



**Katholieke Universiteit  
Leuven  
Faculteit Letteren  
Subfaculteit Geschiedenis**

# **Straddling the Iron Curtain?**

## Migrants' War Memories

Promotor:  
Prof. dr. Idesbald Goddeeris  
Co-promotor:  
Prof. dr. Louis Vos

Proefschrift aangeboden door  
**Machteld Venken**  
tot het behalen van de graad van  
doctor in de geschiedenis

Leuven 2008



*To those  
who did not find the words  
to articulate their war experiences*

*Die aus Sicht der Marginalisierten erzählte Geschichte kann eine als Geschichte von Marginalisierungsprozessen erzählt werden und zur Historisierung des Ortes beitragen, von dem aus gesprochen und Mitsprache eingefordert wird (Stuart Hall, 1994, 62: in Lenz 254).*

*Memories are shaped by forgetting, like the contours of the shore by the sea (Augé 29).*

*My book is not an attempt to fill in empty memory. It is not simply a part of the struggle against forgetfulness. Rather, I try to present memory AS empty (...) which by definition cannot be filled in or recovered (Hirsh 244).*

Photographs on the back cover:

Photograph 1: Ostarbeiterinnen pose for a portrait in the German city Hagen in 1943 (Nauchno-Informatsionnyĭ i prosvetitel'skiĭ tsentr' Memorial, Fond 21, 43411 Sitnik Mariia Frankowa: 'Foto v gorodi Gageni-Vest', 5.6.1943).

Photograph 2: Former soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division during the annual commemoration service at the Polish military cemetery of Lommel on 30 October 2005 (Picture by the author).

## A note

Earlier, often quite different versions of some chapters were published or accepted for publication. Portions of the arguments displayed in the introduction found their way to *Geschiedenis van integratie? Een historische kijk op vestigingsprocessen na migratie* by Leen Beyers and Machteld Venken in 'Mededelingenblad van de Belgische Vereniging voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis' 28 (December 2006). A version of chapter one appeared in the thematic issue 'Gender, migratie en overheidsbeleid' of the 'Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis' (International Institute of Social History, the Netherlands) edited by Marlou Schrover under the title *Gemengd huwen, nationaliteit en de verschillen voor mannen en vrouwen. Poolse oudgedienden en Ostarbeiterinnen in België tijdens de Koude Oorlog* 5/1 (2008), and will appear in 'Gender and Migration in global, historical and theoretical perspective', edited by Marlou Schrover and Eileen Yeo under the title *Polish Liberators and Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium During the Cold War: Mixed Marriages and the Differences for Immigrant Men and Women* (Great Britain, Routledge, 2009).

Ideas from chapter two have been published in the thematic issue 'Hearing from Home - When the State Talks to Emigrants' of the 'Journal of Intercultural Studies. A forum on Social Change & Cultural Diversity' (University of Newcastle, Australia) edited by Philippe Rygiel under the title *The Communist 'Polonia' Society and Polish Immigrants in Belgium, 1956-90* 7 (2007). Some insights from chapter three can be found in *The Nationalization of Identities: Ukrainians in Belgium, 1920-1950* by Machteld Venken and Idesbald Goddeeris in the 'Journal of Ukrainian Studies' (University of Alberta, Canada) 31/2 (2006).

An earlier version of chapter four appeared in the thematic issue 'Recent onderzoek naar de geschiedenis van immigranten in België / Travaux récents en histoire de l'immigration en Belgique' of the 'Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis / Revue Belge d'histoire contemporaine' (vzw Jan Dhondt Stichting/Fondation Jan Dhont asbl, Ghent) edited by Anne Morelli under the title *Constructie en receptie van het collectieve geheugen bij enkele Poolse gewezen divisiesoldaten in België. De Koude Oorlog in praktijken* 37/1-2 (2007), and as *Konstrukcja i recepcja pamięci zbiorowej wśród polskich dywizjonistów w Belgii. Zimna wojna w praktyce* in 'Przegląd Polonijny' (Polish Academy of Sciences, Cracow) 33/1 (September 2007). A reworking of chapter five has been accepted for publication in 'Migration et mémoire. Concepts et méthodes de recherche / Migration und Erinnerung. Konzepte und Methoden der Forschung', edited by Elisabeth Boesen and Fabienne Lentz, under the title *Singing meaning to war experiences* (University of Luxemburg, Lit Verlag, 2009).

The main argument of chapter six will be displayed in an article accepted for publication in the thematic issue 'Families, Constructions of Foreignness and Migration in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western Europe' edited by Machteld Venken, Leen Beyers and Idesbald Goddeeris of 'History of the Family. An International Quarterly' under the title *Bodily Memory: Bringing the Family* in (2009). Appendix two will be published in Gelinada Grinchenko's forthcoming book: 'Ukraińs'ki ostarbańtery u natsysts'kiĩ Nimechchyni: kolektivna pam'iat' ta individual'ni interpretatsii primusovogo dosvidu' (Ukrainian Ostarbeiterinnen in Nazi Germany: collective memory and individual interpretations of forced experience) (Kharkiv, Ukraine) (2009).

## My word of thanks

I clearly remember the evening of 9 November 1989. Our family had gathered in front of the television to watch the seven-thirty news. Already during the intro jingle, my dad jumped up from his sofa, and shouted: ‘The world has changed!’. I was eight years old at the time, and did not understand how what I saw as a bunch of hooligans climbing over a wall could have such an impact on my otherwise quiet father. My mother helped me out, explaining that the wall shown on our television screen had divided Europe into East and West, but that Europe would now be united again. Curious to discover what that other Europe looked like, my parents took the family to Czechoslovakia during the Easter break of 1990 and, together with their children, were introduced to a world of words with up to five consonants in a row, a big castle on a hill and woods in which you could walk all day long without meeting anybody; we were enchanted. A year later, my parents headed to Moscow and Kazakhstan and came back with the next fascinating artefacts: a pile of Russian violin study books. At a flea market, they had discovered books with pictures of violins which they thought would make an appropriate present for their daughter who had started to play two years earlier. Since my parents could not read what was written in these books, and they were incredibly cheap anyway, they simply bought all of them. When I showed my backpack full of Russian books to my violin teacher a little later, she was very excited and immediately decided to switch her teaching method to ‘the Russian school’, a construction which finally enabled her to compete with ‘the Japanese Suzuki school’ from the violin teacher next door. And so, the Belgian children’s songs from before were exchanged for Russian folk songs. My parents lost their interest in Central and Eastern Europe a few years later, when our windsurf board was stolen in Hungary. As a result, every year, the family went to ‘safe’ France again, and again, and the stories about former eastward-bound holidays gradually faded away from the daily family chat. In the meantime, however, I got more and more into my ‘Russian thing’, and by the time I was seventeen, decided to start Slavic Studies at the Catholic University Leuven (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven - further KUL). With the various language, culture and economy courses I took in Ukraine, Poland, Bulgaria and the Russian Federation in the following years, which were often financed by the Flemish Community, Central and Eastern Europe came back into the family.

The doctoral program I started in 2005, financed by the Flemish Fund for Scientific Research (Vlaams Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek - further FWO), offered the opportunity to continue travelling. With the various research stays abroad, either at the University of Warsaw (Uniwersytet Warszawski - further UW) or at the Institute for Russian History in Moscow, stays financed by the FWO, a bilateral program between KUL and UW and the Russian Academy of Sciences, I undertook journeys in reverse of my interviewees, who had migrated from East to West sixty years earlier. My academic supervisors at these foreign academic institutions, Professor Romuald Turkowski and Professor Liudmila Kolodnikova, can rightly consider their help a contribution to my work.

The extended fieldwork I conducted in Belgium between July 2005 and February 2007 took me on a discovery trip throughout my native country. Various archivists, informants and interviewees opened up a formerly unknown aspect of the world in which I had been brought up. I admire the enthusiasm with which especially Dirk Luyten, Louis-Philippe Arnhem, and Mikołaj Morzycki introduced me to the archival materials of the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society in Brussels (Het Studie- en Documentatiecentrum Oorlog en Hedendaagse Maatschappij - further SOMA), the Belgian Alien Police and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Of incredible value have been all

informants who opened up their personal networks to bring me in touch with the people I researched. The most words of thanks, of course, go to my teachers, the persons who were willing to give me an insight into the way they live and lived, to help me to understand how they do and did things. For many of them, this turned out to be a new, and not always easy, experience. I thank them for putting their trust in me and hope they will recognise themselves in this work I have written.

My journeys were all the more pleasant because I could always return to my safe haven: the fifth floor of the Erasmus building, the Department of History at the KUL. I would like to express thanks first of all to my promoter Idesbald Goddeeris. Our cooperation started already eight years ago, when he agreed to supervise my Master's Thesis on the opera oeuvre of Krzysztof Penderecki, a topic which has received increasing attention over the past four years. Back in 2002, Idesbald had just received his doctoral degree thanks to which I could become 'his' first Master's student. Now, six years later, the same pattern repeats itself. Idesbald has recently been appointed to a professorship and I am 'his' first Doctoral student. With his everlasting enthusiasm and openness to new ideas, during our uncountable conversations over the last eight years, Idesbald as no one else, has helped me become a Slavist and a historian. Doctor Leen Beyers, who functioned until a year ago as my co-promotor, will certainly recognise her beneficial influence to this work, which springs from our interesting methodological conversations and cooperation in arranging the *Families, Constructions of Foreignness and Migration in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western Europe* conference on 15 and 16 May 2008 at KUL. I am grateful to Professor Louis Vos for leading this FWO-project in the first two years and for keeping a watchful eye over the project as it has been nearing its end. Many thanks also to Doctor Frank Caestecker for his constructive ideas during the various discussions of ideas which gradually grew into my dissertation over the past four years. Professor Bert Overlaet introduced me in qualitative research methods during what I consider to be among the best courses I have taken at this university and Professor Truyen enthusiastically alleviated my hunger for new software possibilities to support qualitative research.

Crucial to my thinking have also been conversations with other scholars. Members of the Research Unit Modernity and Society 1800-2000 (MoSa), to which I belong, triggered my reasoning during interesting debates on official and officious meetings. In particular, I benefited from discussions with fellow doctoral students, such as the 'Illy-cafe daters' and the 'Gender and Coffee addicts'. With my friend and colleague, Staf Vos, I already shared an interest for music which has become historicised over the last years also thanks to his initiative. My office colleague Bert Vanhulle willingly turned himself into a patient 'first reference person' to validate my ideas. Kris Denhaerynck made me interested in the academic world in the first place, and offered me a loving environment in which the first texts of this dissertation arose. Together we walked a long way, until he decided to take another path.

Of incredible value have been the comments of various scholars on the texts I have written. In this respect, I am grateful to the intellectual generosity of Idesbald Goddeeris, Leen Beyers, Andreas Stynen and Staf Vos from the KUL, Anne Morelli from the Liberal University in Brussels (Belgium), Philippe Rygiel from the Sorbonne (France), Marlou Schrover from Leiden University (the Netherlands), Marcin Kula and Krzysztof Marcin Zalewski from the University of Warsaw (Poland), Pamela Ballinger from Bowdoin College (United States), Louise Ryan from Middlesex University (United Kingdom), Christoph Thonfeld from the University of Trier (Germany), Gelinada Grinchenko from Kharkiv University (Ukraine) and Elisabeth Boesen from the University of Luxemburg (Luxemburg).

On 27 February 2007 I became ill. Most of the following year I spent lying in bed, with the patches of sunlight dancing on my wall being the only signs of the outside world reaching me. I experienced how the distance I had to cross from my bed to the bathroom next door turned into the most exhausting journey I have ever undertaken. I would like to express my gratitude to the people who were with me in the isolated room that became my reality. My family, Eva, Staf, Jasper, de Koesjes, Bert and Evelyne, Joeri, Helga and Ruben, Alex US and Janina, your engagement in sharing my worries shows how beautiful real friendship and love can be, although I was only capable of realising this later. When I woke up, I was confronted with a weakened body and a very sharp deadline to finish this project. Four years ago, I would never have thought I would be so grateful to the people of the Faculteit Bewegings- en Revalidatiewetenschappen (Faculty of Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Science) at the KUL - not for supporting the writing process of this dissertation, but to make it possible at all. This dissertation has been written while engaging in a by times frustrating battle with the frail state of my body, in that same room. It took me time to recover and to regain happiness.

Finishing the final phase of this project would not have been possible with the help of what became my three musketeers, the friends who voluntarily lived my rhythm. My promoter Idesbald set all his other work aside in order to keep me going, my partner Krzysiek turned himself into a sound board for my ideas and could not have supported me better in getting here, and my friend Alexandra Kirby turned my non-native English into her beautiful British English with astonishing elegance, intuition and professionalism. She also pointed out that what I first considered to be proper English, was in reality a mixture of various internationalisms I had come across somewhere on my journeys. 'It is remarkable' can have a different meaning to the French 'C'est remarquable', 'to be in contact with' is not English, but Polish (być w kontakcie), 'überhaupt' is not English, but German (Englishmen say 'at all'), and 'decennia' is not English, but Dutch, or rather Latin (the English say 'decades'). Such comments made me aware of the fact that this dissertation is not only about migrants, it also turned me into much more of a migrant than I could have ever expected.

I wonder how people will give meaning to my dissertation, now that it will start its own journey. Perhaps some will come up with 'Machteld likes music and she wrote a doctoral dissertation about it'; and maybe that is also true.

My room, 30 October 2008

## Table of contents

<b>A note .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>My word of thanks .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Table of contents.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>List of abbreviations.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Introduction: Straddling the Iron Curtain? Migrants' War Memories .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Ethnicity Forever and Ethnification .....	15
The Rise of Memory .....	16
History and Memory .....	20
Agencies of war memory articulation .....	21
Arenas of war memory articulation.....	26
Memory and Performance .....	30
Memory and Trauma .....	32
Outline of the dissertation .....	32
Methodology .....	33
Data gathering .....	34
The interviewees and me: Masha nasha .....	37
Language .....	37
Data analysis .....	38
<b>Chapter 1: Two Migration Streams Allied Soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen</b>	<b>40</b>
Nation, Gender and Citizenship .....	40
Arriving: Allied soldiers from Poland.....	42
Arriving: Ostarbeiterinnen .....	47
Settling: Former Allied soldiers from Poland .....	55
Settling: Former Ostarbeiterinnen .....	58
Conclusion.....	59
<b>Part 1: Constructing Group Memories .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Chapter 2: 'On the battlefield there is a difference with after the war' .....</b>	<b>62</b>
1947-1956.....	63
<i>Politicisation attempts.....</i>	63
<i>Loose a-political group gatherings .....</i>	66
1956-1969.....	68
<i>Agencies of war memory articulation from the Polish People's Republic .....</i>	68
<i>Agencies of war memory articulation from Belgium .....</i>	73
<i>Agencies of war memory articulation from Great Britain .....</i>	74
<i>A 'Polish ex-combatant' pillar of war memory.....</i>	75
1976-1989.....	76
<i>The competitor.....</i>	76
<i>The competition.....</i>	78
1989-2008.....	80
<i>Organisation structures remain .....</i>	80
<i>Narratives on war memory change .....</i>	82
Conclusion.....	83

<b>Chapter 3: ‘For many of my girlfriends, the war is not history, but biography!’</b> .....	<b>85</b>
1945-1956.....	86
1956-1991.....	90
<i>The Motherland calls</i> .....	90
<i>Belgians invite</i> .....	94
<i>SSG members’ loyal compromise</i> .....	95
1991-2008.....	103
Conclusion.....	106
<b>A comparison</b> .....	<b>107</b>
<b>Part 2: Performing Group Memories</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>Chapter 4: ‘Was there only a cross in the cemetery?’</b> .....	<b>109</b>
Creating an arena of war memory articulation.....	110
Symbolizing narratives on war memory .....	116
Mobilizing former division soldiers .....	117
A shift of players in the arena of Lommel .....	124
A Europeanised narrative on war memory.....	126
Conclusion.....	127
<b>Chapter 5: ‘Let’s sing, let’s sing, for Soviet authority we’ll die’</b> .....	<b>129</b>
Compiling a canon of songs .....	129
Singing practices .....	133
<i>Singing in the Soviet Union and during World War II</i> .....	133
<i>Choosing songs in Belgium</i> .....	134
<i>Singing a narrative on war memory</i> .....	137
Linguistic barriers .....	138
<i>Singing propaganda songs</i> .....	138
<i>Singing songs with an alternative war version</i> .....	138
Cultural barriers.....	141
<i>Gendering songs, blurring religious differences</i> .....	141
<i>Performing a narrative on war memory</i> .....	143
Our Buena Vista Social Club .....	148
Conclusion.....	150
<b>A comparison</b> .....	<b>152</b>
<b>Part 3: Trauma in Group Memories</b> .....	<b>154</b>
<b>Chapter 6: ‘I don’t SPEAK about it, I don’t WANT about it speak and I didn’t HAVE TO speak about it!’</b> .....	<b>154</b>
War Experiences, Memories and the Body .....	154
The Construction of War Trauma .....	155
Former Allied soldiers from Poland.....	158
Former Ostarbeiterinnen .....	163
Conclusion.....	169
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>171</b>
<b>Appendix 1: ‘LENIN   NINEL’</b> .....	<b>177</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Song lyrics</b> .....	<b>179</b>
<b>List of References</b> .....	<b>184</b>

## List of abbreviations

AAN	Archive of New Records Archiwum Akt Nowych
AK	Polish Home Army Armia Krajowa
Alien file	Archive the Belgian Alien Police, Alien file
BSV	Belgian-Soviet Association Belgisch-Sovjetische Vereeniging
BVPO	The Belgian Association for Polish ex-combatants De Belgische vereniging voor Poolse oud-strijders
CRN	Central National Council Centralna Rada Narodowa
DK	Consular Department Departament Konsularny
DPI	Department Press and Information Departament Prasy i Informacji
GL	People's Guard Gwardia Ludowa
IPN	Institute of National Remembrance Instytut Pamięci Narodowej
IRO	International Refugee Organisation
KADOC	Documentation and Research Center for Religion, Culture and Society Documentatie- en Onderzoekscentrum voor Religie, Cultuur en Samenleving
KFKAE	The Allied Combatants of Europe - Belgian Federation Het Comité van de Geallieerde Oudstrijdersfederatie in Europa/ Komitet Federacji Kombatantów Alianckich w Europie
KKA	The Polish Ex-combatant Belgium Circle De Poolse oudstrijderscircle België / Koło Kombatantów w Antwerpii
KVR	The Committee for Return to the Motherland Komitet za Vozvrashchenie na Rodinu
KVRRKSSR	The Committee for return to the Motherland and the development of cultural ties with countrymen living abroad Komitet za Vozvrashchenie na Rodinu i razvitie kul'turnykh sviazei s sootchestvennikami za Rubezhom
MSZ	Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych
Nat. Dos.	State Archives in Belgium, Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Naturalisation dossiers Belgisch Staatsarchief, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, naturalisatiedossiers
NKWP	Head Committee of Free Poles Naczelny Komitet Wolnych Polaków
PKO	The Polish Olympic Committee Het Pools Olympisch Comité/ Polski Komitet Olimpijski

PKVMKG	The Polish Colony of Former Soldiers and Catholic Association Poolse Kolonie van Voormalige Militairen en Katholiek Genootschap / Polska Kolonia Byłych Wojskowych i Stowarzyszenie Katolickie
PMK	Polish Catholic Mission Polska Misja Katolicka
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RAMU	Russian all Military Union Russisch al-Militaire Unie
SKKSSR	The Soviet Committee for cultural ties with countrymen living abroad Sovetskiĭ Komitet po kul'turnykh sviaziam s sootechestvennikami za Rubezhom Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society in Brussels
SOMA	Het Studie- en Documentatiecentrum Oorlog en Hedendaagse Maatschappij
SPK	Association for Polish Ex-combatants Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów
SPL	The Polish Airforce Alliation Vereniging van Poolse vliegeniers / Stowarzyszenie Polskich Lotników
SSG	Association for Soviet Citizens Soiuz Sovetskikh Grazhdan
SSP	Association for Soviet Patriots Soiuz Sovetskikh Patriotov
The 'Polonia' Society	The Society for Contact with Poles living Abroad 'Polonia' Towarzystwo Łączności z Polonią Zagraniczną 'Polonia'
The Belgium Circle	The First Polish Armoured Division Association - the Belgium Circle Vereniging van de Eerste Poolse Pantserdivisie – cirkel België
The Benelux Circle	The First Polish Armoured Division Association - the Benelux Circle Vereniging van de Eerste Poolse Pantserdivisie – cirkel Benelux
The Motherland Association	The Association for ties with countrymen living abroad – Association 'The Motherland' Assotsiatsiia po sviaziam s sootechestvennikami za Rubezhom - Assotsiatsiia 'Rodina'
The Motherland Organisation	The Soviet Organisation for cultural ties with countrymen living abroad – Organisation 'The Motherland' Sovetskoe Obshchestvo po kul'turnykh sviaziam s sootechestvennikami za Rubezhom - Obshchestvo 'Rodina'
UDK	The Ukrainian Relief Committee Ukrainskyi Dopomohovyi Komitet
UIGR	The Union for Russian War Invalids Union des Invalides de guerre russes
ZBOWID	The Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację
ZPB	Polish Union Związek Polaków w Belgii

## Introduction: Straddling the Iron Curtain? Migrants' War Memories

Around 350 immigrant men from Poland and 4,000 immigrant women from the Soviet Union. Arrived in Belgium after World War II. Married Belgian citizens. Not even a footnote in the recent *Enzyklopädie Migration in Europa: vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, which professes to be a first class work of migration and integration history in Europe (Bade and others). Why devote four years of academic research - and of my time - to such a topic? To denounce the migrants' absence in the *Enzyklopädie*? Partly. But why does this dissertation in that case not follow the basic assumptions of many authors contributing to the *Enzyklopädie* and focus on war memories instead? Precisely to show that the research approach of these authors led to the men and women of my study being ignored, as well as to demonstrate that my research project in using other methodologies reveals their relevancy for current international academic research. As a result, this dissertation finds itself on the crossroads of a variety of living historiographical developments in the fields of World War II memory, East-West relations, and migration history.

We are currently experiencing a war memory boom. Whereas the war memories of people with political power received unchallenged authority within the public sphere for a number of years, individuals whose experiences remained silenced have recently started to speak up. Popular today are undoubtedly the testimonies of individual war survivors, especially Holocaust survivors. Unheard for many years within the memories articulated by various European nation states, the globalised era with international media channels offers Holocaust testimonies nowadays a quick and wide proliferation. To date, scholars have mainly followed these two tracks of memory articulation and focused either on official memory politics, or on oral testimonies.<sup>1</sup> In conducting them separately, academics failed to pay attention to the power dynamics that lead people to articulate their memories in the public or private sphere, as well as the reshifting of power over time that causes people to speak up or to fall silent. This dissertation is about power. More exactly, it is about the way newcomers at the fringes of Belgian society interacted with, were offered or deprived of access to war memory articulation in the public sphere and about the shape memories took and retook because of their interplay with changing power dynamics.

The war memory boom is all the more present in the former East, in the countries that until twenty years ago were described in the Atlantic World as being 'behind the Iron Curtain'. After the collapse of communism, the repressed memories of many war survivors came to the fore. Due to the weakened, or even absent civil society in the former East, recent studies on the memory of World War II focus on the individual. The popular books *Whisperers. Life under Stalin* by Orlando Figes and *Ivan's War. Life and Death in the Red Army 1939-1945* by Catherine Merridale, both also translated into Dutch, can here serve as an example of Western European research. In the former Soviet Union, it is conducted by the Russian non-governmental organisation Memorial and the Ukrainian Oral History Institute in Kharkiv directed by Gelinada Grinchenko. Both organisations are predominantly occupied with publishing written sources and oral semi-biographical testimonies (Adamushko, Bogdan and Gerasimov; Grinchenko, 2004; Ustnaia Historiia). Until now, however, scholars considered the reshuffling of Soviet war memory to be a matter solely related to the physical space of the

---

<sup>1</sup> See for instance the recent conference *Clashes in European Memory. The Case of Communist Repression and the Holocaust* organised at the University of Chicago Center in Paris, 22-24 September 2008 (<http://centerinparis.uchicago.edu/>, last consulted on 18 October 2008).

former Soviet Union and its satellite states. No specialist in Eastern European history came up with the idea of researching whether its mental space might not be broader and also include migrants who ended up in the West after World War II. This dissertation questions whether the Iron Curtain was as inscrutable as scholars assume. It researches whether migrants from the East settling in the West were not shaping their war memories in interplay with power dynamics in both their home and host societies. Did their war memories thus straddle the Iron Curtain? And how were their memories reshaped once the Cold War was over, in a new geopolitical context?

My dissertation also aims to contribute to the academic field of migration research by reshuffling research assumptions. Like many authors contributing to the *Enzyklopädie*, several migration historians focus on the structural integration of migrants within their host societies. Commonly used factors to measure the successfulness of such integration are intermarriage and scattered habitation patterns, both requirements which the immigrant men and women of this dissertation fulfil. This assumption has made research on the integration of these people needless in the past. They were simply considered examples of perfect integration within the Belgian society. However, measuring integration by structural factors such as religion, housing, intermarriages and others is not the only possibility. Integration can also be researched while looking at the identification patterns of immigrants (Hoerder, 1998, 37; Straub 71-72). Although there are of course various identifications, migration researchers are obsessively pre-occupied with only one: ethnic identification, even when they cannot motivate such a focus through empirical evidence. Also in the *Enzyklopädie*, ethnic classification prevails. The people in this study are not so easy to classify ethnically, and have therefore either been written out of overviews of ethnic migrant populations (examples include a book by Waegemans, a Belgian Professor of Russian Literature, and an article by Mykola Kohut, a ‘Ukrainian’ migrant, or have been inadequately approached ‘ethnically’ (such as by Jerzy Kępa, a ‘Polish’ migrant) (Kępa; Kohut; Waegemans, 2000).

My research takes a different approach. It neither researches structural integration, nor starts from ethnically defined categories. At the basis of this study are two clearly distinguishable migration streams entering Belgium in the aftermath of World War II. First, there were about 350 soldiers from Poland who had served with the Allies, had met Flemish young women during their liberation march through Flanders, married their fiancées in 1945 and 1946 and settled in their wives’ home towns and villages. And second, there were the Ostarbeiterinnen - Soviet young women of Ukrainian, Russian or Belarusian decent, who, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, were deported to Nazi Germany to do forced labour. While at work, the young women met Western European deported workers, volunteers and prisoners of war. Although off duty any contact between them was prohibited, numerous love affairs flourished and after their liberation by the Western Allies, about 4,000 Ostarbeiterinnen chose to migrate further to Belgium rather than be repatriated to the Soviet Union where they could be accused of collaboration. A few of these mixed Belgian-Soviet couples married in Germany, but most were wed in Belgium and all former Ostarbeiterinnen who married settled in their husbands’ home towns or villages. I researched how people belonging to these streams identified themselves, i.e., as the German historian Jörn Rüsen defined it, how they developed ways to find coherence in relation to themselves and to others (Rüsen 254). Empirical evidence showed that the way the immigrants described in this dissertation gave meaning to their war experiences through the construction and articulation of a representation of these experiences, i.e. a narrative on war memory, was a procedure for finding such coherence. By revealing the various dynamics of war memory and war

identification at work, this study aims to reduce the excessive focus on that paramount ethnic identification centralised in migration research.

In this introduction, I start with an explanation of the changing concepts of ethnicity in migration research before showing that my adversity towards an overall use of ethnic identification stems from the increasing profile of memory in historical academic research. In order to clarify this view, I explore the differences of history and memory as well as the opportunities and hindrances of memory for historical research. Further, I describe how I see the memory of World War II operating as a cultural field within society in which various agencies, or voices, articulate their representation of war experiences (i.e. utter their narratives on war memory). They do so in different spaces or arenas. I dwell on the morphology of these arenas. Now that the framework for comparative analysis has been set, I go into how the immigrants of this study operate(d) within these arenas: how they perform their narratives on war memories and how they deal with memories that seem to find no way for articulation in arenas: trauma. Later, I focus on methodology, subsequently describing data gathering, my relation with my interviewees, my approach towards language and data analysis.

## **Ethnicity Forever and Ethnification**

Until fairly recently many migration scholars used ethnic identity as the basic and only principle of research. They considered it to be a primordial identity of newcomers which, because of its inert character, did not require much explanation. Ethnicity was forever. Research therefore concentrated on the structural integration factors of 'primordial ethnics' (Martens). Although in the late 1960s, the anthropologist Frederik Barth suggested that ethnicity is not a fact, but a social construction defined by continuous negotiations of boundaries between groups of people by means of (self) ascription and categorisation, and thus calls for further investigation, it took long before his voice became heard in European historiography (Barth; Schrover, 2002, 14). It first took root in American migration studies, which wrote migrants into national history using an ethnification approach. Following the 'ethnic revival' and for reasons of political correctness, every ethnic immigrant group received a place for its own history, leading to the fragmentation, or even tribalisation, as some scholars suggest, of national history (König and Ohliger 14).

During the Cold War, there was a perception of control in the world system, albeit only seen from a purely Western or Eastern viewpoint (Friedman 244). Some authors stress that the fear of an interbloc conflict encouraged European societies to homogenise in order to appear strong (Zaremba, 2004). People started to perceive society as an agent which could homogenise and equalise (Diner, 2007, 151). In such a society, the migration historians Mareike König and Rainer Ohliger argue, privileged newcomers could become integrated in European host societies; they could gradually mould into a society without losing visibility. The authors speak for instance of post-colonial migrants and political refugees, who often could make use of a victim status (real or not) based on experiences before arrival in the host society to facilitate their integration. Other migrants remained non-represented. Precisely the fact that European host societies, unlike the United States of America, did not consider themselves to be countries of immigration, caused them to overlook the place of these migrants within their societies. The various flows of labour migrants only received scholarly attention from the 1970s onwards (König and Ohliger 14). The historian Leen Beyers, who researched the integration of migrants in Belgian mining towns, recently mentioned that migration policies and, as a consequence, also sociologists researching migration policies, started then to focus on integration. Western European states were by that time experiencing

the end of their post-war economic boom, and the consequent lack of new incoming labour migrants made migration policies focused on the settlers. Beyers argues that migration policies, as a result, culturised. Whereas before, they focused on migration, they now focused on integration (Beyers, 2008, 23).

Only in the 1990s, we see a boom in European historic studies applying Barth's theory to ethnic identity. Not surprisingly, this was directly related to the collapse of communism which led to fundamental changes in the geopolitical context. No Cold War was there any longer to ensure world order. As a result, European societies are now increasingly perceived as pluralistic and not homogenous. But if they are pluralistic, to what do migrants then integrate? The anthropologist Jonathan Friedman touched on this while explaining what he called the ethnification boom of the 1990s:

migration has not led to ethnification. Rather, migration has become ethnified in a period in which assimilation and weaker forms of integration have failed (Friedman 233).

Friedman illustrated that what the integration scholars were referring to before the eclipse of communism, was aimed to take place in a homogenised society, a society which at the moment of his writing no longer existed. He saw this as the reason for ethnification, which indeed has become omnipresent in European historical migration research since the 1990s. Research on the construction of ethnic identities and their interplay with the pluralistic societies in which migrants settle, a process researchers redefined as 'integration', are now mainstream. One of the social migration historian Leo Lucassen's last books, for instance, was titled *Paths of integration* and highlighted different strategies employed by ethnified migrants to find their place within pluralistic societies of the past (Lucassen, Feldman and Oltmer, 2006).

I have displayed the changing topics of interest in historical migration research over the years: a move from structural integration (often based on an 'ethnicity forever' approach) being at the centre of gravity to ethnic identificational integration (ethnification) is clearly visible. What I will do next, is to justify my adversity towards the almost exclusive use of both approaches and explain how my opinion finds its origin in the rise of memory within historiography.

## **The Rise of Memory**

Recently, the historian Dan Diner convincingly argued that historiography is not something which exists, but something which follows from changes in society. As a result, historians write history in the way they see society (Diner, 2007, 151). Historiography not only recreates events that happened in the past, but also creates texts that come to function as new loca of commemoration (König and Ohliger 11). As such, what historiography creates is in fact memory. Diner states that historical paradigms are:

delayed modes of interpretation of historical processes that have preceded them', and 'offer the historian an arsenal of semantizations to correspond to objects in the life-world (Diner, 2007, 151).

According to him, in the late 1960s, a first shift in historical paradigms took place. Whereas before, the historical paradigm of state had corresponded to a vertically power-inspired and structured life-world, the historical paradigm of society came to embody the societal life-world shaped during the Cold War. I consider the move to ethnic studies in the 1990s as an adaptation of the changes in society after the fall of communism to the historical paradigm of

society. The underlining assumption of these ethnic studies is that pluralistic societies integrate or do not integrate ethnified migrants.

However, Diner states that the changes in society following the collapse of communism are causing a second historical paradigm shift: one from society to memory (Diner, 2007, 151). The encyclopedia with which I started this introduction is worth referring to here. Migrant historians are opening up Europe's rich migration experience in past pluralistic societies, in this way denouncing the public opinion still present that 'our' society always has been homogeneous (Bade and others; Moch). However, they almost exclusively do so in an ethnified way. As such, these historiographical works mainly offer an ethnified reading of Europe's migration past. Dan Diner formulates how it can be done differently, although he only applies his argument to migrants and World War II.

Diner argues that the homogenising societies from the Cold War had frozen the diversity of narratives on World War II memory. Standardised, top-down articulations of what the war had been prevailed in societies for almost half a century, whether uttered by the nation states and various civil society agencies, i.e. elites in power for producing memories, in the Atlantic World, or dominated by nation states in the Soviet Bloc, where civil society agencies were muzzled. The end of such a societal model also re-awakened diverse narratives on war memory in pan-Europe, i.e. now on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. When a society is no longer perceived to be homogeneous, but a pluralistic entity consisting of different groups, then precisely these narratives on World War II memory, unheard or interpreted differently during the Cold War, arise. The paradigm of memory raised historical interest in how war experiences were forged into narratives on war memory, how these narratives were selected to be represented within the public sphere, and how that representation took place (König and Ohliger 11).

Let us consider the Holocaust. Pre-eminently, the gradual public proliferation of the narrative on Holocaust memory functioned as 'a window opening onto the foundational event which the war was to become' (Diner, 2007, 156). The way nation states and elites in power formulated narratives on war memory during the Cold War era, laid in line with a nation state's identification (Lagrou, 2000, 285, 291). As nation states are constructions designed at the end of the 18th century after the image of the male citizen and, as a result, left other individuals such as women and non-citizens outside that project, war experiences undergone by people considered to be 'foreign' to the nation state were overlooked in official national narratives on war memory (Yuval-Davis 2). People considered to be 'foreign' to the nation state, and that was how Jews were perceived during the first two postwar decades, were silenced in official national narratives on war memory. As a result, the Holocaust experience initially had difficulties finding articulation in such narratives. In 1961, however, the Eichmann trial gave a voice to Holocaust survivors and provoked international interest in war atrocity and the victims it had generated. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the remembering of the Holocaust experience was stimulated in the Atlantic World both by questions about the transmission to succeeding generations that arose as more and more survivors passed away and by the emerging transnational interest in human rights (Ashplant, 25, 44). Various civil society agencies proposed alternative narratives on war memory centralising victimhood to existing dominant national narratives, some of which became included in the various national narratives of Western countries, and ultimately led to the (still ongoing) recognition of the responsibility for wartime crimes. Behind the Iron Curtain, the process of rediscovering Central and Eastern European Jewish history and war experiences only started in the 1980s (Judt, 2006, 1000; Orla-Bukowska 191; Suleiman 106-107). The inclusion, and even

centralisation, of the narrative on Holocaust memory over the years has led to a collective remembering of the Holocaust experience.

After the collapse of communism, the history of the narrative on Holocaust memory proliferation became a forerunning example, so to speak, for various European war survivors to reconfigure their narratives on war memory and to weigh up their legacies of remembering (Diner, 2007, 158). It does not come as a surprise that that is also true for Displaced Persons (DPs), people from the East who settled in the West after World War II. It is estimated that during World War II up to twenty million people left their homes. Many did not want to go back after liberation since their homegrounds had fallen into the Soviet sphere of influence or they feared repression in their homeland, the Soviet Union (Cohen, 2006, 87). They were forerunners of the geopolitical crisis that arose in 1947 and would span almost the entire second half of the 20th century: the Cold War. Following the unsuccessful attempt of the Allied Forces to repatriate all these people, a special organ, the International Refugee Organisation (IRO), coordinated their settlement in the Atlantic World. In the aftermath of World War II, about 20,000 of these Displaced Persons came to Belgium (Goddeeris, 2005a, 151). These were above all miners, recruited through the IRO, but to a lesser extent students with a stipend and also people who married Belgian citizens, i.e. the 350 former Allied soldiers from Poland and 4,000 Ostarbeiterinnen of this study.

Like Holocaust survivors, DPs were overlooked in official national narratives on war memory because they were considered to be foreign to the nation states in which they lived, and betrayers of the communist idea in the regions where they came from (Cohen, 2006, 89, 92). However, when starting from a historical paradigm of memory, rather than one of state or society, a study on the war memories of Displaced Persons shifts from the margins to the centre of historiographical interest. Let me explain this.

The memory and identification building of Displaced Persons interacted with similar processes of memory and identification construction and articulation in narratives operating in both the DPs' host and home societies. I perceive these narratives on war memory to operate in a cultural field on war memory within a society, where different and changing interests are at stake. A cultural field on war memory contains all the narratives which are visible in the public sphere. The way narratives on war memory of DPs are constructed and articulated then indicates their integration in the host society and transnational contacts with their home society (Jenkins, 2002, 84-85; Joppke and Morawska 3; Lenz 166). In other words, DPs' narratives on war memory do not only reveal something about integration within their host society, but also reflect the (whether or not imaginary) ties DPs have with their home societies and thus help to find out more about their transnational practices. Depending both on the way home and host societies define 'foreignness' (i.e. how they draw boundaries between 'we' and 'them') and the power and creativity DPs have to negotiate these boundaries, various 'paths of integration' and transnational practices are possible, to use Lucassen's title within the light of a new historical paradigm (Beyers and Venken 17-18; Lucassen, Feldman and Oltmer, 2006). According to that paradigm, DPs therefore find, receive or demand a place not as assumed before, in a homogenising society, but in a society consisting of various memory fields, such as the cultural field on war memory.

Such a broad concept of integration enables researchers to go beyond the normative question as to whether DPs integrate or not, a question commonly answered by the measurement of structural factors. It helps to shed light on which fields DPs were involved in, to ask if they accepted the dominant tendencies in these fields, to question how their identifications towards

the fields developed over the years, whether or not leading to greater representation within the public sphere, and how the fields changed because of their presence (Beyers and Venken 18). In this way, migration research can grow beyond its marginal position within historiography and redraw historiography by using the position of DPs on the fringes of society as a unique entrance gate to revealing more about various aspects of home and host pluralistic societies researched in mainstream historiography. Just as gender research yielded to gender mainstreaming over the years, migrant mainstreaming is soon to appear (Caestecker, 2003, 12). This is what makes historical research on DPs' war memories relevant.

It is important to reflect for a while on the fact that there is not something like one Displaced Persons' group which over the years autonomously produced a shared narrative on war memory. Displaced Persons in the West were very heterogeneous, having different national and ethnic backgrounds as well as various political opinions. As the migration historian Daniel Cohen formulated, however, 'they all lived in the same standardized refugee world' having experienced migration because of war (Cohen, 2006, 97). Some other people with similar war experiences, such as Prisoners of War and resistance fighters, over the years came to be seen as homogenised groups with a specific narrative on war memory. The studies of Pieter Lagrou and Annette Wieviorka showed how civil society agencies articulated the war experiences of POWs and resistance fighters in narratives on war memory, which competed with each other within the cultural field on war memory (Lagrou, 2000; Wieviorka). But Displaced Persons, as one group, and with them their narrative(s) on war memory, were not presented. In general historical overviews on Europe's migration history, they also receive very little mention (Bade and Brown; Cohen, 2006, 88; Moch). The renewed attention for Displaced Persons dates from the 1990s (Caestecker, 2007, 535). Migration historians started to focus on the structural and ethnic identification of ethnic groups (categorised by these historians) in one nation state: the 'Polish' Displaced Persons, the 'Ukrainian' Displaced Persons and so on. For Belgium, I am pleased to refer in this respect to the published PhD dissertations of my advisors: Leen Beyers and Idesbald Goddeeris (Beyers, 2007b; Goddeeris, 2005a). Their studies start from the arrival of specific 'ethnified' DPs in Belgium, in this way ignoring the war experiences of the DPs, the narratives on war memory they generated and the influence which these narratives could have on group formation in immigrant organisations.<sup>2</sup>

Recently, the migration historian Christoph Thonfeld focused on the war memories of some specific war survivors, hereby breaking through ethnic categorisation and national identification. He looked for general tendencies in individual narratives on war memory of people displaced during the war because of forced labour and made use of interviews conducted among both people who had been repatriated to the Soviet Bloc as Displaced Persons, here narrowed to only the forced labourers who settled in Germany after World War II. Thonfeld offers new insights, such as the fact that the interviewees in Germany saw forced labour as an interminable intrusion into their lives, whereas repatriates considered it an interruption enabling them to start a new life (Thonfeld, 2008b, 370). In a second article, he addresses the war memories of migrants from Poland and what he calls Ukraine, although that country did not exist in the interwar period, who migrated to Great Britain and shows how their memories are almost entirely host society oriented (Thonfeld, 2008a, 310). My criticism of his work, however, is that he assumes something like a group of what he calls 'slave and forced labourers' exists, although such classification was not used during World War II.

---

<sup>2</sup> Although the article of Venken and Goddeeris examines the role of war experiences on group formation during post-war settlement, it still uses ethnic categorization.

My research builds further on the ideas of Cohen and Thonfeld. It focuses on the war memories of Displaced Persons settled in Belgium, a category that, in contrast to slave and forced labourers, was institutionalised at the end of World War II. More precisely, this dissertation looks for similarities and dissimilarities in the way Displaced Persons belonging to two very clearly distinguishable migration streams (Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen), originating from what would become the Warsaw pact countries and settling in Belgium, walked their paths of integration within the legacies of World War II in their home and host societies.

The central question of this dissertation is as follows: are the war experiences and war memories of these two migration streams similar because they were all Displaced Persons living in the ‘same standardised refugee world’? As that refugee world had taken the form of the Cold War, with an Atlantic World, an Iron Curtain and Warsaw pact countries, I research the importance of that geopolitical context for the construction and articulation of their war memories and identifications. To what extent did the Cold War determine their experiences of World War II to find articulation in sense-bearing and meaningful narratives on war memory? Did it indeed determine the articulation possibilities of former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen in the same way? How did the dominant narratives as expressed by the nation states and civil societies of the DPs’ home and host societies affect their processes of giving meaning to war experiences? Did their war memories consequently straddle the Iron Curtain? How did the DPs at issue search for recognition of their narratives on war memory in the public and private sphere? Did their narratives change when war history was reinterpreted through the perspective of a different geopolitical framework after the collapse of the communist system? In the end, was the geopolitical metanarrative of the Cold War the most decisive element for their memory construction and articulation, hence leading to similar construction processes of remembering and forgetting for the people belonging to these migration streams, or are the characteristics and war experiences of these two streams too different, meaning that the historic geopolitical situation in which they lived played only a minor role in the constructions of their narratives on war memory?

## History and Memory

‘There is a difference between history and memory, especially group memory: between what happened and the way we frame our perceptions of what happened and turn it into a story that explains us to ourselves’.<sup>3</sup> Memory is the interpretation and articulation of experiences in narratives. Narratives on war memory mould the survivors’ contingent war experiences into a coherent and meaningful explanation for the present (Ballinger 49; Suleiman 3, 215). They represent what happened during the war through acts of remembering and forgetting. The ethnographer Marc Augé beautifully described how both acts go hand-in-hand: ‘Memories are shaped by forgetting, like the contours of the shore by the sea’ (Augé 21). Experiences and memories inevitably diverge. The question that remains is how ‘the image of the whole’ reduces to ‘the image of that what interests you’, of that with what you can or want to identify (Bergson, 1911, 40).

As memories turn their backs on factual content, their usage in historical sciences is not supported by all historians. Some claim that because memories distort the past, they are unreliable. Memories are good for politics, not for historiography (Verbeeck 237). However, as Alistair Thomson convincingly stated, the distortion itself of memories can provide a good

---

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Studies in Renewal*, quoted in Orla-Bukowska 177.

resource for historical research (Thomson, 1994, 228). Researching the construction and articulation of narratives allows one to go into the selection process of what is remembered and what forgotten for the sake of meaningful life in the present. Following the historical paradigm on memory, the idea that something like an objective, factual historical representation is possible, is flawed. A historian cannot capture ‘the image of the whole’; even when he thinks he does, he only captures ‘the image of interest’ and hence creates memory. Mainstream historians blinded by historical paradigms of state, and, to a lesser extent, society, have contributed to the current amnesia on Europe’s migration past. Migration historians ethnifying their research topic cause an ethnified remembering of Europe’s migration past.

In writing a history of the memories of former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen settled in Belgium, I use the following framework. War memory functions as a cultural field within host and home societies in which different voices represent their war experiences in various spaces. The dominant voices articulating these narratives on war memory I call agencies. I then go into the narratives on war memory articulated by agencies of the home and host societies of the immigrants at study: nation states and civil society agencies in Belgium, the Soviet Union and the Polish People’s Republic during the Cold War and an (even further) federalised Belgian state, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, and Poland after the Cold War.

### **Agencies of war memory articulation**

During the Cold War, the dominant agencies in articulating war memories formulated narratives that reinterpret events of World War II through the perspective of the ongoing geopolitical crisis. The Western world was eager to equate communism with Nazism and set itself the duty to contend this new but similar form of totalitarianism, whereas behind the Iron Curtain, it was stressed that the Soviets’ continuous concern for peace in the world, brilliantly displayed through the Soviet Union’s participation in the defeat of the fascist Nazi regime, had now been forgotten by Great Britain and America (Ashplant 61; Niven 214-215). These narratives could only be installed because agencies deliberately played up some parts of their war experience while suppressing other areas. In the Atlantic World, especially in the countries that had been occupied during World War II, efforts were made to exaggerate all actions of resistance, including communist ones, against the Nazi regime and to wipe out forms of collaboration with it from the official war memory. Meanwhile, the Nazi-Soviet pact to divide up Central Europe went unmentioned in the Warsaw Pact countries, but Soviet soldiers’ efforts were glorified with the role of American and British forces in World War II being downplayed (Lagrou, 2000, 5; Suleiman 14; Tumarkin 50).

Despite the contradictory nature of the anti-totalitarian and anti-fascist narratives, they hold the silencing of ‘foreign’ people in common. The heroes and victims focused on in the dominant narratives on war memory, i.e. resistance participants and communist martyrs, were people whom the various Atlantic World and Warsaw Pact nation states considered to be crucial for their nation state’s identification (Lagrou, 2000, 285, 291). Although Holocaust memories gradually proliferated in the Atlantic World from the 1960s onwards, they remained censured by the Soviet Union and its satellite states which refused to specifically spotlight Jews as victims of fascist atrocities, because it considered all Slavic people victims of Nazism (Tumarkin 121). It is only since the 1980s that Central and Eastern European Jewish history and war experiences have been rediscovered (Judt, 2006, 1000; Orla-Bukowska 191; Suleiman 106-107). The collective remembering of the Holocaust experience has yet to yield

a discovery of the (also silenced) war experiences of the war survivors focused on in this dissertation.

Presenting the geopolitical battle as one between democracy and totalitarianism, or communism and fascism, would be to simplify the complex nature of national struggles over war memories. Indeed, every country in Europe had to contend with its own specific war experiences which were not necessarily applicable to others (Suleiman 2). Belgium faced enormous internal divisions which were only partially addressed in its post-war national narrative (Ashplant 23). Contrary to the situation in World War I, Belgians had hardly fought on Belgian territory. Moreover, resistance fighters were smaller in number than people supporting Nazi occupation and co-operation with the Nazi regime differed in Flanders and Wallonia, given the common 'ethnic' Germanic background of Flemish and Germans appealed to during wartime and the political program of the Flemish movements. Aiming to stimulate national identification, however, Belgium's immediate post-war national narrative let people believe that the whole country had resisted the Germans, even if few had fought them, and set a seal on remembering collaborationist activities (Lagrou, 2000, 5).

As such, liberated Belgium initially redefined itself through an imagined national identification of collective resistance and a deliberate forgetting of whatever did not fit into that narrative. However, important civil society agencies of war memory articulation opposed this narrative. Whereas Belgian patriotic organisations had at first enjoyed support for their narratives on war memory in Belgian political circles, they felt downgraded by the end of the 1950s. The biggest Flemish political party, the Christian People's Party (Christelijke Volkspartij or CVP), articulated a narrative on war memory aligned with collaborationism and made it a strategy for the greater autonomy of Flanders within Belgium (Lagrou, 2000, 299-301). That resulted from the party's frustration with regard to the Royal Question and its desire to regain power in 1957 by opposing the anti-Catholic reigning 'government of the resistance', as it was called (Lagrou, 1997b, 160; Lagrou, 2000, 301-302). An identification of Flemish Catholicism and collaborationism would proliferate throughout the following decades and lead to contemporary community readings of war experiences placing a fault line between collaborators, who 'were Flemish', and resistance fighters, who 'were Walloon'. The reality is of course more complex, since Catholics had also been active in resistance movements and become members of Belgian patriotic organisations (Lagrou, 1997b, 156-157). The Belgian regions' pursuits for increased autonomy also explain why a debate on the Holocaust occurred later than in other countries of the Atlantic World; neither region was eager to inherit the moral debts of the peeled-off Belgian nation state. In fact, the Holocaust experience was only articulated in a political oppositional narrative counterblasting the xenophobic opinion of extreme right politicians in the 1980s (Lagrou, 2000, 290).

Similarly, the installation of the dominant narrative on war memory in the Soviet Union involved processes of remembering and forgetting. Communist wartime activities were presented as exemplary for the virtuous patriotic nature of Soviet citizens. World War II became known as the 'Great Patriotic War' and served to legitimate communism, as the Soviets had been able to win thanks to the Russian revolution (Wolfe 260, 268). War experiences deviating from this image were marginalised through keeping silent about the deaths of Soviet citizens caused by Stalin's rule and gagging the people who had experienced atrocities from within the Third Reich, such as the Soviet prisoners of war and the Ostarbeiterinnen (Polian 196-201; Tumarkin 50). Many settled in the Atlantic World, on the other side of the Iron Curtain, and several of those who returned faced repression and were either deported to Soviet labour camps or confronted with restrictions on participation in

public life, for instance, limited job opportunities (Biller 222). From the Khrushchëv era onwards however, a memory of death enriched the hegemonic narrative on war memory, mainly in the form of the symbolic 'Unknown Soldier', a protagonist whose death could be given meaning within the existing narrative without bringing it down (Merridale, 2007, 348). Khrushchëv's openness enabled Gulag prisoners and Soviet ex-combatants to formulate a counter narrative to the glorifying propaganda story about the Soviet Union's victory at the end of World War II, but it did not accept criticism of the official narrative on war memory depicting communist discipline and leadership as the source for Soviet victory (Figs 637). When, following the international interest in the Holocaust, artists tried to give meaning to the discovered Jewish mass grave Babi Iar, their works were harshly censored by the Soviet regime, which propagated anti-Zionism in the aftermath of the Six-Day War of 1967. The Holocaust would remain marginalised during the whole epoch of communism. Contrary to the Atlantic World, where civil society agencies of articulation interacted with nation states about the content of war memory narratives, the Soviet Union held a strong centralised rule that impeded such mutual pollination.

Not only did the content and the power relations of memory on war and death in the Soviet Union differ from those on the other side of the Iron Curtain, scholars like Merridale state that also the very nature of that memory was particular to the Soviet Union. The Bolshevik regime had started a new world order in which the memorialisation of death was not desired. Hence, the new Soviet vocabulary did not provide words to express feelings of grief and mourning. When in the event, it had to confront the question, it could do no more than to create a semantically powerless official narrative that, in order to ensure acceptance, was accompanied with repression (erasing painful episodes like the famine of 1932-33), mistrust and fear. In this way it left Soviet citizens without a collective framework for memory and deprived them of authentic words to utter their experiences (Merridale, 2000, 261).

Khrushchëv's openness to war experiences of some other people also enabled contact to be established with former Soviet prisoners of war and former Ostarbeiterinnen living abroad, links that would intensify during the rule of Leonid Brezhnev, who took over the lead of the Soviet Union in 1964 and made the commemoration of the Soviet victory in World War II omnipresent (Figs 638). From 1985 onwards, Mikhaïl Gorbachëv, who was convinced that the Stalinist model of communist development had been hollowed out by his predecessors and leant on anti-Stalinist feelings in society to find support for his policy of openness (*glasnost'*) and restructuring (*perestroïka*) allowed citizens to form civil society movements which openly started to criticise Soviet historiography (Sherlock 47). These movements first concentrated on Stalin's victims in the post-war period, and only later on the war experiences of silenced 'foreigners', like Jews and Soviet Citizens living abroad since World War II.

Although the Soviet Union attempted to impose its war memory on its satellite states, it did not fully succeed in doing so in the Polish People's Republic. Introducing a glorification of communist wartime successes was more problematic than in the Soviet Union since communist governance had only been introduced in Poland towards the end of World War II and struggled to receive legitimisation from Polish citizens. The official narrative on war memory focused on the role of the Soviet army and Polish forces sympathising with it, such as the People's Guard (*Gwardia Ludowa* - further GL), which had, as it was officially stated, together overthrown fascism in a brotherly way and brought peace to the world (Zaremba, 2001, 214). Polish soldiers, who had fought in the West with the Allies during World War II, as well as Home Army fighters (*Armia Krajowa* - further AK), who had been more numerous than People's Guard fighters, were considered a threat to that picture (Wawrzyniak 11, 86,

88). In fact, the state was never capable of overruling civil society agencies which articulated oppositional war memory narratives stressing anticommunist resistance. Silencing Poles living abroad turned out to be too difficult, since the heavily redrawn borders had generated a huge amount of Polish Displaced Persons and the pre-war Polish government, which had operated from Great Britain during the war, refused to recognise the Polish People's Republic. As a result, from around the 1950s to the 1980s, when the official Polish narrative on war memory that came close to the Soviet one dominated, civil society agencies articulating opposing narratives on war memory gradually grew in strength.

In the 1960s, for example, the Polish Minister of Internal Affairs, General Mieczysław Moczar, propagated a Polish nationalism within the communist doctrine in which patriotism and military tradition stood central (Zaremba, 2001, 290, 292). Moczar needed the support of ex-combatants living abroad to legitimate that policy and started a campaign among Allied soldiers from Poland settled abroad together with the Polish World War II veterans' organisation 'the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy' (Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację - further ZBOWID) (Wawrzyniak 292-293). Later, during the 16 months of Solidarity's official activities in 1980 and 1981, many formerly silenced war and post-war events, like the mass murder in Katyń and the pogrom in Kielce, were brought into the public sphere (Orla-Bukowska 191). The introduction of martial law was unable to hinder the contra-narratives which little by little overruled the official version. The publication of books on the Holocaust during this decade serves here as an example (Orla-Bukowska 191).

With the collapse of communism, the existing geopolitical narratives on war memory came under scrutiny, leading to various (still ongoing) reinterpretations of the legacies of World War II and the Cold War. Moreover, in the 1990s, the nation state's dominance over war memory rapidly declined because of the proliferation of new civil society agencies articulating narratives on human rights and ethnic identifications in the globalised era (Ashplant, 62, 67). Consequently, war memories formerly articulated in politically inspired narratives were adapted to narratives articulating trauma, victimhood and ethnic genocides. One may argue that notwithstanding the attempts of postmodernist ideology to bring down the existence of metanarratives, the Holocaust has become for many the ultimate reference point of moral decline (Ballinger 272). During this time, other people whose voices were unheard during the Cold War period came to the fore in the shadow of Jewish victims of war, denouncing directly (i.e. self-organised) or indirectly (i.e. through nation states or civil society agencies) the injustices they experienced during World War II or the Cold War (Ballinger 166-167).

The fact that references to the Holocaust entered Belgium's political sphere only in the 1980s did not prevent it over the years from becoming the ultimate byword for (ethnic) victimhood. Recently, an interesting debate on the status of the Holocaust was held when historians, politicians and Jewish representatives came together. At stake was the destiny of the Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen, known during World War II as the SS-Sammellager Mecheln, a place where mainly Jews, but also Roma and Sinti were gathered before deportation. In 1996, the Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance was opened here. At the request of the Flemish Liberal Minister of Internal Affairs, Patrick Dewael, a committee of historians launched the idea of setting up a museum that would embed the Jewish war experience in a broader context, stressing how nation states produced national and ethnic categories and how mechanisms of exclusion generally work, in this way showing that the Jewish war experience was a unique but not isolated event. Currently however, it is still not known what form the museum will take (Beyen and others; Verbeeck 237-238).

