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IN THE LITHUANIAN WOODS

JEWISH AND LITHUANIAN FEMALE PARTISANS

The research subject and the issues

The thick Lithuanian forests provided in the 1940s a stage for a divided history. During rather short periods of time, women and men fought here as members of different underground formations and with different goals. It was here that women for the first time were seen in uniforms and with machine guns – sights that prior to 1941 would have been inconceivable and hard to imagine for the society in Lithuania. The events of the war led to radical social changes that to a large extent, especially with regard to social and gender-historical consequences, have not yet been studied adequately. That permits the question: To what extent were women in Lithuania involved in military action during the Second World War and in the post-war era? What long-term consequences arose from that?

I will look at women from different ethnic backgrounds and at their activities in a relatively small territory measuring just over 65.000 m^2, an area known as Lithuania or – as it was formerly known – the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.[1] The subject of my interest is women in two partisan movements. I will consider the Jewish female partisans who left the Kaunas und Vilnius ghettos in 1943 to fight the German occupying forces in the Lithuanian forests, and the Lithuanian female partisans who revolted against the Soviet occupation of their country between 1944 and 1953. The starting point and setting for the activities of these women were the dense Lithuanian woods, which in the 1940s served in quick succession

[1] Antje Bruhns, Susanne Dähner and Konstantin Kreiser, 'Estland, Lettland, Litauen – drei Länder, eine Einheit' ['Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania – Three Countries, One Unit'], *Arbeitsberichte 70*, Geographisches Institut (2002), 21. Thereafter Bruhns, Dähner and Kreiser, 'Drei Länder'.

as a fighting base for very different political groups and interests.[2] I will deal with a time period that reaches beyond the general break point of the war's end in 1945. It is a special feature of the Eastern European history of the Second World War that its military operations did not end in the summer of 1945, but rather the armed struggle raged on in numerous regions.

This paper intends to point out that here on the periphery of Central Europe (as in many other areas of Europe), women got involved in the structures and mechanisms of power which (1) for the most part, lay outside of their usual lives and in which (2) they frequently took on new duties. So my effort will be to sketch out a spectrum of partisan activities participated in by women in Lithuania in the 1940s. That will involve asking several questions: 1) about the motives for the respective decisions to join up with these very diverse groups, 2) about the role which was assigned there to the women and young girls, or which they themselves carved out according to the gender relations in the respective groups, and 3) about the gender representations in the respective groups of partisans. Lastly, this perspectival view is supposed to help highlight how gender roles in the post-war society of the Lithuanian Soviet Republic were configured based on the military activities of women.

Current State of the Research and the Sources

On the one hand, it makes sense to consider a summary of the movements that took place in rapid temporal and spatial succession. But on the other hand, Jewish history and Lithuanian national history form two entirely separate strands. In aiming for a summary of particular phenomena, I will attempt to use the prism of gender to analyze phases of radicalization. And then, the situation of women will be considered through the perspective of the Lithuanian and Jewish resistance. My aim is to demonstrate the general changes in gender roles that took place as a consequence of war, occupation, the extermination of the Jews, and the post-war situation in Lithuania.

The story of the armed Jewish resistance in Lithuania has been told and investigated many times since the end of the 1940s.[3] After the restoration

[2] Forests cover 36 pct of Lithuanian land area. Bruhns, Dähner and Kreiser, 'Drei Länder', 21.

[3] Szmerke Kaczerginski, *Partizaner geyen! – (fartseykhenungen fun Vilner Geto)* [*Go to the Partisans! – (Notices from Vilna Getto)*] (Buenos Ayres: Tsentral farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1947); Meir Yelin, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser geto* [*Partisans from Ghetto Kaunas*] (Moskve: Emes, 1948); Moshe Kahanowitz, 'Why no Separate Jewish Partisan Movement was Established During World War II', *Yad Vashem Studies*, 1 (1957), 153-67; Mejeris Eglinis-Elinas and Dmitri Gelpernas, *Kauno getas ir jo kovotojai* [*Ghetto*

of Lithuanian independence in 1990, former male and female partisans who had remained in Lithuania then wrote their memoirs. These memory texts were published in Lithuanian, yet received little comment in the Lithuanian public arena. My sources for the Jewish group are the life stories and memoirs of three Jewish women: Fanya Brancovskaya (born 1922)[4], Rachel Margolis (born 1921)[5] and Sarah Genaitė-Rubinsonienė (born 1924).[6] Up to now, there has been relatively little research on the Lithuanian image of women in the 1940s, since research on women has concentrated itself more so on sociological and political science themes than on gender history.[7] Two collections of women's biographies have appeared in recent years.[8]

