

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between war and society can be described according to four criteria: a) the extent to which war engages society; b) how societies experience war; c) what survival strategies are used during war; and d) how war affects society.

Lithuanian society has been involved in war to a different extent in different periods of history. According to the level of their involvement, it is possible to distinguish: 1) societies at peace; 2) societies of which individual members participate in war outside their area of habitation; 3) societies living through war; and 4) societies at war.

In the first case, we are referring to generations living in peacetime, whose parents and even grandparents have not themselves experienced war *en masse*. There have only been three periods in the history of Lithuania in which the duration of peacetime approached or exceeded 50 years. These include the middle and the second half of the 15th century, when, after a dynastic conflict (internal war) and the Battle of Pabaiskas (Ukmergė),<sup>1</sup> Casimir Jagiellon was proclaimed grand duke, ruling Lithuania for five decades. With the exception of the conflicts with the Ottomans and with Muscovy, which began at the end of Casimir's reign, his reign was an era of peace for several generations of Lithuanian society. Another period of peace was the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, or the period between the January Insurrection (1863–1864) and the outbreak of the First World War. A new period of peace has been experienced again by several generations of Lithuanian society for some time now since the Second World War and the anti-Soviet armed resistance (the Lithuanian partisan war of 1944–1953), during which the country was devastated and many lives were lost. This suggests that in the past, for many Lithuanians, involvement in war was the norm, rather than an exceptional state of affairs.

In the second case, we are talking about societies of which individuals are actively involved in military structures, campaigns and battles somewhere outside their living environment. There is a safe retreat region where combatants can breathe, where they can be taken care of. An example, with some reservations, is Sweden in the 16th and 18th centuries, which was active in the east Baltic region, and became involved in the Thirty Years' War in Central Europe, but Swedish territory itself was hardly affected by intense, long-term military action. The United States of America has repeatedly been such a warring society, with its troops going on military expeditions during the First World War and the Second World War, and the Korean, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghan wars.

<sup>1</sup> For recent research on that issue, see BARANAUSKAS, Tomas. *Pabaisko mūšis: šaltiniai ir interpretacijos*. Vilnius, 2019.

In the third case, war is fought on territory inhabited by civilian communities, but the civilians themselves are not active participants in the war, or else only certain individuals and those subjected to violence are involved. In the case of Lithuania, an example of a period when society lived through a war but was not at war is 1939–1945: the events of the Second World War rolled by outside the farms of many Lithuanians, but without providing a widespread motivation to become involved.

8 | Finally, there have been warlike societies, societies that are actively at war themselves, and that wage war on their own territory. In the case of Lithuania, this has been quite common. During the period of consolidation of Mindaugas' rule, military campaigns were organised on a regular basis and enemies were attacked. This continued throughout the war with the Teutonic Order. In the 16th and 17th centuries, active war was waged with Muscovy (later Russia) and Sweden, whose armies invaded Lithuania. These societies are characterised by militarisation, with the formation of military lords or paramilitary structures that can quickly engage in combat. War becomes a routine, and soldiering becomes a craft and even a family tradition. A truce in such cases does not mean peace. It is only a respite, and a preparation for the next military campaign or the next war, when the trumpets and drums of battle never cease to sound in the minds of society's leaders, and even in the minds of most individuals.

How war is experienced is also important in describing the relationship between society and war. Much depends on the nature of the warfare, how it is accepted and practised in one period or another, and the customs or legal norms of war. Much also depends on the nature of the technology used in war. In practice, similarities and differences between societies in this respect can be seen in clear examples, such as the treatment of prisoners of war, whether they are sacrificed to the gods, killed, ransomed, sold into slavery, or held in prisoner-of-war camps. And killing is not unique to the Middle Ages or Prehistoric tribal societies. The 20th century also saw examples of the organised mass killing of prisoners of war. One of the most prominent episodes in the east Baltic region was the massacre of Polish army officers at Katyn in 1940, for which the USSR was responsible. Aspects of military culture, norms and the use of technology are also relevant to the experience of civilians in the middle of the theatre of war.

In describing the relationship between society and war, it is also important to look at the survival strategies that societies and/or individuals adopt in times of war. Both soldiers and civilians react diversely, and in different ways, to situations in which their survival is threatened. In the case of civilians, some try to stay in their living environment, hiding from the enemy and from hostilities, while others flee to wooded and swampy areas, which are little known to the enemy and difficult to reach (in Premodern times, they would flee to castles or hill-forts), or hide in dug-outs, bunkers and shelters. Others flee from the fighting, becoming war refugees. Lithuanian

history is replete with examples of different survival strategies chosen by civilians. Their choice seems to have been extremely influenced by previous civilian experiences. During the First World War, hundreds of thousands of Lithuanians fled to the interior of the Russian Empire as the front approached, but during the Second World War, most civilians stayed in their own country. The experiences of refugees during the Great War had as much to do with this as the change in attitude towards Russia: during the First World War, it was an empire in which several generations had been born and raised; while during the Second World War, going there would have meant going to the USSR, which had just occupied Lithuania and had undertaken repressions against civilians that had few precedents.