In the Soviet Union, the glasnost era had brought the official anti-fascist narrative on war memory into question. One of the forerunners in opposing that reigning narrative was Memorial, a movement established in 1988 by liberal dissidents whose aim was to awaken and preserve the public awareness of people who had experienced what it called World War II and Soviet ‘repression’ (Judt, 2006, 1017). A few years later, when the Iron Curtain fell, Germany and Austria were able to pay a war pension to the last segment of people who had been employed in the Third Reich war industry, Soviet prisoners of war and Ostarbeiterinnen.<sup>4</sup> Soon, the German Heinrich Böll Foundation started cooperation with Memorial to search for and inform potential candidates. Over the following years, information about application procedures circulated in the Soviet Union’s successor states which facilitated the number of disbursements to increase (Kraef).

Disbursement issues also aroused academic interest in the war experiences of these formerly ‘forgotten’ people and the results of these scientific studies led to official narratives on war memory being redrawn in the former West and East. In the former Atlantic World, changes are so far only noticeable in Germany and Austria. In Germany, major industrial companies asked historians to research the labour contributions of Soviet workers so as to ensure correct disbursement, and cities encouraged historians to map the presence of Soviet workers on their territory during World War II (Ulrich, 2001, 21-30). Although the same kind of studies appeared in Austria, they were usually undertaken a few years later than in Germany (Steiner 325). These studies formed a stimulus to reinterpret the significance of foreign labour in the Third Reich. For the first time, all foreign labourers were collectively referred to as ‘Zwangarbeiter’, a concept often translated into English as ‘forced’ or even ‘slave’ labourers. This categorisation created the impression that a homogeneous group of foreign labourers with similar war experiences existed which could claim to enter the space of victimhood within the cultural field on war memory, until then solely inhabited by Holocaust victims (Ulrich, 2001, 16-18). In addition, touching on slavery, this narrative makes a decontextualised link with people of a totally different time period that lived in a very different place. Despite the inaccuracy with which various people treated differently by the Nazi regime are nowadays grouped together, ‘Zwangarbeiter’ became an officially institutionalised concept in German and Austrian politics and the term proliferated among the population to refer to all foreign workers in the Third Reich (Ulrich, 2001, 16-18).

In the former Soviet Union, the uncovering of formerly silenced war experiences stimulated research, albeit mostly done by non-governmental movements like Memorial, and was also used to push for a higher visibility and recognition of Soviet workers who ‘suffered’ during the Nazi and Soviet regime and therefore ‘deserve’ to be called ‘victims of two dictatorships’ (Internationales Sklaven- und Zwangarbeiter Befragungsprojekt ‘Memorial’; Polian, 2002). However, there are important differences between the narrative agencies of articulation developed in the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus (Adamushko, Bogdan and Gerasimov; Grinchenko, 2008b; Figes; Ustnaia Historiia). In the case of Ukraine for instance, the experience of World War II and Ukraine’s participation in it obstructs the process of coming to terms with the Soviet past. The place for the war memory of Soviet workers in this problematic narrative is consequently very specific.

Polish narratives on war memory were also shuffled after the collapse of communism. More than in the other countries described here, Polish citizens were influenced by people who had

---

<sup>4</sup> For disbursement issues to Jewish Holocaust survivors see Finkelstein 73.

left the country during World War II and their descendants. The contributions of overseas survivors of the Holocaust gradually leads to the inclusion of the Holocaust experience in the national post-Cold War narrative on war memory and awakens public consciousness over what took place on Polish territory during World War II - although the heavy debate over the Polish involvement in the Jedwabne massacre illustrated the commotion it stirs up (Gross; Stola). The dialogue between the Third Polish Republic and representatives of 'Polish' ex-combatants abroad, however, generated a radical upheaval of the former national narrative on war memory, resulting in a profound reversion of World War II heroism. Communist partisans who had opposed Nazi dominance in the People's Army fell into discredit and commemorations started to centre around freedom fighters that had participated in the Warsaw Uprising or had fought on battlefields in the West (Brodecki, Wawer, Kondracki).

## **Arenas of war memory articulation**

Agencies, the dominant voices in the cultural field on war memory, articulate their war memories in various spaces, or arenas as I call them here. In arenas, they interact with different voices and what is formulated is often an outcome of negotiation. Arenas have different forms, depending on the power dynamics between the various voices taking part in the game. It is a very broad concept which encompasses cemeteries or war monuments, immigrant organisations and publications, interview settings and so on. The outcomes of negotiation in arenas differ, as power relations and acts of articulation are situational.

To develop my idea on arenas, I first refer to the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who introduced the concept 'collective memory', and in this way linked the concept of memory to social groups, ranging from a small organisation to a whole nation state. According to Halbwachs, all memory is social; individual memory does not exist (Barash 114; Halbwachs (Elchardus) 8). Individuals are living among others, and consciously or not, are always exchanging their representations of experiences. Halbwachs considers collective memory to be the memory of people who are able to look at the world as those who experienced the events on which the collective memory is based (Gedi and Elam 36). Since I am interested in the memories of people who all shared the same war experiences and found articulation in the groups they formed themselves, I have opted to work with the concept of group memory. Group memory enables the group formation process taking place in the migration streams at issue to be linked with the construction and articulation of narratives on war memory in various arenas of war memory articulation. But before I focus on processes of group formation, constructions of group memory, and articulation of group memory in various arenas of war memory articulation, I describe how Halbwachs' concept has already been applied to different arenas by many scholars.

Above all, commemorations form the arena in which nation states publicly articulate their narratives on war memory. In the footsteps of Pierre Nora, many historians have already researched public war commemorations (mostly concentrated in cemeteries and in front of statues) and demonstrated how these commemorations draw from war experiences of death and sacrifice to stimulate people's identification with the nation state (Hobsbawm; Nora). Rituals and traditions during commemoration services which present wartime suffering as a constitutive element of national unity and identification are powerful means to reinforce official war memory narratives. Scholars such as Jay Winter, on the contrary, touch on the importance of people's collective mourning during such commemorations, showing that they provide a scene where the universally human process of transferring individual grief into shared symbolic forms - which give meaning to war experience - occurs (Winter). These two

approaches introduce an artificial difference between politics and mourning, since nation states offer both war memory narratives and arenas which provide a place to articulate grief, and, in that articulation, politics is never far away (Ashplant 8, 43). Historical research on memory has thus, until now, mainly concentrated on the dominant agencies articulating narratives on war memory: nation states and elites in power. Neither Hobsbawm nor Winter question the construction of nation states and consequently do not criticise the pre-eminently male symbolic representation of war commemoration: the Unknown Soldier (Yuval-Davis 93-97). By concentrating exclusively on commemorations, historians have long neglected many other memories and social groups. They therefore underexpose both the search for the articulation of war memory of people who did not fit into the image of the nation state and the complex mechanisms through which various agencies and arenas of articulation interacted.

Arenas of war memory articulation are indeed influenced by the characteristics of nation states. These characteristics prescribe the access of agencies to, and the expression of narratives on war memory in, pre-existing or newly shaped arenas of articulation. The extent to which a nation state allows civil society movements to debate its official narrative on war memory determines the possibilities of tolerating, or even integrating, the articulation of (aspects of) oppositional narratives. Although nation states in the Atlantic World had a relatively open attitude in this respect, it did not prevent certain groups such as women and non-citizens from being more or less ignored, if only due to the artificial construction of the nation state. A study into how people marginalised by the Western nation-state project (here immigrant non-citizens and women from behind the Iron Curtain living in Belgium) struggled to articulate their war memory in various arenas is innovative because it shows how flexible nation states were in incorporating other narratives, as well as what effects this had on people's attempts to attribute meaning to war experiences, in this way constructing identifications. Behind the Iron Curtain, the Soviet Union and its satellite states strictly enforced their official narratives on war memory and did not permit any questioning, which gave cause to the repression of deviating narratives on war memory and led to the exclusion, rather than integration, of marginalised people from public arenas of articulation. Exclusion, however, did not necessarily mean silence, since repression could also induce these deviating narratives to find expression in private arenas of articulation, like among family members and friends behind closed doors (Merridale, 2000, 62, 64-66, 76-77; Figes).

Changes in society over time have also influenced research on the arenas in which war memories found articulation. Second-wave feminism in the Atlantic World, for instance, criticised the solely male representation in war memory, revealing that the suffering of men could be integrated more easily into national narratives on war memory than the suffering of women, because the former memories were related to virtuousness and honour for the nation state, whereas the latter were often associated with shame (Schwegman 147). Feminist scholars indicated how the war shattered the stabilised pre-war gender order within society, and how official normative narratives giving meaning to war experiences aimed to re-install this order after liberation (Lenz 13, 47). The political scientist Claudia Lenz argued that occupation not only made people afraid of losing their nation's character, but also made men fear they would have to give up their hegemonic role within society. Consequently, narratives on war memory concentrated foremost on male virtuousness, i.e. the identification of men with the (successful) defence of the nation. Women were less often portrayed. If they were, it was either as mothers and housewives, who were taking care of the homestead while their husbands and sons were at the front, or as female dissidents who deliberately had made a mockery of the pre-war social norms of sexuality and had to be punished in order to purify the nation (Diederichs 159; Lenz 44, 46, 51). Although women did play active roles during the

war, in narratives on war memory they are omitted (Lenz 48). These narratives required women to serve their male heroes. Being a female hero was regarded unfeminine (Lenz 52). Aleida Assmann formulated this discrepancy as follows:

As long as the admittance to the cultural memory is of heroic magnitude and as long as it is the canonization of the classics, women systematically fall prey to cultural oblivion. Hereby is alleged the classical case of structural amnesia (Assmann, 1999, 61).

By the same token, including the suffering of women in national narratives on war memory and thus acknowledging soldiers could also have behaved unvirtuously, would knock the omnipresent symbol of the Unknown Soldier from its pedestal. Consequently, statues commemorating World War II only later started to depict women (Schönfeld).

Over the last decade, historians researching (war) memory in the Soviet Union and historians concerned about gender have therefore made intensive use of a third approach. In an attempt to surmount the shortcomings of Hobsbawm's and Winter's approaches, a third one, introduced by Alistair Thomson, focuses on the way survivors (marginalised by the nation state) articulate their personal war memory experience, and how that is influenced by rituals and traditions operating at public national commemorations. Using a variety of written and oral sources, the research has in-depth information on personal remembering and forgetting (Ashplant, 12-13; Thomson, 1994; Thomson, 2006). This approach starts with the personal war memories of people with similar war experiences and indicates to what extent that memory finds articulation in various arenas of articulation in the public sphere, and whether it opposes or reinforces dominant national narratives on war memories in the home or host country (Ashplant 17). For this purpose, most scholars following Thomson make extensive use of oral sources, hereby centralising Jan Assmann's subdivision of Halbwachs' concept 'collective memory' in 'cultural' (i.e. our tradition in mostly material objects like books and pictures), and 'communicative' memory (i.e. oral transmission) (Assmann, 1992). The family historian Annette Kuhn has already demonstrated how oral transmission, memory and identification are intertwined: 'Telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of our selves' (Kuhn 2). Moreover, following Halbwachs, historians using the third approach state that what people conceive to be their personal memory, is actually very public (Thomson, 2006, 11). Through communication with others, people find out what narratives are acceptable for the social group(s) they are part of, and learn which elements need to be silenced for the sake of group identification. Therefore, people tend to reproduce the narrative of their social group, although they are only seldom aware of this (Beyers, 2007a, 122).

Oral historians consider analysing oral sources of individuals to be sufficient to learn about social groups and perceive interview situations to function as arenas of war memory articulation. For instance, they highlight that the marginalisation of female war memories in public arenas of articulation stimulated second-wave feminist-inspired researchers to interview women (and, to a lesser degree, men) about their personal war memories, which in turn made formerly private memories through publications visible in the public sphere. In this way, a new public arena of articulation was created that successfully integrated into dominant public arenas of articulation over the years. While in the Atlantic World this 'third' approach has its origins in the 1970s, it was not until the fall of communism that it started to find response in the Soviet successor states. Only then did people begin to feel relaxed and became more willing to speak openly about their war experiences. More and more studies based on oral sources are now conducted, often supported and published with the support of German or Austrian academic partners (Biller; Havlikova and Vondryskova; Hoffmann; Grinchenko, 2004; Grinchenko 2008a; Grinchenko 2008c; Reddeman; Stelzl-Marx, 2000; Ustnaia

historiia). Orlando Figes' project *Whisperers* about daily life under Stalin, which not only resulted in a book, but also in a website containing the digitalised archive of his research (transcripts of interviews and many family documents), can serve here as an example (Figes).<sup>5</sup> In recent years, there has even been interaction between the new outcomes of this research and the initiatives of German and Austrian nation states and civil society associations to commemorate Soviet forced workers, including Ostarbeiterinnen. In this way, new arenas of war memory articulation, consisting of an impressively increasing number of statues and memorials, have arisen (Schönfeld). These dynamics thus contribute to the Soviet forced workers' memories being integrated into public arenas of articulation on both sides of the former Iron Curtain.

Besides second-wave feminism and the collapse of communism, a third evolution has boosted the emergence of oral testimonies. As the personal memories of Holocaust survivors did not find a place in national narratives on war memory, individual life stories were a means of preserving the reality of suffering, humiliation and death expressed in personal memories at the time when survivors started to pass away and their war experiences made the switch to historical memory (Ashplant 44). All these evolutions have led to the current situation in which personal testimonies expressed in various forms, written, oral or audio-visual, have themselves become arenas of war memory articulation (Ashplant 48).

In this way, however, the third approach, just like the former two, personified by Hobsbawm and Winter, neglects the power dynamics of agencies over time to receive, hold and lose access to arenas of war memory articulation. Recently, the historian Müller stood up for the presence of power in historical memory research, but reduced the scope of his book to political power (Müller 3). Whereas anthropologists point to the importance of group formation in which like-minded people transmute their personal stories to group memory and group interaction for competition and adaptation of that group memory, most memory historians have not yet developed a similar interest. However, Harald Welzer and his colleagues from the Centre for Interdisciplinary Memory Research in Essen recently paid attention to power within family arenas of war memory articulation. They interviewed not only individual family members, but also organised family discussions thanks to which they were able to identify which family members took the lead in the construction of a family memory (Welzer and Lenz 8).

This dissertation uses the methods of the third approach to unravel migrants' narratives on war memory in Belgium. It contains an analysis of 26 in-depth interviews with war survivors of the two migration streams at issue, on which I will elaborate in the methodology section. Moreover, following Welzer and Lenz, I pay attention to the relation of power dynamics and memory over time. I research how people belonging to the two migration streams gathered in groups (i.e. immigrant organisations) and how they constructed narratives on war memories within these groups. I question whether these groups were themselves arenas of war memory articulation, or if they lobbied for articulation within other arenas on war memory of the pluralistic societies in which they live, or lived. Since life-worlds of state and society saw no need to focus on the war memories of migrants, such research nowadays takes place in what for a long time was considered the periphery. A study on immigrant groups and their group memories does not tell 'the big story' of commemoration. When researching how memories on war experiences became articulated on a group level, one is confronted with various

---

<sup>5</sup> See also the website [www.orlandofiges.com](http://www.orlandofiges.com) (consulted on 20.10.2008).

mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion operating within the cultural field on war memory, mechanisms that could hinder migrants from publicly articulating war memories.

Migration historians doing sociological research are specialists when it comes to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of migrants from society. I therefore re-interpret their literature using a different historical paradigm, not the one of society, but the one of memory, in order to enrich the field of memory studies. In doing so, my aim is to re-focus on the primarily social basis of collective memory research. I also strongly encourage more ‘social’ history within the field of historical memory studies, a field still dominated by cultural historians researching commemorations. Of special value for the first part of my dissertation were the publications stemming from the research project *Caught between Scylla and Charybdis? Changing orientations of migrant organisations in the era of national states, 1880-2000* by Rinus Penninx and Leo Lucassen, financed by the Netherlands Fund for Scientific Research (NWO). An explorative study set the basic assumption for this research: immigrant organisations are a boon or a bane for integration (Penninx and Schrover; Vermeulen 10). They can either function as a bridge between individual migrants and society to facilitate integration, or they can be solely inward-looking and consequently obstruct their members from finding their own place within society. The studies from this project which I re-interpret focus on how the formation processes of immigrant groups evolve over time and on the interplay of immigrant groups and migration policy (Lucassen, 2004; Schrover and Vermeulen; Vermeulen).

## Memory and Performance

The dominant voices, the agencies on war memory articulation potentially influencing the war memories of the people from the migration streams at issue, are known. The varieties of arenas on war memory articulation in which they operate are set out. What follows, is the articulation itself, or the performance as I call it. I look into how members of immigrant groups together practised remembering. Following Halbwachs, I am convinced that group memory, and thus also group identification, takes place during group gatherings (Misztal 53). In this dissertation, I focus on performances during such group gatherings, seen as ‘framed events deliberately set apart from everyday life’ and always presented for somebody, even if it is only for the group itself (Burke 43; Carlson 14). For the Allied soldiers from Poland, I concentrate on the yearly commemorations at the Polish war cemetery in Lommel (the Flemish Campines), where 257 soldiers of the First Armoured Division killed in action found their last place of rest. For the former Ostarbeiterinnen, I examine the choir rehearsals and performances of an immigrant organisation consisting of former Ostarbeiterinnen. I analyse how during performances, personal memories interplayed with group memories and show how they exerted an identifying function.

My interest in performances stems from the ‘performative turn’, which stated that text had been overresearched to the detriment of performance in human sciences. With regard to memory studies, it suggested that the material outcomes of remembering, i.e. various objects (in the case of this dissertation, statues and a canon of songs), should be researched in combination with the practices around them: how memory objects are constructed, used during performances and whether or not they are appreciated by participants (Bartlett and Snelus 553). This requires a shift from ‘fixity to fluidity’: a focus away from reified identities and objects to occasional identifications and objects coming into being only because of and during practices (Burke 35).

Here, I turn away from the socio-historical studies on migration used in the first part of this introduction for two reasons. In line with the sociologist Roger Brubaker in his influential book *Ethnicity without Groups*, I criticise two convictions reigning in history studies resulting from the historical paradigm of society. Firstly, Brubaker speaks about identifications instead of identities to underline their fluid character depending on the place, context and time in which people live, do things and thus also perform. Secondly, he challenges the perception that immigrant organisations operating in the host society are the collective crystallisation of reified immigrant groups (Brubaker 13, 33-35). I consider members of immigrant organisations are involved in group memory and experience group identification during occasions of performance. The fact that I break from the traditional socio-historical line of thinking however does not mean that I endorse a solely postmodern interpretation of identifications. I do not agree that identifications are exclusively constructed by participants during performances. For historians with such a postmodern perception, my combination of performances of immigrant groups and group formation processes of immigrant groups can be revealing. It shows that identifications are not only shaped by insiders during performances, but also by outsiders who facilitate or hinder group formation (Burke 42-43).

As historiography has long been pre-eminently occupied with the interpretation of texts, a focus on performance requires a search for new methods and definitions. Not surprisingly, then, I make use of pictures and music recordings. For the song chapter, ethnomusicology turned out to be useful, a discipline which analyses music, often song lyrics, within their contexts of performance and reception. The class work *The Study of Ethnomusicology. Thirty-one Issues and Concepts* by Bruno Nettl offers, among other things, a very good section on how to do fieldwork, also among migrants in contemporary host societies (Nettl 133-214). In addition, I took part in the performances of the immigrant group gatherings discussed. I attended a yearly commemoration service at the cemetery in Lommel, took part in gatherings of the Ostarbeiterinnen's organisation and recorded one of their concerts. The method of participant observation is rarely used in historical sciences, because historians self-evidently state they are occupied with the past. However, it is used among anthropologists, who consider dealing with the past can take place in the present through remembering, thanks to which participating in group remembering processes can reveal performance practices from the past (Ballinger; Meire; Smith, 2006). I will further develop this idea in the methodology section of this introduction.

A shift from text to performance also requires definitions to be revised. After having replaced identity with identification, I now go into the concept of narrative, a crucial word for my dissertation. So far I have used it only in reference to a text or a sequel of words, in the case of oral transmission, reformulating an event and helping to find coherence in relation to ourselves and others. Narratives on war memory thus mould war survivors' contingent war experiences into a coherent, textual explanation for the present (Suleiman 3, 215). This is also how narratives are defined in linguistic studies. There, some scientists say there have to be at least two events representing something and told by somebody to be able to speak of a narrative, while others even require a causal relationship between these events. The linguist H. Porter Abbott, however, in his book *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* arrived at what he called 'the bare minimum' of the concept and defined it as 'the representation of an event, either in words or in some other way' (Abbott 13). In doing so, he opens the door to performances articulating war memory. These performances represent, successfully or not, the war experiences of the participating members of immigrant groups.

## Memory and Trauma

Later in this work, while concentrating on troublesome war experiences, I widen the meaning of 'performance' to include daily practices. It can be argued that social norms structure our lives through repetition and sanctioning of behaviour (Carlson 13). If we call performativity the social norms that guide individual performers and their individual performances, it becomes clear why the most intimate memories on troublesome war experiences are also social, and, as I will show, may consequently be affected by the immigrant organisation(s) which an individual performer frequents, as well as the changing attitudes towards trauma and victimhood he or she meets in his or her environment.

Sometimes war survivors may prefer to forget war experiences or are not able to control their remembering because of their very nature. Articulating them in a narrative of war memory and expressing them in an arena of articulation would demand working through the past, and this might in some cases deliberately not be opted for or simply be psychologically impossible. Whereas scholars like Jay Winter presumed the projection of individual grief into publicly shared symbolic forms to be a necessary step in the mourning process, the third approach indicated situations in which people mourn notwithstanding the fact that their war experiences did not find articulation in words (Ashplant, 18, 42-43; Stanley).

At the centre of this study, I place the human body as an active keeper of the past and analyse how the body remembers through doing, defined as 'unconscious performing'. Research on bodily memory can mostly be done through interviews, if they are considered to be and analysed as performances in the interview setting, i.e. in an arena of war memory articulation. They no longer are presumed to offer a scholar 'real facts' on war experiences, as historians using the historical paradigm of state for instance claim, but are interesting because of the way an interviewee behaves during the interview itself, i.e. during an occasional performance. As the gender scholars Järviluoma and others formulate it:

the attempt to create a coherent and meaningful life course through autobiographical reflections is futile: the truth retreats from the reflecting subject. A new model of autobiographical truth is characterized by disconnected and fragmentary conventions of performance (Järviluoma and others 61).

Accepting the 'disconnected' and 'fragmentary' nature of an interview opens an interest for silence and its interplay with text. During the analysis, one can focus on how people link words and where they place pauses. Moreover, performance helps to bridge the presumed discrepancy between text and silence. Often, non-verbal performative communication gives insights into how text can be full of silence, for instance because of the omission of certain experiences, and silence can be full of text, for example when a person wants to say something, but feels deprived of words, and articulates him or herself through bodily gestures. Therefore, also silence and bodily actions can construct narratives on war memory. Marianne Hirsh, who wrote about family and memory, calls them building blocks for the articulation of 'empty memory'. What a scholar, according to her, has to do, is not 'to fill in that empty memory', but 'to try to present memory AS empty (...) which by definition cannot be filled in or recovered' (Hirsh 244).

## Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of six chapters which are grouped into three parts. An introductory chapter entitled 'Two Migration Streams' searches for similarities and differences in the war,

arrival and settlement experiences of Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen. After this historical overview, I concentrate on the memories which former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen constructed from these experiences. My dissertation is divided into three parts focusing on migrants' war memories: 'Constructing Group Memories', 'Performing Group Memories' and 'Trauma in Group Memories'. The first part consists of two chapters which analyse the group formation process and the construction of group memories within the two migration streams at issue. Chapter two, 'On the battlefield there is a difference with after the war' focuses on former Allied soldiers from Poland and chapter three 'For many of my girlfriends, the war is not history, but biography!' centralise former Ostarbeiterinnen. Afterwards, I go into the similarities and differences of the soldiers and Ostarbeiterinnen in a short comparison.

The second part of this dissertation, 'Performing Group Memories', is made up of two chapters. By analogy with part one, chapter four 'Was there only a cross in the cemetery?' discusses former Allied soldiers from Poland and chapter five 'Let's sing, let's sing, for Soviet authority we'll die' concerns former Ostarbeiterinnen. Part two focuses on performances as framed events set apart from daily life - the Polish military cemetery in Lommel (Belgium) and singing rehearsals and concerts of an immigrant organisation of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium. A short comparison follows these two chapters. The last part of my study, 'Trauma in Group Memories', consists of one chapter. Chapter six is called 'I don't SPEAK about it, I don't WANT about it speak and I didn't HAVE TO speak about it!' and highlights an often neglected aspect of war memory: memories of troublesome war experiences. The conclusion highlights the most important findings of this research and seeks to place them within a broader framework of historiographical developments. At the end, I have included two appendixes. The first, 'LENIN/NINEL' is about the basic personal data of interviewees and the second contains the song lyrics and music I recorded during my research. Before starting, however, it is important to provide more information about the methodology underpinning my research results.

## **Methodology**

This project used a qualitative research approach, mainly based on the Grounded Theory developed by the sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser, Strauss and others). The aim of Grounded Theory is not to reveal facts, as is done in much deductive research checking the assumptions of grand theories on the basis of categories designed by the researchers themselves. On the contrary, Grounded Theory wants to construct theories in an inductive way: coming from, or grounded in so to speak, the research data and analysed through the construction of immanent, i.e. in vivo, categories. Although Grounded Theory has flourished over the last 30 years in various academic disciplines such as sociology, economics, and psychology, it was seldom used before. Much has to do with the fact that historians keep away from theories and do not want to state that the mechanisms they unravel in the past will dictate the future (Brettell and Hollifield 3). They stress the overall importance of context and are very careful with generalisations. But even if the task of a historian is to 'understand past ways of thinking and living', the methods of Grounded Theory can enrich historical research (Tollebeek 191). Above all, Grounded Theory concentrates on how people give meaning to experiences. If we consider meaning to be a construction of social rules and the interpretation of these rules, then it is worth exploring their interplay. Especially in the cases where such interpretation cannot be read from written sources and existing literature, because the people articulating them were not heard in the past, Grounded Theory methods help open up their interpretation of social rules. Therefore, Grounded Theory aims to find and

explain how often marginalised people gave meaning to experiences by unravelling their interpretation through a specific outlined process of data gathering and data analysis. In between the description of data gathering and data analysis, I provide space to examine my relationship with the interviewees, and the languages in which interviews took place.

## **Data gathering**

Grounded Theory methods state the need to create new sources offering people's interpretations on experiences and to constantly cross-check them with existing data in order to embed these oral interpretations in the social contexts in which the interviewees lived/live. As interviews are the best way to get an idea of the way people (re)construct their experiences and articulate them privately and publicly through narratives, they are at the heart of Grounded Theory studies (Beyers, 2007a, 121; Portelli, 64). Qualitative research interviews are not question-answer, but story-telling-listening based (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 61). Qualitative research criticises interview types in which the interviewer meticulously structures the shape, language and contents (due to the researcher's fact-oriented interest) of an interview. On the contrary, it aims to conduct in-depth interviews which are only structured to a minimum extent by the interviewer, believing that the narratives of interviewees have a self-generating order and that that order is crucial for research on for instance memories and identifications (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 64). Only by letting people tell their experiences in their way using their language, one can find out how their narratives differ from others. That difference also offers an insight into a bigger picture, such as the cultural field on war memory in this dissertation. During my research, I conducted in-depth interviews with twelve former soldiers of the First Armoured Polish Division and with twelve former Ostarbeiterinnen, all settled in Belgium.

Between July 2005 and February 2006, I managed to speak to twelve former division soldiers of the twenty who were still alive, as the other division soldiers were either sick or unwilling to speak. Other former Allied soldiers from Poland were no longer living. The interviewees knew each other well since they lived concentrated in the cities they had liberated and frequently attended commemoration services dedicated to the activities of the First Polish Armoured Division. I had no problems in finding information through the informal networks of survivors. Interviewees were actually very helpful in putting me in touch with other former division soldiers, in the meantime commenting extensively as to whether the person they were suggesting me to make contact with had thoughts in line with theirs or not. That reaction might be explained by the recent quarrel in their immigrant organisations, as chapter two will show.

Thanks to cross-reading archival sources both in Belgium and Poland, I discovered the importance that agencies of war memory articulation mobilising former Allied soldiers from Poland attached to the Polish military cemetery in Lommel. I therefore also included specific questions on the commemoration services in Lommel in my interviews, asking every former soldier if he could describe me what the cemetery looked like and how ceremonies were organised. Since I was interested in the way they remembered their practices in the cemetery and how they gave meaning to these practices, I sometimes asked very specific additional questions to get clarifying answers. The results of the analysis are displayed in chapter four. I also did participant observation in October 2005 at the annual commemoration service in Lommel.

In this dissertation, I embed the interpretations of the former division soldiers I interviewed in their social contexts through making use of various archival materials from Poland and Belgium. Thanks to the collapse of communism, many archival sources formerly off limits have been opened up. During my research stays in Warsaw (four months in total), I worked in the Archive of New Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych - further AAN), the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych - further MSZ) and the Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance (Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej - further IPN). In the AAN, I discovered the correspondence files of Towarzystwo Polonia, an institution set up by the Polish Authorities in the 1950s to get into contact with what it called 'Poles living abroad'. In the MSZ, I consulted the annual reports written by the Polish Embassy in Belgium for the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which always included a detailed description of emigrant life. In the IPN, I looked into the way Polish Secret Services followed the activities of the Association of Polish Ex-Combatants (Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów - further SPK) in Belgium. In the Polish National Library of Warsaw, I read immigrant periodicals.

In Belgium, I gathered archives from four Polish ex-combatant organisations: the First Polish Armoured Division Association - the Benelux Circle (Vereniging van de Eerste Poolse Pantserdivisie - cirkel Benelux - further the Benelux Circle), the Belgian Association for Polish Ex-combatants (de Belgische vereniging voor Poolse oud-strijders - further the BVPO), the Polish Airforce Association (Vereniging van Poolse vliegeniers / Stowarzyszenie Polskich Lotników - further SPL) and SPK. The first three archives are in private hands; the last can be consulted in the Polish Library of Brussels. I also had a look in the archives of two related Polish immigrant organisations: the Polish Union (Związek Polaków w Belgii - further ZPB) and the Polish Catholic Mission (Polska Misja Katolicka - further PMK). The former can be consulted in the Polish House in Beringen, a Limburg mine town, the latter at the Rectorate of the PMK in Brussels. In addition, I visited the Archive of the Belgian Aliens Police which was recently opened up, the Archive of the Belgian Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Archive of the city of Lommel. First, I made a partial reconstruction of the migration stream by listing all the sixty-two names of former Allied soldiers from Poland I had found in other archival and press data, thanks to which I could peruse their personal files in the Archive of the Belgian Aliens Police and naturalisation dossiers in the Archive of the Belgian Ministry of Internal Affairs. The files from the Aliens Police gave information on the permission of individuals to stay temporarily and the naturalisation dossiers contained an investigation into their settlement from the time when they became Belgians. Lastly, I had a look at the history of the Polish military cemetery in Lommel.

There were more Ostarbeiterinnen and they lived scattered throughout Belgium. Despite being more numerous, their habitation made them less visible than the former Allied soldiers from Poland. Moreover, as chapter one will show, most of these women became housewives and the children of these women have common Belgian names that in no way reveal the origin of their mothers. They are therefore less visible in the public sphere. Furthermore, their largest immigrant organisation, the Association for Soviet Citizens, did not keep their membership rolls. Consequently, it was difficult for me to get in touch with potential interviewees and even when I managed to be invited for an interview, my interlocutors often harboured suspicion, were reluctant to speak, and unwilling to refer me to a friend (former Ostarbeiterin) for a next interview. As a result, I decided to work with infiltrants, i.e. people who were friends with former Ostarbeiterinnen and would be able to introduce me or even attend the interview. One situation in which these infiltrants asked questions to their friends in my presence turned out to offer me the most in-depth data. My infiltrants were very diverse:

for instance, I cooperated with the Ukrainian honorary consul in Belgium, the ex-colleague of the mother of my promoter, a family member of a good friend of mine who was the daughter of a deceased former Ostarbeiterin but took me to her mother's closest friend, a funeral director who had buried husbands of former Ostarbeiterinnen, an honorary member of the Belgian non-governmental organisation 'Vrede' (Peace) who had been active in the leftist resistance force, The Independent Front (Onafhankelijkheidsfront), during World War II and so on. Although it was a lot of work, it turned out that my interviewees were never further than five phonecalls away. As I often had to rely on my personal network to get in touch with informants, I ended up with only two interviews in Wallonia. Although former Ostarbeiterinnen lived scattered throughout the country my interviewees came mainly from Flanders.

My relationships with former Ostarbeiterinnen improved when I got in touch with the choir director of the Association for Soviet Citizens in Antwerp. She introduced me to the weekly gatherings of this immigrant organisation, in which I saw an opportunity to look behind the suspicion and silence that ruled in the interviews I had done so far. For the next half year, I closely followed the activities of the organisation and participated eleven times in choir practices. During these gatherings, I also sang with them and recorded their performance at the Christmas Market in Antwerp's Zurenborg District. At the end, I interviewed three members of the Antwerp organisation individually at their request and recorded the songs which two of them sang especially for me.

Thanks to the choir director in Antwerp, whose house I visited three times, I could also interview the Ghent choir director whom I visited four times. After a first meeting, we concentrated on singing. They both tried to explain to me which songs they had sung in the organisation, how these songs had been chosen, how they had been performed, for which occasions and so on. During the interviews, I took special care to allow space for them to freely associate with sound. While looking at their materials, they jumped from song to song, from sound combination to sound combination, in this way actively remembering sounds and their meanings. Every once in a while, they paused to explain the meaning of their songs. An analysis of these songs, as well as the reflections of the choir directors on them, found their place in chapter five of this dissertation.

I also gathered cross-data in Belgium and the Russian Federation. In Belgium, I checked the Antwerp marriage register and visited the Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society (Documentatie- en Onderzoekscentrum voor Religie, Cultuur en Samenleving - further KADOC). In the marriage register, I discovered the names of 79 Russian, Ukrainian or Belarusian girls and young women who married Belgians in 1945. With these data, I could consult their individual files in the Archive of the Aliens Police. Since the Ostarbeiterinnen received Belgian citizenship after marriage, the data in the files are limited to forms of arrival and possibly departure from the Belgian territory. No naturalisation dossiers exist. The paucity of Belgian archival data as compared to the data concerning the former Allied soldiers from Poland has left blind spots on the public articulation of their memories and identifications. At KADOC, I found information on missionary activities among former Ostarbeiterinnen in the late 1940s. In the Russian Federation, I worked in three different institutions. In the private archive of the Motherland Association, which during the Cold War upheld contacts with Soviet citizens (including former Ostarbeiterinnen) living abroad, I read internal documents, correspondence with former Ostarbeiterinnen living in Belgium, and consulted the Association's bulletin. In the non-governmental organisation Memorial, which played (as mentioned before) an important role in disimbursement issues for

former Ostarbeiterinnen in the 1990s, I learned about the state of research on former Ostarbeiterinnen in the Russian Federation on the basis of their library and as yet unpublished oral sources. And lastly, as the first historian, I discovered interesting Soviet ethnomusicological studies in Moscow's Lenin library which renounce the ruling perception that former Ostarbeiterinnen were completely silenced in the Soviet Union during Stalinism.

### **The interviewees and me: Masha nasha**

As a researcher, I played a important role during the research. Here, I would like to describe how the people I spoke and listened to perceived me. Former Allied soldiers from Poland expressed they were very proud that a 'researcher' from 'the university' came all the way up to their village, even to their home, to conduct an interview. They felt pleased by my interest and often waited for me in front of their houses or at the bus stop. They felt important because of my visit and did not hesitate to tell neighbours and friends that they did not have time to spend with them now, because they were 'busy with history', as one formulated it.<sup>6</sup> My knowledge of Polish and my Polish degree often turned out to be sufficient to establish a successful link between us. Although I was seen as important, some interviewees could not always help making sexual allusions towards a 'girl' who was up to sixty years younger than them.<sup>7</sup> I think my presence also hindered them from articulating how they felt about the popularity they enjoyed among Flemish girls during their liberation march.<sup>8</sup>

Former Ostarbeiterinnen, on the contrary, did not understand my interest in them. 'What do you want', 'what's that for', 'I have nothing to say', were always among the first sentences of our conversations.<sup>9</sup> During single interviews, informants often helped me out in such cases. Only with some of them, whom I met repeatedly over a six-month period, I could work on a basis of trust that facilitated interviewees to open up. In the immigrant organisation I frequented, I became known as a 'girl' who speaks 'our language' and likes music. The words 'researcher' and 'university' were not mentioned. Even my name had to change. 'Machteld' is too Flemish, too difficult to pronounce and also did not fit into the setting of the gatherings, which were mostly held in Russian and Ukrainian. And so I became 'Masha', and after a few weeks even 'Masha nasha' (our Masha), with the variable Russian possessive pronoun placed after the noun in order to stress closeness. Also, the members did not want to be called 'Miss Ivanovna Janssens' by me, to give a fictitious example, but introduced themselves to me as 'Babushka Lena' (granny Lena), 'Babushka Ania', 'Babushka Tania' and so on. The fact that also my own grandmother, who is however not a former Ostarbeiterin, lives in Antwerp, added to the grandmother-granddaughter relationship we developed.

### **Language**

During my meetings with former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen, I was very concerned that people spoke with me in their language. Interviewees were travelling home and back in their memories while speaking with me and that was also visible in the official languages they chose to articulate such memories. When they spoke about visiting their parents behind the Iron Curtain for instance, they all spoke in their mother tongues, whether Polish, Russian or Ukrainian. When explaining how they received Belgian

<sup>6</sup> P 18: Interview with Andrzej on 7.11.2005 (74). I refer to the electronic database in which I analysed the interviews of this research project. The interviewees have been given fictitious names.

<sup>7</sup> P 4: Interview with Mariusz on 2.12.2005 (182).

<sup>8</sup> P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006 (450:454).

<sup>9</sup> P 22: Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006 (9:10).

citizenship, they all used Dutch or French administrative terms with which they were often unfamiliar in their mother tongues. At other moments, they freely switched between the languages they had come across during their lives. When a colleague of mine saw a transcription of one of my interviews, he pointed at a Cyrillic word positioned between two Dutch ones, and remarked: ‘You are doing interviews in different languages’. That does not line up with my opinion. I tried to interview an interviewee in his or her language, making use of various official languages which an interviewee, just like his or her interviewer, knew sometimes very well, and sometimes only a little. The interview fragments I quote in this dissertation are translated into English, and part of its meaning is, thus, inevitably lost in translation. The song lyrics I attach in appendix two are presented in the original language of former Ostarbeiterinnen, including both dialect words and loan words from German that had slipped into their language during World War II, and published in the way they wrote the lyrics down. I opted for the ALA-LC method of transliteration of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian-language text from Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet.

## Data analysis

Allowing the space for interviewees to use whatever language(s) they so wished has had repercussions on the transcriptions of interviews.

My idea on the language which interviewees spoke also has repercussions on the transcription of the interviews. As you will see in the interview fragments quoted in this dissertation, I use ethnopoetics. This method argues that people do not speak in sentences, but in verses. Freed from language standardisation, transcriptions allow for narrative elements like focuses, pauses, repetitions, non-verbal performances and so on (Blommaert 181). Especially for migrants who generally do not fit into standardised language patterns, this method favours a detailed analysis.

Glaser and Strauss developed a threefold strategy to analyse interview data and various software programs support such analyses. I used the ATLAS.ti program to do the well-known open, axial and selective coding. From the moment when transcriptions are entered into a database, you can start coding. The activity of coding can be compared to highlighting fragments in a book you are reading with a marker, and writing key words in the margin. Coding offers the additional advantage that your activities are electronically registered and dated, which enables a non-linear analysis of linear text materials and keeps you updated about the progress in your thinking over the months. During the open coding process, I concentrated on what experiences interview fragments were about (the categories) and how precisely these experiences were reflected in the words of interviewees (the properties). Between different coding processes, I went back to my archival data and migration periodicals for cross-checking. A few weeks later, I did axial coding, searching for relations between the categories and the properties of my database. In the final phase of analysis, during the selective coding, the core category of war memory sprang up, since all the other codes happened to fit well around it.

Over the years, criticism surrounding Glaser and Strauss’ methods has grown. Linguists in particular argued that the Grounded Theory’s way of cutting interviews into pieces could enhance non-linear analytical thinking, but neglected the linear aspects of an interview. In order to focus more on the linear aspects, Fritz Schütze and Philipp Mayring propose different analytic models. Schütze makes a distinction between what he calls indexical and non-indexical materials in transcriptions, where the former focus on events and the latter on

descriptive and argumentive statements on those events that offer an insight into the self-understanding of an interviewee (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 69; Schütze). Mayring, in turn, developed a technique for serial paraphrasing interview materials in order to facilitate a more profound qualitative content analysis (Mayring). Although I did not follow their strict analytical models, I paid special attention to the underproduction or overproduction of text in interviews and their interplay with various non-textual practices which I also consider to be part of the informants' narratives (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 68).

The outcome of my research revealed that, contrary to what the existence of (ethnic) immigrant organisations leads one to suspect, the predominant group identifications of former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen were not ethnically-based. In fact, they were above all war memory-based. The extensive empirical data collection provided in-depth knowledge on the operational processes of individual and collective - whether privately or publicly - articulated war memories in arenas shaped by the specific geopolitical context of the Cold War, which made it possible to unravel how parts of narratives on war memory and identifications found articulation, also in immigrant organisations, while others did not.

## Chapter 1: Two Migration Streams: Allied Soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen

Above all, this dissertation concentrates on how Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen gave meaning to war experiences during their settlement process in Belgium. Before discussing how these experiences were constructed and presented both during the Cold War and after the collapse of communism, I examine the experiences of the Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen during World War II, reconstruct their migration paths to Belgium and look into the marriages they contracted with Belgian citizens. I analyse the differences these men and women encountered with regard to the Belgian migration and naturalisation policy. Moreover, I explore the ramifications of these differences during their arrival and settlement processes in Belgium. Such information will serve as a background against which the various deflections generated by memory work, and enclosed in the different narratives on war memory from before and after the eclipse of communism, can be depicted.

### Nation, Gender and Citizenship

Until 1984, Belgian law applied the concept of derivative citizenship when people intermarried, requiring women to exchange their original citizenship for that of their husbands. This practice constructed how men and women could make use of rights and be subject to legal exclusion in different ways (Calavita 105). It is generally assumed that derivative citizenship worked to the Ostarbeiterinnens' advantage, because unlike the Allied soldiers from Poland, they were granted Belgian citizenship upon marriage. I argue that one has to consider the context in which people lived to identify the advantages and disadvantages of citizenship for immigrant male and female marriage partners. Such a context specific approach should focus on the following four factors: gendered citizenship, the arrival and settlement of immigrant men and women, the dual nature of citizenship and the geopolitical situation. In this chapter, I have used such an approach to specifically examine the situation of Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium.

First, for decades, scholars have neglected the influence of gender relations on the construction and functioning of nation-states. Nira Yuval-Davis splendidly analyses how gender and nation are intertwined. She argues that the construction of nation-states at the end of the eighteenth century, in which an imagined 'state of nature' transformed into a nation-state, was designed in the image of a male and left women outside this political project (Yuval-Davis 2). Scholars who do not pay attention to gender issues in their publications on the history of nation-states do exactly the same; they do not reach the core of the constructed nation-state.<sup>10</sup> Carole Pateman shows how marriage played a key role in maintaining the nation-state. Women and men were both free to consent to marriage, but marriage limited the opportunities of women because they signed a contract in which their rights were subordinate to those of their husbands (Pateman 155). In Belgium, for example, the Civil Code considered men responsible for their wives, whom they had to 'protect', whereas the wives had to 'obey' their husbands, and were obliged to 'live with their husbands and to follow them'. The husbands were also supposed to take the lead economically. For instance, the marital law of

---

<sup>10</sup> Gender-insensitive studies are for example Caestecker and Rea; Hansen and Weil.

property assigned responsibility to the husbands, and not the wives, for administering the family's goods (Van Houtte, Civil Code art. 213).

Women were also in an unequal position when they intermarried. The concern about the unity of citizenship in the family led to the introduction of derivative citizenship, which reified the concept of citizenship as a masculine attribute and assumed women's citizenship as secondary to male citizenship (Nicolosi 8). Women's citizenship was revocable and a nation-state could use it as a prime maker of inclusion or exclusion. Loss of citizenship could be a disincentive for women to intermarry, as was the fact that children would receive their father's citizenship rather than their mother's (de Hart, 2006, 49).

Second, research usually concentrates on the consequences of migration policy for men and women, but ignores naturalisation policy (Piper 135). This seems to be advantageous to immigrant women because they obtained the host society's citizenship when they married and immigrant men could only receive it during the settlement process following naturalisation (Hondius 148). However, policies in border control and migration differ from policies in granting citizenship, as do the consequences for men and women (de Hart, 2003, 217-221). Only when a study focuses on both migration and naturalisation policies can the advantages and disadvantages of gendered citizenship upon arrival and during the settlement process be explored.

Third, in analyses of migration policies, the focus is usually on the political status that a nation-state assigns to individuals, and not on the impact of this assignment on the daily lives of migrants (Canning and Rose 428). With one exception, the studies that have so far been published on Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen also follow this trend (Coudry, 1995a; Coudry, 1995b; Harms; Luyckx; Mieczkowski, 2003; Omtzigt; Postma; Sword; Tavenier). Individuals can simply follow the prescribed policy, but may also deviate from it which can lead to other (dis)advantages for immigrant men and women (Caestecker, 2003, 14-16). Researching migration policies from a bottom-up perspective allows us to understand the meaning of gendered citizenship in social practices (Lister 3-4). Acknowledging the dual nature of citizenship, as both a political status and a set of social practices, enables us to examine the correlation between gender differences in migration policies and the differences intrinsic to these policies (Canning and Rose 430).

Fourth, research on gendered citizenship is usually limited to the host country (Nye; Radcliff; Stychin). It generally presumes that migrants want to obtain citizenship of the host country (whether or not combined with their original citizenship). However, the citizenship acquisition for individuals depends on the geopolitical situation. The Cold War context shaped specific legal opportunities for immigrants from behind the Iron Curtain in the Atlantic World which sometimes led to individuals wanting to relinquish a certain citizenship. Not only the possibility of attaining citizenship, but also of renouncing it, determines the different opportunities of immigrant men and women.

This chapter shows how gender presuppositions in migration and naturalisation policies influenced the practices of immigrant men and women. It examines the dual nature of citizenship in a specific historical context for Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium during the Cold War. The study indicates how different situations at different times were advantageous to either intermarried immigrant men or women.

## Arriving: Allied soldiers from Poland<sup>11</sup>

In the aftermath of World War II, Allied soldiers from four different army divisions found their way to Belgium: soldiers from the First Polish Armoured Division, aviators from the Polish air force, airmen from the Allied air force and night watchers. The First Polish Armoured Division was established in South-East Poland in 1937 as one of the most prestigious and well-equipped units of the Polish Army and put under the command of General Stanisław Maczek (Majka). The professional army recruited Polish citizens from Małopolska, a multi-ethnic region where various religions such as Roman Catholicism, Greek Catholicism and Judaism were practiced. When the Soviet Union invaded on 17 September 1939, the division defended South-East Poland, but quickly realised their situation was hopeless and left the country for Hungary on the following day. There, soldiers from the Warsaw front who had continued to fight until 11 October joined the division (Anonymous, 1947, 11-14). Marching further through Romania, Yugoslavia and then travelling by boat to Italy, Spain or Northern Africa, most soldiers reached France where they were put into action for the defence of the Champagne and Bourgogne region in June 1940 (Maczek 69-114). As soon as France had fallen, they made a bolt for Great Britain. Here, the division was reorganised and placed under the command of the Allies (Anonymous, 1947, 22-23). In doing so, the division's commanders thought they would be able to fight against the Nazis and in this way also continue the battle for their own country, hereby resuming the traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century narrative of the Polish struggle for independence that Poles are fighting for 'Your Freedom and Ours' (Brodecki, Wawer, Kondracki 63-69; Maczek 127-130; Mieczkowski, 2003, 14).

Since the division was depleted by a large number of casualties, a successful recruitment program was set up to supplement the 8,000 remaining soldiers with approximately the same amount of newcomers (Majka 59-61; Mieczkowski, 2003, 37). Candidates reached Great Britain from all over the world: Polish immigrants from France, Brazil, Belgium and other countries as well as escaped or liberated prisoners of war from camps in France, Italy, and even Siberia and South Africa (Anonymous, 1947, 28; Brodecki, Wawer, Kondracki 33; Kajpus and Van Dam 22). The biggest additional reservoir of forces, however, consisted of men from Western Poland who had enrolled, either voluntarily or through force, in the German army and had deserted. Most of them travelled to Great Britain where they could join the division after going through a collaboration investigation and adopting a pseudonym, but the ones who had switched forces later only met the division during its liberation march and simply shipped in somewhere along the way, whether or not preceded by a short engagement in Belgian resistance forces (Goddeeris, 2005a, 54; Maczek 130; Van Poucke, 1994).<sup>12</sup> Until today, soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division are solely referred to as 'Poles', although the division gathered a mix of soldiers holding pre-war Polish citizenship, including Jews and people who would become Soviet citizens following the Yalta agreement, and persons of Polish descent whose mother tongue was not always Polish. The First Polish Armoured Division did not group Poles, but various people who had 'something in common with Poland'.

In August 1944, the division was put into action to liberate Northern France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany (Pauwels). In the battle of Falaise from 19 until 22 August, it

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of literature and available sources on former Allied soldiers from Poland see Mieczkowski 16-29.

<sup>12</sup> State Archives in Belgium, Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Naturalisation dossiers (further Nat. Dos.). 23495, 24464 and 25552; P 8: Interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005 (42:56).

managed to break through a German besiegement and hereby opened the way to Paris (Anonymous, 1947, 65-70). On 6 September, the division soldiers crossed the Belgian border and liberated several Flemish cities and municipalities within the following sixteen days. After they had marched from Ypres, Roeselare, and Thielt on to Aelter, their advance was stopped at the Ghent-Bruges canal. Instead of moving up further northwards, the division branched off to the east, with some brigades liberating Lokeren, Saint-Nicolas and Saint-Gillis-Waas, and others freeing Ghent. The soldiers then continued their road to the north and crossed the border with the Netherlands on 9 September, where they liberated the Zeeland Flanders' towns Axel, Terneuzen and Hulst and were offered a short rest. Only at the end of September, they crossed the Belgian border again for three days (27 to 30 September) to fight for the Flemish Campines' towns Rijkevorsel, Beerse, Merksplas and Baarle-Hertog (Anonymous, 1947, 137-142 and 215-216; Vos, de; Goddeeris, 2005a, 45; Iwanowski; Marchal; Merksplas Oorlogsboek 129-201; Skibiński; Stanczyk; Van Poucke, 1990; Verbeke and others).

Although the division passed through Flanders (Belgium) in merely a couple of days, it was not offered an easy parade march. In Thielt for instance, a fierce battle took place on the central market square in which several soldiers died. A generally accepted estimation states that in total about 400 division soldiers were killed in action, of which 257 found their final resting places in the Polish war cemetery of Lommel (Van Alphen; Van Poucke, 1990, 152-153). The division's loss of troops is large when compared to that of the more numerous American and British troops, but small when put against the losses suffered by the Canadian army (Goddeeris, 2005a, 45-46).

The battles apparently enthused civilians in Flemish cities and towns who welcomed the division soldiers as liberators (Pinet). Video footage shot at the time shows tank parades in the streets of Ghent, packed with rejoicing people (Verstockt). It is therefore not surprising that the division soldiers, who normally spent the nights in tents, were then commonly offered lodging at civilians' houses. It is similarly unremarkable that Belgians who had fought in the Ypres region during World War I were among the willing hosts. During the interviews I held with former division soldiers settled in Belgium, it became clear that many fathers-in-law had been soldiers in World War II who had offered accommodation to the division soldiers or encouraged them to meet their daughters.<sup>13</sup> Numerous division soldiers indeed fell in love with the Flemish young women they met not only during overnight stays in the houses of civilians, but also at liberation parties, through casual conversations in broken German or English on the streets and in the soldiers' encampments (Kajpus and Van Dam 45-50).<sup>14</sup> For some of them, and not only for the soldier who fathered a child to a Flemish woman in September 1944, these love affairs would have long-lasting consequences; they would settle in Belgium after World War II.<sup>15</sup>

In the autumn of 1944, having finished fighting in Moerdijk, among other towns, the division managed to occupy the Dutch region situated south of the river Maas. After wintering nearby in the city of Breda, the division moved north, reaching Germany on 12 April and Port Willemshaven on 5 May 1945 (Anonymous, 1947, 275-279 and 323-329). The division hoped to march on and liberate Poland, but in February 1945 the Yalta Conference had already

<sup>13</sup> See for instance P 8: Interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005 (59:60); P 16: Interview with Jacek on 6.12.2005 (41:46).

<sup>14</sup> See for instance P 6: Interview with Artur on 20.10.2005 (86:88); P 13: Interview with Waldek on 25.11.2005 (15:17).

<sup>15</sup> Nat. Dos. 23683.

consolidated the Soviet Union's influence over Poland. After the end of World War II, the division was set up as an occupying force in the region of Willemshaven for two years. During that period of time, its soldiers could easily come on holiday to Belgium (Kajpus and Van Dam 64).<sup>16</sup> It was not unusual that soldiers married their fiancées as early as in 1945 and 1946 while still holding their pre-war Polish passports and that the spouses stayed with their Belgian parents awaiting demobilisation. Interestingly, these women did not experience feelings of exclusion because of their mixed marriages in their local environments. Contrary to the commonly held view in research, the out-marriage of these women was not seen as problematic (Hondius 305-307; Rose 1148, 1175). As ex-combatants, the division soldiers had something in common with their fathers-in-law. It made the mixed marriages of division soldiers with local women acceptable and even desired (Pinet).<sup>17</sup>

The mixed marriages which the division soldiers contracted with Belgian citizens changed their legal position, since Belgium, like many other countries, applied derivative citizenship, letting the citizenship of the men determine the citizenship of all family members (Closset 93-94; Mak 104; Yuval-Davis 79; Augustine-Adams 21). The Belgian wives of division soldiers upon marriage initially received Polish citizenship, but then requested their Belgian citizenship back. Belgium had already in 1922 added an exception to the derivative citizenship legislation in force: it allowed brides to re-obtain their original citizenship and to renounce the newly gained citizenship in the first six months after the wedding. However, Belgian women marrying foreigners in general only made use of this addendum when their husbands were refugees without any citizenship (Closset 36). The fact that the wives of Polish citizens asked for their original citizenship back is, therefore, exceptional.

The Belgian spouses' preference not to permanently change their citizenship can easily be explained by the demobilisation problems the division experienced. In 1946, the British government decided to dissolve the First Polish Armoured Division and encouraged its soldiers to return to the Polish People's Republic. Only eight percent of them, however, accepted this offer as they feared prosecution by the Polish communist regime (Mieczkowski, 2003, 153 and 185-190). Although this fear was perhaps exaggerated, it was not unfounded. For instance, General Maczek's right hand man, General Franciszek Skibiński, was charged with espionage in 1951, and despite being vindicated during the Thaw in the late 1950s, he remained under strict control within the Polish army (Mieczkowski, 2003, 191-192). When the British government finally demobilised the First Polish Armoured Division in March 1947, it proposed the remaining soldiers to join the Polish Resettlement Corps set up under British command which offered training programs to prepare the soldiers for civilian life. However, signing up for the corps had a serious consequence. An old Polish decree stated that Polish soldiers who joined a foreign army would lose their citizenship. The British government made it clear to the soldiers that joining the corps was the only way to stay in the West, and that the International Refugee Organisation would exchange their invalid Polish passport for a Displaced Persons' status (Sword 372).

Belgian women who married division soldiers officially became Polish citizens before their husbands received Displaced Person's status. It is, however, understandable that even before this change they preferred their original citizenship to the uncertainty of Polish citizenship. The geopolitical situation on the eve of the Cold War created a situation in which the husbands with their Displaced Persons' status enjoyed fewer rights than their spouses, which

---

<sup>16</sup> Archive Secretary the Benelux Circle, file with members; P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006 (357:368).

<sup>17</sup> See for instance P 16: Interview with Jacek on 6.12.2005 (41:46).

is exactly the opposite idea of derivative citizenship. But the citizenship situation of the mixed couples also brought an advantage for division soldiers as it prevented them from being repatriated to the Polish People's Republic. Moreover, from the early 1950s onwards, the Belgian state could only expel a Displaced Person when he or she had found legal admission into a country other than his home country.<sup>18</sup> The fact that the division soldiers were married to Belgian citizens further complicated expulsion. In the case of a wife following her expelled husband, which the marriage contract obliged her to do, the Belgian state would be expelling its own citizens (Van Houtte, Civil Code, art. 214). The mixed marriage therefore granted division soldiers an advantage other immigrants in Belgium did not have.

