

Women in the Armed Resistance in the Northeast of Lithuania: The Case of the King Mindaugas Partisan Region

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The purpose of the article is to refine the data of the initial statistical study, “Women in the Lithuanian Partisan War, 1944-1953”, by examining the biographies of the female partisans in the Northeastern Lithuania partisan region according to targeted biographical parameters, and to present an objective picture of the female partisan. The paper analyses the reasons for women getting involved in the partisan movement, examines the social cross-section of the female fighters, and investigates the marital status and fates of the female partisans. After conducting the research, it was found that more than half of the female fighters chose this path because they had been influenced by their immediate environment, i.e. their relatives were actively involved in the armed resistance. This insight confirms the relationship between women’s motivation and the activities of their relatives imparted in historiography. One tenth of the female partisans examined became involved in the armed resistance for political reasons. This trend correlates with the insight that political engagement was low among women. Examination of the social cross-section revealed that most of the female partisans came from farming families, i.e. belonged to the main social group of the Republic of Lithuania population. Empirical data confirmed the opinion that the partisan resistance was essentially a struggle of the rural part of society against the Soviet regime. An analysis of the marital status of the female partisans revealed that more than 60 per cent of the female fighters were single, while 30 per cent were married and 18 per cent had children. The study of the fates of the female fighters imparts that these women either died/committed suicide or were arrested and convicted. There were only a few isolated cases of female partisans becoming legal. In this case, a clear difference is evident between the fates of women and men. Men became legal both individually and in groups. The Soviet repressive system treated male and female partisans equally – they were called “bandits” and punished according to Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR.

Keywords: female partisan, resistance, partisan warfare, collective biography.

Introduction

The armed resistance to the Soviet occupation that emerged in Lithuania after World War II created favourable conditions for Lithuanian women to join the armed movement. For the first time in the history of Lithuania, a female fighter became a systemic occurrence rather than an isolated case or exception.¹ However, Lithuanian historians studying the phenomenon of partisan warfare in the first decades of restored Lithuanian independence failed – whether consciously or not – to notice the phenomenon of the female Lithuanian fighter. The stories of women remained on the margins of scientific research, and male partisans were always the protagonists and heroes.

This outlook of Lithuanian historians is no exception in the general field of research on armed partisan struggles in Europe. In Italian partisan historiography of the 1970s, the term *la resistenza taciuta* (“the silenced resistance”) was even coined in reference to the Italian women partisans left in historical oblivion. A similar situation arose in France, where the struggles of female partisan took on the definition of *fighting in the shadows*.² Female partisans had to earn the right not only to fight as equals with men on the battlefield, but also to garner attention in the field of historical research.

Over the last decade, with a new generation of historians coming of age (Marius Ėmužis, Aistė Petrauskienė, Enrika Kripienė, Inese Dreimane, Sanita Reinsone), there has been a clear breakthrough in researching the role of women in the Lithuanian and Latvian partisan war.

Žaneta Smolskutė³ is one of the first historians who tried to systematically and coherently look at the role of women in the partisan struggles. By examining the biographies of 250 female partisans, she explicated the motives that encouraged women to join the partisan movement, the dynamics of their joining the ranks of the armed resistance, their functions, and so on. Smolskutė discerned a tendency for the male partisans themselves to invite them to become helpers, but only in an emergency did they invite them to join their ranks. She also found that more than 70 per cent of the female fighters were married, and that their decision to become partisans was influenced by their husbands, who were also partisans.

Using field research, the memoirs compiled by Romas Kaunietis and archival sources, historian Aistė Petrauskienė presented a classification of female partisans by func-

¹ Ramona Staveckaitė-Notari, “Moterys Lietuvos partizaniniame kare 1944–1953 m. Statistinis tyrimas”, [online], in: http://www.genocid.lt/UserFiles/File/GRTD/20211119_statistika.pdf (07-Oct-2022).

² “Storia delle donne nella resistenza italiana”, [online], in: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storia_delle_donne_nella_Resistenza_italiana, (22-Sep-2022); “Femmes dans la resistance interieure française”, in: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Femmes_dans_la_R%C3%A9sistance_int%C3%A9rieure_fran%C3%A7aise (07-Oct-2022).

³ Žaneta Smolskutė, “Moterų dalyvavimo ginkluotame pasipriešinime 1944–1953 m. ypatumai”, in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2006, No 2 (20), pp. 53–62.

tion and discussed the partisan documents that regulated the position of women in the partisan movement.⁴ The author emphasised that it was very rare for women to become partisans for political reasons; usually, they were previously supporters or messengers who joined the ranks of the armed resistance to avoid repression. Petrauskienė also emphasised the family ties that resulted in wives following after their fighting husbands, as well as partisans getting married and having children. The author's insights are formulated clearly and accurately. On the other hand, Petrauskienė stressed that she has only performed the initial stage of research of the material.

Marius Ėmužis, who is researching the partisan struggles, analysed the biography of partisan Monika Alūzaitė using primary sources, memoirs and historiography.⁵ His book is an attempt to paint a picture of a woman fighter – to look at her inner experiences and reveal the reasoning behind her decision, the path of the struggle, the way she carried herself during interrogations, and her fate. Alongside Alūzaitė's biographical line, Ėmužis examined the specifics of partisan battles. He formulated the definition of the concept of a female partisan – a fighter who has taken an oath, belongs to an organisation and lives illegally.

Enrika Kripienė,⁶ who is a member of the new generation of historians, used partisan documents, press and memoirs to analyse one of the aspects of the daily life of the fighters – the relationship between men and women in the partisan ranks. Kripienė revealed that the conditions of partisan warfare led to the liberalisation of gender relations. On the other hand, relationships between men and women were still based on traditional values and included courtship, engagement and marriage.

Latvian ethnographer Sanita Reinšone took an unusual and sensitive look at women's experiences as partisans in her article entitled "Forbidden and Sublime Forest Landscapes: Narrated Experiences of Latvian National Partisan Women After World War II". The relationship between the *meža meita* ("forest daughter") and the forest in the memoirs of Latvian female partisans became the main object of her research. The author singled out the role of the forest in women's lives before retreating to it and after, when women had already crossed that invisible line into the Soviet legal borderland.⁷ In the narratives of female partisans, the forest, which before the war was a symbol of harmony with nature, after the war became a symbol of hiding and escape – a gathering place for outlaws. On the

⁴ Aistė Petrauskienė, "Moteris Lietuvos partizaniniame kare: nuo formalaus reglamentavimo iki praktinio veikimo", in: *Acta historica*, Klaipėda, 2021, Vol. 42, pp. 241-261.

⁵ Marius Ėmužis, *Partizanė. Monika Alūzaitė – moteris laisvės kovose*, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2020.

⁶ Enrika Kripienė, "Vyrų ir moterų santykiai Lietuvos partizanų gretose", in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2020, No 1 (47), pp. 81-96.

⁷ Sanita Reinšone, "Forbidden and Sublime Forest Landscapes: Narrated Experiences of Latvian National Partisan Women After World War II", in: *Cold War History*, 2016, No 16, pp. 9-10.

other hand, knowing that they were in the forest with sisters and brothers of the same fate gave the partisans a psychological sense of security and community.

Latvian partisan women rarely retreated to the forest for ideological reasons. Reinsone argues that for the majority of the women, the decision was based on fear for their lives and fear of being arrested and tortured.⁸ Like in Lithuania, Latvian women went to the forest when they had no other choice – when living in the forest became a safer alternative to being in the “human world”.

In the memoirs of Lithuanian women who were participants in the freedom fights, the experience and relationship with the forest unfold in a similar manner. For women who found themselves on the fringes of the society created by the Soviets, the forest became a temporary shelter and home while they waited for “America to come”.

A historiographic review revealed that existing papers are limited to an examination of the women’s reasoning, their relationship with family members involved in the partisan movement, partisan functions, and so on. On the other hand, no comprehensive, consistent study yet exists that confirms, refutes or challenges the insights found in the literature discussed. Therefore, the continuing “Women in the Partisan Movement in Lithuania” project seeks to become a study that fills the gaps in the research problematics of female members of the resistance and provides a comprehensive picture of female members of the resistance who fought against the Soviet regime in 1944-1953.

The biographical study of the female partisans in the Northeastern Lithuania (King Mindaugas) partisan region is a part of the continuing “Women in the Lithuanian Partisan War, 1944-1953” study.

The **purpose of the article** is to refine the data of the initial statistical study, “Women in the Lithuanian Partisan War, 1944-1953”,⁹ by investigating the biographies of the female partisans in the Northeastern Lithuania partisan region according to targeted biographical parameters, and to present an objective picture of the female partisan. In conducting this study, we aimed to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the analysis technique selected, and to identify the challenges that researchers undertaking studies of this type encounter.

Tasks:

1. Analyse the reasons for women getting involved in the partisan movement.
2. Examine the social cross-section of the female fighters.
3. Investigate the marital status of the female members of the resistance.
4. Analyse the fates of the female partisans.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹ “Women in the Lithuanian Partisan War, 1944-1953. A Statistical Study”, conducted in 2021, [online], in: http://www.genocid.lt/UserFiles/File/GRTD/20211119_statistika.pdf (21-Nov-2022).

Research methodology and novelty. This research uses the prosopographic approach, where, after selecting a certain social group of historical figures (in the case of this paper, it would be more accurate to call this a political group¹⁰) and creating a targeted questionnaire about their various biographical facts (social origin, profession, education, marital status), the aim is to create a collective biography for the group being studied and discern certain dynamics that unite the group of individuals being studied.

Claude Nicolet, a representative of the French Annales school, defined the essence of prosopography very precisely, stating that this method “highlights individuality and singularity in order to, on the contrary, bring collectivity and normality into the field.”¹¹

The first historians in Lithuania to use the prosopographic approach were studying the elite of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.¹² The attractiveness and innovativeness of this approach (in the case of Lithuania) soon resonated among scholars studying the recent history of Lithuania.

The first prosopographic studies on the participants in the partisan war become a very important starting point for us. Historian Enrika Žilytė is considered to be a pioneer in this field, having prepared a scientific study entitled “A Collective Biography of Partisan Commanders”, where she attempted to determine whether it is possible to talk about a solid and complete “portrait” of the partisan commander.¹³ In order to achieve the objectives set in his dissertation entitled “Partisan War in Lithuania (1944–1953): The Issue of Social Structures” – analysing the social composition of the partisans and disclosing the influence of the social structures of Lithuanian society in 1920–1950 on the specific features of the creation, development and activities of the organisational units of the Lithuanian partisans in 1944–1953¹⁴ – Dainius Noreika also used the prosopographic approach and studied the biographical data of a thousand partisans.

The approach used by both scientists made it possible not only to look at the phenomenon of partisan resistance through the usual prism of the description of events, but also to establish that these partisans were not just randomly gathered collaborators. The empiri-

¹⁰ In his article entitled “Partisan Dictatorship”, Bernardas Gailius uses Carl Schmitt’s theory as the basis for his argument on why a partisan war is a political event and partisans are political fighters, or even, in a way, armed politicians (B. Gailius, “Partizanų diktatūra” in: *Politologija*, Vilnius, 2011, No 2 (62), pp. 75, 77).