Kaunas and his fighters] (Vilnius: Mintis, 1969). Thereafter Eglinis-Elinas and Gelpernas, *Kauno*; Lester S. Eckman, *The Jewish Resistance: The History of the Jewish Partisans in Lithuania and White Russia During the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1945* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1977); Chaim E. Lazar Litai, *Destruction and Resistance* (New York: Shengold Publishers in cooperation with the Museum of Combatants and Partisans in Israel, 1985); Farband fun partizaner, untergrunt-kemfers un geto-oyfshtendlers in Yiśroel and Zunia Shtrom, *Hurbn un kamf: (fun Kovner geto tsu di Rudnitsker velder): zikhroynes* [*Destruction and Struggle: (From the Kovno Ghetto to Wood of Rudnickai): Memories*] (Tel-Aviv: Aroysgegebn fun "Farband fun partizaner untergrunt-kemfers un geto-oyfshtendlers in Yiśroel", 1990); Aleks Faitelson, *Heroism & Bravery in Lithuania, 1941-1945* (New York: Gefen Books, 1996); Moshe R. Shutan, *Ghetto and Forest* (Israel: Organization of Partisans Underground Fighters and Ghetto Rebels, 2005); Anita Walke, *Jüdische Partisaninnen: Der verschwiegene Widerstand in der Sowjetunion* [*Jewish Women Partisans. The Discreet Resistance in the Soviet Union*] (Berlin: Dietz, 2007); Dina Porat, *The Fall of a Sparrow: The Life and Times of Abba Kovner* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

[4] Fanya Brancovskaja-Jocheles, 'Fanya Brancovskaja-Jocheles', in Diana Bartkute-Barnard, ed., *Su adata sirdyje: Getu ir koncentracijos stovyklu kaliniu atsiminimai* [*With a needle in the heart*] (Vilnius: Garnelis, 2003), 45-54; Fanya Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview by Zhanna Litinskaya 2002, available at http://centropa.org/module/ebooks/files/LT_Brantovskaya_A4.pdf (last visited 25 March 2011). Thereafter Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview.

[5] Margolis, Rachel, Franziska Bruder, and Gudrun Schroeter, *Als Partisanin in Wilna: Erinnerungen an den jüdischen Widerstand in Litauen* [*As Partisan in Vilna. Remembering the Jewish Resistance in Lithuania*] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2008); thereafter Margolis, Bruder, and Schroeter, *Partisanin Wilna*. Rahel Margolis, *Partisan of Vilna* (Brighton: Academic Studies, 2010). Thereafter Margolis, *Partisan*.

[6] Sarah Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo knyga: Kauno žydų bendruomenė 1941-1944 metais* [*Book of Memories. The Jewish Community of Kovno 1941-1944*] (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 1999). Thereafter Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*.

[7] Rūta G. Vėliūtė, *Partizanai* [*Partisans*] (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2009). Thereafter Vėliūtė, *Partizanai*.

[8] Dalia Leinarte, ed., *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010); Dalia Marcinkevičienė, *Prijaukintos kasdienybės, 1945-1970 metai: Biografiniai Lietuvos moteru interviu* [*Accustomed Everyday*

There exists one article about female Lithuanian partisans.[9] However, in the last 20 years, numerous individual recollections from members of the armed resistance have appeared.[10] The subject of the armed resistance, utterly taboo in the Soviet era, has now become a hugely politicized tale of heroism. A recently published monograph by Mindaugas Pocius[11], which views the resistance critically and analyzes as well its crimes and acts of terror, has been quite strongly criticized by the broader Lithuanian public.[12] The life stories of female Lithuanian partisans were put out in memory volumes and individual publications, as for example, the life stories of the currier Nina Nausedaitė-Rasa (born 1924)[13] und Anelė Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė (born 1923)[14].

There are more complete autobiographical accounts from female Jewish partisans in Lithuania than there are from female fighters in the Lithuanian partisan movements. After the war, the first group had the possibility to catch up on vocational training or university studies[15], whereas the Lithuanians, after serving out their sentences were, as a rule, denied advanced training or university studies.[16] Many Lithuanian women had their life

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1945-1970: Biographical interviews with Lithuanian women] (Vilnius: Vilniaus Univ. Leidykla, 2007).

[9] Žaneta Smolskutė, 'Moterų dalyvavimo ginkluotame pasipriešinime 1944–1953 m. ypatumai' ['Special Aspects of Women Share in the Armed Resistance 1944–1953'], *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2, 20 (2006), available at http: //www.genocid.lt/centras/lt/449/a/ (last visited 25 March 2011). Thereafter Smolskutė, 'Moterų'.

[10] Antanina Garmutė, *Motinėle, auginai* [*Mother, You have brought up*] (Kaunas: Spindulys, 1993).

[11] Mindaugas Pocius, *Kita Mėnulio Pusė: Lietuvos partizanų kova su kolaboravimu 1944-1953 metais* [*The other Side of the Moon: The Struggle of Lithuanian Partisans with Collaboration in the years 1944-1953*] (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2009).

[12] Mindaugas Jackevičius interviews Liudas Truska, 'L.Truska: partizanavimui reikėjo drąsos, tačiau ką galėjo padaryti žalio kaimo berneliai', available at http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/ltruska-partizanavimui-reikejo-drasos-taciau-ka-galejo-padaryti-zalio-kaimo-berneliai.d?id=43058983 (last visited 25 March 2011).

[13] Nina Nausedaitė-Rasa, 'Ne vien duona gyvi…' ['You live not only from bread…'], *Laisvės kovų archyvas*, 12 (1994), 147-63. Thereafter Nausedaitė-Rasa, 'Ne vien duona gyvi…'.

[14] Anelė Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, 'Juodi debesys virš Dzūkijos' ['Dark clouds over Dzūkija'], *Laisvės kovų archyvas*, 22 (1997), 178-86. Thereafter Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, 'Juodi'.

[15] Brancovskaya, Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė und Margolis pursued further studies, and the last two received their doctorates.