Nevertheless, marriage did not guarantee division soldiers the right to stay in Belgium. Belgian migration policy stated that an immigrant man could receive a temporary work and residence permit only when a Belgian employer could provide employment for at least two years (Caestecker, 1992, 109). The criterion for staying was not his marriage, but his usefulness to the Belgian economy, which corresponds with the established idea of male economical responsibility for the family (Creighton 310). Theoretically, division soldiers could receive permission to stay in Belgium without being married, but in practice all the ones who could fulfil this criterion were married.

The division soldiers had spent their adolescent years in the army and most did not hold any qualifications, apart from their training as soldiers. Moreover, they did not speak Flemish and the modest demobilisation premium they received did not guarantee any financial independence.<sup>19</sup> To find a job, they relied on the family networks of their wives. Although the Belgian migration policy stimulated division soldiers to do so, research indicates that migrant men act similarly in other contexts of migration (Bertaux-Wiame 27). Most division soldiers were employed in the business of their family-in-law or their acquaintances. Wives were not allowed to employ their husbands in their private businesses and needed to transfer at least half of the assets to their husbands (Van Houtte, Civil Code art. 1388).<sup>20</sup> Despite the attempts of the law to make the wives legally dependent on their immigrant husbands, the economic responsibility of the men was in practice guaranteed by the family network of the women.

Some division soldiers, but not as many as in other countries of settlement, signed up for a training program at the Polish Resettlement Corps in Great Britain, planning to join their wives in Belgium afterwards (Zubrycki 655, 664).<sup>21</sup> The return to Belgium went less smoothly than they had expected.<sup>22</sup> Those who possessed a valid Belgian work permit before leaving for Great Britain could easily join their spouses, but those who did not were sent to the Belgian mines. Since the Belgian coal industry was highly profitable in the first years after the war and due to the shortage of labour supply, Belgian migration policy was directed towards employing migrants as miners (Caestecker, 1992, 67; van Wageningen and Żelichowski 11-13).<sup>23</sup> Consequently, Belgian wives, whose family network had not been able to provide their husbands with work permits, followed them to the mining regions.<sup>24</sup> In reality, it was the wives who enabled their husbands to function as family providers. The

---

<sup>18</sup> Article 32 and 33 of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted on 28 July 1951 by the United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons convened under General Assembly resolution 429 (V) of 14 December 1950.

<sup>19</sup> See for instance P 1: Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005 (86:96).

<sup>20</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, Alien file (further Alien file) 2099264.

<sup>21</sup> Alien files 2096475, 2194008 and 2293440.

<sup>22</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 432 and Alien file 2225180.

<sup>23</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 347, 12.3.1948.

<sup>24</sup> Alien file 2097894 and 2293440; P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006 (10:23).

women took this responsibility seriously because their own position was at stake. Also, a few immigrants who had worked in Belgium during the interwar period and had joined the First Polish Armoured Division settled in the mining regions.<sup>25</sup> After a few years, in the early 1950s, these miners enjoyed an important policy liberalisation. Following the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the Belgian government offered a permanent work and residence permit to all Displaced Persons who had already lived in Belgium for three years and allowed them to search for employment in labour sectors other than mining. As such, Displaced Persons were privileged in comparison to other immigrants (Caestecker, 1992, 32-33, 109).

In addition, there was a handful of unmarried division soldiers who came to Belgium to study thanks to stipends granted by the Centre des Hautes Etudes Polonaises en Belgique, an organisation set up in 1945 by the Polish ambassador Stefan Glaser and Kazimierz Drewnowski, a former professor (Goddeeris, 2005a, 54). This number of division soldiers from Poland should definitely not be overestimated, and almost all of whom left Belgium again after their studies, except for two who married Belgian women during their studies.<sup>26</sup>

Not only division soldiers, but also aviators from the Polish air force, airmen from the Allied air force and night watchers married Flemish young women and settled in Belgium. On 1 January 1945, aviators of the 131<sup>st</sup> wing of the Polish air force, under the command of the British Royal Air Force, brought down 19 German aircrafts in Saint-Denijs-Westrem close to Ghent. About 15 of these aviators later settled in the region (Goddeeris, 2005a, 53).<sup>27</sup> From 1944 onwards, in the Fort of Wommelgem close to Antwerp, 150 soldiers with pre-war Polish passports under British command offered maintenance service for Allied fighter planes, a few of whom stayed.<sup>28</sup> Lastly, about 10 former Polish citizens who had worked during World War II in Nazi Germany and after the liberation had operated as night guards for American military stores in the neighbourhood of Saint-Nicolas made the decision to stay.<sup>29</sup> In this dissertation, I only mention these airmen and night watchers as so far as they were in contact with division soldiers, since archival materials are very scarce and none were alive by the time I started this PhD project.

It is difficult to say how many former Allied soldiers from Poland settled in Belgium, since not a single statistic mentions them separately and their number fluctuated in the early postwar years. For sure, many of the division soldiers employed in the Belgian mines, all unmarried, moved back to their homeland within the first two years, by then the Polish People's Republic. Most of the division soldiers with a scholarship, and even a few mixed married couples, eventually migrated overseas (van Wageningen and Żelichowski 11-13).<sup>30</sup> I rely on the two estimates provided by the Presidents of two organisations of Allied soldiers from Poland: 200 and 370.<sup>31</sup> Two hundred seems rather low, since it is only slightly higher than the amount of Allied soldiers from Poland that were enrolled in immigrant organisations

<sup>25</sup> Archive Secretary the Benelux Circle, file members; P 18: Interview with Andrzej on 7.11.2005 (130:142).

<sup>26</sup> Goddeeris speaks of about 780 'Polish' students in the summer of 1945 and 595 in 1946, of which only a very limited number can have been former division soldiers (Goddeeris 57 and 59; P 1: Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005 (97:121); P 15: Interview with Adam on 2.12.2005 (27:33).

<sup>27</sup> *Wolne Słowo* 5/22 (12.1992) 7 and 11/43 (4.1998) 3,7; P 1: Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005 (246:256); P 5: Interview with Artur on 14.07.2005 (49) and on 22.10.2005 (60:61).

<sup>28</sup> *Tygodnik Polski* 14/38 (674) 4.10.1970 8; P 11: Interview with Damian on 13.02.2006 (60:70).

<sup>29</sup> P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006 (169:185).

<sup>30</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 347, 12.3.1948; P 1: Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2006 (149:153); P 9: Interview with Sławomir on 6.12.2005 (16:18).

<sup>31</sup> P 1: Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2006 (154:180); P 5: Interview with Artur on 14.07.2005 (12:14).

and oral sources made it clear that in the informal networks of interviewees, Allied soldiers from Poland who were not members of an organisation had been present. Three hundred and seventy is decidedly an overestimation, as the interviewee himself mentioned that this was a commonly cited number among Allied soldiers from Poland at the end of the 1940s, which is before migration overseas started happening and, more important, before a network of former Allied soldiers from Poland was formed where such information could be exchanged and discussed. There is also another source quoting a smaller number, but the author is less infiltrated in the former Allied soldiers from Poland's network.<sup>32</sup>

Although most Allied soldiers from Poland found a place to live in the liberated cities and Antwerp, some settled in other Belgian towns and cities. The highest concentration of Allied soldiers from Poland is found in the liberated cities in the East-Flanders province (including Ghent) and the Waasland region (including the city of Saint-Nicolas), which is unsurprising since some of the division's brigades were offered a short rest period here (Goddeeris, 2005a, 45). Even though the division did not liberate Antwerp, it became the habitat of Allied soldiers from Poland married to young woman from Antwerp who, afraid of the bombings, had sheltered in the East-Flanders countryside at the end of World War II.<sup>33</sup> In the Belgian mining regions, both Polish interwar immigrants who had signed up for the division and division soldiers subject to the Belgian miners' recruitment policy could be found. In addition, two division soldiers remained in their student city.<sup>34</sup> The extent to which former Allied soldiers from Poland became attached to a town is remarkable. From the twenty division soldiers still alive in 2005, eighteen still lived in the town or city where his wife had grown up and the two who had moved, had done so to the nearest bigger city because it offered more job opportunities.<sup>35</sup> Besides, in the bigger cities Antwerp and Ghent and the mining regions, Allied soldiers from Poland were the first and only foreigners in their close environment for several decades.

### **Arriving: Ostarbeiterinnen**

The second migration stream to Belgium consists of young women of mainly Ukrainian, but also Russian and Belarusian origin who were transported by the Nazis from the Soviet Union to the Third Reich for forced labour and found their way to Belgium after World War II: Ostarbeiterinnen (Venken and Goddeeris, 2005a, 98). I refer here to the way the Nazi regime defined Ostarbeiter and Ostarbeiterinnen: forced workers from the East, i.e. from within the borders of the Soviet territory as it existed until 17 September 1939. This differs from the Soviet understanding as Soviet repatriation officials broadened the concept directly after the end of World War II, making a distinction between Eastern Ostarbeiter(innen) and Western Ostarbeiter(innen), the latter coming from territories which the Soviet Union aspired to annex in the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact: the interwar independent Baltic states, and the territories nowadays often called Western Ukraine and Western Belarus (Adamushko, Bogdan and Gerasimov; Gerlach; Grinchenko, 2004; Polian, 2002, 92, 131). The Russian historian Pavel Polian puts the total number of Soviet citizens transported to the Third Reich at 6.44 million, of which 3.24 were Soviet prisoners of war and 3.2 were Ostarbeiter(innen) (Polian, 2002, 132, 135). The last category was largely made up of very young women: 2.5 million of whom in 1944, were around 20 years old (Ulrich, 1993, 168-171; Grinchenko, 2008c, 195-196).

---

<sup>32</sup> *Tygodnik Polski* 14/40 (676) 18.10.1970 7.

<sup>33</sup> P 4: Interview with Mariusz on 2.12.2005 (103:109).

<sup>34</sup> P 15: Interview with Adam on 2.12.2006 (26:42) and (105:109).

<sup>35</sup> P 9: Interview with Slawomir on 6.12.2005 (138:140); P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006 (24:29).

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, Nazis brought Soviet prisoners of war - almost exclusively men - to the Third Reich for captivity and forced labour (Grinchenko, 2008c, 194-196). Only from February 1942 onwards, they invited Soviet civilians for foreign labour opportunities in the Third Reich on a voluntary basis, nevertheless changing that policy over the summer of 1942 into numerous mass deportations (Polian, 2002, 93; Ulrich, 1986, 154-158, 165). In particular, young women born between 1920 and 1926 were conscripted or simply taken away from their families, put on cattle-trucks with hardly any food or sanitary facilities and transported to the Third Reich (Ulrich, 1986, 161-162). Once there, they received a placard inscribed with the word 'Ost', which, similar to Jews, they had to wear at all times. They were then dispersed around various factories and farms all over the Reich (Polian, 2002, 235). In industrial areas, Ostarbeiter(innen) lived in barracks situated in isolated territories surrounded with barbed wire which initially they were only allowed to leave under guidance to go to work (Ulrich, 1986, 163). Others were quartered on farms, where working and living conditions varied greatly depending on the housekeeper (Grossmann).

Nazi law conceived Ostarbeiter(innen) as Untermenschen and placed them on almost the bottom rung of the racial ladder, allowing them to precede only the Jews, Roma, Sinti and homosexuals (Polian, 2002, 104). Not only were Ostarbeiterinnen compelled to perform labour-intensive work, they also received limited amounts of food - in October 1942 for instance the official diet contained 2,283 to 2,673 calories a day, but in reality this constituted a bowl of soup, 300 grams of bread, and a small amount of butter and tea. They had almost no access to health service and were discriminated against verbally (Polian, 2002, 250; Ulrich, 1986, 161, 163, 171). Throughout the war their treatment ran in direct contrast to the Nazi situation on the front; the better the situation Nazis were in, the worse treatment Ostarbeiterinnen received, and vice versa. After the defeat of Stalingrad, the pressure for military production became acute and in order to make Ostarbeiterinnen perform better, they received greater support (Ulrich, 1993, 175). All the time, however, Ostarbeiterinnen were strictly separated from Germans, from Westarbeiter, Western European voluntary workers or labour conscripts who received better treatment, and from prisoners of war (Ulrich, 1986, 286-287).<sup>36</sup> A police order from August 1942 prescribed that everything which could enhance feelings of solidarity among Ostarbeiterinnen and people of other countries, should be prohibited (Ulrich, 1986, 177).

In reality however, Ostarbeiterinnen and German or Western European men established several contacts among themselves (Frankenberger). In the past two years, oral history projects have succeeded in unravelling how some, but not all, through small gestures tried to make the lives of Ostarbeiterinnen more bearable: German colleagues secretly passed on food during work, Western labourers threw bars of soap over the barbed wire and so on (Grinchenko, 2004, 94; Hoffmann; Ostrovskaja and Shcherbakova 82; Polian, 2002, 309; Shilova 111). About the amount and impact of such called 'interracial' sexual contacts, relationships and fraternalization, we still know very little (Ulrich, 2001, 24). For sure, the Nazi regime wanted to keep the German blood clean from all alien influences and therefore made sexual intercourse with Germans punishable by death (Ulrich, 1986, 247). However, reports show how already in the spring of 1943, so many pregnancies among Ostarbeiterinnen were reported that in Nazi circles it was considered a scandal (Ulrich, 1986, 248). Consequently, a decree was issued that allowed Ostarbeiterinnen to undergo abortion,

---

<sup>36</sup> The Ministry of Public Health estimated shortly after the liberation that 234,000 Belgians were in Nazi Germany, of whom 17,915 were concentration camp survivors, 62,039 were prisoners of war, 79,000 labour conscripts, 10,535 arrested evaders of labour conscription and 54,141 voluntary workers (Lagrou, 2000, 86).

sterilisation programs were launched, several clinics for pregnant Ostarbeiterinnen were set up, and, later, children's homes were opened where these 'bad-race' Ostarbeiter children lived separated from their parents (Polian, 2002, 306; Ulrich, 1986, 248). Micro-level studies indicate that abortion was not always procured with the permission of the pregnant mother and especially in the last phase of World War II, the murder of pregnant Ostarbeiterinnen and their children became common practice in the Third Reich (Bock; Reiter; Schwarze; Ulrich, 1986, 355; Vögel; Zegenhagen).

The overall mortality rate of Ostarbeiterinnen remains difficult to estimate, since statistics only exist for 1943 in which the deaths of 14,522 Ostarbeiter(innen) were officially registered. The Russian historian Pavel Polian argues that not only this number is an underestimation (for instance because deaths in Ostarbeiterinnen clinics are not included), but also that the amount of deaths in 1942 and 1944-45 must have been even higher because of the severe treatment Ostarbeiterinnen experienced in the first months upon arrival and the bombings at the end of World War II (Polian, 2002, 257-258). But even without accurate mortality rates, it is clear that Ostarbeiterinnen experienced twofold discrimination, not only because of their race, but also because of their sex (Ulrich, 1986, 355).

Discrimination did not end once World War II was over, since Stalin had already in 1941 issued a decree that all Soviet citizens who worked for the Nazis would be considered collaborators and would be prosecuted after repatriation (Stelzl-Marx, 2003, 44). Shortly before the liberation, in the spring of 1945, a special organ 'F' under the supervision of General Sudoplatov was set up within the NKVD (Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del or the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the leading secret police organisation of the Soviet Union) that would deal with the control and filtration of repatriates (Polian, 2002, 359). The Soviet citizens who were liberated by Soviet troops in May 1945 could immediately be investigated and repatriated, the ones who happened to be located in the British, American or French occupation zones, first had to be passed on following the Yalta Treaty of February 1945 that stipulated all Soviet citizens who found themselves outside the borders of the Soviet Union due to war circumstances were Displaced Persons and had to be repatriated (Davies 558-559; Polian, 2001, 194-195). The high number of repatriations - official Soviet sources speak about more than 5.3 million Soviet citizens in March 1946 - does not illumine the unwillingness of many Soviet citizens to move back and the difficulties 'F' faced in persuading or even catching them (Polian, 2002, 447). Although it is certain that directly after liberation repatriates were largely naive about what would happen once back at home, many tried to escape repatriation by running away, taking on another name, or marrying a foreigner (Polian, 2002, 439; Ostrovskaia and Shcherbakova 83).

In January 1945, the first Ostarbeiterinnen arrived in Belgium with Belgian partners whom they had met in the Third Reich and decided to follow and to live with, as Ostarbeiterinnen did in other Western European countries such as France and the Netherlands.<sup>37</sup> Later, Ostarbeiterinnen with or without Belgian partners joined the convoys organised by the Belgian Committee for Repatriation to bring Belgian workers back from Germany.<sup>38</sup> Upon arrival, the women and men were interrogated. Only the women who could show a German marriage certificate and whose husband was not suspected of collaboration, could join their husbands. Thanks to their married status, they acquired Belgian citizenship.

---

<sup>37</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 373, 28.5.1945.

<sup>38</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 813, 'Rapport sur l'activité du Commissariat Belge au Rapatriement: 8 octobre 1944 - 25 juillet 1945'.

The unmarried women were put in a repatriation centre. Following the Yalta Treaty, the Belgian government informed the Military Soviet Mission in Belgium about the women and selected possible candidates for repatriation. The American Allied forces in Belgium were authorised to effectuate the repatriations (Luyckx 100-101). Similar set-ups existed in the Netherlands and France (Coudry, 1995a, 116-118; Postma 331).

A Belgian partner could only collect his fiancée from a repatriation centre providing he had a temporary residence permit for her. He could obtain this from his municipal administration if he declared that he could support her financially (Luyckx 153-154). This placed the girlfriends in a very dependent position. Only with a residence permit could an Ostarbeiterin marry. It was assumed that she would be safe from repatriation due to her new Belgian citizenship status following the mixed marriage.<sup>39</sup>

Soviet citizenship law however was not based on the concept of derivative citizenship. The Soviet Union proclaimed the equality of men and women and did not allow a mixed marriage to make a Soviet woman dependent on her husband with regard to citizenship. The Soviet system simply forbade all mixed marriages and hence did not recognise the citizenship change of Ostarbeiterinnen married to Belgians. According to Soviet citizenship law, these women remained Soviet citizens and were not even considered to have been married. Nor could they renounce their initial citizenship (Ginsburgs 52). Women born in the Soviet Union were lifelong Soviet citizens, and foreign husbands could never receive that same citizenship. Although international law stated that in cases of dual citizenship a Belgian in Belgium had to be seen as a Belgian, the Soviet authorities did not accept this, as they had never joined the Den Haag Convention of 1930 which previously resolved internationally contradictory citizenship laws.<sup>40</sup> The Military Soviet Mission therefore demanded the repatriation of all Ostarbeiterinnen from Belgium.

As Ostarbeiterinnen could not renounce their Soviet citizenship, they feared repatriation unless their presence in Belgium was safeguarded by the Belgian state. In June 1945, Belgian authorities reported to the Soviet Mission that they were willing to pass on the names of Ostarbeiterinnen-fiancées. However, they required a guarantee against repatriation in the first place for married women, but also for women who were at least five-months pregnant, women whose children were under eighteen months or were in a poor state of health.<sup>41</sup> The main criterion for a woman to stay was a mixed marriage. The exception criteria could have been motivated by humanitarian, but also by national reasons. Women who had given birth to Belgian citizens or were going to, could stay. Seemingly, they had proven their usefulness with regard to the reproduction of the Belgian nation (Yuval-Davis 26-38).

The Belgian approach offered more opportunities to Ostarbeiterinnen to stay than the Dutch one, which might have resulted from the fact that the country had been liberated earlier, its administration restored earlier and could therefore react more quickly (Postma 321). In the Netherlands, all mixed marriages contracted in Germany after May 1940 were simply declared invalid, but in August 1945 this measure was again annulled (Postma 176). However, the impact of the Belgian state's liberal attitude should not be overestimated. Other

<sup>39</sup> See for instance P 24: Interview with Kelly on 7.02.2006 (15:18).

<sup>40</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 1040, 11.4.1949.

<sup>41</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 373, 13.6.1945 and 21.6.1945; Archive Studie- en Documentatiecentrum Oorlog en Hedendaagse Maatschappij (Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society - further SOMA), Archive of the Commissioner's Office for Repatriation, AA 690 20 (2), 21.6.1945.

migrant women in Belgium had the possibility of staying on Belgian territory independently, for example as domestic servants, whereas the Cold War context shut this door to Ostarbeiterinnen (Caestecker, 2000, 232, 237).

It is not known how many names the Belgian government sent to the Military Soviet Mission for repatriation (Luyckx 155). In the Archive of the Aliens Police, I found one list with the names of one hundred Ostarbeiterinnen.<sup>42</sup> I analysed the profiles of the women and discovered who the Belgian state allowed to stay, to whom it closed its borders and how Ostarbeiterinnen dealt with these decisions.

Among the one hundred women, I found fifty-five ‘winners’. They were able to stay in Belgium because they married shortly after their names had been passed on to the Military Soviet Mission. Notably, seven of them did not marry the man they met in Germany, but a partner they met in Belgium through, according to the Aliens Police, debauchery and prostitution.<sup>43</sup> The number of women who left no path untrodden to find a husband was small, but their behaviour influenced the public perception of Ostarbeiterinnen. They were called war whores and prostitutes.<sup>44</sup> Leslie Page Moch already indicated that also in other contexts, and especially war contexts, migrant women were portrayed as sexually available (Rose 1148, 1175).

Besides the winners, I also found thirty-six ‘losers’. No marriage automatically meant repatriation. Fifteen of them arrived with a Belgian partner, but he could not obtain a residence permit for his girlfriend or no longer wanted to share his life with her. Among this group, twenty-one had no chance of staying because they had migrated independently to Belgium. Besides the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, there were nine women whose fate was unknown. The case study shows that not all Ostarbeiterinnen arrived in Belgium with a partner, but that in order to stay, they needed a Belgian man who was willing to marry them.

Eight women on the list were pregnant and eight had already given birth to a child in Germany. Although the Belgian state made it possible for all Ostarbeiterinnen mothers to stay, only the married ones did.<sup>45</sup> For example, there was a woman who arrived in Belgium with her baby. Her partner was already married to a Belgian woman and started divorce proceedings. The former Ostarbeiterin placed her baby with a carer and, in order to support herself, went to live with a family as a domestic servant. In the end, she did not marry and opted for voluntary repatriation. She had the right to stay, but maybe the lack of a supportive family network or simply homesickness made her stay less desirable.<sup>46</sup>

In July 1945 the American Allied forces in Belgium, the Netherlands and France transferred their repatriation authority to the Military Soviet Mission, but stressed the implementation of orders had to be supervised by the local authorities (Coudry, 1995b, 131-132; Luyckx 106; Postma 224). The Belgian state agreed that only unmarried Ostarbeiterinnen could be sent to repatriation centres, but soon, the rumour circulated that a Russian captain had used the excuse of registering married Ostarbeiterinnen at the Soviet Mission as a pretext to forcibly

<sup>42</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 373, the list of 15.6.1945 contains 231 names. Most were Soviet Prisoners of War.

<sup>43</sup> Alien files 2025069, 2028168 and 2029566.

<sup>44</sup> *Gazet van Antwerpen* 11.9.1945 1 ‘Een zeer actueel vraagstuk. Duizenden Oekraïnsche Meisjes kwamen naar België Duizenden Katholieke jongens willen met hen trouwen’; P 27: Interview with Peggy on 10.11.2006 (206:210) and (226:234).

<sup>45</sup> Alien file 2029103.

<sup>46</sup> Alien file 2072135.

take them away to repatriation centres (Harms 18-20; Luyckx 162-163; Postma 329). These centres turned into mini Soviet islands which only in theory stood under Belgian supervision. Belgian authorities expressed their disapproval, but the Military Soviet Mission did not change its policy. The heavy-handed action of the Soviets motivated the Belgian authorities to protect engaged Ostarbeiterinnen against repatriation by letting them sign a declaration of intent to marry at the end of the summer in 1945 - French and Dutch authorities undertook similar actions (Coudry, 1995b, 131-132; Postma 331).<sup>47</sup> This was a brave move, since diplomatic relations had to be maintained in order to ensure the safe return of Belgian Prisoners of War from the Soviet Union (Luyckx 170).

Fighting the conduct of the Military Soviet Mission only became possible when the persistent international protest of Soviet citizens was given a hearing by the United States. In autumn 1945, they decided that repatriation could only take place when Soviet citizens voluntarily agreed to it. Belgium followed this lead at the end of 1945 - a month later than the Netherlands, but one earlier than France (Postma 332).

The switch to voluntary repatriation did not solve all problems. Due to the different legal positions of Ostarbeiterinnen and their husbands, the couples could be torn apart. The husbands could not leave with their wives, since the Soviet Union did not recognise mixed marriages and refused the husbands entry. When Ostarbeiterinnen wanted to return independently, the Soviet Embassy asked them to renounce their Belgian citizenship, which they, according to the Belgian law, could only do with the approval of their husbands. Most husbands refused their wives (and children) permission to leave. However, a refusal did not make a departure impossible. The Soviet Embassy offered the Ostarbeiterinnen assistance to escape from Belgian territory. When an Ostarbeiterin simply showed her Soviet passport at the border, nobody would suspect she was also Belgian.<sup>48</sup> This situation was later resolved in a pragmatic way. When in 1949 a Belgian became the director of a repatriation centre, he simply refused the further internment of Belgian citizens.<sup>49</sup>

Due to the undocumented migration of many Ostarbeiterinnen settling in Belgium, it is impossible to give their exact amount. A study on Ukrainian migrants in Belgium estimates there were 2,500, but the author told me he was only in contact with very few former Ostarbeiterinnen and did not know anything about their settlement (Kohut, 214).<sup>50</sup> A more recent interview-based study on former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium spoke about 5,000 women.<sup>51</sup> The former Ostarbeiterinnen I spoke to mostly estimated their number in Belgium at around 3,500 to 4,000.<sup>52</sup>

In order to understand more fully the consequences the Soviet and Belgian policies had on the lives of marrying Ostarbeiterinnen and on the profile of married couples, I made a case-study of the city of Antwerp.<sup>53</sup> The Ostarbeiterinnen were more numerous than the former Allied soldiers from Poland and were scattered all over Belgium, depending on the pre-war living place of their Belgian husbands. Moreover, contrary to the former soldiers, Ostarbeiterinnen did not hold membership lists of their immigrant organisations. I therefore consulted the

---

<sup>47</sup> Archive SOMA, Archive of the Commissioner's Office for Repatriation, AA 105, 27.8.1945.

<sup>48</sup> Alien files 2027856 and 2028415.

<sup>49</sup> Archive of the Belgian Aliens Police, file 1040, 13.4.1949.

<sup>50</sup> P 35: Interview with Mykola Kohut on 15.09.2005 (15:19).

<sup>51</sup> *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 10.

<sup>52</sup> See for instance P 28: Interview with Elly on 2.01.2007 (60:65).

<sup>53</sup> Eight of the nine contemporary city districts in Antwerp (excluding Wilrijk).

marriage register of the city of Antwerp, where I discovered the names of seventy-nine Russian, Ukrainian or Belarusian girls and young women who married Belgians in 1945. Only sixty-five individual files could be found in the Archive of the Aliens Police. Since the Ostarbeiterinnen became Belgians after marriage, the data in the files are limited to forms of arrival and later possibly departure from the Belgian territory; derivative citizenship in Belgium made their settlement process invisible in government archives.

Although Belgian policy had rapidly liberalised during 1945, in particular taking a softer approach towards Ostarbeiterinnen, this did not directly influence their decision to stay or leave, and the number of marriages involving Ostarbeiterinnen in Antwerp each month in 1945 remained stable (from May to October 1945). The influence of the Belgian policy is visible from September 1945 onwards in the usage of declarations of intent to marry. Also, the number of children that were acknowledged and pregnancies registered during the marriage ceremony was high.<sup>54</sup> This indicates that the Belgian exception criteria, allowing pregnant women, women with a baby and sick women to stay, did play a role. One could think that couples with children born during World War II were already determined to marry when they were still in Germany and were not helped by the Belgian protection measures, but this was not what the case-study showed. Among the seven couples who married in Germany, there was only one which already had a child.<sup>55</sup> The case-study made it clear that the Belgian measure gave young couples some time to marry and hence protected Ostarbeiterinnen from being placed in a repatriation centre. Once an Ostarbeiterin arrived at a centre, there was no way back.<sup>56</sup> The women must have known this very well, since the ones who were called up preferred to go into hiding.<sup>57</sup>

I also checked the profile of the Antwerp husbands of Ostarbeiterinnen in the Archive of the Belgian Service for War Victims, which contains personal files of most Belgians who worked in Germany and offers information on whether they applied for recognition as a labour conscript, prisoner of war or a 'werkweigeraar' (a person who refuses to carry out a job) after World War II, recognition of which involved some financial compensation.<sup>58</sup> The files show that out of the 79 husbands, 32 went to work in the Third Reich voluntarily: 16 were employed before conscription was launched in Belgium in October 1942 and they did or could not offer proof of penal servitude, six applications for recognition of being a labour conscript or 'werkweigeraar' were not complied with by court, nine husbands were known by the Service for War Victims as 'Ruckkehrer', a privilege attributed by the Nazis to voluntary workers, and one withdrew his application for recognition to labour conscript. Probably 18 were labour conscripts - eight were granted the status of labour conscript and ten left for Nazi Germany after October 1942. Three of them signed a paper stating that they had voluntarily signed up for work in the Third Reich, but they might have been forced to do so. I did not find any information for the remaining 29 husbands.

Interestingly, the penalties for voluntary worker-husbands after World War II sometimes influenced the citizenship status of the husbands, but never their Ostarbeiterinnen-wives.

---

<sup>54</sup> During the seventy-nine marriage ceremonies, eight children born in Germany were acknowledged, like during marriage 1740 on 23 September 1945 in Antwerp and marriage 259 on 2 September 1945 in Deurne (district Antwerp).

<sup>55</sup> Marriage 138 on 14 May 1945 in Antwerp.

<sup>56</sup> With exceptions of the husbands in marriage 1562 on 9 September 1945 in Antwerp and marriage 323 on 21 October 1945 in Berchem (district Antwerp).

<sup>57</sup> The woman from marriage 280 on 4 October 1945 in Borgerhout (Antwerp).

<sup>58</sup> The Belgian Federal Governmental Service Social Security, Archive Directory-General War Victims (Archief Federale Overheidsdienst Sociale Zekerheid, Archief Directie-generaal Oorlogsslachtoffers, individual files).

Upon arrival, the Belgian authorities tried to prevent mixed marriages between Ostarbeiterinnen and men suspected of collaboration, but they did not invalidate the marriages of later-convicted men. For instance, the list in the archive of the Aliens Police included two women whose husbands had been convicted of collaboration and lost Belgian citizenship, but that did not harm the legal status of their marriages nor the citizenship status of their wives.<sup>59</sup> This was also the case for Ostarbeiterinnen whose husbands had worked voluntarily in Germany and temporarily lost their civil rights as a punishment (Huyse 25-28).<sup>60</sup>

What happened when repatriates, Soviet prisoners of war and Ostarbeiter(innen) arrived in the Soviet Union? The Russian historian Pavel Polian interpreted Soviet statistics from 1946, and concluded that 58 percent of repatriates were sent home, about 19 percent enrolled in the Red Army, about 14 percent were taken to work battalions under the supervision of the National Commissar of Defence (including GULAG-camps), and about 9 percent of repatriates were put under further investigation of the NKVD or were assigned to conduct work supporting the Soviet army (Polian, 2002, 529-530). Some received amnesty during the Khrushchëv era (Figs 613-618; Polian, 2002, 577). The people who went home, however, experienced difficulties. The case study by the historian Jens Biller about the repatriation of Soviet citizens (including Ostarbeiterinnen) from the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen highlighted differences both for men and women, and for urban and rural areas. Women could more often return home than men, but they faced denigratory sexual stereotyping in their daily lives (Biller 214, 217). In rural areas, repatriates returned to a community of people who had experienced Nazi occupation and had known the repatriates before they left, whereas in anonymous big cities, inhabitants had more often been evacuated during World War II and therefore had ideas about occupation and collaborationism that came closer to the propaganda tropes of the official Soviet narrative on war memory (Biller 214). All repatriates were confronted with limited job opportunities, but it affected those settling in the cities more than those returning to the countryside, because job and career opportunities were more limited in the latter (Biller 222; Herbert 150). Far less is known about the way people dealt with physical and psychological harm, such as the impossibility to become pregnant because of sterilisation, and the fear to articulate war experiences in public (Ostrovskaja and Shcherbakova 80-81).

In sum, the criteria which Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen had to fulfil to stay in Belgium were different. Allied soldiers from Poland had to prove they were useful for the Belgian economy, Ostarbeiterinnen that they had married Belgian citizens or given birth to a child that had Belgian citizenship. In contrast to the Allied soldiers from Poland, Ostarbeiterinnen were granted Belgian citizenship when they married. This might seem advantageous, but it also meant they were dependent on their partners firstly because their consent was the criterion to stay and secondly because of the very nature of the marriage contract. In practice, the Allied soldiers from Poland were dependent on the family networks of their spouses to stay, but the marriage contract did not place them in a subordinate position.

The citizenship change did not enable the Ostarbeiterinnen to relinquish their Soviet citizenship, even if they wanted to. In fact, the contradictions between the concept of derivative citizenship and the Soviet equality system on the one hand and the importance of good diplomatic relations on the eve of the Cold War on the other hand, meant that even on its own territory the Belgian state could not always protect (even married) Ostarbeiterinnen

---

<sup>59</sup> Alien files 2029624 and 2029890; Archive SOMA, 'Index of the Belgian Law Gazette on Judgements of Processes against Belgians who Collaborated with the German Occupier during World War II'.

<sup>60</sup> P 29: Interview with Cindy on 6.02.2006 (512:530).

against repatriation. The Allied soldiers from Poland, who had lost their original citizenship and did not have Belgian citizenship, but only a Displaced Persons' status, did not have to fear repatriation. There is yet another difference between the Allied soldiers from Poland and the Ostarbeiterinnen. Although the Allied soldiers from Poland did not have Belgian citizenship, they felt accepted in their environment, whereas the Belgian Ostarbeiterinnen experienced categorisation as war whores and prostitutes. Despite the fact that Ostarbeiterinnen received Belgian citizenship, the consequences of intermarriage for them, as opposed to the Allied soldiers from Poland, were not necessarily more favourable. When paying attention to gendered citizenship, the dual nature of citizenship and the geopolitical context they lived in, one sees that intermarriages shaped different opportunities and restrictions that were mostly less advantageous for Ostarbeiterinnen than for Allied soldiers from Poland. In what follows, I explore whether the same mechanisms also played a role during their settlement process.

### **Settling: Former Allied soldiers from Poland**

In due course, all former Allied soldiers from Poland exchanged their Displaced Persons' status for Belgian citizenship. An analysis of their naturalisations reveals with which criteria they had to comply in order to become part of the Belgian nation and how they dealt with these requirements.

A former Allied soldier from Poland was only qualified for naturalisation when he had lived in Belgium for at least five years.<sup>61</sup> This was a common requirement for all people who wanted to acquire citizenship through naturalisation. The naturalisation procedure took two to three years for all Allied soldiers from Poland. The naturalisation pattern of the fifty-two dossiers I consulted shows a normal distribution in which the first naturalisations were assigned in 1954 with the most recent one in 1984. The top of the curve occurred from 1958 to 1963. These five years contain half of the naturalisations.

At first individual former Allied soldiers from Poland applied for naturalisation, but in 1957 the Belgian Patriotic Committee of the liberated city Saint Nicolas, a Belgian patriotic organisation, sent in a group application for twenty former division soldiers.<sup>62</sup> Their involvement showed that, apparently, for many former Allied soldiers from Poland applying individually was too difficult. Following the group application, former Allied soldiers from Poland from the region of Saint Nicolas applied individually. They probably received support from their compatriots who had already gone through the procedure. From the mid-1960s onwards the number of applications declined, but requests now came from all over Flanders.

In the fifty-two dossiers I found no former Allied soldier from Poland who experienced special difficulties in receiving Belgian citizenship. Naturalisation was only postponed in two cases, but not rejected, because the applicants had committed serious crimes.<sup>63</sup> During the procedure the economic and financial situation of the former Allied soldier from Poland was checked, but the criteria to allow naturalisation were apparently not difficult to attain. A dubious wage estimate made by a father-in-law who employed a former division soldier, but had never paid him, was admitted.<sup>64</sup> A few former Allied soldiers from Poland were exempted

---

<sup>61</sup> *Belgian Monitor* 17.12.1932.

<sup>62</sup> Nat. dos. 25186.

<sup>63</sup> Nat. dos. 26719 and 25186.

<sup>64</sup> Nat. dos. 23401.

from registration costs because their salary was too modest.<sup>65</sup> One former division soldier even gave up his pseudonym when he applied. The man had deserted from the German army and had joined the First Polish Armoured Division under a false name. He had lied about his real identity when he received a Displaced Person's Card, but with the prospect of a Belgian citizenship he must have felt safe enough to reveal the truth.

An exemption from registration costs could also be granted when one had made oneself useful towards the Belgian nation. That privilege was awarded to ethnic Germans, brought up in Poland, who had first served in the German army, but later deserted. Having fled to Belgium, they were active in the Belgian resistance movement until they joined the passing First Polish Armoured Division.<sup>66</sup> From the interviews I learned former division soldiers nowadays do not consider their involvement in the resistance important.<sup>67</sup> However Belgians did, since they had hardly fought on Belgian territory and the resistance movement was therefore the only source of collective national pride (Lagrou, 2000, 5).

Thanks to the group application from the Belgian Patriotic Committee, in 1960 the participation of the First Polish Armoured Division in the liberation of Flanders became an argument to apply for exemption from registration costs.<sup>68</sup> However, former membership of the Division did not automatically equate with useful service to the Belgian nation. The authorities meticulously checked what a former division soldier had done during the liberation. For example, those who had been assigned to the reserve troops were not granted exemption.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, one 'ethnic German-Polish' former soldier had to pay registration costs. The man had deserted the German army in Northern Africa and so, in contrast to other 'ethnic German' former soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division, had not participated in the Belgian resistance movement before assisting in the liberation of Flanders. His dossier did not explicitly mention why the man was not exempted from registration costs, but since exemptions on the basis of a modest salary were always justified and naturalisation officials in those years got down to the bottom of former Allied soldiers from Poland's war activities, one may assume that his enrolment in the German army formed an obstacle, while it did not for his colleagues with a short Belgian resistance movement history.<sup>70</sup> The Belgian lawyer Michel Verwilghen had already denounced the subjective judgments in naturalisation dossiers in the 1960s (Verwilghen 178). When in the mid-1960s the number of applications diminished, the war activities of the former division soldiers were no longer checked. Every soldier who had been assigned to the First Polish Armoured Division was exempted from registration costs. The focus on registration costs during the naturalisation procedure of former division soldiers showed the importance of military value to the Belgian nation. By granting exemption, the Belgian state recognised the former division soldiers had done their duty and therefore enjoyed the privilege of becoming Belgians for free.

When I analysed the reasons why former Allied soldiers from Poland applied for Belgian citizenship, I found different results in the application forms and the interviews. In the applications, former Allied soldiers from Poland mentioned they wanted to enjoy the same rights as Belgian citizens, who could, for example, work without having to pay for an

---

<sup>65</sup> Nat. dos. 22221 and 25175.

<sup>66</sup> Nat. dos. 24464 and 23495.

<sup>67</sup> Nat. dos. 23495 and 25552; See for instance P 8: Interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005 (40:42).

<sup>68</sup> Nat. dos. 25552, 25827, 26475 and 29103.

<sup>69</sup> Nat. dos. 27455 and 27974.

<sup>70</sup> Nat. dos. 27883.

expensive work permit or could receive subsidies for the structural alterations of their old houses.<sup>71</sup> The interviews revealed two other reasons.

The first reason I found when I asked the interviewees (all former division soldiers): ‘When did you travel to Poland for the first time?’ It was most automatically answered with the question: ‘When did I become Belgian?’ The interviewees said they needed the Belgian citizenship to make a trip to Poland possible.<sup>72</sup> Was this the real reason to become Belgian? Was it something they did not want to mention on their application forms for naturalisation during the Cold War? Or do former division soldiers nowadays use the argument that it was dangerous to go to Poland so as to romanticise their citizenship change, while their real reasons at the time they applied were more pragmatic? Interviewees had heard persistent rumours about the fate of repatriated division soldiers. They said they only dared to visit the Polish People’s Republic when they were sure their Belgian citizenship would offer them protection while on Polish territory.<sup>73</sup> Displaced Persons were not allowed to visit their homeland. If they did, they lost their privileged status.<sup>74</sup>

I found evidence that the testimonies of former division soldiers are not all romanticism. When I compared their naturalisation data with membership rolls of immigrant organisations, I realised that Belgian citizenship offered former division soldiers protection not only in Poland, but also on Belgian territory. There is no difference in the naturalisation data of members from anti-communist organisations and organisations that were in contact with the communist Polish Consulate in Belgium, but those former division soldiers who became active in communist organisations only did so after they had received Belgian citizenship. Contrary to what the communist Polish Consulate pretended, it mainly cooperated with Belgians.<sup>75</sup>

A second reason to become a Belgian citizen, revealed during the interviews, was to make a career in the Belgian army possible for their sons. Children automatically received Belgian citizenship when the father was naturalised. They could also apply independently for naturalisation when they were sixteen, but interviewees did not know this.<sup>76</sup> One former division soldier indicated he had applied for naturalisation after visiting an air show of the Belgian air force with his son because he wanted to enable his son to apply for a job in the army.<sup>77</sup> He considered it important that when one became a citizen, one was willing to do one’s duty for the nation.

After the naturalisation procedure, former Allied soldiers from Poland could vote in local, but not in national elections and they were not allowed to run for political office. Until 1984, Belgium had two naturalisation procedures. Most immigrants, including the former Allied soldiers from Poland, opted for the cheapest, the ‘common’ naturalisation. If they wanted to have the same political rights as Belgian citizens, they had to apply for the more expensive and less common ‘state’ naturalisation (Closset 308). Former Allied soldiers from Poland only started to do so in anticipation of the first European direct election in 1979 because they

---

<sup>71</sup> Nat. dos. 22307 and 25552.

<sup>72</sup> See for instance: P 16: Interview with Jacek on 6.12.2005 (178:182).

<sup>73</sup> See for instance P 14: Interview with Rafał on 6.12.2005 (28:36).

<sup>74</sup> Nat. dos. 35551 and 31688.

<sup>75</sup> See for instance Archive of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych - further MSZ), Consular Department (Departament Konsularny - further DK), file 13/73 ‘Raport konsularny za 1969r.’

<sup>76</sup> *Belgian Monitor* 17.12.1932.

<sup>77</sup> P 1: Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2006 (80:90).

wanted European voting rights.<sup>78</sup> A Belgian law of 1976 had already granted these rights to people who had become Belgian through the common naturalisation procedure, but the interviewees did not know this.<sup>79</sup> The citizenship law of 1984 erased the differences between a common and a state naturalisation and granted all individuals the same political rights as people who were Belgians by birth.<sup>80</sup>

For former Allied soldiers from Poland, the criteria to stay in Belgium were not the same as they were to receive Belgian citizenship. Becoming a Belgian seemed not to have been a problem for former Allied soldiers from Poland and acquisition was postponed on the basis of law infringement and not due to a lack of economic usefulness. Unlike the Ostarbeiterinnen, whose marriages to Belgians enabled them to stay in Belgium and receive Belgian citizenship, former Allied soldiers from Poland were allowed to stay due to their economic usefulness. Marriage also played no part for former Allied soldiers from Poland in obtaining citizenship. Each case was judged according to a set criteria for naturalisation (e.g. living in the country for five years).

But whereas former Allied soldiers from Poland upon arrival used their Belgian family networks to guarantee their usefulness and were in practice dependent on their spouses, they could now fulfil the criteria independently. The focus during the naturalisation procedure was on the exemption from registration costs for military value to the Belgian nation. Some former division soldiers made a link between citizenship and national defence when they spoke about their sons' military services. For most, however, the reasons to become a Belgian citizen were more practical. On their applications they wrote they wanted to increase their rights, but in interviews they mentioned they wanted to visit Poland.

### **Settling: Former Ostarbeiterinnen**

The citizenship status of some former Ostarbeiterinnen and their husbands changed during their settlement process because they returned to the Soviet Union. I present what choices former Ostarbeiterinnen and their husbands made in deciding where to live and what consequences these choices had during the Cold War. The repatriation of former Ostarbeiterinnen stopped when relations between East and West were frozen at the peak of Stalinism in 1950. Five years later, a Soviet decree permitted Soviet citizens who had emigrated to come on holiday (Ginsburgs 63). The cultural agreement of 1956 between Belgium and the USSR made this possible for Belgian former Ostarbeiterinnen (Van den Wijngaert and Beullens 22).

Former Ostarbeiterinnen retained Belgian citizenship when they visited their families, but lost it when they wanted to settle in the Soviet Union. At the end of the 1940s, they could leave if their husbands gave permission and if they gave up their Belgian citizenship. If their husbands refused, they could leave after a divorce. The case study showed that in Antwerp ten out of seventy-nine couples divorced during the settlement process, and half of them did so in the mid-1950s. The majority of the approximately forty women who left Belgium in these years were divorced.<sup>81</sup> The husbands also decided whether their children could leave, but as in the

---

<sup>78</sup> Nat. dos. 65763, 67441 and 71260; *De Nieuwe Gazet* 19.3.1981 'Poolse oud-strijders in ons land nog niet aan de bak'.

<sup>79</sup> *Belgian Monitor* 29.7.1976.

<sup>80</sup> *Belgian Monitor* 12.7.1984.

<sup>81</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 1040, 'Rapatriement russes'.

1940s the Soviet Embassy acted so secretively, that the Aliens Police could not always prevent their departure.<sup>82</sup>

After Stalin had died, the Soviet Union also accepted that spouses of Soviet citizens could settle on their territory when they gave up their initial citizenship and adopted the Soviet one.<sup>83</sup> At least ten couples decided to leave Belgium together. However, the majority of the husbands did not enjoy living in the Soviet Union. Already in 1957, five husbands begged the Belgian Embassy in Moscow to help them return. They were astonished to hear they had given up their Belgian citizenship upon departure. Since the documents they had filled in at the Soviet Embassy had been in Russian, they were not aware of this fact. As the husbands had not applied to a Belgian administration office, the Belgian authorities decided to declare their citizenship change invalid and to allow their return.<sup>84</sup> In contrast to the Belgian citizenship law, the Soviet law did not require one partner's permission for the other to leave (Closset 308; Ginsburgs 334). The husbands in the Soviet Union could therefore independently decide to return home. The former Ostarbeiterinnen who returned with them enjoyed the same rights because they were still considered married to a Belgian. Divorced Ostarbeiterinnen could also return, but they had to regain their Belgian citizenship through a procedure at a Belgian Court of First Instance.

For both former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen, the motive for citizenship change was related to the possibility of travelling home. Former Allied soldiers from Poland expressed their fear of visiting Poland without the protection of the Belgian state that Belgian citizenship guaranteed and former Ostarbeiterinnen who wanted to settle in the Soviet Union had to give up their Belgian citizenship. Former Allied soldiers from Poland seemed not to have had problems in becoming Belgians and in cases of law infringement, the acquisition of Belgian citizenship was only postponed, and not rejected. For former Ostarbeiterinnen, their mixed marriage seemed less essential for the retention (and sometimes re-acquisition) of Belgian citizenship, since former Ostarbeiterinnen kept Belgian citizenship after a divorce and could independently apply to regain it after they returned from settlement in the Soviet Union. However, both practices were the result of Belgian law. The case study showed that former Ostarbeiterinnen divorced to avoid having to obtain departure permission from their husbands. By contrast to the Soviet one, the Belgian marriage contract created a legal dependence of one partner on the other. The second practice indicated the dependence of the women in derivative citizenship. Former Ostarbeiterinnen who returned from the Soviet Union with their husbands could retain their Belgian citizenship, while divorced women had to regain it.

## Conclusion

This chapter aimed to dispel eight myths with regards to the war experiences of Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen, their migration paths to Belgium and their mixed marriages with Belgian citizens.

First, until today, historiography depicts former division soldiers solely as 'Poles', although the division gathered a mix of soldiers holding pre-war Polish citizenship, including Jews and people who would call themselves Ukrainians after World War II, and persons of Polish

---

<sup>82</sup> Alien file 2041765.

<sup>83</sup> Alien file A345960.

<sup>84</sup> Alien file 2048604, 14 June 1956.

descent whose mother tongue was not always Polish. The First Polish Armoured Division did not consist of Poles, but various people who had 'something in common with Poland'.

Second, this chapter tackled a myth about the migration paths of former division soldiers. It follows that not all division soldiers marched all the way from Poland through Southern Europe and France to Great Britain, and then from France through Belgium to the Netherlands and Germany. The biggest reservoir of additional forces joining the division in Great Britain was Polish citizens who had first voluntarily or forcibly fought in the Nazi army and had then deserted.

Third, it also dispelled the myth that all Ostarbeiterinnen who arrived in Belgium after World War II followed Belgian partners they had met in Nazi Germany. There were Ostarbeiterinnen who arrived independently, but Belgian migration policy required migrant women to intermarry in order to stay, which impeded their settlement.

Fourth, I refuted the myth of Ostarbeiterinnen's advantages over Allied soldiers from Poland in mixed marriages with Belgian citizens upon arrival and during settlement. It is generally assumed that derivative citizenship was advantageous to immigrant women because they were easily granted the citizenship of the host country. I argue that, when one considers the context in which people lived, Ostarbeiterinnen, although they were granted Belgian citizenship when they intermarried, were in a less advantageous situation than Allied soldiers from Poland. Various factors, the marriage contract, concepts of gendered citizenship, the dual nature of citizenship and the geopolitical situation, formed a framework of (sometimes) contradicting possibilities that often turned out to be better for division soldiers. This context specific approach enabled another four myths to be put to rest.

Fifth, gender clauses in Belgian migration policy required Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen to fulfil other criteria in order to be allowed to settle and therefore falsely created an idea of male independency and female dependency. Allied soldiers from Poland had to prove they were useful for the Belgian economy, Ostarbeiterinnen that they had married Belgian citizens or given birth to a child that had Belgian citizenship. However, it is a myth that Allied soldiers from Poland could meet these criteria independently, whereas Ostarbeiterinnen were dependent on their Belgian partners firstly because their consent was the criterion to stay and secondly because of the very nature of the marriage contract. In practice, Allied soldiers from Poland were as dependent on the family networks of their spouses to stay as Ostarbeiterinnen. They had an advantage, however, since the marriage contract did not place them in a subordinate position.

Sixth, the citizenship status of Allied soldiers from Poland did not determine the citizenship of their wives. Contrary to the idea of derivative citizenship, Belgian women who married Allied soldiers from Poland asked for their Belgian citizenship back following the registration of the marriage. The practices of the wives illustrate the uncertain position of Polish citizenship in the Atlantic World. That the Allied soldiers from Poland ended up with a Displaced Persons' status which offered them fewer political and social rights than their wives might look like a disadvantage, but it also formed a safeguard against expulsion which the Ostarbeiterinnen did not have. The marriage contract prescribed wives to follow their husbands, and the Belgian state would not expel its own citizens. The exceptional legal situation of Allied soldiers from Poland and their spouses resulted from an intertwinement of derivative citizenship, the geopolitical situation and the marriage contract.

Seventh, Ostarbeiterinnen married to Belgians were not only subject to Belgian law. The concept of derivative citizenship was not the only one used in the twentieth century. The Soviet Union proclaimed the equality of men and women and did not permit Soviet citizens to change citizenship due to intermarriage. The married Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium, although having received Belgian citizenship, were still considered Soviet citizens by the Soviet Military Mission and in order to ensure good diplomatic relations, the Belgian state did not intervene when the Mission repatriated these Ostarbeiterinnen with Belgian citizenship. Strangely enough, the combination of Soviet equal citizenship rights and the acquisition of Belgian citizenship could lead to the disadvantage of being repatriated. The discrepancy of international laws could turn advantages into disadvantages.

Eighth, finally, although the Allied soldiers from Poland did not have Belgian citizenship and thus officially did not belong to the Belgian nation-state, they did not feel excluded in their environment. The fact that most fathers-in-law had been soldiers themselves, made them feel accepted among family and friends. In contrast, Ostarbeiterinnen received Belgian citizenship thanks to intermarrying, but they experienced a form of denigratory stereotypisation, were called war whores and prostitutes and were regarded as outsiders.

## Part 1: Constructing Group Memories

### Chapter 2: 'On the battlefield there is a difference with after the war'

This chapter offers an insight into how former Allied soldiers from Poland created groups and articulated narratives on war memory, in this way giving meaning to their war and migration experiences. It analyses how such groups, i.e. both informal and formal organisations, opened dialogue and debated with other players expressing narratives of war memory in their home and host societies. For more than sixty years, starting in a polarised world during the Cold War and ending up in a unified Europe after the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, they asked for, were offered, or were deprived of, access to the cultural field on war memory. Various agencies articulating narratives in that field clashed over not only who should be remembered and who not, but also over the arenas in which such remembrance could be articulated. This created a power struggle with various mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion which over time led to changes in mobilisation and denial policies (Koopmans and Statham, 2000, 31-36; Koopmans and Statham, 2003, 207-208; Penninx and Schrover, 2001, 57; Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005, 826). I question how organisations gathering former Allied soldiers from Poland promoted their case, gained power and reshuffled relations in the cultural field on war memory. While showing that societies can be regarded as consisting of various fields, previous studies interpreted these fields in a purely sociological or political way, such as the labour market or participation in politics (Joppke and Morawska 3; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 1177; Schrover, 2006, 862). This chapter illustrates if, and how, the group memory of former Allied soldiers from Poland played a role in the path of integration which they walked in the cultural field on war memory of their host society and the transnational contacts they maintained with their home society both in the short and long term (Lucassen, 2004, 14; Foner 169-171).

My approach differs from mainstream studies on the organisational life of 'Polish' immigrants during the Cold War, studies which give a snapshot of what they consider to be 'Polish' ethnic organisations of a certain country, dividing them into two opposite political camps: anti-communist and communist (Burrell, 69; Dopierała; Friszke; Machcewicz; Pula; Turkowski; Zięta). Such an approach insinuates 'Polish' immigrant organisations were all politically involved, solely homeland-oriented and articulated the static collective ethnic identity of their members.

Recent theoretical research, however, has questioned this approach for five main reasons. First, theoretical studies on immigrant organisations have shown that, although the majority of immigrant organisations are non-political associations, migration scholars devote the most attention in their research to the small amount of politically active immigrant organisations. Jose C. Moya, who recently wrote an overview article about historical research on immigrant organisations, even comes to the conclusion that the preference of scholars to visit embassy receptions instead of local fairs, biases research (Moya 857). Most studies on migrants from Poland in Belgium are written by migrants themselves or by historians from Poland, who all presuppose immigrant organisations were solely influenced by the political situation in their home country, the Polish People's Republic, and, hence, strictly divided into two opposite political camps (Eder 1983; Kępa; Żmigrodzki). Such studies do not even question whether immigrant organisations were also, and in some cases even more, influenced by their host

country Belgium (Moya 856; Schrover and Vermeulen 826). There are also examples of such political studies written by historians from Belgium, however the overall picture is much more balanced thanks to the in-depth research on migration in the Belgian mines (Beyers, 2007b; Caestecker, 1991; Dumoulin and Goddeeris; Goddeeris, 2005a).

Third, by offering a snapshot, they presume immigrant organisations are fixed entities, in this way ignoring that the organisational process of immigrants is a dynamic phenomenon which passes through different stages during the settlement process, as Vermeulen, a sociologist from the Netherlands, demonstrated in his recent dissertation. Theoretical research, indeed, has proven that it is necessary to look at the whole course of life of immigrant organisations, including both origin and operation, and also consider internal competition mechanisms between organisations (Aldrich 1999, 1; Olzak and West, 1991, 458). Research focused on the longer term helps indicate how changes in home and host societies over time influence immigrant organisations and how immigrant organisations influence each other (Minkoff, 1995, 3).

Fourth, just as immigrant organisations, the identifications of their members change over time. The former conviction that identities are static and only ethnic, obstructed the analysis of whether, how, and when, other factors - in this case war memory - shaped and changed people's searches for finding coherence with themselves and with others over time (Diner, 2000, 36; Lucassen and Lucassen, 1997, 22). Moreover, fifth and finally, I am not convinced that immigrant organisations are mere crystallisations of an 'ethnic migration group's collective identity', an example being 'Polish' migrants in Belgium. Contrary to researchers who attribute an overall ethnic label 'from above' to all migrants of a certain descent, I analyse 'from the bottom up' how group formation took place within a particular migration stream of newcomers: former Allied soldiers from Poland. I research how dominant agencies of war memory articulation and leaders of immigrant organisations tried to unify members around certain narratives on war memory and confront these findings with the narratives of members (Straub 69).

