

»I was
never liberated
from Auschwitz.«

Female Jewish Partisan's Perspectives
on Victory in Europe Day

trans*geniale f_antifa?

Antifa, because Nazis and the conditions which make their ideology possible still need to be abolished.

F_, because feminism does not only mean smashing the patriarchy, but also keeping other power relations in mind and sabotaging them.

Trans*genial (trans*genius), because too many people still believe there are only two genders and we will glitter away this claim.

A detailed self-conception can be found on our website.

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You can contact us via

transgenialefantifa@riseup.net

May 8: Victory in Europe Day

On **May 8, 1945** Germany signed its unconditional surrender. This day did not only mark the end of the Second World War in Europe, but also the liberation from national socialism and the end of the Shoah (Hebrew: **השואה** , »the disaster« or »the catastrophe«. Jewish term for the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators.). Germany's surrender was celebrated in all countries attacked and occupied by the Nazis.

Even today the 8th of May is an official holiday in many countries, for example in Great Britain, France, the Netherlands (On the 5th of May the Bevrijdingsdag (Liberation Day) is celebrated.) or in some states of the former Soviet Union (On the 9th of May the Victory Day is celebrated.). In the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) the 8th of May was called *Tag der Befreiung des deutschen Volkes vom Hitlerfaschismus* (Day of Liberation of the German people from Hitler fascism). In the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) the 8th of May was never an official holiday and it isn't until today.

Celebrating the liberation from national socialism even today is a good sign - against oblivion and current national socialist and fascist efforts. But unfortunately a very important aspect isn't taken into consideration: not everyone persecuted by the Nazis was able to celebrate on May 8, 1945.

»Then I realized everyone was dead, I was alone, there wasn't a place for me anymore.«

(Quote from »Die Angst kam erst danach. Jüdische Frauen im Widerstand 1939-1945« by Ingrid Strobl, original edition, page 390. All following quotes and most of the information are taken from this book.)

This quote of Jewish partisan Ewa Krakowska makes clear Victory Day wasn't a reason to celebrate for most of the Jews. Because it were mostly Jews who were deported to concentration and extermination camps, shot and beaten to death in the streets, and killed in the gas chambers by the Nazis and their helpers. The surviving Jews were often the only ones left of their families. There was no home to which they could return. Because non-Jews who moved in when the Jews were deported were now living in their flats and houses. While non-Jewish partisans fired their guns in the air with joy on Victory Day, Jewish partisan Chasia Bielicka-Bornstein sat on a tree stump and was near to tears, because she knew her whole family had been murdered.

Dealing with the Experiences

Some of the female fighters had sworn to never talk about their experiences during the war. Liza Czapnik, a Jewish partisan, says: »No one would have believed it. Or maybe they would have believed but not understood.« For Chaika Grossman, also a Jewish partisan, »these first months from the liberation of Białystok until the liberation of Warsaw« were »maybe the hardest times«, because: »I didn't know why I was still alive and what for.«

To be able to live with the horrors of the war and the Shoah, some of the female partisans rescued themselves through political work. Chaika Grossman for example worked for the Hashomer Hazair (Hebrew: **השומר הצעיר**, »The Youth Guard«), a left-wing Zionist youth movement, and Chasia Bielicka-Bornstein smuggled Jewish children who survived the Shoah in Poland to Palestine. Many Zionists went to Palestine themselves to build a Jewish state. Other fighters retrieved children who were hidden during the war and tried to find surviving family members. Others cared for former concentration camp prisoners.

Disappointments & Degradation

Many former female partisans were disappointed in many aspects. For example their active work for the resistance was very rarely honored. This even included their male comrades and companions banning womyn from marching at the 1945 liberation parades. It was justified among other things with the myth that a womyn couldn't be a fighter. Although the female partisans had impressively proven to be at least as courageous and brave as the men, their fight wasn't acknowledged. Often it was and still is forgotten that the (armed) resistance wouldn't have been possible without the work of womyn who didn't fight with guns. It were especially womyn who carried weapons for assaults on Germans, kept up the connection between the ghettos, and linked the fighting units with each other. Womyn were more able to move unsuspectingly in public, because the Germans didn't think womyn were capable of participating in the resistance. This degradation of the womyn's work quite often lead to a return to patriarchal roles as housewife and mother.

»They took away our weapons and our fighting spirit.«

More than a few female partisans were also communists. They experienced »the liberation as a defeat of the revolutionary aspect of their struggle« as Ingrid Strobl writes. Although the partisans had liberated the countries in which they were living from the Germans, the conservative exile governments came back and took over power after the liberation. Régine Orfinger says: »After the liberation heavy bitterness dominated. The government came back from exile in London. They unarmed us very quickly, because they were afraid of the communists. They took away our weapons and our fighting spirit.« But also in the countries of the Soviet Union the Jewish communists were bitterly disappointed. Many of them left the USSR because of antisemitic campaigns. (For example as part of the so called »Doctors' plot« in 1948 Jews were insulted as »rootless cosmopolitans«, persecuted and executed.)

Ingrid Strobl writes: »Hardly any of the resistance fighters interviewed by me ever again became what one could call a ›normal, average citizen‹. Still today many suffer from the traumas of the Shoa and the loss of their families.«

With this in mind the quote of Sarah Goldberg on the cover is to be understood. The entire quote is: »One always says we were liberated. I was never liberated from Auschwitz.«

In Remembrance of the Female Jewish partisans
who fought for the Liberation from national socialism.



Partisans from Vilnius (from left to right):
Vitka Kempner, Roza Korczak, Zelda Treger