

Women in Freedom Fights: State of Research and Methodological Insights

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The topic of the article is women in the Lithuanian partisan war. The authors review the development of the topic in Western historiography and the changing theoretical and methodological approaches, and then discuss the case of the Lithuanian guerilla war. Firstly, the image of female partisan war participants (participation in a broad sense, from combatants to assisting the resistance in different ways) is reviewed in a broad time perspective, from the period of partisan struggle to the Second Republic of Lithuania. Secondly, Lithuanian historiography is analyzed.

The research reveals that, just like in the Western historiography, in the early period, while the partisan struggle was still ongoing, the first collective images appeared as uncritical, little reflected, idealized, and propagandized. Under the conditions of the Soviet regime, Lithuanian historiography did not develop, so after independence was restored, the same images – now supported by several of the earliest narrative sources (Juozas Lukša's memoirs, Lionginas Baliukevičius's diary) – crossed over into historiography, and are still widespread in the popular historical consciousness to this day. Propaganda about the Lithuanian guerilla war of the Soviet period did not offer any specific images of the female participants. In the last decade new multicentric efforts to approach the research of women in the Lithuanian armed resistance (in terms of theory and methodology), as well as in social history in general, are observed.

Finally, the authors formulate possible guidelines for further research: to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data collected so far, to present a detailed statistical analysis of women in the partisan war; to study women within the context of social history, combining research on women's participation in partisan warfare with the social development of the society; to study the history of war memory simultaneously with the research of guerilla war; to use the interview method more extensively, since examples in Western research have revealed that conventional written sources do not capture the specific experiences of women.

Keywords: Second World War, partisan warfare, postwar, freedom fights, women, women's history, gender studies, images.

Introduction

Relevance and issues. With the start of unrest in 2014, and the outbreak of war in Ukraine, it is perhaps not accidentally that society has remembered and rediscovered the interest in the post-war freedom fights in Lithuania that had been felt during the years of *Sąjūdis*, and later somewhat faded away. Some saw the Ukrainians who resisted the aggression from the East as modern partisans, comparing them to members of our (and their) anti-Soviet armed underground, while others wondered whether, if the threat arose today, there would be many willing to resist the invader in the same way as they did more than sixty years ago. In this way, in response to today's realities, the post-war partisan fights seem to have regained relevance in modern times. After the initial effect of the armed conflict in the neighbouring country had subsided, the focus on this topic was and has been primarily on the events related to the individuals involved in the movement – several successful stories of the search for the remains of partisans,¹ discussions, or rather public rows, over controversial biographical details and their assessments,² and, finally, the anniversary and the announcement of the anniversary year.³ Such a commemorative, usually rather narrow, personality-centred focus not only does not pretend to search for deeper, more scholarly interest, but is sometimes even detrimental – one wants to see and talk only about the heroic side of the movement, and to view the members of the underground only from a positive side. On the other hand, it cannot be seen only in a negative light either. Both the interest itself and the specific angles of that interest can signal to historian certain sensitivities and the need for some research. This becomes the basis for developing research guidelines.

From a broader perspective looking not only at the anti-Soviet underground movement, but also at the whole social fabric of that very difficult, turning point period, the keen eye of the researcher can see that there is also a lot of research still to be done, not only in the scientific field, but also in the retrospective assessment of the past, which is typical of a part of the broader society of today. Valdemaras Klumbys has spoken and writ-

¹ In 2018-2019, the remains of famous partisans Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, Antanas Kraujelis-Siaubūnas and Juozapas Streikus-Stumbras were found. For more information, see „Rasti partizanų vado Adolfo Ramanausko-Vanago palaikai, [online], in: <http://genocid.lt/centras/lt/2962/a> (2021-11-11); „Rasti partizano Antano Kraujelio-Siaubūno palaikai“, [online], in: <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/rasti-partizano-antano-kraujelio-siaubuno-palaikai.d?id=81506845> (2021-11-11); „Našlaičių kapinėse Vilniuje rasti partizano Streikaus-Stumbro palaikai“, [online], in: <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/naslaiciu-kapinese-vilniuje-rasti-partizano-streikaus-stumbro-palaikai.d?id=82754895> (11/11/2021).

² Probably the most debatable issue is the evaluation of the activities of Jonas Noreika-General Vėtra during the Nazi occupation and the commemoration of them today, and from time to time, the public sphere continues to discuss the activities of one of the partisan commanders of the Vytis District, Juozas Krikštaponis, during WWII.

³ On the occasion of the 100th birth anniversary, the year 2021 has been proclaimed the Year of Lithuanian Partisan Juozas Lukša. For more information see: „Dėl 2021 metų paskelbimo Juozo Lukšos-Daumanto metais“, [online], in: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/a1b43412c03611eaae0db016672cba9c> (11/11/2021).

ten about this in his writings on the intricacies of historical memory and self-perception.⁴

There has also been a recent ‘discovery’ of the role of women in history and a growing ability to use it not only in conventional contexts of remembrance and commemoration, but also in broader contexts of emancipation, education, etc. One of the most prominent historical personalities in the public space these days is Marcelė Kubiliūtė, a public figure from interwar Lithuania, and a member of resistance movement against the Nazi and Soviet regimes. This year, on the occasion of her 125th birth anniversary, a discussion was held in her honour, not only on historical issues, but also on the issue of women’s status and rights, titled ‘Beyond Stereotypes: the example of Marcelė Kubiliūtė’s leadership for future generations of women.’⁵ It was after this woman that the citizens of Rokiškis decided to name a new street in the town⁶. The inspiring stories of various Lithuanian women are also included in a children’s book.⁷ For young readers, a most recent book by Marius Marcinkevičius and Lina Itagaki, a graphic novel *Mergaitė su šautuvu. Istorija apie mergaitę partizanę*. The story of the post-war freedom fights, told from the perspective of a girl, also invites the reader to travel around Lithuania, visiting museums dedicated to armed resistance, partisan bunkers, etc.⁸

Taking a synthetic approach to the issues and relevance briefly discussed above, we have chosen to deal with the topic of women who participated in the freedom fights in Lithuania in 1944–1953, considering it an integral part of armed resistance. We are interested not only in women armed fighters, but in all those who, in one way or another, contributed to or were influenced by the armed underground movement. Unfortunately, we still tend to intuitively perceive the resistance, the war, as an exclusively male thing, a male affair, and the whole history of war and post-war Lithuania is still gender-neutral, while the social dimension of gender is still struggling to find its way into the historiography of Lithuania in this period. The roles of women and discussion about them in the context of the partisan warfare are still treated as an interesting, unfamiliar, and, first and foremost,

⁴ Gediminas Kajėnas, Istorikas Valdemaras Klumbys „Mes vis dar gyvename apgulties sąlygomis“ [online], in: <https://www.15min.lt/kultura/naujiena/asmenybe/istorikas-valdemaras-klumbys-mes-vis-dar-gyvename-apgulties-salygomis-285-1512834> (8-11-2021); Valdemaras Klumbys, “Po Cvirkos. Kas toliau?”, [online], in: <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/valdemaras-klumbys-po-cvirkos-kas-toliau.d?id=88230521> (08/11/2023).

⁵ Vilius Narkūnas, „Marcelės Kubiliūtės pavyzdys ateities moterų kartoms: jos biografija – liudijimas, kaip ji nuosekliai siekė savo gyvenimo tikslų“, [online], <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2048643/marceles-kubiliutes-pavyzdys-ateities-moteru-kartoms-jos-biografija-liudijimas-kaip-ji-nuosekliai-sieke-savo-gyvenimo-tikslu> (10/08/2023).

⁶ Daugiau rokiškėnų balsavo už Marcelės Kubiliūtės gatvę, [online], in: <https://www.grokiskis.lt/aktualijos/daugiau-rokiskenu-balsavo-uz-marceles-kubiliutes-gatve> (10-08-2023).

⁷ Viktorija Aprimaitė, Viktorija Urbonaitė, *Vakaro istorijos Lietuvos mergaitėms: 100 istorijų apie Lietuvos moteris*, Vilnius: Dvi tylos, 2020.

⁸ Lina Itagaki, Marius Marcinkevičius, *Mergaitė su šautuvu. Istorija apie mergaitę partizanę*, Vilnius: Misteris Pinkmanas, 2023.

as an intriguing or romantic topic. Being aware of the topic and regularly following the debates in the public space, we would probably not be wrong to claim that women in the Lithuanian partisan warfare are imagined in a mythical form – an average Lithuanian citizen interested in history may be able to point out some generally accepted facts, such as: a good number of women were liaisons, deftly navigating in forests and the whole of Lithuania, because the Soviets were much less suspicious of girls, or women were better at bearing the tortures. But such understanding usually marks the end of our knowledge. Usually, it becomes difficult to name any of these brave liaisons or heroines who endured Soviet interrogation and did not reveal secret information. Sometimes those who have interest in the partisan warfare (even historians not exclusively focussing on the theme of partisan war) are able to pull out from their memories the name of Pušėlė – the ‘machine gunner’ of the Kalniškės battle or the hostess of the ‘pancake ball’, but a nickname does not help to recall the real name.⁹ The most famous woman associated with the partisan war is the wife of a partisan – Nijolė Bražėnaitė-Lukšienė (although it must be said that she does not introduce herself and is not called by her first husband’s surname anywhere). Two Pušėlės and a wife, or two wives (the machine-gunner Albina Neifaltienė-Pušėlė is also often remembered as ‘someone’s wife’), are the absolute horizon of knowledge about women in the Lithuanian partisan warfare in popular historical consciousness.

We believe that the separation of men’s and women’s experiences during the war and post-war years, and the introduction of the gender aspect into historical research, would be a valuable addition to Lithuanian social and cultural history. This is especially true given the obviously stark different consequences for both gender (e.g., there is still a much higher suicide rate among men; the suicide index is convincingly linked to the political repression experienced during the war and post-war period).¹⁰ On the other hand, we are also not entirely satisfied with the starting points of discussion offered by gender studies, where the meaningfulness and necessity of the research is seen primarily in terms of its relevance from a gender point of view. Post-war women, in one way or another involved in freedom fights, are seen as an integral part of the movement as a whole, and of society of the time. Indeed, a discourse about the partisan warfare as one of the fundamental, turning points in the 20th century Lithuanian history, that had an undisputed impact on the subsequent development of society, the formation of our historical memory, etc., is

⁹ We mean here Albina Neifaltienė and Anelė Senkutė, who both used the pseudonym Pušėlė.

¹⁰ Žr., pvz., Danutė Gailienė, *Ką jie mums padarė: Lietuvos gyvenimas traumų psichologijos žvilgsniu*, Vilnius: Tyto alba, 2008; *Sunkių traumų psichologija: Politinių represijų padariniai*, compiled by Danutė Gailienė, Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2004; Danutė Gailienė, „Politinių represijų psichologiniai padariniai“, in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2002, no. 2, p. 121–126; Evaldas Kazlauskas, Danutė Gailienė, „Politinių represijų metu patirto sunkaus ilgalaikio traumavimo psichologinių padarinių kompleksškumas“, *Psichologija: Mokslo darbai*, Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2003, no. 27, p. 43–52; Evaldas Kazlauskas, Danutė Gailienė, „Išgyvenusiųjų politines represijas potrauminės simptomatikos ir trauminės patirties, demografinių, somatinių veiksmų bei vidinės darnos sąsajos“, in: *Psichologija: Mokslo darbai*, Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2005, no. 32.

primarily focussed on the male part of the partisan society, and often effectively excludes half of the whole society, give-or-take, which was affected, directly or indirectly, by the resistance at that time.

With a view to a thorough, comprehensive, and continuous research into the selected field of study, today we propose an introductory article, the **aim of** which is to discuss the current situation in the thematic field of interest and to formulate possible guidelines for a further meaningful and successful study.

