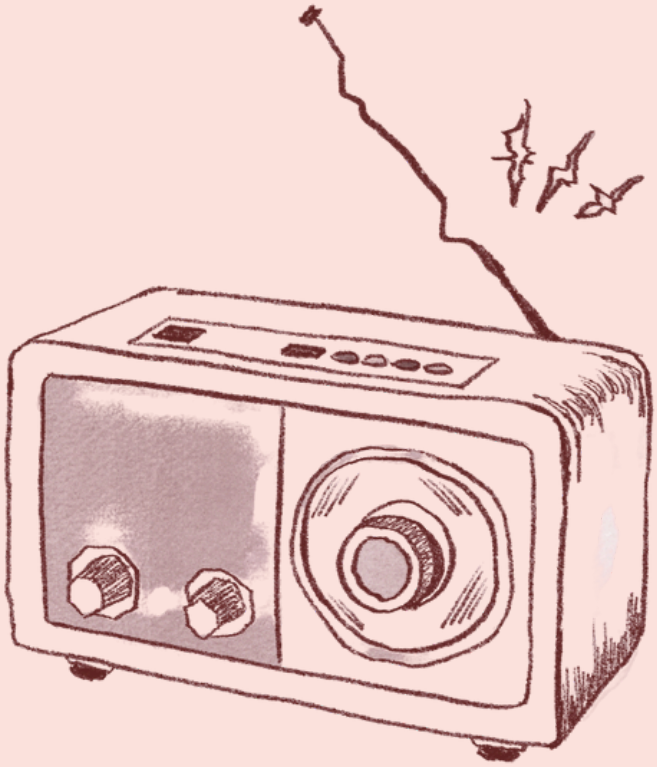
Please, stop now. Your old owner is very far away. Let the past stay there, in your cable covered with heavy dust.

Broken radio, look at the state you are in, here by my window, far from the place where you grew up, where you caught every station with precision. The way you used to speak into Grandfather's ear, believe me, I often envied you.

Broken radio, why do you suddenly stop working? Are you afraid of me, or is it perhaps that old man with the young soul whom you apparently miss now too?

Broken radio, please, stop. Voices are sometimes not enough. They cannot bring back lost hugs. They cannot bring back the nights under the light-piercing moon, nights full of tales, nor the early mornings in the dew-filled yard, where his shadow trod heavily on the ash-gray paving stones, and after every step a memory sprouted.

Broken radio, you are still speaking. You turned minutes and hours into years. Aren't you tired of this voice of yours, the voice of a sad machine, worn out by the traces of time?



Broken radio, stop! Enough babbling, enough empty words. Little by little every memory fades in the corners, the corners of the room, long forgotten, because life is not clarity, it is an unsolved mystery, a labyrinth of memories lost with time.

Soon I turn back, as if the dream has scattered. The radio was fine, old and without a voice, but the memory was like this, mixed up, raging, and my brain, it turns out, had been confusing it with the poor radio.

Roland Peraj

The Bazaar of Superstitions

When we gather to talk about superstitions, we feel free and quite sure of ourselves, capable of untying even the most tangled knot until we take charge of the problem. So, in this spirit, I am taking a balloon inflated so hard it is about to burst, filled with oxygen sprinkled with a little helium. Inside it, people of every kind, with their cultures and their assorted languages, sit together face to face, spinning between earth and sky, straining somewhere between earth and sky.

They are like people who breathe in helium, whose voices warp like the wailing of mourning women for the fallen dead, and grow thin as the layers of flija, to remind us of our first God, the Sun!

Some speak Albanian, some Macedonian, from one corner comes a kind of old Serbian, and from another a heap of half-Turkish, all mixed together like autumn jam, full of different fruits.

This is the little picture that shows us the bazaar where superstition is sold and bought, and indeed traded, a habit as firm as a great boulder on our Balkan Peninsula.

One of the merchants calls out in a hoarse voice, looking for customers in turn. In his bag he has a dream, but he is struggling to sell it. It is one of those dreams in which fever from fright grips you at night and your breath stops halfway. It seems as if the snake has slithered free, and is about to seize you by the throat and split the lid of your skull. All this the merchant dumped out of his bag, adding to his offer the possibility of having the dream interpreted.