[16] Nina Nausedaitė wanted to study after her return from the camp in Siberia, and even though she twice passed the entrance exam, she was turned down for admission by the party organization of the university. Nausedaitė-Rasa, 'Ne vien duona gyvi…', 162.

stories written down by others since they did not have confidence in their own writing. These were, however, as a rule quite embellished by the actual writers and so do not really represent an autobiographical account.

Partisan Groups in Lithuanian Territory since 1942

The Soviet Republic of Lithuania was occupied by the German army on 22. June 1941 without any great struggle. It was only later that a resistance took shape, directed initially from Moscow.[17] The central staff of the Soviet partisans, which was set up at the end of May 1942, instructed the leading members of the Lithuanian communist party in Soviet exile to organize under its leadership a resistance movement against the German occupation. Groups were formed in the woods, joined among others by escaped Soviet prisoners of war. The partisans were coordinated from Moscow. The Jewish resistance in the ghettos of Wilna and Kaunas got into contact with these groups. In just that first half year of the German occupation, 85 % of the Jewish population had been murdered and the liquidation was continuing. Jewish groups sought opportunities to fight against the occupation.[18] In Wilna, a joint resistance organization was formed with the merging of communist and Zionist groups under the name *Fareinigte Partisaner Organisatzije* (FPO). In Kaunas in 1942, the *Anti-Fascist Fighting Organization* (AKO) was formed. The members of the Wilna group left the ghetto in September 1943 heading toward Rūdninkai, and from Kaunas many more groups came in December and January into the forested mountains.[19]

At the same time, units of the Polish *Armia Krajowa* began to operate in Lithuanian territory, especially active in the former Polish district of Wilna, seeing themselves as defenders of the Polish region. From the summer of 1944 on, as the German army was in retreat and the Red Army once again occupied Lithuania, Lithuanian men took to the woods because they wanted to avoid Soviet conscription. As long as the newly established power did not put any pressure on the family members of those who were to be mobilized, their wives remained at home.

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[17] Romuald J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of dependence, 1940-1990*, Expanded and updated ed. (London: Hurst, 1993).

[18] Arūnas Bubnys, *The Holocaust in Lithuania between 1941 and 1944* (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2005).

[19] Šarunas Liekis, 'Jewish Partisans and Soviet Resistance', in David Gaunt, ed., *Collaboration and Resistance During the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (Bern: Lang, 2004), 459-78. Thereafter Liekis, 'Partisans'.

In the middle of the 1940s, the Lithuanians had the idea that the allies would provide armed aid against the Soviet occupation of the Baltic region and that either in the short- or the long-term it would lead to an invasion. The Soviet Union in 1946 and the following years nurtured rumors of an imminent new war, since through that the flow of people into the forests grew larger and the Red Army could fight in a more focused way using armed forces against these enemies of sovietization. A Lithuanian partisan movement arose which operated primarily in the countryside, relying on either the voluntary or forced delivery of provisions from the farmers. In order to break the national resistance, in October 1946 twelve troop regiments of the Soviet Interior Ministry were deployed. In 1948, the forced collectivization of the famers began. Those who refused were sent in 1948 and 1949 by the tens of thousands to Siberia. In that way it was possible to weaken the partisan movement, which ended in 1953.

All partisan movements were based on the military structures of the various armies. Their commanders came from the Red Army, or had served in the Polish or Lithuanian forces. These armies were all designed as entirely male domains. This meant that the leading partisan groups also thought of the units as male domains, automatically affirming this gender construction and cultivating it along with all its associated characteristics.

How Did Women Become Partisans

In the time period 1943-1944, there were about 2000 Jewish partisans in Lithuania[20], and of them at most 15 % were women.[21] The Lithuanian resistance movement operated over a longer time period, specifically, from 1944 until 1953. If there were up to 30.000 partisans in 1945, their number was reduced to about 500 by 1953.[22] Of the total number of the whole period one can show after an initial analysis that there were around 250 active women.[23] One can assume that in the two groups of women, we are dealing with a small age-range. Those who joined the female partisans, regardless of whether they were Jewish or Lithuanian, were almost exclu-

[20] Dov Levin and Adam Teller, *The Litvaks: A short history of the Jews in Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000), available at http://www.gbv.de/dms/bowker/toc/9781571812643.pdf, 230 (last visited 25 March 2011). Thereafter Levin and Teller, *Litvaks*.

[21] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 162.

[22] Nijole Gaškaitė, *Pasipriešinimo istorija: 1944-1953 metai* [*The History of Resistance: 1944-1953*] (Vilnius: Aidai, 1997), 134.

[23] Smolskutė, 'Moterų'.

sively young adults, who upon entering were between the ages of 18 and 25. How did the Jewish women explain their motives? Rachel Margolis says in retrospect: "If we perished it would be with honour, having proved to humanity that we were not sheep going meekly to the slaughter."[24]

This short statement makes it clear yet again that they really did not have a large number of options from which to choose. Whoever did not dare to find a way out of the ghetto to join the partisans, had to almost certainly reckon with death. The memory stayed in her mind of her friend Onia, who also wanted to go to the partisans, but was not allowed to by her mother.

> "Her mother did not let her out. Onia thought it necessary to tell her about her intention of going into the forest. 'This is the only path to salvation', she assured her. 'Otherwise we will all be killed in the ghetto or in the camp [...] I am young, I want to live, so let me go.' Her mother was against it."[25]

Fanya's reception into a partisan unit had some difficulties associated with it.