The following **objectives** are used to consistently achieve the aim of this paper:

1. To make a typology of women's participation in the war and to briefly outline the characteristics of women's participation in armed resistance during World War II and in post-war Europe.
2. To reveal chronologically the images of women in the post-war Lithuanian freedom fights.
3. Discuss the features of the historiography of women's participation in the anti-Soviet post-war resistance.

Structure. The study consists of an introduction, the body, and conclusions. There is a dedicated chapter addressing each of the objectives; the chapter is thematically divided into sub-sections. The second chapter of the paper begins with an overview of female images, starting with the images of partisans themselves, mainly in the underground press, but also in memoirs, which were most often used and developed, followed by a discussion of the propaganda images of the Soviet era, and finally, chronologically, to the depiction of women in the underground of the partisans in the public space of independent Lithuania and in art (cinema, literature). The guidelines for further research, mentioned in the aim of the article, are presented in the conclusions.

Chronological timeframe. The aim, objectives and structure of the paper imply that it covers a wide chronological range from the outbreak of World War II in late 1940s to the present day.

Sources, historiography. A detailed analysis of the state of the historiography is provided in the third chapter of the paper. Insights and suggestions on the use of potential sources and their characteristics in the planned multifaceted research on the topic of interest are presented in the conclusions of the paper.

In this study, we understand the image as the most general picture that can be found in the public space, influenced by various social, political, and cultural factors. We are more concerned with capturing and analysing the final product that emerges, with a rather limited analysis of the social and political contexts that led to the emergence of the images in question – only to the extent that is necessary to understand the underlying assumptions that shaped them in the respective eras.

Specifically, this article refers to several groups of sources, which can be categorised according to their origin and the nature of their use. The most vivid images of women, nurtured by the partisans themselves, are captured by the sources they left behind: articles in the underground press, as well as a few examples of personal documents, and more broadly, the creative legacy of the resistance fighters. The very comprehensive collection of partisan press publications¹¹ helps to provide a general picture in the field of interest, and its strength lies not only in its careful thematic breakdown, but also in the fact that it contains documents held not only in public but also in private archives, which may be more difficult for a researcher to access under normal conditions. Written legacy of well-known partisan commanders¹² can be used as typical sources of memoiristic style characterised by the abundance and diversity of the topics covered. On the one hand, it is difficult to think of a more genuine way of exploring an aspect of interest to us. On the other hand, we must not forget that, because of the original purpose of the sources (which was usually propaganda, in the neutral sense of the term, i.e., the dissemination or perpetuation of one's own information, worldview, values, etc.), the images they contain cannot be regarded as truthful representation of reality. Understanding this becomes even more important when it comes to the use and escalation of these images in the current public space, and also opens the way for a multidirectional development of research.

The reconstruction of Soviet-era imagery is based on the press and artistic interpretations in fiction and cinema. In the search for images of women resistance members, not controlled by the Soviet regime, underground works were reviewed: the *Lietuvos katalikų bažnyčios kronika*, *Aušra*, *Ateitis*, *Alma Mater*, *Dievas ir Tėvynė*, *Laisvės šauklys*, *Perspektyvos*, *Rūpintojėlis*, *Tautos kelias*, and *Vytis*. For the study of the Soviet imagery, i.e., the image created, supported, and controlled by the Soviet regime, we first looked at the publications of the Editorial Board of the Institute of Party History, published in the Archival Documents in 1950s-1960s in the series *Faktai kaltina* – a special and targeted propaganda aimed at reinterpreting the Lithuanian partisan warfare according to Soviet ideological schemes of historical interpretation. Some publications of the republican, regional and cultural press were also reviewed: *Tiesa*, *Komjaunimo tiesa*, *Valstiečių laikraštis*, *Kolektyvinis darbas* of Anykščiai district, *Tarybiniu keliu* of Molėtai district and *Pirmyn* and *Lenino keliu* newspapers of Utena district, *Švyturys* and *Literatūra ir menas* monthlies. Due to the highly developed Soviet censorship and surveillance apparatus, we do not believe it would be reasonable to expand the scope of publications, as it is unlikely to yield more results, or any variations of the imagery already identified. Research was done by investigating the

¹¹ *Partizanai apie pasaulį, politiką ir save*, compiled by Nijolė Gaškaitė-Žemaitienė, Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 1998.

¹² [Juozas Lukša] Juozas Daumantas, *Partizanai*, Vilnius: Vaga, 1990; Lionginas Baliukevičius, *Partizano Dzūko dienoraštis*, Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2002.

forms, related to the Soviet version of the Lithuanian partisan warfare, in which women appear in fiction and in short and feature films interpreting the Lithuanian partisan warfare.¹³

Several types of sources are used to reconstruct the most common female images in Lithuania today: images that have crystallised in the public space during public discourse. To this end, relevant comments were used that had been found in social media (the Facebook group devoted to the history of Lithuanian partisans), as well as reports on news portals. It should be noted that with the maximal increase of Internet access, the widespread practice of anonymous commenting, and, later, the widespread use of social networking sites, the monitoring of public space has become quite simple and accessible to almost everyone. On the other hand, social networking has created social bubbles that tend to distort the extent to which an issue of interest is popular or widespread, and it is therefore necessary to bear in mind that sometimes a seemingly widespread, popular image of an area of interest may be one that is spoken about by a comparatively small group of people. However, even this small group of people is the one that is most interested in the issues we are concerned with, so even if their opinion is not universal, it is not only important, but also qualitatively reflective of what we are looking for.

Images of women's freedom fights are also found in contemporary art (films, books, music). Here, as in the other subsections of the chapter under discussion, the focus is not on quantity, i.e., the aim is not to record, highlight and discuss all/any references to women in the public space, in creative works, but instead to highlight the most prominent or otherwise special examples.

One of the most recent films that has received a lot of attention for its portrayal of post-war society, *Sutemos*, is not discussed at all. This is a deliberate position taken by the authors in response to accusations of inappropriate representation of women against the director of the film, which led to the decision not to see the film.¹⁴ The analysis uses the work *Vienui vieni* of Jonas Vaitkus, a director who has received similar accusations,¹⁵ as

¹³ The films screened: *Gyvieji Didvyriai: Paskutinis Šūvis*, script writer H. Šablevičius, director Arūnas Žebriūnas, 1960; *Jausmai*, script writer Vytautas Žalakevičius, dir. Almantas Grikevičius, Algirdas Dausa, 1960; *Laiptai į dangų*, script writer and director Raimondas Vabalas, 1966; *Niekas nenorėjo mirti*, script writer and director Vytautas Žalakevičius, 1965; *Perskeltas dangus*, script writer Marijonas Giedrys, Romas Gudaitis, director Marijonas Giedrys, 1975; *Sužeista tyla*, script writer Juozas Požėra, director Algimantas Kundelis, 1979; *Svetimi*, script writer Antanas Jonynas, director Marijonas Giedrys, 1961; *Vyrų vasara*, script writers Aleksandras Jurovskis, Saulius Šaltenis, director Marijonas Giedrys, 1970.

¹⁴ At least two women claim to have been sexually harassed by Šarūnas Bartas, for more see, e. g., *Š. Bartui – dar vieni kaltinimai: prakalbo ir dailininkė P. Bocullaitė*, [online], in: <https://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/laisvalaikis-ir-kultura/kultura/s-bartui-dar-vieni-kaltinimai-prakalbo-ir-dailininke-p-bocullaite-837288> (8-11-2023).

¹⁵ At least four women have spoken out about sexual harassment from Jonas Vaitkus, for more see, e.g., *J. Vaitkus nušalintas nuo darbo su studentais LMTA*, [online], <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/202680/j-vaitkus-nusalintas-nuo-darbo-su-studentais-lmta> (8 November 2023).

the film was made when the alleged behaviour of its director was not known, so the authors have seen the film.

Women in war: typology and experiences in the European context

Technological advances and the ensuing social developments of 19th and 20th centuries have profoundly changed war. Technological developments have led to the increasing brutality of war and the unprecedented toll of civilian casualties in military conflicts. 20 million soldiers and an estimated 30 million civilians perished during WWII.¹⁶ In a modernising world, the theatre of war has expanded to cover an ever-larger social terrain, involving wider and more diverse civilian populations. Even deep in the home front, involvement in servicing the war machine, has become possible, and often inevitable. Such involvement began to go beyond the increase in taxes paid for the war effort and impacted the structure of personal time, the dedication of personal energy and time to the war, even when sitting at home. Women's roles in the wars of the 20th century, whether fought by regular armies or in partisan structures behind the front line (e.g., the Red Partisans of the Soviet Union), or without the support of regular armies at all (e.g., Ukraine, the Baltic States), also became much more varied.

Seven roles played by women in modern 20th century wars can be singled out:

- 1) women as non-participants in war: civilians, defending, protecting, suffering, waiting for the soldiers to return from war (mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, and lovers);
- 2) women as part of the war, holding the home front, often working in jobs previously considered specifically male while men fight (the economic rearguard);
- 3) women performing certain support functions at the front, outside military structures (field hospital, logistics, mechanics);
- 4) women performing certain non-military support functions in military structures (liaisons, etc.);
- 5) women performing military functions in military structures (combatants);
- 6) women military leaders (in leadership positions);
- 7) women victims of war (sexual and other types of violence against women).

With some modification, all these seven roles of women can also be identified in partisan warfare (though there seem to have been no women in leadership positions in Lithuanian partisan warfare). However, whenever the focus is not on regular armies, but rather on armed partisan resistance, one must not overlook its specificity – partisan resistance if a war at home, rarely away from the place of residence, never away from the commu-

¹⁶ Since estimates and discussions on the exact number of participants, casualties, etc. are still ongoing, we have chosen to present only rounded estimates. However, it is safe to say that the civilian casualties in the war certainly far outweigh the military losses.

nity/society with which one identifies and for which one fights. In the middle of the 20th century, communities¹⁷ joined partisan wars, the same communities which existed at that moment in time, from Catholic Lithuania to Muslim Algeria, from the emancipated to the strictly conservative for their time.

This leads to one obvious difference that emerges when comparing the roles of men and women in different resistance movements – the differences among women's roles are, to the naked eye, more pronounced than those among men. Naturally and understandably, men have been at the forefront of the modernisation process, their social roles have evolved and became more universal more rapidly in response to the general economic and social changes within societies. Meanwhile, women, a much more constrained and inert group in society, have retained more traditional traits, less eroded by modernisation.

There is not a single country in Europe where there was no armed resistance during or immediately after the Second World War. The gold standard in Western Europe (and in Western historiography) is the French Resistance in Nazi Germany-occupied and Vichy France, *la Résistance*,¹⁸ although the previously overlooked movements in eastern Europe, which saw the Soviet Union as the main enemy, are increasingly gaining more visibility. In Eastern and Southern Europe, armed resistance movements sometimes opposed not only the occupation forces, but also dealt with the question of the choice of a socio-political path, i.e., groups mobilised by the idea of a nation-state fought side by side with (or against) groups formed based on communist ideology. This distinction was also present in Western Europe, i.e., resistance movements were mobilised around nationalists or communists, but without the direct intervention of the Soviet Union, communist influence was limited to the form of social movements. The most massive participation of women took place precisely where the movements were organised and coordinated by leftist ideologies.

In all cases, participation in the resistance also meant some degree of women's emancipation. Sometimes women sought this on their own, taking advantage of the war (at the time of disintegrating or wavering social order), sometimes it was the resistance movements themselves – especially the left – that wanted to mobilise them¹⁹ (regardless of

¹⁷ See, e.g., Roger D. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; Dainius Noreika, *Partizanų karas Lietuvoje (1944–1953): socialinių struktūrų problema* [doctoral thesis], Vilnius: Vilnius University, 2020.

¹⁸ For example, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* still defines resistance as resistance specifically to the Nazi regime: 'resistance, also called Underground, in European history, any of various secret and clandestine groups that sprang up throughout German-occupied Europe during World War II to oppose Nazi rule: 'Resistance', [online], in: <https://www.britannica.com/event/resistance-Europe-an-history> (8 November 2023-11).