¹¹ Sylvie Duval, “Prosopografie femminili”, [online], in: https://www.academia.edu/18633851/Prosopografie_femminili (17-Sep-2023).

¹² Rimvydas Petrauskas, *Lietuvos diduomenė XIV a. pabaigoje–XV a.: sudėtis, struktūra, valdžia*, Vilnius: Aidai, 2003; Aivas Ragauskas, *Vilniaus miesto valdantysis elitas XVII a. antrojoje pusėje (1662–1702 m.)*, Vilnius: Diemedis, 2002; Tomas Vaitkus, “Prozopografinis metodas ir Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės centrinių, administracinių, teisinių pareigūnų duomenys Lietuvos Metrikoje 1528–1564 metais”, in: *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, 2022, No 50, pp. 8–27.

¹³ Enrika Žilytė, “Partizanų vadų kolektyvinė biografija”, in: *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, 2016, No 38, pp. 84–112.

¹⁴ Dainius Noreika, *Partizanų karas Lietuvoje (1944–1953): socialinių struktūrų problema* [doctoral dissertation], Vilnius University, 2020, pp. 18–19, 21.

cal data collected made it possible to discover certain patterns, and highlight and confirm the nexus of social structures that were initially considered by historians to be only inferred. In most cases, Lithuanian partisans were united by common features of collective behaviour, the foundations of which were laid in interwar Lithuania.

In terms of its conception, idea and vision in search of a “collective portrait” of the female partisan, the closest is “Partisan War in Lithuania (1944-1953): The Issue of Social Structures”, Dainius Noreika’s doctoral dissertation, which is something of a collective biography of the social structure of the Lithuanian partisans. The author draws new research trajectories in the field of historical research of partisan warfare, which cannot be bypassed if one wants to reveal the said “portrait”. The dissertation highlights the influence of interwar Lithuanian paramilitary culture on the decision to join the partisans.

In this research, it was extremely important to define the concept of the Lithuanian partisan. What criterion does Lithuania apply to this definition, and what do foreign countries apply? The Boston *Lietuvių enciklopedija* defines partisans as “armed units that fight in a territory occupied by the enemy, but do not form part of an organised army. Partisans are usually made up of the remnants of a defeated army and organised local residents, to weaken the enemy and paralyse military supply/transport.”¹⁵

The *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija* states that “partisans are participants in an armed struggle who voluntarily acts behind enemy lines or in territory controlled by a particular regime. They fight for the independence of their homeland in organised armed formations.”¹⁶

In their definition of a guerrilla, the Anglo-Saxons do not mention one of the defining criteria in the concept of a partisan – “territory captured or occupied by the enemy”. This is likely related to the personal historical experience of Great Britain and the United States. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a guerrilla is a “member of an irregular military force fighting small-scale, limited actions, in concert with an overall political-military strategy, against conventional military forces. Guerrilla tactics involve constantly shifting attack operations and include the use of sabotage and terrorism.”¹⁷ According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, “a guerrilla is a member of a small, independent, usually political, group taking part in irregular fighting against larger regular forces.”¹⁸

The Italians, whose historical memory holds a very important place for the partisan war that took place in the country during World War II, give the following definition: “Par-

¹⁵ Partizanai, *Lietuvių enciklopedija*, Vol. 22, Boston: Lietuvių enciklopedijos leidykla, 1960, p. 40.

¹⁶ Eugenijus Kisinis, “Partizanas”, *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija*, Vol. 18, Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 2010, p. 524.

¹⁷ “Guerrilla”, *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 5, Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1993, p. 544.

¹⁸ “Guerrilla”, *Oxford Dictionary*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 362.

tisans are persons associated with or belonging to irregular armed formations operating in enemy-occupied territory”,¹⁹ adding that in terms of Europe during World War II, the term “partisan” includes everyone who belonged to resistance movements against occupying powers, whatever the form of their organisation and activity.²⁰

German jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt formulated the principles of his partisan theory in his 1963 book, *Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political*. In his opinion, partisans are fighters who share four main characteristics – irregularity, mobility, political activism and telluricity.²¹

Historian Marius Ėmužis singles out “female partisan fighters”, i.e. women who took the oath, lived in bunkers, wore uniforms and were armed.²²

Dainius Noreika, a researcher who specialises in the anti-Soviet armed resistance in Lithuania, defines belonging to a partisan organisational unit (a territorial unit, company or the squads subordinate to it) and performing the duties assigned to it as essential criteria defining the concept of a partisan. According to Noreika, belonging to a partisan unit means that the person constantly (during the period of being a partisan) maintained direct contact with other partisans in the same unit – lived in common camps, bunkers or other hiding places. At the same time, the performance of duties meant that the person carried out the instructions of the commander of the partisan unit and performed the functions assigned. This included carrying out combat assignments with a weapon, working at headquarters (for example, preparing press releases), and taking care of housekeeping and auxiliary functions (for example, acting as the squad cook, tailor, paramedic/nurse). Hence, people who did not carry out combat assignments with weapons, but performed other duties while constantly being with the partisans, are also classified as partisans.²³

The definitions given in dictionaries and encyclopaedias have one common denominator: partisans are members of irregular armed formations. However, similar definitions are not relevant when examining the actions of partisans in Lithuania in 1944-1953, as they do not reflect their specifics.

Meanwhile, the definitions of partisans given by researchers are more precise. The characteristics of partisans formulated by Carl Schmitt correspond to the case of Lithuania, but they are not all-encompassing. Using them, it is difficult to formulate the individualised definition of partisans necessary for this study.

¹⁹ Giacomo Devoto, Gian Carlo Oli, *Dizionario della lingua italiana*, Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 2004.

²⁰ “Partigiano” [interactive], in: <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/partigiano> (25-Sep-2023).

²¹ Bernardas Gailius, “Partizanų diktatūra”, in: *Politologija*, 2015, No 1, p. 76.

²² Marius Ėmužis, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²³ D. Noreika, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

Marius Ėmužis's insight about "female partisan fighters" is insufficient for our research, because it leaves one question unanswered: If only an armed woman who lived in a bunker and participated in combat is a partisan, then how do we classify a woman who belonged to a partisan squad, but only performed auxiliary functions?

The definition of partisans proposed by Dainius Noreika perhaps most accurately describes the group examined in this study. Therefore, when we use the term "female partisans" we shall be referring to women who belonged to armed anti-Soviet resistance formations and performed the assignments given to them. In this case, the length of time that they belonged to the structure is not a deciding factor. Whether she spent several years as a partisan or was just in a squad for a short time, this woman meets one of the definition criteria – she belonged to an armed resistance formation. The functions performed by the female partisans also do not provide grounds for differentiating them as "fighters" (i.e. the women who had weapons and participated in battles) and "women who were in the squads but who only cooked and sewed". In this study, all women who belonged to partisan squads (whether they participated in battles, worked at headquarters, or took care of housekeeping) were partisans who performed their own functions.

Research area. The area of the King Mindaugas partisan region extended through Northeastern Lithuania, i.e. it covered the ethnographic territory of Aukštaitija. The region was made up of the Algimantas, Didžioji Kova, Vytis and Vytautas Military Districts. This is the territory of Lithuania that the Red Army first occupied in the second half of 1944 after it pushed the German army west. This is also the territory where the armed resistance against the occupants first started – in late summer 1944.

Study sample. The initial statistical analysis of women who participated in the Lithuanian partisan war in 1944–1953 became the starting point for this study. For the statistical analysis, we used information collected by the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania (LGGRTC) about individuals who participated in the Lithuanian partisan war in 1944–1953. The nominal database (DB) about these persons (both men and women) was compiled on the basis of archival and historical sources – documents of the Soviet repressive apparatus and criminal and exile cases safeguarded by the Lithuanian Special Archives (LSA), as well as partisan document funds and memoirs of contemporaries and witnesses of the events preserved by the LGGRTC.

The initial statistical data reveal that in 1944–1953, 770 women fought in the ranks of the partisans.²⁴ In conducting this research, we focused on female partisans who were active in the territory of the Northeastern Lithuania (King Mindaugas) partisan region in 1944–1953. We examined the biographies of a total of 210 female fighters. During the investigation, inaccuracies in the DB information became apparent. For example, there were

²⁴ Ramona Staveckaitė-Notari, *op. cit.*

cases where the DB listed a woman as a partisan, but further investigation revealed that although she did support the fighters, she did not belong to the armed resistance structures. We also found information about female partisans who are not in the DB. Therefore, the actual numbers of fighters will differ from those recorded in the DB.²⁵

Theoretical and statistical insights and generalisations are supplemented by illustrative episodes from the life and activities of partisan Emilija Lujanienė.²⁶ In this way, we aim to vitalise the questionnaire sections of the study, giving them touches of the life of a partisan who actually existed. The episodes are presented without additional commentary, using the information recorded in interrogation protocols, the memoirs of her fellow partisans, what is probably poetry written by Lujanienė herself, and episodes of her life recorded in historical sources.

I. Analysis of Partisan Motivation

In trying to put together a historical picture of the female partisan, we acknowledge that the most important component is the motivation of these fighters. The theoretical justification of the motivation of residents to become partisans has been examined by the émigré historian Kęstutis Girnius. He singled out four main factors that encouraged Lithuanian residents to join the armed resistance – “the experience of the first Bolshevik and German occupation, unbridled Soviet terror in the first post-war years, the hope of Western intervention and patriotism.”²⁷ At the same time, Girnius admitted that these were only the prerequisites for becoming a partisan, but were not enough on their own. According to him, personal resolve and character traits often played a decisive role.²⁸

The theoretical interpretations of Girnius’s motivation to be a partisan were limited by the documents of the Soviet apparatus, which were not available at the time of writing the monograph. In this case, Noreika was much more fortunate, as he had all the archival sources he needed at his disposal and was therefore able to empirically substantiate his insights.

Looking for links between past social structures and being a partisan, Noreika studied all partisans without distinguishing a specific segment (just men or just women). It is only

²⁵ This project is a quantitative study. Such access makes it possible to step back from isolated borderline cases that are presented in historiography as examples and used as bases for drawing conclusions, i.e. where exceptional cases become the basis for generalisations that lead to incorrect conclusions. The project uses individual examples as illustrations to explain the context in which the lives and fates of the subjects developed.

²⁶ Lujanienė (née Ivanauskaitė) Emilija, Kazys, b. 05-Sep-1910, Šiauliai County, Klovainiai District, Siečiai Village, into the family of farmers Kazimieras and Ona (née Kareivytė) Ivanauskas. Belonged to the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union since 1930, established relations with the partisans in 1945, was a supporter, escaped from the rampage of the Cheka troops in 1946 and went into hiding, joined the ranks of the partisans in the spring of 1946, became legal in 1947, came to an agreement with the partisans in 1948 and rejoined their ranks, was arrested in 1953 and sentenced to 25 years in correctional labour camps, lived in Latvia after imprisonment, and died in 1985.