Over a period lasting sixty or so years, the group formation process of former Allied soldiers from Poland passed through four phases, each accentuating one decisive factor. I follow Vermeulen in his theoretical approach for the first forty years of settlement of the immigrants at issue, but turn away from his theory for the post cold-war period. As I will demonstrate, my research findings for the last twenty years point to interesting differences. During the first phase, the former Allied soldiers' war experiences and political disinterest were crucial, followed by a phase in which the opportunity structure of host and home society played the first violin. Later, the internal competition dynamics between immigrant organisations came to the fore. Finally, after the collapse of communism, Europeanisation redrew their organisational life and war memory.

## **1947-1956**

### **Politicisation attempts**

At the time when soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division demobilised and settled in Belgium, a wide range of 'Polish' immigrant organisations already existed, such as the Polish Union (Związek Polaków w Belgii - further ZPB) and the Association for Polish Ex-combatants (Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów - further SPK) (Goddeeris, 2005a, 68). SPK Belgium was an affiliation of SPK London: both were set up in the interwar years and

brought together highly-ranked ex-combatants of World War I (Kondracki). After World War II, many Displaced Persons who had been active in the Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa - further AK) and were recruited by the Belgian state to work in the mines, joined SPK Belgium. SPK did not acknowledge the Polish People's Republic, only recognising the Polish government in exile - the pre-war Polish government which had operated from England during World War II and refused to merge with the communist Polish government after liberation. Paying a yearly contribution to the Polish National Treasury in exile, SPK asserted itself to be a representative of that only Polish nation.<sup>85</sup> In the first years, only a few former Allied soldiers from Poland found their way to SPK Belgium. All of them had been highly ranked within the First Polish Armoured Division, while the majority, who had belonged to the lower ranks, remained outside.<sup>86</sup> Lieutenant Stanisław Merlo, for instance, who would become the President of SPK in the 1950s, had received higher education in pre-war Poland and fought with the Home Army in the Warsaw Uprising before being deported to Nazi Germany. After the liberation, he joined the First Polish Armoured Division, which by that time already operated as an occupying force in Willemshaven.<sup>87</sup>

The style of SPK reports of these days testify to the importance of status among SPK members. Texts paid great attention to the former army titles and positions of members and condescendingly categorised lower ranking soldiers as 'ordinary workers'.<sup>88</sup> It indicates SPK members were probably not even interested in including the majority of soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division in their organisation. That changed in 1951, when the tense climate of the Cold War culminated with the Korean War and spread fear about an upcoming Third World War around the globe. The Polish government in exile, which suffered from a lack of attention from former Allied forces after they had recognised the communist regime in Poland, saw in this geopolitical situation an opportunity to legitimise its existence. It aimed to organise Polish forces in exile into a Polish Legion that could help the Atlantic Allies to fight communism and, in this way, also to re-establish democracy in Poland (Goddeeris, 2005a, 126). For that purpose, Alfred Marski, a secretary from the SPK headquarters in London, came to Belgium to launch a recruitment campaign among former Allied soldiers from Poland.<sup>89</sup> In March 1952, he addressed SPK members as follows:

all ex-combatants are actually Polish soldiers on holiday who should be united and made ready to be called under order.<sup>90</sup>

By describing former Allied soldiers from Poland as 'soldiers on holiday', Marski completely ignored the fact that they had already been demobilised for five years, had married Belgian women and in the meantime become fathers. Moreover, he considered all former Allied soldiers from Poland to be 'Polish'. As chapter one demonstrated, the division gathered a mix of soldiers holding pre-war Polish citizenship, including Jews and people who would call themselves Ukrainians after World War II, as well as persons of Polish descent whose mother

<sup>85</sup> Archive SPK, file Zebranie Zarządu SPK, Walne zebrania i zebrania Zarządu, kwiecień 1953, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Archive Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej - further IPN), 0236/67 t 1-6 Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów na Zachodzie, Kryptyk 'Ulik', Teczka 1, p. 198 SPK Bruksela 19.6.1946; Teczka 2, p. 346.

<sup>87</sup> Archive IPN, 0236/67 t 1-6 Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów na Zachodzie, Kryptyk 'Ulik', Teczka 4, p. 34 - 35 Vespa 27.2.1959 Z działalności SPK w Belgii (Ścisłe tajne); p. 53- 59 Miles 10.9.1959 SPK (Ścisłe tajne).

<sup>88</sup> Archive IPN, 0236/67 t 1-6, Teczka 1, p. 303 - 304 3.10.1948 Virginia SPK w Belgii; Teczka 1, p. 198 SPK Bruksela 19.6.1946; Teczka 2, p. 63- 69 Walny Zjazd SPK Oddział Belgia 29.5.1949.

<sup>89</sup> Goddeeris wrongly mentions Morski (Goddeeris, 2005, 126).

<sup>90</sup> Archive IPN, 0236/67 t 1-6, Teczka 3, p. 100-103 13.3.1952 Agent 38 SPK Walne Zebranie Koła Bruksela SPK.

tongue was not always Polish.<sup>91</sup> Former Allied soldiers, in turn, were not especially willing to go and fight in another war, as the following interview fragment indicates:

with the war in Korea many migrated to Canada, America or Australia  
 why? it's very easy  
 because when we were demobilised they said to us  
 when it is necessary  
 they have the right to recruit us<sup>92</sup>

Nowadays it is impossible to determine whether the motives of former Allied soldiers from Poland who migrated overseas differed from the majority of Displaced Persons who migrated in the early 1950s with the hope of finding better employment. Goddeeris demonstrated how growing unemployment, the closing-down of the IRO and the friendly migration policy from overseas countries lay at the basis of the decisions made by several Polish migrants to leave in the early 1950s (Goddeeris, 2005a, 185). However, it is revealing that the respondent, by making a causal connection between the Korean War and migration overseas, suggests that some former Allied soldiers from Poland were fleeing out of fear to further and safer destinations.<sup>93</sup>

Marski's quest clearly demonstrates that even in the early 1950s, in cities liberated by soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division, former division soldiers gathered informally without being politically active.<sup>94</sup> Status differences and fear for political and/or military mobilisation most likely contributed to the failure of Marski's attempt to bring former combatants closer to SPK and to recruit them for the Polish Legion. Empty-handed, he returned to England in 1953.<sup>95</sup>

Marski's activities were closely followed by the Secret Services of the Polish People's Republic, which saw a danger to the young communist state in the organising and, as they supposed, later activities of a Polish Legion. They considered that former soldiers of Polish Military Forces living in exile could act as pioneers for Atlantic forces in a possible future confrontation. Consequently, it ordered its agents to infiltrate ex-combatant circles in the Atlantic World and persuaded migrants to cooperate with them, asking them to pass on information about activities and attitudes. In Belgium, several agents guaranteed a constant flow of information on SPK's working from the end of the 1940s until the mid-1950s, and then again from the late 1950s to halfway through the 1960s. Throughout this whole period, at least according to my sources, the Secret Services had a good idea of what was happening in SPK Belgium, but never managed to infiltrate the circles of former soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division. The Secret Services meticulously ordered reports of SPK meetings, membership lists and secretly taken pictures of minutes and supplemented them with information on SPKs from other Western European countries. In all reports, names of members were encircled and listed in a manual index of names. By means of underlining, they carefully selected striking text fragments such as the quote of Alfred Marski mentioned above.

<sup>91</sup> P 9: Interview with Sławomir on 6.12.2005 (30:39); P 14: Interview with Rafał on 6.12.2005 (346:352) and (366:377).

<sup>92</sup> P 1: Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005 (149:153).

<sup>93</sup> P 1: Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005 (177); P 9: Interview with Sławomir on 6.12.2005 (12:17).

<sup>94</sup> Archive IPN, 0236/67 t 1-6, Teczka 3, p. 92-98; Teczka 3, p. 255 Virginia 19.7.1948 SPK w Belgii.

<sup>95</sup> Archive IPN, 0236/67 t 1-6, Teczka 3, p. 190 - 191 Agent Karo 27.1.1953 O wpływy w SPK w Belgii. Rozmowy Niwy z W. Grabowskim, M. Dogilewskim oraz z Dehnelem; Teczka 3, p. 195 Simon 25.9.1951 Marski w miejsce Krzyczana w SPK w Belgii. Rozmowa Bliskiej z Dehnelem; Teczka 3, p. 197 - 199 Agent Nelli 23.9.1953: Walne Zebranie Kola Bruksela SPK.

It may be argued that, in the Polish People's Republic, former soldiers of the First Polish Division living abroad were not only feared because one thought they could bring down the young communist state, but also because they could disturb the installation of a war memory legitimising that new political rule. The official narrative on war memory, which the communist party tried to install, focused on the role of the Soviet army and Polish forces sympathising with it, such as the People's Guard (Gwardia Ludowa - further GL), who had, as it was officially stated, together overthrown fascism in a brotherly way and brought peace to the world (Zaremba, 2001, 214). Polish soldiers, who had fought in the West with the Allies during World War II, as well as Home Army fighters, who had been more numerous than People's Guard fighters, were considered a threat to that picture (Wawrzyniak 11, 86, 88).<sup>96</sup>

### **Loose a-political group gatherings**

Almost all former Allied soldiers from Poland in Belgium kept far away from political issues both in London and Warsaw, and met up informally every so often in their cities of residence with other migrants from Poland who had been employed in Allied armies and had settled in Belgium at the end of World War II, such as aviators from the Polish air force, lower ranking members of the Allied air force, and night watchers from the American army married to Flemish young women (see chapter one). They went for a beer together or stopped for a chat in a grocery shop ran by a former division soldier.<sup>97</sup> In two cases, however, this group formation received support of the local city council.

City councils were willing to offer support as they considered the former Allied soldiers from Poland settled on their territory to be liberators who had won World War II in Belgium, but had lost it back home, due to which they could not move back and, as a result, were regarded as victims of communism.<sup>98</sup> Depending on the kind of support offered, gatherings sometimes grew to become a formal organisation. In Saint-Nicolas, for instance, symbolic support in the form of a yearly ceremony in the city hall encouraged the former division soldiers settled in the city to unite and profile themselves as a separate group at the yearly ceremonies held in the Polish war cemetery in Lommel from the early 1950s onwards (Venken, 2007c, 405). Contrary to this symbolic support, the city council of Ghent offered the former Allied soldiers from Poland settled in its city infrastructural and financial support. Thanks to this, they could meet up in a house allocated to political refugees, where they established the official organisation called the Polish Colony of Former Soldiers and Catholic Association (Poolse Kolonie van Voormalige Militairen en Katholiek Genootschap / Polska Kolonia Byłych Wojskowych i Stowarzyszenie Katolickie - further PKVMKG) and started to publish a quarterly bulletin in 1950 (Goddeeris, 2005a, 47). The association opened its doors to all 'Polish migrants' from the city and around, on the precondition that they were Catholics. That it hereby clearly disapproved of the a-religious communist state does not automatically mean it was politically involved. Even though almost all 'Polish' migrants who settled in Belgium after World War II had chosen to migrate because they were against communism, only some of them were members of the politically involved SPK, and the PKVMKG from the start refused to pay a yearly contribution to the symbol of political recognition of the Polish

---

<sup>96</sup> Archive of New Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych- further AAN). sygn. 237/XXII/303 Zespół PZPR Belgia. Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację - działalność. Korespondencja, rezolucje, odezwy innych organizacji polonijnych 1951-1953, p. 4 Rezolucja Uchwalona na zjeździe Związku Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację w Dniu 19.4.1953 r.

<sup>97</sup> P 4: Interview with Mariusz on 2.12.2005 (250:257); P 18: Interview with Andrzej on 7.12.2005 (37:42).

<sup>98</sup> P 5: Interview with Artur on 14.07.2005 (88:90).

Government in exile: its treasury.<sup>99</sup> Choosing a Catholic profile had yet another consequence: it narrowed the idea of Polishness down to fellow-believers and left out former Allied soldiers from Poland with other religious preferences.<sup>100</sup> A respondent formulated this exclusion as follows:

we all were soldiers  
 we had to fight together  
 and to lay under a tank  
 and if that was a Ukrainian or a Jew  
 on the battlefield there is a difference with after the war  
 you also understand that  
 if I had laid under a tank with you  
 we would get along  
 everybody marches towards the future  
 and we will survive<sup>101</sup>

During the interview, two persons with very little in common came face to face: Rafał and me. An age difference of almost 60 years, a difference in sex, mother tongue, country of birth, and level of education stood between us. Precisely by stating that these factors would not hinder us in fighting together ('we would get along'), the respondent made it clear to me that people, however different they were, could easily be part of the First Armoured Division, but not of the post-war organisational life.

Former Allied soldiers from Poland did not only meet soldiers from Poland, but were also in contact with Belgian ex-combatant circles. The first chapter stated that many of their fathers-in-law had been Belgian ex-combatants of World War I. Others approached such World War I ex-combatants with requests because they considered they had something in common, such as this respondent:

when I came to live here in the beginning I had nothing  
 and I also got nothing  
 and I could not buy coal  
 there, a little further was a big garden, an orchard  
 of a Belgian ex-combatant  
 and I asked  
 because he was an ex-combatant  
 if I could receive dry wood to heat my house  
 and so I got into contact with this person<sup>102</sup>

However, during the interviews it became clear that in the first years of settlement, no former soldiers of the First Armoured Division had officially joined Belgian patriotic organisations. Since Belgians had hardly fought on Belgian territories during World War II, such patriotic organisations mainly gathered resistance fighters with whom former division soldiers considered themselves to have little in common (Lagrou, 2000, 299).

In sum, it may be clear that former Allied soldiers from Poland at first sought the company of people with similar war experiences and the same disinterest in political issues, whether fellow former division soldiers, other former Ally soldiers from Poland who arrived in Belgium in the aftermath of the war, or Belgian World War I ex-combatants. However, they

<sup>99</sup> P 6: Interview with Artur on 20.10.2005 (356:358).

<sup>100</sup> P 4: Interview with Mariusz on 2.12.2005 (216:222); P 9: Interview with Sławomir on 6.12.2005 (40:42).

<sup>101</sup> P 14: Interview with Rafał on 6.12.2005 (374:383).

<sup>102</sup> P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006 (97:105).

did not join existing 'Polish' immigrant organisations or Belgian patriotic organisations. Differences in convictions, status and the geopolitical tension caused by speculations on a Third World War hindered such cooperation. The majority of former Allied soldiers from Poland were ordinary people who did not want to be politically mobilised by the Polish Government in exile, but preferred to be honoured as liberators in a local city hall. Their gatherings remained loose group formations, unless local city councils encouraged them to set up informal or formal organisations.

My conclusion runs counter to the research findings of Idesbald Goddeeris, who did exploratory research on former soldiers of the First Armoured Polish Division in the margin of his study on 'Polish' migrants in Belgian cities and mine regions (Goddeeris, 2005a, 43-50). Five differences are immediately obvious. First, Goddeeris stated that former division soldiers were all 'Polish' and in this way uncritically adopted the view of the Polish Government in exile and many authors from Poland, who considered that all soldiers fighting in Polish army forces during World War II were solely Polish and denied their heterogeneous character (Brodecki, Wawer, Kondracki; Lencznarowicz, 2007). Second, according to Goddeeris, the small number of formal organisations gathering former division soldiers and their absence within existing 'Polish' immigrant organisations, proves that former division soldiers rarely met each other during the early post-war years. However, I argue that it testifies how this new migration stream, precisely due to its specificity, did not find affiliation to existing networks. Their limited power as newcomers, as well as their fear of a Third World War, caused their gatherings to remain loose group formations. Third, by the same token, their scarce presence in 'Polish' immigrant press and at 'Polish' immigrant demonstrations does not, as Goddeeris postulates, demonstrate a lack of group formation among former division soldiers. For example, my analysis showed that many preferred to form a group in the public sphere during yearly ceremonies at the city hall of Saint-Nicolas, where they were specially honoured as liberators. Fourth, Goddeeris stated that former division soldiers did not meet each other often because they were geographically dispersed. Distance, however, did not affect small scale group formation among former division soldiers, because always a couple of them ended up in each of the limited number of liberated cities. And fifth, Goddeeris is only focusing on the contact between former division soldiers and 'Polish' immigrants, in this way affirming the 'ethnicity forever' approach and ignoring the contacts they established with Belgian city councils and patriotic circles.

## **1956-1969**

The gatherings of people with similar war experiences became formalised during the second phase of group formation. Various organisations arose, thanks to agencies in the host and home societies of former Allied soldiers from Poland. These agencies created an opportunity structure enabling them to establish formal organisations in which they could articulate war memories. Here I analyse how agencies tried to bestow these organisations with their own agenda of war memory and highlight whether their mobilisation attempts in this respect gained approval among former Allied soldiers from Poland in Belgium.

### **Agencies of war memory articulation from the Polish People's Republic**

The Thaw of 1956 signalled a major shift in Polish politics and geopolitical relations when amnesty was offered to political prisoners and borders became easier to cross. A large number of Home Army fighters were released from prison, as well as former soldiers who had fought in Allied forces (Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann 2006). One of them was General Franciszek

Skibiński, the former right-hand man of General Stanisław Maczek, who had returned home after demobilisation and had been condemned for Western espionage (Mieczkowski, 2003, 203-215). The visibility of fighters other than those which formed the focus of the dominant narrative on war memory, threatened to downsize the legitimacy of the Polish communist party. It therefore broadened the content of that narrative by integrating these 'newcomers in society' in its narrative on war memory. World War II became presented as a united struggle of all 'Polish', even non-communist, forces against fascism (Zaremba, 2001, 238, 290). They had, as the narrative creatively put it, all fought, not for the Polish People's Republic, but for their 'Motherland' (Wawrzyniak 227). As the visit or return of Home Army fighters and former Allied soldiers living abroad could help that conviction gain impetus, the communist party started a second remigration campaign (Goddeeris, 2005a, 189-190; Zaremba, 2001, 241).

It set up a special institution to get into contact with 'Polish' immigrants. The Communist 'Polonia' society was under the strict control of the Polish communist authorities and functioned as a political tool to counterbalance the unpopularity of communism among 'Polish' immigrants and to encourage them to move back to their 'Motherland'. However, it knew support for communist ideology in Western countries stood at an all-time low and therefore put itself forward as an organisation that was concerned about the fates of 'Polish' immigrants and wanted to help them in solving their problems (Cenckiewicz, 2004a, 177; Cenckiewicz 2004b, 197; Goddeeris, 2005a, 182; Lencznarowicz, 1996, 48, 53-54).

For the remigration campaign, the 'Polonia' society designed a threefold strategy. First, it tried to make contact with 'Polish' immigrant organisations and to obtain their membership lists. Then, it sent 'Polish' immigrants a standard letter with an appealing offer of cultural support that would hopefully lead to a stable correspondence. Only at that stage, the 'Polonia' society would explicitly invite 'Polish' immigrants to re-migrate (Cenckiewicz, 2004b, 127; Goddeeris, 2005a, 255). But the lack of interest and the animosity of 'Polish' immigrants in Belgium prevented the remigration campaign from being realised. The communist 'Polonia' society could not gather enough information to contact a significant number of 'Polish' immigrants, and failed to get into contact with former Allied soldiers in Belgium. The first former Allied soldier from Poland to contact the 'Polonia' society was Antoni Sznurkowski, who in 1963 spontaneously wrote to the organisation asking if his daughter could come on a summer camp in the Polish People's Republic offered for free. Sznurkowski received a response, but no further letters were exchanged.<sup>103</sup>

The few people in Belgium with whom the 'Polonia' society succeeded in establishing correspondence were either useless informants or pragmatists from the mining regions. It developed a strong relationship with a few 'Polish' immigrant women who migrated to Belgium after 1956 and members of the Central National Council (Centralna Rada Narodowa - further CRN), the umbrella pro-communist 'Polish' immigrant organisation in Belgium. These were people who already knew the Polish People's Republic and had a negligible influence on the organisational life of 'Polish' immigrants in Belgium.<sup>104</sup>

The Polish communist party soon realised that, in order to improve support for its narrative on war memory abroad, it needed to diversify its policy. It therefore asked the Polish Consulate in Belgium to increase the appeal of their commemoration service held at the Polish military

<sup>103</sup> Archive AAN, The Archive of the Communist 'Polonia' Society, Correspondence with Belgium, file 389.

<sup>104</sup> Archive AAN, The Archive of the Communist 'Polonia' Society, Correspondence with Belgium, file 41, 72, 142, 209, 223, 621.

cemetery in Lommel. Contacting the Belgian-Polish Friendship organisation in Brussels, it suggested a joint project to install a statue offered by the Polish People's Republic. With the support of this organisation, which focused on cultural cooperation between Belgium and the Polish People's Republic and was able to gather some of Belgium's most influential politicians, the Consulate hoped to mobilise former Home Army fighters and former Allied soldiers (Goddeeris, 2003, 295-299; Goddeeris 2005a, 93-94). It let the organisation edit a special booklet about the liberation of Belgium written by Franciszek Skibiński, and hoped that the distribution of it among individual migrants would stimulate them to donate money for the production of the statue (Skibiński, 1958).<sup>105</sup> The fact that only 10 percent of the value of the statue could be paid with Belgian money, and most of it came not from individual migrants, but from liberated cities, seems to indicate that the action was not a success (Eder 46-56).<sup>106</sup>

However, the action had two indirect consequences. First, members of the SPK became interested in the Polish People's Republic's initiatives, due to which the Polish Secret Services could establish contact with new, more influential agents reporting on the organisation's activities. And second, it brought the city councils of liberated cities for the first time into contact with the Polish Consulate, which in turn led to the foundation of two Belgian-Polish Friendship organisations in the liberated cities of Ghent and Willebroek.<sup>107</sup> They gathered mostly local political dignitaries who had been involved in the sponsoring of the statue or were family members of former Allied soldiers from Poland. Thanks to these family ties, the Friendship Associations were able to attract aviators from the Polish air force and airmen from the Allied air force, but only a few individual former division soldiers.<sup>108</sup> The cultural cooperation with the Polish People's Republic which these organisations maintained, in the form of art exhibitions and film showings, intensified when they came into contact with Mieczysław Moczar in the second half of the 1960s.

When General Mieczysław Moczar became the Polish Minister of Internal Affairs in 1964, the fraction within the Polish communist party gathering ex-combatants gained real power for the first time. Former Home Army fighters and former Allied soldiers had been too young and powerless to influence decision-making about their rehabilitation in 1956. In the 1960s however, Moczar became their spokesperson, propagating a Polish nationalism within the communist doctrine in which patriotism and military tradition stood central (Zaremba, 2001, 290, 292). A closer identification with patriotism also enhanced national ethnic exclusiveness; the Polish People's Republic became portrayed as an homogeneous, ethnic Polish state arisen thanks to the fight of Polish soldiers against fascism, a narrative in which the war experiences of Jews and Ukrainians did not find a place (Zaremba, 2001, 121). Since Moczar needed the support of ex-combatants living abroad to legitimate that policy, he started a third re-

<sup>105</sup> Archive of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych - further MSZ). Departament IV 6/76 Belgia. Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Belgijsko-Polskiej (1947/55/59-64/66/68). Letter of the Polish Ambassador A. Wolski to MSZ on 30.8.1960; The organisation edited the following bulletin: *Polen van heden*, 1954-1959; Archive MSZ. Department Press and Information (Departament Prasy i Informacji - further DPI) 23/25. Belgia. Wydawnictwa. Korespondencja w sprawie publikacji przez Tow. Przyjaźni B-P broszury Gen. F. Skibińskiego o udziale Polaków w wyzwoleniu Belgii 1958.

<sup>106</sup> Archive MSZ. DK 70/920. Belgia. Raporty konsularne za rok 1959. Sprawy polonijne. p. 5; Archive MSZ. Departament IV 10/79 Belgia. Cmentarz polski w Lommel 1957/64. Notatka Służbowa (21.3.1959). 3 p.

<sup>107</sup> Archive MSZ. Departament IV 6/76 Belgia. Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Belgijsko-Polskiej (1947/55/59-64/66/68); Archive IPN. 0236/67 t 1-6, Teczka 4, p. 53-59 Miles 10.9.1959 SPK; Teczka 4 134-136 Wir (Wrzos) 5.12.1961 Raport dot. SPK na terenie Belgii.

<sup>108</sup> *Tygodnik Polski* 14/40 (676) 18.10.1970; 15/42 (730) 17.10.1971; 16/15 (755) 9.4.1972; 16/50 (790) 10.12.1972; Archive IPN. 0236/67 t 1-6, Teczka 4, p. 151 - 156 Wir - Wzros 4.4.1962 Raport dot. Szygowskiego K. (tajne).

emigration campaign together with the WW II veterans' organisation the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację - further ZBOWID) and the communist 'Polonia' society (Wawrzyniak 292-293).

Moczar's initiative could only convince a few 'Polish' immigrants, and not one single former Allied soldier settled in Belgium, to move back to the Polish People's Republic. However, it succeeded in bursting through the anticommunist former Allied soldiers' cordon as some of these former soldiers accepted an invitation to the Polish People's Republic, where they paraded at official war commemorations and, in this way, contributed to the legitimisation of his policy (Cenckiewicz, 2005, 280).

In order to achieve this, Moczar used a twofold strategy. On the one hand, he encouraged the ZBOWID to establish contact with the SPK to ask if they could unite all 'Polish ex-combatants' in Belgium and to start cooperation with the Polish People's Republic. SPK organised a meeting with the President of PKVMKG but where, according to the SPK agent reporting to Polish Secret Services about the meeting, SPK at least hesitated to cooperate, the PKVMKG was categorically against.<sup>109</sup>

On the other hand, with the help of the 'Polonia' society, two new organisations were established which gathered fifteen former Allied soldiers. In 1967, the Polish Olympic Committee (Het Pools Olympisch Comité/ Polski Komitet Olimpijski - further PKO) arose in Wommelgem. At a first glance, one could say the 'Polonia' society encouraged members to sponsor Polish sport heroes to participate in the Olympic Games in order to strengthen the ties between 'Polish' immigrants and their home society. However, the real aim was to make up for the country's shortage in foreign currencies so that 'Polish' sportsmen could at least participate in the Olympic Games, and to mobilise former Allied soldiers to officially attend commemoration services in Belgium and the Polish People's Republic (Lencznarowicz, 2002, 180).<sup>110</sup> The Olympic Committee organised events commemorating the participation of the First Polish Armoured Division in the liberation of Belgium, and for those occasions could attract former Allied soldiers who were not members.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, the 'Polonia' society successfully offered their members free trips to Poland, where they took part in war commemorations dressed in special ex-combatant uniforms.<sup>112</sup> For that purpose, the 'Polonia' society was even willing to cut back on the privileges offered to its supporters, loyal pro-communist pre-war 'Polish' immigrants. The plaint of such a faithful follower, Sir Gałuszka from Quaregnon, suggests that they knew it favoured 'Polish' ex-combatants above their loyalty. Gałuszka wrote in 1968 that 21 years previously he had become a member of the CRN because he dreamt of going on a trip to Poland, and that now that he was so close to getting a place on a free trip organised by the 'Polonia' society, he had to give up his seat for somebody who was not even a member.<sup>113</sup>

The second organisation, The Allied Combatants of Europe - Belgian Federation (Het Comité van de Geallieerde Oudstrijdersfederatie in Europa/ Komitet Federacji Kombatantów Alianckich w Europie - further KFKAE) was set up with the help of the Polish Consulate in order to prepare the visit of General Moczar in September 1968 for the 24th anniversary of

<sup>109</sup> Archive IPN, 0236/67 t 1-6, Teczka 2, p. 326-327 Notatka z przebiegu Walnego Zebrania SPK. Oddział - Belgia w Brukseli w dn. 12 czerwca 1965 r. poufne.

<sup>110</sup> *Tygodnik Polski* 17/5 (797) 28.1.1973.

<sup>111</sup> *Tygodnik Polski* 18/21 (918) 25.5.1975.

<sup>112</sup> P 11: Interview with Damian on 13 February 2006 (342:348).

<sup>113</sup> Archive AAN. Archive Towarzystwo Polonia. Correspondence with Belgium, file 529.

the city's liberation.<sup>114</sup> In reality, it was no more than a paper organisation since it gathered exactly the same members of the Belgian-Polish Friendship Association in Ghent. Complex cooperation between the 'Polonia' society and the Luxemburg government in 1968 led to the foundation of a *Fédération des Combattants Alliés en Europe*. Under this umbrella, country headquarters were opened in Luxemburg, Belgium and France. The country committee of Belgium found a seat in Brussel, although it did not have a single member, and managed to open only one sister organisation in Ghent.<sup>115</sup>

The KFKAE's activities in Belgium cannot be called a success. Although it managed to organise an interesting visit for Moczar, who was for instance welcomed by several liberated city councils, other former Allied soldiers from Poland started a protest action when they saw the poster in the streets announcing Moczar's coming. They contacted other 'Polish' immigrant organisations and, together, wrote letters of protest to the Belgian Prime Minister, the Belgian Ministers of Internal and External Affairs and the Mayors of all cities liberated by the First Polish Armoured Division at the end of World War II. They also published articles in both the Belgian and 'Polish' immigrant press.<sup>116</sup> 'Polish' migrants highlighted the fact that the Polish People's Republic had provided troops for the invasion of Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring and, thus, had contributed to the oppression of people. They argued that a Minister supporting such an invasion should not be granted a visa. The Belgian state fulfilled that request, due to which General Moczar had to cancel his visit. This shows that, although the 'Polonia' society cooperated with some former Allied soldiers, it did not neutralise the feelings of the majority. However, Moczar was able to use these few migrants from Belgium cooperating with the 'Polonia' society, KFKAE's members, to exhibit them, so to speak, at public war commemorations in the Polish People's Republic, in this way contributing to the legitimacy of his internal policy (Kozłowska 192). Moreover, when Moczar was invited by the Brussels city council and the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs a year later for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation, 'Polish' anti-communist immigrant organisations could not block that decision (Goddeeris, 2001, 500). Migrants appeared to have some influence on a local level in the liberated cities, but not on a national level. There, the mild policy of the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Pierre Harmel towards the Communist Bloc, also known as the 'Doctrine Harmel', reigned (Goddeeris, 2005b, 61).

One could also ask if members of the organisations PKO and KFKAE endorsed the underpinning political ideology of these organisations. When I researched the naturalisation files of former Allied soldiers from Poland and compared their naturalisation data with the membership rolls of their organisations, I realised that the Belgian citizenship must have given a feeling of protection to former Allied soldiers active in organisations co-operating with the Polish Consulate. There is no difference in the naturalisation data of members from organisations which maintained, or did not maintain ties with the Polish Consulate in Belgium, but those former Allied soldiers who became active in the latter only did so after

---

<sup>114</sup> Archive AAN. Archive Towarzystwo Polonia. Correspondence with Belgium, file 492, 483, 587/2, 717; Archive AAN. Towarzystwo Łączności z Polonią Zagraniczną 'Polonia'. Zespół Informacji i Dokumentacji, Belgia. Organizacje 1989, 18/44, teczka 4.

<sup>115</sup> *Tygodnik Polski* 12/27 (559) 30.9.1968.

<sup>116</sup> Archive SPK, Box 1, Komunikat Zarząd Główny SPK 12.8.1968; Archive SPK. Letter of the Head Committee of Free Poles (Naczelny Komitet Wolnych Polaków - further NKWP) to SPK 21.8.1968; Archive SPK. *La voix internationale de la Résistance* 7.1968 n 125 'Le general Moczar sera-t-il l'hôte de la Belgique et de la ville de Gand le 1-er Septembre?'; Archive AAN. Archive Towarzystwo Polonia. Correspondence with Belgium, file 585, 697; Archive SPK. *Dziennik Polski Londyn* 30.7.1968 n 181 'Rocznica wyzwolenia Gandawy przez 1 Dywizję Pancerną'; *Tygodnik Polski* 12/27 (559) 6.9.1968.

they had received Belgian citizenship. Contrary to what the Polish Consulate stated, it mainly cooperated with Belgian (naturalised) citizens.<sup>117</sup>

## Agencies of war memory articulation from Belgium

These naturalisation files also revealed that former Allied soldiers from Poland, for the first time, had made contact with a Belgian patriotic organisation. In 1957, the Belgian Patriotic Committee of the liberated city of Saint Nicolas, on the request of the city council, sent in a group naturalisation application for twenty former division soldiers.<sup>118</sup> As chapter one already discussed, thanks to the group application, the Belgian state adjusted its criteria to include former division soldiers as a group which was exempt from registration costs for naturalisation. Whereas before, that privilege was awarded to ‘ethnic Germans’ brought up in Poland who had first served in the German army, but had then deserted, fled to Belgium and been active in the Belgian resistance movement until they had joined the passing First Polish Armoured Division, it was later applied to every soldier who had been assigned to the First Polish Armoured Division.<sup>119</sup> In this way, a local Belgian patriotic organisation managed to lobby for the widening of Belgium’s official narrative on World War II. The contact with the Belgian patriotic organisation, however, was encouraged by the city council and remained limited to that local level.

That had much to do with the way World War II was remembered in Belgium. Pieter Lagrou, in his book *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, comes to the conclusion that various people with similar war experiences, such as resistance fighters, labour conscripts and victims of Nazi persecution, each formed their own group narratives on war memory and searched for their path of integration in a constructed and often contradictory Belgian national narrative on war memory (Lagrou, 2000, 301). He states that whereas Belgian patriotic organisations had initially enjoyed support for their narratives on war memory in Belgian political circles, they felt downgraded by the end of the 1950s. The biggest Flemish political party, the Christian People’s Party (Christelijke Volkspartij or CVP), changed its former identification with anti-fascism into one supporting collaborationism. That resulted from the party’s frustration with regard to the Royal Question and its desire to regain power in 1957 by opposing the anti-Catholic reigning ‘government of the resistance’, as it was called (Lagrou, 1997b, 160; Lagrou, 2000, 301-302). An identification of Flemish Catholicism and collaborationism would proliferate throughout the following decades and lead to contemporary community readings of war experiences placing a fault line between collaborators, who ‘were Flemish’, and resistance fighters, who ‘were Walloon’. The reality is of course more complex, since Catholics had also been active in resistance movements and become members of Belgian patriotic organisations (Lagrou, 1997b, 156-157). Nevertheless, these Belgian patriotic organisations felt marginalised by a spreading Flemish-emancipating narrative of collaborationism, and consequently focused more on lobbying their own case than helping for instance former Allied soldiers from Poland. Former Allied soldiers would always find more support from the councils of cities which they had liberated, although they never functioned as initiators of formal group formation. Agencies from Great Britain, where the Polish government in exile was situated, appeared to be more decisive in this respect.

---

<sup>117</sup> Archive MSZ, Consular Department, see for example file 13/73 ‘Raport konsularny za 1969r.’

<sup>118</sup> State Archives in Belgium, Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Naturalisation dossiers (further Nat. Dos.). 25186.

<sup>119</sup> Nat. dos. 24464 and 23495.

## Agencies of war memory articulation from Great Britain

In 1964, General Stanisław Maczek paid a visit to Belgium for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its liberation and proposed the loose groups of Saint-Nicolas and Ghent to merge in a Belgian sister association of the First Polish Armoured Division Association (*Związek Kół Pierwszej Dywizji Pancerniej*), established a little earlier in Great Britain. As a result, in 1966, the First Polish Armoured Division Association - the Belgium Circle (*Vereniging van de Eerste Poolse Pantserdivisie - cirkel België*) was founded under the presidency of Ryszard Łuczak, a former division soldier who had also played a major role in the PKVMKG (*Кęпа 181-183*). The new organisation strived for the following: to gather exclusively former division soldiers, to make a contribution from the Division to the liberation of Belgium by erecting statues and other objects of commemoration, and to parade at yearly services of commemorations in the liberated cities.<sup>120</sup>

Interested former division soldiers firstly needed to send their curriculum vitae to be checked by the Polish Ministry of Defence in exile. Only with London's permission could an individual join. Most members subscribed within the first years, but a second wave followed in 1972 when the organisation also took up responsibility for former division soldiers settled in the Netherlands and changed its name to the Benelux Circle. In those days, the organisation numbered about 100 members, of which 70 came from among the estimated 300 former division soldiers settled in Belgium.<sup>121</sup> From the very start, the Belgium Circle was able to attract about the same amount of honorary members - Belgians who were warmly disposed to its activities. Several of these honorary members played a pivotal and successful role in negotiations between the Circle and city councils about its funding and the establishment of commemorative objects. A first success in negotiations happened in 1967, when a specially founded consortium of liberated cities decided to grant a yearly subsidy to the Circle.<sup>122</sup> Throughout the years, the Circle managed to cooperate with several liberated city councils to install a total of 54 objects including statues, streets, squares and commemorative tablets dedicated to the contribution of the First Polish Armoured Division in the liberated cities (*Кęпа 414*; Mieczkowski, 1989). These objects became the focus of attention during the yearly parades of the Circle at commemoration services in the liberated cities. The President articulated the importance of these services during the interview as follows:

we did not hold a Christmas or Easter party (denigratorily)  
because we had too many other obligations (proudly)  
from the first weekend of September  
two months in a row  
my wife was alone at home on Sunday  
that's, really, hard labour  
in this period we worked almost every day<sup>123</sup>

The President distinguished the work of his Circle from that of other 'Polish' immigrant organisations operating for instance in the mining regions, where, as he denigratorily put it, celebrating holidays together was always a big event. His Circle did not meet up for fun, but because it had 'obligations'. Proudly calling participating in services of commemorations

<sup>120</sup> *Vereniging van de Eerste Poolse Pantserdivisie - cirkel België Bulletin 5* (1969). The bulletin gives a 'military' overview of all commemoration services, for many years without any further descriptions.

<sup>121</sup> Archive Secretary the Benelux Circle. Ledenmap.

<sup>122</sup> Archive Treasurer the Benelux Circle. Kasboek.

<sup>123</sup> P 5: Interview with Artur on 14.07.2005 (112:118).

‘work’, and mentioning it was a sacrifice (he had to leave his wife alone), only added to the important task he considered the Circle had to fulfil.

The exclusive admission criteria to the Benelux Circle left former Allied soldiers, other than division soldiers, out in the cold. Some of them joined the Polish Airforce Alliation (Vereniging van Poolse vliegeniers / Stowarzyszenie Polskich Lotników - further SPL) after the aviator Aleksander Gabszewicz from the Polish Airforce Alliation in Great Britain had visited Belgium for the 25th anniversary of the Belgian liberation. Its activities ran parallel to those of the Benelux Circle. With fifteen former aviators as members, it took up responsibility for the annual commemoration service in Sint-Denijs-Westrem where the Airforce had brought down German war planes, put up a statue and, in order to obtain financing for it, founded a circle of Belgian friends (Vriendschapscircle van Poolse Vliegeniers / Koło Przyjaciół Polskich Lotników).<sup>124</sup>

### **A ‘Polish ex-combatant’ pillar of war memory**

During the second phase of group formation, organisations which formalised the previously loose gatherings of former Allied soldiers from Poland were set up thanks not to Belgian, but to transnational agencies in Great Britain and the Polish People’s Republic. They bestowed the organisations with their own narratives on war memory and for that purpose also streamlined membership recruitment. Agencies from Great Britain had their mind set on ex-combatant circles exclusively gathering former soldiers from a specific war unit, such as the First Polish Armoured Division or the 131<sup>st</sup> wing of the Polish air force, and stressed that their war experiences had contributed to the liberation of Belgium, but had not prevented Poland from becoming communist. Agencies from the Polish People’s Republic, however, targeted all former Allied soldiers from Poland, including airmen of the Allied air force and night watchers settled around Saint-Nicolas as well as division soldiers and aviators from the Polish air force. Agencies from the Polish People’s Republic were less successful on Belgian territory, gathering only a few former Allied soldiers from Poland who were denied membership of organisations with exclusive entrance policies cooperating with Great Britain. Nevertheless, they could offer Mieczysław Moczar support for his policy legitimising the Polish People’s Republic based on the common struggle of Polish fighters all over the world during World War II.

The interest of transnational agencies made Belgians aware of the exclusiveness of former Allied soldiers from Poland. City councils and individual citizens, but not Belgian patriotic organisations, were generous in their financial and moral support to ‘their’ liberators through offering funding, objects of commemoration and parading opportunities, hereby following their own political conviction. Since the Catholic pillar was always more powerful in the liberated areas than those under socialist/communist rule, the London-oriented ex-combatant organisations received more support than the Poland-oriented friendship associations.

The many opportunities offered by local and transnational agencies led to a spectacular growth of various ex-combatant organisations which all gradually contributed to the emergence of a local and prestigious ‘Polish ex-combatant’ pillar within the cultural field on war memory in Belgium. Paradoxically, building their own pillar, a bastion so to speak, was the best way to obtain an equal voice. Other groups, such as resistance fighters, labour conscripts and victims of Nazi persecution, who all separately searched for integration in the

---

<sup>124</sup> *Wolne Słowo* 5/20 (8.1992) 10; P 1: Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005 (138:164).

cultural field on war memory, did not achieve such success. This conclusion runs counter to research which depicts inwardly looking immigrant organisations as bastions hindering integration.<sup>125</sup>

## 1976-1989

With the foundation of the SPL at the end of the 1960s, that exclusive 'Polish ex-combatant pillar' reached its saturation point. In the following years, no new organisations arose; the eight existing former Allied soldiers' organisations (SPK, PKVMKG, the two Belgian-Polish Friendship associations in Ghent and Willebroek, PKO, KFKAE, the Benelux Circle and SPL) had by that time all angled for the engagement of only about 350 individuals and could now only increase their membership lists by stealing members from one another. As a result, a third phase of group formation began: internal competition between the organisations. Initially, competition remained negligible, since the Benelux Circle stood head and shoulders above the other organisations and the scope of the 'Polonia' society's activities became more limited due to the decreased interest of migrants following crises in the Communist Bloc, such as the Prague Spring, and because it preferred contacts with 'Polish' immigrant business persons and intelligentsia at the detriment of contacts with former Allied soldiers in the 1970s (Lencznarowicz, 2002, 178-181).

### The competitor

When in 1976, in Antwerp, the Polish ex-combatant Belgium circle (de Poolse oudstrijderscircle België / Koło Kombatantów w Antwerpii - further KKA) was founded, the Benelux Circle received a real competitor. The initiative was taken by members of the Friendship Association in Willebroek and the PKO, organisations that both had fallen to pieces when support from the Polish People's Republic had diminished. Edmund Kaczyński, president of the KKA and a former division soldier, had been declared 20 percent disabled after World War II, and wanted, now that his professional career was in a downward spiral, to receive financial compensation for his handicap. Kaczyński had a daughter, who had just finished her law degree at a Belgian university, and was willing to find out how she could help her father and his friends.<sup>126</sup> The KKA started as a few-man campaign, but would have far-reaching consequences.

In its opening manifesto, the KKA stated its objectives as being cooperation with other 'Polish ex-combatant' and patriotic organisations in Belgium and striving for the same rights as Belgian ex-combatants.<sup>127</sup> It therefore made contact with the Polish Consulate in Antwerp and local Belgian patriotic organisations: the Coordination Committee 1940-1945 (Coördinatie comité 1940-1945) and the Royal Association of Patriotic Circles in Antwerp (het Koninklijk verbond van Vaderlandsminnende circleën van Antwerpen). Surprisingly, they all supported the idea. Belgian patriotic organisations needed people in ex-combatant uniforms who had fought on Belgian territory in the commemoration parade on November 11, the day World War I had ended. Now that there was a lack of native Belgian World War I ex-combatants, Belgian patriotic organisations looked to former Allied soldiers from Poland. Whereas most other former Allied soldiers, such as Canadians, had returned home after

<sup>125</sup> See for instance Penninx and Schrover 57.

<sup>126</sup> Archive the Belgian Association for Polish ex-combatants (de Belgische vereniging voor Poolse oud-strijders - further BVPO). In Memoriam Edmund Kaczyński.

<sup>127</sup> Archive BVPO. 1e Sprawozdanie z zebrania Polskich kombatantów. 1976.

liberation, the ones from Poland had stayed because of the Cold War. Several of them were invited to become members of local Belgian patriotic organisations and to participate in the commemoration services of World War I. During the interviews, it became clear that their engagement in Belgian patriotic organisations remained limited to the annual November 11 service and that interviewees did not consider their membership very important. For instance, one former division soldier showed me a folder in which he had meticulously kept his yearly Benelux Circle membership cards. When I asked him if he also had membership cards to a Belgian patriotic organisation, he was surprised I was interested in them and had to dig deep into his wardrobe, adding that he had not kept them all.<sup>128</sup>

The KKA stated its members should receive the same rights as Belgian ex-combatants, i.e. that their years of service in the army should be taken into account in their pension and that they should be granted the same privileges as Belgian ex-combatants. Former Allied soldiers from Poland reached retirement age and realised that their years of service in the army did not count for the calculation of their pension. People who had joined the First Polish Division as early as 1937, had a career in which ten years were counted as not eligible, and ended up with a very small monthly amount of money to live from. Moreover, the contact with Belgian patriotic organisations had shown former Allied soldiers from Poland they did not enjoy the same privileges as Belgian ex-combatants, such as a discount on public transportation, financial compensation in case of war invalidity, and cheaper health care.<sup>129</sup> It was time for action. Kaczynski's daughter started to write letters to Belgian ministries.

Her requests were immediately declined. The Belgian state responded that it could only pay out ex-combatants of foreign descent who had fought under Belgian command or foreigners who had been active in Belgian resistance organisations. Former Allied soldiers from Poland, however, had fought under British command and therefore, needed to address their question to the British authorities.<sup>130</sup> Great Britain applied the principle of territoriality and so was only willing to offer financial support to former Allied soldiers from Poland who had settled in Great Britain after World War II.<sup>131</sup> The few Canadian soldiers who had fought under British command and settled later in Belgium were in a similar situation, but they could count on the help of the Canadian authorities. Such a solution did not work for former Allied soldiers from Poland, because the Polish People's Republic refused to recognise them as ex-combatants after World War II (Sword 389). What is more, in 1975, the Belgian government had signed a *Protocol of Agreement* with Belgian patriotic organisations in which it had stated how to deal with all pending cases with regard to war victims from World War II, and although the situation of minorities had not been taken into account, the Belgian government was not willing to reopen the discussion.<sup>132</sup> It clearly shows the lack of interest of both Belgian patriotic organisations and the Belgian government in the situation of former Allied soldiers from Poland before they had made themselves visible. The correspondence initiatives, however, offered also one good piece of news. Belgian law stated that war invalids, regardless of their descent, enjoyed support of their country of settlement. It had taken Edmund Kaczyński 30 years to learn of his rights.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> P 14: Notes on the Interview with Rafał on 6.12.2005; See also P 8: Interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005 (178:187).

<sup>129</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter of Pools oudstrijderscircle van België to Jacques Noel, advisor to the Prime Minister on 25.4.1977.

<sup>130</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter of Marcel Plasmans (Ministry for Social Issues) to BVPO on 13.5.1977.

<sup>131</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter of PVV to BVPO on 18.3.1980. The PVV was the forerunner of the contemporary Flemish liberal party VLD.

<sup>132</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter of the Minister of Defence to BVPO on 13.4.1977.

<sup>133</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter of the Minister of Retirement Pays to BVPO on 22.6.1977.

Jacques Noel, advisor of the Belgian Prime Minister, encouraged the KKA to gather all 'Polish' ex-combatants so that they could function as a mouthpiece for the whole 'Polish community' and to increase cooperation with Belgian ex-combatant organisations, so that they could help to lobby their case.<sup>134</sup> As a result, the organisation firstly tried to attain not only the support of the Polish Consulate, but also of the headquarters of the First Polish Armoured Division in London. Not surprisingly, General Stanisław Maczek responded that the whole Benelux area fell under the competence of the Benelux Circle which refused to recognise the Polish Consulate. It shows that the advice of the Belgian government to unite all former Allied soldiers from Poland in one umbrella organisation could not be fulfilled from the very start due to political differences of opinion.<sup>135</sup> Second, the organisation, as the first and only organisation gathering former Allied soldiers from Poland, transformed itself into an association recognised by the Belgian state: the Belgian Association for Polish ex-combatants (de Belgische vereniging voor Poolse oud-strijders - further BVPO). Organising their lobbying activities in this way, however, did not yield any result. This situation changed only in 1981, when Vincent Foubert, an alderman of Saint-Nicolas, passed on a bill to Ferdinand De Bondt, a member of the Belgian senate.<sup>136</sup> Cooperating with local politicians from liberated cities reaped greater rewards than working together with Belgian patriotic organisations.

The bill resulted in a Royal Decree being passed on 22 July 1983, which came into effect a year later, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the liberation.<sup>137</sup> It granted all foreign soldiers who held Belgian citizenship and had been part of the Allied forces during World War II a moral statute that enabled them to receive military decorations. However there was no mention of war pensions or discounts in health care. In the following two years, 74 former Allied soldiers from Poland received this moral ex-combatant statute via the BVPO.<sup>138</sup>

## The competition

The BVPO filled a need which the Benelux Circle had overlooked. Where the Benelux Circle had taken responsibility for the commemoration of the First Polish Armoured Division's contribution to the liberation of Belgium on a local level, the BVPO raised their members' material needs at the national Belgian level. As a result, it could easily attract members. Already in its founding years, it gathered about 70 former Allied soldiers paying membership, and at its peak, in 1984, it counted about 200 members, of which half were former Allied soldiers and half were Belgian supporters.<sup>139</sup> Among these members, we counted fourteen members of the Benelux Circle who did not leave the Circle, but simply became members of both.

In the early 1980s, the Benelux Circle and the BVPO fought over every member. In 1984, for instance, President Edmund Kaczyński wrote in the BVPO's bulletin:

---

<sup>134</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter of Jacques Noel to BVPO on 10.6.1977; Archive BVPO. *Het Strijdersblad* 20.12.1978.

<sup>135</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter to the 1st Polish Armoured Division on 12.5.1979 and an answer from Maczek on 14.6.1979.

<sup>136</sup> Archive BVPO. *Het vrije waasland* 3.4.1981. Mede op verzoek van Sint-Niklase schepen Foubert. Senator De Bondt dient wetsvoorstel in voor erkenning van Poolse oud-strijders.

<sup>137</sup> *Belgian Monitor* 11.8.1983.

<sup>138</sup> Archive BVPO. Registered list from BVPO to Ministry of Defence on 20.1.1984 with names.

<sup>139</sup> Archive BVPO. Lista członków.

We welcomed several new members... at the detriment of the already long-existing organisation of Polish ex-combatants (First Polish Armoured Division) in Benelux which arose shortly after the liberation and demands the sole representation of Polish ex-combatants. However, it has done nothing to defend the rights of Polish ex-combatants.<sup>140</sup>

For Ryszard Łuczak, the President of the Benelux Circle, not the activities but the ideological differences between the two organisations were crucial, as he militantly put it:

but with the years the battle became harder  
and we were harder and harder  
against people who thought in another way to us  
because we cannot allow compromises  
we were abroad, not in our own country  
and it was a matter of keeping your character  
and we did not have a grey element  
there was white and black and nothing in between  
here in the West there is luxury, because you can choose  
we cannot accept (contact with the consulate - MV)  
we would lose ourselves  
and then we would become the same  
but we had the choice, and he, who did not take advantage of this choice  
of this choice, thus, did not want to take advantage  
he was our enemy  
not enemy, but betrayer<sup>141</sup>

So, the Presidents of the competing organisations the BVPO and the Benelux Circle named a different bone of contention: for Kaczyński, it was the representation of Polish former division soldiers, whereas for Łuczak, it was homeland-related political ideology.

In the second half of the 1980s, however, competition diminished as the BVPO was facing the impossible attribution of financial privileges for its members and the political crisis in the Polish People's Republic. First, the European Court of Justice had rejected the BVPO's request to interpret a European regulation which enabled naturalised Belgians of foreign descent to receive the same rights to ex-combatant privileges as native Belgians, because it considered it only applicable to persons coming from other EEC-member states.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, in 1986, the Belgian Minister of Defence, François-Xavier de Donnea, informed the BVPO that the government would only take into account what had been stipulated in the *Protocol of Agreement* of 1975.<sup>143</sup> Second, in that same period, most members supported the political opposition in the Polish People's Republic and became politically involved for the first time. They had difficulties with the pro-consular course which the board of the BVPO steered. Despite the disapproval of the board and the Polish Consulate, most members supported a demonstration requesting political asylum for a Polish sailor who had escaped from his ship in the harbour of Antwerp.<sup>144</sup> As a result, many members decided to leave the BVPO.

In the third phase of group formation, we see an interesting competition taking place between two very different organisations: the Benelux Circle and the BVPO. The Benelux Circle was

<sup>140</sup> Archive BVPO. Bulletin of the BVPO. *Buletijn* 1984/4 p 1.

<sup>141</sup> P 5: Interview with Ryszard Łuczak on 14.07.2005 (52:67).

<sup>142</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter from Mark Bienstman, representative of the Minister of Finances to BVPO on 3.4.1983.

<sup>143</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter of François-Xavier de Donnea, Minister of Defence to BVPO on 30.1.1986.

<sup>144</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter of Zbigniew Rosiński to his friend Romek from the 24<sup>th</sup> Pułk Ułanów in Great-Britain in 3.1985.

an organisation of former division soldiers, which derived its legitimacy from The First Armoured Division in London and focused its activities on the commemoration of the Division's contribution to the liberation of Belgium. The BVPO was a Belgian association recognized by the Belgian state, which gathered various former Allied soldiers from Poland, who received support from the Polish Consulate and Belgian patriotic organisations and strived for Belgian ex-combatant rights. The Circle's appeal lay in its exclusive membership policy and did not recognise the Polish People's Republic, the BVPO was attractive because it helped individual members to procure a moral ex-combatant statute in Belgium. Whereas the Circle concentrated its activities within the territory of the liberated cities and enjoyed sympathy from city councils and the local population, the BVPO strived for recognition on a national level. On the initiative of the BVPO, Belgian patriotic organisations started to lobby for equal ex-combatant rights. However, only thanks to the intervention of a politician from a liberated city, their case was heard. After approbation of the moral ex-combatant statute for former Allied soldiers from Poland, the Belgian Government used the BVPO to implement its policy, hereby recognising its binding power between the state and individuals. Later, however, the BVPO lost support because the political crises in the Polish People's Republic forced the board to make its political preference explicit, whereas before, it could avoid articulating this since it was Belgian, and not homeland-related issues, which were of most interest for its members.

### **1989-2008**

After the collapse of communism, however, the organisational set-up of former Allied soldiers from Poland came under scrutiny. The new geopolitical Europeanised context brought other lines of division to the fore. A fourth phase of group formation depicts how the old organisation structures and narratives on war memory adapted to the contemporary situation.

### **Organisation structures remain**

The BVPO quickly downgraded to a mere paper organisation; its political engagement in the late 1980s and the death of its President in 1989 effectively finished the organisation's activity. As a result, the Benelux Circle opened its doors to all former division soldiers, regardless of their former organisational engagement. The Circle also established contact with its successor in Poland: the First Polish Armoured Division in Żagań. In 1991, a delegation of the Circle symbolically marched over the German-Polish border to hand over the old insignia of the Division, which had been safeguarded in exile for the whole period that the 'Homeland' had been under communist rule (Kajpus and Van Dam 68). It also contributed to the erection of a monument remembering the activities of the First Polish Armoured Division in Warsaw in 1995 (Fundacja Upamiętnienia Pierwszej Dywizji Pancерnej). Furthermore, it started to cooperate with the local politician Magda De Meyer on lobbying for more ex-combatant rights in Belgian Parliament. This time with success: in 2002, former Allied soldiers from Poland were granted a yearly financial compensation according to the number of years they had served in the army (Verstockt, 2004).<sup>145</sup> However, in 2004, on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation, that decision was revoked, because the soldiers had not had Belgian citizenship during the war.<sup>146</sup> Pieter De Crem and Magda de Meyer, both politicians from liberated cities,

---

<sup>145</sup> *Belgian Monitor* 31.12.2002.

<sup>146</sup> *Het Nieuwsblad* 1.9.2004.

successfully lobbied for a change, and after a disruption of four months, twenty former Allied soldiers from Poland again received their financial compensation.<sup>147</sup>

In 1995, the BVPO resumed activity. Since most former division soldiers preferred to be solely affiliated to the Benelux Circle, the board addressed itself to other former Allied soldiers from Poland, children of 'Polish' immigrants who had moved from the mining regions to Antwerp, 'Polish' refugees who had arrived in the 1980s and new, mostly illegal, 'Polish' immigrants who came to Belgium after the collapse of communism. The BVPO became a social meeting point for people of Polish descent, mainly organising social activities and commemoration services. Nowadays at the steer stands Władysław Styranka, the son of a miner from Poland. A reserve officer, he is the only member of the BVPO who keeps in touch with the Belgian army.<sup>148</sup>

Members of the Benelux Circle kept a distance from the newly arriving 'Polish' immigrants. They felt how after almost half a century, the newcomers downgraded their positive status of unique and exotic foreigners. They realised that the status of foreigner on which they had been able to build their exclusiveness, now all of a sudden could also be a threat. Consequently, they started to stress their 'Belgianness', as the following respondent:

I don't say I am against foreigners or so  
I am also a foreigner  
but with me it is different  
I do not have to be ashamed  
I am with Belgian organisations and so on and so forth<sup>149</sup>

The differences between former division soldiers and newly arrived 'Polish' immigrants were indeed large. Former division soldiers had stayed in exile because they refused to recognise the communist regime in the Polish People's Republic, however the new 'Polish' immigrants had been brought up within the communist system. Whereas former division soldiers in the late 1940s had only had the right to settle in Belgium when they had an officially recognised labour contract, Belgian migration policy offered 'Polish' refugees a per diem upon arrival, and 'Polish' labour migrants mostly worked illegally. Former division soldiers had Belgian wives, and by the 1990s were fluent in Flemish and had built up a social network, new immigrants were upon arrival mostly in another familial situation, did not know Flemish and looked for each others' company (Erdmans 124-157). Consequently, according to the interviewee, 'Polish' immigrants had to be 'ashamed'.