¹⁹ The Greek National Liberation Front (*Εθνικό Απελευθερωτικό Μέτωπο*), active since 1941, was the main force behind the Greek Communist Party, and had a particularly strong programme of political education for women.

the perspective, women made up appr. 50% of the total population). Therefore, the study of the role of women in resistance movements can be seen as an integral and important component of the study/understanding of society (of that period), going beyond the issues of freedom fights alone.

The strongest involvement of women in the armed resistance happened in Italy and Yugoslavia, where, according to official figures, a quarter of the Soviet Union's Red Partisans (25%) were women. In Italy, women accounted for 23.3% of the total number of resistant fighters (35,000 women and 150,000 men).²⁰ In Josip Broz-Tito's Yugoslav People's Liberation Army, women accounted for 16.7% (about 100,000 women and 600,000 men).²¹ In France's la Résistance, women accounted for about 12% of all members.²² In the Jewish partisan ranks, women made up about 10%.²³

Research on women's resistance is dependent on the general state of resistance studies, and the path to historiography has been manifold. The first form that appeared can be called declarative-encyclopaedic, or women aides who fought alongside men. This is an irreflexive image, not explored in depth, held by the resistance members themselves, recorded and disseminated by them or by later historiographers. For example, in France it would include the statement that women were braver than men, and in Lithuania – that women were better at withstanding torture, which may have come straight from the diary of partisan Dzūkai. In his diary, women do not appear individually, but as a group. The second form is the heroic narrative or women heroines. It consists of individual stories told by women, memories written down by themselves or by other people. These are tales of dangers, exploits, adventures, hardships, and losses, but they do not differ substantially from those of men. The last historiographical form began to emerge around the 1970s, when the subject of women in the resistance began to be developed from the perspectives of the war sociology and, naturally, gender studies.

In Western Europe, research has been influenced by political conjunctures and academic fashions, while in communist Europe, historical research on anti-Nazi resistance was much more complicated by ideological demands that made studies of resistance organised against regimes virtually impossible. The late start, the greater difference in time, the difficulties caused by narratives born out of the political tensions of the Cold War may have been the reason why the countries that fought against the occupation of the Soviet Union (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine) are only taking the first steps in the research

²⁰ Dan A. d'Amelio, "Italian Women in the Resistance", in 19, no. 2 (Summer 2001), p. 127.

²¹ Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: a History of World War II Resistance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

²² Claire Andrieu, "Les résistantes, perspectives de recherche", *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 180, 1997, p. 74.

²³ Data from the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation in San Francisco: [online], <https://www.jewishpartisans.org/content/jewish-women-partisans> (08/11/2021).

on the subject by trying to systematize, verify and provide initial quantitative information.²⁴ Meanwhile, in countries where resistance movements have been studied practically since they ended, more nuanced statistical questions are being raised and addressed (in addition to basic questions such as how many women were combatants and how many were involved in supportive structures, the breakdown of women involved in the resistance is being studied according to their age, marital status, education, etc.),²⁵ as well as more complex social questions are raised, such as, whether there had been links between the resistance and the social processes that followed it, how did resistance experiences connect with post-war issues, what forms of social behaviour and culture were given rise to/were determined by the resistance, was there a genetic link, a continuity or a break between the resistance and the processes that later affected women?

In principle, all similar issues fall under the process of women's emancipation. In all resistance movements, women played more auxiliary than combat roles, acting as liaisons, medical staff, contributing to the publishing and distribution of underground press and propaganda, etc. Women in command of combat units are extremely rare. Even in a movement with a strong female presence, such as the partisans of the communist wing of Yugoslavia, the women who joined the resistance from the same social strata as the male fighters – peasants and farmers – were mainly engaged in functions similar to those they had performed in their villages during the years of peace, i.e., in the tasks of facilitating the daily life of male fighters, such as cooking, laundry and the like.²⁶ It should be borne in mind that the involvement of women in the armed resistance was, however, a unique and new phenomenon. To date, war has not been a popular female activity almost anywhere, and compulsory military service for both sexes is only applicable in a few countries. Women's involvement in war was, therefore, a matter of significant social change in society.

In the early post-war decades, the dominant belief was that resistance movements accelerated women's emancipation, but in 1970s reviews by revisionists challenged this belief.²⁷ As more detailed statistical data was being collected, and in particular as the interview method began to be used, it became apparent that the historiography of the past

²⁴ This project, of which this article is one of the outputs, is the first time that the participants have codified and synthesised the data collected to date. See Ramona Staveckaitė-Notari's article published on the website of the LGGR-TC: „Moterys Lietuvos partizaniniame kare 1944-1953 m. Statistinis tyrimas“, [online], in: [http://www.genocid.lt/centras/lt/3451/a/\(09/08/2023\)](http://www.genocid.lt/centras/lt/3451/a/(09/08/2023)), at a later stage, the research was expanded, narrowed in scope, based on the examples of Western European research, localised, focusing on the situation in the North-East of Lithuania, see: Ramona Staveckaitė-Notari, Andrius Tumavičius, *Moterys ginkluotoje rezistencijoje Lietuvos Šiaurės Rytuose* (Karaliaus Mindaugo sritis atvejais), in: *Ibid.*

²⁵ E.g. Charlotte Delbo, *Le Convoi du 24 janvier 1943* [collection of documents], Paris: Les Ed. de Minuit, 2017; Claire Andrieu, “Les Résistantes, Perspectives de Recherche”, in. 180, 1997, pp. 79-80.

²⁶ Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*.

²⁷ Cf. Laura Lee Downs, Women and War: Conference at Harvard University's Center for European Studies, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 1984 no. 25, pp. 85-89.

was often limited to pre-declarative statements (women fought on an equal footing with men, women were more courageous, the majority of those who fought were young, single women, and so on), which often had to be corrected after in-depth research.

The declarative nature of women's participation in the resistance is not necessarily due to any negligence on the part of resistance scholars. In terms of a historiography devoted to social history, wartime falls into a strange zone. World wars, especially the Second World War, are still characterised in historiography by the fact that they divide normal social history into 'before the war', 'during the war' and 'after the war'. Both the study of war as war (warfare), political development and social history tend to fall under the umbrella of the war, being observed, studied, and analysed as a closed period, a kind of capsule of war. Ruth Leiserowitz has pointed out that syntheses of gender history are also usually divided into pre-1939 and post-1945 history.²⁸ The major wars of the 20th century, especially WWII, were characterised by a particular disruptive – and transformative – force on social relations, which makes it difficult and problematic to integrate the time of the war in a process of research that is extended over a period of time. A look at wartime immediately reveals its 'abnormality', e.g., in Lithuania, during the so-called post-war period, the social order suddenly changed radically, people's behaviour began to change in a way that contradicted previous social norms, and society reacted in its own way by legitimising this abnormality, e.g., parents turning a blind eye on their daughters' intimate relationship with partisan fighters.²⁹ But where did this different behaviour come from? Was it accelerated by changes that had been evolving for some time, or was it a temporary ethic born amidst the realities of war? Was there a return to previous values after the war, or did the experience of the war lay the foundations for ensuing changes?

After breaking the capsule of war and by going beyond the strict dates of the beginning and end of the war, it is often observed that the experiences of the war, the roles and skills developed during the war, were differently combined with the social life that was being re-arranged during the post-war years. The biographical accounts of women who took part in the Greek National Liberation Front revealed that, while society restored women's pre-war roles in the post-war years, the participants themselves often rejected the scenario of accumulating dowry for a good marriage as the only or best scenario and looked instead for alternative opportunities on the labour market and in education. Women's participation in the Greek anti-Nazi resistance sparked a public dialogue on the equal-

²⁸ *Women and Men at War: A Gender Perspective on World War II and its Aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Ruth Leiserowitz and Maren Röger, Warsaw: Zeilenwert GmbH, 2014, p. 14.

²⁹ Enrika Kripienė, „Vyrų ir moterų santykiai lietuvių partizanų gretose“, in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2020 no. 1 (47), pp. 81–96.

sation of men's and women's rights.³⁰ The two largest and most important Italian women's associations (the right-wing Catholic Centro Italiano Femminile and the left-wing Unione Donne Italiane), which promoted women's emancipation, originated from the anti-Nazi resistance.³¹ Meanwhile, a deeper examination of the French Resistance demonstrates that women's participation in the Resistance is in no way linked to women's emancipation movements. Moreover, French feminists are not able to draw much on the examples or experiences of women resistance members, as they had tended to take on an overly traditional female role. Even the most prominent female organisers of resistance groups usually acted as leaders until a male leader could take over, and then voluntarily retreated to a secondary position.³² This behaviour of women – not questioning traditional gender roles, limiting themselves to the domestic (not public) space for personal expression – may also have caused less numerous (according to official data) women's participation in the resistance. Some women, especially in rural areas, did not register as former resistance members after the war because they lacked the experience of and motivation for public action.³³

What do we get out of all of this? There are several take-aways. If the resistance is understood as a social phenomenon, there is an obvious perspective of several time horizons. Of course, when studying women in the Lithuanian partisan warfare, the starting point shall be the resistance itself and identification of the number of women involved, their roles, etc., but it would be valuable to look at the resistance as a whole as part of a broader sociocultural process. Indeed, the partisan movement was not inspired by the circumstances alone (Soviet repression) but also by deeper cultural processes, the idea of resistance and the ability to form an organised movement grew out of the culture of the interwar period.³⁴ The genesis of the Sajūdis and the motivations of the resistance participants can largely be explained only by interwar history. What motivated women to take part in the partisan movement? Did they follow their husbands (mothers, sisters and 'somebody's wife') or, like Monika Alūzaitė,³⁵ make their own independent decisions? If so, what were their cultural and/or social motivation?

Similarly, the society that resisted, even after the resistance was suppressed, did not simply disappear. As research by Western historians suggests, the post-resistance period

³⁰ Janet Hart, Women in the Greek Resistance: National Crisis and Political Transformation, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 1990 no. 38, p. 59.

³¹ Wendy Pojmann, Emancipation or Liberation?: Women's Associations and the Italian Movement, *The Historian*, 2005 vol. 67, no. 1, p. 74.

³² Claire Andrieu, Women in the French Resistance: Revisiting the Historical Record, in: *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 2000 vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 16-17.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁴ Dainius Noreika, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Marius Ėmužis, *Monika Alūzaitė - moteris laisvės kovose*, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2020.

can be equally important for the (further) development of the identity of resistance members. For example, it was the prison that collectively reinforced the collective identity of the women who participated in the Greek anti-Nazi resistance, while on the battlefield they had little contact with other female resistance members.³⁶ How did men and women in Lithuania accept defeat? How did they cope in places of imprisonment, how did (and whether) they maintain a (collective) identity among resistance members, and how did they participate in the process of memory preservation/transfer? The examples encountered show that there were significant differences in female versus male behaviour. Genė Karaliūtė, who was imprisoned in the Norilsk camp (and later married to a former political prisoner), said that women found it easier to endure the Gulag because they stuck together (they celebrated the major holidays of the year together, such as Christmas and Easter, and engaged in various collective activities, such as sitting down together to pray when they had a spare minute, etc.), while she said that it was much more difficult for the men, who were 'alone'.³⁷ Greek women testified to similar solidarity in detention.³⁸ Other signs observed suggest that women were the main transmitters of the living memory of freedom fights. When researching the memory of the Lithuanian partisan struggle in families (and family memory in general), there is often evidence that it was from women that individuals learned about the partisan war and its significance, both within families and outside the family circle, e.g., in the Church, during meetings for youth catechesis, often intertwined with patriotic education.³⁹ However, all these initial insights need to be verified by more in-depth systematic research.