> "The partisan unit we met was the one named after Adam Mickiewicz. Its commanding officer met with us and asked us a few questions. A beautiful blonde woman, who looked like a Lithuanian woman, was sitting beside him during the interrogation. He suggested that we joined his unit, but the woman said: 'I shall not let Jewish girls join your unit!' I was shaking from such hurtful comments: did we escape from the ghetto just to get into the hands of an anti-Semitic woman? Later it turned out that this woman, whose last name was Glezer, was Jewish and just felt sorry for us, innocent Jewish girls. There were vague morals in the partisan unit and she was concerned about us. However, the partisans treated us like their sisters."[26]

Joined by her companion Doba who had fled with her, she got in the group "For Victory" and fought then in the group "Revenger".[27] An important 'admission ticket' for female Jews in the partisan groups in the woods was a rifle. You had to bring one along.[28] Sarah brought one. She described her

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[24] Gordon Brown, 'Women of Courage: Rachel Margolis', *Independent*, 9 March 2011, available at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/women-of-courage-rachel-margolis-2236081.html (last visited 25 March 2011).

[25] Margolis, *Partisan*, 359.

[26] Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 32.

[27] In the unit "Adam Mickiewicz" the Jews represented a minority, while on the other hand, the partisan units "Victory" and "Revenger" were predominantly Jewish. Liekis, 'Partisans', 475.

[28] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 158.

feelings upon arriving in the group of partisans called "Death to the Occupiers"[29]:

> "It was then that I suddenly realized that I was not dreaming. I was really free and I was a partisan. I could barely control my joy and my pride. I had become a soldier, a fighter against our oppressors, our killers, the worst enemies of mankind: the German Nazis."[30]

Were the motives of the Lithuanian women different? The decision to participate in the resistance was a gradual one. The first step was the fact that numerous men refused to join the Red Army in 1944 and the years that followed. Feelings of loyalty towards male family members and a strong sense of identification with the Lithuanian nation state were further prompts for action among women and girls.[31] The parents of these female activists were first-generation citizens of an independent Lithuania and had raised their children in an ardent spirit of patriotism.[32] The decision to head for the woods was an enthusiastic and highly emotional act of popular nationalism.[33] So now, how could the younger generation protect its national identity under the circumstances of the occupation? In the summer of 1944, the resistance was initially a form of the people's nationalist enthusiasm. Anelė Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė, who as a currier called herself "Klajūnė", remembered that:

> "When Lithuania was occupied the second time, young men were conscripted. My husband and my brother refused to serve the enemy and headed for the woods at the end of 1944 to join the partisans. They said: 'If we have to die, then we will die in our own country and for our own ideals.'"[34]

Anelė was a simple peasant girl with no professional training or job. Emotionally bound to the resistance through her husband and her brother, she

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[29] In the unit "Death to the Occupants", Jews made up about a third of the members. Liekis, 'Partisans', 475.

[30] Sarah Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance and Survival: the Jewish Community in Kaunas, 1941-1944* (Oakville ON: Mosaic Press, 2005), 126. Thereafter Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*.

[31] Petronelė Pušinskaitė-Vėlyvienė, 'Žalieji namai' ['The Green House'], *Laisvės kovų archyvas*, 2 (1991), 59-82, here 16.

[32] Mara Lazda describes the propogandized patriotism in Latvia in a similar way. Mara Lazda, 'Family, Gender, and Ideology in World War II Latvia', in Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, eds., *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 133-53, here 133.

[33] See also Benedict Anderson, *The Invention of the Nation. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verson, 1983).

[34] Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, 'Juodi', 178.

saw no alternative course of action. As it turned out, along with her small son, she was a chance witness to both men being killed in an armed engagement with Soviet soldiers. It was not for nothing that the partisans used code names because the NKVD had family members of resistance fighters arrested, deported to Siberia, and then burned their villages to the ground. In spite of all of this, Anelė says:

> "I saw their horribly mutilated bodies and swore that I would remain faithful to my home country of Lithuania and her sons to the end of my days, and that I would sacrifice my freedom and my life for that purpose."[35]

Nina Nausedaitė came from a small town, and after her *Abitur* she studied airplane construction. In 1945 she came rather by chance into the sights of the NKVD and was in investigative custody for a month. After being let go, it became clear to her that she was still being followed. She got her mother settled in a different place and family members sought a new job for her. She herself began to act outside the law and became a woman currier for several partisan staffs.

Female Partisans against Families

To what extent did the family play a role in the decisions of the women to go to the woods? The women who joined the active resistance did not yet have families and so did not bear the associated responsibilities of having their own children. Nevertheless, it was a difficult decision to leave family members. Sarah had scruples:

> "I learned about our escape from the ghetto to Rudninkai Forest in early December and immediately told my mother about it. She wept with joy, thinking that this would save me. I, on the other hand was, was very confused. I felt that I was being unfair to my closest family and that I had no moral right to leave them. In my soul, I struggled with two conflicting feelings. One whispered that I must go and fight the enemy, the other one urged me to remain with the family- either to perish with them or survive with them."[36]

And Rachel was hesitant as well to separate herself from her family: "If only you knew how hard it is for me to leave you behind. How much I am afraid of everything that lies ahead of me, and how much I fear that I shall never see you again."[37] Fanya, on the other hand was quite decisive: "I

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[35] Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, 'Juodi', 181.