²⁷ Kęstutis Girnius, “Partizanų kovos Lietuvoje”, Chicago: *Draugas*, 1987, p. 110.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

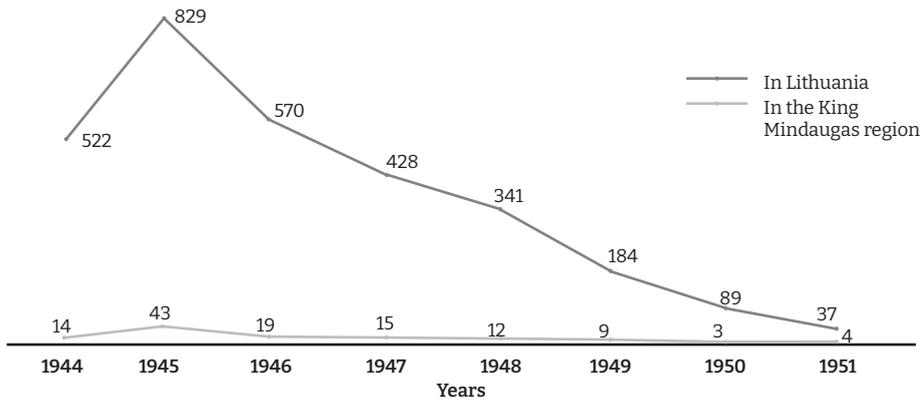


Figure 1. Enlistment in the ranks of partisans in Lithuania and in the King Mindaugas region

natural that men, who made up the absolute majority of all Lithuanian partisans, dominate in his study and reflect the masculine factors of being partisan, which are at the same time common to the entire Lithuanian partisan war.

When researching female partisans, some of the important factors of being a male partisan are naturally ruled out – the conscription factor that was extremely relevant in the first stage of the fighting (1944-1945), and which transformed, albeit to a lesser extent, into avoiding service in the Soviet army. Women also did not have the past baggage that Noreika calls “active participation in anti-Soviet activities”, including service in the Lithuanian army and being a part of the 1941 June Uprising, the security squads that operated in the summer of 1941, the auxiliary police and the self-defence or construction battalions.²⁹ So in summarising according to the factors of being a partisan that Noreika identified, women fall primarily into the group of individuals who were messengers, supporters or members of underground organisations before becoming partisans.³⁰ This trend is illustrated by numerous examples of the female partisan path – Jadvyga Žardinskaitė (code name “Daktaras Dolitlis”), Emilija Lujanienė (code name “Miško zylė”), Elena Valevičiūtė (code name “Nida”), and many others.

The numbers of new female partisans in the King Mindaugas region reflect the general trend of Lithuania. The number of female partisans peaked in 1945. Enlistment rates (see Fig. 1) show that 8 per cent of all of the fighters studied became partisans in the second half of 1944, and as many as 24 per cent of the female partisans studied started out on this path in 1945. In subsequent years, enlistment steadily decreased, with 10 per cent in 1946, 9 per cent in 1947, 8 per cent in 1948, 6 per cent in 1949, 2 per cent in 1950, and 3 per cent in 1951. We did not manage to establish enlistment dates for 30 per cent of the female

²⁹ D. Noreika, *op. cit.*, pp. 292, 295.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

partisans studied. However, if we were to use the chronological framework of the change in the composition of the partisans that Noreika singled out in his research (1944-1945 and 1946-1953), we would see that although the total number of female partisans in the King Mindaugas region peaked in the first stage of the war, the majority of women (38 per cent) started their partisan activities in the second stage. These numbers support Noreika's conclusion that starting in 1946, there was a growing trend where the new members of the partisan squads were their former messengers and supporters, often connected by family ties with existing partisans. And as we know, a relatively large share of the messengers and supporters were women.

The typical path of women to the ranks of the partisans started with supporting fighters. In 1944-1945, at the beginning of the partisan war, women who eventually became partisans used to help their brothers, fathers and husbands who were dodging conscription and later joined active partisan squads.

Excerpt from Emilija Lujanienė's 07-Apr-1953 interrogation protocol:

Our farm [Lujanai Village] was one kilometre away from the Biržai forest. There was a river near the homestead where members of the armed nationalist gang led by Jonas Žagrakalnis used to go swimming. My husband's parents and I helped them with food. This is how I got to know the members of the armed nationalist gang. These bandits talked to my husband's relatives and asked them to build a bunker for them. A bunker was built in the shed of our farm where three bandits were in hiding. My husband's mother cooked for them and I took it to the bunker; I also washed their linens.³¹

Women joined the ranks of the partisans later, pressured by external circumstances – repressive apparatus persecution, family repression, and so on. Female partisans joined the armed struggles throughout the entire duration of the partisan war. Even when the outcome of the partisan war was clear and society was gradually coming to terms with the Soviet occupation, women continued to try to join the fighters who were left. In the King Mindaugas partisan region, one such woman was Valerija Streikutė (code name "Piemenaitė"), a fighter in the Lokys territorial unit who became a partisan in 1951.

After studying the biographies of the female partisans (see Figure 2), it was found that 37 per cent of them joined the ranks of the partisans because their family members and loved ones were partisans, while 11 per cent joined because their loved ones were partisan supporters, and 3 per cent joined because they were recruited by active partisans. 9 per cent of the female partisans joined on their own accord. 34 per cent of the biographies examined did not reveal the possible reasons for enlistment.

During this study, we were faced with a question: Is it possible to identify a person's motivation based on factual material? The motivational component of female partisans remains more hypothetical and conjectural than refined by empirical research. On the

³¹ Emilija Lujanienė's interrogation protocol, 07-Apr-1953, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 26572/3, l. 34.

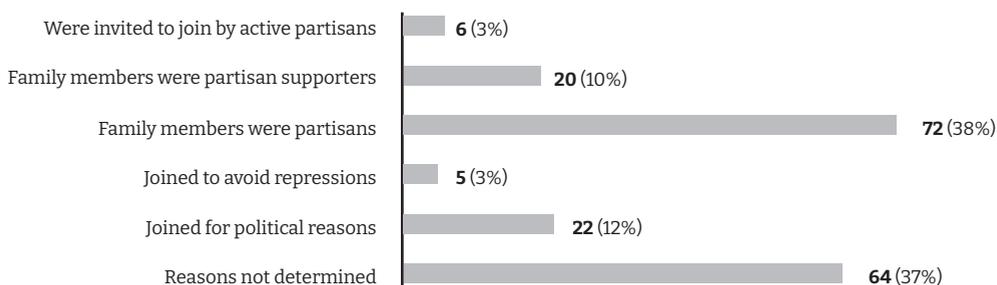


Figure 2. Reasons for female partisans joining the armed resistance in the King Mindaugas region

other hand, there are enough factual data for us to see the multidimensionality and complexity of the reasons for joining the ranks of the partisans:

On 14 September 1951, when asked by an interrogator: “Why did you decide to join the so-called ‘partisans?’”, partisan Jadvyga Žardinskaitė- Daktaras Dolitlis, who was formerly a third-year student in the Faculty of Medicine, answered: “I didn’t want Soviet rule. I wanted a free Lithuania.”³²

On 10 May 1946, when asked by an interrogator: “What made you choose this criminal path?” Vanda Starukienė, who had a six-month-old baby and whose husband, Juozas Starukas, was a partisan, answered: “I chose this criminal path only because I really loved my husband Juozas.”³³

On 5 August 1950, when asked by an interrogator: “Why did you enter into a criminal association with gang leader Petras Tupėnas?”, Ona Šepetytė, a partisan messenger and supporter who worked on a collective farm, answered: “He suggested I help and I agreed. He asked me not to inform the MGB about our connection, because they were going to find out about it anyway, since he has his own people in the Biržai County department of the MGB.”³⁴

These are just a few examples of women’s reasons for becoming a partisan that one can come across in the criminal cases of remand prisoners. The responses of these female partisans reveal almost the entire spectrum of reasons for women to join the partisan war. From value-based reasons, when personal and national freedom and independence were considered values, and the aggressor trampling on these values evoked the decision to defend them and resist the occupant, to a marriage-based decision to help a spouse who was a partisan, to reasons that are difficult to pin down, when, due to unfavourable circumstances, women were unable to refuse to join the ranks of partisans.

³² Jadvyga Žardinskaitė’s interrogation protocol, 14-Sep-1951, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 201173/, t. 2, l. 189,190, 193, 196.

³³ Vanda Starukienė’s interrogation protocol, 10-May-1946, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 29412/3, l. 46, 46 a. p., 50 a. p.

³⁴ Ona Šepetytė’s interrogation protocol, 05-Aug-1950, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 23559/3, l. 24, 26, 30.

The biographies revealed that for 12 per cent of the women, the decision to become a partisan was determined by political hostility to the Soviet occupation regime, and we can call this internal motivation. Meanwhile, for nearly half of the women – 48 per cent – the decision to become a partisan was determined by external circumstances, i.e. their relatives were directly connected to the partisan movement (were partisans themselves or supported the fighters). Thus, family ties had a greater influence on the personal decision of Lithuanian women to become partisans than political and civic convictions. Historian Dainius Noreika also emphasises the factor of kinship on becoming a partisan, underscoring that social media researchers call kinship and family relationships the *strong ties*, and relationships between individuals in an organisation the *weak ties*.³⁵

Excerpt from Emilija Lujanienė's 04-Jul-1953 interrogation protocol:

On 17 January 1946, our farm was surrounded by MVD soldiers; the bunker was found and the bandits were taken alive. At the same time, my husband Petras Lujanas and his father Petras Lujanas were arrested and then sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment for helping the bandits.³⁶

The documents of the Soviet repressive apparatus do not fully disclose the network of social ties which may have formed between female partisans in the interwar period, and which Noreika has proven to have impacted the partisan struggles. For this reason, the questions remain unanswered of to what extent social acquaintances could have influenced women's decision to join the partisans, and whether women would have retreated to the forest in exactly the same way if their male family members had not become involved in the partisan battles and they had not been faced with the threat of repression.

The largest interwar paramilitary organisation in Lithuania that had both male and female members was the Riflemen's Union. In 1940, this organisation had approximately 88,000 members, of whom 9,522 were women.³⁷ Noreika's empirical research revealed that in the partisan units he studied, members of the Riflemen's Union accounted for 17.5 per cent of all partisans.³⁸ The number is not impressive, but the author emphasises the qualitative role of these members, which these figures do not speak to.

At this stage of the study, we did not aim to purposefully establish female membership in the Riflemen's Union, but knowing the general numbers and the statistical trend, we can assume that the number of female members of the Riflemen's Union in the partisan ranks was minimal. Yet here too, the *weak ties* had a qualitative potential that was given to them by the knowledge of military and sanitary basics that they acquired in the Riflemen's Union.

³⁵ D. Noreika, *op. cit.*, pp. 80, 81.

³⁶ Emilija Lujanienė's interrogation protocol, 04-Jul-1953, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 26572/3, l. 36.

³⁷ Skirmantė Javaitytė, "Istorinė sąjunga Kaune: stereotipas keitusios moterys šaulės", [online], in: <https://kaunas.kasvyksta.lt/2019/06/09/kultura/sauliu-moteru-veikla-laikinosios-sostines-laikotarpiu-foto/> (06-Oct-2023).