Images

Images of women nurtured by partisans

The images of women nurtured by the partisans can be divided into several groups. Firstly, it is a set of characteristics attributed to the Lithuanian woman-patriot. In this context, women's and girls' courage, loyalty and patriotism are strongly emphasised,⁴⁰ and it is precisely these qualities, as well as courage and determination,⁴¹ that were typical of Lithuanian women. It is true that the last two qualities were regarded more typical of men, and

³⁶ Janet Hart, "Women in the Greek Resistance", p. 47.

³⁷ From a personal conversation between Mingailė Jurkutė and Genė Karaliūtė.

³⁸ "I was on death row for eight years. We had come to the conclusion that we were going to die, we really had no doubt about it. But of course we resisted in prison. Whenever the name of the condemned woman was announced, we would dance around the palm tree all night with that woman and sing the song *Farewell, women at the well*, quote by Janet Hart from *Women in the Greek Resistance*, p. 46.

³⁹ Such testimonies have been recorded by Mingailė Jurkutė during her dissertation research „Lietuvos partizanų karas: sovietinis, vietinis ir išėivijos pasakojimas“ (2015) and her postdoctoral research „Trauminių įvykių dalyvių atmintis“ (2020).

⁴⁰ „Lietuvos jaunime!“, in: *Partizanai apie pasaulį, politiką ir save...*, p. 448.

⁴¹ „Kovokime prieš dvasinius ir materialinius tautos naikintojus“ in: *ibid.*, p. 216.

they, as well as the cold nerves of one girl, were mockingly (though not angrily) referred to as a commandant in the partisan ranks.⁴² Meanwhile, female underground fellow members tend to be attributed with sometimes exaggerated sensitivity, and exceptional sensuality.⁴³ On the other hand, in the diary of one of the partisan commanders, Lionginas Baliukevičius-Dzūkas, there is a passage dedicated to the bravery of female aides, who allegedly often endured the torture and interrogation of their enemies better than their male peers, who betray less, and who were setting an example for “more than one man”.⁴⁴

Interestingly, alongside the virtuous Lithuanians, there is another picture of the Russian female sex, as well as of those Lithuanians who in one way or another chose to collaborate with the occupation regime (including romantic relationships). They are portrayed as the opposite of the humble, modest, and patriotic Lithuanians – debauched, audacious, morally fallen *Katyushas*.⁴⁵ Not simply fallen women, but prostitutes really. Such treatment and condemnation of women as traitors to the nation, horizontal collaborators,⁴⁶ was not new in the resistance underground. In France, for example, after WWII, there was a public shaming practice against French women who used to be in romantic relationships with German soldiers; such women were ridiculed and punished by shaving off their hair. It is worth mentioning that the Lithuanian partisans also used hair cutting as one of the punishments for female collaborators.⁴⁷ There are other cases where women suspected of collaboration with the Soviets were subjected by the partisans to gender-based punishments, or to the mockery or disparagement of their sexuality in one way or another.⁴⁸ In the context of the war, both the above-mentioned depictions of negative qualities and the above-mentioned treatment of enemy women (in the broadest sense) were a common practice. Also, the observed juxtaposition between the depictions of own women and those of collaborators can easily be explained by the sources in which the above-mentioned images can be found (for more on this, see the introduction of the paper, in the section on the sources). On the other hand, stereotypical images of Soviet women, em-

⁴² Juozas Lukša [Juozas Daumantas], op. cit., p. 116.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴⁴ Lionginas Baliukevičius, op. cit., p. 122.

⁴⁵ Gardinas, „Komunistų rojus vyresnysis brolis“ in: *Partizanai apie pasaulį, politiką ir save...*, p. 221; „Mokytojų ir moksleivių uždaviniai per vasaros atostogas“ in: *ibid.*, p. 450; „Mieli moksleiviai“, *ibid.*, p. 456.

⁴⁶ Horizontal collaboration is the term used to describe the sexual or romantic relationships established and maintained by the French with the Germans occupying France. After the liberation of the country, such women were treated as collaborators and the most common punishment was shaving hair.

⁴⁷ „Pasakoja Mykolas Dirsė“, in: *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai. IV dalis*, compiled by Romas Kaunietis, Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2004, p. 158; Merkio rinktinės 3-io bataliono 2-o būrio vado Adolfo Baublio-Vyto raportas rinktinės vadui apie Eišiškių vls. Zubiškių apyl. Seniūno likvidavimą ir nelaimingą atsitikimą, 26/04/1947 in *Lietuvos partizanų Dainavos apygarda 1945–1952*, Vilnius: Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas, 2003, p. 195.

⁴⁸ We have probably all heard of partisans stripping naked girls who, in one situation or another, behaved inappropriately in their opinion.

phasising their rudeness and unwomanliness (who just as enemy men cursed, stole, were rude and very audacious),⁴⁹ can be found not only in the press, but also in the memoirs of freedom fighters and in their diaries. Freedom fighters are assisted by brave women and girls, while girls who befriended collaborators were called bitches.⁵⁰ The negative connotation is obvious. A collaborator's stepmother who accidentally discovers partisans in the forest is an old bag, while a trusted woman who comes across them by chance is simply a woman.⁵¹

The second group of images relates to women's roles and functions in the family and, in some cases, in the underground. Here, motherhood is the most prominent feature of the female image. In retrospect, it should be noted that Mother's Day was officially started to be celebrated in Lithuania in 1929. On 24 March of that year, on the initiative of public figure and former member of the Seimas, Magdalena Galdikienė, a meeting of representatives of various women's organisations and the press operating in the country was convened, during which it was decided that the public would be invited to celebrate and was encouraged to celebrate Mother's Day on the first Sunday of May each year. A special appeal was issued, and contacts were made with the bishops,⁵² who were to contribute to the dissemination of information about a new type of spring family celebration. On the first Sunday in May, writer B. Sruoga wrote solemnly in the press that Lithuania had finally begun to celebrate "the celebration of the unity of a true, sincere and indivisible nation – the holiest of all holidays".⁵³ During the remaining decade of independence, a tradition of honouring mothers was established, on the eve of the festival as well as during its celebration, various events focused not only on mothers themselves, but also on preparing young women for motherhood and the position of mothers in society. In the imaginary calendar of partisan holidays, Mother's Day and its celebration occupied an important and honourable place,⁵⁴ which was not only a continuation of the traditions of independent Lithuania, but also a principled opposition to the Soviet attempts to replace Mother's Day with the day of 8th of March. In the "public space" of freedom fighters, in addition to the mother as the source of life, the safeguard and guarantee of nurturing and preserving national identity, another motif of suffering and sacrifice was also very important: "Once again, with your sinking and self-sacrificing heart, you embraced your son and daughter, raised in sleepless nights, to your fainting chest for the last time, and for the last time, with

⁴⁹ Juozas Daumantas, *op. cit.*, pp. 10, 21.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁵¹ Lionginas Baliukevičius, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁵² Juozas Kudirka, *Motinos diena*, Ukmergė, 1994, pp. 13-14.

⁵³ Balys Sruoga, "Motinos diena", in: *Motina ir vaikas*, no. 5, 1929, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Aistė Petrauskienė, „Karas ir šventės. Partizanų švenčių ir atmintinų datų kalendorius“, in: *Liaudies kultūra*, no. 4, Vilnius, 2018, p. 83.

a gentle hand, you caressed them and blessed them, and saw them off on their honourable quest – on the Partisans' path".⁵⁵ In his diary, partisan Dzūkas mentions an elderly woman who lived with freedom fighters in the forest, mainly in charge of household chores, who was in a way a partial mother substitute for younger men.⁵⁶

The importance of the mother is well illustrated by the symbolic link mentioned in partisan songs. This is easily explained, above all, by the adoption of traditional images from folk songs. In partisan minor songs, sisters, like mothers, are often given the role of mourners and grave-keepers.⁵⁷ In the press, however, the concept of a sister is much broader: she is both a kind-hearted Resistance helper, a Lithuanian sister who is asked to knit warm clothes and gloves for the partisans,⁵⁸ and a family member,⁵⁹ and an abstract Lithuanian woman who was deported by the Soviets,⁶⁰ and, last but not least, a partisan who, together with her forest brothers, is a fighter for the freedom of Lithuania.⁶¹ However, it should be noted that the last image (of a sister) is quite rare, and in public discourse, a sister, and women in general, are primarily attributed traditional, usual family-related roles and jobs. Women and girls were seen and regarded as someone who took care of partisans in whatever way they could, primarily in a maternal or sisterly way. They also comfort and reassure freedom fighters in need of consolation and reassurance in the face of setbacks or misfortune.⁶² This functional representation was partly in line with reality, as women living together with partisans in bunkers and camps were primarily responsible for various household chores.⁶³

In general, both by emphasising and depicting the feminine qualities characteristic of a Lithuanian woman, primarily a partisan aide, and by supplementing her spiritual-sensual spectrum with social roles, we can identify stereotypical traits and functions attributed to the female gender. This should not be surprising, but rather the opposite, as this way of depicting women was a very good reflection of the societal worldview of society that was evolving or maturing in interwar Lithuania, which was characterised by clear-cut, traditional gender roles, and which naturally projected different trajectories of (self) perception onto individuals of different genders. In other words, women in the context of freedom fights were portrayed in the way the 'proper' behaviour of the gender in question was *seen* or *imagined* at the time.

⁵⁵ „Motinos dieną minint“ in: *Kovojantis lietuvis*, 1952-05, no. 5.

⁵⁶ Lionginas Baliukevičius, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁵⁷ *Aukštaitijos partizanų eilės ir dainos*, compiled by Vaclovas Slivinskas, Kėdainiai: Spaudvita, 2015, pp. 32-33.

⁵⁸ „Sese lietuvaite“, in: *Partizanai apie pasaulį, politiką ir save...*, p. 355.

⁵⁹ „Vėlinės“, in: *ibid.*, p. 491.

⁶⁰ „Requiescat in pace“ in: *ibid.*, p. 493.

⁶¹ Broliai ir sesės partizanai! in: *Laisvės kovų archyvas*, no. 7, Kaunas, 1993, p. 133.

⁶² Lionginas Baliukevičius, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁶³ Žaneta Smolskutė, „Moterų dalyvavimo ginkluotame pasipriešinime 1944–1953 m. ypatumai“, in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, no. 2, Vilnius, 2006, p. 60.

Images of the Soviet period

As far as the images of the Soviet era are concerned, we have to look at least at two dimensions – the official image regulated by the regime and the alternative image preserved by society from the memory of partisan struggle. The latter is extremely difficult, maybe even impossible, to reconstruct. The contemporary sources that have recorded and left only scant fragments of the partisan warfare are the underground publications, in which the partisan fights in general are very vaguely touched upon, while the image of partisans is extremely abstract. The whole image of the partisan war was limited to the general meanings of patriotism, love of the homeland and resistance to Sovietisation. This simplification and reduction left almost no room for more specific nuances, names, etc., and thus the participation of women did not develop into any concrete picture. Only a small number of families have retained a living memory, and with the stories remaining strictly within the family circle, it is impossible to speak of any alternative image of *society*, because there was none.

Officially, in Soviet Lithuania, there should have been no resistance. During the partisan fights, the press kept silence, and requests were sent to Moscow to revise the lists of news banned from publication by the Union-wide GLAVLIT (i.e., the General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press), because propaganda was considered as really useful in the difficult struggle against the resistance.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, permission to speak out and to reinterpret ideologically the Lithuanian partisan resistance was only given in the early 1950s, at the beginning of the so-called destalinisation, and this was due to a slightly different kind of pressure.