But the exclusiveness former division soldiers bestowed upon themselves was nonetheless at a dead end now that they were growing older. On 3 April 2005, the Benelux Circle dedicated its meeting to the following crucial issue: given our advanced years, we should transfer the task to preserve our tradition to another organisation. The members came up with two possible solutions. They could either join a Belgian patriotic organisation or the BVPO. The latter option was selected during a vote that stirred up so much emotion, that people who had

---

<sup>147</sup> *Het Volk* 4.12.2004.

<sup>148</sup> *Belgian Monitor* 25.3.1995; Talk with the current President of the BVPO, Władysław Styranka on 28 December 2005.

<sup>149</sup> P 14: Interview with Rafał on 6 December 2005 (84:88).

gotten along for more than 60 years, suddenly could not find a common language any longer.<sup>150</sup> What had happened?

### **Narratives on war memory change**

One element of the First Polish Armoured Division's character appeared to have been silenced during the Cold War: its recruitment. The Division consisted not only of the soldiers who had left Poland in 1939, but also of people who had found their way to Great Britain between 1940 and 1944, having flown from various prisoner of war and concentration camps in Europe, Siberia and Africa, or having managed to switch the German front for the French or Belgian one. The latter were mostly people from Silesia who had voluntarily or forcibly been enrolled in the Nazi army and had managed to escape. The ones who had arrived in Great Britain could join the Division after going through a collaboration investigation and taking on a pseudonym, whereas the ones who had only met the Division in Belgium, simply shipped in somewhere on its liberation march (Maczek 130; Mieczkowski, 2003, 14).

This recruitment element turned out to be of crucial importance for Belgian patriotic organisations. As long as contacts had remained loose and pragmatic, that past had been able to remain hidden, but on the eve of a merger, the curriculum vitae of every single individual became important. The members of Benelux were unable to reach an agreement, and, therefore, decided to ally with the new 'Polish' migrants of the BVPO whom they had kept away from before.

There, they were welcomed with open arms. The tradition of the former division soldiers in fact provided the new 'Polish' migrant-members with an extremely good argument to defend their stay in Belgium. After all, had these former division soldiers not been the forerunners of peace in Europe and did the new 'Polish' migrants-members, as fellow-ethnics, not have to continue to build a unified and peaceful Europe? The President, for instance, wrote the following about the merger in the organisation's bulletin:

I have the hope that all members, sympathisers and friends will become members of our new organisation, which will enable us to take part in the further building of a Unified Europe, a Europe without war.<sup>151</sup>

The BVPO offers a re-interpretation of war memory, one that transcends the nation-oriented focus that had, and still does, characterise(d) the way World War II has been remembered in Europe. That such an idea surfaced among new 'Polish' immigrants, does not come as a surprise. They are the first ones experiencing how the new geopolitical context after the end of the Cold War changed their lives. Are they, therefore, the heralds of a Europeanised collective war memory in Europe? (Bingen, Borodziej, Troebst (ed.); Brodecki, Wawer, Kondracki).

To conclude, the merger phenomenon I here described does not fit into academic literature stating that integration means newcomers over time are absorbed in the host society. As the second phase of group formation indicated, former Allied soldiers from Poland had found a particular path of integration by setting up their own 'Polish ex-combatant' pillar. But with

<sup>150</sup> *Komunikat* BVPO nr 96. Sprawozdanie z walnego zebrania 3.3.2003, 3; P 13: Interview with Waldek on 25.11.2005 (73:78); P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006 (48:55).

<sup>151</sup> *Komunikat* Verbond van Poolse Oud-strijders en Veteranen van de 1<sup>ste</sup> Poolse Pantserdivisie van Generaal Maczek in België vzw / Związek Polskich Kombatantów i Weteranów 1 Dywizji Panczernej Generała Maczka w Belgii vzw 2005 (27/01) 4.

the change of the geopolitical context, that integration had to be re-negotiated between various players. This aspect has been overlooked by Vermeulen. Similarly to Schrover and Penninx, fellow integration researchers focusing on immigrant organisations such as Vermeulen do not take into account that a shift in geopolitical context can turn a society, and hence also the integration within that society, upside down. What I made clear is that within the field of the society which I researched, the cultural field on war memory, the collapse of communism redefined integration for former Allied soldiers from Poland. The current Europeanisation brought other players into that field, and maybe the organisations' merger, i.e. the choice to cooperate with 'Polish' newcomers considered not yet integrated in public opinion, is in fact the contemporary path to integration in a Europeanised memory of World War II.

## Conclusion

The group formation dynamics of former Allied soldiers from Poland passed through four distinct phases, each accentuating a decisive factor. During the first phase, war experiences and political disinterest created bonds between people. Only when, in the second phase, dominant agencies of war memory articulation started mobilisation, did formal organisations arise. Transnational agencies targeted specific people and tried to push through their narratives. On the initiative of agencies from Great Britain, the biggest organisation, the Benelux Circle arose. It gathered only former division soldiers and saw the experiences of the First Polish Armoured Division through the eyes of the ongoing Cold War. History had simply started with 'Catholic Poles' liberating Flanders. It was the installation of the communist Polish People's Republic that had 'forced' them (i.e. those who were concerned about the 'freedom of Poland') to stay in exile. A mutual hatred towards communism unified the members and kept them focused on former Allied soldiers who had deserted free Poland by walking into the enticing trap of the Polish People's Republic mobilisation, i.e. joining competing organisations sponsored by the Communist 'Polonia' society or supported by Minister Mieczysław Moczar. In fact, for former Allied soldiers from Poland, other than division soldiers, this was the only chance of support. The Benelux Circle's focus also legitimised the settlement of its members in Belgium as 'victims of communism', and, as a consequence, did well out of it in their host society. This is why from all the former Allied soldiers from Poland, only former division soldiers are commonly known. Interestingly, Belgian agencies of war memory offering support were initially councils of liberated cities, and not Belgian patriotic organisations. This phenomenon, however, runs parallel with the segregated cultural field on war memory in Belgium, in which various agencies with similar war experiences each lobbied separately for their case on the national level. Forming an own 'Polish ex-combatant' pillar was therefore a successful path of integration.

In the third phase, the BVPO fought hard for equal ex-combatant rights, hereby striving for the integration of former Allied soldiers from Poland in the cultural field on war memory on a national level. Although Belgian patriotic organisations started to include former Allied soldiers from Poland at World War I public commemoration services as Belgian ex-combatants were dying out, they were uninterested or incapable of lobbying for equal ex-combatant rights. Representatives of local city councils managed to assist the BVPO. The organisation became a competitor of the Benelux Circle because of its different strategy towards the host society, but was categorised by the Circle as a political opponent. The switching of members back and forth shows that ordinary members dealt more pragmatically with the issue.

Lastly, after the collapse of communism, Europeanisation redrew the organisational life and war memory of former Allied soldiers from Poland. With the change of the geopolitical context, the integration of former Allied soldiers from Poland had to be re-negotiated between the various agencies in the cultural field on war memory. Belgian patriotic organisations pointed to a drawback in the Circle's Cold War narrative on war memory: the recruitment policy of the First Polish Armoured Division. Perhaps the merger of the Benelux Circle with 'Polish' newcomers could be the contemporary path to integration in a Europeanised narrative on war memory. The idea that societies can change due to geopolitical incidents, and that in such cases integration also has to be re-defined, has until now been absent in academic literature on immigrant organisations.

### Chapter 3: ‘For many of my girlfriends, the war is not history, but biography!’

Like former Allied soldiers from Poland, former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium gathered in immigrant organisations and, together, articulated narratives on war memory, in this way giving meaning to their war and migration experiences. However, their organisational landscape and narratives on war memory were very different to the ones of the former soldiers discussed in the former chapter. Contrary to the variety of small formal ex-combatant organisations, former Ostarbeiterinnen gathered in one large formal organisation: the Association for Soviet Patriots/Citizens (Soiuz Sovetskikh Patriotov - further SSP, from 1953 onwards Soiuz Sovetskikh Grazhdan - further SSG).<sup>152</sup> The title of this organisation already suggests that members, more than former Allied soldiers from Poland, lent an ear to their home society to articulate their narratives on war memory. This chapter unravels the group formation process and group memory activities of former Ostarbeiterinnen upon arrival and during their settlement in Belgium. It examines how their group formation processes were almost exclusively oriented around their home and not host society. It also questions which mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion led to the SSP/SSG being marginalised within Belgian and Soviet narratives on war memory during communism, and why Soviet authorities nevertheless had a special interest in maintaining contact with the SSP/SSG.

As literature examining marginalised people during communism and opposition under Stalin holds strong doubts that civil organisations uniting Ostarbeiterinnen in the Soviet Union existed at all, researching group formation process and group memory activities of former Ostarbeiterinnen in the Atlantic World is particularly interesting (Fürst 314; Kuromiya 309-314). Soviet authorities meticulously prevented voices from contradicting the official narrative on war memory and succeeded to a great extent within the Soviet Union (Tumarkin; Merridale, 2007). However, former Ostarbeiterinnen in the Atlantic World posed an additional danger. The construction of their own narratives on war memory was much more difficult to obviate, and due to their travels to the Soviet Union, that possible counter narrative could be dispersed within Soviet society. Here I research to what extent former Ostarbeiterinnen in the Atlantic World, namely in Belgium, within their organisation the SSP/SSG, reacted to Soviet attempts to bring their narrative on war memory in line with the official Soviet one. By focusing on the narratives of migrants, this chapter adds new elements to the recent research concerning the counter narratives on war memory within the former Soviet Union as performed by Orlando Figes in *The Whisperers*, on daily life under Stalin and Catherine Merridale in *Ivan's War*, on the war memory of Red Army soldiers (Figes; Merridale, 2007).

The group formation process and the construction of a narrative on war memory of former Ostarbeiterinnen passed through three phases. As with the former Allied soldiers from Poland, during the first phase, war experiences and political preferences were crucial, followed by a phase in which the opportunity structure of host and home society were decisive. The monopoly position of SSG however, led to an absence of internal competition dynamics between various immigrant organisations. Interestingly, in the third phase (after the fall of communism), the organisational landscape was not redrawn, although the narratives on war memory articulated in the SSG noticeably changed.

---

<sup>152</sup> *Belgian Monitor* 20.1.1945 annex 90, 9.3.1946 nr 592, 31.10.1953 nr 2856, 17.1.1963 nr 275.

## 1945-1956

When former Ostarbeiterinnen arrived in Belgium, various existing civil society organisations were interested in making contact with them: ‘Russian’ immigrant organisations, a Belgian organisation sympathising with the Soviet Union, a ‘Ukrainian’ immigrant organisation and the Belgian religious order, the ‘Rhedemptorist Fathers’. The interviews I conducted made it clear, however, that their attempts did not yield much and that most former Ostarbeiterinnen during the first years of settlement preferred to gather informally.

Estimations suggest that around 1945, about 20,000 migrants of Russian descent lived in Belgium.<sup>153</sup> Most of them had arrived in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, leading to a significantly high number of former soldiers of the White army. In the interwar years, these Apatrides, i.e. political refugees recognised by the League of Nations, gathered in the Russian all-Military Union (Russisch al-Militaire Unie - further RAMU) and other ex-combatant organisations, which during the Second World War were dissolved by Iuriï Voïchekhovskiï, the de facto leader of Russian immigrant organisational life (Coudenys, 2004, 138, 155, 211, 252). Voïchekhovskiï introduced a split within the organisational outline: while before, all people involved had been anti-communists, he and his hard-line fellows now collaborated with the German occupier, whereas others engaged in Belgian resistance forces (Coudenys, 2004, 258-259). After liberation, within the ‘Russian’ immigrant organisational life, anti-communism was equated with collaborationism and the Voïchekhovskiï club was charged with heresy (Coudenys, 2004, 273). Initially, ‘Russian’ immigrant organisations from the resistance camp were more open towards the Soviet Union and made contact with the Soviet Military Mission as well as with new arriving Soviet migrants like former Ostarbeiterinnen. The Union for Russian War Invalids (Union des Invalides de guerre russes - further UIGR) for instance, an organisation of World War I veterans which had lobbied for the support of the League of Nations in the interwar years, was willing to plea for Ostarbeiterinnen at the International Refugee Organisation (Coudenys, 2004, 138). However, the convictions of Ostarbeiterinnen who were brought up with Soviet ideology were not in tune with the naive ideas on communism of the Union and contact was soon broken off.<sup>154</sup> When, in 1950, a consortium of thirteen ‘Russian’ immigrant organisations, including the UIGR, applied for subsidies at the International Refugee Organisation, they mentioned in their application that they did not seek or maintain contact with ‘Soviet immigrants’.<sup>155</sup>

However, a few former Ostarbeiterinnen found their way to a new ‘Russian’ immigrant organisation: the SSP, which was established in 1946. Some interwar immigrants, none of whom had played a significant role before, now were used by the Military Soviet Mission as puppets to inspire others with Soviet ideology (Coudenys, 2004, 273; Ronin 46-47).<sup>156</sup> Although at first the board consisted of elderly immigrant men, a special women’s department (Zhenotdel) would gather young former Ostarbeiterinnen of Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian descent from 1947 onwards.<sup>157</sup> Given the risk of repatriation which former Ostarbeiterinnen faced due to their dual citizenship, eyebrows might be raised at such

<sup>153</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police 813. Réfugiés russes (établis en Yougoslavie) 1930-1960. Memorandum sur les activités philanthropiques, culturelles et les besoins de l’émigration d’expression russe en Belgique 18.1.1950, p. 2. For detailed information on naturalisations and student numbers see Coudenys, 2004, 324-326.

<sup>154</sup> P 28: Interview with Elly on 2.02.2007 (11).

<sup>155</sup> Archive the Belgian Aliens Police 813. Réfugiés russes, p. 8.

<sup>156</sup> *Sovetskiï Patriot* 3/12-13 (11.1947) 5.

<sup>157</sup> *Sovetskiï Patriot* 3/12-13 (11.1947) 9; P 25: Interview with Wendy on 6.11.2006 (22:34).

organisational engagement. However, one should keep in mind that initially only about fifteen former Ostarbeiterinnen gathered in the Zhenotdels (Zhenotdeli) of Brussels and Ghent, that they were only loosely attached to the board and that their names were never mentioned in the organisation's bulletin, *Sovetskii Patriot*.<sup>158</sup> Within Belgian society, moreover, communist ideology was fairly popular. The Belgian Communist Party had been one of the driving forces behind the Independent Front (Het Onafhankelijkheidsfront), the biggest left-wing resistance force during World War II, and could convert its successes into electoral support in 1946, when it gained 12.6 percent of the votes (Van den Wijngaert, Beullens 15). As a result, the Belgian Communist Party became part of the government, but only until March 1947. Moreover, the immensely popular Belgian queen-widow, Elisabeth, admired the communist world and knew Russian (Raskin 331). Immediately after the liberation, for instance, she wrote a congratulation letter to Stalin in Russian (Tavenier 132). From the beginning, however, the SSP stated it would not interfere with Belgian domestic politics and therefore did not have formal contacts with the Belgian Communist Party, nor with the queen.<sup>159</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Belgian-Soviet Association (Belgisch-Sovjetische Vereeniging - further BSV), with its roots in the 1920s and several communist voters among its members, was also interested in the newly arrived Soviet citizens (Coudenys, 2000). Although the interviews I conducted revealed that former Ostarbeiterinnen felt welcomed at the Soviet film evenings organised by the Association, the BSV's bulletin reported that Soviet citizens had to be repatriated consistent with the Yalta Agreement and even included a form for completion through which members could inform on former Ostarbeiterinnen.<sup>160</sup>

After World War II, a 'Ukrainian' immigrant organisation also tried to get in touch with the arriving Ostarbeiterinnen. In the interwar period, 'Ukrainian' migrants in Belgium had gathered in different types of immigrant organisations at different places of settlement. In provincial mining areas, folk community-type groups of economic immigrants sprang up, whereas in big cities, organisational life was based around nationality-type groups consisting of 'Ukrainian' political refugees from different parts of Ukraine. After the Second World War, a united Ukrainian relief effort with a clear anti-Soviet profile was established to overcome the geographical dichotomy of those who had emigrated to Belgium. The Ukrainian Relief Committee (Ukrainskyi Dopomohovyi Komitet - further UDK) tried to unite all factions of 'Ukrainian' migrants around one central point: helping 'Ukrainians' in Belgium, whether they were Displaced Persons employed in the Belgian coal mines, Greek-Catholic students at the Catholic University of Leuven or former Ostarbeiterinnen. Initially, UDK lobbied on behalf of these women at various Belgian ministries and protested against Soviet demands to repatriate them. Later however, UDK cut off contact with them because it feared Soviet infiltration (Luyckx 160; Venken and Goddeeris 104, 106, 118).

The Rhedemptorist Fathers in turn were interested in the former Ostarbeiterinnen for religious reasons. In 1913, the Belgian Rhedemptorists had accepted Metropolitan Andreï Sheptytskyi's request to reassign Belgian Fathers who had been active among Ukrainians in Canada since 1899 to Galicia. As fewer 'Ukrainian' migrants were arriving in Canada, the Metropolitan considered the Rhedemptorist Fathers' help more necessary in the region where these emigrants were coming from. What is now Western Ukraine, was in 1913 part of the

<sup>158</sup> *Sovetskii Patriot* 3/12-13 (11.1947) 9; Archive of the Ghent choir conductor, report 'Soiuz Sovetskikh Grazhdan v Bel'gii', s.d., 3 p. In 1980, *Sovetskii Patriot* would change to simply *Patriot*.

<sup>159</sup> *Sovetskii Patriot* 3/12-13 (11.1947) 8.

<sup>160</sup> *De Sovjet-Unie. Wekelijksch Orgaan der Belgisch-Sovjetische Vereeniging* 2/17 (4.5.1945) 7; 2/38 (28.9.1945) 8; P 25: Interview with Wendy on 6.11.2006 (12:14).

Austrian-Hungarian Empire and would become part of the newly established independent Polish state after World War I. In Galicia, the Rhedemptorist Fathers did missionary work for the Greek Catholic Church until their departure at the outbreak of the Second World War (Boni 278; Ceyssens 54; Houthaeve; Lukie and Chernoff; Venken and Goddeeris 93). With the arrival of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium after World War II, young women who were irreligious or non-practising Orthodox, the Rhedemptorists aimed to restart their missionary activities. They appointed Father Karel Blicke and Father Louis Regaert to take responsibility for the spiritual care of former Ostarbeiterinnen and engaged Irène Posnoff, the daughter of a former Kievan theology professor living in Belgium since the Civil War, who had just finished her doctoral studies in Roman Philology at the Catholic University of Leuven, to edit the newspaper *Zhizn' s Bogom* in Russian for Catholics coming from the Soviet Union.<sup>161</sup>

A baptism campaign was launched. The Rhedemptorists went to more than one hundred Flemish cities where they preached the word of God in order to convince former Ostarbeiterinnen to get baptised.<sup>162</sup> The notebook of Karel Bilcke shows that parents-in-law welcomed the initiative far more enthusiastically than the former Ostarbeiterinnen themselves.<sup>163</sup> As the Rhedemptorist Fathers spoke Ukrainian or a Russian-Ukrainian dialect, but not Russian, Ostarbeiterinnen immediately associated them with the Galicia region and some thought they must have supported Stepan Bandera, the well-known Ukrainian nationalist leader who Ostarbeiterinnen believed to have collaborated with the Germans during World War II.<sup>164</sup> Bilcke tried to overcome their unwillingness and even wrote a manual for his colleagues in which he explained his technique to convince former Ostarbeiterinnen:

The priest has never to address her, but the parents of the boy (the Ostarbeiterin's future husband - MV) or the boy himself. With them, the priest can reason and in them, the girl has confidence. So, work on the environment and this environment can force her softly.<sup>165</sup>

Rhedemptorists were convinced that they were saving souls, as the triumphant words of Karel Bilcke on the baptism of Ol'ga Lewchenko show:

She said: if one sentence contains twenty words, and two or three are lacking, then, the whole sentence is nonsense, false. If in Orthodoxy, for every one hundred veracities there are only five present, then that whole Orthodox Church is false.<sup>166</sup>

The archive of the Rhedemptorist Fathers contains 138 names of former Ostarbeiterinnen who were baptised into the Roman Catholic Church in the early post-war years.<sup>167</sup> All of them were automatically subscribed to Posnoff's bulletin.

<sup>161</sup> Archive KADOC, Archive of the Rhedemptorist Fathers, 5.3.1. Bilcke Karel and Regaert Louis; *Kerk en Leven* 17.1.1985 11.

<sup>162</sup> Archive KADOC, 'Rhedemptorist Fathers', 210 Louis Vanganswinkel, folder 3, 'De huissmissie verover Vlaanderen. De 103 huissmissies van de paters Rhedemptoristen: 1946-1953. Met missiekaart, huis- en nabezoeken'.

<sup>163</sup> Archive KADOC, 'Rhedemptorist Fathers', 5.3.1. Bilcke Karel, folder 8, Notebook.

<sup>164</sup> P 22: Interview with Debby on 20 July 2006 (80:86).

<sup>165</sup> Archive KADOC, 'Rhedemptorist Fathers', 5.3.1. Bilcke Karel, folder 3, Een onvoorzien geval van moderne zielzorg en apostolaat: het huwelijk van orthodoxe meisjes uit USSR, p 2.

<sup>166</sup> Archive KADOC, 'Rhedemptorist Fathers', 5.3.1. Bilcke Karel, folder 8, Notebook, Olga Lewtschenko.

<sup>167</sup> Archive KADOC, 'Rhedemptorist Fathers', 5.3.1. Bilcke Karel, folder 3 and 8; 171 Jozef Deweerdt, folder 2.

During the interviews it became clear that the various existing civil society organisations interested in the former Ostarbeiterinnen, ‘Russian’ immigrant organisations, a Belgian organisation sympathising with the Soviet Union, a ‘Ukrainian’ immigrant organisation and the Belgian religious order the Rhedemptorist Fathers, could not count on the numerous support of former Ostarbeiterinnen. Instead, they started to meet up informally, and often their husbands were the decisive factor for such group formation. Former research already demonstrated the more informal character of women’s immigrant organisations and the difficulties historians encounter in unravelling the formation of such groups (Lucassen, 2004, 19). Sandy, for instance, told me how the city council of La Louvière in 1946 held a ceremony for all city-dwellers who had been prisoners of war, and that she had met a handful former Ostarbeiterinnen there with whom she established friendships.<sup>168</sup> Brenda from Waregem told me that her husband had met a man who was also married to a former Ostarbeiterin at a local football game. From that moment on, both families visited each other weekly.<sup>169</sup>

Even more difficult than unravelling how such informal grouping took place, is to discover what former Ostarbeiterinnen spoke about when they met up. No written sources reported their gatherings. Interviewees told me their main concern was to exchange information from ‘home’. Many of them faced difficulties getting in touch with their families in the Soviet Union, because they had moved, their letters were censored or even held back.<sup>170</sup> News from home, no matter how scarce and distorted, was always a big event.<sup>171</sup> Letters that reached Belgium were in line with the official Stalin doctrine, articulating the Soviet narrative on war memory. Various voices in the direct environment of former Ostarbeiterinnen and Belgian public discourse spoke badly of the Soviet Union and Stalin and challenged the war memory which former Ostarbeiterinnen read in letters from home. Interviewees made it clear to me that they had been ‘afraid’ of the Soviet regime in these days, but that they nevertheless continued to give more credit to the words of their relatives at home than to what their environment told them.<sup>172</sup> It is therefore worth briefly describing how World War II was remembered in the Soviet Union during Stalinism.

The Stalin doctrine propagated a war discourse of loyalty towards the Motherland and spoke about universal brotherhood, two forces which had led to the Soviets’ victory over Germany. That victory, in turn, served as the ultimate legitimacy of the Russian Revolution and the installation of the Soviet system. However, World War II had also caused spontaneous destalinisation, since the Communist Party had not been able to control social life and had therefore been forced to offer people more freedom of initiative (Figs 636; Hosking 173). After the war, the Communist Party was afraid that the remembrance of this war freedom would destabilise political life. It therefore silenced the war experiences of many individuals and changed the meaning of Soviet propaganda concepts used during World War II. During the war, patriotism had been portrayed as the force that had led to the realisation of the Russian revolutionary liberating ideal; finally, Soviet people could combat a real fascist enemy of socialism (Weiner, 1996, 638). Afterwards, however, the same patriotism became the motive behind internal purification within the Soviet Union, leading to the expulsion of

---

<sup>168</sup> P 41: Interview with Sandy on 14.02.2006 (102:110).

<sup>169</sup> P 20: Interview with Brenda on 13.11.2006 (273:290).

<sup>170</sup> *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 11.

<sup>171</sup> P 24: Interview with Kelly on 7.02.2007 (420:436).

<sup>172</sup> See for instance P 24: Interview with Kelly on 7.02.2007 (390:398); P 30: Interview with Amanda on 18.07.2006 (256:268).

many dissidents (Merridale, 2007, 369-370). In this way, the freedom Soviet citizens had fought for during World War II was not realised.

## 1956-1991

### The Motherland calls

Former Ostarbeiterinnen would, as other Soviet citizens, find out to what atrocities Stalin's policy had led only in 1956, three years after his death, when Nikita Khrushchëv gave his famous secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress. Although on 14 February 1956 Khrushchëv unveiled only a limited scope of Stalin's atrocities, it was a shock for many Soviet citizens and led to a dramatic change in the Soviet Union's policy (Figs 616; Sherlock 2). Within the country, many Gulag prisoners received amnesty and became reintegrated into society. Like Soviet ex-combatants, they started to formulate a counter narrative to the propaganda story glorifying the Soviet Union's victory at the end of World War II. From 1956 onwards, the Communist Party was willing to integrate the war experiences of some other people than Communist Partisans in its official narrative on war memory. It tolerated the new literary genre of *okopnaia pravda* (trench truth), consisting of individual Soviet ex-combatants of the Red Army's war memoirs that describe Stalin's military setbacks, but it did not accept criticism on the official narrative on war memory depicting communist discipline and leadership as the source for Soviet victory (Figs 637).

The openness to war experiences of some other people also helped establish contact with former Soviet prisoners of war and Ostarbeiterinnen living abroad. The Soviet administration even set up a special organisation to make contact with (former) Soviet citizens in the Atlantic World and to persuade them to move back.<sup>173</sup> Just like the Polonia Society concentrated on in chapter two, the Committee for Return to the Motherland (*Komitet za Vozvrashchenie na Rodinu* - further KVR) was portrayed by Soviet authorities as a grass-roots initiative - coming from former Soviet prisoners of war living in the Soviet Union - in order to bypass the negative image of Soviet authorities in the Atlantic World.<sup>174</sup>

The organisation edited the bulletin *Za Vozvrashchenie na Rodinu!* (For the Return to the Motherland!) that was distributed among immigrants abroad through Soviet Embassies and supporting immigrant organisations, like the SSG in Belgium.<sup>175</sup> In the first years of its existence, the bulletin consisted of persuasive articles inciting people to move back (such as 'The Motherland Calls') and pictures of happily returned families; hereby imitating the

<sup>173</sup> As chapter one indicated, former Ostarbeiterinnen were still Soviet citizens after they had married their Belgian husbands, former Ostarbeiter received the status of Displaced Persons.

<sup>174</sup> In 1959, KVR would change into The Committee for Return to the Motherland and the development of cultural ties with countrymen living abroad (*Komitet za Vozvrashchenie na Rodinu i razvitie kul'turnykh svyazei s sootchestvennikami za Rubezhom* - further KVRKSSR). In 1963, KVRKSSR would become The Soviet Committee for cultural ties with countrymen living abroad (*Sovetskii Komitet po kul'turnykh svyaziam s sootchestvennikami za Rubezhom* - further SKKSSR). In 1975, SKKSSR would change into The Soviet Organisation for cultural ties with countrymen living abroad - Organisation 'The Motherland' (*Sovetskoe Obshchestvo po kul'turnykh svyaziam s sootchestvennikami za Rubezhom* - *Obshchestvo 'Rodina'* - further the Motherland Organisation). In 1992, the Motherland Organisation would turn into the Association for ties with countrymen living abroad - Association 'The Motherland' (*Assotsiatsiia po svyaziam s sootchestvennikami za Rubezhom* - *Assotsiatsiia 'Rodina'* - further the Motherland Association (Archive the Motherland Association, 50 Let Sluzheniia Rodine 3, 5, 6).

<sup>175</sup> P 31: Participant Observation on 25.09.2006. In 1960, *Za Vozvrashchenie na Rodinu!* became *Golos Rodiny* (The Voice of the Motherland).

remigration campaign from the early post-war years (Stelzl-Marx, 2003, 46).<sup>176</sup> In the meantime, the bulletin tried to make the official Soviet ideology attractive to immigrants. It therefore used the following two techniques.

First, it wrote glorious propaganda articles about important Soviet history anniversaries. In 1958, on the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, for instance, it informed its readership:

Before our eyes we have the image of an uncomplicated Soviet person neglected abroad, sucking up the idea of brotherhood and solidarity, a patriot, left behind, wherever he was, in the battle for truth, freedom or peace. That's why, today, we have the right to say in the name of the Soviet Motherland: Dear countryman! The holiday of the Great October - that is also your holiday. You still live far from the Motherland, but you are her son, her daughter.<sup>177</sup>

The KVR used the Russian Revolution, which was portrayed as a fight for freedom and peace, as an ideological tool to appeal to Soviet immigrants to move back (note the use of the word 'still'). As such, the Soviet narrative concentrating on World War II - in which, as said before, the Soviets' victory functioned as the legitimacy for the Russian Revolution - was only articulated in an indirect way. Such a presentation lines up with the way World War II was remembered within the Soviet Union by that time. Orlando Figes wrote that until the mid-1960s, several aspects of World War II were silenced and that the authorities used the Russian Revolution to remember World War II, instead of placing World War II directly under the spotlight (Figes 637-638).

Second, the KVR made use of the voices of immigrants to counterbalance the stereotypisation, by that time negative and violent, of the Soviet Union in the Atlantic World (Lagrou, 1997a, 136). Quotations of immigrants' letters written to the Committee had to serve as proof for the Soviet Union's prosperous development and peace-keeping objective. Just like the Polonia Society, the Committee silenced the majority of letters asking for help or expressing disbelief at the Committee's initiative and only published censored contributions from former Ostarbeiterinnen who had visited the Soviet Union and wrote positively about their experience.<sup>178</sup>

Indeed, the Thaw permitted Soviet citizens who had emigrated to travel home to meet their families and enabled foreigners to come on organised tourist trips (Ginsburgs 63; Van den Wijngaert and Beullens 22). In 1961, for instance, the former Ostarbeiterin Irena Filippovskaia 'wrote' in the bulletin that her Flemish neighbour used to say that the Soviet Union was a backward region, but she had seen this was not true and so had convinced him to visit the country himself. Afterwards, he spoke only in superlatives about communism.<sup>179</sup> That her neighbour's impression about the Soviet Union was so roseate does not come as a surprise, since it was the task of the official tourist agency Intourist to overwhelm tourists with typical Soviet successes such as impressive buildings and the 'fruits' of its social security policy, e.g. kindergartens.<sup>180</sup> It had also developed a special method to manipulate foreigners ideologically (Bagdasarian and others 121, 159). One has the impression the Committee used the letter from Irena to show Soviet migrants living abroad that each of them could help to change the convictions of their direct environment. The bulletin, indeed, reads

<sup>176</sup> *Za Vozvrashchenie na Rodinu!* 1/10 (9.1955) 1, 3; 4/1 (192) (1.1958) 2; 4/5 (196) (1.1958) 2.

<sup>177</sup> *Za Vozvrashchenie na Rodinu!* 4/86 (277) (11.1958) 1.

<sup>178</sup> Archive the Motherland Association, D-085 Bel'giiia. *Perepiska s otdel'nymi litsami; Golos Rodiny* 7/41 (528) (5.1961) 3).

<sup>179</sup> *Golos Rodiny* 7/45 (542) (6.1961) 3.

<sup>180</sup> *Golos Rodiny* 7/44 (541) (6.1961) 3.

like a cookbook with various basic recipes on how to be a communist in the Atlantic World.<sup>181</sup>

The ideological education aimed to counteract the disillusionments which former Ostarbeiterinnen from Belgium experienced during their holidays in the Soviet Union. On the way back from their first visits, their heads were full of questions, as they found themselves straddled between the fear for communism reigning in their environment on the one hand, and the positive (censored) words their relatives had formulated in their letters on the second. For many interviewees, their first trip dispelled their beliefs in the Soviet Union. Peggy, for instance, made that clear to me when we were having a cup of coffee:

do you know  
at home we did not drink real coffee  
because that was chicory  
but they call it coffee  
but I didn't drink coffee until I came to live in Belgium  
but without sugar I can't drink  
I've heard my mama telling  
when she was young  
that she was allowed to drink coffee once in a while  
but with sugar  
without you don't have to give her, because she won't drink it

I: and did your mama drink coffee afterwards?

Peggy: but that was pure milk!  
they boiled milk, and they made coffee from that  
but when we came there  
and she let everything burn  
and I said: 'Ma! You can't do that!  
coffee needs its bitter taste!  
despite the sugar!'<sup>182</sup>

Let us take a look at Peggy's thoughts. During her childhood, coffee had functioned as a symbol of past luxury. Her mother was a descendant of a noble 'Polish' family in Galicia, and had once in a while drunken coffee before she had met Peggy's father, a 'Ukrainian' workman from the Kiev region.<sup>183</sup> Through her mother, little Peggy knew that the coffee she drunk was of inferior quality. Since the letters Peggy received from her mother in the early post-war years had spoken about good food, Peggy had thought that her mother had rediscovered the taste of real coffee.<sup>184</sup> For Peggy, coffee was a new thing in Belgium. When she started to drink it, she developed the habit of adding sugar, just like her mother had told her. However, when she paid her mother a visit, it not only turned out that her mother used smaller quantities of coffee than Peggy did in Belgium, but also that she did not really know how to prepare coffee and used sugar to adjust its taste. For Peggy, her mother's behaviour showed the coffee her mother had drunken when she was young must have been similarly bad and that insight refuted Peggy's childhood imagination on luxury. Peggy now realised she knew how to drink coffee better than her mother and used that perception to value life style in Belgium more highly than in the Soviet Union, a perception that dominated during the whole interview.

<sup>181</sup> See for instance *Golos Rodiny* 7/41 (538) (5.1961) 3; 7/44 (541) (6.1961) 3.

<sup>182</sup> P 27: Interview with Peggy on 15.10.2006 (306:323).

<sup>183</sup> P 27: Interview with Peggy on 14.09.2006 (54:58).

<sup>184</sup> P 27: Interview with Peggy on 18.09.2006 (783:789).

Former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium could visit their relatives after the Soviet Embassy had approved their visa application. Interestingly, in the 1950s, only Ostarbeiterinnen involved in the SSG received a visa. Although membership was not a criterion mentioned on the visa form for completion, embassy personnel asked each individual for it.<sup>185</sup> Not surprisingly, the SSG's membership roll started to grow. In Ghent for instance, the SSG counted 20 members in 1955, and 80 in 1957.<sup>186</sup> By the early 1960s, the SSG counted more than 1,000 members (of an estimated total of 3,000 to 4,000 former Ostarbeiterinnen settled in Belgium) and had thirteen regional departments in Brussels, Antwerp, Boom, Saint Nicolas, Ghent, Denderleeuw, Liège, Moeskroen-Kortrijk, Charleroi, Mons, Namur, Tournai and La Louvière.<sup>187</sup>

During one of the SSG Antwerp meetings which I attended in January 2006, a member told me how her friend had become a member in those years. Becky's friend was from Herentals, a town one hour's train ride from Antwerp. They had worked together in Germany and had stayed in touch after settling in Belgium. Becky considered her friend lived too far to come to SSG gatherings. When she saw how her friend had left the consul's office in tears, after her visa had been refused because her friend was not a member, she decided to arrange a meeting between the consul and her friend at an evening party of SSG. There, the consul had asked Becky if he should give her friend a visa. After she had approved that, Becky told me, her friend could finally leave for a holiday in the Soviet Union.<sup>188</sup>

Not only the Soviet Embassy, but also the KVRKSSR/ the Motherland Organisation played an important role in this respect. When a former Ostarbeiterin was rejected to travel independently to the Soviet Union, she could still try to be invited by the KVRKSSR/ the Motherland Organisation on an organised holiday.<sup>189</sup> Every year, the KVRKSSR/ the Motherland Organisation invited about ten loyal SSG board members to the Soviet Union for free. Choir directors received musical instruction, members writing for the SSG's bulletin *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* received training in journalism, and Presidents of regional branches were interviewed about the SSGs working at the KVRKSSR/ the Motherland Organisation's headquarters. On these holidays, board members learned how to proliferate the Soviet narrative on war memory among their members by means of Soviet propaganda songs (see chapter five) and articles which glorified Soviet victory, and organising activities such as remembrances of the Soviet Army.<sup>190</sup> The talks which the Committee held with Presidents functioned as a source of control and policy adjustment. In 1973, for instance, a President explained that members immediately left the SSG when they were refused a visa, after which the KVRKSSR started to invite also regular, i.e. non-board, members.<sup>191</sup>

Due to the good cooperation between the SSG, the KVRKSSR/ the Motherland Organisation and the Soviet Embassy in Belgium, it was in the interest of former

<sup>185</sup> See for instance P 21: Interview with Maddy on 22.09.2005 (30:36).

<sup>186</sup> Archive the Ghent choir conductor, report 'Soiuz Sovetskikh Grazhdan v Bel'gii', s.d., p. 3.

<sup>187</sup> *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 19/13 (367) (1964) 13.

<sup>188</sup> P 31: Participant Observation on 22.01.2007.

<sup>189</sup> Archive The Motherland Association, Map D-053 Bel'gii SSG - Spravki i kharakteristiki na otdel'nykh lits, Spravka na SSG gor. Booma 13.9.1965.

<sup>190</sup> P 22: Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006 (182:192), Archive The Motherland Association, Map Bel'gii SSG. Perepiska s ts. P. SST, Spravka o besede s Pigarevoĭ M. F. i Ventsel' 4.8.1965 g.; *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 26/516 (4.1971) 13.

<sup>191</sup> Archive The Motherland Association, D-053 Bel'gii SSG - Spravki i kharakteristiki na otdel'nykh lits, Spravka Chentsovoĭ E.N. (1973) 3.

Ostarbeiterinnen to behave as loyal members and to not to fundamentally criticise how the SSG functioned. Besides that cooperation, other factors may have added to the monopoly status of SSG over the formal gathering of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium. In the Netherlands, for instance, the only neighbouring country where infant research on former Ostarbeiterinnen has already been conducted, the organisational landscape of former Ostarbeiterinnen was far more diverse (Beijk, Dolman, van Lopik-de Vet, Verzijden, 2004, 65; Harms 34-35).<sup>192</sup>

Three elements might have contributed to the SSG's success. First, the part of the communist party in Belgian politics was played out in 1947, when a continuous electoral decline set in. Later, the communist party was merely an innocuous onlooker in politics (Lagrou, 1997a, 125). Those inspired by communism became marginalised and gathered in what one can only call a partially developed 'fourth' pillar of the pillarised Belgian society, functioning largely beyond the Catholic, Socialist and Liberal pillar's field of vision. Therefore, from the 1950s onwards, the 'communists' in Belgium no longer needed to be combated, unlike, for instance, in France, where the Communist Party played an important role in politics for a considerable period of time.<sup>193</sup> Their marginalisation also offered opportunities; they could develop their own organisations, such as the BSV and SSG, which were perceived by Belgians as small and harmless fringe phenomena. Second, the Belgian queen Elisabeth functioned as a trailblazer for rapprochement. In March and April 1958, she went on a cultural trip to the Soviet Union. Apart from attending the Chaïkovskii competition, she also visited the tomb of Lenin and was full of praise for communism on Soviet radio (Raskin 355). The 'red' queen never met members of SSG, but her behaviour contributed to an atmosphere of tolerance.<sup>194</sup> And third, Belgium organised an impressive World Exhibition in 1958, at which Belgians could learn about the Soviet Union in the eye-catching Soviet pavilion. To transport Soviet artists, politicians and tourists, Belgium, as the first Western European country, opened a direct flight connection, Brussels-Moscow (Tavenier 133-134).

## Belgians invite

The advantageous loyalty of many members to their organisation, SSG, probably also contributed to crippling the initiative of the Belgian Catholic Church. Following the Thaw in 1956, it saw an opportunity to open contact between the 'irreligious East and catholic West'.<sup>195</sup> Through the establishment of a chapel and centre for Eastern Christians in Brussels under the direction of Irène Posnoff, it aimed to attract people from behind the Iron Curtain in Belgium, among others former Ostarbeiterinnen, to attend Catholic masses in Byzantine style and to disperse Catholic books edited in Russian in the Soviet Union.<sup>196</sup> However, it did not succeed in gathering many Russian speakers and certainly not former Ostarbeiterinnen, since they are never mentioned in the bulletin. The 160 spiritual texts edited by the centre were therefore almost exclusively exported to the Soviet Union.<sup>197</sup> The lack of interested people was soon offset by the influx of Belgians following the second Vatican Council. With the help of the Brussels episcopacy and the Rhedemptorist Fathers, Irène Posnoff restyled the house on 206 Kroonlaan (Crown Avenue) in Brussels into an Eastern Ecumenical Centre where

<sup>192</sup> *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 12; Archive the Motherland Association, 50 Let Sluzheniia Rodine 5.

<sup>193</sup> *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 12.

<sup>194</sup> *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 12.

<sup>195</sup> *Tijdingen van het Tehuis voor oostkristenen* 3/2 (4.1958) 9-12.

<sup>196</sup> *Tijdingen van het Tehuis voor oostkristenen* 1/1-2 (Herfst 1956) 8; 9/25 (6.1964) 8.

<sup>197</sup> *Tijdingen van het Tehuis voor oostkristenen* 3/2 (4.1958) 3; 5/2 (Pasen 1960); 17/57 (2-4.1972) 8).

intellectual discussions on Catholic missionary in Marxist countries were held.<sup>198</sup> To that purpose, it also offered members who travelled to the Soviet Union a *Vademecum for the Christian Tourist*, in which it assured tourists:

Our attitude towards people living under the communist regime has to be permeated with respect and HUMBLE LOVE, and not with a CHARITY which from above looks down on them; if we possess the truth, it is not a reason to take on an arrogant attitude because the truth is a gift of God.<sup>199</sup>

The Belgian Catholic Church was, certainly after the second Vatican Council, very supportive of ecumenism and offered the centre much financial support, thanks to which it had the potential to become a competitor to the SSG. However, former Ostarbeiterinnen did not find their way to it. They had been rather unwilling towards the Rhedemptorist baptism campaign in the first place, and were probably more concerned about upholding good relations with the SSG and the Soviet Embassy to safeguard their visa, than becoming involved in ecumenist missionary activities. Consequently, the SSG held the formal organisational monopoly over former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium.

As in the initial post-war years, the BVR was also interested in former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium. The organisation focused on culture and tourism to stimulate understanding between East and West. The way the SSG and the BVR cooperated was very well-defined: no former Ostarbeiterin became a member of BVR, but the SSG was regularly invited to come and sing at the BVR's gatherings and the SSG members of Antwerp still have good memories from the time when Professor Hugo Benoy, the BSFA's President in 1986, rented a bus to bring them to a Soviet exhibition in Brussels (Huwel, 2000, 30).<sup>200</sup> Both organisations were complementary and never angled in each others' membership pool.

### **SSG members' loyal compromise**

The SSG held the formal organisational monopoly over former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium and was assured of a loyal membership because it could influence visa procedures. The compromise to which the members' loyalty towards SSG led is visible in SSG's bulletin *Sovetskiĭ Patriot*. It consisted of two parts; the first half was filled with articles provided by the KVR, and the second part contained reports of local SSG gatherings written by members.<sup>201</sup>

In the first ten pages of the SSG's monthly, members could read about the Soviet Union. Whereas in the beginning, Soviet successes, such as its space exploration, received much attention, the emphasis over the years shifted to World War II.<sup>202</sup> Such articles were copied from Soviet papers, e.g. *Pravda*, and contained the official Soviet narrative on war memory.

The bulletin's increased focus on World War II ran parallel to the changed contents of the Soviet narrative in the mid-1960s. Leonid Brezhnev, who had taken over leadership of the Soviet Union from Nikita Khrushchëv in 1964, used the Soviet victory in World War II to enhance his cult of personality. Over the years, references to World War II became increasingly present within Soviet society. Brezhnev's personal war memoirs, *Malaia Zemlia*,

<sup>198</sup> *Tijdingen van het Tehuis voor oostkristenen* 29/102 (1-3.1984) 6.

<sup>199</sup> *Tijdingen van het Tehuis voor oostkristenen* 10/28 (1965) 11.

<sup>200</sup> *België URSS Magazine* (11.1978) 20; (6.1985) 14; (3.1986) 13; P 31: Participant Observation on 6.11.2006.

<sup>201</sup> Archive the Motherland Association, Map Bel'giia SSG Spravki na Organisationsii D- 055, Spravka na SSG v Bel'gii na 1.10.1974, 2.

<sup>202</sup> *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 26/516 (4.1971) 1-3.

in which he ascribed the 1943 successful fighting around Novorossiisk to his contribution in that action (although in reality, he stood aside), became obligatory reading in schools and the official holiday Victory Day, abolished in 1947 because it was thought people should move on, and not to look backwards, was reinstated (Mikolchak 1; Tumarkin 103, 155-156). Soviet citizens started to associate World War II with the numerous statues to the Unknown Soldier - constructed as the archetype of the Soviet hero, a large, annual parade in which all the top-ranking figures of the Communist Party took part, and the magic number of twenty million deceased - a number launched to function as a 'Messianic symbol' for the Soviet Union's contribution to world peace (Figs 638).

The official Brezhnev Soviet narrative on war memory also found a place within the bulletin. For instance, on the occasion of Victory Day in 1967, it informed:

So far 23 years have passed. 23 years of hard work in the ongoing battle for peace, so that never again will the monster of war fall on peaceful towns and villages, nor the eyes of mothers and women become dulled with tears.<sup>203</sup>

The article takes it for granted that members of the SSG had for years cooperated in the continuous Soviet struggle for peace, and would continue to do so. To illustrate the necessity for such a struggle, the author appeals to the emotions of the readership; war is a 'monster', which causes the 'tears of mothers and women'. Such a description pinpoints the male character of the Soviet narrative on war memory. That narrative concentrated on the war experiences of Communist Partisans and, from the Thaw onwards, Red Army soldiers, all men who had, according to the narrative, battled for peace. Women were portrayed as the wives and mothers who stayed behind and wept for their husbands and sons at the front. The narrative excluded the war experiences of women who had left their homes during the war and had been forced to work for the enemy. However, to support that war memory of male bravery after World War II, all Soviet citizens, including Ostarbeiterinnen living abroad, were appealed to. Women were excluded from the content of the official Soviet narrative on war memory, but not from its proliferation. To support and continue the Soviet struggle for peace, they were as crucial as men.

The second part of the *Sovetskii Patriot* bulletin contained reports of SSG gatherings written by members. Although these texts were screened by the board of the organisation, they provide a glimpse of how members interpreted the Soviet propaganda texts from the first part. Let us have a look at a report of a gathering in SSG Antwerp on the occasion of the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian Revolution in 1972. The article first describes how the room is decorated with Soviet pictures, a Soviet flag and a bust of Lenin before mentioning how a delegate from the Soviet Embassy gave a speech. It seems that some lines of his speech are copied in the report because the fluid style of writing is suddenly interrupted with a few lines of bombastic words, such as 'the continuous growth of wealth of Soviet citizens' and 'speaking about the peaceful internal politics of the Soviet Union'. The same amount of space is then used to mention that the whole room listened carefully and applauded loudly. What follows is a description in simple words of the various choirs from Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels who performed, the buffet, the evening party and detailed thanks to all people involved in the organisation of the event.<sup>204</sup> Whereas the description of the speech and the applause accounts for only one third of the article, the singing, eating, merry-making and thanking is drawn out over twice as much space. The anniversary of the Russian Revolution

<sup>203</sup> *Sovetskii Patriot* 13/88 (6.1967) 3.

<sup>204</sup> *Sovetskii Patriot* 27/532 (12.1972) 15-16.

and the speech of the Soviet delegate seemed merely pretexts for gathering; the emphasis clearly laid on being together.

The Motherland Organisation and the Soviet Embassy were aware that their propaganda policy in the SSG did not yield successes. In internal documents, the Motherland Organisation complained about the low quality of the members' contributions to *Sovetskii Patriot*. 'One has the impression they only have parties', reads a document from those days.<sup>205</sup> It therefore influenced the appointment of a new chief editor for *Sovetskii Patriot*, the former Ostarbeiterin Halina Fedoseevna, who could assure that contributions would be more in line with the Motherland Organisation's expectations.<sup>206</sup> As a result, from the mid 1970s onwards, the bulletin contained more speeches from Soviet officials and fewer words from former Ostarbeiterinnen. The articles on SSG gatherings now often dedicated two thirds to speeches, and one third to the socialising which took place afterwards.<sup>207</sup> This proves that the Motherland Organisation and the Soviet Embassy, in any case, wanted to prevent the SSG from functioning as an arena in which former Ostarbeiterinnen would develop their own narrative on war memory that ran counter to the official Soviet one. However, they were soon presented with the consequences of their policy as after the appointment of the new chief editor, the readership of *Sovetskii Patriot* fell dramatically.<sup>208</sup>

Interviewee members of SSG told me that they did not leave the organisation (their concern about visa permission thus ensured the Motherland Organisation a stable membership), but stopped reading *Sovetskii Patriot* and switched preferences, oddly enough, to *Golos Rodiny*, the bulletin of the Motherland Organisation itself.<sup>209</sup> The stricter editorial policies of *Sovetskii Patriot*, and the reactions of its readership, had taught the Motherland Organisation that it needed to liberalise its contacts with former Ostarbeiterinnen. It therefore opened up *Golos Rodiny*, knowing it had better control over it. It could restyle the words which former Ostarbeiterinnen articulated in their letters before publishing, instead of being dependent on the less educated, and therefore less reliable, editor of *Sovetskii Patriot*.

*Golos Rodiny* widened its correspondence column. Whereas before, only board members of SSG had been offered a voice, in the late 1970s almost every issue counted at least two letters from regular members of the SSG in Belgium.<sup>210</sup> Through publishing a reader's letter, *Golos Rodiny* revealed for the first time that a migrant living in the Atlantic World had been deported to Germany to do forced labour during World War II.<sup>211</sup> This article had a waterfall effect; week after week former Ostarbeiterinnen from Belgium formulated their personal war experiences in the bulletin. They could speak about pitiful working conditions and homesickness and could mention pain, as long as they stated that 'their love for their Motherland had helped them to survive' and silenced why and with whom they had ended up in Belgium.<sup>212</sup> The Motherland Organisation made sure it presented the letters as individual cases and never clarified that all the writers had been part of the same immigrant

<sup>205</sup> Archive The Motherland Association, Map D-053 Bel'giiia SSG - Spravki i kharakteristiki na otdel'nykh lits, Spravka o zhurnale 'Patriot' 15.3.1977, p. 1.

<sup>206</sup> Archive The Motherland Association, Map D-053, Otchet o rabote s delegatsiei na Bel'gii, p. 1.

<sup>207</sup> See for instance *Sovetskii Patriot* 36/619-620 (1-2.1981) 15-18.

<sup>208</sup> *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 13; Archive The 'Motherland Association, Map D-053 Bel'giiia SSG - Spravki i kharakteristiki na otdel'nykh lits D-053, Spravka na 'Soiuz Sovetskikh Grazhdan' v Bel'gii na 1.10.1974.

<sup>209</sup> P 31: Participant Observation on 25.09.2006.

<sup>210</sup> Archive the Motherland Association, 50 Let Sluzheniia Rodine 5.

<sup>211</sup> *Sovetskii Patriot* 23/17 (2057) (5.1977) 10.

<sup>212</sup> *Sovetskii Patriot* 23/17 (2057) (5.1977) 10.

organisation.<sup>213</sup> The way World War II was remembered in the magazine was therefore very hybrid; the Motherland Organisation continued to spread the official Soviet narrative on war memory in the first pages, but allowed individual readers, in Belgium all members of SSG, limited counter narration in the following pages.

The way the SSG members' stories were portrayed in *Golos Rodiny* corresponds with the way former Ostarbeiterinnen articulated me their war experiences. They put an emphasis on their deportation to Germany, but tried to omit the reasons for their migration to Belgium. Here I provide two examples that offered a glimpse behind that self-censorship. Again, it was Peggy who helped me out. When we were looking at one of her pictures, showing how she had presented her SSG choir to a Belgian audience just before a performance at some point in the 1970s, she told me the following. It is worth quoting her at length.

that is for public  
 that we can say something to people  
 that we are citizens from Ukraine, that we through  
 circumstances are integrated here  
 there was somebody  
 the daughter of X (mother's name - MV)  
 who had translated that wrongly  
 because her Russian is not that good  
 I said that there are people here who are through circumstances  
 INTEGRATED  
 it is allowed to say so  
 and she translated that  
 for the editorial office of the Russian paper in Brussels  
 and she translated that I had said  
 UPROOTED  
 uprooted  
 and then I was angry  
 voilà  
 I said if it's so (gets agitated)  
 we have to cooperate here with people  
 and we have to strike up FRIENDSHIP with them but not  
 just imagine that they get that in Moscow  
 that is for me a big minus  
 I am not allowed to say so  
 we were not uprooted  
 we were deported because of war  
 and yet that is a big difference<sup>214</sup>

Let us take a closer look at Peggy's words. Before the performance, Peggy introduced the choir to the Belgian audience. Peggy told me she had said the SSG members were 'citizens from Ukraine'. Probably, she had used the concept 'Soviet citizens', in line with the title of the SSG, but was now confused because an independent Ukrainian state had arisen after the collapse of communism. She continued that the reason why she and her friends had come to Belgium - 'circumstances' - had also led to their 'integration'. The fact that Peggy repeated these words a little later and added that 'it is allowed to say so', only reinforces the impression that she was articulating the official narrative on war memory which the Motherland Organisation had wanted SSG members to utter. 'Circumstances' is a vague word which enabled to omit the fact that former Ostarbeiterinnen might have tried to escape Soviet

<sup>213</sup> *Golos Rodiny* 24/54 (2104) (12.1978) 10.

<sup>214</sup> P 27: Interview with Peggy on 18.09.2006 (164:190).

repatriation, a silenced drawback in the official Soviet narrative on war memory (Weiner, 2001, 446-447).

However, the daughter of her friend, who wrote a report of her speech for *Sovetskii Patriot* - by Peggy referred to as a 'Russian paper' because it was written in Russian - had translated Peggy's words into 'uprooted', i.e. people without a homeland. Peggy wanted to believe the mistake was caused by the bad knowledge of Russian of her friend's daughter, and not by a difference in opinion. Her desperation, expressed through anger, showed she did not know how to cope with the situation. 'We must cooperate here with people', which presumes a cooperation of two partners of equal value, but not '...', and her agitation prevented her from finishing. Later in the interview, Peggy told me something which might have fitted here. The 'uprooted' people from the Soviet Union, who started to arrive in Belgium from the late 1970s onwards, asked for political asylum and were 'not proud of their Motherland', two reasons that precluded the equal cooperation Peggy put forward.<sup>215</sup> Peggy knew her friend's daughter's words were not acceptable for the Motherland Organisation in Moscow; she knew she was 'not allowed to say so', and feared its reaction ('that is for me a big minus'). Peggy corrected that, instead of being 'uprooted', they were 'deported because of war'. Like in the correspondence column of *Golos Rodiny*, she put an emphasis on her deportation to Germany and silenced how she had ended up in Belgium afterwards, hereby omitting the debate on her status as either Soviet citizens or Displaced Persons (see chapter one).