On one side sits an old woman, her hair down to the small of her back, a headscarf that can't even cover the tips of her unruly hair, not a single tooth in her mouth, barely opening it. Her offer is advice on what to do when a black cat crosses your path. In such cases people are confused to the point of sadness, because when a black cat crosses in front of you and cuts your path, and darkness falls, no one knows what awaits the poor soul.

And the stalls, in rows, as if arranged in a symmetrical division, with certified banners, offer different superstitions. Almost every stall is topped by a blue eye, like a machine gun against the evil eye, with instant effect.

Facing the stalls stands, stoically, an Orthodox priest from Vojvodina, with a cross he can barely hold up around his neck, calling people to exorcism. Opposite him is an imam from Tuzla, with a pen, scribbling on scraps of paper that are clearly triangular in shape. Below them, seated on a single bench, are a Roma priest and a dervish, turning prayer beads around their hands.

Every now and then, as if to cut off their conversation, another woman, around fifty, steps in with a rasping voice directed at the clerics:

"Why don't you tell people? Why don't you forbid them from cutting their nails on Tuesday evenings? Can't you see this society has gone to the devil?"

But all four clerics ignore the woman with contempt, except the imam, who now and then sprinkles her with a little blessed water, after reciting ten suras of the Quran to her.

But the woman does not back down.



"You're wasting your time. Your tap water does nothing to me. You are incapable of convincing people of the basic rules for how to behave when the date is the 13th, when the hands of the clock are one on top of the other, when a mirror breaks, or even about positive things. For example, when your palm itches, you're bound to receive something from someone first!"

The women, the clerics and the other characters embody the mix of people living together across essential cultural differences, sometimes accompanied by nationalist tension and interethnic clashes, but in the end united in the shared exchange of the products that superstition and blind faith offer. Indeed, with delicate care, they pass them down from generation to generation, building a strong fortress of belief.

The question inevitably arises: what are superstitions? Are they perhaps a direct response by the individual, a weakness born of being unable to control the things of everyday life? Or are they simply a need to explain everything, sometimes even to the edge of the absurd?

This shows us that superstition is not merely local, but walks like a living being that communicates and trumpets its own truth and is easily embraced by people.

Malinowski, the social anthropologist, studied magic and ritual at length in his work. He linked their presence to a lack of certainty, precisely to the impossibility of controlling the situations of daily life. According to him, this is where part of the power of superstitions lies: they don't necessarily promise truth, they simply create the illusion that we have something in our hands.

In the bazaar of dreams we can also bring in Freud. In The Interpretation of Dreams, he saw dreams as recesses of the hidden contents of psychic life. So perhaps we can venture a hypothesis: if a snake appears in your dream, why does the need arise to ask a second or a third person what is going to happen to us?

But if we go further and look through a sociological lens, it turns out that superstition is not merely an individual product but more a social one. According to the famous French sociologist Durkheim, beliefs gain strength and weight precisely because they are shared with others

In this form, they become part of a shared symbolic order. An individual may be an isolated case, but when the belief is repeated by the old woman, the old man, the imam, the priest, the other woman, and so on, then it begins to acquire authority, which does not necessarily spring from truth but is strengthened by repetition.



For this reason I decided to bring my little bazaar from the big Balkan world, this straining between sky and earth. Perhaps the stalls may change shape, but the content and the product keep the same taste. And perhaps, just perhaps, this is why superstitions do not disappear with modernization, not even as our means of communication move from letters sent by pigeon to digital keyboards and video calls. We may conclude that in these social constructs only the stalls change, while every other flavor is still there, living together in our collective essence.

Until the next issue, wash your hands after eating dinner, or the cat will come and eat your night...

Stories, photographs and antifascism - (un)forgotten legacy of partisan women

Milica Markovic

Lilijana Dožić's grandmother was captured by German soldiers. Because of hair. But no matter the hair length, freedom was not destined for women during World War II.

Women with short hair were considered members of the partisan movement, suitable for life in the forest, and were separated out for Jasenovac, a concetration camp based in Croatia. Women with long hair were assumed to be peasant women who had stayed home and kept up their hair hygiene; they were sent to forced labour in Germany instead.