There were basically two circumstances (one external, another one internal) why the Soviet regime had to return to this seemingly solved problem, and if not, instead of some officially approved and proclaimed image, there would have been a resounding silence – the partisan resistance spoiled the propaganda narrative of World War II as a popular struggle against the fascist beast and the peaceful and joyful integration of the new socialist republics, including Lithuania, into the friendly family of Soviet republics. The first is the news of the Lithuanian partisans spread in the free world. The most dangerous was the book by partisan commander Juozas Lukša, *Partizanai už geležinės uždangos*, which served as the basis for the entire subsequent historiography of the Lithuanian partisan warfare in the Lithuanian diaspora, and even partly motivated the aspiration for, and the necessity of, political independence of Lithuania from the Soviet Union. At the same time, the return of former resistance fighters to Lithuania as a result of Khrushchev's destalinization process was perceived as a threat to the stability of Soviet Lithuania. All this forced the Soviets to prepare a response, and in the late 1950s the Soviets were forced to react – a propaganda narrative emerged, in line with Soviet ideology and the approved schemes of historical interpretation.

⁶⁴ Arūnas Streikus, *Minties kolektyvizacija: cenzūra sovietų Lietuvoje*, Vilnius: Naujasis Židinys-Aidai, 2018, pp. 147–148.

In the Soviet interpretation, the axis of the conflict was the struggle of the classes. In it, brutalised bandits, formerly belonging to the upper strata of society, who exploited peasants and workers, terrorised the peaceful population of Lithuania that was determined to build communism. The 'bandits' were alien to the 'people' on a double measure. Their alienation was marked not only by the unbridgeable gulf of different social origins, but also by their lack of independence and their dependence on hostile foreign powers: first they served the Nazis ('Nazi assistants'), and after they had overcome them, the Western imperialists, primarily, the United States of America, which, through the *voice of America*, had inspired and controlled the whole partisan movement.⁶⁵ The 'bandits' were extremely cruel, blinded by social suspicion, they were nonhumans. This primitive image persisted until the release of Vytautas Žalakevičius' famous film *Niekas nenorėjo mirti* (1966), which marked the beginning of a much more subtle manipulation, when alongside the previously alleged handful of 'bandits', a much wider social stratum emerged that was involved in the partisan movement, namely, the misled, people deceived by the 'bandits', or those who helped them out of fear, but who were essentially genuine Soviet people who later realised their mistakes and returned to the true Soviet path.

Was there any room for women in this scheme? They have not appeared as fighters or in any other significant resistance roles, except for one example, which we will discuss later. In fact, women's links with the partisans ('bandits') fits into three images: victims of bandits (the most common), lovers of bandits and mothers of bandits. The last one appears most clearly in the propaganda opus *Vanagai iš anapus*, which was intended to discredit Juozas Lukša. As mentioned above, the entire Soviet interpretation of the partisan warfare was reactive, and *Vanagai iš anapus* came about in response to the message spread by Lukša, and his book, in particular. In it, Lukša, as was typical of the whole generation of partisans, gave a prominent place and showed great respect to his mother, and the Soviet propagandists decided to destroy this image. As mothers of bandits brought them up, they were responsible for, for example, 'fanatical piety' or contempt and hatred for the working people:

As a young boy, he realised that he held a special place in his mother's heart. Following her lead in everything, the child since early days despised weaklings. The maidservant suffered the most from the young Lukša. Encouraged by his parents' silence, he would grab at her hair and scratch her face with his fingernails for the smallest trifle. Once a girl was carrying two buckets of water from a well along a slippery winter path. Joseph was skiing in the yard when he saw the maid and put a stick under her feet. The girl fell, hurt her arm and ran into the house crying. And small Lukša was laughing his lungs out while shouting: 'Clumsy you!' 'Don't walk with your head up in the clouds, but look under the feet when you walk,' said Lukšienė, and she did not reproach her son.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ It should be noted that *Voice of America* broadcasts to Lithuania began only in 1951.

⁶⁶ Menašas Chienas, Kostas Šmigelskis, Edvardas Uldukis, *Vanagai iš anapus*, Vilnius: Valstybinė grožinės literatūros leidykla, 1960, pp. 19-21.

Women victims of bandit violence are in principle no different from other bandit victims; gender-based crimes against women, such as rape of women, were not publicized in Soviet propaganda, although a woman – teacher Ona Sukackienė became the ‘face’ of the victims (a textbook example).⁶⁷ There was also a tendency to emphasise murdered mothers and children, presumably in the belief that these images would be emotionally stronger.⁶⁸ The most striking example of this imagery is Arūnas Žebriūnas’ short debut film *Paskutinis šūvis* (1960) in the cycle of four telenovelas, *Gyvieji didvyriai*. In the film, a girl feeding swans on the sunny shore meets a grim, armed and hungry bandit, who is secretly feverishly collecting breadcrumbs that she was feeding to the birds. The sweet, cheerful girl talks to the sullen bandit and tries to be friendly, but he shoots her dead for no reason.

In the Soviet ideological scheme, women played other roles, not so much to illustrate the reality of the partisan warfare, but rather to highlight the propaganda message that had to come out of the Soviet representation of freedom fights. For example, in youth literature there appeared a dramatic pair of impossible loves – a young communist party member and a girl of bourgeois background, which somehow was in touch with the bandits: through ties of kinship, neighbourhood, and close friendship. The main characteristic of such a heroine is that she belongs to the same exploiting class as the bandits. By falling in love with a communist, she opens the possibility of personal salvation, and a human drama is born. Such a couple appears in Justinas Marcinkevičius’ poem,⁶⁹ in Vytautas Rimkevičius’ play,⁷⁰ Alfonsas Bieliauskas⁷¹ and Vytautas Petkevičius⁷² novels. However, this is only an external image; the purpose of this literature is to indoctrinate the young, to highlight the hostility of the bourgeois class and the irreconcilability of the classes. Behind the human drama lies the same old scheme, whereby a good ending for a bourgeois girl is impossible. There is only one way out of this forbidden love: the death of the heroine, usually tragic, but the individual belonging to the class cannot change his or her place or fate. Thus, while youth literature represented the partisan warfare in the liveliest way, it has also had the least room for freedom and improvisation. The freest were the smaller literary genres, such as the poem, the short story, where more of the reality of the partisan warfare war would seep in and an attempt of something similar to a quest to communi-

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Sukackienė Ona, *Mažoji lietuviškoji tarybinė enciklopedija*, vol. 3, pp. 330-331. Often, when it was necessary to illustrate some specific “malice of the bandits”, it was Sukackienė’s example that was used that was embedded in the Soviet system of knowledge. Her image was used in the writing of textbooks for secondary schools, in forwards to propaganda publications etc.

⁶⁸ E.g. „Būkit prakeikti, motinų žudikai“, in: *Tiesa*, 1959-12-27.

⁶⁹ Justinas Marcinkevičius, *Dvidešimtas pavasaris*, Vilnius: State Publishing House of Fiction, 1956.

⁷⁰ Vytautas Rimkevičius, *Vandens lelija*, Vilnius: Valstybinė grožinės literatūros leidykla, 1959.

⁷¹ Alfonsas Bieliauskas, *Rožės žydi raudonai*, Vilnius: Valstybinė grožinės literatūros leidykla, 1959.

⁷² Vytautas Petkevičius, *Apie duona, meilę ir šautuvą*, Vilnius: Vaga, 1967.

cate authentic experience under Soviet conditions.⁷³ In these genres, women were practically non-existent.

One of the most popular genres in the Soviet press for presenting the story of the “bandit” period was the “confession”. It started during the partisan struggles and was meant to persuade active fighters to surrender. The most striking example of this genre after the end of partisan fights were the two confessions of Jonas Deksnys about how he had ‘realised’ how rotten the ‘bourgeois world’ really was, and how great the Soviet one was.⁷⁴ Interestingly, the only ‘confession’ made by a woman is essentially mute. According to the script, the woman, who was 19 at the time of the partisan warfare, agreed to accompany the investigating journalist on a tour to show him the places where the atrocities had taken place, but she herself never said a word to the journalist during the tour: ‘What have they done? What have they done?’ I asked G., but each time she would look away, shrugging her shoulders’.⁷⁵

In the 1960s, the Soviet narrative about the partisan warfare underwent the said transformation, greatly impacted by Žalakevičius’ film, the new narrative allowed simultaneously maintain the ideological scheme and to let in more of reality. Instead of a handful of brutalised bandits in conflict with society, there was the interpretation that ‘bandits’ were a mass phenomenon, and that the masses involved were simply the real Soviet people who had been misled by bandits.⁷⁶ This correction had no impact on the representation of women, and no special propaganda was created about them or for them. The only prominent portrayal of a female partisan-liaison appeared in *Vyrų vasara* (1970) directed by Marijonas Giedrys. This is a highly ideological film, making a decisive comeback to strict, straightforward schemes, presenting the partisans in the full spectrum of propaganda that had been perfected by then (unscrupulously cruel bandits, longing for lost social privileges). There are even a few scenes of implied rapes of women, and for the first time a detailed image of a female resistance fighter appears – that of a woman with black hair, wearing a black scarf, cold and ruthless, causing fear even among her fellow men. She is the one who, at a meeting of the partisan squads, offers to toast to death, her words are followed by a sudden silence, then by a compliment (?), ‘Lady, death is not scary next to you’, and Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas’ thunderous and loud speech about the need to go and kill all Soviet people immediately. In essence, this woman is a hyperbolisation of all bandit qualities, evoking the uncomfortable fear that women taking to arms (or, in other words, finding themselves as out of place) have often evoked in patriarchal society.

⁷³ Mingailė Jurkutė, *Lietuvos partizanų karas: sovietinis, vietinis ir išėivijos pasakojimai* [doctoral thesis], Vilniaus Universitetas, Vilnius, 2016.

⁷⁴ Jonas Deksnys, „Kodėl aš su jais nutraukiau ryšius“, in: *Tiesa*, 1960-02-20.

⁷⁵ „Žmonės, Vilkas tarp jų“, in: *Švyturys*, 1964, no. 9, pp. 11-13.

⁷⁶ Mingailė Jurkutė M., *Lietuvos partizanų karas...*, pp. 101-108.

In the Soviet propaganda and regime-regulated (e.g., artistic interpretations – fiction, cinema, theatre) narrative of the Lithuanian partisan warfare, the general image of the ‘men’s cause’ was clearly dominant. The most striking expression of the irrelevance of women in the partisan resistance (reinterpreted as banditry and struggle of the classes) is given by Žalakevičius’s hero, the partisan commander Aitvaras, who, when asked “and who are you with, Saint Joseph, the Lithuanians or the Soviets?”, replies “I am with my old woman!”.

Women Images in the Public Space and Culture of Independent Lithuania

The most striking and most tangible feature of the public image of women in Lithuania’s post-war freedom fights is that it is practically a mirror image of the image of women nurtured by the partisans themselves. Those who do not have scientific intentions and are partisan history lovers-enthusiasts tend to rely on the image of a humble, modest, honest, and at the same time – courageous – Lithuanian female partisan or underground collaborator, which was promoted by resistance fighters. The arguments they put forward in their discussions are sometimes legitimised and strongly supported by information from the same sources mentioned and discussed at the beginning of this chapter.⁷⁷ And they are not wrong. It should only be added that such perceptions and beliefs reveal only a small part of a complex picture. At the same time, it is symptomatic that this group of interested parties is undoubtedly also impressed by works that in one way or another illustrate and thus reaffirm their perceptions. For example, a feature film *Vienui vieni*, released in 2004, was officially promoted as a historical drama about the 1944-1953 freedom fights. The filmmakers have made no secret of the fact that it was mainly based on the biography of one of Lithuania’s most famous partisans, Juozas Lukša, which he wrote during resistance.⁷⁸ Without going too much into the details about the success of the film’s idea, the roles of women in the post-war armed resistance were depicted extremely bland, lacking depth, being clichéd and stereotyped. The most prevalent post-war scenes are not omitted, when a home invaded by a *stribas* (i.e., paramilitary Soviet collaborator) attempts to rape a blonde, long-hair daughter of Lithuanian fields, who seems to be so brave, resolute and stoic that she practically emits no sound, betraying her resistance only with her body language. There is also a young woman who is brought to the bodies of the desecrated partisans and who tries her best not to reveal that she has recognised her husband in the pile of corpses. Lukša’s liaison, who brought the letter, only appears in the frame for a few moments. Probably the biggest role in the film is played by the mother of the four partisan Lukša brothers, who, as usual, hardly speaks, and silently accepts the painful trials that

⁷⁷ According to the discussions (in some of which one of the authors happened to participate herself) and statements that can be found in the Facebook group Lietuvos partizanų istorija, [online], in: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/123096087759069> (10/11/2023).