Using an example from the Participant Observation I conducted, I dwell upon the meaning of Peggy's 'circumstances'. I will describe a scene that illustrates the other silenced drawback in the narrative which *Golos Rodiny* wanted to impose on SSG's members: not why, but with whom former Ostarbeiterinnen had come to Belgium. During the SSG of Antwerp's gathering on 6 November 2006, the President was passing on greetings from Kimberley, a fellow-member who lived in a retirement home and only received news about the SSG's activities through the president's visits. Kimberley's greetings were not unanimously accepted, as some of the members started looking down at the table, exchanging knowing looks, or all of a sudden started praising the taste of the tea. I did not know what was going on, until, after everybody else had left, Wendy made an emotional speech. Since the members had been singing that day, my recorder was still on:

about Kenny and Kimberley (pseudonyms - MV)  
 nobody has to tell us  
 because here in the group, I  
 me and my husband  
 often heard  
 that so very black they speak about Kenny  
 and that is not true!  
 not true  
 my husband knows Kenny from when he was six  
 they went to school together  
 they together out of school  
 but Kenny has to go and work from his fourteen on  
 why?  
 because mother alone with three boys  
 and his eldest brother worked for the printer in Church Street  
 and Kenny has to go and work from his fourteen on  
 and his brother dragged him off at the beginning  
 for all heavy  
 they were simply heavy errands

---

<sup>215</sup> P 27: interview with Peggy on 18.09.2006 (974:978).

and during the war my husband and Kenny worked in the same factory  
both in Germany for three years  
or even four years?  
because my husband was locked up a year in France before<sup>216</sup>

Wendy fulminated against the rumours that circulated in SSG Antwerp about the war activities of Kimberley's husband Kenny, war activities that many considered should not be openly articulated, as the behaviour of the members (looking down to the table, exchanging knowing looks, or all of a sudden starting to praise the taste of the tea) indicated. Wendy thought I had interpreted that silencing as an affirmation of Kenny's collaborationism ('black'), and wanted to change the opinion she thought I had formulated by defending Kenny ('not true' (twice)). Wendy's husband had known Kenny very well; they had been at primary school together ('together' is used twice). Because his mother was a widow, Wendy said, Kenny stopped his education early and had 'to go and work' (also twice). He had joined his older brother, who 'dragged him off'. Wendy portrayed Kenny passively; not he, but his family had decided what he had to do.

During the war, Wendy continued, her husband and Kenny again had spent a lot of time together. She repeated the word together, as if to say her husband knew perfectly all that Kenny had been doing in Germany. About the length of time, she was not sure anymore ('for three years, or even four years'). In any case, her husband had gone to Germany after his captivity in France ('was locked up'). It is important to take a closer look at Wendy's time framing. Approximately three years spent in Germany would mean Kenny could have left for Germany after October 1942, when conscription was launched in Belgium (see chapter one). Kenny, then, had probably been a labour conscript, and not a voluntary worker. In that case, insinuations on collaborationism by people who had not spent time in Germany would be rather strange. Wendy, however, later mentioned it could also have been four years. Belgians, who had left for work in Germany before October 1942, were after the war considered to have been voluntary workers unless they could offer proof of penal servitude.<sup>217</sup> Wendy defended her own husband by arguing that he had not been a voluntary worker, but a prisoner of war in France before going to Germany (Lagrou, 2000, 5). But Kenny could have been, she indirectly suggested. However, if this was the case, it was not his choice. He had been (and here her description from before turns into arguments), very young, poor, and followed decisions made by his family members. These arguments all lay in line with how voluntary workers have been depicted in the post-war years in Flanders; many of them voluntarily signed up because they were hungry and did not know better because of their young age.<sup>218</sup> Therefore, Wendy seems to say, other SSG members should not blacken Kenny as a collaborationist. Since I could not find Kenny's file in the Belgian Archive of War Victims, I can not say whether Kenny collaborated or not.

For the purpose of this study, such a question is of lesser importance than the way SSG's members had given meaning to Kenny's war experiences, or to what they thought they knew about these experiences. As the behaviour of some members showed, these experiences became an important source for social dividing lines among members. SSG members had managed to find something in common because they shared the same war experiences, as the first paragraph of this chapter indicated, but their husbands did not. The case study of Antwerp elaborated on in chapter one showed that the majority of Ostarbeiterinnen's

<sup>216</sup> P 25: Interview with Wendy on 6.11.2006 (79:101).

<sup>217</sup> The Belgian Federal Governmental Service Social Security, Archive Directory-General War Victims, individual files.

<sup>218</sup> P 24: Interview with Kelly on 7.02.2007 (258:288); P 30: Interview with Amanda on 18.07.2006 (460:467).

husbands had been voluntary workers. Whether that is also true for the husbands of SSG members is impossible to say, but what we do know is that their war experiences were not openly tolerated. Members linked them with collaborationism, a taboo word within the official Soviet narrative on war memory. As such, husbands were silenced in *Golos Rodiny*. Reading this bulletin, one might have the impression SSG members were not married at all.

The relative freedom for former Ostarbeiterinnen to articulate counter narration, except for the drawbacks mentioned, within official Soviet structures decreased again from 1980 onwards, maybe because of internal agitation within Soviet satellite states such as in the Polish People's Republic. The magazine now used its readers' column to popularise its propaganda articles. Zinaida Koval'chuk's letter, for instance, asked why so much attention was paid to war:

In every issue you write about war. War... brrr. Shivers simply run down my spine when I read or even hear that word.<sup>219</sup>

Her words offered a good opportunity for the Motherland Organisation to stress once more how important it was to remember the heroism and bravery of the Soviet nation in World War II: the Soviets had defeated fascism and such remembrance would help to safeguard peace on earth.<sup>220</sup> The Motherland Organisation did not succeed; the interest of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium towards the magazine dwindled and gravitated back to *Patriot* which had developed itself as a successful 'female' magazine, in which the members' reports on holidays such as Mother's Day and Father Frost were visibly written with much more enthusiasm than holidays such as the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, in which recipes were exchanged and children received their own corner.<sup>221</sup> *Patriot* had these topics to thank for its popularity rather than its coverage of war memory; this still lay in line with the official Soviet narrative on war memory in which Ostarbeiterinnen were completely silenced.

That would change after Mikhaïl Gorbachëv took over leadership of the Soviet Union in 1985. Convinced that the Stalinist model of communist development had been hollowed out by his predecessors, Gorbachëv leant on anti-Stalinist feelings in society to find support for his policy of openness (*glasnost'*) and restructuring (*perestroïka*) (Sherlock 47). Contrary to the destalinisation under Khrushchëv, which had been strictly state-controlled, Gorbachëv's new policy allowed citizens to form civil society movements which openly started to criticise Soviet historiography. One of them, Memorial, brought together dissident intelligentsia striving for the commemoration of 'Stalin's victims', people who had undergone political prosecution and repression (Merridale, 2003, 20; Smith, 1996, 2). Memorial pioneered the review of the official Soviet narrative on war memory and found there to be shifting, short-term support for various 1980s' politicians, who continued to hesitate whether the proliferation of memories on repression would ease or hinder reform within the Soviet political framework (Sherlock 25). In these years, various voices uttered fragmentary counter narrations, which undermined, but did not replace the official Soviet narrative on war memory and created a gamut of war memories without any coherence (Sherlock 122). Among these first counter voices were Baltic politicians who denounced the liberating character of the Soviet Union's victory at the end of World War II, since it had deprived the Baltic States from their interwar independence (Sherlock 126).

<sup>219</sup> *Golos Rodiny* 26/22 (2218) (6.1980) 11.

<sup>220</sup> *Golos Rodiny* 26/22 (2218) (6.1980) 11; 27/45 (2293) (11.1981) 10.

<sup>221</sup> P 31: Participant Observation on 25.09.2006; *Patriot* 35/619 (12.1980) 6; 36/622 (4.1981) 19-20; 38/643 (3.1981) 11; 39/650 (10.1984) 14.

The SSG's bulletin *Patriot* and the Motherland Organisation's *Golos Rodiny* reacted differently. *Patriot* continued to articulate the official Soviet narrative on war memory, but now also opened it for, and even centralized, Ostarbeiterinnen. In 1986, the SSG's President Vera Kushnarëva addressed a gathering of SSG members:

Soviet women, wherever destiny brought them, have a special right to demand peace. For many of my girlfriends, the war is not history, but biography!<sup>222</sup>

Vera juxtaposed history and biography; she did not consider her biography to be part of history. For her, war history had not simply been what had happened during the war, but how that war had been represented in books, speeches and so on, i.e. in the official Soviet narrative on war memory. In this way, she had been able to agree with the narrative which the Motherland Organisation had tried to impose on the SSG for 30 years. She had taken part in Soviet war anniversaries without criticising them, because she had considered they did not personally refer to her. As I indicated before, women were excluded from the content of the official Soviet narrative on war memory, but not from its proliferation. Their task in this respect was as crucial as that of men.

Already in 1986, Vera strongly advocated the widening of war memory. According to her, the time had come for war memory to include both 'history' and 'biography'. She centralized the biography of her members ('a special right', 'wherever destiny brought them'), in this way not openly attacking the official Soviet narrative on war memory, but placing it in the background. In her speech, Vera even offered a bridge on which biography and history could meet: to demand peace. However, such a proposition is not convincing, since the way in which the two parties interpreted that peace greatly differed. Former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium thought that peace could safeguard against forced labour, whereas the official Soviet narrative on war memory portrayed it as a value for which Soviet citizens had to keep on fighting fascism in the Atlantic World.

*Golos Rodiny* did not support Vera's idea. Ostarbeiterinnen were no longer mentioned in the bulletin, which continued to cover the commemoration of official Soviet war anniversaries, but resigned from the long accompanying propaganda texts and published large photographs instead. Such coverage testifies the Motherland Organisation had lost its sense of direction and no longer knew what it could publish or not.<sup>223</sup>

In the Soviet Union, people became informed about former Ostarbeiterinnen living abroad by local newspapers and a documentary. In a local Ukrainian newspaper, for instance, a former Ostarbeiterin from Belgium on holiday spoke about her war experiences, mentioning that she had visited a fellow Ostarbeiterin from her time in Germany who had returned home after World War II and questioning why Soviet citizens did not know what had happened with Ostarbeiterinnen during and after the war.<sup>224</sup> Mikhaïl Kizilov, a Soviet journalist who had visited Belgium in 1988, had met several Ostarbeiterinnen and had found official Soviet state support to edit a book and to make the documentary *Alënushka iz Briussela* (Alënushka from Brussels) (Kizilov, 1990; Kizilov, 1992). The film explained to people in the Soviet Union who Ostarbeiterinnen were and used elements of the official Soviet narrative on war memory for this purpose. For instance, Ostarbeiterinnens' fear for repatriation after the war was not mentioned and the documentary, instead, emphasized the strength of love between wives and

<sup>222</sup> *Patriot* 41/677 (6.1986) 11.

<sup>223</sup> *Golos Rodiny* 33/45 (2657) (11.1988) 1; 35/46-49 (2761-2765) (11.1990) 1.

<sup>224</sup> *Kremenchuts'ka zoria* 95/13855 (9.8.1988) 3.

husbands. At the same time, Ostarbeiterinnen were offered a voice to echo the revelations on bad living conditions from the Gorbachëv era:

Mama and my sister found everyday life so difficult  
and when I came back  
I said to the Consul  
it's better to live here  
but I want to go and visit every year  
(Kizilov, 1990)

## 1991-2008

The cultural field on war memory underwent yet further changes after the collapse of communism as public opinion could now freely enter the various arenas of war memory in the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus. Moscow's Victory Park, where yearly commemorations of the Great Patriotic War have taken place since 1993, offers a good example for the consensus that the battle on war memory could lead to (Merridale, 2003, 17). In the park, the Great Patriotic War is represented for the first time as part of World War II by an enormous statue depicting an American, British and Russian soldier together (Schleifman 26). Moreover, the site contains a newly built Orthodox church, a synagogue and a mosque. These religious symbols underpin the multicultural character of the Russian Federation, which does not want to be seen as either the inheritor of the Soviet Union, or of Tsarist Russia (Schleifman 17). Indeed, war memory opened up for Holocaust victims and, thanks to the research by Memorial and German and Austrian disbursement agents, gradually also to Ostarbeiter(innen) (Asher; Polian, 2002).

Whereas former Ostarbeiterinnen members of SSG were among the first ones to openly criticise the official Soviet historiography in the mid 1980s, they took a conservative standpoint in the 1990s. They did not dissolve their organisation, did not even rename it, their membership did not fall significantly, and they did not set up a new organisation. In 2008, there is still one official organisation of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium - the Association for Soviet Citizens in Belgium - despite the fact that all members lost Soviet citizenship and opted for Belgian citizenship when they were offered the choice between a Belgian or a Russian/Ukrainian/Byelorussian passport in the early 1990s. Contrary to Soviet times, dual citizenship was no longer possible. SSG ceased to edit *Patriot* when the Motherland Organisation, having lost state support, stopped providing assistance. *Golos Rodina* shared the same lot in 1995, when the Motherland Association's financial reserves dried up.<sup>225</sup>

In one of the last issues, *Golos Rodiny* reported on the commemoration of Victory Day in Brussels. The article restyled the former Soviet narrative on war memory in the following way: it lined it up with the consensus on war memory as depicted in Moscow's Victory Park, thereby placing the Great Patriotic War in a more international framework and stressing its multicultural character. Moreover, war experiences of Ostarbeiterinnen are included. Although the reason as to why former Ostarbeiterinnen ended up in Belgium still remains vague and we find no word about repatriation, the article for the first time mentions that Ostarbeiterinnen married Belgians in the early post-war years (silencing, however, the fact that they had met their husbands during forced labour in Germany). Interestingly, the war experiences of Ostarbeiterinnen are linked to those of Soviet female soldiers. For the occasion, the Russian Embassy had invited Nina Raspopova to Brussels, a female pilot who

<sup>225</sup> *Golos Rodiny* 37/2 (2821) (1.1992) 3.

had been awarded the title 'Hero of the Soviet Union'. In the article, all women present are portrayed as active fighters for freedom who were central to - by this time - 'Russia's' war victory:

In the room, the atmosphere was charged with unrepeatably pride for our women, and for all it became clear: such a nation you cannot vanquish.<sup>226</sup>

Whereas before, women were most often offered a place in war memory as the ones staying at home and mourning for their husbands and sons, they are here identified with characteristics in narratives typically attributed to men, such as bravery and invincibility (Hosking 172).

However, during the interviews and participant observation I conducted, I noticed that interviewees and members of SSG wrestle with such an idea. Their inclusion in a heroic Russian narrative on war memory helps some of them to be reconciled with their fate; it gives them the impression their war experiences had served a higher purpose.<sup>227</sup> Such mechanism runs parallel with the way soldiers of the Red Army have given meaning to their war experiences (Merridale, 2007, 369). From the 1990s on, however, the SSG also became a place where members could speak about the disbursement procedures each of them got involved in.<sup>228</sup> Such issues opened the door to the articulation of troublesome war experiences (see chapter six). This also happened in the Russian Federation and Ukraine, where Ostarbeiterinnen for the first time started to gather in a formal organisation fighting for aid to what they call 'war victims': the Association for Former Prisoners of Fascism (Assotsiatsiia byvshikh uznikov fashizma).<sup>229</sup>

SSG members started to articulate to their colleagues that they were 'in pain'. The daughter of one member, who sometimes attended gatherings, told me that, in those days, she felt so sad hearing her mother and friends complaining all the time that she engaged her cousin to renew the singing activities of SSG, on which I will elaborate in chapter five. According to her, it helped the members to concentrate on 'something positive'.<sup>230</sup>

Only very recently have the changes in the way SSG members remember their war experiences after the collapse of communism been recorded in writing. The organisational activities of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium became a topic of interest for the Belgian and Russian press, whereby the former give a voice to war trauma and the latter articulate the heroic Russian narrative. First, in March 2006, the local newspaper of the Zurenborg District (Antwerp) published an article about an SSG Antwerp gathering. More than half of the two pages are filled with four pictures of singing members and underneath the highlighted quote:

According to the Nazis, we, girls and women from a communist country, were the lowest in the hierarchy of all prisoners.<sup>231</sup>

Reading the article affirms that first impression. The author examines two topics: ethnicisation and victimisation. On the one hand, he focuses on ethnic practices within the organisation, such as singing and cooking for each other. On the other hand, in line with the

<sup>226</sup> *Golos Rodiny* 40/19 (2986) (7.1995) 4.

<sup>227</sup> P 28: Interview with Elly on 2.02.2007 (10) and (70:83); P 31: Participant Observation on 6.11.2006.

<sup>228</sup> P 25: Interview with Wendy on 6.11.2006 (114:122); P 31: Participant Observation on 27.11.2006.

<sup>229</sup> Archive Memorial, Internationales Sklaven- und Zwangarbeiter Befragungsprojekt 'Memorial' Moskva, Interview with Valentina Pavlovna Gdrichinaia 15.6.2005 Rostov - na - Don, p 3.

<sup>230</sup> P 31: Participant Observation on 4.09.2006.

<sup>231</sup> *Gazet van Zurenborg* 2 (3.2006) 4-5.

quote above, he paraphrases the members speaking about their war experiences in a victimising way: ‘they deported us like cattle’. ‘Belgians sometimes gave us an extra piece of bread or so’. In the following issue, we find another article in which the same topics re-appear: ‘Russian women thank with caviar and vodka’. The text informs that members, after they had read the first article, had invited the author again, because:

After all those years we get a little bit of attention. And that is a form of recognition. Finally, somebody understands us. This is a new beginning.<sup>232</sup>

When I started to do participant observation at the weekly gatherings of SSG Antwerp a few months later, many members, indeed, saw my attendance as ‘a new beginning’. Over the following months, some of them gradually started to specify some formerly silenced war experiences (see chapter six).

Second, with support of the Russian embassy, a first review article about SSG was published in the magazine *Sovetskaia Rossiia*. The author fulminates against the marginalisation of SSG in the Russian historiography of the 1990s:

Had it been an organisation not of Soviet, but of anti-Soviet citizens, then, probably, hundreds of pages would already have been written about them.<sup>233</sup>

The article fits well into the current re-appreciation of the Soviet past within the Russian Federation started under Vladimir Putin and continued under Dmitrii Medvedev (Merridale, 2003, 23). Under Putin, the liberal narratives on war memory from the perestroika and El'tsin era faced pressure and the Soviet Union is increasingly remembered as a time of stability and cohesion (Sherlock 184). It is not only a political decision to break with the chaotic liberalism of the 1990s; Soviet past nowadays also helps Russian citizens to give meaning to their existence in an uprooted society (Sherlock 149-150).

Third, in 2007, the Motherland Association was re-established in the Russian Federation and resumed the Soviet threat by re-editing *Golos Rodiny*, a monthly for Russians living abroad. One of its first activities was a visit to Brussels to honour Marina Aleksandrovna Shafrova-Marutaev, a woman who had been part of a Russian group cooperating with Belgian resistance forces and had died in a confrontation with German soldiers.<sup>234</sup> At the celebration ceremony I attended in the Russian cultural centre on November 14, 2006, the Motherland Association's President Viktor Alekseenko offered her husband the Order of Great Victory (Orden Velikoï Pobedy). I had the impression that the presentation was only a pretext to renew contact with SSG members and their families, but that, due to the inferior position of Ostarbeiterinnen within the official Russian narrative on war memory, a war medal could not be granted to a former Ostarbeiterin. The majority of the twenty attendants were elderly women, all visibly above eighty, and Alekseenko's speech was much more directed towards them than towards their husbands. These SSG members applauded the speech, but informed Alekseenko during the reception that their children and grandchildren are not interested in the Motherland Association.

While walking over to the bar, I was able to eavesdrop on a diplomatic conversation between Viktor Alekseenko and a delegate of the Ukrainian Embassy, in which the Ukrainian delegate

<sup>232</sup> *Gazet van Zurenborg* 3 (7-8.2006) 6.

<sup>233</sup> *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 10.

<sup>234</sup> *Golos Rodiny* 1 (3005) (5.2007) 7.

corrected Alekseenko, stating that the latter had wrongly called the SSG members Russian in his speech, since most of them are Ukrainian. Growing Russian and Ukrainian nationalism caused the interlocutors to get into a verbal fight and the Ukrainian delegate soon afterwards left the cultural centre (Sherlock 184). I was then able to speak with Viktor Alekseenko to ask if I could come to do research in the Motherland Association. My question helped clear his fighting mood from before; he became enthusiastic, saying that 'now the time has come to write the history of these women'. Thanks to his helpfulness, I became the first historian who could explore the Motherland Association's archives in Moscow ten months later.

## Conclusion

The group formation process of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium led to the monopolisation of one formal organisation (SSG) because of various reasons. In the first period of settlement, other interested players did not offer convincing identifiers. Later, the interaction of the opportunity structures of former Ostarbeiterinnens' home and host society led to the magnificent growth of SSG. Although the Belgian Catholic Church greatly desired to engage former Ostarbeiterinnen as they could embody its ecumenical interest, former Ostarbeiterinnen joined the SSG because it could provide them with the certainty of visiting their relatives in the Soviet Union. The close cooperation between SSG, the Soviet Embassy and the KVRKSSR/ Motherland Organisation, an official Soviet organisation looking after Soviet citizens living abroad, nipped other initiatives in the bud. Moreover, the categorization of SSG within a 'fourth' and marginalized Belgian 'communist' pillar, oddly enough, even facilitated the expansion of its activities.

The loyalty of SSG members also made open criticism of the imposition of the official Soviet narrative on war memory impossible. Although that narrative remained more or less intact during the entire Cold War era, successive Soviet leaders used it differently to realise their political aims and therefore sometimes offered a proverbial carrot to certain war survivors: the possibility to articulate counter narration. My research showed that during the Brezhnev era, following the centralization of the Soviet narrative on war memory within Soviet society, the KVRKSSR/ Motherland Organisation, but not SSG, eased censorship for former Ostarbeiterinnen living abroad in its publication. Individuals could speak about their deportation, pitiful working conditions and homesickness and could mention pain - all elements lining up with the categorization of the 'fascist enemy', as long as they stated that 'their love for their Motherland had helped them to survive' and withheld how and why they had ended up in Belgium - Soviet repatriation, their disappointment in Soviet life after their first trips home and the profile of their husbands needed to remain silent. The Gorbachëv era offered a second period in which SSG pleaded for the inclusion of their members' war experiences within Soviet war memory. As sources reveal little about the way counter narratives functioned within the organisation in a non-written way, I will analyse the singing of SSG members in chapter five.

Post-communist Russia developed a more diverse cultural field on war memory in which various agencies articulate narratives on war memory and hash over the remembrance of Ostarbeiter(innen). Former Ostarbeiterinnen, with the help of Memorial, are still lobbying for their place in the official Russian war memory. Sometimes, they are heroised as active female fighters for freedom who were central to 'Russia's' war victory. At other times, they are recognised as war victims. In Belgium, it is possible that they are on their way to being included in the cultural field on war memory in Belgium as war victims, a topic I will elaborate on in chapter six.

## A comparison

Some former Allied soldiers from Poland successfully lobbied for their place within the cultural field on war memory in Belgium, first only on a local level, but later also on a national level. Over the years, they built up a special ‘Polish ex-combatant pillar’ that could stand beside other pillars of people gathered around similar war experiences, for instance, Prisoners of War and Belgian resistance fighters. As the cultural field on war memory was organised in such a segregated way in Belgium, these former Allied soldiers from Poland followed a successful path of integration into their host society. They grew from being a marginalised group, whose narrative was dominated by others, to becoming a dominant player themselves. The marginalised position of former Ostarbeiterinnen within the cultural field on war memory in Belgium, on the contrary, did not change dramatically over the years. Former Allied soldiers became what the migration historians Mareike König and Rainer Ohliger, mentioned in the introduction, called privileged newcomers, whereas former Ostarbeiterinnen remained non-represented (König and Ohliger 14). Non-representation also offered advantages; out of the spotlight, former Ostarbeiterinnen in fact had considerable room to develop organisational activities.

Former Allied soldiers from Poland successfully lobbied to become remembered within Belgium as Catholic, brave and solely ‘Polish’ division soldiers who liberated Flanders but unfortunately lost World War II and were betrayed by communism. Over the years, a successful cult was developed which combined heroism and political victimisation. Former Ostarbeiterinnen were not visible, and in the rare cases they spoke up in the public sphere, they mainly had to defend themselves against dominant negative stereotyping as ‘war whores’ or ‘communists’.

That male war survivors have fewer problems to enter public war memory than their female counterparts, has already been described by many authors concentrating on gender and memory (Lenz; Schwegman). As chapter one has shown, the fact that many of the former Allied soldiers from Poland had liberated the cities in which they later settled, and that Belgian migration policy facilitated the settlement of former Ostarbeiterinnen who were pregnant or had already given birth to a small Belgian citizen thanks to their intermarriage, only added to the virtue/shame dichotomy. In my opinion, what enlarged the gap between the public remembering of former division soldiers and the public forgetting of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium was the geopolitical context of the Cold War. Let us remember that this research focused on Flemish cities where both former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen had settled. As the soldiers were constructed as ‘victims of communism’ within their direct environment, Ostarbeiterinnen experienced harsher negative political stereotyping. The good and the bad stereotypes were constructed as two sides of the same coin.

Interestingly, Belgian dominant agencies on war memory articulation only became aware of the exclusiveness of former Allied soldiers from Poland due to the support these former soldiers enjoyed from transnational agencies in Great Britain and the Polish People’s Republic. Such agencies targeted specific people from the migration stream, offered them the opportunity to establish formal organisations, and tried to push through their narratives on war memory. Agencies from Great Britain were the most successful and stimulated the group gathering of former division soldiers, whereas the other, less numerous, former Allied soldiers

from Poland who were left aside eagerly received support from agencies of the Polish People's Republic. Mutual hatred between the two 'camps' developed over the years.

The Belgian opportunity structure offered appealing affirmations to dominant war memory narratives as articulated by former Allied soldiers from Poland, but not to the narratives of former Ostarbeiterinnen. Unsurprisingly, then, agencies from the home societies conducted successful mobilisation among the latter. The close cooperation between the Soviet Consulate, the SSP/SSG and the 'Motherland' Organisation created a situation in which the formation of a democratic organisational landscape as well as the construction of an own group narrative on war memory seemed to have been nipped in the bud. Most often, the narrative which SSP/SSG articulated in the public sphere aligned with the official Soviet narrative on war memory, with only some room for counter narration during the eras of Brezhnev and Gorbachëv. Therefore, in the case of both migration streams, war memories straddled the Iron Curtain.

After the collapse of communism, group formation and construction of group memories in the two migration streams underwent a serious re-shuffling. In the new geopolitical context, former Allied soldiers from Poland lost credibility in Belgian patriotic organisations, but found new support among freshly arrived 'ethnic' fellows who construct them as the forerunners of peace in Europe and firmly place them within the cultural field on war memory in Poland as heroes. Their narrative on war memory switched its point of gravity to the other side of the former Iron Curtain. During the Gorbachëv era, former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium demanded the enlargement of the official Soviet narrative so that it would offer a place for their war memories. After the collapse of communism, Ostarbeiterinnen still gather in the SSG, and are portrayed by agencies from former Soviet Union countries either as active 'Russian' or 'Ukrainian' female fighters for freedom or as war victims. In Belgium, the first signs have appeared of a victimised and ethnificised categorisation.

## Part 2: Performing Group Memories

### Chapter 4: 'Was there only a cross in the cemetery?'

Even today, traces still remain of Belgium's liberation by the First Polish Armoured Division. This is not only because around 350 of the former Allied soldiers from Poland married local young women and settled in Belgium, but also because most of the division soldiers killed in action (257 from a total of about 410), found their last place of rest in a specially created war cemetery in Lommel, a city in the Belgian province of Limburg (Goddeeris, 2005a, 45). Over the years, visiting this cemetery has become an annual activity for organisations of former Allied soldiers from Poland. These organisations, as showed in the previous chapter, attempted to establish group memories. Participating in commemoration services enabled these organisations to experience their group memories and, in this way, to ascribe meaning to war experiences.

In this chapter, I concentrate on the commemoration services held at the cemetery in Lommel to investigate this experience of group memory. During the Cold War, the cemetery functioned as an interesting arena of war memory where two main agencies - 'Polish' immigrants who refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Polish People's Republic, and those who toed the official communist party line in Belgium, the Polish Consulate, battled to assert their own war memory narratives. Representatives of both political 'camps' tried to include the memory of division soldiers killed in action in their own narrative on war memory to the detriment of the other camp (Stynen, 2005, 250). They reconstructed their vision of the cemetery's past and in this way legitimized their own position within the geopolitical framework of the Cold War (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995, 130). While it is vital to examine what was included in (or excluded from) the group memory, of equal importance is how the past was experienced (Nora (red.), 1984-1992). The practice of remembering provided a context in which the memories of participants were shaped (Burke, 2005; Halbwachs (red. Elchardus), 1991; Gedi and Elam, 1996, 35).

I am interested as to how the articulated narratives on war memory during the official annual commemoration services in Lommel influenced the memories of individual participating former division soldiers. Concentrating not only on the creation of group memories, i.e. the formation and functioning of immigrant organisations, but also on the public presentation and individual experience of group memories, I will demonstrate the extent to which individuals adopted the organisations' narratives on war memory. The successfulness of immigrant organisations can therefore be measured not only by their membership numbers - elaborated on in chapter 2, but also by the impact of the organisations' activities on the memories of their members. For this reason, I will analyse the changes in narratives during the commemoration services over the years and consider the memories of the former division soldiers with whom I spoke about these changes.

More precisely, my research focused on four questions: first, how the cemetery was created and modified over the years; second, which narratives on war memory fought for legitimacy and how they were articulated during commemoration services; third, when former division soldiers visited Lommel and how did they participate in the services; and last, how former division soldiers who are alive today remember the cemetery and the commemoration services.

## Creating an arena of war memory articulation

In 1944, the soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division killed in action were offered a place of rest in the municipal cemeteries of the places they had helped to liberate. In 1947 however, the Bestuur der Militie voor de Identificatie en Teraardebestelling der Slachtoffers van den Oorlog (The Military Council for the Identification and Burial of Victims of War), coming under the Belgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, decided that all the division soldiers should be buried on a piece of land offered by the city council of Lommel, situated in the Limburg province (Anonymous, 1983, 45-55). In this way, the British military cemetery for Polish soldiers took shape. The Belgian state held ownership over the cemetery and the British army was assigned the duty of grave maintenance.<sup>235</sup>

In the same year, the Polish Union of Limburg (Związek Polaków w Belgii - Okręg Limburgia - further ZPB), an immigrant organisation that since 1923 had gathered 'Polish' miners from the Flemish Campines, organised, with the oral permission of the British army, the consecration of a big wooden cross in the middle of the cemetery.<sup>236</sup> The city council of Lommel felt uncomfortable with the informal character of the cooperation, and asked the Polish Union in 1948 for written permission from the British army. However, to a letter of request from the Polish Union, the British army replied that it was no longer the right contact person, as it had handed on the duty of grave maintenance to the Polish Consulate in Brussels.<sup>237</sup> On the day of the second commemoration service, 31 October 1948, this led to an open provocation. When the Polish Union was ready to start their procession, the Polish Consul K. Szelaḡowski asked the mayor of Lommel for an immediate accord. In the presence of members of the Polish Union, he declared only to be able to agree to the commemoration if the responsibility for its organisation were transferred to him. The Polish Union refused because this would have allowed the Consul to lead the procession and to prohibit anti-communist speeches. What followed was a difficult discussion in which the Polish Consul finally agreed to cooperate with the city council of Lommel in maintaining the cemetery and to permit a yearly commemoration service organised by the Polish Union.<sup>238</sup>

The dispute brought this difference in political opinion to the fore. The Polish Union did not accept the Treaties of Yalta, which had consolidated the communist regime in Poland, and put itself forward as an anti-communist organisation for 'Polish' immigrants who had not been able to return to their home country due to their political convictions. In the commemoration service, it aimed to stress that soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division had fought for the liberation of Belgium in order to free their home country from the yoke of German and Soviet occupation, that the communist Polish People's Republic was a continuation of Soviet occupation and that it, therefore, could not recognise the new political Polish regime.<sup>239</sup> In turn, the Polish Consulate was the official representative of the communist Polish People's Republic in Belgium and profiled itself as the only official body authorized to organise commemoration services at the cemetery. In these services, it wanted to highlight that the

<sup>235</sup> Archive of the City of Lommel, 547.43 Pools militair kerkhof: onderhoud. Nota van het stadsbestuur: Poolse Militaire begraafplaats Lommel Ontwikkeling-Ontstaan-Betekenis.

<sup>236</sup> Archive of the Polish Union in Belgium (Związek Polaków w Belgii - further ZPB), Map 5B. 1990-1995. Toespraak van voorzitter Władysław Pietrzak naar aanleiding van 50 jaar Poolse vereniging afdeling Beringen in 1995.

<sup>237</sup> Archive of the City of Lommel, 547.73 Pools militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1947-1967. Briefwisseling 1947-1948.

<sup>238</sup> Idem. Engels (-Pools) militair kerkhof te Lommel. Rouwhulde ter ere van de Poolse gesneuvelden op zondag 31 October 1948. Verslag.

<sup>239</sup> Archive ZPB. Książka Protokołowa ZPB Okręg Limburgia 1949-1969. p. 1: Sprawozdanie 27.11.1949.

soldiers were killed in the battle against Nazism and, as such, had freed the way for the installation of the peace-bringing communist Polish People's Republic.<sup>240</sup> General Stanisław Maczek wrote in the foreword of a book of war memories, edited by the First Polish Armoured Division in 1947, that 'one can fight for all countries, but only die for Poland' (Praca Zbiorowa, 1947, ii). The Polish Union and the Polish Consulate could not agree with one another on the meaning of 'Poland' in this context; for the Polish Union, it was the continuation of the Polish state of the interwar years, for the Polish Consulate, it was the Polish People's Republic.

From 1949 onwards, they each organised their own yearly commemoration service at the cemetery in Lommel. The Polish Consulate was the first one to pick a date, and opted for All Saints Day, whereupon the Polish Union chose the closest holiday to All Saints Day for its commemoration service: the last Sunday of October (Goddeeris, 2003, 289).<sup>241</sup> The city council of Lommel took care to tactfully erase the traces of the former visitors in the sometimes very short period of time between the two commemorations.<sup>242</sup> The choice of dates in itself illustrates that, from the beginning, both organisers strived to legitimize their own commemoration service to the detriment of the other.<sup>243</sup> Initially, this focused around a battle for participants.<sup>244</sup> For instance, organisers rented trains in order to transport 'Polish' immigrants from all over the country to Lommel and announced their commemoration services in Polish migration newspapers and on flyers.<sup>245</sup> In the mining regions, representatives of the Polish Union even went door-to-door to mobilize not only their own backing, but also supporters of the other 'camp'.<sup>246</sup> That policy seemed to have created a feeling of common responsibility in the mining cities, as one interviewee told me that upon arrival in the Flemish Campines, he was encouraged by his miner-friends to join them at the commemoration service led by the Polish Union.<sup>247</sup> Thanks to such initiatives, the Polish Union could count every year on about one thousand participants, whereas around six hundred attended the service organised by the Polish Consulate.<sup>248</sup>

Not only high turnouts, but also the proceedings of the commemoration services were crucial. Initially, the Polish Union began its service with a procession of all 'Polish' immigrant organisations present, which started at the city council and led to the church in the city centre.

<sup>240</sup> Archive MSZ. DK 22/263 Wydział do spraw Polonii za granicą. Sprawozdania polonijne (Belgia) 1952-1953 r. Sprawozdanie z odbytej w dniu 1.XI.1953 Uroczystości na cmentarzu wojskowym w Lommel (tajne).

<sup>241</sup> Archive ZPB. Książka Protokołowa ZPB Okręg Limburgia 1949-1969. p 19: Sprawozdanie 27.5.1951.

<sup>242</sup> Telephone call with Wim Verkammen, the former city secretary of Lommel, on 20.4.2006.

<sup>243</sup> Two examples of sources in which the other organiser is blackened: Archive ZPB. Idem. p 22: Sprawozdanie 15.7.1951; Archive MSZ. DK 22/263. Zagadnienie polonijne. p 2-3.

<sup>244</sup> Archive MSZ. DK 24/288 Wydział do spraw polonii za granicą. Sprawozdania polonijne - Belgia 1952 r. Archive ZPB. Idem. p. 13: Sprawozdanie 18.11.1950.

<sup>245</sup> About transport: Archive ZPB. Map 1. 1946-1959. Zarząd Główny. Protokół n 2 Kadencja 1951-52. Sprawozdanie 30.9.1951 and Archive MSZ. Idem; About invitations: Archive MSZ. DK 26/317 Wydział do spraw Polonii za granicą. Sprawozdania polonijne (Wyciągi z raportów). Belgia 1955. p. 107 and for instance in *Narodowiec*, the most popular Polish newspaper edited in Northern France, but also distributed in Belgium: 30.10.1953 45/257 p 3.

<sup>246</sup> Archive of New Acts (Archiwum Akt Nowych - further AAN). Sygn. 237/XXII/313. Belgia. Położenie i działalność organizacyjna Polonii. Raporty, korespondencja: 1949-1953. Raport Polonii Belgijskiej 1950. p. 71; Archive MSZ. DK 22/263. Sprawy Polonijne. Działalność organizacji demokratycznych (IV kwartał 1952) p. 84; Archive MSZ. Departament IV 10/79 Belgia. Cmentarz polski w Lommel 1957/64. Sprawozdanie z przebiegu uroczystości w Lommel w r. 1957.

<sup>247</sup> P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.2.2006 (123:126).

<sup>248</sup> Archive MSZ. DK 22/263. p. 84 en DK 25/306 Wydział do spraw Polonii za granicą. Sprawozdania polonijne (Belgia) 1954 r. Sprawozdanie z przebiegu uroczystości w Lommel w r. 1954. p. 78; Archive ZPB. Zarząd Główny. Protokół n 2 Kadencja 1951-52. Sprawozdanie 30.9.1951. Zarząd Główny. Protokół 13.6.1954. p. 4-5.

There, the rector of the Polish Catholic Mission celebrated Mass, after which he laid a wreath at the foot of the statue in memory of soldiers killed in action in Lommel during World War II situated in front of the church on the town square. Then, the procession continued to the cemetery where speeches were made by the mayor of Lommel, the rector of the Polish Catholic Mission and a representative of one of the Polish non-communist immigrant organisations. Afterwards, a floral tribute took place around the wooden cross and participants laid their wreaths on individual graves.<sup>249</sup> The Polish Consulate held a different commemoration service, visiting in turn the statue on the village square, the cemetery, where speeches of the mayor and the Polish Consul followed, and, finally, the town hall for a drink.<sup>250</sup> During the ceremony, the organisers tried to focus the attention of the participants on the graves, but of course it remained difficult to ignore the big wooden cross so ostentatiously placed in the middle of the cemetery. Therefore, in 1952, the Polish Consulate ordered a commemorative placard in the name of the Polish People's Republic, which was laid at the far end of the cemetery and was swamped with wreaths on every All Saint's Day.<sup>251</sup> Although the placard was a useful tool to attract the attention of the visitors, it was by no means a worthy competitor to the big cross.

In the meantime, however, the Polish Consulate wrestled with another, greater challenge. It wanted to transfer the responsibility for organisational practicalities to 'Polish' immigrants with communist sympathies. If they could take over the initiative of the commemoration service, it would enhance the profile of the Polish People's Republic as the personification of Poland's liberation and boost its legitimacy.<sup>252</sup> The commemoration service continued to bear the stamp of the Polish Consulate, since its sympathizers were generally old miners with little education who could not guarantee 'the desired level' and whose engagement only yielded 'miserable effects', according to the Consulate.<sup>253</sup> After a few unsuccessful attempts of cooperation, the Consulate changed its policy. It strived to strengthen the legitimacy of its commemoration service through cooperation with influential Belgian politicians in the Belgian-Polish Friendship organisation based in Brussels, politicians who in turn would hopefully be able to attract the younger and more educated 'Polish' immigrants the Consulate was aiming for: former Home Army fighters and 'Polish' ex-combatants (Goddeeris, 2005a, 93-94).<sup>254</sup> Together, they edited a special leaflet written by General Stanislaw Maczek's right hand man living in the Polish People's Republic, Franciszek Skibiński, and distributed it among 4,000 'Polish' immigrants in Belgium (Skibiński, 1958).<sup>255</sup> As the previous chapter showed, this strategy had different outcomes. On the one hand, it led to a statue being

---

<sup>249</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Pools militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Poolse militaire begraafplaats 1947-1967. Brief van ZPB aan het gemeentebestuur van Lommel op 22.10.1947; Idem. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1968-1979. Programma dodenhulde te Lommel 27.10.1968; Archive ZPB. Persoonsarchief Paweł Maj (in the 1970s and 1980s, Paweł Maj was responsible for the floral tribute at the commemoration service of the Polish Union).

<sup>250</sup> Archive MSZ. DK 22/263. Idem; Archive MSZ. DK 13/73 Belgia. Bruksela 1970. Raport konsularny za 1969. Sprawy polonijne. p. 13-24; Archive AAN. Archive Towarzystwo Łączności z Polonią Zagraniczną 'Polonia'. Korespondencja z Belgią. Map 456/2. 'Polonia belgijska w hołdzie bohaterskim żołnierzom polskim, poległym w walce o wyzwolenie Belgii' (1962).

<sup>251</sup> Archive MSZ. DK 24/288. Idem.

<sup>252</sup> Archive MSZ. DK 28/336 Wydział do spraw Polonii za granicą. Sprawozdania z działalności polonijnej 1956r. p. 166-168 i verte, p. 171 i verte: 'Notatka z przebiegu uroczystości w Lommel'.

<sup>253</sup> Archive MSZ. Departament IV 10/79 Belgia. Cmentarz polski w Lommel 1957/64. Idem.

<sup>254</sup> Archive MSZ. Departament IV 6/76 Belgia. Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Belgijsko-Polskiej (1947/55/59-64/66/68).

<sup>255</sup> Archive MSZ. Departament Prasy i Informacji (further DPI) 23/251. Belgia. Wydawnictwa. Korespondencja w sprawie publikacji przez Tow. Przyjaźni B-P broszury Gen. F. Skibińskiego o udziale Polaków w wyzwoleniu Belgii 1958.

installed in the cemetery, but the statue was imported from the Polish People's Republic and mainly paid for not by individual 'Polish' immigrants, but by the Polish People's Republic, some Belgian politicians and cities liberated by the First Polish Armoured Division (Eder, 1983, 46-56).<sup>256</sup> On the other hand, the propagation activities regarding the statue raised interest about the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate among members of SPK, as well as among liberated cities.<sup>257</sup>

The Polish Union, on the contrary, did not face problems of support for its commemoration service initially. These only started after the Thaw of 1956, when 'Polish' immigrants, including many of the loyal participants to the commemoration service of the Polish Union, went to visit their families in the Polish People's Republic. Their trips tarnished the narrative on war memory propagated by the Polish Union, since visiting the Polish People's Republic in a way also meant recognizing the political regime, and from there it was, according to the Polish Union, only a small step to switching commemoration services and joining the 'communists'. No wonder therefore, that in these years, speeches of the commemoration services of the Polish Union warned the audience to stay on the road of freedom and justice and not to be dazzled by the 'truth' which the communist authorities proclaimed.<sup>258</sup>

In that same period of time, rumours about the installation of a statue reached the Polish Union. To bypass the fear that such a monument would overtrump 'their' cross, they considered exchanging the cross for a bigger one. However, this transpired to be an impossible task, since the maintenance of the cemetery was a shared responsibility of both the city council of Lommel and the Polish Consulate and their initiative needed official permission from the Polish People's Republic.<sup>259</sup>

The inauguration of the statue in the presence of General Skibiński, eminent Belgian politicians such as the Chairman of the Belgian Senate, Paul Struye, and the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lefebvre, was initially scheduled for 4 September 1959, the 15th anniversary of the liberation, but only took place on 4 October 1959. The participants gathered in front of the statue and ostentatiously turned their backs to the cross. Among the

---

<sup>256</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. Letter of the Polish Viceconsul Stanislaw Olasek to the mayor of Lommel on 19.11.1956; Idem. 547.73 Pools militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1947-1967. Letter of E. Van Houte, Head of the Dienst Identificatie en Teraardebesteding der Slachtoffers van de Oorlog to the mayor of Lommel on 24.9.1959; Idem. Letter of the city council to Amitiés Belgo-Polonaïses on 26.5.1959; Idem. Pools militaire begraafplaats: oprichting gedenkteken. Letter of the Belgisch-Poolse vriendschapsorganisatie (Amities Belgo-Polonaïses) to the mayor of Lommel, no date; Archive AAN. Archive Towarzystwo Łączności z Polonią Zagraniczną 'Polonia'. Korespondencja z Belgią. Map 122. Letter of Sir Mieczysław to Towarzystwo 'Polonia' from 1959 (no specific date mentioned); Archive MSZ. DK 62/777 Wydział do spraw Polonii za granica Belgia. Sprawozdawność polonijna. 1957. Sprawozdanie z pracy polonijnej za rok 1956. p. 15; Archive MSZ. DK 70/920. Belgia. Raporty konsularne za rok 1959. Sprawy polonijne. p. 5; Archive MSZ. Departament IV 10/79 Belgia. Cmentarz polski w Lommel 1957/64. Notatka Służbowa (21.3.1959). 3 p; *Polen van heden* 7/4 (12.1958) p. 11.

<sup>257</sup> Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej - further IPN). 0236/67 t 1-6 Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów na Zachodzie Kryptyk 'Ulik'. Teczka 4. p. 53-59 Miles 10.9.1959 SPK Ścisłe tajne; p. 134-136 Wir (Wrzos) 5.12.1961 Raport dot. SPK na terenie Belgii.

<sup>258</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Pools militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1947-1967. Speeches of Stanisław Merlo and Mr. Szadkowski (1956), Lucien Blazejczyk (1957) and Stefan Dulak (1958).

<sup>259</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Pools militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1947-1967. Letter of ZPB to the mayor of Lommel on 6.2.1957, and answer of the mayor on 2.5.1957). The Polish Union resorted to printing leaflets which aimed to discredit the communist plan (Archive MSZ. Departament IV 10/79 Belgia. Cmentarz polski w Lommel 1957/64. p. 32-33; Notatka w sprawie przebiegu uroczystości odsłonięcia pomnika na cmentarzu żołnierzy polskich w Lommel.

1,500 visitors that day, members of the SPK who stated that they were taking part in the commemoration service as an individual, not as a member of their organisation, were noticed for the first time.<sup>260</sup>

A few weeks later, the Polish Union as usual organised its commemoration service, but although an encroaching change in the landscape of the cemetery had taken place, no word about the statue was uttered during the speeches.<sup>261</sup> Indirectly, however, the organisers reacted to the installation of the statue by adapting its rite and narrative. They encouraged participants to lay their wreaths not only on the graves, but around the cross.<sup>262</sup> Also during their commemoration service, the monument of the 'other camp' was only greeted by the backs of the participants. During both commemoration services that year, the word 'symbol' was used in speeches for the first time. For the Polish Consulate, the cemetery was a symbol for the 'unity of thoughts and feelings of all those who dedicated their lives to the struggle for the Motherland', with this last word ingeniously bypassing the problematic concept of the Polish People's Republic and appealing to the homesickness of 'Polish' immigrants.<sup>263</sup> In the speeches at the commemoration service organised by the Polish Union, the cemetery was referred to as 'the aim of our yearly pilgrimage, the symbol of our tragedy'.<sup>264</sup> The speaker set the tone for a change in the articulated narrative on war memory. Whereas the initial narrative had focused on the non-recognition of the Polish People's Republic and had depicted the Polish Consulate as an enemy, the speaker now accentuated that Catholicism was the binding factor of participants. In doing so, she opened the door for a narrative on war memory in which the Christian image of a pilgrimage was linked with the concept of tragedy.

In terms of press coverage about the cemetery in Lommel, the year 1959 also proved to be a milestone. From that year onwards, journalists only commented on the commemoration service corresponding with the political ideology of their Polish immigrant newspaper, and anti-communist and communist newspapers avoided pictures of both the statue and the cross (Anonymous, 1983, 45-46).<sup>265</sup> Since the statue stood only about fifteen metres from the cross, and both monuments were directly visible when entering the cemetery, photographers had to be quite inventive to shoot such pictures.<sup>266</sup>

---

<sup>260</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Pools militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1947-1967. p. 36-38. Sprawozdanie z przebiegu uroczystości w Lommel; *Komunikat Informacyjny* (Weekly of SPK) 1 3.1960 - 1987 (From 1988 onwards *Wolne Słowo*); *Polen van Heden* 8/3-4 (12.1959); *Tygodnik Polski* 3/41 (15.10.1959); P 10: Interview with Edward on 17.11.2005 (32:37).

<sup>261</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Pools militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1947-1967. Speech of Jadwiga Pomorska (1959).

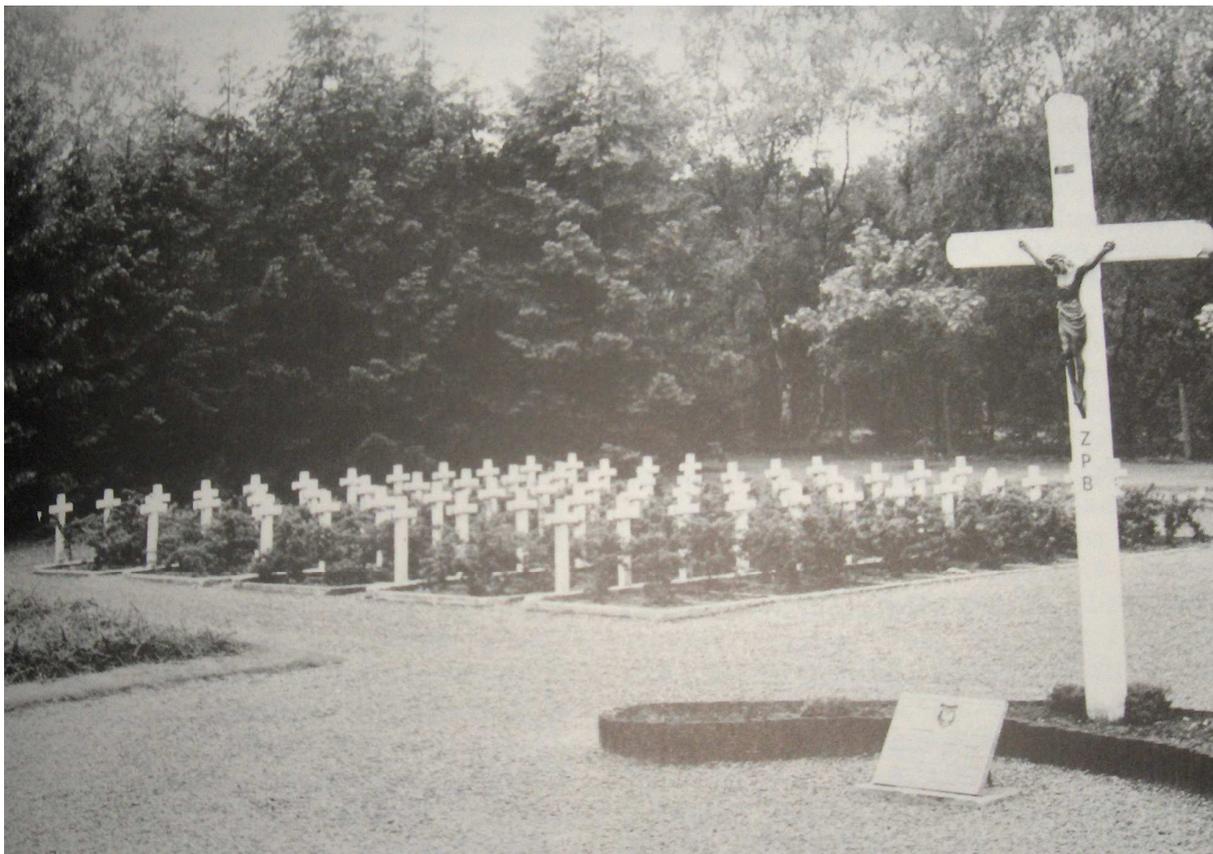
<sup>262</sup> Archive ZPB. Książka Protokołowa ZPB Okręg Limburgia 1949-1969. p. 84: Sprawozdanie 4.10.1959. *Narodowiec*. 6-7.11.1960 p. 4 and 8.11.1960 p. 5.

<sup>263</sup> Archive AAN. Archive Towarzystwo Łączności z Polonią Zagraniczną 'Polonia'. Korespondencja z Belgią. Map 122; *Nasza Ojczyzna* 1/1 (8.1956) p. 1.

<sup>264</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Pools militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1947-1967. Speech of Jadwiga Pomorska (1959); *Narodowiec* 1-2.11.1959 p. 6.

<sup>265</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Poolse militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1968-1979. flyer; *Tygodnik Polski* 44/160 6.11.1960 p. 15 and following years (from 1976 onwards included into Panorama Polska); *Polen van Heden* 8/3-4 (12.1959); *Narodowiec* 6-7.11.1960 p. 4.

<sup>266</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. Foto-archief. Poolse militaire begraafplaats. Zicht 1980.

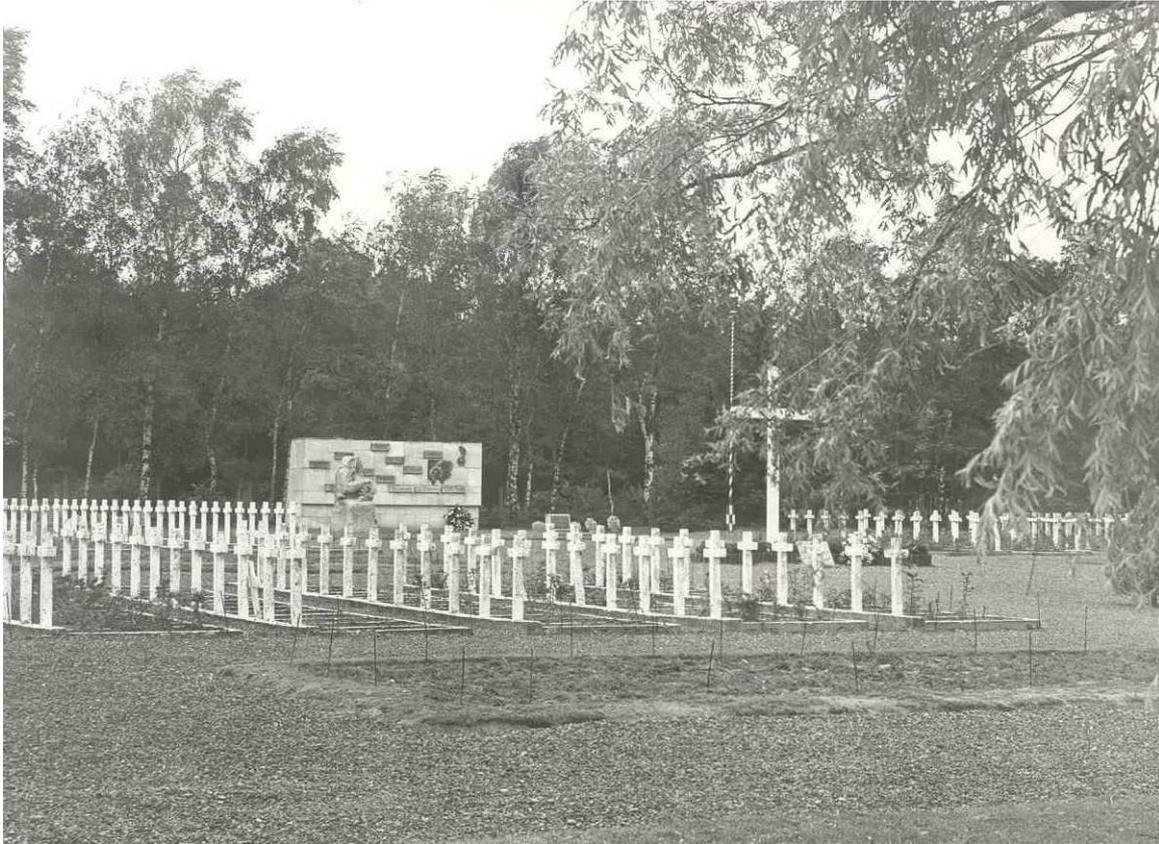


Picture 1: Photographers at the commemoration service of the Polish Union turned the lens of their cameras in order to avoid the statue in their pictures (Stanisław Maczekmuseum Breda).

Although the city council of Lommel had given its permission for the installation of the statue and had taken part in the official inauguration service, this did not strain relations with the Polish Union. As the Union took heed of the showy flagstaff next to the statue, the city council proposed to finance the purchase of two flagstaffs to be placed either side of the cross.<sup>267</sup> Throughout the years, the city council would persist in searching for solutions that could ease the subtle sensitivities of the two camps. The flagstaffs were inaugurated in 1960 and were the last change made to the cemetery's landscape for the next 30 years.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>267</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Poolse militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1949-1967. Letter of the city council to ZPB on 7.10.1960.