"My grandmother, fortunately, had long hair, because her father wouldn't allow it to be cut. Together with her younger sister Milja, she was sent to Germany. Until the very end of the war, she worked in a weapons factory in Nuremberg."

This is part of one of the stories from the book My Grandma, Partisan, published by Femin Kolektiv. Granddaughter Ljiljana Dožić is speaking about her grandmother, Radosava Babić.

What is the idea behind the book ?

The book was created as a final project for Feminist Studies at the Center for Women's Studies, when a group of women chose antifascism through women's heritage as their topic.

They decided to collect stories from granddaughters of female partisans for a practical reason: very few partisans are still alive, and even daughters are becoming hard to find. They wanted the third generation's perspective on antifascist heritage and legacy. One of the book's authors, Ljiljana Jovanović Todorović notes what inspired her:

"One sentence in particular keeps coming back to me, written by Dobrunka Kristić during the war, while she was in prison: 'Hope is a matter of decision. Even in prison, I woke up cheerful.' It reminds me that even in the most difficult circumstances, a person can hold on to hope. And every time, it brings a smile back to my face."

For Jovanović Todorović, there was also a personal thread. A photograph of her grandfather included one unknown woman who caught her eye.

"Even as a child, she caught my attention. Recently, while sorting through family photographs, I picked it up again and realized I was still asking the same question: who was that woman, and what must she have been like to participate equally in the People's Liberation War at that time? I think it was exactly that curiosity that made me want to learn more about the women who took part in the antifascist fight, and to bring their stories back into collective memory."



The narrative around partisan women and antifascism has been shaped negatively in the recent time. Jovanović Todorović describes it through an anecdote from a public discussion for the film Forests, Forests and the book My Grandmother the Partisan. A woman in the audience asked a question that stayed with her: Did the words "partisan woman" and "feminism" become ugly words today?

"The contribution of partisan women is often diminished, silenced, or disputed. At the same time, they're almost automatically equated with communism as an ideology, and what's essentially important gets lost: that these were women who took part in the antifascist fight and opened space for the political, social, and economic emancipation of women in this region."

Who has been silenced?

Modern naratives have opened the door to historical revisionism, a phenomenon where women's contribution to the antifascist war is often silenced or reduced to a caricature. It's especially visible with the Antifascist Front of Women.

"It was not an informal group of women, but one of the most massive women's organizations in Europe of its time. The AFW organized literacy programs for women, healthcare, aid for war orphans, reconstruction of the country, and the inclusion of women in political and public life. When all of this is forgotten, we lose awareness of how great a contribution that organization made to society and to the status of women."

Unforgotten legacy

Even though society at large failed to preserve that legacy, each family found its own way of holding onto it. In conversations with granddaughters, Jovanović Todorović found the legacy preserved in very different ways, some grandmothers spoke openly about their wartime experience; others said very little, or nothing at all.

“Some granddaughters learned about their grandmothers' experiences through family stories, photographs, and documents, while others only much later began researching their family history themselves. The reasons for the silence varied , from personal trauma to the circumstances they lived through.”

In the absence of a broader history that records women's experience, using intimate, personal stories felt like the natural way to let family memory tell the stories that history usually lefts out.

“I think gratitude isn't just about remembering them, but also about understanding how much they shaped the society we live in today.”

For the women who spoke with Ljiljana Jovanović Todorović, remembering wasn't only an act of gratitude toward the past. It was a way of asking what, of everything carried down to them without words, still belongs to them today, and what they choose to carry forward: freedom, something most partisan women never had, yet the biggest legacy they left their descendants.

Something stops with you.

Zineb Ouadghiri

Something starts with you.

I think of inheritance as what arrives before us — what becomes ours without having originated with us, and what we then carry forward.
We all inherit. We are all heirs to someone who existed before us.

We think we come to this world as a blank slate until we realize one day how much of what we thought was ours was already there. And then we pause.

We realize we did not come into the world empty-handed. We came with a body, a lineage, a family, a language, a geography, a culture, a history — and into a world that had already made many decisions about us before we were old enough to make any of our own.