[36] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 122.

[37] Margolis, *Partisan*, 361.

said 'good bye' to my family. My mother and sister were crying. I stayed strong. It never occurred to me that this could be the last time I saw them."[38] The mother of Rachel's friend Onia remained firm:

> "Lala [Rachel Margolis] is deceiving you! I don't want her to set foot here again! What kind of partisans, what kind of gunfire is she talking about? You are not going to go anywhere; you are staying here with me. Who has ever heard of a girl shooting and killing someone? And if you take it into your head to leave, I am going to throw myself down on the doorstep. You will have to step over my body if you want to leave."[39]

Onia did not dare to rebel against her mother. Both women lost their lives in the liquidation of the Wilna ghetto.

Female Jews joined the partisans either as individuals or as couples. Sarah and Misha Robinson decided to get married in advance since they wanted to go into the woods to the partisans as a married couple.[40] Other female Jews also had a stable male partner, such as Rachel Margolis, who went along with Chaim Zaydelson into the woods[41], or Vitka Kempner, the companion of Abba Kovner, or Ida Vilencik. Yet there were also women, such as Fanya who joined the partisans without a partner and only there did they meet their future husbands. Rachel remembers other fighting comrades who gravitated toward them:

> "Marysia had recently come from the ghetto with her friend Mira Gonionska. They had given them the route, and they had found the way themselves to the partisans in the forest. […] Many girls reached the partisans the same way. They were sent out of the ghetto alone, unarmed, disguised as Poles so as not to load the groups down with women. Everyone thought that the partisans needed bold young men who wanted to fight and were armed. It turned out later that the girls fought just as well as the men."[42]

For the female Jew in the ghetto there were no other alternatives. Whoever did not flee had only a short life expectancy. The decision of the young women to leave proves above all their unbridled will to survive. The female Lithuanian partisans, that is, the active members of the underground, often acted in the context of their family story. In such cases, the women were often the 'replacements'. The historian Žaneta Smolskutė has shown

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[38] Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 30-31.

[39] Margolis, *Partisan*, 359.

[40] Margolis, *Partisan*, 124.

[41] Margolis, Bruder and Schroeter, *Partisanin Wilna*, 81.

[42] Margolis, *Partisan*, 380.

that the majority of the active female partisans (about 72 %) were married.[43]

Anelė's life was radically changed by the death of her husband. She wanted to revenge him and began to work as a currier for the partisans using the name "Klajune". When she was arrested, her son was sent to a children's home.[44]

For completeness sake one must add that there were a large number of women and young girls whose lives came undone in the post-war period even if they themselves had not been actively involved in the resistance. On the one hand, it had to do with family members, especially widows of dead partisans, who went into hiding in other places under false names in order to avoid exile. In other cases, it concerned wives and children of fighting partisans who were living outside the law, but not in the woods.[45] In these cases attempts were made to at least keep some geographical distance from the resistance actions.

In the Woods

What did the destination 'the woods' mean for the female Jews, and what did it mean for the female Lithuanians? For the female Lithuanian partisans, there really was not that kind of clear separation between the place where their family members lived and the partisan's front line. In this space, the woods to a certain extent were right in front of the house door; here the home and the partisan front were closely interlocked, which doubtlessly had consequences for all members of the partisans. On the one hand, the available network was significantly denser, which meant that there was a greater possibility to see the members of their families now and then and to get messages to them. Moreover, farmers near the forests also allowed them to use their wells or saunas. On the other hand, the visit of a partisan always presented for the family members the danger of discovery. The female Lithuanian partisans came as a rule from the countryside, where as farm girls since they were little they were used to gathering berries and mushrooms in the extensive forests and also to walk the long pathways

[43] Smolskutė, 'Moterų'.

[44] Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, 'Juodi', 184-6.

[45] So, for example, the wife and daughter of Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas. See Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, *Daugel krito sunu* [*Many Sons Have Fallen...*] (Vilnius: Mintis, 1991), 442. Nina Nausedaitė reported as well about the four year-old son of the partisan leader Jonas Žemaitis for whom she had to find a hiding place. Nausedaitė-Rasa, 'Ne vien duona gyvi...', 157-8.

from village to village. In short, they had an ability to orient themselves, something which life in the country had taught them in a special way. Added to that was the fact that they were predominantly active in the resistance quite close to home, so it was an area that was very familiar to them, whereas the female Jews as a rule went into such large forests for the first time. The former partisan and contemporaneous witness, Dov Levin, wrote the following about the Jewish partisans:

> "They generally had previously been residents of the local towns and knew the forest well and so were able to act as guides and scouts for the partisans, as well as liaise between them and the rural population."[46]

But this statement does not correlate at all with the experiences before us. On the contrary, the forests presented an immense challenge for the female Jewish partisans. Sarah describes it this way:

> "We were far from our families and would be living in the woods without toilets, water, baths, or electricity. Snow had begun falling, the wind was rustling in the trees, and it was white and beautiful all around us."[47]

> "For the first time, I found myself alone in the woods at night with a gun. Although I had been through some military training, I had no idea what I should do with the gun if anything happened."[48]

The conditions were sometimes extreme, as Sarah portrays it:

> "For a long time, we had neither a bathhouse nor an outhouse. We had to go far into the woods through deep snow in order simply to wash. The female partisans were often plagued by lice. […] Our menstrual periods were as torturous as the assault of the parasites, particularly when we were on missions or on guard duty. Because we had no female hygiene products, we resorted to shredding sheets or buying rags from the local peasants which we washed in cold water in the woods."[49]

For the Jewish women, there was a clear separation between where their family members lived and the partisan's front line. There were only a few isolated instances in which a female partisan was sent back again into the ghetto. Sarah Ginaitė made such a trip together with other female partisans for the purpose of getting additional fighters from the ghetto in Kaunas

[46] Levin and Teller, *Litvaks*, 230.