Finally, the impact of war is also important in understanding the relationship between society and war. In many cases, it is uneven. Often war is a shattering and fundamentally transformative event for society. War almost always involves casualties, which are important not least because of the long-term impact on reproduction and other demographic trends. After a war, survivors mourn, or, for other reasons (material or political), attribute meaning to their experiences and commemorate the sacrifices made. War also has an economic impact on society. It causes poverty and reduces social inequality, as wealthier sections of society lose a significant part of their capital, especially in the event of total war.<sup>2</sup> In the history of Lithuania, the country has been continuously destroyed and devastated by years of war. This has had a negative impact on social and economic development. In the last two centuries alone, three wars left the current territory of Lithuania exposed to the effects of large-scale warfare. These include the campaign of the French Grande Armée in Russia in 1812, the First World War, and the Second World War. Šiauliai, Lithuania's fourth-largest city and an important railway hub, was destroyed twice in the 20th century. In addition, war has a moral and psychological impact, and can transform communities' value systems and change lifestyles. An example of such an impact is the effect wars have on changing the position of women in society. When men go to war *en masse*, women replace them in the economic spheres where they used to work. Wars have also advanced the emancipation of women. The impact of war on society is thus multi-layered.

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Conventional notions of gender roles in war are linked to broader notions that characterise modern history. Both in the period when armies were still largely made up

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SCHEIDEL, Walter. *The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton, NJ, 2017.

of mercenaries, and in societies that created armies based on universal conscription in the 19th and 20th centuries, soldiers were men. Even today, women are still included in compulsory service in only a few countries. In Europe and its immediate neighbourhood, these include Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Israel and Tunisia.

In societies where the prevailing perception is that the soldier is a man, women are still the 'weaker sex', 'incapable' of defending their homeland with arms, or doing it 'less well' than men. In these societies, there still persist patriarchal stereotypes that women are inherently peaceful beings, and therefore not supporters of war; that women are meant to take care of the hearth, bring up the children and wait at home for the soldier; that war makes a woman an object or a trophy to be coveted, a passive observer of war or a healer of the wounds of war that are usually suffered by men, a victim of war or a beneficiary of it. Because of the factor of physical force and certain moral and ethical attitudes, a woman is a giver of life, a giver of birth, not a taker of life. However, as technology and warfare change, this attitude is also changing, simultaneously with historians' attention to women's roles and experiences in war.

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The brief overview of the relationship between society and war in the first part of this introduction makes it clear that these roles and these experiences have been influenced by a diverse constellation of factors in different periods. For a very long time, however, historians have only written about how this constellation affected men's experiences of war and men's roles. In the field of 'war and society', the emergence of women as equal actors is a recent development that largely results from the more general 'feminist turn' in historiography on both sides of the Atlantic in the 20th century. It is therefore perhaps hardly surprising today to find that those who won the First World War were undoubtedly women: it was that war that provided the essential impetus for their emancipation. Today, it is not only Medieval historians who write about women soldiers, studying figures such as Joan of Arc, but also 20th-century historians, who calculate, for example, that at least 490,000 women were on active service in the ranks of the Red Army alone during the Second World War.<sup>3</sup>

However, historians in Lithuania have written remarkably little about women's roles and experiences in past wars and armies. If you turn to Lithuanian history textbooks, the main actors in the First World War are still male public figures and male politicians who fought for Lithuania; the main actors in the wars of 1919 and 1920 for Lithuania's independence were male volunteers; and the main protagonists in the

<sup>3</sup> This is an official General Staff estimate according to KRIVOSHEEV, Grigorii. O poteriakh sredi zhenshchin-voennosluzhashchikh i vol'nonaemnogo sostava. *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 2005, № 1, s. 33. Cf. MARKWICK, Roger D.; CARDONA, Euridice Charon. *Soviet Woman on the Frontline in the Second World War*. Houndmills-Basingstoke, New York, 2012. Some authors put the estimate even higher, at 800,000, e.g., SENIAVSKAIA, Elena. *Psikhologija voiny v XX veke: istoricheskii opyt Rossii*. Moskva, 1999, s. 165; IVANOVA, Iuliia. *Khrabreishie iz prekrasnykh. Zhenshchiny Rossii v voynakh*. Moskva, 2002, s. 256; GOLDSTEIN, Joshua A. *War and Gender. How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Cambridge, 2001, p. 65.