The biological

Some of this inheritance is biological. Our DNA is an extraordinary old record, carrying genetic information that contributes to everything from eye colour and body composition to aspects of immune function; literally how well we can protect ourselves from stressors. But genes are not a fixed script.

Their expression is influenced by a constant interaction between biology and environment — by nutrition, exposure, stress, relationships and the conditions in which a person grows and surrounds itself with.

This means that biological inheritance is not a prediction of who we will become. It gives us a starting point: a particular combination of traits, predispositions, a set of possibilities and vulnerabilities that are then shaped by the life they meet. The same inherited tendency can have very different consequences depending on the environment in which it meets the world. I find this both humbling and strange. We are each carrying biological information that predates us by an almost incomprehensible amount of time. Every cell contains a version of a message that has been passed through generations, altered and recombined along the way, before arriving here — in this particular body, in this particular life. We did not choose what we received, but we are the ones living inside its consequences. And perhaps that is the first tension of inheritance: what comes before us can shape us profoundly, without ever fully determining us, and whether you experience what you inherited as a privilege, a burden, or simply as "the way things are" depends, in part, on how well you are currently functioning.

The psychological & cultural

Then there is cultural inheritance — the environment through which the self develops, because a child is born into civilization. We inherit language before we have language. Customs before we have preferences. Ideas about what is right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, safe and dangerous, long before we are old enough to question where those ideas came from.

Sometimes culture is transmitted without a single word being spoken. As children we learn it by watching. By noticing what is never spoken about. By observing who is allowed to be angry, who is expected to be quiet, what happens when someone fails, what happens when someone leaves, what love looks like, what success costs, what must be sacrificed to belong. No one has to tell you, for example, that conflict is dangerous if you repeatedly watch people become silent whenever it enters the room or that anger is how you get your way if you repeatedly watch the angriest person in the room be the one everyone eventually listens to. And this is where inheritance becomes less visible, because not everything is written into our DNA and passed down like eye colour.



Culture does not exist separately from history. We are born into a particular time, into institutions and social structures that were already there, carrying the consequences of decisions made long before we arrived. Wars we did not fight, borders we did not draw, economic systems we did not build, technologies we did not invent, and ideas about gender, class, success, family and belonging that existed before us.

This is where cultural inheritance becomes particularly interesting to me: the beliefs of one generation can become the common sense of the next.

Once an idea becomes ordinary enough, it stops announcing itself as an idea and starts feeling like reality which traps us in transmission of meaning we never signed up for, long before we have the distance to recognize it as someone else's way of seeing it. A survival strategy can become a family value. A historical circumstance can become tradition

A social expectation can become something we simply call “normal.” We therefore inherit not only what happened before us, but ways of making sense of what happened.

And some of the most influential things we inherit are precisely the ones we cannot initially see as inheritance. They feel like us — our preferences, our instincts, our values, our understanding of how people are and how the world works — until we develop enough distance to ask: where did I learn this?

A good old mix

So if inheritance does not stop at what is encoded in our DNA and the body we inherit is also a body that learns, how much messier can it get?

From the beginning of life, our nervous system is taking in information from the environment around us: what brings comfort, what signals danger, how closeness feels, how conflict is handled, whether our needs are met, whether other people can be trusted. These patterns are not written into our genes, but repeated experiences can shape how we regulate ourselves, respond to stress and relate to other people. In this sense, inheritance is not only something we receive biologically; it is also something we learn relationally. And perhaps this is where the biological and psychological dimensions of inheritance begin to meet. We are social creatures. Our development depends profoundly on relationships, and our need for attachment, connection and belonging is not something we simply grow out of. We are also raised inside cultures that give us ideas about what intimacy, romance, partnership and love are supposed to look like.

This makes relationships one of the places where our inheritance becomes particularly visible. At some point, if we want to relate to another person in a healthy and freer way, we have to become curious about what we are bringing with us.

Not because everything we learned was wrong, and not because our nervous system somehow got it wrong, but because many of the reactions that once helped us adapt to our environment can become limiting when the environment changes.