³⁸ D. Noreika, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

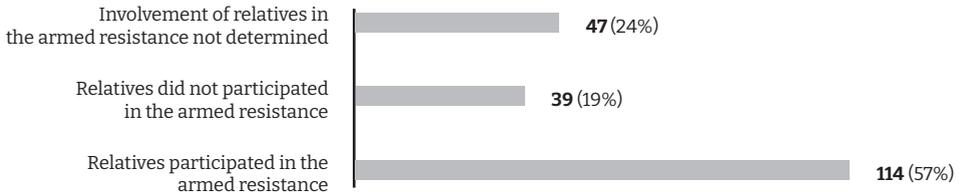


Figure 3. Involvement of the relatives of the female partisans in the armed resistance in the King Mindaugas region

Excerpt from Riflemen's Union member Emilija Ivanauskaitė-Lujanienė's service certificate: *Member of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union since 11 September 1930.*³⁹ Excerpt from the memoirs of Danutė Ivanauskaitė-Tabakienė: *In Kaunas, at the riflemen convention, she took first place in the shooting competition.*⁴⁰

The example of Ivanauskaitė-Lujanienė forms the basis for the hypothesis that what was typical for men was an exception for women. However, additional research is needed to confirm or refute this hypothesis.

Analysis of the biographical data revealed (see Fig. 3) that 57 per cent of the female partisans in the King Mindaugas region had relatives who participated in the armed freedom fights, while 19 per cent did not; for 24 per cent of the female fighters, it was not possible to determine whether their relatives were members of partisan squads.

The data show that the participation of most women in the armed resistance was directly related to the fact that their brothers, husbands or fathers had become involved in the partisan battles. This indicator of the involvement of relatives directly correlates with the motivation of women to join the partisan ranks – a woman was more likely to join the partisan movement if her family was already directly involved in the partisan battles.

Repression of the families of the participants in the Lithuanian freedom fights was a targeted measure used by the Soviet authorities to both isolate the partisans from direct contact with their relatives (in very frequent cases – supporters) and thus weaken the fights themselves, as well as to discourage the public from wanting to join the ranks of the partisans.

The biographies examined show (see Fig. 4) that 50 per cent of the female partisan had families that were repressed, i.e. their immediate family members had been arrested or deported.

However, one can also not assert that the repression of family members was always

³⁹ Riflemen's Union member Emilija Ivanauskaitė's service certificate, in: *Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCSA)*, f. 561, ap. 21, b. 62, l. 3; Emilija Ivanauskaitė's application to join the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, in: *LCSA*, f. 561, ap. 22, b. 349, l. 1

⁴⁰ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 2, Part 2, compiled by Romas Kaunietis, Vilnius: Vaga, 2000, p. 661.

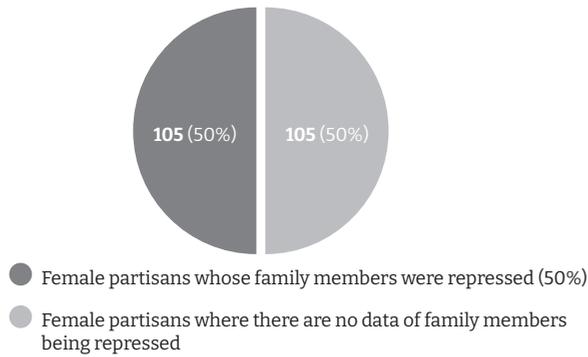


Figure 4. Female partisans in the King Mindaugas region whose family members were repressed

caused by the women enlisting as partisans. The biographies revealed that some of their families were repressed even before they joined the ranks of active fighters. In these cases, repression became the deciding factor for women to enlist. Families that escaped direct Soviet repression as a result of their family members participating in the partisan battles still experienced the constant silent persecution of the Soviet system and the demeaning stigma of being called the *family of a bandit*.

An analysis of women becoming partisans confirms Kęstutis Girnius's insight that "the theory does not claim that under certain circumstances, everyone will go into the forest. There is still room for personal resolve and character traits."⁴¹ The study revealed that there was no single universally shared factor that led to women's decision to become partisans. Their decision to join the armed resistance was determined by a set of reasons.

The deciding factor to fight could not have appeared in a social and political vacuum – it could only have appeared in a space where the social ties formed in the face of geopolitical processes unfavourable to Lithuania's statehood had already created the prerequisites and conditions for individuals to make this decision. One might therefore say that in a sense, the motivation of Lithuanian female partisans was a reflection of the sociocultural and political processes that took place in interwar Lithuanian society and the maturity of the society itself.

II. Social Cross-Section: Functions, Social Origin, Education and Age

In the study, special attention was paid to the analysis of the functions and social cross-section of the female partisans.

The data on the functions performed by female partisans in the King Mindaugas region (see Fig. 5) revealed that 24 per cent of the women had weapons and were ready to partici-

⁴¹ Kęstutis Girnius, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

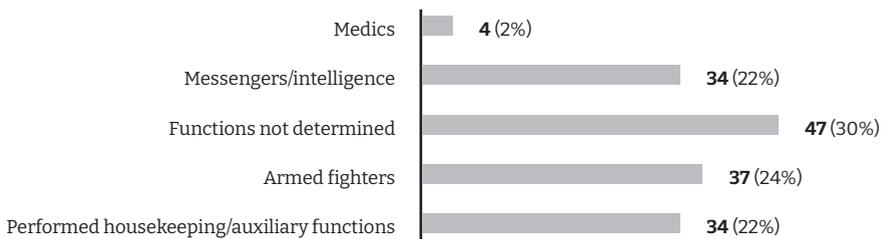


Figure 5. Distribution of the female partisans in the King Mindaugas region by operational functions

pate or participated in armed actions, 28 per cent took care of housekeeping and auxiliary functions, 22 per cent performed intelligence and messengers functions, and 2 per cent were involved as combat medics. We did not find information about the functions of 24 per cent of the female fighters, and this is related to the fact that in historical and archival sources, there is quantitatively less factual information about specific ordinary female partisans than there is about more prominent women who made a more distinct mark in the context of the partisan war.

The biographical analysis that was conducted revealed that as partisans, women performed a wide range of functions. These were mainly housekeeping activities such as making food and mending and washing clothes, but they also took part in partisan combat operations.

Excerpt from Emilija Lujanienė's 07-Apr-1953 interrogation protocol:

When I was in Giedrikas's gang, I didn't have a weapon. In May 1949, I transferred to Krivickas's gang, and he gave me a PPS submachine gun that used to belong to Povilas Tylukas, a bandit who was killed. In addition, Jonas Krivickas gave me a foreign pistol and seven cartridges in the summer of 1952. These weapons were taken when the MVD authorities arrested me.⁴²

The analysis of women's activities also shows that the patriarchal family model that was prevalent in Lithuania at that time, when household chores were exclusively the responsibility of the woman, had transferred into the forest as well. First and foremost, a female partisan was expected to perform auxiliary housekeeping functions. Partisan Robertas Indrikas was happy about the presence of women in the bunker: "It was clean inside, because feminine hands constantly maintained order and cleanliness."⁴³

Excerpt from Emilija Lujanienė's 08-Apr-1953 interrogation protocol:

Giedrikas told us women to go deeper into the forest, and after we left, he gave all the bandits code names, except for the women.⁴⁴

As many as a quarter of the female partisans in the King Mindaugas region were armed,

⁴² Emilija Lujanienė's interrogation protocol, 07-Apr-1953, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 26572/3, l. 25-26.

⁴³ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 1, compiled by Romas Kaunietis, Vilnius: Vaga, 1996, p. 677.

⁴⁴ Emilija Lujanienė's interrogation protocol, 08-Apr-1953, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 26572/3, l. 53.

but the male partisans were wary (and sometimes sceptic) of an armed woman. They used to come up with all sorts of ways to test the women's accuracy and marksmanship, many of which had comic elements as well. Leokadija Krapaitė, a partisan from the Lokys territorial unit in the Vytautas Military District, remembers an exchange she had with Juozas Streikus (code name "Stumbras"):

Streikus and I got in an argument once. He says: "What do you need a weapon for? You can turn your ass to a broad, but she'll still miss..." I loaded my rifle and said: "Go ahead and turn it." So he went and pinned a small piece of paper to a tree and said: "Shoot!" I hardly even aimed and the bullet went right into the paper. Then Streikus lowered his head and never insulted me again.⁴⁵

Benedikta Viščiūtė (code name "Vėtra"), a partisan from Petraitis's squad in the Vytis Military District, received a Belgian carbine after taking her oath:

Then he took me to the village. There was this huge, long house. He opened all the doors, hung a target on the wall in the store-room, and then put me and the carbine at the other end of the farmhouse and told me to shoot. I fired once and hit the target, and Petraitis said I'm a good shot. That's how that Belgian carbine became my best friend.⁴⁶

However, that *best friend* often betrayed the partisans at the worst possible moment. The general state of the partisans' armament, especially in the second half of the partisan war, was pitiful. Due to improper storage conditions, the weapons had begun to rust, and there was a shortage of ammunition. During her arrest, Jadvyga Žardinskaitė tried to shoot with not one, but two weapons – a submachine gun and a pistol. The partisan admitted to the interrogator that during the military operation, she shot at the soldiers with a machine gun, which quickly jammed and stopped working. She only managed to get one shot out of the pistol before that stopped working too.⁴⁷

More than 40 years after the start of this arrest operation, Žardinskaitė vividly remembered one episode:

During the last battle, I tried to shoot – I pulled and pulled the trigger, but not a single round. When they arrested me and took away that machine gun, the Russian, looking at it, just shook his head and muttered: "A warrior, you're a warrior" (Russian: "Вояка, ты вояка...").⁴⁸

On the other hand, there were women who managed to secure leadership positions in male partisan squads. Partisan Uršulė Vildžiūnienė (b. 1895) began her path as a fighter in 1944. She formed and headed a partisan squad that operated in Kupiškis, and was killed in battle on 18 April 1947 in that territory.⁴⁹ Hence, a woman was in charge of a partisan squad for three years and made decisions regarding combat actions, requisitions and new

⁴⁵ *Laisvės kovotojų prisiminimai*, Vol. 8, compiled by Romas Kaunietis, Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2014, p. 143.

⁴⁶ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 3, compiled by Romas Kaunietis, Vilnius: Margi raštai, p. 127.

⁴⁷ Jadvyga Žardinskaitė's interrogation protocol, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 20117/3, t. 1, l. 196.

⁴⁸ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 1, p. 298.