Second World War, perhaps to a lesser extent, were the male victims of the war and the multiple occupations of Lithuania. Everywhere, it is almost exclusively men. In seeking explanations for this situation, we can, of course, recall the early feminist critique of historiography, according to which women do not have a proper role in history, because for a very long time history has been written by men, who have done so by focusing on the themes of politics, diplomacy and war, themes in which women cannot be portrayed as active participants, because they have virtually been excluded from participation.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps that is why characters such as Emilia Plater, a participant in the November Insurrection (1830–1831), have come to the attention of Lithuanian historians because of their exclusivity; they have not been depicted as typical cases.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps that is why the war history magazine *Karo archyvas* (Military Archives, published in Lithuania from 1925 to 1940, and again since 1992) published only a few women's testimonies about war in Lithuania in the period between the world wars, and the first article devoted exclusively to women's issues was published only in 2006, symptomatically, with a sociologist, not a historian, as its author.<sup>6</sup> However, the explanation that emphasises the correlation between the prevalence of male authors of history and male actors in history seems to be somewhat simplistic. For even in Lithuanian history textbooks written by women, the role of women is not given much more space. An example could be the textbook by the Lithuanian historian Vanda Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė, which was republished and expanded several times in different contexts over the course of the 20th century.<sup>7</sup> There are more female characters in this textbook than in contemporary textbooks written by men, but male historical characters dominate the textbook, and the roles of women in the narrative of Lithuania's past are presented by Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė as if she were pandering to the expectations of a male-dominated society.<sup>8</sup> Another example could be the research on the impact of war on Lithuanian society. In the 1930s, the impact of the First World War on Lithuanian society was studied most extensively by Marija Urbšienė.<sup>9</sup> However, the fact that she was an emancipated woman hardly

<sup>4</sup> Cf. KELLY-GADOL, Joan. The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History. *Signs*, 1976, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 810. See also BEAUVOIR, Simone de. *Le Deuxième Sexe*. T. 1: *Les faits et les mythes*. Paris, 1949, p. 221; LERNER, Gerda. New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History. *Journal of Social History*, 1969, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Probably the first essay written by a Lithuanian historian about Emilia Plater is JANULAITIS, A[ugustinas]. *Emilija Pliateraitė. Lenkmečių karžygė (1806–1831)*. Tiltžė, 1908.

<sup>6</sup> MASLAUSKAITĖ, Aušra. Moterų padėtis ir karjeros galimybės Lietuvos krašto apsaugos sistemoje. *Karo archyvas*, 2006, t. XXI, p. 277–314.

<sup>7</sup> For the first edition, see: DAUGIRDAITĖ-SRUOGIENĖ, V[anda]. *Lietuvos istorija: vadovėlis gimnazijoms*. Kaunas, 1935.

<sup>8</sup> See also DAUGIRDAITĖ-SRUOGIENĖ, Vanda. Mūsų praeities moterų siluetai. *Naujoji Romuva*, 1936, nr. 39, p. 709–714.

<sup>9</sup> For a list of her publications, see: SAFRONOVAS, Vasilijus. Lithuania and the Lithuanians in the First World War. Bibliography, 1914–1945. In *The Great War in Lithuania and Lithuanians in the Great War: Experiences and Memories* (Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis, vol. XXXIV). Ed. by V. SAFRONOVAS. Klaipėda, 2017, p. 194.

had a direct impact on her publications, which do not pay special attention to the role of women in Lithuania during the Great War. So the explanation why women are still not equal actors in Lithuanian history (and military history is no exception) probably lies somewhere else: it seems that Lithuanian historians have still not done enough to reveal the diversity of actors in the past. As long as the narratives of war are dominated by the desire to portray the collective behaviour of the nation and the perceptive guidance of wise leaders, there is not much room for this diversity. When we begin to ask new questions about society, and we search for the answer even in familiar historical sources, those sources may provide new answers as well.

We hope that this collection of articles, one of the first attempts, if not the first, in Lithuania to draw attention to the broader role of women in war, will be an opportunity not only to revisit women's role and experience in war, or to remind us that the need for women to be brought back into the history of Lithuania is indeed critically ripe. It may also broaden the understanding of the fact that society, as a multi-layered phenomenon, experiences war differently.

Of course, civilians, and especially women, have often been, and still are, victims and even spoils in war. However, in this collection of articles, we have purposely decided to go beyond the image of women as war victims. The collection reveals a much broader range of women's experiences and roles related to war, armies and warfare. This is done by approaching war not only as battles, but also by including periods of preparation for war, as well as moments when de jure wars were fought but de facto hostilities were absent. This approach is based on the fact that war is usually a long and monotonous process of marching, redeploying and waiting, but above all, a routine that is sometimes even dangerous for the morale of armies. And the battle is a very brief episode in the whole process of war, although of course it is essential and often decisive.