⁷⁸ *Vienui vieni*, [online], in: <http://www.lfc.lt/lt/Page=MovieList&ID=1257&GenreID=454&Y=2001&C=> (10/11/2023).

fate sends to her: the loss of her sons, her husband, her home, as well as other post-war misfortunes. Then there is of course Lukša's sweetheart Nijolė,⁷⁹ but she is on the other side of the Iron Curtain; her image is linked with the post-war freedom fights only through Lukša; in the space of the Lithuanian armed resistance she is practically absent, her portrayal is, therefore, of no interest to us in this context. It is obvious that one of the first films in independent Lithuania devoted to the post-war partisan resistance focussed on the depiction of historical events, widely known biographical and historical facts, and personalities, and it is therefore probably not surprising that there was no room for deeper depictions of women, which are particularly favourable to the disclosure of more interesting contexts and storylines.

The usual types of women in freedom fights also recur in original musical works dedicated to the partisans, which are sufficiently well known to the public, and which are liked and appreciated by interest groups. Here they are: sweethearts, family members, waiting for and often not seeing their husbands returning from the forest: "I will lie down, you will come back,/ Red evenings will fall. /[...] The town bell has been wailing, the city bell has been wailing, brothers have disappeared in the woods./ [...] Our half-empty houses are covered with red blood. When I lay down, you did not come back";⁸⁰ "Don't wait for me, don't wait for me anymore, my darling - / [...] You'll undo your braids when the evening mists rises / And the drawing room will smell of the green mint's tender branch./ Maybe you'll regret having fallen in love with a partisan wanderer, darling, and maybe you'll regret such a hopeless lot of ours".⁸¹

The video clip for the dreamy song by the American, whose family roots are in Lithuania, also tells the tragic love story of the Lithuanian partisan Juozas and his beloved Ana (Ona). The dreamy Ana, in love and caring for Juozas, attracts the attention of the Soviets. One of the couple's dates ends tragically: her boyfriend is killed.⁸² Thematically, the song *Klajūnė* by Aistė Smilgevičiūtė and the band *Skylė* stands out a little bit, because it is dedicated primarily to all women partisans, as well as to those who contributed in other ways to the post-war freedom fights.⁸³ It is fitting for a dramatic and emotional song that the

⁷⁹ Feature film *Vienui vieni*, [online], in: <https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/2000174323/vaidybinis-filmas-vienui-vieni> (2023-11-06).

⁸⁰ Excerpt from the patriotic song *Raudoni vakarai*, composed and performed by Ieva Narkutė. Full track available [online]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jf66b9VQ8c> (2023-11-06).

⁸¹ Excerpt from *Nebelauki manęs* by Aistė Smilgevičiūtė and Skylė band. The song is a part of the music album *Broliai* dedicated to Lithuanian partisans. Full track [online]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_5D4QMZhkU (2023-11-06).

⁸² This is the plot of the song *Nobody loves me like you* by *Low roar*. The track can be accessed [online]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOIOlzjIBnc> (2023-11-06). For more on the Lithuanian roots of the band's leader Ryan Karazija, see "Amerikiečio Rayano Karazijos svajonė – lietuviškas pasas", [online], in: <https://www.lrytas.lt/kultura/scena/2018/04/09/news/amerikiecio-ryano-karazijos-svajone-lietuviskas-pasas-5728042> (2023-11-06).

⁸³ Aistė Smilgevičiūtė and the band *Skylė*, CD *Broliai*, [booklet for CD], 2010.

heroine of the song is a personification of all the women and girls who took part in the post-war resistance – a person whose courage and devotion to the cause is admirable and exemplary, even for men (an analogue of the characteristic mentioned in Lukša's memoirs): "A wanderer who hasn't betrayed her tribe / carrying a silver sword of young moon over her shoulder./ A wanderer who tamed frost / who is a shepherd of lead sisters – bullets./ A wanderer adored by eight warriors [...]"⁸⁴ The artists' decision, somewhat unexpected and, in the general context, still unusual, to commemorate not only those women who were fighting along with men, but also those who were active in the underground, can be at least partly explained by personal background and inspiration: the grandmother of one of the above-mentioned band's members, Zofija Striogaitė-Žilienė, was a partisan with the nickname of 'Klajūnė' (wanderer in Lithuanian).⁸⁵

In Valdas Papievis' complex and slightly psychedelic novel *Brydė*, the plot of the post-war resistance is also palpable, in the context of which the inner dramas, transformations and experiences of women who lived through the post-war period are also looked at sensitively, from unexpected angles, with an empathic, yet not clichéd look, in a somewhat probing way, using the standard themes of doomed love and the constant fear of repression.⁸⁶ However, because the form of the work is understandable and relevant not to an average reader, the work did not stir a wider public debate.

This novel stands in contrast to the critically acclaimed novel *Žali*.⁸⁷ In addition to the partisans named after the real-life fighters, there are also several women: the wife of Jonas Žemaitis, Elena, and those whose prototypes we can only partially guess at: the sympathiser of Žemaitis, Natalija, a liaison under the pseudonym Pieninė, and other girls who appear in only a few episodes. The fiercest critics have said that the work is contemptuous of the partisans, like a spit on the face of Lithuanian political prisoners and deportees, and on all the surviving participants in the freedom struggle.⁸⁸ The critics were planning to appeal to the General Prosecutor's Office with the claim of the desecration of the memory

⁸⁴ Excerpt from Aistė Smilgevičiūtė and the band Skylė's work *Klajūnė*. Full track available [online]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFI-12b7DDY> (2023-11-06).

⁸⁵ Aistė Smilgevičiūtė and the band Skylė, CD *Broliai*, 2010, [booklet to the CD]; "A. Smilgevičiūtė on the legendary project 'Broliai': Broliai: tikėjimės pasiekti jaunus žmones [online], in: <https://m.kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/laisvalaikis-ir-kultura/zvaigzdes-ir-pramogos/smilgeviuciute-apie-legendini-projekta-broliai-tikejomes-pasiekti-jainus-zmones-935449> (2023-11-06).

⁸⁶ Valdas Papievis, *Brydė*, Vilnius: Odilė, 2018.

⁸⁷ The first wave came after the publication of the work (2002). An illustrative example is Vytautas Landsbergis' review in *Šiaurės Atėnai*, George'as Washingtonas tuštinasi į kibirą, [online], in: <https://www.rasyk.lt/ivykiai/george-as-washingtonas-tustinasi-i-kibira.html> (7-11-2023). The second was in early 2019, following the announcement that Marius Ivaškevičius had been awarded the National Prize for Culture and Art. See the next footnote for more details.

⁸⁸ Angelė Jakavonytė, „M. Ivaškevičiaus nuomonė buvo lyg spjūvis mūsų tautos istorijai [online]: <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/nuomones/angele-jakavonyte-m-ivaskeviciaus-nuomone-buvo-lyg-spujuvis-musu-tautos-istorijai-18-1090064> (7/11/2023).

of the resistance fighters.⁸⁹ Indeed, the novel is full of domestic scenes, depicting partisans not as uniformed heroes determined to fight to the death, but as people torn by the harsh, oppressive realities of war and by inner dramas and dilemmas. They sometimes treat women in an ungentlemanly manner, there are many sex scenes, vulgar vocabulary, and the characters communicate in a very direct manner. Thus, in many cases, the women here are not the stereotypical sweethearts or helpers of the partisans, but rather like them: very earthy, audacious, with physiological needs, the descriptions of how they are met are at times very straightforward, and therefore shocking.⁹⁰ The images and the way in which the women have been presented, at first glance and without looking deep into it, are in this case essentially in line with the image and characteristics of enemies and collaborators in partisan discourse, or with the propaganda clichés used by the Soviets. It is therefore not surprising that, based on the usual model (impersonation) of participants in freedom fights, Ivaškevičius' choice of portrayal has been evaluated by many stakeholders in a very negative light.

The authors of *Purpurinis rūkas* have also been accused by some for being ignorant, lacking education, for working for the enemy, because they made a film portraying the partisans in a negative light. Critics also missed the heroism and sacrifice of freedom fighters.⁹¹ The story of a woman directly linked to the freedom struggle is also unusual here – Janina, the beloved of a local partisan commander, later becomes involved with Jozefas, a Soviet informer, who took up residence in the same house, and whom she eventually tried to poison...⁹² And although the plot suggests that there is a lot of personal drama in this particular woman's freedom struggle and the potential to grasp more than the usual, traditional images, the expectation is, unfortunately, unfulfilled. The theoretically important protagonist remains rather flat, primitive, overly calm (maybe that's how she reacts to the stresses and turning points of her life?). Clearly, the director did not intend to focus on her story.

Pelėdų kalnas that was made a little earlier and received much more favourable publicity tells the story of partisan activities in the town. This film chose a fairly safe route – the few girls who appear in the film episodically, as sweethearts and helpers of the resistance fighters, in their qualities and their roles basically corresponded to the traditional, moderate image of girls. Apparently, this is why the short episode in which one of the characters,

⁸⁹ Angelė Jakavonytė, „Nacionalinė premija neturi būti skirta žmogui, išniekinusiam partizanų atminimą“, [online], in: <https://alkas.lt/2019/01/22/a-jakavonyte-nacionaline-premija-neturi-buti-skirta-zmogui-isniekinusiam-partizanu-atminima/> (2023-11-07).

⁹⁰ Marius Ivaškevičius, *Žali*, Tyto alba, Vilnius, 2002.

⁹¹ Ramūnas Aušrotas, *Bebenčiuko naratyvas*, [online], in: <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2019-02-19-bebenciuko-naratyvas/>, as well as various discussions on Facebook after the film's release, in which one of the authors of the text participated.

⁹² *Purpurinis rūkas* (2019), directed by Raimundas Banionis [online]: <https://zmonescinema.lt/filmas/purpurinis-rukas-2019> (2023-11-07).

who has fallen into the water during a covert operation and is very cold, tries to warm up the underground fighter by making love to him was not regarded as disrespect for freedom fighters, nor was there any significant outcry.⁹³

The latest film dedicated to Lithuania's post-war history, *Poetas*, which looks at a complex era from a perspective that is somewhat unexpected, new, and intriguing for the filmmakers and the audience – that of a partisan traitor, features two distinctly striking female characters. Julė, a school librarian, is a partisan sympathiser and supporter of the partisans, portrayed by actress Indrė Patkauskaitė.⁹⁴ She makes a significant contribution to the inclusion of her former classmate and new colleague, Kostas, a poet from the city, who is the main protagonist of the film, in the ranks of freedom fighters' supporters. She plays the expected and stereotypical role of the main character's beloved. However, it should be noted that Julia's character is not primitive and one-dimensional, she is not just the traditional somewhat dreamy, well-educated, patriotic girl. She is also courageous and unquestionably true to her values. She proves this by making an uncompromising decision – in the film's climax scene, after learning that her beloved is a traitor to the partisans, perhaps burdened by the guilt of having introduced him herself to the Resistance, perhaps ashamed of her connection to him, or perhaps simply seeing no other way out and no possibility of continuing the life she had lived before, she killed herself. She killed herself presumably with a weapon she had received from the partisans. The ending is tragically heroic. It should be noted that such an image of a courageous, active woman, capable of making difficult decisions, a participant in the freedom struggle, is quite rare and new in our culture. Here we can also identify at least a partial divergence from the images promoted by the partisans – although heroism was very important to them, desirable and to be emphasised, such a symbiosis between it and a tragic, albeit just, ending is rather an exception. Even more so because in the reality of partisan warfare an armed woman was rare enough.