⁴⁹ Document on the results of the Cheka military operation, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 6451/3, l. 81.

members in the vicinity of its operations. In Soviet government documents, Vildžiūnienė was ideologically referred to as a bandit. In the eyes of the aggressor, she was equated with the partisans. The memoirs of her peers also reveal aspects of Vildžiūnienė's activities that were not quite partisan-like. In her time, not only soldiers, but also the very partisans who had "pressed" Vildžiūnienė were searching for her. [They] told her: "Stop it, don't taint our name!"⁵⁰

A company that was made up exclusively of female partisan messengers operated in the Didžioji Kova Military District, headed by Aldona Sipavičiūtė (code name "Velnio Išpera").⁵¹ A total of 37 female partisans were included on the company's list. The company was divided into four squads: Karklynų Pelėdos, Vaidilutė, Erika and Pašvaistė.⁵² The members of the company had code names, received assignments, were included in the lists of fighters in the military district, and were considered full-fledged partisans. In the summer of 1945, a group of female paramedics was also formed in the same military district. The group was named Aušra, and its members were trained to provide medical aid to partisans.⁵³

From the very beginning of the armed struggle, the partisans were clever in inviting women to participate in the fight against the occupants. Heroic literary characters were reborn in the most unexpected roles. A flyer that the Lithuanian Freedom Army released in May 1945 read: "Noble Lithuanian woman, if the blood of Gražina flows in your veins, then rise to the great work for the honour of the nation Free Lithuania!"⁵⁴ When appealing to women, the partisans used the national image of the warrior Gražina, with which the interwar society felt an emotional connection.⁵⁵

The nationality factor was not emphasised when appealing to Lithuanian women for help in the partisan battles. The most important thing was a "clear Lithuanian attitude". Petras Tupėnas's squad in the Biržai region had a partisan named Tamara Michailova – a Russian woman who was born in Leningrad in 1927. In the general context of the Lithuanian partisan war, this was extremely rare – in fact, it was likely that this was the only case when a non-local Russian woman became a partisan.

Tamara Michailova had finished the seventh grade, and her father was an engineer who starved to death during the siege of Leningrad. In 1943, Michailova and her aunt were

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵¹ Report on the activities of Aldona Sipavičiūtė, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. P-15370, l. 296.

⁵² List of female partisan messengers, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. P-15370, l. 283–283 a. p.

⁵³ Elena Pociūnaitė's interrogation protocol, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 34940/3, l. 14, 28.

⁵⁴ Flyer from the headquarters of the Lithuanian Freedom Army Vanagai District, 20-May-1945, in: *LSA*, f. K-5, ap. 1, b. 27, l. 2.

⁵⁵ *Grażyna* (Lithuanian: *Gražina*) is a Polish-language narrative poem by Adam Mickiewicz that was published in Vilnius in 1823. Gražina is the mythical wife of the Lithuanian Duke Liutauras who dies heroically in the fight against the Order of the Teutonic Knights. Composer Jurgis Karnavičius wrote the opera *Grażyna* according to this poem in 1933.

taken by the Germans to work in Lithuania. She worked for a farmer in the Biržai region, where she met a local Lithuanian named Jonas Aukštikalnis. The two became fond of one another and began dating. In the summer of 1944, when the Soviets returned to Lithuania, Jonas Aukštikalnis was at risk of being drafted into the Red Army. He left home, and, like many of his peers, went into hiding, later joining the partisan groups that were emerging. Michailova soon joined him.⁵⁶

After joining the ranks of the partisans, Michailova did the usual housekeeping jobs of making food and washing clothes, but she also had a weapon. There was nothing special about her service as a partisan. In this situation, what is interesting is not that the female partisan was Russian, but the attitude of the very repressive apparatus to the fact that a “real” Russian woman was fighting on the side of the enemies of the Soviet government. Michailova was arrested in December 1946 and the resolution in her criminal case on pressing charges against her said that she, “being hostile to the Soviet authorities, chose the path of the enemies of the Soviet people and became a traitor to her Soviet Motherland. In pursuit of her delusional [Russian: бредовых] goals, she joined an armed German-Lithuanian squad with a gun in order to carry out an armed struggle against the Soviet authorities.”⁵⁷ Lithuanian partisan Ona Vaškaitė, who was arrested together with Tamara Michailova, was not directly accused of “betraying her Soviet Motherland”. The anti-Soviet sentiments of Lithuanians were taken for granted – Lithuanians were considered enemies of the Soviet government, but epithets of *traitors of the Soviet Motherland* were not directed their way.

The issue of women serving as partisans is also reflected in numerous documents prepared by male partisans. The partisan leadership sought to define and standardise the presence of women in the squads. In many cases, the attitude towards female partisans depended on the attitude of a specific squad leader or a wider circle of leaders towards women in general.

The earliest known partisan documents regulating the presence of women in the ranks of the partisans were drawn up in the territory of the Northeastern Lithuania partisan region.

In the spring of 1945, the chief of staff of the Lithuanian partisan Sakalas territorial unit drew up two sets of instructions related to the enlistment of women in the partisan war. The first one focused on managing the activities of female Lithuanian partisans. The main idea of the instructions was reflected in item 9, which stated that “Lithuanian women Partisans are the ‘eyes and ears’ in the fight against Bolshevism.” The second set of instructions defined the organisation of female Lithuanian partisan messengers squads. The

⁵⁶ Michailova went to Russia with her aunt in late 1944, but quickly changed her mind and returned to Biržai.

⁵⁷ Resolution on pressing charges against Tamara Michailova, 23-Dec-1946, in: LSA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 10008/3, l. 51.

document states the purpose of the Lithuanian women Partisan squads as being “to help L. [Lithuanian] men Partisan soldiers in their active struggle and in the service of passive resistance against all enemies of the Lithuanian nation.” The authors of the instructions emphasised that “all Lithuanian women and girls with a clear Lithuanian attitude can join the L. W. P. [Lithuanian women Partisan] squads.”⁵⁸ Thus, some of the first partisan documents already speak of the enlistment of Lithuania’s entire national society in the partisan battles. Men taking up arms to defend their country was self-evident; however, the partisan war gave Lithuanian women the first historical opportunity to participate en masse in the armed resistance and respond to the fate of their country with concrete actions.

In June 1945, a branch of the LSSR NKGB exposed and destroyed the headquarters of the Lithuanian Partisan Union. The documents found during the operation about the general enlistment of women in the partisan resistance forced the Soviet authorities to take countermeasures and issue a document dedicated to the targeted fight against female partisans.⁵⁹ Recruiting women accused of links with the partisans and involvement in the anti-Soviet underground was meant to become a crucial push to dismantle the networks of female participants and thus discourage them from becoming involved in the partisan battles.

The supreme partisan leaders also examined the position of women in the partisan squads. However, the “question of women” only began to be standardised in 1949. At a meeting in February 1949, the Council of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters decided that “accepting women into partisan squads should be avoided; every kind of assistance is to be rendered to women persecuted by the enemy for participating in the union by providing them with the conditions for legal life; women who have been accepted as partisans should be treated in all respects (armament, training services, etc.) in the same way as male partisans.”⁶⁰ The partisan leadership saw women joining the ranks of armed freedom fighters as a last resort. However, after becoming combatants, women carried out all the instructions and functions assigned by the partisan leadership equally. They included military and combat assignments as well as housekeeping activities.

The conditions of the partisan struggle led to a shift in the attitudes of the patriarchal model that was prevalent at the time, where the female fighter was no longer viewed solely as a “keeper of the family hearth”. Male and female partisans began to be treated

⁵⁸ Instructions No 1 and No 2 for managing the activities of female Lithuanian partisans, in: *LSA*, f. K-21, approx. 1, b. 52, l. 49.

⁵⁹ USSR Deputy People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs Apolonov’s letter to all LSSR NKVD-NKGB operational sector chiefs, 16-Jul-1945, in: *LSA*, f. K-21, ap. 1, b. 22, l. 23.

⁶⁰ Protocol of the meeting of the Council of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters, 11-17 February 1949, in: *Laisvės kovos 1941–1953 metais: dokumentų rinkinys*, compiled by Dalia Kuodytė and Algis Kašėta, Kaunas: Lietuvos politinių kalinių ir tremtinių sąjunga, 1996, p. 303.

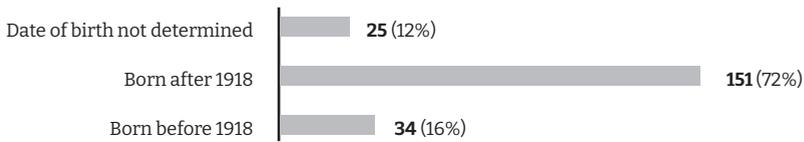


Figure 6. Age of the female partisans in the King Mindaugas region

as equals. With so many men dying in battle, there were attempts in some places to replace them with female fighters.⁶¹ And although all this remained an exception and not a general trend throughout the entire partisan war, it was precisely during the period of the freedom fights that a silent turning point that was only noticeable from a historical perspective took place in the conservative and relatively isolated consciousness of Lithuanian society, with the realisation that after Lithuania lost its statehood in the face of dramatic historical events, the duty to oppose the occupant rested with the majority of the Lithuanian population, regardless of their social origin, gender or age.⁶²

Statistical analysis of the distribution of the female partisans by age (see Fig. 6) reveals that 72 per cent of the women who participated in the partisan war were born after 1918, while 18 per cent of the armed female fighters were born before 1918. The oldest female fighter in this region was Uršulė Vildžiūnienė, who was born in 1895, and one of the youngest was Valerija Streikutė- Piemenaitė, who was born in 1936 and joined the partisans in 1951, when she was just 15 years old. She was in the same partisan squad as her brother, Juozas Streikus- Stumbras. In 1956, after receiving the permission of the commanders, she became legal.

The age of the female partisans discloses that most of them were born, grew up and came of age in independent Lithuania. Their civic values were shaped by the nationally oriented interwar education system. This generation of independence grew up on the foundations of Šapokas's *History* narrative, which, despite the manifestations of romanticism, managed to consolidate the perception of independence as a value in Lithuanian society in a relatively short time.⁶³

Excerpt from Emilija Lujanienė's birth record:

Emilija Lujanienė (née Ivanauskaitė), b. 5 September 1910, Šiauliai County, Klovainiai District, Siečiai Village, into the family of farmers Kazimieras and Ona (née Kareivytė) Ivanauskas.⁶⁴ She became involved in resistance activities at the age of 35.

⁶¹ In 1952, Southern region commander Sergijus Staniškis (code name "Viltis") appointed Antanina Kurtinytė (code name "Liepa") as the head of the Dešinys homeland with Monika Marčiulynaitė (code name "Nykštukas") as her deputy; Regina Jančiauskaitė (code name "Pempė") was an ordinary partisan. The commander of the region said that they had to take the place of fallen partisans. These women were arrested in 1952-1953.

⁶² R. Staveckaitė-Notari, *op. cit.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Emilija Ivanauskaitė's birth record, in: *Lithuanian State Historical Archives (LSHA)*, f. 1412, ap. 1, b. 1, l. 14.

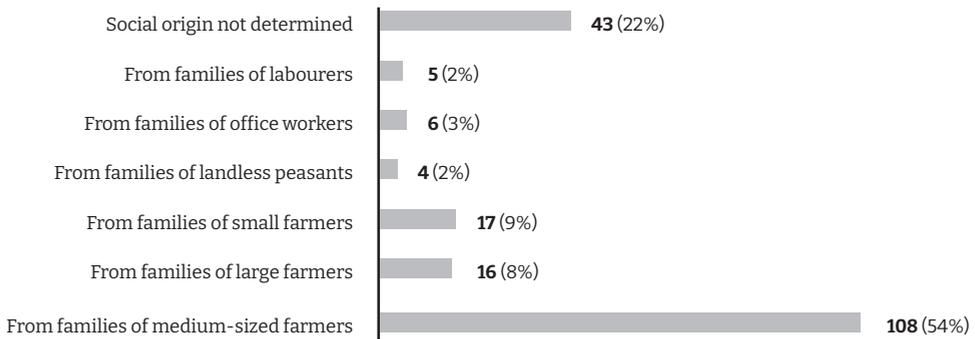


Figure 7. Social origin of the female partisans in the King Mindaugas region

The table of social origins of the female partisans (see Fig. 7) is dominated by women from families of medium-sized farmers.