<sup>268</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Poolse militaire begraafplaats. Poolse militaire begraafplaats: oprichting gedenkteken. Letter of the ZPB to the mayor of Lommel on 11.01.1971; Idem. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1968-1979. Letter of the ZPB to the mayor of Lommel on 18.11.1971.



Picture 2: The Polish military cemetery in Lommel between 1959 and 1989 (Archive of the city of Lommel).

## Symbolizing narratives on war memory

In the 1960s, both camps deepened the interpretation of their central symbols - the statue and the cross. In 1960, the Polish Consulate placed an urn containing soil from Grunwald inside the statue.<sup>269</sup> At the battle of Grunwald in 1410, the Polish-Lithuanian forces had conquered the army of the Teutonic Knights Order and in that way stopped their claim to domination in the Baltic Sea area. After World War II, the Polish People's Republic used the battle of Grunwald to place the Polish victory over Nazi Germany in a story of 'eternal Polish-German conflict' (Zaremba, 2001, 142). Later in the 1960s, General Skibiński came to Lommel to collect some soil which was placed inside the statue of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw. This monument was erected after World War I to commemorate the 'Polish' soldiers who died in World War I and subsequent wars which led to the formation of the second Polish Republic, and was placed beneath the colonnade joining the two wings of the Saxon Palace in the very centre of Warsaw.<sup>270</sup> The building – but not the statue itself – was destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. After WW II, the former inscriptions were overwritten in order to make the statue into a symbol of victory over Nazism. For this purpose, it gathered the soil from twenty-four battlefields where 'Polish' soldiers, both in the distant and recent past, had fought to conquer 'the Germans' (Strzałkowski). In this way, the Polish cemetery in Lommel became a symbol and was granted a place in the centuries-old struggle for the liberation of the Polish 'Motherland' (the 'Polish People's Republic' was seen as a contemporary embodiment of that concept, although it was no longer said in so many words).

<sup>269</sup> *Tygodnik Polski* 45/161 13.11.1960 p. 5.

<sup>270</sup> P 11: Interview with Damian on 13.2.2006 (499:501).

The Polish Union also developed its own symbolic meaning of the cemetery. Starting in 1961, it organised an academic meeting every year dedicated to the Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King before the commemoration service.<sup>271</sup> By doing so, its narrative on war memory could shift the focus away from the recognition of the Polish People's Republic and place the importance of Catholicism first. This change is also visible in its invitations to commemoration services. From the middle of the 1960s onwards, no longer *all independent Polish organisations* and *all free Poles* of Belgium were kindly requested to take part in the ceremony, but *all independent Polish organisations* and *all Poles* were welcomed to the cemetery.<sup>272</sup> The Polish Union still expected 'Polish' immigrant organisations to be 'independent', i.e. not recognizing the Polish People's Republic, but there were no longer such requirements for individual participants.

However, that policy soon became obsolete. In 1969, the SPK decided that members of its board could go to visit their families in the Polish People's Republic on the condition that they resigned from their membership for the duration of their holiday.<sup>273</sup> In that same year, the Polish Union elected a man who had already participated in the commemoration services of the Polish Consulate as an individual for ten years, to vice-President.<sup>274</sup> Both initiatives show that the independence of 'Polish' immigrant organisations was an elastic concept. Also, the focus on Catholicism was not so well-chosen. As the number of individual migrants attending the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate dropped, it gained popularity among the Catholic church-goers.<sup>275</sup> The ideological weakening of Polish migrants and their organisations in Limburg led to a subsequent shift in the Polish Union's commemoration service's articulated narrative on war memory. From the late 1960s, the legitimacy of its ceremony could no longer be measured by the presence of 'Polish' immigrants from the mine regions, but by the attendance levels of former division soldiers. The Polish Consulate did not wait long to start a new battle for supremacy and devised its own methods to mobilize the same former division soldiers.

## Mobilizing former division soldiers

Whereas former division soldiers before had mainly gathered in informal groupings, many of them after the visit of General Maczek to Belgium in 1964 became members of the newly founded Benelux Circle (Majka).<sup>276</sup> Each year, the organisation brought former soldiers of the Division together at the military cemetery of Lommel. For the Polish Union, the numerous and ostentatious presence of ex-combatants in ex-combatant uniforms and with war medals

<sup>271</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Poolse militaire begraafplaats. Letter of the Christelijke Vereniging van Vrije Polen in België (Chrześcijańskie Zjednoczenie Wolnych Polaków w Belgii) to the mayor of Lommel on 24.10.1961 and invitation for the commemoration service of the ZPB to the mayor of Lommel on 18.10.1961; Archive ZPB. Map 2a. Sprawozdanie 20.2.1965.

<sup>272</sup> Archive ZPB. Persoonsarchief Paweł Maj. Map ZPB Sprawy Lommel. Invitations from 1965 onwards.

<sup>273</sup> Archive MSZ. DK 13/73 Belgia. Antwerpia. Sprawozdanie Konsularne za 1969 r. Sprawy polonijne. p. 19; *Kombatant Polski w Beneluxie*. 4 (XVII) / 8 (81) 2.1967 p 8- 9. Uchwały VIII Zjazdu Federacji Światowej.

<sup>274</sup> Archive AAN. Archive Towarzystwo Łączności z Polonią Zagraniczną 'Polonia'. Korespondencja z Belgią. Map 617; Archive ZPB. Książka Protokółowa ZPB Okręg Limburgia 1949-1969. p. 167: Sprawozdanie 5.3.1967; *Tygodnik Polski* 3/41 (15.10.1959).

<sup>275</sup> P 10: Interview with Edward on 17.11.2005 (20:21).

<sup>276</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Poolse militaire begraafplaats. Letter of Severin Zajdenbajtel, 1st Polish Armoured Division Deputy in Belgium, to the mayor of Lommel on 9.6.1964; Idem. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1968-1979. Letter of General Stanisław Maczek to the mayor of Lommel on 14.11.1969. Archive Benelux Circle. Vereniging van de Eerste Poolse pantsersdivisie - kring België. Map met ledenlijsten.

issued by the Ministry of Defence of the Polish Government in London, could amply compensate the disaffection of 'Polish' immigrants from the mine regions.<sup>277</sup>

The Polish Consulate also had its eye on former division soldiers. In these years, the Consulate could only convince a few of these former soldiers to start cooperation, but it overwhelmed each of them with so many financial incentives, that almost every individual could start its own organisation.<sup>278</sup> As all organisations took part separately in the commemoration service, the amount of ex-combatant banners at the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate looked even more impressive than at the one of the Polish Union. It was only from the mid 1970s onwards, however, when the BVPO was established and joined the ceremony of the Polish Consulate, that competition for a greater number of participating former division soldiers between both organisers intensified.<sup>279</sup>

During my interviews with twelve former division soldiers, I managed to gain an insight on the impact of this mobilization. Here I describe the profile of the interviewees, their knowledge about the fact that they were mobilized, and the narratives on war memory articulated at the cemetery. Before the collapse of communism, seven of the interviewees had been active in an ex-combatant organisation not recognizing the Polish People's Republic, two in an ex-combatant organisation that was linked to the Polish Consulate, two took part in activities of both types of organisations, and one switched camps after he had held membership for two years in a 'pro-consular' organisation. Nine of the interviewees visited their family members in the Polish People's Republic on a regular basis from the late 1950s onwards. Three interviewees only undertook their first journey to their home country after the collapse of communism. All twelve interviewees throughout the years regularly attended Catholic Church services. These data already indicate that a simplistic juxtaposition of a catholic anti-communist camp versus a communist camp of people visiting the Polish People's Republic does not match with the behaviour of individual former division soldiers. Members of 'anti-communist' organisations also visited the Polish People's Republic and members of pro-consular organisations were also Catholics.

Only board members of 'anti-communist' ex-combatant organisations knew that in the late 1960s a competition between the organisers of the two commemoration services had started, focusing on the mobilization of former division soldiers. For instance, the President of such an organisation formulated his opinion about the Polish Consulate as follows:

the Polish Consulate was not difficult  
they kept on looking  
for soldiers who wanted to cooperate with them (laugh)  
we said, laughing,  
that the Ambassador had to fulfil the 'communist norm'  
that he needed to convince x-amount of soldiers  
to take a Polish passport  
(with a Polish consular passport you could travel more easily to the Polish People's Republic M.V.)<sup>280</sup>

Although regular members did not know they had been objects of mobilization, most of them stated during the interview that in the past, two commemoration services had been held in the

<sup>277</sup> P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.2.2006 (260:267).

<sup>278</sup> Archive MSZ. DK 3/68 Sprawozdanie Konsularne Konsulatu PRL w Antwerpii za 1964 r. p. 41-38; Archive MSZ. DK 16/80 Antwerpia. Sprawozdanie konsularne za 1970-1976. Sprawozdanie 1972. p. 11; *Tygodnik Polski* 12/27 (559) 30.9.1968 p 21.

<sup>279</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter of the BVPO to the Polish Consulate on 1.6.1977.

<sup>280</sup> P 5: Interview with Artur on 14.7.2005 (70:76).

Polish military cemetery in Lommel and explicitly mentioned the hostile relations between the organisers of the services. Six of them attended the commemoration service organised by the ex-combatant organisation of which they were a member. The two interviewees who were active in ex-combatant organisations in both opposite ‘camps’ simply picked the date of a commemoration service that suited them the best, and one interviewee once made a blunder by attending the wrong commemoration service.<sup>281</sup> Interestingly, three of the interviewees were not aware of the fact that two different commemoration services had existed in Lommel. Two of them just went to Lommel when they were ‘picked up’, and one declared that he always went to Lommel when something was going on there, but he did not happen to know that the Polish Union also organised a commemoration service.<sup>282</sup> This information also nuances the contradistinction of two ideologically different commemoration services as depicted in written sources. Five of the twelve interviewees who participated in these services either were not aware of an ideological difference, or dealt pragmatically with it.

Moreover, the motivations of interviewees to attend commemoration services in Lommel all point in the same direction. They had fought for the liberation of Belgium, as their narratives said, and had been sacrificed on the altar of international negotiations at the end of World War II. In this way, treason had been committed against the ideals for which soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division had fought and been killed in action on Belgian territory. This had to be remembered.<sup>283</sup>

In addition to this generally shared narrative on war memory, interviewees who attended the commemoration service of the Polish Union mentioned that they visited Lommel because they did not support the communist Polish People’s Republic. Often, they illustrated their attitude by making a reference to their church attendance. As such, the narratives of these interviewees correspond to what had been articulated in speeches during commemoration services in the cemetery. When speaking about fellow ex-combatants visiting the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate, however, their narratives deviate. Board members of their ex-combatant organisations use strong language, depicting the people attending the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate as ‘enemies’ and ‘areligious people’.<sup>284</sup> Regular members, in their turn, were more generous towards their former soldier-colleagues, stating that they had ties with the Consulate because it made visiting their families in the Polish People’s Republic easier.

Interviewees who attended the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate, however, did not express the narrative on war memory articulated during the speeches in the cemetery. Instead of supporting the idea of the Polish People’s Republic safeguarding peace through a continuous struggle against Nazism-Fascism, they expressed a pragmatic attitude towards the communist regime and interpreted that political ideology in the same ‘hypocritical way’ as Polish citizens in the Polish People’s Republic.<sup>285</sup> For them, recognizing the Polish People’s Republic and attending the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate did not have anything in common with supporting its narrative on war memory.

---

<sup>281</sup> P 4: Interview with Mariusz on 2.2.2006 (64:72); P 13: Interview with Waldek on 25.11.2005 (64:72); P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.2.2006 (135:141).

<sup>282</sup> P 8: Interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005 (258); P 9: Interview with Sławomir on 6.2.2006 (26:27); P 16: Interview with Jacek on 6.2.2006 (159:160).

<sup>283</sup> See for instance P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.2.2006 (236:247).

<sup>284</sup> P 5: Interview with Artur on 14.7.2005 (50:57).

<sup>285</sup> See for instance P 4: Interview with Mariusz on 2.2.2006 (39:44).

The practices of individual former division soldiers participating in the different, or even in both, commemoration services were very similar. All interviewees went to church and most visited the Polish People's Republic. Nonetheless, they hurled reproaches at each other on what divided them: the recognition of the Polish People's Republic. The 'anti-communists' stated that those who developed relations with the Polish Consulate were hypocrites because by doing so, they supported a pagan state and brushed aside their Catholicism, whereas the others considered the 'anti-communists' hypocrites since they did not openly recognise the Polish People's Republic, but almost all went on regular visits. Both camps stigmatized each other, with the 'anti-communists' using the narrative on war memory articulated at their cemetery ceremonies, and the communist supporters criticising this narrative during the commemoration services of the Polish Consulate. It is clear however that not all individual participants lost sleep over such reproaches. Almost half of them did not know there was a difference, or dealt with it pragmatically.

During the commemoration services in Lommel, narratives on war memory were not only articulated through speech, but also through symbols and practices. However, the knowledge about the meaning of the statue and the cross appeared to be scarce among the interviewees. Out of the seven interviewees who had exclusively attended the commemoration service of the Polish Union, only two board members of ex-combatant organisations knew the Polish Consulate had been the initiator of the statue.<sup>286</sup> Three interviewees thought that 'Polish' immigrants from Brussels or from the mine regions had erected the statue.<sup>287</sup> The wording of one of them reveals much about how he remembered the symbolization of the services' narrative on war memory. After he had described the scenery of the cemetery and the course of the commemoration service, I asked him:

I: was there only a cross in the cemetery?

He: yes (1 sec)

and there at the end, but (3 sec)

hé, strange (2 sec)

we didn't go there

there was so

how to say (2 sec)

a statue

I: that statue, how did it get there?

He (without hesitation): it got there through the Polish organisations from Brussels so Pomorski and Glaser<sup>288</sup>

they were concerned that something of use would remain

because one kilometre further there's a German cemetery

and we said: 'But wait! People will be confused!

if it is not clear that this is a Polish cemetery

they will go and lay flowers at the Germans!<sup>289</sup>

The interviewee had described the cemetery and the course of the ceremony in line with the way it was set by the Polish Union, i.e. without mentioning the statue. When I asked him if

<sup>286</sup> P 5: Interview with Artur on 14.7.2005 (26:28), P 14: Interview with Rafał on 6.2.2006 (290:291).

<sup>287</sup> P 1: Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005 (420:435); P 9: Interview with Sławomir on 6.2.2006 (28:30); P 18: Interview with Andrzej on 7.11.2005 (210:218).

<sup>288</sup> Edward Pomorski (1902 - 1995) and Stefan Glaser (1895 - 1984) were two of the most prominent intellectuals among 'Polish' immigrants in Belgium. Pomorski was a translator of Slavic languages, President of ZPB and active in Polish language schools in Belgium. Glaser had been a professor at the University of Lublin and Vilnius before WW II. In Belgium, he was for many years the President of the NKWP (Kepa, 2004, 105-106 and 258-260; Goddeeris, 2005b, 79-98).

<sup>289</sup> P 1: Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005 (420:435).

that was it, he automatically confirmed that question. Only later, when he seemed to realize my question also contained the suggestion the picture he described to me might have been incomplete, he plunged into thought and reflected on what he had told me before. He slowly re-interpreted his story, mentioning that it was ‘strange’, and that there had been something more, while struggling with how to articulate that in words (‘how to say’). His words show that during the commemoration service of the Polish Union, no attention was paid to the statue. Nevertheless, he was convinced that ‘Polish’ immigrants from Brussels (‘Polish organisations from Brussels’) had financed it. Also the last interviewee, who had regularly attended the commemoration service of the Polish Union, did not bring up the statue while describing the cemetery of Lommel. When I explicitly asked about the statue later, he did not say more than:

I: In the cemetery there is also a statue?

He: a statue?

yes

(4 sec)

(uncertainly) there was something?<sup>290</sup>

The fact that the interviewees did not pay attention to the statue dovetails with the narrative on war memory as performed during the commemoration services of the Polish Union they attended. However, it is striking that the interviewees who went to the service of the Polish Consulate at which the statue was centralized, were equally unaware of how the statue had come to the cemetery. Two of them thought the city council of Lommel had given it as a present.<sup>291</sup> One interviewee, who switched commemoration services depending on his business agenda, thought the Polish Consulate preferred the statue above the cross for the floral tribute, because ‘it was bigger’.<sup>292</sup> The interviewee who once made a mistake and accidentally attended the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate, never realised that the place of the floral tribute differed depending on the organisers of the commemoration service, nor that it could have a meaning.<sup>293</sup>

Interviewees remembered the cross in a different way to the statue. Interviewees who attended the commemoration service of the Polish Union were very aware of the central place dedicated to the cross, which even corresponds to their ignorance of the statue. The forgetting of the statue might indeed have served the cross to become more accentuated in their stories. Three of them showed me pictures they had taken during the commemoration services. All pictures show participants gathered around the cross and none reveal the slightest glimpse of the statue.<sup>294</sup> Interviewees had not only taken over the narrative on war memory as articulated in words during the service, but also in rituals. Moreover, they also found themselves in the symbolization of the centralized ritual object: the cross. One interviewee ascribed the following meaning to the cross during his description of the cemetery:

there was a cross

it was of the free Poles<sup>295</sup>

<sup>290</sup> P 16: Interview with Jacek on 6.2.2006 (166:169).

<sup>291</sup> P 8: Interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005 (216:219); P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.2.2006 (231:235).

<sup>292</sup> P 4: Interview with Mariusz on 2.2.2006 (241).

<sup>293</sup> P 13: Interview with Waldek on 25.11.2005 (62:78).

<sup>294</sup> P 14: Interview with Rafał on 6.2.2006; P 16: Interview with Jacek on 6.2.2006; P 18: Interview with Andrzej on 7.11.2005.

<sup>295</sup> P 14: Interview with Rafal on 6.2.2006 (283:284).

For him, the cross symbolized Catholicism, and Catholicism the resistance against the Polish People's Republic which his compatriots, 'the free Poles' supported. The immediate equation of the cross and 'free Poles', shows the self-evidence of the Catholic, anti-communist meaning the cross articulated for the interviewee.

Interestingly, most interviewees who had attended the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate mentioned the cross in their description of the cemetery and gave it a meaning. For example, one former division soldier said the 'cross was beautiful' and 'typical for a cemetery'.<sup>296</sup> Another one added to his description, which had been in line with the course of the commemoration service he had participated in:

there was also a cross  
I have been in front of that cross  
but there were never flowers<sup>297</sup>

For him, the absence of wreaths ('flowers') had made it less appealing than the statue. Only one interviewee was convinced that there had never been a cross in the cemetery.<sup>298</sup> I was also offered to look through the photo album of one interviewee who had attended the commemoration services of the Polish Consulate. In some pictures, I saw how participants of the ceremony faced the statue and turned their backs to the cross. The interviewee used those pictures to describe me the course of the ceremony in line with how it had been conducted, silencing the cross. After he had finished his story, I pointed to the picture and suggested:

I: here is for instance a cross in Lommel?  
He (agitated): who believes that those are all communists who stand there?  
nobody believes that!  
ho, come on!  
His wife: there came buses from Wallonia with miners and people from Limburg  
He: it was the same, (spouse's name), in Scherpenheuvel on Second Whitsun day  
His wife: there came all Poles, all catholic Poles  
He: we went there every year  
His wife: and there is also a Polish mass<sup>299</sup>

The interviewee had not noticed himself that above the heads of the participants stood an ostentatious cross, and when I drew his attention to it, he interpreted that as a possible suggestion participants were a-religious communists, with which he did not want to agree. He therefore referred to his loyal presence on the yearly pilgrimage of 'Polish' immigrants to Scherpenheuvel, where, according to his wife 'all Poles, all catholic Poles', gathered.

---

<sup>296</sup> P 11: Interview with Damian on 3.2.2006 (564:566).

<sup>297</sup> P 4: Interview with Mariusz on 2.2.2006 (237:239).

<sup>298</sup> P 8: Interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005 (240:244).

<sup>299</sup> P 11: Interview with Damian on 13.2.2006 (649:657).



Picture 3: During the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate people turned their back towards the cross (Archive of the city of Lommel).

In sum, the interviewees who attended the commemoration service of the Polish Union took over the narrative on war memory presented in words, symbols and rituals. The organisers successfully managed to keep the attention away from the symbol of the other camp, the statue, and to convince visitors of the symbolization of their own monument: the cross. Only board members of anti-communist ex-combatant organisations knew why there were two monuments in the cemetery and why the different commemoration services were so meticulously orchestrated. As the statue was a thorn in their flesh, they considered it wise to remain silent about its origin and meaning. One interviewee did not remember there had been a statue in the past at all, and the others could live with the idea that there was an extra monument in the cemetery which did not receive attention during the commemoration service they attended, of which they did not know the origin and about which was not spoken among their ex-combatant friends. Each of them individually came up with an innocent explanation for the presence of the statue, such as ‘a gift from the city of Lommel’.<sup>300</sup>

The situation of the interviewees who attended the service of the Polish Consulate is different. They followed the way the narrative on war memory of the Polish Consulate was performed in symbols and rituals, although they did not agree with the symbolization of that performance as presented in speeches. Interviewees described the cemetery in line with the way it was set up and experienced during the commemoration service, focusing on the statue and forgetting the cross or giving it an innocent explanation. Nevertheless, when they expressed the meaning

<sup>300</sup> P 17: Interview with Robert on 13.2.2006 (231:235).

of these symbols, it turned out they did not know where the statue (i.e. the focal point of the ceremony) came from and what it meant. Moreover, they linked the cross with Catholicism whose role they supported in the Polish People's Republic. The Polish Consulate thus successfully managed to shape the memories of those present at its commemoration service in line with its performance, but did not succeed in influencing the way interviewees gave meaning to this performance. In the end, interviewees of both commemoration services remembered the cemetery as portrayed during the ceremony they attended, so focusing either on the cross or the statue, but all followed the narrative on war memory presented by the Polish Union in the symbolization of these monuments, whether or not they had attended that commemoration service.

## A shift of players in the arena of Lommel

In the 1980s, two important shifts took place at the Polish military cemetery in Lommel. First, the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate lost popularity and shrunk to a small and isolated gathering, no longer able to compete with the commemoration service of the Polish Union. And second, a Jewish family member of a soldier buried in Lommel started to visit the cemetery.

First, following Martial Law and the popularity of the trade union 'Solidarity' in the Polish People's Republic, the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate fell into decay. The omnipresent resistance of Polish citizens, which clearly showed (former) participants that not only the family members they had already visited, but the majority of Poles did not see the Polish People's Republic as the safekeeper of peace after World War II, mowed down the legitimacy of the commemoration service. Former division soldiers in the beginning of the 1980s still visited the ceremony with their organisation, the BVPO, but when the board of the organisation came into discredit in the second half of the 1980s, many stopped attending. When the BVPO organised a survey among its members at this time asking whether they were still willing to participate in the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate in Lommel, the answer was negative.<sup>301</sup> As a result, the status and influence of the Polish Consulate at the cemetery withered.

Second, the Israeli sister of a soldier killed in action during the liberation of Belgium, Rosa Rosen, found his grave in Lommel. In 1980, she had visited the municipality in Drongen where her brother, Tadeusz, had died almost 40 years earlier. When she could not find the grave in the local cemetery, she asked the town council for more information. Following a lack of response, she then took her story to a Flemish newspaper.<sup>302</sup> Through the publication of her request, she came into contact with a Belgian hobbyist specialised in war cemeteries.<sup>303</sup> George Spittaël could trace the grave of Tadeusz Rosen back to the cemetery of Lommel, and accompanied Rosa when she visited the cemetery a year later. Entering the cemetery, Rosa was shocked to see that her brother had been buried under a cross.<sup>304</sup> She then wrote the following request to the mayor of Lommel:

<sup>301</sup> Archive BVPO. Letter of Colonel P.Eygenraam to Edmund Kaczyński on 11.4.1987.

<sup>302</sup> *Het Volk* 13-14.9.1980 'Israeli's zochten naar gesneuvelde Pool. Een stap naar het Paradijs'.

<sup>303</sup> *Het Volk* 24.5.1982 'Israëlsche zocht 40 jaar naar graf van in België gesneuvelde broer'.

<sup>304</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.42 Poolse militaire begraafplaats 1980-. Letter of George Spittaël to the mayor of Lommel on 13.5.1982.

I believe that during the burial it was not known he was Jewish, and therefore he was placed under a cross. I am the only surviving family member after the destruction and I feel it is my task to change the cross for a Star of David.<sup>305</sup>

The city council successfully lobbied the Polish Consulate to allow such a change, albeit at the personal cost of Rosa Rosen.<sup>306</sup> George Spittael, however, not wanting to have her paying, started fundraising among friends, ex-combatants and through Azriel Chaikin, the Rabbi of the Orthodox-Jewish community of Brussels.<sup>307</sup> Organisations gathering former division soldiers, such as the Benelux Circle and the BVPO, appeared not to be interested. However, when George Spittael met a former division soldier on a rally of the Royal British Legion in Ghent, and when he told him about his plans, the man immediately donated 1,000 Belgian francs (about 25 euro).<sup>308</sup> That man also encouraged some of his colleagues to come to the inauguration ceremony of the Star of David a year later. In the Benelux Circle, the landscape change in the cemetery caused a short internal discussion about whether Tadeusz Rosen had been Catholic or Jewish, which was ended when one of his comrades stated Rosen had had a rosary in his trouser pocket, after which the whole event was silenced.<sup>309</sup> Currently, the cemetery in Lommel contains three Stars of David, which are centralized during regular family ceremonies.<sup>310</sup>



Picture 4: Inauguration of the first Star of David at the Polish military cemetery in Lommel (Archive of the city of Lommel)

<sup>305</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.42 Poolse militaire begraafplaats 1980-. Letter of Fried Warda to the mayor of Lommel on 21.4.1981.

<sup>306</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.42 Poolse militaire begraafplaats 1980-. Letter of George Spittael to the mayor of Lommel on 9.4.1981.

<sup>307</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.42 Poolse militaire begraafplaats 1980-. Letter of George Spittael to the mayor of Lommel on 31.8.1981.

<sup>308</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.42 Poolse militaire begraafplaats 1980- Letter of George Spittael to the mayor of Lommel on 17.6.1981.

<sup>309</sup> P 3: Participant observation during the Lommel commemoration service in 2006.

<sup>310</sup> P 3: Participant observation during the Lommel commemoration service in 2006.

Although in the 1980s, both the Polish Union and the Polish Consulate continued to organise separate commemoration services, there was no longer competition. The political events in the Polish People's Republic caused the ceremony of the latter to shrivel. At the same time, another player entered the arena of war memory. After a hunt lasting several years, an Israeli woman found the grave of her brother and managed to exchange the cross on his grave for a Star of David. This act laid bare the war memory narratives of ex-combatant organisations which for the past 40 years had focused on the sole Polish character of the First Polish Armoured Division, and silenced the different ethnic and religious backgrounds of its soldiers. The Circle Benelux and BVPO were unwilling to re-examine their narrative, trying to silence or marginalize the phenomenon.

## A Europeanised narrative on war memory

After the collapse of communism, the Polish Consulate and the Polish Union reached an agreement to unite their commemoration services. The Polish Union became responsible for the commemoration service and simply copied its former pattern. However, speeches and floral tributes took place in front of the statue. Both former organisers, together, decided to replace the old wooden cross for an iron one placed on top of the statue, in order to 'unite both symbols' and 'to achieve one architectural project'.<sup>311</sup> In 1991, the Polish President Lech Wałęsa visited the cemetery and recognised the division soldiers' efforts in the battle for a 'free Poland'. After both symbols had been fused, he managed to unite both camps also intrinsically. For the first time since the outbreak of World War II, the word 'Poland' again reflected a state with which all Polish migrants could identify.<sup>312</sup>

Over the years, the narrative on war memory articulated in speeches changed and became more Europeanised. During the commemoration service in Lommel in 2006, for instance, the Polish Ambassador Iwo Byczewski addressed the public in the following way:

In the past, our *narody* (nations or people) united in a common fight for independence. Today they are united within the European Union, the Council of Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty to jointly ensure security and peace, democracy and development.<sup>313</sup>

According to him, Belgians and Poles had fought together for independence in the past. By leaving 'the past' unidentified, the Ambassador placed the death of the division soldiers in an historic continuum of Belgian-Polish cooperation, dating from the beginning of the Belgian state in 1830, including the battle of the First Polish Armoured Division, and leaving the communist past open (Goddeeris, 2001, 57-62). As the word *narody* in Polish can mean both people or nations, it is likely that the Ambassador wanted to say that during the Cold War, 'our people' i.e. Belgians and former division soldiers who settled in Belgium, worked together, since he considered it obvious that both had continued to criticise the communist regime. After the collapse of communism, the resistance of former Allied soldiers from Poland settled abroad pushed aside the war experiences of communist fighters during World War II from the centre of official war memory in Poland (Brodecki, Wawer, Kondracki, 2005). Whereas former Allied soldiers from Poland living abroad had been mainly silenced or

<sup>311</sup> Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.43 Pools kerkhof 1987-1994. Letter of ZPB to the mayor of Lommel on 26.8.1990.

<sup>312</sup> Archive Benelux Circle. Map 1990-.... Speech of Lech Wałęsa in Lommel on 3.7.1991.

<sup>313</sup> *Novum Polonia* 19.11.2006 p 11. Przemówienie p. Ambasadora RP Iwo Byczewskiego podczas uroczystości w Lommel.

marginalized in the Polish People's Republic, in contemporary Poland, they became essential to Polish identification; they became 'ours'. Moreover, due to the double meaning of the word *narody*, the Ambassador could gloss over almost fifty years of less fruitful cooperation between the Belgian and Polish nations as regards independence and peace.

That cooperation continued, as the Ambassador said, in a Unified Europe. Within a new framework of international organisations, Poland cooperates with Western European states and other allies from World War II, former satellite states, within the Council of Europe, and also with the Russian Federation. The sequence of his two sentences drew attention to not only the soldiers of the First Polish Division killed in action, but also to its former soldiers, as they were so to speak the forerunners of that European peace and democracy.

During his speech, I stood in the cemetery among the twelve former division soldiers who had been able to attend the ceremony. That at least some of them did not fully endorse the viewpoint of the Ambassador, I realised a little later, during the floral tribute. Each year, military representatives of various embassies in Belgium, including the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Germany and Great Britain, attend the commemoration service and lay wreaths in front of the statue. When the Russian representative was called up to the front, one former division soldier bowed over to his colleague directly in front of me, and made the following joke:

A Pole, a German and a Russian are walking through the desert and they want to drink. The devil appears and says that they will get water if their penises come to a total of 100 cm. The Pole pulls his out...50 cm... the German - 49 cm. The Russian searches...and pulls out 1 cm. They keep going...and the Pole says: 'It's a good thing mine was 50 cm' ...the German says: 'It's a good thing mine was 49 cm...' and the Russian says: 'It's a good thing I was erect'.<sup>314</sup>

By articulating the superiority of the 'Poles', and making fun of the 'Russians', the former division soldier indicated how he saw that international cooperation in the name of freedom and democracy.

## Conclusion

This chapter investigated how during commemoration services held at the Polish war cemetery in Lommel, the last place of rest for 257 soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division killed in action during the liberation of Belgium, individual former division soldiers experienced group memory. It described how the war cemetery in Lommel was created as an arena of war memory articulation and how it was modified over the years, which narratives on war memory fought for legitimacy and how they were articulated through practices during commemoration services, when former division soldiers visited Lommel and how they participated in the services, and last, how former division soldiers who are still alive remember the cemetery and the commemoration services.

During the Cold War, the cemetery functioned as a politicized arena for the articulation of war memory. The Polish Consulate and the 'anti-communist' Polish Union organised commemoration services separately and avoided direct contact with each other. Each ceremony concentrated on the inclusion of sympathizers and the complete disregard of opponents. Each reconstructed its own vision of the past in order to legitimize its own position within the Cold War context and, for this purpose, formulated narratives on war

---

<sup>314</sup> P 3: Participant observation during the Lommel commemoration service in 2006, notes.

memory by means of speeches, their own monuments (respectively a statue and a cross), and their own rituals centralized around their monument. Such articulations of remembering provided a context in which the meaningful memories of participants were created.

After the landscape of the cemetery had been finalized, both organisers deepened the interpretation of their central symbols - the statue and the cross. The Polish Union remembered that the soldiers had been killed in vain, since the independent Polish state of the interwar years was not re-installed after liberation and equalized Catholicism with the struggle against communism. The Polish Consulate, on the contrary, stated the soldiers had given their lives for a centuries' long battle for the liberation of the Polish Motherland, of which the Polish People's Republic was the long-awaited result.

By the end of the 1960s, following the ideological weakening of 'Polish' migrants in Limburg, both organisers shifted their focus. The legitimacy of their ceremonies could no longer be measured by the presence of 'Polish' migrants from the mine regions, but by the attendance of former division soldiers. The interviews I performed with surviving former division soldiers made it clear that most of them did not know they had been subjects of mobilization. For almost half, their ideological conviction did not determine which commemoration service they attended. Interestingly, interviewees of both commemoration services remembered the cemetery as portrayed during the ceremony they attended, so focusing either on the cross or the statue. All interviewees, however, followed the narrative on war memory presented by the Polish Union in the symbolization of these monuments, whether or not they had attended that commemoration service.

In the 1980s, the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate shrunk to a small and isolated gathering no longer able to compete with the commemoration service of the Polish Union. A Jewish family member of a soldier buried in Lommel also started to visit the cemetery, laying bare the narratives on war memory of ex-combatant organisations which had always focused on the sole Polish character of the First Polish Armoured Division, and had silenced the different ethnic and religious background of its soldiers. The ex-combatant organisations of the Division were unwilling to reassess their vision and made attempts to silence or marginalize the phenomenon.

After the collapse of communism, the Polish Consulate and the Polish Union united their commemoration services and symbols. Over the years, their narrative on war memory became more Europeanised, portraying the formerly marginalized former division soldiers as vital to Polish national identification and displaying them as the forerunners of European peace and democracy. However, such a representation was dismissed by one former division soldier with a joke.

## Chapter 5: ‘Let’s sing, let’s sing, for Soviet authority we’ll die’

Throughout more than 60 years of its existence, the largest immigrant organisation of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium, the SSP/SSG brought together women who loved singing. Although the SSP/SSG organised other activities besides singing, and there were always members who did not sing, singing was the most important aspect of its work and the choir attracted a number of members. For years, choir rehearsals took place on a weekly basis and performances happened between four and twelve times a year.

When I saw the song scores, observed rehearsals and spoke with various choir members, I realised it was war memory that had tied these singing voices together. During rehearsals, the memories of individual members were moulded into a group memory through remembering certain experiences and forgetting others. That memory was then brought into the public sphere by means of performances. In this chapter, I analyse how the singing voices of the SSP/SSG experienced that group memory through giving meaning to their war experiences during rehearsals and concerts. I unravel how they sang memory.

During the Cold War, the SSP/SSG’s singing took place in a geopolitical arena of war memory articulation dominated by nation state and civil society agencies formulating different war memory narratives on both sides of the Iron Curtain. These dominant narratives on war memory in Belgium and the Soviet Union were contradictory with regard to politics, respectively supporting anti-totalitarianism and anti-fascism, but nonetheless ran parallel in marginalising the role and fate of Ostarbeiterinnen. It was the task of the SSP/SSG to determine its place within this framework, thereby following or denouncing these narratives through the formulation and articulation of a meaningful narrative on war memory.

Here I examine how the SSP/SSG, through singing, responded both to the political message present in the dominant narratives on war memory and to the feelings of marginalisation which its choir members experienced in those narratives both during the Cold War and after the collapse of communism. The extent to which the members borrowed aspects from the dominant narratives of their home and host societies to form their own narrative on war memory offers an insight into both their transnational practices and the paths of integration they walked in their host society.

### Compiling a canon of songs

The SSP/SSG’s songs formed the starting point for this study. By means of ethnomusicological and acoustemological methodologies, the SSP/SSG members’ narrative on war memory can be distilled from their canon of songs and singing practices. Ethnomusicology considers a migrant song repertoire to be an innovative cultural creation which enables the researcher to fathom the importance of music in the migrants’ lives. Ethnomusicologists therefore not only catalogue what songs migrants composed and sang, but also examine when and where these songs were sung and what meaning they articulated (Cohen, 1997, 26; Nettl 7). Acoustemologists focus on the epistemological potential of sound, i.e. what we experience when listening or singing, and how (Feld 97). Sound is therefore no longer merely researched as a physical phenomenon, but as a carrier of meaning depending on the situation and on the listener. In this way, singing helps to connect the experienced

sensations of sound to individual or shared emotions and memories (Feld 97). In order to reveal all these mechanisms of formulating and articulating meaning at work, ethnomusicologists and acoustemologists combine written source readings with fieldwork. Pre-eminently, their conclusions are grounded in empirical data gathered through oral or sound history and participant observation (Nettl 9-11, 133-148).

I interviewed choir conductors of the SSP/SSG regional branches in Antwerp, Ghent, Waregem and Brussels. The interviews took place at their homes, where, with the help of their song books and recording collections, the conductors assisted me in reconstructing the songs which they had sung over the years. They also informed me how they had gathered the scores, where and on what occasions the songs had been performed, and which ones had been more popular than others. One of my major sources became the file belonging to a daughter of a former Ostarbeiterin, who had kept the entire repertoire of her mother's songs.

Besides this written source, I analysed archival materials both from the regional branches of the SSP/SSG in Ghent and from the 'Motherland' association, set up by the Soviet Union to maintain contact with Soviet migrants living abroad. I also found short articles on SSP/SSG activities in various bulletins.<sup>315</sup>

Very few books touch on the Ostarbeiterinnen's singing culture. Although the experiences of Ostarbeiterinnen were generally silenced in the Soviet Union during the Cold War era, a few Soviet scholars in the early 1950s tried to glorify the role and significance of Soviet opposition against Nazi occupation by means of the songs of Ostarbeiterinnen and Soviet prisoners of war. As a result, ethnomusicological studies interpreted the songs in line with the Soviet narrative on war memory, illustrating how the war songs displayed the ideal Soviet citizen: heroic, virtuous and fully committed to the battle against the 'fascist' aggressors (Kirdan 8). Of course, the experiences of Ostarbeiterinnen could only partially fit into that image, as the study of Mints, Grechina, and Dobrovolskii demonstrated. Their article about the mass song culture during World War II is one of very few texts published in the Soviet Union that speak about Ostarbeiterinnen. During the Cold War, no written sources about the singing culture of Ostarbeiterinnen were created by civil society movements either in the Soviet Union, or in the Atlantic World (Anonymous, 1953; Grynblat; Mel'ts). Literature examining opposition under Stalin even doubts that civil organisations uniting Ostarbeiterinnen in the Soviet Union existed at all (Fürst 314; Kuromiya 309-314).

Books addressing the war culture of Soviet citizens in the Third Reich only started to appear after the fall of communism. Barbara Stelzl-Marx analysed poems written by Soviet prisoners of war, and recent publications based on interviews with Ostarbeiterinnen occasionally mention wartime poetry and singing practices, as do German studies on foreign labour in major industrial companies (Grinchenko, 2004, 114-115; Obens 92-93; Stelzl-Marx, 2000, 188-207). To date, the most important book on Ostarbeiterinnen's war songs is *Fol'klor i iazyk Ostarbaïterov*, published in 1998. It contains what has been called the 'Freiburg collection', i.e. the archive of a Nazi war censor which was found in the Freiburg Ethnographic Museum in the early 1990s (Daniël', Eremina and Zhemkov). The war censor, whose identity is unknown, but who certainly had in-depth knowledge of local Ukrainian and Russian dialects and an interest in linguistics, was appointed in 1942 to censor the letters which mostly Ostarbeiterinnen, and to a lesser extent Soviet prisoners of war, sent to their relatives at home and their friends in other labour camps. He/she formed lists not only of the

---

<sup>315</sup> *Belgique URSS Magazine; Golos Rodiny; Patriot; Sovetskii Patriot; Za vozvrashchenie na Rodinu!*

poems and songs he/she came across, but also of the Germanisms that started creep into the correspondence (in Ukrainian and Russian). In addition, he/she painstakingly registered the indirect interaction that took place between him/her and the people writing letters by showing how people 'prepared' their letters. Knowing that the letters had to pass censorship, Ostarbeiterinnen set up an informal network to exchange experiences and provide each other with feedback on what had failed to pass censorship (Daniël', Eremina and Zhemkov 41). For instance, the songs about Soviet soldiers at the front which Ostarbeiterinnen sung did not stand any chance of passing through (Daniël', Eremina and Zhemkov 44). Nowadays, however, it is not difficult to find the lyrics of such soldiers' songs. In the Russian Federation, soldiers' memories on war experiences have recently been published in large numbers, including collections of battle songs from World War II (Alpern Engel 125; Andriianov and Kuznetsov; Borisova; Lipatov).

In addition, between September 2006 and February 2007, I conducted participant observation during the weekly gatherings of the SSG regional branch in Antwerp. In a diary, I wrote down observations and fragments of conversations. At first, I started to observe without any paper or recording materials at hand and only updated my diary after a gathering had taken place. I only began to make notes during the gatherings when some women encouraged me to write their names down. From that moment on, I knew they would no longer feel frightened by me scribbling down information, such as the names of songs they particularly liked and still remembered. They also encouraged me to make sound recordings of the third rehearsal I attended and of their performance at the local Christmas Market. Halfway through the participant observation, I discovered that the lyrics sung by SSG's members did not always articulate the song's full meaning. Over the following weeks, I learned how to read between the lines to distil a layer of meaning that could not be read directly from the lyrics.

In November 2006, after a weekly meeting, the accordionist of the Association's choir from Antwerp invited me to his house for a chat. The grandson of the choir conductor, he had taken over her role a few years ago because he felt she had grown too old. We had a long conversation about songs, in which he mentioned his grandmother had recently told him she still remembered the 'alternative' lyrics she had sung during World War II to the melodies of some songs that had been part of the choir's repertoire for years. He agreed to ask his grandmother whether she would like to sing these songs for me.<sup>316</sup> Two weeks later, I was invited to her house and she sang three songs in both their original and alternative wordings (see music recordings): *Katiusha*, *Bravely We Go to Battle* and *Pretzels*.<sup>317</sup> She said that she had not spoken about these songs during the previous interview since she had not considered this information to be of any importance. When she cried several times during and in between the recordings, as she had never thought she would ever perform these songs again, I understood this was a very important moment for her.<sup>318</sup>

This was a moment of such importance that she decided not to keep this experience for herself but to share it with her girlfriends from the choir. I realised something had changed when at a rehearsal in late November 2006, the former choir conductor spontaneously followed the choir's rendition of *Katiusha* with: 'And We, and We', after which she started to sing the alternative war version. The choir members reacted remarkably receptively, although it was

<sup>316</sup> P 31: Participant Observation, Notes on a talk with the accordionist on 6.11.2006.

<sup>317</sup> Sound Recording with Debby on 20.11.2006.

<sup>318</sup> P 22: Notes on the sound recording with Debby on 20.11.2006.

the first time the song had been performed at a SSG gathering and they had always tried to avoid speaking about their war experiences during the meetings I had attended.<sup>319</sup>

At that same gathering, another choir member approached me and said she remembered another war song, whose lyrics she wanted to write down for me. She needed some time for that, she said, because the words were ‘almost buried in my memory’.<sup>320</sup> I received the song *Mama* about six weeks later, and we decided to make a sound recording. During that recording, she also remembered a fragment of another song she had sung in Germany: *Let’s sing*.<sup>321</sup> When, during a meeting, she handed the lyrics of the first song over to me, the woman sitting next to her said she also remembered an alternative version of the song and dictated me the lyrics: *Little Blue Scarf*. She did not want to be recorded later, because she considered her voice to be ‘too old for that’.<sup>322</sup> Interestingly, the President of the SSG’s headquarters in Brussels remembered there was yet another alternative version of that same song.<sup>323</sup> In the end, I gathered the lyrics of six alternative war songs and recorded five of them.<sup>324</sup> I also made a sound recording of a performance by the SSG Antwerp choir at the Christmas market in the Zurenborg district on 17 December 2006.

Through comparing the existing literature with the results of my fieldwork, I could discover nine songs with a hidden layer of meaning which had been composed in Germany.<sup>325</sup> Six of the nine songs are part of the choir’s repertoire, three of which the choir never performed after World War II.<sup>326</sup> Literature enabled me to compare the lyrics which choir members could still remember more than 60 years after World War II (words were written down in the early 1940s), as well as to reconstruct how choir members who were taking part in the participant observation, but were reluctant to reveal their wartime singing culture to me, and choir members who had already passed away, had given meaning to war experiences in the words of songs. In its turn, oral history offered advantages which the existing literature on war songs could not. Among the nine songs, there were three songs on which no information had been written. All articulate a satirical message. (Self) censorship had excluded these songs from Soviet ethnomusicological studies and the Freiburg collection; oral history however provided the means to make up for that shortcoming, in this way contributing to a more complete war song collection which clearly demonstrates that the war experiences of Ostarbeiterinnen had been more diverse than hitherto literature suggests.

Based on all this information, I constructed a canon of 45 songs. When looking at these materials, three thoughts immediately sprang to mind. First, the choirs had a very limited repertoire that had only undergone minor changes during the Cold War era. The same songs were repeated over and over again for almost half a century. It was only later, after the collapse of communism, that the SSG’s repertoire in Antwerp was turned upside down. Second, the canon contains a preponderance of war songs: 24 out of 45. The choir focused on war, whether through singing about the Russian Revolution, World War I, the Civil War, World War II or the Cold War. Third, with one exception, all songs are in Russian, some containing Ukrainian words. The choir’s memory work seems to have occupied itself with its

<sup>319</sup> P 31: Participant Observation on 27.11.2006.

<sup>320</sup> P 31: Participant Observation on 27.11.2006.

<sup>321</sup> Sound Recording with Becky on 22.01.2007.

<sup>322</sup> P 31: Participant Observation during the Christmas Market on 17.12.2006; *Gazet van Zurenborg* 4.2006 4-5, ‘Elke week een stukje Rusland in Zurenborg’.

<sup>323</sup> P 28: Interview with Elly on 2.01.2006 (38:38).

<sup>324</sup> *Bravely We Go to Battle*, *Little Blue Scarf*, *Katiusha*, *Pretzels*, *Let’s Sing* and *Mama*.

<sup>325</sup> In addition to the former: *Country Girl*, *Little Fire* and *The Sea Stretches out Widely*.

<sup>326</sup> The songs *Mama*, *Pretzels* and *Let’s Sing* were never sung.

home society, the (former) Soviet Union, and was not oriented towards the host society, Belgium. Singing appeared to have been a transnational practice that was unrelated to, and perhaps even impeded, the choir members' paths of integration.

These three observations lead to the impression that during the Cold War, the choir above all sung about war experiences and expressed itself in Russian, therefore appearing to support the Soviet narrative on war memory. The collapse of communism reshaped the choir's fixed narrative on war memory, but it continued to be articulated in the choir members' native languages, Russian and Ukrainian. By analysing how members experienced singing, we can now establish whether singing practices supported or opposed the choirs' narrative on war memory as read from their canon of songs.

## Singing practices

Singing practices encompass a whole gamut of activities. I first concentrate on how Ostarbeiterinnen practised singing in the Soviet Union and Germany, before they arrived in Belgium. I then illustrate how songs for public performances in Belgium were chosen before demonstrating how choir members used the chosen songs to articulate their narrative on war memory, hereby dealing with both linguistic and cultural barriers.

## Singing in the Soviet Union and during World War II

During the 1920s, children in the Soviet Union learned songs propagating the new communist world order. Participating in school choirs was obligatory, and propaganda war songs recalling the Russian Revolution, World War I and the Civil War were used as a means to educate and legitimise communism to the first maturing Soviet generation (Mironets 29, 36). War songs made the ideas of communism clear to the masses and helped to spread the new political culture (Acton, Cherniaev and Rosenberg 6). However, it also meant that young people grew away from their parents and grandparents who continued their lifestyles from before the Russian Revolution and sung their traditional folklore songs (Figs 53-65).

The choir conductor of SSG Antwerp formulated the hybrid cultural atmosphere which the newborn Soviet Union had experienced before World War II as follows:

many women of us  
 came from the villages  
 and there it was not so developed  
 they sing the songs that are traditional  
 but that are the old ones from the grandparents, they know them  
 and new, that were those of the youth  
 but these elderly did not know (...)  
 and of us who came  
 they all did seven classes  
 and at us you can only work from eighteen years on  
 and every school, that always had choir, that was in school  
 also those of the village they knew these new songs all  
 but in the village there are also a lot of traditional songs from the past, folk songs<sup>327</sup>

---

<sup>327</sup> P 22: interview with Debby on 20.07.2006 (470:491).

The choir conductor from the SSG Antwerp originates from the city Poltava in Ukraine. By calling the countryside ('the villages') 'not so developed', she wanted to make it clear that she considered life in Soviet cities to have been more prosperous than in the countryside, where the revolution had yet to make an impact. Girls who grew up in the countryside had therefore had more contact with the traditional songs sung by their grandparents. She then refined her argument by juxtaposing grandparents and youth as the embodiment of the old and new (music) culture ('that are the old ones from the grandparents' versus 'and new, that were those of the youth'), which was a common thing to do for children born in the Soviet Union (Figs 61). She further stressed that the less developed character of the countryside by no means (note the enumeration 'and', 'and', 'also' and additional emphatic words such as 'all' and 'only') suggested that country girls had been deprived of education, self-evidently including the learning of propaganda songs. To this end, she emphasised 'all' had had a decent educational background. By making such a statement, she implicitly referred to a common perception among Soviet young people that the old culture of 'grandparents' had been a consequence of their lack of education that would naturally fade away.<sup>328</sup>

During World War II, singing had been a different experience for every Ostarbeiterin, depending on her personal preferences, the place where and the conditions under which she was employed. Some Ostarbeiterinnen mentioned to me they had not sung in Germany at all, since due to the situation they were in, 'there had been nothing to sing about', as one former Ostarbeiterin formulated it, or 'we had no time for singing', as another remarked.<sup>329</sup> Others told me they had sung 'at night, instead of crying' or 'when I was alone, to pass the time'.<sup>330</sup> Collective singing was widespread in big labour camps, such as Koblenz, Rombach and Werl (Daniël', Eremina and Zhemkov 133). Hans Obens described how the camp administration of Werl organised a choir of Ostarbeiterinnen that held public performances and how the choir members in their free time knitted folklore costumes in front of their barracks while singing (Obens 92-93). But collective singing also took place unofficially. The Freiburg collection shows how singing war lyrics set to popular melodies was one of the safest ways to collectively utter war experiences in public; as soon as a Nazi superior approached, singers could imperceptibly switch to the original lyrics (Daniël', Eremina and Zhemkov 25). Collective singing, therefore, raised complex questions on complicity.

Ostarbeiterinnen who migrated to Belgium brought a rich collection of songs. They also had their own understanding of what singing was and what purpose it served. All Ostarbeiterinnen had learned propaganda songs in school choirs, where they had learned that singing songs was a serious activity typifying the new Soviet Union and that folklore songs were old-fashioned. The degree to which this opinion was supported by others in Soviet society, e.g. older generations, varied. The singing experiences of Ostarbeiterinnen in Germany also differed.

### **Choosing songs in Belgium**

Once settled in Belgium, former Ostarbeiterinnen in the SSP/SSG had to decide on which songs to sing. The choir conductor of Antwerp referred to that choice in the sequel to her argument above:

---

<sup>328</sup> P 25: Interview with Wendy on 6.11.2006 (20); P 28: Notes on the interview with Elly on 2.01.2007, P 41: Interview with Sandy on 14.02.2006 (80).

<sup>329</sup> P 27: Interview with Peggy on 10.11.2006 (283:285); P 31: Participant Observation on 22.01.2007.

<sup>330</sup> P 31: Participant Observation on 22.01.2007; P 20: Interview with Brenda on 13.11.2006 (445:447).

(also those of the village they knew these new songs all  
 but in the village there are also a lot of traditional songs from the past, folk songs)  
 and therefore they said  
 we should not forget these<sup>331</sup>

As a result, the choir conductor selected a mixture of old and new songs which had existed side by side in the young Soviet Union. The members of the choir, the ‘we’ the choir conductor counted herself among, decided to sing both types of songs, traditional (folklore) and new (propaganda) ones. However, by using the word ‘they’, i.e. excluding herself, the choir conductor pointed out that it was not a choice she actively supported. With these few words, she depicted the Achilles heel of the whole song selection process.

Officially, choir conductors were responsible for choosing the choirs’ repertoire. They were selected on the basis of their talent and the intensive music training they had received within the Soviet educational system. Unsurprisingly, they were biased towards propaganda songs and looked down on folklore songs. Moreover, the ‘Motherland’ association encouraged choir conductors to supplement their pre-World War II collection of propaganda songs with new ones articulating the Soviet narrative on war memory adapted to the Cold War context. Not only did it publish new propaganda songs in its weekly *The Voice of the Motherland (Golos Rodiny)*, it also regularly invited a selection of choir members to the Soviet Union for a music course.<sup>332</sup> There, Soviet composers such as Mikhail Ul’ianov taught them new propaganda songs and provided them with scores and recordings.<sup>333</sup>

The new Soviet propaganda songs also found their way into the choirs’ canon of songs because they were given an arena of articulation through the headquarters of the SSP/SSG. It had worked out a rotation system in which every regional choir once a year, on the occasion of a particular Soviet holiday, such as the anniversary of the October Revolution (November 7) or the day of the Red Army (February 23), organised a concert where all regional choirs performed.<sup>334</sup> Consequently, SSP/SSG choir conductors all over Belgium dedicated their October rehearsals to practising revolutionary songs.

However, a few folklore songs also appeared in the canon, and, interestingly, all of them happened to have an alternative war version.<sup>335</sup> During the interviews, it became clear that there was not a single member who remembered all the alternative lyrics of the folklore songs. An individual former Ostarbeiterin could never have gathered all the alternative lyrics, since Ostarbeiterinnens’ singing culture during World War II had been highly personalised and choir members had, after World War II, kept silent about it, not even referring to it amongst themselves. A fragment of the interview with the choir conductor of Antwerp made it possible to take a glimpse behind that silence. She told me about the songs with an alternative war version:

<sup>331</sup> P 22: Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006 (490:493).

<sup>332</sup> *Golos Rodiny* 8/1 (598) (1.1962) 3; 22/44 (2032) (11.1976) 8-9.

<sup>333</sup> Archive of the Ghent choir conductor, map with songs, visiting card; Archive Obshestvo ‘Rodina’, Map D-053 Bel’gia SSG - Spravki i kharakteristiki na otdel’nykh lits, Zapis’ besedy s rukovoditeliami progressivnykh organizatsii sootchestvennikov v Bel’gii i Avstrii (1968) and Spravka o kandidatach, predlozhennykh Konsul’skym otdelom Posol’stva SSSR v Bel’gii dlia poezdki v Sovetskii Soiuz (1971).

<sup>334</sup> *Sovetskii Patriot*, see for instance 23/453 (6.1968) 8, 26/516 (4.1971) 17, 26/518 (6.1971) 23, 27/532 (12.1972) 15-16, 38/644 (4.1983) 20, 39/650 (10.1984) 14.

<sup>335</sup> See for instance *Sovetskii Patriot* 26/518 (6.1971) 23, 27/532 (12.1972) 15-16, 39/651-652 (3-4.1984) 21; Archive belonging to the daughter of the Antwerp choir conductor, map with songs, ‘1974-1980’ (performance list), p. 1-5; Archive of the Ghent choir conductor, map with songs, ‘Nash repertuar’; map with transliterated songs for husbands.

when we sang  
 we tried to sing our real Russian and Ukrainian songs  
 but not these  
 we stayed away from them<sup>336</sup>

Using the word ‘real’, she indicated she did not consider the alternative versions which had arisen during World War II to be ‘real’. The choir conductor had learned in school to consider propaganda songs the only ‘real’ ones and to look down on folklore songs. Not all choir members however, shared this point of view.<sup>337</sup> By saying ‘Russian and Ukrainian songs’, the choir conductor might have been alluding to these different attitudes, since when she used the adjective ‘Soviet’, she would only have referred to propaganda songs, whereas her wording now can stand both for propaganda and folklore songs. However, her choice of words may also have been influenced by the changed geopolitical context. After the collapse of communism, using the word ‘Soviet’ is definitely outdated. By conducting the original folklore versions of the alternative war songs, the choir conductor had allowed what had been disapproved of by the Soviet school choirs in which Ostarbeiterinnen had participated before World War II. A negotiation process between the choir conductor and choir members had led to original folklore versions being included, but meant that the rules of singing which Ostarbeiterinnen had learnt as Soviet children had been silently broken.

Each member therefore had an individualised understanding of the layer articulating their war experiences in the original songs which made up the SSP/SSG’s choir canon. The repertoire consequently meant something different for every choir member, depending on the degree of hidden meaning she was aware of. Somehow, that individualised act of secretly giving meaning to war experience through collective singing was continued by including the majority of these double-layered songs in the choirs’ repertoire. The choirs had added the songs with an alternative version(s) to the repertoire as a collective and had sung those innumerable times without ever speaking about their hidden contents.