The second character is the episodic but memorable role of Yevgenia Karpikova, a Soviet activist, teacher Svetlana, who recites poems glorifying the invaders with great, comic but powerful fervour, and puts on pupils' performances that are absurd in our eyes, glorifying the totalitarian regime. The comic, colourful role and image of a female Soviet supporter can also be described as an innovation and a kind of departure from female images that have dominated the works so far.

The fact that we can detect a recent shift in the Lithuanian cultural field on a topic of interest to us is evidenced by the debut novel by historian Bernardas Gailius, a thriller *Krau-*

⁹³ *Pelėdų kalnas* (2018), directed by Audrius Juzėnas [online]: <https://zmonescinema.lt/filmas/peledu-kalnas-2018> (7-11-2023).

⁹⁴ *Poetas* (2022), directed by Giedrius Tamoševičius, Vytautas V. Landsbergis, [online], in: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt23827080/> (10-08-2023).

*jo kvapas*⁹⁵ (published in 2022) which focuses not only on the commander of the partisan unit Andrius Karnauskas-Drakonas, but also on his beloved (oh, how unexpected!) Nastė. She is also principled and, because of her adamant stance that a partisan's struggle is only over if he dies or falls into the Soviet hands, she is even willing to break off her romantic ties with Karnauskas. In addition to Nastė, several other characters appear episodically in the book – smart, lustful, colourful and, again, quite atypical in the context of post-war depictions. Philosopher Simas Čelutka also pointed this out when interviewing the author of the work. However, this observation came as a surprise to Gailius himself.⁹⁶ Of course, his female characters are common and even stereotypical in the context of Western spy literature (that was a source of inspiration for Gailius), but in the field of our fiction dedicated to partisan warfare they are still a big novelty.

Thus, female images in partisan struggles in contemporary Lithuanian public space and artistic works mostly coincide with the main characteristics of the images used by the partisans. It is likely that this aspect (the adoption of the characteristics used by resistance fighters themselves) additionally legitimises the image of female partisans in contemporary society. The most obvious attempts to “break away” from tradition are met with considerable criticism. However, there have been some recent innovations, albeit quite moderate. One can only wonder whether the search for more varied forms of representation in art is hindered by fear of criticism, by the emergence of self-censorship, by the insufficient amount of historical information available, or by the form of the work (for example, a song), which is not particularly conducive to such a search. Do creators try to please their audience, or are consumers of culture in the given field at least partly shaped, among other aspects, by the work available to them? If collaboration between artists and historians is not necessary, then researchers' attempts to try to reveal as diverse a picture as possible of women in partisan underground is essential and, if the right forms are found, perhaps even desirable. Do some recent attempts to do otherwise signal a shift and a change in trends, or are they just an optimistic coincidence? If it is not a coincidence, I wonder what has led to such a change, however slight, that has been so long awaited in the Lithuanian cultural space? To answer these questions in detail, we will probably have to observe the situation for at least a few more years.

Participants of the post-war freedom struggles in historiography

The search for the place of women who took part in the Lithuanian freedom struggle in the historiography must inevitably begin with a discussion of the state of post-war armed struggle research in Lithuania. It should be noted that Mindaugas Pocius attempted to

⁹⁵ Bernardas Gailius, *Kraujo kvapas*, Vilnius: Aukso žuvis, 2022.

⁹⁶ „Homo cultus. Tarp praeities ir ateities. Kraujo kvapas, išdavystė ir kova be taisyklių. Pokalbis su Bernardu Gailiumi, [online], in: <https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/2000202844/homo-cultus-tarp-praeities-ir-ateities-kraujo-kvapas-isdavyste-ir-kova-be-taisykliu-pokalbis-su-bernardu-gailiumi> (2023-06-10).

do this almost fifteen years ago, stating that the historiography of the period still lacks comprehensiveness and a critical approach, that the research conducted in independent Lithuania is dominated by an emotional approach, and that researchers “often idealise freedom fighters, schematically interpret painful and complex events”⁹⁷ and although a lot of valuable factual material and documents have been introduced into scientific discourse, important questions have been raised, there is still a lot of space for research, and conceptual research is not only desirable, but also necessary.⁹⁸

Sadly, the situation has not improved significantly over this period. While we can be happy that we have several successfully defended doctoral theses on individual partisan history⁹⁹ or closely related phenomena,¹⁰⁰ we still do not have a conceptual, synthetic work dedicated to the freedom fights and published in the more than thirty years of the existence of the independent Lithuanian state. In fact, the title of the best monograph on the phenomenon is rightfully retained by the work of Kęstutis K. Girnius, which appeared for the first time in the diaspora.¹⁰¹ It should be noted that, unlike a significant number of scholars after Girnius who studied the same topic, he was particularly interested in the question of the (post-war?) social reality of the time. We can suspect that perhaps it was not obvious to him as an expatriate, so he asked, for example, *why did* men go into the forests, what social reasons pushed them?¹⁰² Ironically, the extremely limited availability of sources served him well in this case. Historians of independent Lithuania, on the other hand, with the open archives of the Soviet repressive structures, much better opportunities to study the written legacy of the freedom fighters themselves, and to collect the memoirs of direct witnesses of the epoch, have for a long time concentrated on filling in the factual record of partisan fights. It is therefore not surprising that their research on the movement as a whole has been very episodic, relying on a few isolated inspirational examples, life stories or emotionally powerful, influential theses that in principle say very little about reality (for example, the statement, already mentioned several times in the thesis, that “women endured Soviet

⁹⁷ Mindaugas Pocius, „1944–1953 metų partizaninio karo Lietuvoje istoriografija“, in: *Istorija*, no. 64, Vilnius, 2006, p. 60.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ For example, the peculiarities of the partisans' struggle against collaboration have been studied by Mindaugas Pocius, see his monograph *Kita mėnulio pusė: Lietuvos partizanų kova su kolaboravimu 1944–1953 metais*, Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2009, as well as several researchers who have studied the regional peculiarities of the phenomenon. Dainius Noreika's doctoral thesis looked into the place of social structures and their influence on the entire armed anti-Soviet resistance movement: Dainius Noreika, *Partizanų karas Lietuvoje (1944–1953 m.): socialinių struktūrų problema* [doctoral thesis], Vilnius: Vilnius University, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Mingailė Jurkutė analysed specifics of memory of postwar freedom fighters: Mingailė Jurkutė: *Lietuvos partizanų karas: sovietinis, vietinis ir išėivijos pasakojimai* [doctoral thesis], Vilniaus Universitetas, Vilnius, 2016; Aistė Petrauskienė researched contemporary practices of the inheritance of the Partisan War in Lithuania: Aistė Petrauskienė, *Partizaninio karo vietos: jamžinimas ir įpaveldinimas nepriklausomoje Lietuvoje* [doctoral thesis], Vilnius: Vilniaus Universitetas, 2017.

¹⁰¹ Kęstutis K. Girnius, *Partizanų kovos Lietuvoje*, Į laisvę fondas lietuviškai kultūrai ugdyti, Chicago, 1987.

¹⁰² In the opinion of the authors of this article, this question has been answered thoroughly and very successfully by Dainius Noreika in his doctoral thesis mentioned above.

interrogations better and were less likely to betray their brothers and sisters in arms”.¹⁰³

Historians have tended to describe the role of women in the context of the movement in purely functional terms, stressing that most of the women who helped in the armed underground were liaisons, a role that was uniquely suited to girls.¹⁰⁴ It should be noted that, although the statement is well known and assimilated by the general public and seems to be axiomatic, it is in fact misleading. If at the beginning of the fighting there were indeed provisions and instructions to use women and children as liaisons for the transmission of messages, for the monitoring of the environment, because they were less likely to attract the attention of the Soviets, less likely to be searched,¹⁰⁵ it was noticed later that the enemy had become familiar with this ploy, and was instructed to make sure that “the persons working as liaisons are not distinguished in terms of their age or sex”.¹⁰⁶ A local study of a partisan unit also shows the opposite tendency – women were far from being in the majority among liaisons.¹⁰⁷ We can speculate that a false impression may have been given to the researchers when, knowing the original partisan attitudes, they linked them to later, striking examples – for example, the situation during the creation of the Partisan High Command in 1948–1949. In the responsible and crucial work of centralising the underground, the critical mass of female liaisons, who travelled throughout partisan areas of Lithuania and the headquarters of their organisational units, was indeed made up of girls.

Generally speaking, when discussing the history of 1944–1953 and the situation in Lithuania, historians have recently begun to take the first steps in trying to move away from the usual functional-heroic-victimised portrayal of people who acted at that time, to interpret the period through a more social and societal prism. Although this approach raises reasonable hopes for a future breakthrough, we will still have to wait before it starts bearing fruit, as a lot of the aforementioned type of discussions are still taking place within inner circles of scholars, not in academic journals.

It is worth briefly discussing the works covering one or another aspect of women’s freedom struggles. In 2006, at the then Vilnius Pedagogical University, Žaneta Smolskutė defended her master’s thesis “Moterys Lietuvos partizaniniame judėjime 1944–1953 m.”,¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Nijolė Gaškaitė, Dalia Kuodytė, Algis Kašėta, Bonifacas Ulevičius, *Lietuvos partizanai 1944–1953 m.*, Kaunas, 1996, pp. 93–104.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94

¹⁰⁵ „Dzūkų rinktinės DLK Kęstučio grupės štabo instrukcija Nr. 1 dėl priešų sekimo“, 1945-06-30, in: *Lietuvos partizanų Dainavos apygarda 1945–1952*, Vilnius, 2003, p. 77.

¹⁰⁶ „Geležinio Vilko rinktinės vado Algirdo Varkalos-Daumanto įsakymas Nr. 2“, 1947-03-29, in: *Lietuvos partizanų Tauro apygarda 1945–1952*, Vilnius, 2000, p. 210.

¹⁰⁷ Enrika Kripienė, “Partisan Supporters: the Unseen Participants of the Resistance”, in *The Unknown War: Anti-Soviet armed resistance in Lithuania and its legacies*, compiled by Arūnas Streikus, New York: Routledge, 2022, p. 90.

¹⁰⁸ Smolskutė Ž., *Lietuvos moterys partizaniniame judėjime 1944-1953 m.* [Master’s thesis], Vilniaus pedagoginis universitetas, Vilnius, 2006.

in which the author attempted to reveal the peculiarities of women's participation in the freedom struggle. This research was the basis for a follow-up article.¹⁰⁹ Smolskutė is regarded as a pioneer of a more consistent and detailed research of the topic in Lithuanian historiography. It is symptomatic that, given the state of historiography at the time, the scope, and objectives of the types of works she produced, the research cannot claim to be a conceptual quest, but rather a fact-based study of factual type, successfully synthesising the information relevant to the topic in the scientific literature, and introducing a few new aspects. For example, the author is probably the only one who has so far presented statistical data within the framework of the topic under study. Smolskutė focussed on women who, at the time of the research, already had a recognised legal status of a soldier volunteer, and thus were actually armed participants of the resistance. She provided information on the evolution of the intensity of their participation in the underground, arrests, deaths.¹¹⁰ The choice to focus only on women volunteers of the 1944–1953 wars is understandable and justified in the context of the work carried out but is nevertheless rather limited in terms of their wider use and incorporation into a larger-scale study.