[47] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 126.

[48] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 135.

[49] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 176.

(and she had a chance to see her mother again).[50] This situation was horribly ambivalent for her.

> "Suddenly, I was overcome with horror. I had come from a life of freedom. Even though it was a dangerous and difficult one, and now I found myself once again on death row. [...] I wanted only to abandon the ghetto and walk by myself back into our Rudninkai Forest. I didn't care if it meant four nights of walking to be next to Misha and among my 'Death to the Occupiers' detachment comrades."[51]

She visited her family members and enjoyed for a few days the amenities (though quite limited) of the ghetto.

> "But all I wanted now was to wash, to remove my lousy clothing and lie down in clean sheets. Mother soon turned the kitchen into a small bathhouse. She rinsed my head with kerosene to kill the lice, combed my hair, and then washed my hair and body."[52]

Sarah said good-bye to her family once again, fulfilled her assignment, and then went back into the forest.

Gender Roles and Relationships

Were there divisions of labor in the forest? Were there divisions of responsibilities in the indispensible network of partisans with the surrounding civilian world? From the reports of the Jewish partisans one can determine that for life in the base stations, there were typical divisions in the tasks for the men and women. For transactions, running of errands, and requisitions, the criterion was most often about the Jewish or not-Jewish appearance of the partisan. However, the men did not gladly take women along on missions. Rachel Margolis remembered a scene where it came to a difficult river crossing, at which the women hesitated. The men moaned. "There's always confusion with women around. It makes you wonder why they let them go on missions."[53] Fanya learned to shoot and to lay mines. Her first assignment consisted of destroying telephone lines.[54] She did not shirk from any assignments.

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[50] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 152.

[51] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 151-2.

[52] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 152.

[53] Margolis, *Partisan*, 495.

[54] Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 32.

> "I became a member of a group. I was given a rifle and then an automatic gun. I dragged it with me and took part in military missions. I rarely saw Doba. Since she looked like a Slavic girl, she joined an intelligence group. We blasted trains and placed explosives in the enemy's equipment. We shot and killed them. Yes, I did, I killed them and did so with ease. I knew that my dear ones were dead and I took my revenge for them and thousands others with each and every shot."[55]

In Sarah's group, the girls had to teach themselves about the weaponry.[56] Included among Sarah's assignments was the requisitioning of food provisions from the surroundings. In one case she went to a nearby farmhouse:

> "The farmer's wife […] looked me over carefully and told me that war was not for women to fight. I didn't wait for a reply as I asked her, 'And is the killing of women and children proper work for men?' and left the house."[57]

Rachel had a similar experience when a farmer woman criticized her saying that a decent young girl should not be going around with these Soviet bandits.

> "'What would impel a decent young lady to hang around with these Soviet bandits? You should be staying home with your Mama and Father. You're just out for an adventure!' wondered the farmer's wife. Then she concluded. 'Fighting is not a womanly thing to do.'"[58]

As a rule, the women had to take care of a lot of 'women's work'. They peeled potatoes, kept the kitchen cleaned up and washed the dirty clothes for the men.[59] The requisitioned cows also had to be taken out to pasture by the women, which for them as women from towns was something they did not know how to do, so it presented a real challenge.[60] Taking care of the sick and surgeries also fell into the sphere of the women. In the group "Death to the Occupiers", there were two nurses, Ania and Zoya, and there was an experienced surgical nurse Riva Kaganiene who performed operations.[61] As already mentioned, whether one looked Arian or Jewish played a crucial role for those job assignments which would have contact with the outside world. Then it would make no difference whom the male

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[55] Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 33.

[56] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 162.

[57] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 135.

[58] Margolis, *Partisan*, 465.

[59] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 163.

[60] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 164.

[61] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 163.

or female partisan met, whether German occupation forces or some person from the population who was anti-Jewish.

From the Soviet perspective, there was however a clear gender hierarchy: the men of the Lithuanian underground were considered to be significantly more dangerous than the women. Because of the severe torturing and punishments they would receive, they would have hardly any chance to survive. The women as a rule were sentenced to significantly lesser punishments. The differences between the tasks for the men and women in the Lithuanian underground were quite clear. The men fought with the weapons, the women took care of supplies and communication and bore as a result an essential responsibility for the functioning of the resistance. Moreover, they looked after the medical care.[62] While in 1944 there was no clear attitude to the role of women in the armed resistance, in 1949 a resolution of the presidium of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters was formulated saying that women should no longer fight in the ranks of the partisans. The partisans should offer them opportunities (above all falsified documents), so that they would be able to return to civilian life.[63] In the reports about military confrontations with Soviet troops, there is mention of female victims, but not of armed women. That means that in actual Lithuanian historiography, there must have existed a directive in the documents of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters to make no distinction between female and male partisans.[64] As far as the reaction of the Lithuanian population to the participation of women in the armed resistance is concerned, no contemporaneous sources can be found. If farm women could assert in 1943 that "Fighting is not a womanly thing to do"[65], by 1945 because of their husbands and sons, women were involved in the struggle or in the widest sense in supporting the struggle. Or they had changed over to the other side and were defending the Soviet occupation forces. In 1944-1945 the attitudes of women to the armed struggle changed.