We inherit templates for reality, and relationships are one of the places where those templates become particularly visible, because they are mirrors to our inner world. Another person can show us the parts of ourselves we have been able to avoid alone. They can reveal the places where our beliefs about love contradict our desire for it. They can expose the distance between what we say we want and what we are actually able to tolerate. They can make visible the old strategies we have mistaken for personality. We are all walking projection machines until we learn to sit with what's ours. We bring our expectations, our fears, our ideas about what love and friendship is supposed to feel like, our ways of protecting ourselves, the things we are afraid to say or ask for, and the things we don't yet know how to receive. And inevitably, some of what belongs to our own history gets placed onto the person in front of us.

Sometimes we are responding to what is actually happening. Sometimes we are responding to what it reminds us of. The silence of another person can become the silence of someone who once withdrew from us. Their anger can become every anger we have known. Their distance can confirm an old belief that we are not wanted. Their closeness can trigger the fear of being consumed. Trust can become a test we keep giving people, asking them to prove they won't do what someone before them did. We don't only meet the person in front of us; we meet them through everything we have already learned about people. This is not to say that everything we experience in a relationship is projection. Sometimes someone's distance really is distance. Sometimes a relationship really is unsafe. Sometimes our instincts are telling us something important. Discernment is knowing the difference between what belongs to the present and what the past has taught us to expect from it, and perhaps this is why intimacy can be such a powerful encounter with inheritance. And perhaps change begins when we can hold both truths at once: I understand why I became this way, and I do not have to remain this way

Sometimes this means exposure to experiences that contradict what our nervous system has learned to expect. Staying present when the instinct is to withdraw. Allowing someone to be kind without immediately looking for the catch. Learning that conflict does not necessarily mean abandonment. Learning that boundaries do not necessarily mean rejection. Learning that safety can feel unfamiliar before it feels safe.

Carry-on

So I started looking at the beliefs I carry one by one and asked myself: is this actually mine? What did I learn about love? About success? About conflict? And which of these things do I want to keep? And once you become conscious of what you have inherited, what do you do with that awareness? Because eventually, inheritance has to become a responsibility.

We are not only the descendants of our ancestors.

We are also the ancestors of someone yet to come.

And the work we do within ourselves today may become the freedom someone else inherits tomorrow. Because we are transmitting something whether we intend to or not: a way of speaking to a child, a way of handling anger, a belief about money, a capacity for tenderness, a fear, a value, a wound. and maybe the deeper responsibility of inheritance is not to pass on everything we were given, but to decide what ends with us.

But also, what are we leaving behind for a world that may be increasingly difficult to inherit? Mother Nature is part of the inheritance question, but also the future itself — what happens when there is less and less future to inherit?

And what if we become more conscious of the conditions that shaped us, what responsibility do we have toward people whose circumstances make that freedom harder to access? Poverty, scarcity, trauma, instability, lack of education, etc. are not individual "mindset" failures, but real conditions that constrain what people can imagine and choose. What becomes of social responsibility when it isn't "help everyone around you," but rather ask where our contribution can have meaningful, tangible impact?

I will end by noting that I am a psychologist, but behind this identity I am a human with opinions. Freedom is an important value to me and through my own maturing process freedom moved from "I can do whatever I want," to the much harder freedom of "I can become conscious enough to decide what I want to carry forward." If you believe your life has a purpose, that belief can be meaningful without becoming a universal prescription. I believe my life has purpose. There can be conviction without certainty and purpose without superiority.

As we create the conscious distance between what was given to us and what we choose to continue, we need to keep in mind that if we want freedom from inherited beliefs, identities and reactions for ourselves, we also have to tolerate the fact that other people are doing the same thing differently.

Nobody's inherited worldview gets to become the unquestionable centre of reality. We can disagree without turning the person carrying a different inheritance into an enemy. Sometimes the work is not immediately deciding whether another person's way of living/thinking is right or wrong, but noticing what their freedom activates in us before we react to it. This world certainly needs more grace: toward ourselves and toward other people who are still figuring out what to do with what they inherited. You can disagree with someone's interpretation of reality without denying that their experience of it is real to them.

Something stops with you. Something starts with you. And if each of us thought about inheritance with the lives of others in mind, perhaps we could move the world, one person at a time, one generation at a time, a little closer to each other and make this ride a little more enjoyable too.



All illustrations featured in this edition are original works by
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