Ruth Leiserowitz's article compares the motives and roles of women partisans in the underground, in the Jewish and Lithuanian armed resistance groups in the Lithuanian forests during World War II and the post-war years. The researcher also presented her insights into the representation of gender roles in the studied groups, and from this perspective, she tried to draw parallels with the interwar, revival and contemporary society (its national groups). It should be noted that the study is included in a collection of texts on social gender issues that emerged in Central and Eastern Europe during the Second World War and the post-war years, thus placing the topic in a broader geographical context.¹¹¹

The study drafted by Marius Ėmužis, dedicated to the personality of Monika Alūzaitė, a participant of the freedom fights, is also directly related to the topic of interest. Using a micro-historical approach, Ėmužis attempts to reveal the characteristics of the Lithuanian freedom fights through the life story of one person, while not forgetting some social contexts.¹¹² The study is suitable for both the curious reader willing to learn more about the history of the anti-Soviet resistance, and for scholars looking for inspiration and possible new points of view. However, it should be stressed that this book is intended to provide an overview of the Lithuanian armed resistance and its characteristics, rather than a

¹⁰⁹ Smolskutė Ž., *Moterų dalyvavimo ginkluotame pasipriešinime...*, pp. 53-62.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Ruth Leiserowitz, "In the Lithuanian woods. Jewish and Lithuanian Female partisans", in: *Women and Men at War: A Gender Perspective on World War II and its Aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Ruth Leiserowitz, Maren Röger, Osnabrück: Fibrer, 2012, pp. 199-218.

¹¹² Marius Ėmužis, *Partizanė: Monika Alūzaitė - moteris laisvės kovose*, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2020.

comprehensive examination of the issue of women and their place in the movement. The author himself did not set himself such an ambitious goal.

Dovilė Budrytė has analysed women's memories and memories of WWII and the post-war period and the female role in them from the perspective of the participants in the resistance movement. One of them was Aldona Vilutienė, member of freedom fights. The research reveals that Vilutienė's own memoirs, i.e., how she remembers and talks about her participation and role in the anti-Soviet resistance, correlate directly with the episodic role of a woman as an aide to the male partisans, which is most often presented in the historiography of freedom fights. Even when asked about her personal experiences, the woman always tried to divert her speech away from herself. In the local museum dedicated to the Freedom Fighters, which she founded and curated, Vilutienė also made very little space for women. Budrytė attributes this to the traditional narrative of the Lithuanian partisan fights and the perception of gender roles, which undoubtedly influenced Vilutienė greatly.¹¹³ Such findings suggest that a historian researching women in the ranks of the freedom fighters is likely to encounter additional source research problems: it may be extremely difficult to uncover more information from the already collected memoirs of female partisan aides (given that there are few surviving participants because of their age) in some aspects of interest, and interviews with women involved in freedom fights will also require additional preparation.

Kripienė's attempt to discuss the complexities of relations among men and women in the ranks of the partisans is also partly relevant to us. Contextually, the article touches on some aspects of women's involvement in the resistance underground, as well as other peculiarities. It raises questions about the related, possibly changing behaviour, norms, and worldview.¹¹⁴ The above-mentioned article is a niche one, and the problems of the structure of the society of the time, the issues of the movement, which are of interest to us, are analysed from a rather narrow point of view of the work.

The scientific conference organised by the Thomas Mann Culture Centre in Nida and the Institute of History and Archaeology of the Baltic Region of Klaipėda University in the beginning of autumn 2020, dedicated to the topic of women in war, is also worth mentioning. Here, five presentations were devoted to discussing various aspects, features and interlinks of women's participation in freedom fights.¹¹⁵ The success of the event and the diversity of the presentations suggest that the topic of women in war is indeed a promis-

¹¹³ Dovilė Budrytė, "From partisan warfare to memory battlefields: two women's stories about the Second World War and its aftermath in Lithuania", in *Gender & History*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 754-774.

¹¹⁴ Enrika Kripienė, „Vyrų ir moterų santykiai Lietuvos partizanų gretose“, in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, no. 1, Vilnius, 2020, pp. 81-96.

¹¹⁵ For more information see *Mokslinė konferencija „Karas ir moterys“*, [online], in: <https://www.mann.lt/lt/naujienos/moksline-konferencija-karas-ir-moterys-/200> (9/11/2023).

ing and relevant in the context of Lithuanian history. The conference report was also the basis for an article by A. Petrauskienė. It is an overview in which the historian describes the peculiarities of the regulation of women in the Lithuanian freedom fights and highlights the guidelines for practical action.¹¹⁶

At the end of October 2021, an international conference was organised in Vilnius on the initiative of historians from the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania on the theme and issues of women in freedom struggles. Colleagues from Eastern and Western Europe presented their research, a discussion was held, the main challenges for researchers were discussed, and experience was shared in raising problematic issues, selection, and application of methodology.¹¹⁷

Finally, it should be noted that the topic of our interest is well researched beyond the framework of historical science, i.e., it is clearly applicable to interdisciplinary research. A project funded by the Lithuanian Research Council is currently underway on the topic of violence against women in 20th century Lithuania, which also focuses on the state of the phenomenon both in the ranks of the partisans and in postwar Lithuanian society. It uses tools offered not only by the discipline of history but also by the discipline of law.¹¹⁸ Of course, this is just one example of how the same topic can be addressed from multiple perspectives, combining access provided by different disciplines. There are undoubtedly more.

Conclusions / proposals

A review of both the historiography and the prevailing images shows that women in the Lithuanian armed resistance are still a little-known phenomenon. Discussions, portrayals and summaries of women's participation are still based on repeated, rather superficial notions that are not subject to criticism and are taken from the few descriptions of women left by the partisans themselves.

In the context of the entire freedom fights movement, historical studies usually portray women from a functional point of view – by discussing their (auxiliary) roles, their relations with the partisans: liaison, supporter, nurse, mother. Such portrayals are most clearly reflected in the sources and memoirs left by the participants of the freedom fights themselves, as well as in today's cultural and public space. However, the authors of the article

¹¹⁶ Aistė Petrauskienė, „Moteris Lietuvos partizaniniame kare: nuo formalaus reglamentavimo iki praktinio veikimo“, in: *Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis*, vol. XLII, Klaipėda, 2021, pp. 241-261.

¹¹⁷ For more information see. *Sisters in Arms: European Women in the Armed Resistance against the Soviet and Nazi Regimes*, [online], in: http://www.genocid.lt/UserFiles/File/Titulinis/2022/20221027_programa.pdf (12-08-2023).

¹¹⁸ Monika Kareniauskaitė, "Silenced trauma? Violence against women in the context of Soviet occupations", in: *See International Conference "The History of Violence Against Women: From Theoretical to Empirical Perspectives"*, [online], in: [https://hmf.vdu.lt/en/international-conference-the-history-of-violence-against-women-from-theoretical-to-empirical-perspectives/\(2023-11-08\)](https://hmf.vdu.lt/en/international-conference-the-history-of-violence-against-women-from-theoretical-to-empirical-perspectives/(2023-11-08)).

believe that such a rather one-sided, simplistic depiction falls far short of revealing the complex post-war reality, the characteristics of the community of freedom fighters and their supporters, as well as of the wider fabric of society. Although the situation seems to be changing for the better in more recent post-war historical research, and the topic of women in the ranks of the resistance is gradually being discovered and normalised, no longer perceived merely as a piquant appendix to more serious topics, there is still a lot of work to be done before it can be fully integrated, qualitatively, and comprehensively investigated.

We believe that the following guidelines are worth pursuing in developing research on this topic:

1. To analyse the quantitative and qualitative data collected so far and to provide a comprehensive statistical analysis of women in freedom fights. At present, it is already possible to make certain generalisations (by age, social origin, role, i.e., combat, or auxiliary functions, etc.) using the nominal database of Lithuanian partisans compiled by the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania (LGGRTC). There are also many audio and video interviews with former participants in the resistance, some of which were also collected by the LGGRTC. It is necessary to organise this archive and make it available to researchers, thus expanding the possibilities for studying the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of women's participation in the armed resistance (and the Freedom Fights more generally).

2. To think about women's history and to research it within the context of social history, by closely linking the study of women's participation in the partisan warfare with the social development of society. In Eastern European countries the prolonged Soviet occupation, social history research poses additional challenges, as we are dealing with a society that has undergone a major rupture and a profound transformation. However, this only reinforces the need not to lose sight of this context when thinking about the consequences, legacy, and memory of the freedom struggle.

3. It is a sensible approach to investigate not only the partisan warfare itself, within the framework of 1944-1953, but also to investigate the history of the warfare's memory together with the history of the war. Initial research shows that men and women probably played different roles in the transmission of the memory of the partisan warfare, and that men and women used different strategies to cope with the trauma of war and political repression. Given the assumption that communication of traumatic experiences is one of the fundamental conditions for overcoming trauma, this would be another argument for focusing separately on the women's and men's groups.

4. Examples from foreign historiography suggest that interviews should be the main source for researching women's resistance history, as conventional sources do little to capture women's experiences specifically. In this case, future research needs to start as soon as possible, because although women in Lithuania tend to outlive men, we are talking about a generation that is passing away.

Mingailė Jurkutė, Enrika Kripienė

Moterys laisvės kovose: tyrimų būklė ir metodologinės išvalgos

Santrauka

Straipsnyje aptariama tema – moterys Lietuvos partizanų kare. Autorės apžvelgia šios srities tyrimus, jų raidą Vakarų istoriografijoje, akcentuodamos tiek teorinių, tiek metodologinių priėgų kismą, vėliau aptaria konkrečiai Lietuvos partizanų karo atvejį. Pirmiausia plačioje laiko perspektyvoje – nuo partizanų kovų laikotarpio iki antrosios Lietuvos nepriklausomybės laikų – apžvelgiamas moterų partizanų kario dalyvių (dalyvavimą suprantant plačiai, nuo kombatantų iki įvairių rezistencijos pagalbininkų) vaizdinys. Atskirai analizuojama lietuviška istoriografija – nuo išėivijos istorikų iki naujausių darbų.

Nustatyta, kad Lietuvos atveju kartojosi visiems moterų rezistencijoje tyrimams būdinga situacija, kai ankstyvuoju laikotarpiu (partizanų kovoms tebevykstant ir klostantis pirmiesiems kolektyviniams vaizdiniais) vyravo nekritiški, nedaug reflektuoti, idealizuoti ir propagandizuoti vaizdiniai. Sovietų režimo sąlygomis lietuviška istoriografija neišgyveno Vakarų šalims būdingos istoriografinės raidos, todėl atgavus nepriklausomybę tie patys vaizdiniai, dabar jau paremti keliais ankstyviausiais naratyviniais šaltiniais (Juozo Lukšos memuarais, Liongino Baliukevičiaus dienoraščiu), persikėlė į istoriografiją, o populiariojoje istorinėje sąmonėje jie iki šiol plačiai paplitę. Sovietinio laikotarpio Lietuvos partizanų karui skirta propaganda nepasiūlė jokių specifinių moterų partizanų karo dalyvių vaizdinių. Pastarąjį dešimtmetį išvelgiamos daugiacentriškos pastangos iš naujo (teorijos ir metodologijos prasme) prieiti prie moterų Lietuvos ginkluotoje rezistencijoje tyrimų, suvokiant juos kaip savarankišką temą, vertintinos kaip gilesnių tyrinėjimų pradžia.

Pabaigoje autorės formuluoja galimas tolesnių tyrimų gaires: išnagrinėti kiekybinius ir kokybinius iki šiol sukauptus duomenis, pateikti išsamią moterų laisvės kovose statistinę analizę; tirti moterų vaizdinį socialinės istorijos kontekste, glaudžiai siejant moterų dalyvavimo partizanų kare tyrimus su socialine visuomenės raida; tiriant patį partizanų karą, kartu tirti ir karo atminties istoriją; plačiai naudoti interviu metodą, nes Vakarų tyrimų pavyzdžiai atskleidė, jog įprasti rašytiniai šaltiniai mažai fiksuoja specifiskas moterų patirtis.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Antrasis pasaulinis karas, partizanų karas, pokaris, laisvės kovos, moterys, moterų istorija, lyčių tyrimai, vaizdiniai.