Both during the interwar period and after the war, agrarian society was predominant in Lithuania. Data shows that even 85 per cent of Lithuanian residents lived in rural areas in 1945.⁶⁵ The post-war partisan resistance was the war of a village against the occupant. On the other hand, if it was the war of a village, this means that it was also the war of all of Lithuania. There were few representatives of the intelligentsia in the partisan squads, although their intellectual contribution to the partisan struggles is undeniable and disproportionately large compared to the total number of educated persons in the partisan ranks.

It is no secret that the partisans themselves often wrote about this “inconvenient” hurt of partisan battles in the press and in their memoirs. For example, in 1949, the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters’ publication *Prie rymančio Rūpintojėlio* wrote: “Who is it that makes up those heroic squads of freedom fighters? – The sons of the ploughman of the grey Lithuanian soil, the daughters of the weavers of fine linens, and just the occasional teacher, officer, student. Where is the majority of the nation’s elite/intelligentsia? ... It is with great sadness that we are left to state that a large part of our intelligentsia kept at a distance from the liberation struggles led by the nation.”⁶⁶

The biographies studied revealed that more than half (54 per cent) of the female partisans came from families of medium-sized farmers, while 8 per cent of the women represented large farmers, 9 per cent represented small farmers, and 2 per cent came from landless peasant families. Meanwhile, 2 per cent of the women came from the families of labourers, and 3 per cent came from the families of office workers. It was not possible to determine the social origin of 24 per cent of the female fighters.

⁶⁵ Saulis Vaitekūnas, “Lietuvos gyventojai sovietinės okupacijos metais (1944–1990)”, [online], in: <https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/lietuvos-gyventojai-sovietines-okupacijos-metais-1944-1990/> (06-Oct-2022).

⁶⁶ *Partizanai apie pasaulį, politiką ir save: 1944–1956 m. partizanų spaudos publikacijos*, compiled by Nijolė Gaškaitė-Žemaitienė, Vilnius: LGRTC, 1998, p. 360.

Excerpt from Emilija Ivanauskaitė-Lujanienė's application to join the Lithuanian Rifle-
men's Union:

Father had six hectares of land.⁶⁷

Excerpt from a 1927 voter list:

In 1927, Petras Lujanas [Ivanauskaitė-Lujanienė's father-in-law] owned a 34-ha farm in Lujana-
nai Village, Biržai District, Biržai County.⁶⁸

In summary, it becomes clear that 75 per cent of the female fighters whose social back-
ground we identified came from families of farmers. The statistical figures also indicate hy-
pothetical assumptions why the majority of female partisans came from families of medi-
um-sized farmers, i.e. belonged to the middle class that was emerging during the period of
existence of the Republic of Lithuania. Historian Dainius Noreika notes that the agricultural
reform carried out in Lithuania during the interwar period created a broad stratum of the
population for whom Lithuania's independence was not just an abstraction, but also a real-
ity characterised by objective changes.⁶⁹ For these people, the loss of Lithuanian statehood
and the social and economic policy carried out by the Soviets (the abolition of private prop-
erty and the establishment of collective farms) was not only a consequence of the unfavour-
able geopolitical realities, but most importantly – the expropriation of their own property
(usually agriculture) that they had acquired through personal effort. Medium-sized farms
prevailed in Lithuania during the interwar period,⁷⁰ so the most affected by this Soviet pol-
icy were medium-sized farmers, who made up the largest segment of farmers in Lithuania
during the interwar period. The drastic changes in their personal and financial life led to an
uncompromising attitude and hostility towards the Soviet authorities.

After declaring independence in 1918, Lithuania became concerned about its literacy
rates, which were very low compared to other European countries. According to the 1923
Lithuanian census, almost 56 per cent of the population was literate or semi-literate (only
able to read), so more than 40 per cent could neither read nor write. Among women, 55
per cent were literate or semi-literate. The percentage was similar for men⁷¹.

Data on the education of the female partisans (see Fig. 8) show that 35 per cent of these
women had completed four grades of primary school. This was the requirement for com-
pulsory schooling in the Lithuanian education system during the interwar period. 10 per
cent of the women had a secondary education, and 4 per cent had higher education. Some

⁶⁷ Emilija Ivanauskaitė's application to join the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, 15-Oct-1929, in: *LCSA*, f. 561, ap. 22, b. 349, l. 1

⁶⁸ Biržai County, Biržai District, Šleideriškiiai Eldership voter list, in: *LCSA*, f. 1357, ap. 12, b. 73, l. 34 a. p.

⁶⁹ D. Noreika, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁷⁰ A. Stalgienė, "Ūkio dydžio problema tarpukario Lietuvoje", [online], in: <https://www.manoukis.lt/mano-ukis-zurnalas/2014/05/ukio-dydzio-problema-tarpukario-lietuvoje/> (15-Oct-2022).

⁷¹ *Lietuvos gyventojai. Pirmojo 1923 m. rugsėjo 17 d. visuotinio gyventojų surašymo duomenys*, Kaunas, 1925, p. XLVIII.

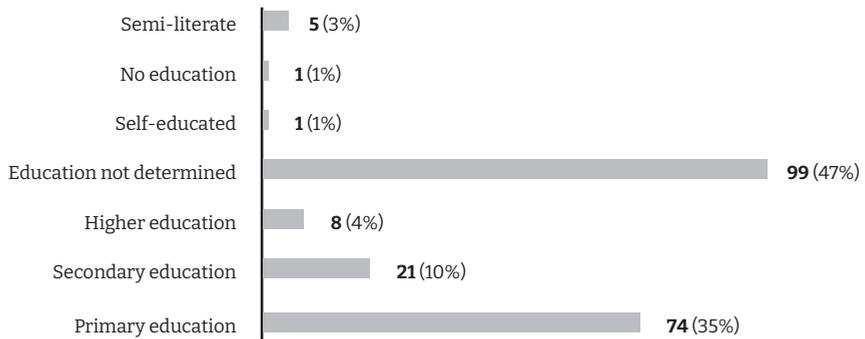


Figure 8. Education of the female partisans in the King Mindaugas region

3 per cent of the female partisans were semi-literate. It was not possible to determine the level of education of 47 per cent of the female partisans, but taking into account the general trends in interwar education and the empirical data collected, one could say that the women who fall into this statistically undefined part also had a primary education. For many children of farmers, the life path was associated with work on their own farm, so primary school was the only educational institution where the knowledge gained was enough for practical life.

Looking deeper into the education of the female fighters in the Northeastern Lithuania partisan region, it is noticeable that this region included the counties where both the most literate and the least literate inhabitants of Lithuania lived during the interwar period. For example, in the counties of Biržai and Pasvalys, the city of Panevėžys and Ukmergė, the overall illiteracy rate was 30-35 per cent, while in the counties of Zarasai and Rokiškis, illiteracy ranged from 40 to 50 per cent.⁷²

Excerpt from Robertas Indrikas's memoirs:

Sometimes in the bunker, Emilija used to sit and write. She would write and compose, and constantly consulted with Jonas Krivickas about how to write something better, what words to use... Even though Emilija Lujanienė was uneducated, she really wanted to write poems, and downright envied Bronius Krivickas for his talent.⁷³ And sometimes, sitting on a stump in the forest, with her machine gun next to her, she would write and compose verses:

By the Pensive Christ

... Ease my misery, O God,
Give me strength in adversity,
So that I am patient and staunch
With my weapon always raised.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Bronius Krivickas (1919–1952) was a Lithuanian writer, poet, literary critic and anti-Soviet partisan. His work is mainly characterised by satire and literary criticism against the occupying Soviet state. Among the partisans, he was also widely known by his code name, "Vilnius".

My – a woman's – hands may be weak,
But they hold the weapon firmly...⁷⁴

III. Marital Status

A very important aspect of the study of the female partisans' biographies is their marital status.

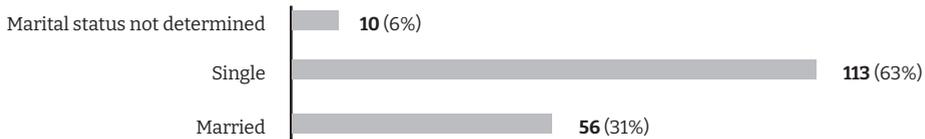


Figure 9. Marital status of the female partisans in the King Mindaugas region

The indicators of the female partisans' marital status that were examined (see Fig. 9) highlight a direct connection with their motivation. The study revealed that 31 per cent of the female fighters were married. Following their husbands, married women joined the ranks of the partisans. Pranas Dirsė (code name "Kraštelis"), a partisan from the Vytytis Military District, notes that "it was not the most pleasant thing for women to be partisans with men in the forests, but they were all devoted to their husbands."⁷⁵

Dainius Noreika's research also reveals that family was not an obstacle to choosing the partisan path. For men (especially after the announcement of the amnesty), family could be either a factor in leaving the ranks of the partisans or a factor in staying with them. However, it was more common for men to give priority not to their families, but to fighting for Lithuania's independence, since some of them had already lost their families before the amnesty was declared.⁷⁶ The author concludes that repressed families and the desire to avenge them could have been a deciding factor in staying with the partisans and not giving up.⁷⁷

The biographies of the women that were examined testify that most of them (63 per cent) were not married. The Soviet repressive apparatus sought to exploit this circumstance by discrediting the moral face of the partisan war. In the character sketches, indictments and other operational documents drawn up by the occupants for female partisans or messengers, the term "female bandit" (Russian: *бандитка*) is often accompanied by the additional "bandit's lover" (*любовница бандита*) or "had an intimate relationship with a bandit" (*состояла в интимной связи с бандитом*).

⁷⁴ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 2, Part 2, pp. 665, 668.

⁷⁵ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 2, Part 1, compiled by Romas Kaunietis, Vilnius: Vaga, 1998, p. 340.

⁷⁶ D. Noreika, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

When describing women who were participants in the partisan warfare, the Cheka deliberately used terminology that was stigmatising and suggested that the person was immoral. This campaign of discrediting women, which continued throughout the partisan war, was targeted at the part of society that supported the partisan efforts, in order to diminish the physical and moral public support that was so vital to the partisans. To be fair, it should be mentioned that in the written legacy of the partisans, we can come across numerous cases (only with women sympathetic to the Soviet government as their object) where the partisans give their opinions very expressively about women who interacted with the occupants, calling them whores and morally depraved “Katyushas”.⁷⁸

The Soviets’ “concern” about the moral face of Lithuanian women was hypocritical. Partisan documents and contemporaries’ memories of the events present a different picture than that found in the Soviet discourse. Even in the conditions of partisan warfare, the freedom fighters – both men and women – tried to continue the usual traditions of forming the institution of family. Partisan men and women would secretly get married in churches with their comrades in arms as witnesses, postponing the formalisation of a church marriage until the times “when victory is achieved”.