The End of the Partisan Period

Fanya, Rachel and Sarah's time as partisans ended around July 1944, and all three of them remained in the country. From their families (with the exception of Sarah's sister), they were the only ones who had survived.

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[62] Laisvės kovų archyvas, 96 (former Archive of KGB, F 3.47/10.T.1. L.131-135).

[63] Laisvės kovų archyvas, 93.

[64] Laisvės kovų archyvas, 93.

[65] Margolis, *Partisan*, 465.

Nevertheless, Fanya, who immediately after the liberation married her companion from the partisan time, described the situation as follows: "We were intoxicated by the victory, our youth and love."[66] The photograph of Sarah Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, taken by the war reporter Jakov Rumkin during the battle for the liberation of Vilnius, appeared on the front page of the Ogonjok in July 1944.[67] It bore the caption: "Lithuanian Partisan". Rachel Rudinsky appeared as a laughing and armed "Lithuanian Partisan" on postcards.[68] On the other hand, no photos exist of Rachel Margolis. She acknowledged later that

> "[n]o one had the idea to have herself photographed with a rifle. [...] The weapons had been taken away from us; we were now civilians. I was afraid to walk on the street without a weapon. I had gotten used to holding the strap of the rifle with my right hand."[69]

The former partisans could not so quickly get used to a life outside the forest. It took a long time for Fanya Brancovskaya to let go of her weapon and she even took it with her into the Ministerial Office where she worked after the liberation: "I used to take my rifle to work putting it in the corner. The minister joked: 'One day you'll shoot me!' [...]. Sometime later we were ordered to turn in our weapons."[70] Fanya took part in the victory parade in Moscow on 9. May 1945.

> "In summer 1945 Mikhail and I were in the Lithuanian delegation standing in Red Square [in Moscow] at the Victory Parade. These were unforgettable moments. My husband and five others were awarded the 'Medal for Partisan of the Great Patriotic War', Grade I, and they were some of the first awardees."[71]

This public recognition did not last long, since the anti-Semitic campaigns at the end of the 1940s also caused problems for Fanya, Rachel, Sarah and their families even if they did escape the repressive measures.[72] For the Lithuanian population in the countryside, the partisan war (which lasted until 1953) became a traumatic event that far overshadowed those of the

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[66] Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 35.

[67] Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 175.

[68] See http://www.lsa.umich.edu/judaic/html/admissions_2_1_5.htm (last visited 28 February 2012).

[69] Margolis, Bruder and Schroeter, *Partisan in Wilna*, 229. A whole chapter about Wilna after the War in 1944, including this passage, is only available in the German publication, but not included in the English version of the book.

[70] Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 35.

[71] Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 35.

[72] Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 38.

Second World War. Between the years 1949-1952, around 20.000 fighters (men and women) of the armed national underground lost their lives.[73]

Nina Nausedaitė-Rasa was sentenced to ten years in Siberia and was able to return to Kaunas with the amnesty of 1956.[74] Since she was not allowed to study, she found employment as an unskilled worker.[75] Anelė Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė was sentenced in 1951 to Modovia and returned as well with the amnesty in 1956.[76] But she fared as so many others who were returning from exile: her attempts to find a place to live and to work were torpedoed by the authorities in the Lithuanian Soviet Republic and moreover she was ostracized by the society. So she went with her child for ten years to Krasnojarsk as an immigrant worker and did not come back to Lithuania until 1964.[77] At the end of the Stalin era, a period of adjustment began for the citizens of the Lithuanian Soviet Republic, a time when they wanted to be reminded as little as possible of the bloody events of the post-war years. In spite of this self-enforced amnesia, one can claim, the memory remained of those women who had taken over new areas for themselves in such extreme situations and had carried weapons and worn uniforms, and who, therefore, had expanded the sphere of action for women, something not only the women but also the men held in their memories.

Photos

In the photos from the time period of the partisans, it is striking that in the Jewish groups, women and men are photographed together. Even the group portraits of veterans which were taken during the whole post-war period always show women and men. These pictures were always around, except that rather quickly the inscription "Jewish" was left off and the partisans were all labeled as "Heroes of the great war of the Fatherland".[78] However, the photos in which young women could be seen with weapons, these disappeared; and those that appeared on the front page in the summer of 1944 on a soviet magazine, these later disappeared as well, only to be shown again after 1989. A lot of things were photographed during the

[73] Jelena Zubkova, *Pabaltijys ir Kremlius, 1940-1953 m* [*The Baltic and the Kremlin, 1940-1953*] (Vilnius: Mintis, 2010).

[74] Nausedaitė-Rasa, 'Ne vien duona gyvi...', 161.

[75] Nausedaitė-Rasa, 'Ne vien duona gyvi...', 162.

[76] Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, 'Juodi', 184.

[77] Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, 'Juodi', 186.

[78] Eglinis-Elinas and Gelpernas, *Kauno*, 195, 197, 211.

Lithuanian resistance. But the photographs of the Lithuanian resistance showed women only very rarely with the whole formation. If women were photographed, then it was most often exclusively with the appropriate male person (with the husband, the brother, the cousin). These photos from the resistance were forbidden in public; they emerged again in 1989 from many different hiding places. When looking at the photos, the eye catches the fact that the women present themselves with emphasis on their femininity, with carefully done hairstyles and womanly clothing accents, quite frequently with pleated skirts. In the numerous memoirs and histories of the Lithuanian resistance that have appeared in the last twenty years, no pictures of fighting women have been included.[79] What predominates is either the picture of the mother or the whole family of the partisans,[80] or pictures of a female friend who was visiting, wherein the conscious contrast between the uniforms of the men and the folk dresses of the women is so striking.[81] If a woman was in uniform in the picture, then one notices above all the long hair (also long braids) as well as that the women wore skirts.[82] Yet one finds a different perspective in the current permanent exhibition in the Vilnius Museum which exhibits a relatively large number of photos of Lithuanian partisans that include female fighters. There one sees pictures which show women in trousers and/or with machine guns.[83]

These are pictures which until now have been viewed as untypical. Presumably this stronger accent on female partisans is intended (after the fact) to correct the image for the female visitor. You can also trace this phenomenon clearly with the aid of the catalogue which reproduces a much greater number of group portraits of Lithuanian partisans in which women can be seen.[84] One can suspect that at the beginning of the 1990s, when the flood of pictures about the Lithuanian post-war period began, a clear line was being drawn to distinguish these re-emerging pictures from what (to that point) had been the usual depictions of the Soviet and pro-Soviet fe-

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[79] See Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, who likewise highlight the poor integration of heroines in popular accounts of the war. Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, 'Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe', in Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, *eds., Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1-20, here 7.

[80] Vėliūtė, *Partizanai*, 11.

[81] Vėliūtė, *Partizanai*, 49.

[82] Vėliūtė, *Partizanai*, 70.

[83] Rima Mekaitė, *Karas po karo: Ginkluotasis antisovietinis pasipriesinimas Lietuvoje 1944-1953 m. Parodos katalogas* [*War After War: Armed Anti-Soviet Resistance in Lithuania 1944-1953. Exhibition catalogue*] (Vilnius: LGGRTC, 2004), 8, 9. Thereafter Mekaitė, *Karas*.

[84] Mekaitė, *Karas*.

male fighters and their attempt to create a certain picture of women in the Lithuanian underground.

Conclusion

The activities in the woods and the expansion of women's sphere of actions were things remembered not only by the women, but also by the men. However, this still represents a divided history even though it was within one geographical area and a short time period. The Jewish female partisans, in many cases, stayed together for their whole lives with their partners from the time of the campaign. The shared time in the ghetto and the woods had often 'welded them together' as equal partners. The group pictures of the veterans and their appearances at anniversary events were components of a collective memory in the LiSSR and were looked on by the Lithuanians as an expression of the Soviet culture of occupation.

During the time of the Soviet occupation, these Jewish women primarily pursued their professional lives and dedicated themselves to their families. Starting in 1987, when the Lithuanian Soviet Republic once again allowed a Jewish cultural association, women began to dedicate themselves to the memory of the Jewish extermination in Lithuania and to reflect on those memories. In that way they became important and notable bearers of the Jewish memory in what was once again an independent Lithuania.

The Lithuanian male role model of the pre-war period with its manly ideals was substantially destroyed with the defeat of the partisan movement. Only a few active fighters had survived, over whom numerous myths were quickly overlaid while being told secretly. Because strictly forbidden, there was no possibility for a pictorial or written passing on of tradition. There was here in the post-war years an empty gap, and bound up with it was a loss of orientation for the men. The women who had worked as curriers for the resistance were commonly punished with 5-10 years exile to Siberia and were able to return back to the LiSSR by circumventing diverse prohibitions.

The female veterans of the Lithuanian resistance were an important potent force in the movements leading to the restoration of Lithuanian independence in 1990. However, most people had only a local level of awareness and there still does not exist today a master narrative of female Lithuanian partisans. That is astounding since the role of Lithuanian women (through their activities in the resistance, through their resilience in exile, though their efforts to hold the remaining family together and as the bearers of a memories that were taboo) has in general in this time period

been strengthened enormously.[85] Because of this disproportionate development (my closing thesis) the gender relationship was burdened. This (which still needs to be proven), however, was reduced by the official propagandized Soviet gender order.

The stability of the gender differences in the society of pre-war Lithuania was clearly burst apart both by the war and the underground war of the post-war period. The women emancipated themselves through these events and endured in some cases a long phase of discrimination, from exile up until the restoration of independence. Subconsciously, the men knew this. Officially, the Soviet ideology dictated a complete equality of genders, such that every discussion about gender relationships had the rug pulled out from under it right from the start. Unofficially, however, the citizens, the men and women of Soviet Lithuania, knew that gender equality was only on a piece of paper and a subtle discrimination against women in many areas was commonplace. Knowledge of this led the men not to take too seriously the emancipatory successes of the women. In conclusion, I would mention that in the totalitarian society, no balanced evaluation and work on the war and post-war experiences could take place. It was only after the beginning of *Perestroika* that more comprehensive processes of perception and recognition have begun, and yet within them, gender relations and their change have still not been adequately studied.

[85] See also Stanislovas Abromavičius, *Žalio velnio takais* [*On the Path of the Green Devil*] (Kaunas: Sąjūdis, 1999), 74.