Joana Railaitė (code name “Neringa”) and Antanas Slučka (code name “Šarūnas”), a charismatic partisan couple with a tragic fate, got married in 1947, when Slučka was the commander of the Algimantas Military District.

The partisan poet Diana Glemžaitė and Juozas Bulovas (code name “Iksas”), commander of the Gediminas company of the Kunigaikštis Margiris territorial unit, took their vows in 1948. Both women and their spouses created a partisan family life in forest conditions. They did not live somewhere not far from their husbands, but alongside them in the forest.

When their daughter died at birth, Glemžaitė immediately returned to Bulovas. A close friend recalled Glemžaitė saying that “if I die, it’ll be with my husband – I have to be by his side.”⁷⁹ Glemžaitė’s words were prophetic – she died together with her husband on 14 November 1949 in Plunksnuočiai forest in Rokiškis County. A couple of weeks earlier, on 28 October 1949, Lithuania had already lost one of its most famous and most active partisan couples – King Mindaugas region commander Antanas Slučka-Šarūnas and secretary of staff Joana Railaitė-Neringa – who died together in the bunker.

On 28 September 1951, an older couple died together in Paindrė Village (Zarasai District) – Povilas Stukas and his wife Ona Stukienė, who had the symbolic code names of *Motina* (“Mother”) and *Tėvas* (“Father”). Betrayed in front of their young son, Edvardas Vaičėnas (code name “Edzka”) and Ona Vaičėnienė (code name “Marti”) were killed on 29 January 1949.

⁷⁸ E. Kripienė, *Vyrų...*, pp. 84–85.

⁷⁹ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 2, Part 2, p. 380.

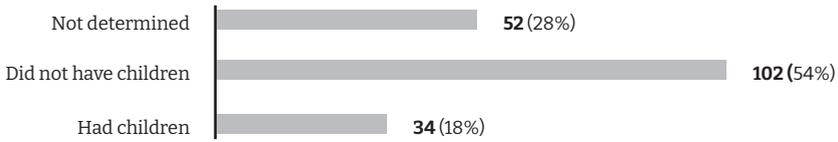


Figure 10. Female partisans and children in the King Mindaugas region

For partisan couples, the foreboding words of the marriage vows “until death do us part” became a likely scenario, the end of which was very consciously chosen by the women themselves. Sometimes having very little chance of not getting directly involved in the partisan war and saving their lives that way, it was the women who decided to stay with their partisan husbands.

Excerpt from Emilija Lujanienė’s 16-Apr-1953 interrogation protocol:

My husband was Petras Lujanas, who was arrested and sentenced by the MGB in 1946. However, ringleader Jonas Krivickas and I began living together in 1949, and I considered him my husband, even though our marriage was not officially registered, but in previous interrogations I called the latter my husband.⁸⁰

One of the most sensitive aspects in researching the biographies of female partisan is their relationship with their children. Empirical studies show (see Fig. 10) that more than half of the partisans (54 per cent) did not have children, while 18 per cent of the female fighters were mothers; historical and archival sources do not provide data about the remaining 28 per cent of women.

She [Emilija Lujanienė] tended to fantasise. She told everyone that Modesta (the daughter of her brother, who was exiled to Siberia) was her daughter. Apparently, her maternal instinct was kicking in. She also came up with a story about a son...⁸¹

The decision for women to join the partisan ranks with their fighting husbands and leave their children with relatives was determined by the rational understanding that they, as spouses of partisans, could be arrested or otherwise repressed at any time, so it was better for them to leave their children in the safe environment of their relatives and go join the partisans themselves. It was very likely that in the case of arrest, the children of the partisans would end up in orphanages or in the care of strangers.

Women also had children while in the ranks of the partisans. Pregnant fighters who had retreated to the forest had to endure extremely difficult physical and moral conditions. The constant stress and not having a permanent place of residence, as well as the bad diet and lack of medical care, meant that women’s pregnancies did not always end well, and not all newborns survived.

⁸⁰ Emilija Lujanienė’s interrogation protocol, 16-Apr-1953, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 26572/3, l. 100.

⁸¹ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 2, Part 2, pp. 667-668.

Diana Glemžaitė and Juozas Bulovas-Iksas were expecting a child in 1949. When the time came to give birth, Glemžaitė went to Kaunas to have her baby, pretended to be just someone passing through. The baby girl did not survive. Glemžaitė returned to her husband, and soon after, on 11 November 1949, they died together.

In the winter of 1949, partisan Emilija Miškinytė (code name “Audronė”) and partisan Jonas Šimonius (code name “Šposas”) were expecting a baby. The year 1949 was extremely tragic for Miškinytė. First her husband drowned in an accident, and then their son, who was born shortly after, only survived a few months. Miškinytė, who was 21 at the time, returned to the partisans immediately after her son’s death and was arrested in the autumn of 1949.⁸²

Salomėja Piliponytė (code name “Rūta”) had a baby with another partisan in March 1947. The child’s father died soon after, and Piliponytė decided to go to the forest for good. The child was taken in by reliable people. However, Soviet government activists quickly found out whose child it was, and after being taken away from her guardians, she was sent to an orphanage. Piliponytė had hoped that after getting forged documents, she would be able to legalise herself and get her daughter back, but in October 1948 she was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Once she got back from prison camp, Piliponytė was advised not to look for her daughter, because she had been adopted by a Russian family as a foundling.⁸³

The family life of partisans Genovaitė Grigoravičiūtė-Dautartienė and her husband Adomas Dautartas (code name “Žvirblys”) ended tragically. The spouses died in Kėdainiai County on 21 April 1949. Grigoravičiūtė-Dautartienė was expecting a baby at the time of her death.⁸⁴

Partisan Jonas Kadžionis (code name “Bėda”) spoke of the tragic situation of a mother and a child born to partisans in a bunker without embellishment: “...we had a son. He was born underground, in a dark bunker. He didn’t cry, and didn’t show any voice. The baby’s eyes were blue, and a louse – hardship’s companion – was crawling on his face.”⁸⁵

The Soviet authorities realised that the soft spot for partisans, and especially partisans who were mothers, was children. Children became a kind of bait to force women to withdraw from the ranks of the partisans. There was a conscious appeal to the female partisan’s maternal instinct, questioning her behaviour as a mother and emphasising that she clearly does not care about her child’s safety and well-being, or the fact that her child is growing up without a mother. Partisan Sofija Žilienė (code name “Klajūnė”) was the wife of

⁸² Emilija Miškinytė’s interrogation protocol, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 41129/3, l. 18, 30, 31.

⁸³ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 3, pp. 893, 895, 896.

⁸⁴ *Laisvės kovotojų prisiminimai*, Vol. 7, Part 2, compiled by Romas Kaunietis, Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2010, p. 623.

⁸⁵ Jonas Kadžionis-Bėda, *Per skausmo pelkes*, Vilnius: LGGRTC, 2020, p. 191.

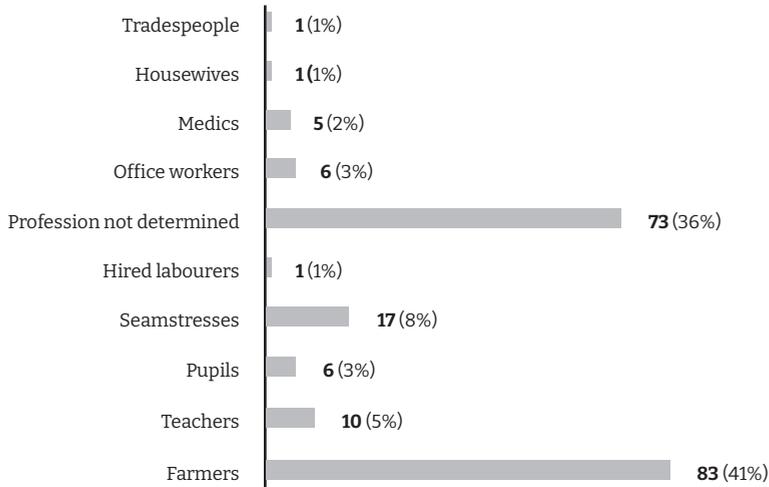


Figure 11. Professions of the female partisans in the King Mindaugas region

Antanas Žilys (code name “Žaibas”). After personally experiencing a mother-child drama when her son, who was only a few years old, was taken hostage by the authorities, Žilienė admitted that if they had tortured the children, she would have not been able to handle it.⁸⁶

These stories reveal both personal tragedies and personal decisions. Children born during the partisan war did not become a reason for women to leave the forest. Their behaviour was determined by specific circumstances – the understanding of the women themselves that *this* was the best decision for them and their children at that time.

The children of the partisans admit themselves that being the *child of a “bandit”* haunted them throughout the Soviet era. When Janina Stukaitė, the daughter of Povilas Stukas-Tėvas and Ona Stukienė-Motina, wanted to get a job as an accountant at the MTS (machine tractor station), she was told that “for a child of bandits, milking the cows of a collective farm is too great an honour. To everyone, I was just the child of bandits.”⁸⁷

In the table of work and professional activities of the female participants in the partisan war (see Fig. 11), agricultural activities dominate. The majority of the female fighters (41 per cent) were farmers, while 8 per cent of the women worked as seamstresses, 5 per cent were teachers, 3 per cent were schoolgirls, 3 per cent were maids, and 2 per cent had medical training. So even 13 per cent of the female partisans had intellectual/creative potential, which was extremely necessary in the public activities of the partisans – publishing various partisan press and contributing to the formation of its content. It was not possible to determine the professions of 38 per cent of the female partisans. If we compare this to the

⁸⁶ Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai, Vol. 1, p. 81.

⁸⁷ Povilas Stukas and Ona Stukienė’s military volunteer file, in: *The Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania (LGGRTC) archive*, b. D-16.

overall statistics of work activities and occupations of female participants in the partisan war, we can see that the female partisans in the Northeastern Lithuania partisan region reflect the general statistical trends. The only statistical component that stands out and does not coincide is that in the Northeastern Lithuania partisan region, only 3 per cent of the female partisans were pupils, whereas in the general statistical study of female partisan war participants, this indicator is 9 per cent. This difference is also due to the fact that the general statistics include all women who participated in the freedom fights, while these only include partisans. The number of pupils was significantly higher among the messengers.

IV. The Fates of the Female Partisans

A study of the fates of the female partisans (see Fig. 12) revealed that women who chose the path of fighters faced a very specific fate – death or arrest. 43 per cent of the female partisans in the King Mindaugas region were killed and 42 per cent were arrested and convicted, while just 2 per cent became legal and 2 per cent went into hiding. The fates of 7 per cent of the female partisans is unknown.

Emilija Lujanienė was in Tučas's squad until 22 February 1947, and then, without telling the other partisans, secretly became legal "due to illness and the difficult conditions in hiding."⁸⁸ When going through the legalisation process, Lujanienė "handed in German rifle No 3088 and 16 rounds."⁸⁹ A year later, she rejoined the resistance activities. On 6 April 1953, 200 MVD internal troops carried out a military operation in the vicinity of Skaistkalne, a village in the Bauska District of the Latvian SSR.

Excerpt from the report about the Cheka's military operation:

At 13:00, the troops came under fire in forest block 94. Jonas Krivickas and Povilas Dagys were killed during the ensuing shootout. Later, the soldiers spotted a woman armed with a machine gun on the edge of the forest; when she saw the soldiers, she went back into the forest, tossed down the machine gun and tried to escape, but was arrested. The person who was arrested turned out to be the "bandit" Emilija Lujanienė.⁹⁰

Just like men, women were killed in battle or committed suicide. Some of them surrendered to captivity, were interrogated and tried just like men – according to Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR "for treason". Female partisans were given the same punishment as male partisans: 25 years of imprisonment in correctional labour camps.

Excerpt from Emilija Lujanienė's judgment:

Pursuant to Article 58(1)(a) of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, Lujanienė Emilija, daughter of Kazimieras, is to be imprisoned in a correctional labour camp for twenty-five years, with restriction of civil rights for five years and confiscation of all property.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Emilija Lujanienė's interrogation protocol, 07-Apr-1953, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, a p. 58, b. 26572/3, l. 23.

⁸⁹ Emilija Lujanienė's certificate of legalisation, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 26572/3, l. 372.

⁹⁰ Military operation report, in: *LSA*, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 26572/3, l. 354-355.

⁹¹ Emilija Lujanienė's sentence, in: *LSA*, f. k-1, ap. 58, b. 26572/3, l. 444.

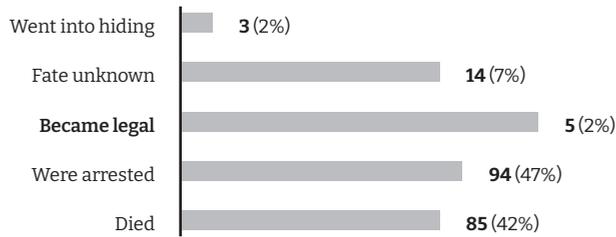


Figure 12. Fates of the female partisans in the King Mindaugas region

The female partisans who were arrested and survived admit in their memoirs that at that time, they were jealous of their sisters in arms who were killed. Partisan Jadvyga Žardinskaitė- Doktoras Dolitlis recalls that when she was captured on 14 March 1951, the most tragic part of her life began: “I’m jealous of my dead friends,” said Žardinskaitė, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison.⁹² The physical and psychological abuse experienced during the interrogation became a wound that would not heal. The interrogation protocols in the criminal cases do not directly disclose what means were used by the repressive apparatus. Only certain telling details – the duration and time of the interrogation, the sudden decision of the interrogators to start speaking “only the truth” – allow us to infer the physical and psychological effects applied to the remand prisoners in order to extract the information they wanted.

Only the spoken past helps to understand the extent of physical and psychological torture experienced after the war. In the women’s memories, the method of breaking the remand prisoners psychologically by humiliating their human dignity and the mocking of the female body stand out clearly. The former participants of the freedom fights, both through their silence and through their frank testimony, revealed what they were forced to go through. Partisan Stasė Bislytė (code name “Klajūnė”), who was the wife of partisan Matas Paškonis, was held completely naked for three days in a cell with water up to her knees.⁹³

Messenger Onutė Kripaitytė (code name “Vyšnia”) said that after the war, she and her sister raised a relative’s daughter who was born in prison. When Kripaitytė was arrested, the interrogator accused her of having this girl with a partisan. She denied these allegations, so the interrogators decided to conduct multiple checks to make sure, as Kripaitytė claims, that she was not living with a man.⁹⁴

Pulling women’s hair out during interrogation was both physical punishment and a symbolic form of humiliation. This is come across in the memories of almost every wom-

⁹² Jadvyga Žardinskaitė-Bartašienė’s military volunteer file B-162, in: LGGRTC archive.

⁹³ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 1, p. 734.

⁹⁴ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 3, pp. 162-164.

an who was interrogated. Partisan Stasė Bislytė had long hair. During the interrogation, they tied her by her braids and began lifting her up until they ripped them out, scalp and all.⁹⁵ Partisan Sofija Žilienė- Klajūnė remembers: “I was wearing braids, so the executioners, they pulled them out; I couldn’t touch my head – it was like all the skin had been ripped off my skull.”

The statistical data that we used to refine the historical image of female partisans and to explain one of the most tragic stages of Lithuanian history hide the tragedies of Lithuanian society as well as the personal tragedies and ruined lives of people. The emotionally impactful micro-histories of female partisans that were uncovered during the research are like puzzle pieces that gradually fill in the yet unfinished map of the partisan struggles.

Since the beginning of research on the Lithuanian partisan war, a romanticised image of the “female fighter” – the “female warrior” – shaped in the historical consciousness of Lithuanian society after the restoration of independence and is still prevalent to this day. It is emotional and highlights the heroism of the fight. The female fighter becomes an example of the heroism of the nation. This is a very convenient image that is easily accepted by historical memory and that the public wants to see. Empirical material and memoirs reveal the everyday image of fighting women that is not a façade, including the moral and physical fatigue, hunger, disease, disappointment, arrests, interrogations and deaths, as well as determination to fight and unbreakable strength of will.

Conclusions

1. The typical path of women to the ranks of partisans started with supporting partisans or maintaining connections between partisan formations, i.e. at first they were sponsors or served as messengers. Often the women had family members who were partisans – fathers, brothers, husbands or fiancées – while in other cases they knew men from the same village, school or so on who were partisans. The biographies of the women that were examined revealed that most of them (38 per cent) started their partisan activities in the second stage of the partisan war that began in 1946, although if we look at the figures by year, new enlistments peaked in 1945 (24 per cent).

2. The analysis of the reasons for women getting involved in the partisan movement revealed that more than half of them chose the path of fighters because they had been influenced by their immediate environment, i.e. their relatives were already actively involved in the armed resistance. This insight confirms the relationship between women’s motivation and the activities of their relatives imparted in historiography (the works of Žaneta Smolskutė and Aistė Petrauskienė). One tenth of the female partisans examined became involved in the armed resistance for political reasons. This trend correlates with

⁹⁵ *Aukštaitijos partizanų prisiminimai*, Vol. 1, p. 736.

the insight that political engagement was not a decisive factor in women's decisions to become partisans. On the other hand, the political motives of women enlisting speak of the civic awareness and engagement that was introduced during the interwar period and highlight the phenomenon of personal responsibility for the creation of one's own state that matured at that time. We recognise that refining the motivating factors is difficult, because personal beliefs (political hostility to the Soviet government) and the influence of the immediate environment on the decision are very closely related.

3. Examination of the social cross-section revealed that most of the female partisans came from families of medium-sized farmers, i.e. belonged to the largest social group in interwar Lithuania. Empirical data confirmed the opinion that the partisan resistance was essentially a struggle of the rural part of society against the Soviet regime.

4. Having a family or children was not an obstacle for women to become partisans. On the contrary – it can be observed that if a woman's husband was a partisan, the probability that she herself will join the partisans in one way or another clearly increased. As many as 31 per cent of the female partisans who were studied were married, and 18 per cent had children.

5. The study of the fates of the female fighters imparts that these women either died/committed suicide or were arrested and convicted. There were only a few isolated cases of female partisans becoming legal. In this case, a clear difference is evident between the fates of women and men. Men became legal both individually and in groups. The Soviet repressive system treated male and female partisans equally – they were called “bandits” and punished according to Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR.

6. The research highlighted the following typical collective biography of a female partisan in the King Mindaugas region: A 20-year-old Lithuanian farmer with a primary education, single, no children, with family members who were participants in the armed resistance; she became involved in the resistance under the influence of external (the involvement of family members) rather than internal factors (anti-Soviet sentiment), starting out as a supporter or messenger and then joining the ranks of the partisans, where she performed both housekeeping and combat functions before being arrested or killed.

Ramona Staveckaitė-Notari, Andrius Tumavičius

Moterys ginkluotoje rezistencijoje Lietuvos šiaurės rytuose: Karaliaus Mindaugo partizanų srities atvejis

Santrauka

Straipsnyje siekta išgryninti pirminio statistinio tyrimo „Moterys Lietuvos partizaniniame kare 1944–1953 m.“ duomenis, ištiriant Šiaurės Lietuvos rytų partizanų srities moterų partizanų biografijas pagal tikslingai pasirinktus biografinius parametrus, ir pateikti objektyvų moters partizanės paveikslą. Darbe išanalizuoti moterų įsitraukimo į partizaninį judėjimą motyvai, iširtas socialinis kovotojų biografijų pjūvis, išnagrinėta šeiminė rezistenčių padėtis bei partizanų likimai. Atlikus tyrimą nustatyta, kad daugiau kaip pusė kovotojų kelią pasirinko paveiktos artimos aplinkos, t. y. jų artimieji aktyviai dalyvavo ginkluotoje rezistencijoje. Ši įžvalga patvirtina istoriografijoje atskleistą moterų motyvacijos ir jų artimųjų veiklos santykį. Dėl politinių motyvų į ginkluotą rezistenciją įsitraukė dešimtadalis iširtų partizanų. Tokia tendencija koreliuoja su įžvalga, kad politinis angažuotumas tarp moterų buvo mažas. Socialinio pjūvio nagrinėjimas atskleidė, kad dauguma partizanų buvo kilusios iš ūkininkų, t. y. priklausė pagrindinei socialinei Lietuvos Respublikos gyventojų grupei. Empiriniai duomenys patvirtino nuomonę, kad partizaninis pasipriešinimas iš esmės buvo kaimiškosios visuomenės dalies kova su sovietiniu režimu. Partizanų šeiminės padėties analizė atskleidė, jog daugiau nei 60 proc. kovotojų buvo netekėjusios merginos, 30 proc. buvo sukūrusios šeimą, o 18 proc. turėjo vaikų. Kovotojų likimų tyrimas byloja, kad jos arba žūdavo (nusižudydavo), arba būdavo suimtos ir nuteistos. Partizanų legalizacijos buvo tik keletas pavienių atvejų. Šiuo atveju įžvelgiamas aiškus skirtumas tarp moterų ir vyrų likimų. Vyrų legalizuodavosi tiek pavieniui, tiek ir grupėmis. Sovietų represinė sistema partizanus ir partizanes vertino vienodai: jie buvo vadinami banditais ir baudžiami pagal RSFSR baudžiamojo kodekso 58 str. Analizuota medžiaga suformavo tokią tipinę Karaliaus Mindaugo partizanų srities partizanės kolektyvinę biografiją: dvidešimtmetė lietuvė, ūkininkė, baigusi pradžios mokyklą, nesusituokusi, neturinti vaikų, šeimos nariai ginkluotos rezistencijos dalyviai, rezistencinę veiklą pradėjo veikiami išorinių (šeimos narių įsitraukimo), o ne vidinių veiksnių (asmeninis antisovietinis nusiteikimas), iš pradžių buvo rėmėja ar ryšininkė, vėliau įstojo į partizanų gretas, vykdė tiek ūkines, tiek kovines funkcijas, buvo areštuota arba žuvusi.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: partizanė, rezistencija, partizaninis karas, kolektyvinė biografija.