Obviously, not all the songs in the canon gained the same degree of popularity. Propaganda songs stood a greater chance of being selected for performance thanks to the association’s rotation system. It is, however, interesting to see that the canon was dominated by songs about war, whether propaganda or folklore songs, and that the quantity of these war songs also correlated to their popularity.<sup>338</sup> Moreover, I could not find a single concert programme of the choirs which did not contain at least one out of the nine songs with an alternative war version.<sup>339</sup> During the Cold War, notwithstanding the various actors with different objectives involved in the selection process of the songs - choir conductors, the ‘Motherland’ association and choir members - there was an overall preference of songs about war; through singing these songs, choir members narrated their war memory.

In sum, the compilation of the SSP/SSG choirs’ canon was a joint effort of the choir conductors, the ‘Motherland’ association and choir members. During their Soviet education, choir members had learned to prefer propaganda songs. Not surprisingly, choir conductors and members gave significant room to pre-war propaganda songs in their repertoires. Choir

<sup>336</sup> P 22: Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006 (483:487).

<sup>337</sup> See for instance P 31: Participant Observation on 9.10.2006.

<sup>338</sup> Archive belonging to the daughter of the choir conductor in Antwerp, map with songs, ‘Pod Zvëzdami Balkanskimi’ een groep jonge Russen... p. 1-3; P 31: Participant Observation on 9.10.2006.

<sup>339</sup> See for instance Archive of the daughter of the choir conductor in Antwerp, map with songs, performance list, p. 1-5.

conductors also included the post-war propaganda songs through which the ‘Motherland’ association aimed to spread the Soviet narrative on war memory adapted to the Cold War context. Songs which they had been taught during visits to the Soviet Union were performed in an arena shaped by SSP/SSG. Alongside the propaganda songs, folklore songs with a double meaning found their way into the choirs’ canon through a silent collective process in which several choir members were involved.

### **Singing a narrative on war memory**

Although the choir members’ narrative on war memory is articulated through a canon mostly composed of Soviet propaganda songs and only a few original (folklore) songs with hidden variants which were sung in Germany, I argue that singing practices enabled choir members to transform the meaning of official Soviet songs to their own narrative on war memory. Therefore, contrary to what the above reading of the canon of songs suggested, through singing, choirs did not take on the official Soviet war memory narrative, but made the narrative they received from their home society fit the path of integration they walked in the host society: the Belgian cultural field on war memory. Not in the lyrics of the canon, but in the singing practices of the choir members, we see a constant negotiation at work between pushing forward and neglecting both transnational ties and integration.

Ethnomusicological research amongst other war survivors, Jews from the Łódź ghetto, established that these survivors did not use their songs composed in the ghetto after World War II to articulate their narrative on war memory (Flam 176). In the study *Singing for Survival*, Gila Flam argued that due to mythologisation in post-war narratives, the Holocaust was transformed to an idealised and simplified struggle between good and evil in which songs remembering the despair and loneliness experienced in daily ghetto life did not fit (Flam 172, 181, 185). Survivors, hence, used other songs to articulate their war experiences, songs that through repetition and transgression could be bestowed with a symbolised meaning, referring to an issue which could not be directly addressed. Choir members of the SSP/SSG experienced similar difficulties. Like the Holocaust survivors, Ostarbeiterinnen were unable to directly express their war experiences within the official narrative. Through singing the official versions of songs to which alternative lyrics had been created, Ostarbeiterinnen could remind themselves, while hinting to others, of their experiences.

The most eye-catching singing practice of the choirs was their year-long repetition of the same songs. For the sake of keeping war memory alive, choir members continued to sing songs about war for almost half a century, continuously repeating a very select repertoire of songs. Through such painstaking repetition, singing received a ritualised character transcending reality (Reyes 143). It enabled choir members to transgress the linguistic and cultural barriers they faced in daily life and to make what was unpronounceable through ordinary speech pronounceable (Coplan 239-240; Reyes Schramm 91). In what follows, I respectively focus on these linguistic and cultural barriers. In analysing linguistic barriers, I distinguish propaganda songs from songs with a hidden layer of meaning. When highlighting cultural barriers, I examine processes of gendering and performing.

## Linguistic barriers

### Singing propaganda songs

Most of the canon's lyrics, the propaganda songs, were written in Soviet Russian, the language supporting the official Soviet narrative on war memory. Official Soviet Russian lined up with Soviet ideology and was subject to censorship, due to which it suffered from linguistic isolationism. For example, Soviet Russian had an elaborated vocabulary on heroism and militantism, but could not provide Ostarbeiterinnen with the words to utter despair, grief and humiliation because these feelings were considered unnecessary in the 'socialist society in the make' (Stelzl-Marx, 2000, 207). Through singing, however, choir members sometimes managed to transcend this barrier and to confer their sensitive understanding of war to these propaganda songs.

Let me give one example. The Komsomol song *We are for Peace* from 1952 displayed the propagandist, even bellicose, message that the Soviet Union and its satellite states were the only safekeepers of peace in the world. That message of peace was picked up by choir members, who, through singing, could transcend the Soviet narrative on war memory and bestow the Soviet lyrics with their own message of peace. Their convictions, indeed, lined up with the general idea of the song, since they all considered that war should never again take place, but they could not find themselves in a Cold War juxtaposition of a peace-loving East and a hawkish West. Therefore, they interpreted the song in a de-politicised way.<sup>340</sup> However, as expressed in the song, their message had difficulties in being conveyed:

we are standing for the honour  
of brotherhood and labour  
our lost sign is  
a beacon for the whole world  
the Red Star  
we are for freedom!

The choir members' message was articulated using militant Soviet vocabulary that portrayed the Red Star as the safekeeper of peace. However, for the West, this pre-eminent figurative representation of communism symbolised war, and not peace. Although singing *We are for Peace* enabled choir members to articulate their own war memory by means of Soviet lyrics, passing on that message to others was problematic due to the specificity of the official Soviet vocabulary. Choir members also faced linguistic barriers in other songs of their repertoire: the songs with an alternative war version.

### Singing songs with an alternative war version

During World War II, Ostarbeiterinnen had barely composed alternative lyrics to Soviet propaganda songs, but had selected existing folklore songs and romantic popular music for articulating daily experiences. This seemed to have freed them from the semantically poor official Soviet language used in propaganda songs (Merridale, 2000, 261). After the war, the songs with a double layer became evergreens in the choirs' repertoire, expressing a war memory that stood the closest to the choir members' personal experiences. Singing the original versions of the alternative lyrics made it possible for choir members to silently

---

<sup>340</sup> See for instance P 27: Interview with Peggy on 10.11.2006 (750:765).

remember and articulate their daily war experiences; the hidden layer provided the songs with meaning.

The song lyrics of these hidden layers can be grouped into three categories: feelings of homesickness or humiliation, calls to battle, and satire. The first category is the most numerous and makes use of original folklore and romantic popular music, whereas the other two categories number fewer songs and use not only folklore and romantic popular music, but also one Soviet propaganda song. Whereas the Freiburg collection offers a good insight into the alternative song lyrics of the first category, recent Russian publications on soldiers' songs provide us with information on alternative song lyrics about the call to battle (Song recordings in appendix).<sup>341</sup> My fieldwork opened up how alternative song lyrics, containing satire, gave meaning to war experiences. Through satire, resistance in particular was able to come into its own.

Let us compare the original and alternative version of two satirical songs, one based on the romantic popular melody *Little Blue Scarf*, and the other based on the propaganda song *Bravely We Go to Battle*. The first song was written in 1940 and became one of the most popular songs during World War II. It depicts a soldier who recalls how, at the moment when he said goodbye to his girlfriend, her little blue scarf fell from her shoulders and she promised to keep it as a symbol of their love (Lipatov 61; Mints, Grechina, and Dobrovol'skiĭ 127). During World War II, the hit *Little Blue Scarf* received an alternative version which became widely known. According to the Soviet myth, on 29 June 1941 (i.e. merely a week after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union), a soldier in the Ukraine wrote in his diary alternative wordings to the song's melody. It started:

on the 22nd of June  
at exactly four o'clock  
they bombed Kiev, we were informed  
that war had started

The lyrics were then picked up by Soviet folklorists and soon found their way through the Soviet Union and beyond (Lipatov 60). After the first four lines, the song starts to use militant vocabulary to express both people's hope for a Soviet victory and their hatred towards Nazi soldiers. The song warns 'the Hanses and Fritzes', for instance that 'soon the time will come! We will beat you on the lousy backs of your heads'.

Interestingly, the Antwerp choir sang a mixed version of *Little Blue Scarf*, hereby combining parts of the original and alternative wordings. From the alternative version, it only copied the first four lines, in this way silencing the militant language of the song.

---

<sup>341</sup> Listen to Track 1 until 8. The first category contains the songs *The Sea Stretches out Widely* (Borisova 34, 72-73, 108, 141; Daniël', Eremina and Zhemkov 44-45, 132-134, 137; Lipatov 73; Mints, Grechina, and Dobrovol'skiĭ 120, 137), *Little Fire* and *Country Girl* (Borisova 30; Lipatov 61-62; Mints, Grechina, and Dobrovol'skiĭ 126, 127, 130-131), *Mama* (for an alternative version see Track 1) and *Pretzels* (for the original and an alternative version see Track 2 and 3) (Daniël', Eremina and Zhemkov 134-135). The second category is represented by the famous song *Katiusha* (for the original and an alternative version see Track 4 and 5) (Borisova, 3; Daniël', Eremina and Zhemkov 44; Lipatov 79; Mints, Grechina, and Dobrovol'skiĭ 123; *Golos Rodiny* 40/14 (2981) (6.1995) 7; P31: Participant Observation on 11.09.2006 (61:130) and on 25.09.2006 (161:177). The third category is represented by *Little Blue Scarf*, *Bravely We Go to Battle* (for the original and an alternative version see Track 6 and 7) and *Let's Sing* (for the original version see Track 8) (Daniël', Eremina and Zhemkov 137-138).

Besides the alternative version *On the 22th of June* that became partly included in the choirs' canon, a second alternative version of *Little Blue Scarf* remained unarticulated. It satirically describes how in exchange for hard work, Ostarbeiterinnen received pitiful food rations and humiliation in return:

a little blue scarf  
a German brought to wash  
and for the work  
a piece of bread  
and his bowl to lick<sup>342</sup>

The second song with alternative satiric lyrics is *Bravely We Go to Battle*.<sup>343</sup> The original version splendidly summarises the Soviet narrative on war memory of the 1920s and 1930s:

bravely we'll go to battle  
for the power of the Soviets  
and, as one, we will die  
in the struggle for this<sup>344</sup>

As one of the most famous songs in the 1920s which was played uncountable times at military parades, it describes how Soviet people stood united, and were all willing to bravely fight and die for the new communist world order embodied by the Soviet Communist Party (Mironets 39). Glorifying courageous Bolshevik partisans who waged battle against bourgeois Whites, the song can be seen as a propagandist symbol for the Soviet legitimacy of the Bolshevik regime. Thanks to the Bolsheviks' fighting, which had been the necessary cost paid to establish the Soviet Union, civilisation of the masses, freedom and progress had replaced the yoke of bourgeoisie (Lipatov 40-42). Pitting the bourgeois owners of production against the proletariat, the class endowed to realise communist ideals, made it possible to portray the revolution as the ultimate class struggle (Acton, Cherniaev and Rosenberg 6). Through the public singing of revolutionary war songs, Soviet citizens repetitively had it brought to their attention that this struggle had not yet ended. Preserving the prosperous Soviet achievements required constant vigilance for the ongoing bourgeois anti-socialist behaviour in the Soviet Union and beyond (Figs 32-43).

The choir conductor from Antwerp sang the satiric alternative version of this propaganda song to me:

bravely we'll go to battle  
for potato soup  
we'll overcome the fascists  
with a soup spoon<sup>345</sup>

While singing, the choir conductor was visibly and audibly amused. The heroic phrase 'bravely we'll go to battle' immediately takes on a satirical meaning when juxtaposed with 'for potato soup'. Presenting soup as the most essential item for battle expresses the severe hunger Ostarbeiterinnen experienced. In addition, the song articulates resistance by

<sup>342</sup> P 31: Notes on Participant Observation on 19.02.2006.

<sup>343</sup> Archive of the daughter of the SSG Antwerp choir conductor, map with songs, '1974-1980' (performance list), p. 1-5; P 31: Participant Observation, Notes on a talk with the daughter and her mother on 6.11.2006.

<sup>344</sup> Listen to Track 6: Sound recording with Debby on 20.11.2006.

<sup>345</sup> Listen to Track 7: Sound recording with Debby on 20.11.2006.

encouraging to hit and to overcome ‘the fascists’ with one of the few things Ostarbeiterinnen had, a ‘soup spoon’.

Singing enabled choir members to create their own narrative on war memory that went beyond the linguistic barriers of the lyrics as written down in their canon of songs. Ostarbeiterinnen had sung ‘beyond’ song lyrics in Germany while facing war atrocities and choir members had continued to do so in the choir after World War II, even bestowing post-war Soviet propaganda songs with their own meanings, articulating feelings of homesickness or humiliation, calls to battle, and, the contribution of my research to international studies: satire. Apart from crossing linguistic barriers, singing practices helped to transgress cultural barriers.

## Cultural barriers

### Gendering songs, blurring religious differences

The dominant war memory narratives on both sides of the Iron Curtain bore remarkable similarities in the roles they attributed to men and women. Both centralised the war experiences of men, pre-eminently soldiers and resistance fighters, and only remembered the experiences of women to a lesser extent, depicting the ones who stayed behind either as hearth keepers awaiting their menfolk fighting at the front, or as victims mourning their male relatives killed in action. Narratives either brought women’s virtue into question or silenced their fate (Buckley; Hosking 172). Both in the home and host society of Ostarbeiterinnen, war experiences of women were hardly mentioned. Nevertheless, through singing propaganda songs, choir members were able to transgress the gender barriers of song lyrics and to give meaning to their war experiences.

Let us take a closer look at the song *Do Russians Want War?* written by the poet Evgeniï Evtushenko. The lyrics were written during the Thaw when it became possible to make references to the suffering of ordinary people during World War II. The song formulated an answer to the people Evtushenko had met during his visit to the United States, directly after the Bay of Pigs’ invasion in 1961, who had asked him whether the Russians wanted war:

yes, we are able to fight  
but we do not want  
soldiers to fall in battle again  
on our bitter earth  
ask mothers  
ask my wife  
and you will then understand  
whether the Russians want war

Interestingly, this is how the choir director from Ghent explained the contents of the song:

they said that the Russians wanted war during the Cold War  
and here they say  
ask those mothers who lost children in the war  
they did not return and the mothers are nostalgic  
then you will be convinced about whether the Russians want war<sup>346</sup>

---

<sup>346</sup> P 27: Interview with Peggy on 10.11.2006 (783:787).

By referring to ‘children’, she extended the song’s meaning to include the situation of choir members’ mothers who had lived in ignorance after World War II about the fate of their daughters. This is certainly not what the official Soviet narrative on war memory had in mind, since the fate of Ostarbeiterinnen, who were seen as collaborators of the Nazis, was silenced. ‘Mothers’ in the song refer to the mothers of heroic Soviet soldiers who had fallen for the Soviet Union, not to Ostarbeiterinnen who had worked in the German war industry. Similar processes of giving meaning occurred in other Soviet propaganda songs included in the canon of the SSP/SSG’s choirs. It is worth noting that choirs specifically selected the Soviet propaganda songs which paid attention to the war experiences of women, although these songs were few among Soviet propaganda songs.<sup>347</sup>

Very rarely do Ostarbeiterinnen receive a mention in written sources due to their marginalised position in the dominant narratives on war memory on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Two such exceptions are the Soviet ethnomusicological study by Mints, Grechina and Dobrovol’skiĭ and a Flemish newspaper article published directly after liberation. Interestingly, the authors defend the virtuousness of Ostarbeiterinnen who had been placed under scrutiny. Mints, Grechina and Dobrovol’skiĭ argue that songs had successfully exhorted Ostarbeiterinnen to maintain their female and national virtuousness and use a war song to illustrate that, although there were girls who had developed relations with the German enemy, they were among the minority:

there are girls who are kindly disposed towards Germans  
 these girls have forgotten that the Germans are our enemies,  
 but they are one in a thousand  
 (Mints, Grechina, and Dobrovol'skiĭ 137)

The Flemish newspaper article stressed that now World War II was over, ‘Russian and Ukrainian girls had to become faithful and strong spouses’.<sup>348</sup>

In the canon, there is a song indicating that choir members liked to conform to this normative stereotypisation of virtuousness. Choirs included a Flemish song translated into Russian in their repertoire *On the Purple Heath*:

in a desolated little house sat a girl  
 like I had never seen a girl before  
 through the window she shyly looked at me  
 she drew the little curtain and got up again<sup>349</sup>

The choir conductor from Ghent had made her own translation into Russian of the Flemish composer Armand Preud’homme’s most successful song when her choir was invited to perform for him. It had been such a success that other choirs of the SSP/SSG included the song in their repertoires.<sup>350</sup> When I asked her to tell me about the Russian translation, the choir conductor told me:

<sup>347</sup> See for instance *In the Park at Mamaev Kurgan* and *Victory Day*.

<sup>348</sup> *Gazet van Antwerpen* 11.9.1945 1 ‘Een zeer actueel vraagstuk. Duizenden Oekraïnsche Meisjes kwamen naar België Duizenden Katholieke jongens willen met hen trouwen’.

<sup>349</sup> Listen to Track 9: Sound recording with Peggy on 10.11.2006.

<sup>350</sup> Archive of the daughter of the SSG Antwerp choir conductor, map with songs, ‘1974-1980’ (performance list), p. 1-5; P 27: Interview with Peggy on 15.10.2006 (969:970); P 30: Interview with Amanda on 18.07.2006 (372:377).

that was not forbidden  
 we could do that for friendship (towards Belgians - MV)  
 that song is about a beautiful girl  
 who is in love and about a little curtain  
 and then they have a baby  
 and the little curtain never closes again  
 all dignified and good<sup>351</sup>

She immediately apologised stating that by translating and singing the song she had not done anything ‘forbidden’ but on the contrary, had articulated the ‘friendship’ of the choir (‘we’) towards Belgians. In the way she summarised the song, she applied it to the situation Ostarbeiterinnen were in upon their arrival in Belgium. They were ‘beautiful’, ‘in love’, and already had or soon would have ‘babies’. With the addition ‘all dignified and good’, she indirectly replied to sexual reproaches choir members (had) experienced.<sup>352</sup>

By singing the song, choir members wanted to adjust the denigratory stereotyping they experienced in society, to present themselves as virtuous (‘dignified and good’), and in this way become friends with Belgians. It was an appeal to change their categorisation as outsiders in Belgian narratives on war memory; singing was about integration.

However, the degree to which choir members were willing to trade in their own values for the sake of integration, for the sake of ‘friendship’ with Belgians, becomes clear when we look at the translation of one verse from the song: ‘Here on earth is heaven for me’. In the Russian translation, it became: ‘Here is happiness on earth, here is my destiny’.<sup>353</sup> Ostarbeiterinnen were brought up in an irreligious society, and although a significant number were baptised into the Catholic church upon arriving in Belgium, they apparently still had problems with using the word ‘heaven’ in Russian and preferred ‘destiny’, although rhythmically and with reference to the rhyme, the Russian word for heaven, (nebo), could easily have been included in the lyrics.<sup>354</sup>

Here we see how choir members dealt with the cultural barriers of gender and religion in narratives on war memory during the Cold War. Through portraying themselves as innocent beauties, choir members were able to distract the attention from the differences in belief between singers and audience. Narratives on war memory on both sides of the Iron Curtain juxtaposed Christians in the Atlantic World with irreligious communists in the Warsaw pact countries. Through the Russian translation of *On the Purple Heath*, choir members could hide their areligiosity thanks to focusing on the love content of the song. It helped to pass on their message of ‘friendship’; singing meaning to war experiences was a matter of presentation, or, to use another word, performance.

## Performing a narrative on war memory

The performances of the SSP/SSG choirs indeed functioned as arenas of war memory articulation in which players supporting different narratives on war memory went into negotiation. This process yielded different outcomes at rehearsals and concerts.

<sup>351</sup> P 27: Interview with Peggy on 10.11.2006 (599:605).

<sup>352</sup> See for instance P 30: Interview with Amanda on 18.07.2006 (202:206).

<sup>353</sup> Listen to Track 10: Sound recording with Peggy on 10.11.2006.

<sup>354</sup> Archive KADOC, Archive of the Rhedemptorists, Archive of Deweerdt, Jozef and Archive of Bilcke, Karel (1898-1948).

Through rehearsing together, choir members created an arena of articulation for themselves in which they could collectively ventilate their war experiences. During the Cold War, within the SSP/SSG, war experiences were not spoken about.<sup>355</sup> Through bestowing lyrics with an individualised hidden layer of meaning and singing them together, however, choir members were able to articulate what they could not through ordinary speech. Music, hence, voiced the individualised feelings of disruption, humiliation and despair choir members had experienced in Germany and as such had a therapeutic function (Dokter). During rehearsals, in this way, the SSP/SSG transformed itself into a self-help group practising music therapy. The choir conductor from Ghent recalled how choir members had often told her: ‘You are our medicine’.<sup>356</sup>

In fact, choir members did nothing new. During my fieldwork, I discovered Ostarbeiterinnen in Germany had already experimented with ways to add a hidden layer of meaning to existing song lyrics during their performance, a layer that helped to cope with their war experiences. Only through performing the Soviet propaganda song *Let's Sing* for instance, were Ostarbeiterinnen able to lace its lyrics with a sarcastic meaning, expressing their resistance against Nazi oppression. A choir member told me how she had sung the song together with other Ostarbeiterinnen when marching in lines from their barracks to the factories where they worked:

it was us who came to work  
 we had lines of one hundred people  
 one hundred people!  
 the Polizei led us to work  
 I here and others there  
 at the side and (2 sec)  
 we agreed with the women - girls like me  
 we sang  
 we were hungry but we sang  
 to anger them  
 to make them angry  
 and so they started that song  
 and we (2 sec)  
 that means we helped them  
 and then at the end  
 if they started there  
 then he screamed  
 ‘Schweigen, Schweinerei, ich werde schießen, ja’  
 (‘Silence, you pigs, otherwise I’ll shoot’ - MV)  
 they fell silent  
 the ones in the middle began  
 and so we sang:  
*let's sing let's sing for Soviet authority we'll die*  
 and so on<sup>357</sup>

The choir member related how Ostarbeiterinnen (‘we’, ‘women - girls like me’) together made agreements to outsmart Nazi oppressors (‘Polizei’) by taking turns to sing at the front, in the middle and at the end of the line. She stressed that despite the cold, the humiliation (‘Schweinerei’) and the danger it provoked (‘Ich werde schießen’), Ostarbeiterinnen wanted to make ‘them’ angry and worked all together (‘helped’) for that purpose. Thanks to such a

<sup>355</sup> See for instance P 20: Interview with Brenda on 13.11.2006 (20:28).

<sup>356</sup> P 27: Interview with Peggy on 10.11.2006 (715).

<sup>357</sup> Listen to Track 8: Sound recording with Becky on 22.01.2007.

collective performance, the song could provide a means to articulate resistance against forced labour duties.

In this song, sarcasm links the blind-alley situation Ostarbeiterinnen experienced with their resistance against it. Ostarbeiterinnen performed the song while marching to the factories where they knew they were involved in producing war equipment that was used in the Nazi battle with the Soviet Union, i.e. directly against their relatives and fellow citizens at home.<sup>358</sup> Ostarbeiterinnen had grown up with the revolutionary ideas, believing in Soviet power and being prepared to die for it ('for Soviet authority we'll die'). By doing forced labour in Germany, i.e. being badly treated which can eventually lead to death, they helped the Nazis to kill their fellow citizens; the 'we' here refers to the Ostarbeiterinnen, who were 'willing' (ironically) 'to die for Nazi authority' so that (also) 'we' (i.e. our nation, our fellow citizens) can be killed. 'Let's sing', suggests the song's refrain. Through the collective act of performing singing, the double meaning of the phrase 'for Soviet authority we'll die', referring to both their blind-alley situation and to their resistance against it, could be ventilated. Singing served a therapeutic function already in Germany and choir members simply continued that practice after World War II.

Singing in front of an audience, however, did not have the same therapeutic effect. Concerts functioned as arenas in which the choirs' narrative on war memory interacted with that of the audience. The choirs' narrative was articulated mostly through propaganda songs underpinning the official Soviet narrative on war memory. However, members soon noticed that the message conveyed in Soviet propaganda songs failed to gain approval among most of the Belgian audience. Consequently, they learnt to compile a repertoire that best 'suited' the audience of a particular concert. During concerts for people supporting Soviet ideology, such as the Belgian-Soviet Friendship's Association, choirs could sing whatever songs they liked, but when addressing other Belgian audiences, they remained much more on their guard.<sup>359</sup> The choir conductor from Ghent told me that when her choir held a performance for what she called 'Belgian Catholics', she did the following:

I look then where the lyrics are only so innocent  
lullabies, songs about homesickness and so (3 sec)  
(almost whispering) adapt  
but when it was a feast for the First of May in Brussels  
where people listen for the October revolution  
(stress) then  
we sang others<sup>360</sup>

She compiled a repertoire that contained, among others, lullabies and songs about homesickness, because she considered them to be 'innocent'. The usage of the word 'innocent' implies she would have felt guilty if she had performed propaganda songs for a Belgian Catholic audience. When she summed up the kind of songs she usually selected for that purpose ('lullabies, songs about homesickness'), she spoke more quickly. Also the words 'and so' indicate she quickly wanted to get over with. Afterwards, she sighed heavily (3

<sup>358</sup> P 30: Interview with Amanda on 18.07.2006 (208).

<sup>359</sup> *Belgique URSS Magazine*, see for instance 11.1978 19; 6.1985 14-15; 3.1986 13-14; *Sovetskii Patriot* 23/453 (6.1968) 9, 12; Archive of the choir conductor from Ghent, 'Soiuz Sovetskikh Grazhdan' (report from 1960); Idem, article from a newspaper 'De zangavond van de Kerels op 3 november 1968'; Archive of the daughter of the SSG Antwerp choir conductor, map ring binder with songs, '1974-1980' (performance list), p. 1-5; Archive of the President of SSG Antwerp, 3 photos of performances.

<sup>360</sup> P 27: Interview with Peggy on 10.11.2006 (621:643).

sec) and almost whispered ‘adapt’. I clearly saw how she experienced difficulties admitting to me she had done so and felt as if I had been confided a secret.

When performing ‘in Brussels’, she continued (and here her voice regained confidence), whether on Labour Day for ‘socialist’ Belgians, as she called them later in the interview, or at one of the SSP/SSG’s concerts commemorating the Russian revolution, the choir could sing the ‘other’, i.e. propaganda, songs.<sup>361</sup> Through her wording and non-verbal communication, the choir conductor from Ghent made very clear which performances she (had) preferred.

In this interview fragment, the choir conductor mentioned that in Brussels, ‘people listened (for the October Revolution)’. The usage of the verb ‘to listen’ can hardly be called incidental, since concerts of the SSP/SSG were, in contrast to the Belgian ones, frequented by a Russian or Ukrainian-speaking audience. Belgians in general did not understand anything of what the choirs sang, and even the short introductory words in Flemish or French the choirs provided the public with, could not bridge that communication gap.<sup>362</sup> The choir conductor might have been insinuating that Belgians heard, but did not listen to their concerts. The language barrier in a way also offered the choirs the opportunity to sing songs they expected the audience to have problems with. Examples of concerts held for (‘Catholic’) Belgians where propaganda songs were programmed were indeed numerous.<sup>363</sup>

Selecting a repertoire was not only a matter of including and excluding songs, but also of performing certain songs in such a way that they could gain approval among the public. Propaganda songs could be given a second meaning deviating from their lyrics through performance, just as the song *Let’s Sing* had done in Germany. Through performing the meaning to war experiences, choir members could even blur the propaganda message of a Soviet song for the benefit of an alternative meaning made visible on stage.

The Soviet propaganda song *Buchenwald Alert*, for example, remembers the war experiences in the concentration camp Buchenwald. Although the camp’s prisoners were an international mix of Germans, Czechs, Poles, French, Soviet and Jewish prisoners of war, after the war only the resistance of male German communist prisoners was enlarged and remembered in the German Democratic Republic (Niven 2, 10, 11). In 1958, the building of a monument, a street of nations and the hanging of bells to remember the dead extended that commemoration to include an internationally united communist resistance force fighting for peace. The new Soviet song *Buchenwald alert* underpinned that idea as follows (Niven 69-70):

people of the world, stand up for a minute!  
listen, listen, it tolls from all sides -  
ringing out in Buchenwald  
the sound of bells, the sound of bells.  
amid the coppery clamour, righteous blood  
is born again and growing stronger  
victims come alive from the ashes  
and arise again, and arise again  
and arise

<sup>361</sup> P 27: Interview with Peggy on 10.11.2006 (281).

<sup>362</sup> *Sovetskii Patriot* 23/453 (6.1968) 12; Archive of the Ghent choir conductor, ‘toespraak Heer de Mits’.

<sup>363</sup> Archive of the daughter of the choir conductor of Antwerp, map with songs, ‘1974-1980’ (performance list), p. 1-5; Archive of the Ghent choir conductor, ‘Beste vrienden, het is de Heer en Mevrouw De Mits een eer en genoegen voor u te mogen optreden’; P 20: Interview with Brenda on 13.11.2006 (149:165).

and arise  
and arise again!<sup>364</sup>

It is here, for the first time, that the official Soviet narrative on war memory pays attention to the role of Soviet prisoners of war in Nazi concentration camps. What is more, they are represented as the super heroes whose ‘fair blood’ has been spilled ‘in the lion’s den itself’ (Niven 2). This image was used to mobilise, as it sounds in the official Soviet narrative on war memory, people for ‘the battle of peace’. Interestingly, such a message ran counter to the initial intentions of the Jewish author of the song, Vano Muradelli, who wanted to address the silencing of Jews in the Soviet narrative on war memory (Pozhidaeva 140; Vinnikov).

Choir members in Belgium performed the song as follows:

with us there was a man with clothes like there (Buchenwald - MV)  
they did not have clothes, but a kind of pyjama (a concentration camp outfit - MV)  
they stood at the two sides of the stage  
because we went through that  
and war may never come again  
and that always made a deep impression  
because after the war there was a lot of hate for war  
and we do not want anything else  
we want there to be peace  
we’re doing nothing wrong with that hé?<sup>365</sup>

The performance to which the Ghent choir conductor refers in this interview fragment offers a unique intertwinement of the official Soviet narrative on war memory with dominant narratives in Belgium and the choirs’ own constructed narrative. Although a concentration camp outfit in the Soviet narrative referred to communist prisoners of war, in Belgium it was connected with the Holocaust. Using this image, the choir members were able to ‘impress’ Belgian audiences.

Belgian husbands of Ostarbeiterinnen, dressed in concentration camp outfits, accompanied the choir members’ performance of *Buchenwald Alert* on stage, because, as the choir conductor of Ghent said, not these men, but the Ostarbeiterinnen themselves ‘went through that’. The historical overview in chapter one made it clear that some Ostarbeiterinnen had indeed not only lived in work camps, but also in concentration camps.<sup>366</sup> The Antwerp case study furthermore demonstrated that most Belgian husbands had worked in Germany not as forced workers, but as volunteers who had therefore somehow supported the Nazi system. Although these interrelations prevented the choir members from presenting their own war experiences with concentration camps themselves, they enlisted the help of their husbands. This male representation of war lines up with the dominant narratives on war memory, which had problems recognising the role of female forced workers because of its close connotation with sexual harassment, a connotation that also choir members wanted to avoid at any cost (Herzog 239; Rose 1148, 1175).

The most interesting fact is that although the song’s purpose was to unite communists to fight for freedom, through performing this song, the choir aimed to transcend the hatred towards

---

<sup>364</sup> Listen to Track 11: Sound recording with Peggy on 10 November 2006.

<sup>365</sup> P 27: Interview with Peggy on 15 October 2006 (465:474).

<sup>366</sup> P 26: Interview with Josy on 15 September 2006 (35:37); P 30: Notes on the interview with Amanda on 18 July 2006 (680).

communism in Belgium ('a lot of hate for war') in order to maintain, and not to fight for, peace. That their message did not line up with official narratives on war memory on either side of the Iron Curtain, each of which used militant vocabulary blackmailing the other, and as a result had difficulties in finding a response, the choir conductor articulated in a defensive way through adding 'we're do nothing wrong with that hé?'

In sum, during World War II, Ostarbeiterinnen realised the songs which they grew up with could not provide them with the means to articulate the experiences they faced. Some of them composed alternative versions to songs in order to give meaning to their war experiences. Later in Belgium, choir members continued to sing the original songs, in this way silencing but not forgetting the accompanying alternative layer of meaning. By doing so, singing could function as music therapy, making the unpronounceable pronounceable. Also, the Soviet propaganda songs were not sufficient to articulate what choir members wanted to remember. Members still used these propaganda songs with their hollow Soviet slogans and symbols, but searched for ways to sing beyond their linguistic and cultural barriers. Singing and performative practices enabled choir members to bestow Soviet propaganda songs with a second layer of meaning. In this way, choir members constructed their own narrative on war memory that, balanced between dominant Soviet and Belgian narratives on war memory, found its way into different arenas of articulation and (almost always) uttered in vain the appeal to be integrated in Belgian narratives on war memory.

## Our Buena Vista Social Club

With the collapse of communism, the SSG choirs gave up singing. A few years ago, however, the grandson of the choir conductor in Antwerp decided to start the choir up again. I joined them at the Christmas Market in the Zurenborg neighbourhood in Antwerp on 17 December 2006. That day, the choir conductor's grandson addressed the audience as follows:

I just briefly want to say who we are  
 what we are is not necessary  
 that is already clear  
 Cossack yelling from the ex-Soviet Union  
 here you hear the Russian variant of the Buena Vista Social Club  
 but instead of Cuban men over eighty  
 you hear Russian and Ukrainian women over eighty  
 and the Havana cigar has here been replaced by vodka  
 Cossack songs, songs from home, songs from the ex-Soviet Union,  
 Russian songs, love songs  
 this and many more you will hear  
 as long as the cold and our voices permit us to continue<sup>367</sup>

Clearly, the grandson gave a romanticised ethnic interpretation of 'who we are' by referring to 'Cossacks', 'The Buena Vista Social Club' and 'vodka'. The Buena Vista Social Club formed at the end of the 1990s, consisting of a group of old Cuban musicians and two younger American musicians who performed Cuban folk music and soon gained enormous success thanks to their frequent international concert tours (Wenders). In addition, the grandson made a distinction between 'Russian' and 'Ukrainian' women, something choir members did not do during the Cold War era. The SSP/SSG presented themselves firstly as 'Soviets', and when they did not want to focus on the political connotation that nomination entailed, they simplified it to 'Russians'; 'Ukrainian' was never used as a separate identifier. Lastly, the

---

<sup>367</sup> Listen to Track 12: Sound recording on 17.12.2006.

grandson blurred the word 'ex-Soviet Union' by only mentioning it after 'Cossack yelling' in the first case and sandwiching it between 'songs from home' and 'Russian songs' the second time.

Not only the presentation, but also the repertoire radically differed from what the choir had performed during the Cold War, as the grandson of the former choir conductor asked the choir members of Antwerp to sing 'songs of the old days'.<sup>368</sup> Consequently, the contemporary repertoire consists mostly of Russian and - for the first time - Ukrainian folklore songs, together with a few propaganda songs which choir members knew from childhood. During the concert, the choir neither performed a single post-war Soviet propaganda song, nor a double layer song from Germany. Apparently, after the disappearance of the SSP/SSG's rotation system, choir members no longer feel the need to perform post-war Soviet propaganda songs, or they do not want to create difficulties with migrants from the former Soviet Union who arrived in Belgium after the fall of communism and understand the Russian and Ukrainian lyrics which the choir sings. In addition, now that it has become easier for choir members to voice their war experiences in the post-Cold war world, they seemingly no longer need the double-layer songs. Instead, they sing Russian and Ukrainian folklore songs about harvest, trees and love. Among the ten songs the choir performed, there were five folklore songs in Russian, two in Ukrainian, one song from a Soviet film made in the 1930s and two pre-war propaganda songs.<sup>369</sup> All these songs received a musical restyling.

Three musicians accompanied the choir: the choir conductor's grandson played the accordion and two of his friends played the violin. During the Cold War era, a musician had also performed with the choir, but whereas she had meticulously followed the scores provided by the choir conductor, the three contemporary musicians freely improvised on the spot.<sup>370</sup> One of them is actually a Roma musician who frequently performs in Belgium and abroad (Vermeersch vi). The grandson became good friends with him 'because', as he told me, 'we have so much in common: we love folk music and we are blind'.<sup>371</sup> That is also how a choir member articulated the relation between the musicians and singers: 'they do not see, but they feel the music, just like we do'.<sup>372</sup> In the music recording, we hear the Roma violinist is taking the lead, playing characteristic Roma music with a large number of chromatics and glissandi, a tendency to play behind the beat and freely improvise at times (Sadie and Tyrrell, vol. 10, 615-617).

The combination of Russian and Ukrainian folk music, but especially of pre-war Soviet propaganda songs, with Roma music, sounded strange, but was remarkably successful. After the concert, the choir received a warm round of applause and more than ten people came to ask me, as I was recording the performance, whether they could buy a CD. 'It sounds so Romanian', said a woman admiringly, and 'I did not know we also had our Buena Vista Social Club', another commented enthusiastically. The music impressed the audience and nobody, even the few Russian migrants I noticed, cared about the contents of the songs. They hardly seemed to react to words like 'comrade Voroshilov', referring to the army officer and later intimate friend of Stalin Kliment Efremovich Voroshilov, or phrases like 'the fame of

<sup>368</sup> P 31: Notes on my conversation with the grandson of the choir conductor on 6.11.2006.

<sup>369</sup> Listen to Tracks 13 until 22. *Oh, on the Mountain the Mowers Mow* (Track 13), *The Wind Bents a shoot* (Track 14), *Across the Steppes* (Track 15), *Slender Rowan Tree* (Track 16), *On the Mountain Stands a Guelder Rose* (Track 17), *A Long Way* (Track 18), *Through Valleys and Over Hills* (Track 19), *Hawkers* (Track 20), *Farmers, Hitch the Horses* (Track 21), *While Fishing* (Track 22).

<sup>370</sup> P 22: Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006 (127:132).

<sup>371</sup> P 31: Participant Observation on 17.12.2006.

<sup>372</sup> P 31: Participant Observation on 17.12.2006.

those days shall never dim' recalling the victory of Bolshevik partisans over the White Guard, as the words were cloaked in Roma motifs (Alymov 135-142; Bezemer 254, 314). In fact, choir members were using here the same technique as during the Cold War: through performing, they added a layer of meaning to the propaganda lyrics that could attract the audience.

In the early post-communist years, former politically inspired narratives transformed into narratives which placed ethnicity and ethnic violence at the very centre of a globalised world (Ballinger 166-167). Roma and Cuban musicians, when presented as transnational ethnics, appear to fit in a strange way into that picture: they are increasingly offered a note, but not a voice in global media forums (Imre 661, 665, 670). The melodies of a Roma fiddler or a Cuban clarinetist appeal to spectators' imagination of a globalised world, but the discrimination which Roma and Cuban populations experience is of little concern to the audience (Imre 663). The proliferation of world music is therefore more a top-down media industry construction than a bottom-up street phenomenon (Friedman 246). Similarly, by switching the repertoire to Russian and Ukrainian folk music from pre-communist times and referring to media-popular Roma and Cuban folk music, the grandson 'top-down' led the choir to its biggest success ever. Belgians embrace the charming vodka-drinking babushkas and exoticise them as 'our Buena Vista Social Club', and no longer focus on their politicised articulation of war experiences. By placing Russian and Ukrainian folk music at the centre of their repertoire, the choir has become easily integrated in a post-cold war ethnic narrative of ethnic transnationalism. Choir members themselves do not understand why 'all of a sudden' they are receiving so many invitations to perform. However, they are eager to continue, despite their advanced years.<sup>373</sup>

## Conclusion

During the Cold War era, the choirs of the Association of Soviet Patriots/Citizens (SSP/SSG) in Belgium constructed their own narrative on war memory that struck a balance between the dominant narratives on war memory in the Soviet Union and Belgium.

The choirs' repertoire consisted almost exclusively of Soviet propaganda songs that underpinned the official Soviet narrative on war memory. Although the choirs shared the concern for peace expressed in the official Soviet narrative, they did not feel comfortable with the militant language in which this peace was articulated. It was a difficult balance: the war experiences made it impossible for the choir members to support the militant jargon Soviet propaganda songs articulated, but the revolutionary songs calling to battle which they had grown up with continued to enjoy support among choir members. Especially when confronted with revolutionary symbols such as the Red Star, Soviet language could no longer articulate the meaning choir members wanted to articulate, and they did not have an alternative. They were confronted with the incapacity of their mother tongue and searched for different ways to transgress that barrier.

Various singing and performative practices helped to provide songs with a double layer of meaning opposing the message which song lyrics expressed. Ostarbeiterinnen had trained themselves to do so in Germany, and after World War II, choir members simply continued to practise the same techniques, although they never spoke openly about it. The SSP/SSG was, therefore, an ambiguous entity. On the one hand, it functioned as an organ that helped the

---

<sup>373</sup> P 22: Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006 (10:12).

Soviet 'Motherland' association to spread communist propaganda in Belgium, while on the other, it was a self-help group practising music therapy through singing and performing a meaning to war experiences that transcended the song lyrics.

Contrary to what the Russian song lyrics suggest, the choirs were not only oriented towards their home, but also towards their host society. For example, to articulate their message of peace for Belgian audiences, the choirs referred to a popular framework for the interpretation of suffering among Belgians, the Holocaust, even asking their husbands to perform on stage. In order to not offend their public, they selected a repertoire of unpoliticised songs. Their appeal to be integrated into Belgian narratives on war memory, however, did not result in success because of differences in political and religious opinions and gender stereotyping.

Since the choir in Antwerp has reformed in the post-communist era, it has become surprisingly successful by performing concerts using Roma folk music melodies. By using more traditional music lyrics from home than before, the choir has easily integrated in a post-cold war ethnic narrative that has replaced the narratives on war memory from the Cold War era.

## A comparison

The second part of this dissertation concentrated on the performance of group memory and highlighted how members of immigrant groups together practised remembering through expressing their war memory in a specific arena of war memory articulation. The underlying assumption for such an approach is that group memory, and thus also group identification, takes place during group gatherings. Chapters four and five focused on performances during such group gatherings. In chapter four, I analysed the yearly commemorations held at the Polish war cemetery in Lommel, where 257 soldiers of the First Armoured Division killed in action during the liberation of Flanders found their last place of rest. In chapter five, I researched the choir rehearsals and concerts of SSP/SSG, an immigrant organisation consisting of former Ostarbeiterinnen. I highlighted how during performances, the personal memories of members interplayed with group memories.

Former Allied soldiers from Poland, and especially former division soldiers, were highly visible in the public sphere while articulating their group memories. Over the years, the commemoration plaques, statues and streets referring to the liberation march of the First Polish Armoured Division grew in number and the former soldiers paid these objects a visit during annual commemoration parades in the liberated cities. In this dissertation, I focused on the commemoration services held at this important cemetery outside the liberated cities, where the bodies of soldiers killed in action were buried. Interestingly, the Lommel cemetery was originally built as an arena of war memory articulation by other agencies of war memory articulation - the Polish Union, one of the biggest immigrant organisations for 'Poles' in Belgium, and the Polish Consulate. The former Allied soldiers were only mobilised to endorse their narratives on war memory by means of their presence.

The commemoration services of the Polish Union and the Polish Consulate propagated diametrically opposed narratives, either denouncing or glorifying communism. The former division soldiers I spoke to all remembered the cemetery in line with the way they had performed during the commemoration service which they attended. However, all described the symbolisation of the cemetery in accordance with the narrative on war memory presented by the Polish Union and were often even not aware of the fact they had been specially mobilised. They still seem to give meaning to the cemetery in the same way, despite the more ethnically diverse and Europeanised narratives articulated at the cemetery after the collapse of communism.

Following the analysis in chapter three, which looked into the group formation and construction of group memories in the migration stream of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium, it is self-evident that SSP/SSG members articulated their war memories above all for fellow members, and only occasionally for 'Belgians' in the mainstream Belgian public sphere. A bottom-up approach revealed that singing was not primarily an ethnic folklore activity, or a political activity, as historians starting from ethnic categorisation or focusing on politics 'from above', would say. On the contrary, the members used the podium set up for them by the SSP/SSG in cooperation with the 'Motherland' Organisation and the Soviet Consulate, to articulate their war memories. Precisely through performing, they managed to transform the podium designed to facilitate the proliferation of Soviet propaganda, into an arena of war memory articulation. In this way, performing enabled the singers to transcend the linguistic and cultural barriers of the lyrics that impeded them from articulating their personal, but silently shared, narrative on war memory balancing between both dominant

Soviet and Belgian narratives on war memory. Unlike the former division soldiers, SSG members agreed with the post-Cold war narrative that was offered to them 'from above' and through being portrayed as ethnic transnationals were ensured a relatively easy path of integration into their host society.

Although there are several differences between the performances of former Allied soldiers from Poland at the cemetery and of former Ostarbeiterinnen during rehearsals and concerts, such as their visibility within the mainstream Belgian public sphere, the degree of a democratic construction and performance of their group memories and their way of dealing with the overall male symbolisation of war memory, we also see similar mechanisms at work. Members did not align their group narratives on war memory with the narratives proposed to them by dominant agencies from their home societies. All former division soldiers gave meaning to their war experiences in line with the symbolisation of the narrative on war memory articulation as propagated by the 'anti-communist' Polish Union, and former Ostarbeiterinnen developed an opposing, hidden layer of meaning to official propaganda songs.

## Part 3: Trauma in Group Memories

### Chapter 6: 'I don't SPEAK about it, I don't WANT about it speak and I didn't HAVE TO speak about it!'

Through narratives, people mould past events into a coherent and meaningful explanation for the present. Survivors of war, however, often feel disturbed when forging war experiences into sense-bearing memories. Their experiences can be troublesome, due to which the memories referring to them can have difficulties in finding a way to articulation in words and remain locked up within their bodies. In this chapter, I will determine what place bodily memories hold within the current narratives on war memory of individual former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium. I question if the immigrant organisations of the migrants at issue played a role in the way members articulate bodily memories. I then examine to what extent the involvement of these organisations in the construction and recognition of trauma in the public sphere over time helped their members to articulate bodily memories.

#### War Experiences, Memories and the Body

No experience is more one's own than a feeling of harm to the body. Similarly, no memory relating to that experience is more locked up within that body, unable to find a way out through speech. When survivors feel deprived of words, they fall silent and simply omit disturbing war experiences in their narratives on war memories. Constructing a narrative of war memory and expressing that narrative in an arena of war memory demands working through the past. However, this might not be opted for because memories of disturbing war experiences are usually not the first to be articulated. Instead, such memories are often used to enable survival (Ashplant, 18, 42-43; Culbertson 175; Stanley).

Survivors may think that remaining silent will help them to free themselves of both the disturbing war experiences and the destructive force which such experiences exert on their post-war lives (Bernard-Donals 1313). However, attempts to stifle these memories do not lead to their obliteration since troublesome war experiences of bodily harm search for their articulation and leave their marks in the present in non-verbal forms (Culbertson, 169-170). As a result, such disturbing war experiences related to the body are often remembered by and through a person's body.

The anthropologist Paul Connerton had this kind of remembering in mind when he, in the late 1980s, introduced the concept of bodily memory, aiming to fill a gap left by Maurice Halbwachs in his theory on collective memory (Connerton 72). Connerton argues that researchers often have a biased view towards the body. In the linguistic fashion, they approach the body as if it were a text from which various political, social and cultural meanings can be read. However, the body can also function as an agent, as 'a keeper of the past' (Roodenburg 317). Bodies can remember performances executed in the past. Moreover, the way they remember such performances is above all non-textual and, frequently, even non-cognitive (Connerton 103). Often, only by doing something, the body remembers a past experience. Only then, do we realize that we remember (Roodenburg 319). Going back to swimming after having recovered from a car accident is a good example here. Although you previously considered swimming to be a natural thing to do, it ceases to be like that when you

have to re-learn it. All of a sudden, you see yourself repeating the movements you have unconsciously practised so many times before, meticulously examining what you are actually doing. In this chapter, I will refer to bodily memory as the way the body remembers a troublesome feeling of harm to the body experienced during war.

Although bodily memories are a popular research topic for anthropologists and psychologists, they shape problems for historians. Anthropologists observe contemporary performances articulating bodily memories. But how can historians today capture the non-textual and often even unconscious articulation of bodily memories in the past? Are 'wordless' memories not impossible to find in 'wordy' written and oral sources? Can a historian interpret them from images (such as films or photographs), which might display the articulation of bodily memories, although there is nobody who finds the words to indicate that this is what they display? These preoccupations with historical understanding are researched in depth by the historian Dominick LaCapra in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma*.

LaCapra shows how survivors can help historians to understand the articulation of bodily memories. Over time, survivors may have worked through their troublesome war experiences and have found words to name them. When listening to their narratives, one can specify past performances that operated as the articulation of bodily memories (LaCapra 86-89). In this chapter, I indicate how former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium started to name their bodily memories, whether or not helped by the way war trauma became constructed and recognised in their organisations or within the broadening cultural field on war memory.

## **The Construction of War Trauma**

After war, survivors can have difficulties in coming to terms with their troublesome war experiences. Nowadays, there is a tendency to say that all survivors suffer from war traumas and are war victims. However, the current sensitivity to psychological suffering has not always existed. For centuries, people distinguished victims from perpetrators on a moral basis. It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that two interesting phenomena caused a change. The 1864 Geneva Convention, by introducing humanitarian law, recognised that the experience of modern war could be traumatic, whether witnessed as a perpetrator or a victim. The concept of war trauma then became centralised in the new school of psychoanalysis, referring to psychological damage caused by disturbing war experiences, hereby totally rejecting the former moral distinction (Levy and Sznajder 2). Two events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were also crucial. In 1961, the Eichmann trial gave an opportunity for the voices of Holocaust survivors to be heard, after which a victim-based Holocaust counter narrative started to debate with the various national narratives of Western countries in which the Holocaust was absent. This counter narrative gradually proliferated in the Atlantic World and led again to questions of responsibility for wartime crimes. This could have re-introduced the moral perpetrator-victim relationship from before. However, in the 1980s, a second event provided counterbalance. Ex-combatants from the Vietnam War and American feminists successfully lobbied for the recognition of troublesome experiences of war and sexual abuse; the concept of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (further PTSD) was born and, with it, a remedy to cure. Psychological health could be re-achieved through a therapy of memory work, i.e. of uncovering non-verbal war memories (Stanley). Both Holocaust victimhood and PTSD diagnosis are currently omnipresent in the remembrance of war. Jolande Withuis, a sociologist who researches historical trauma in the Netherlands, argues that this evolution blurs the relationship between troublesome war experiences and context. One no longer has to

look for a person's individual psychological capacity nor for the specific circumstances in which experiences had happened; war, simply, causes trauma (Withuis).

The attention paid by sociologists to war trauma comes as no surprise. As war trauma is no longer perceived to be individually, but collectively experienced, such trauma can create groups of traumatised people, therefore attracting the interest of sociologists (Erikson 231). According to one of them, Jeffrey Alexander, collective identification with trauma occurs when 'members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways' (Alexander 1). From the 1990s onwards, sociologists started to research trauma and shifted the focus from pathology to collective societal dynamics, assuming that trauma does not just exist, but is constructed by society. They also concentrated on the way the recognition, representation, rejection or silencing of war trauma is negotiated between various agents articulating narratives on war memory (Alexander 2). By referring to victims - people experiencing war trauma - not as a psychological, but a social category, they 'move from psychology to history' (LaCapra 79; Levy and Sznajder 3).

History, indeed, since at the core of this research lies the question what the past experiences and the memories of war victims mean for broader collective societal entities in the present; how they can streamline group formation around a shared meaningful explanation of that past for the present. Or, in the words of Dominick LaCapra, how historical trauma, referring to the experiences of war victims, is transformed into structural trauma, referring to a 'trans-historical absence' constituting a certain collective (LaCapra 76). During the last decade, the historical trauma of the Holocaust and World War II has been used to create such a structural trauma underpinning various collectives, such as a Unified Europe, or an American society fighting against the violation of human rights (Ashplant 44; Bingen, Borodziej and Troebst 19; Hass 33).

As such, war experiences and war memories are no longer perceived to only cause trauma for the (certain) people who experienced it, but are lifted out of their context and transformed into a universal trauma for the broader collective societal entity identifying (or, at least, supposed to identify) with it (Levy and Sznajder 7). Troublesome war experiences are moulded into contemporary narratives on war memory that can function as negative founding myths, as 'moral touchstones', for a common European identification, or an American society operating as a moral judge of genocides and sexual harassment all over the world (Hass 33; Levy and Sznajder 5). Such narratives are in need of the memories of survivors; the voice of individual survivors can help people who have not experienced war to identify with it; the grim realities of war are brought much closer to home when related on a personal basis. We, indeed, are currently experiencing a boom in publications and documentaries based on the reported memories of survivors, in which trauma and victimhood are centralised and which easily find a worldwide readership or viewing public through internationally interconnected media channels (Ashplant 63).

The more often that memories of individual survivors enter the public sphere and receive attention, the more other survivors may consider it important to utter their troublesome war experiences about which they have so far remained silent, whether or not through conscious decision. Their forerunning articulators, and the way these voices are interpreted by politicians, filmmakers and others, have provided survivors with a linguistic toolkit to name what they could not before. Nowadays, survivors of war are increasingly aware that when, or

even if, they focus on troublesome war experiences when articulating their narratives, their voices will be heard. They may shape their war experiences in such a way that they are aligned with dominant narratives, such as the victimisation of Holocaust survivors. Such stories can help to gain the attention of others and even facilitate recognition as war victims. The lack of troublesome war experiences being articulated is perhaps not only due to the characteristics of the actual experiences, but also because of the kind of narratives on war memory which survivors encounter in their environment and formulate themselves.

The extent to which narratives, through lobbying, find recognition in the public sphere, greatly determines the way memories are articulated and silenced. As such, certain survivors can receive acknowledgement to have war traumas and, as a result, are considered to be war victims, whereas others remain in the margin. Today is indeed a busy time within the cultural field on war memory as various agents strive for the fault lines to be redrawn due to the recognition of victimhood for formerly unheard survivors of war with troublesome war experiences.

Within that lobby for victimhood, the attention for the gendered character of bodily harm experienced during war only dates from the late 1970s. The second feminist wave exposed the fact that women's memories were often absent, or only marginally present, within official narratives on war memory (Noakes 664). In many cases, although war experiences had been similar for men and women, only the men's experiences were commemorated. The French historian Hannah Diamond for instance showed that French women had been as active in resistance as men, but that commemoration after the war centred around the organised resistance in which more men had been active (Diamond). War experiences could also differ between men and women. Experiences of harm to the body, for instance, were often not the same for men and women. In the construction of memories after the war, these similarities and differences passed through a gendered discourse symbolising stereotypes of men and women. The symbol of the Unknown Soldier encompassed the virtuousness and honour of men for their nation state. What was initially centralised was their bravery, and not their suffering. Due to the moral decline during the war and the possibility of both fraternisation and sexual harassment, the bodily harm experienced by women, in turn, was associated with shame (Schwegman 147). A woman's body symbolised the reproduction of the nation, and sexual deviation from moral norms stood for the violation of the nation itself (Noakes 666). The linguist Helen Vassallo therefore argues that because of the pre-dominant presence of shame and taboo in a female war survivor's environment, the body of such a survivor becomes what she calls 'a locus of trauma'. Being deprived of words, a female war survivor can, in most cases, only find articulation through practising bodily memory (Vassallo 11).

Until the 1990s, a definite split was also noticeable between the way the Holocaust was publicly commemorated and how various female Holocaust survivors privately articulated their memories (Ringelheim 18). Within these commemorations, there was no place for the specific troublesome war experiences of women. During World War II, Nazis targeted Jewish women differently to men, sometimes treating them as sexual objects who endured rape or underwent sterilisation (Duchen 7). It has been argued that forms of sexual harassment have long been considered irrelevant to 'such horror' as the mass extermination of people; it simply became lost in the comparison. Recent research, however, points to the necessity of integrating the history of sexuality in historiography to gain an insight into crucial post-war social and political transformations (Herzog 238).

In this chapter, I will go into the place of bodily memories within current narratives on war memory of individual former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium and their organisations. As shown in the first chapter, one of the immigrant organisations of former Allied soldiers from Poland, the BVPO, started a successful lobby in the late 1970s for the recognition of historical war trauma for its members. Former Allied soldiers from Poland received symbolic recognition as ex-combatants from the Belgian state in 1983, and financial recognition in 2002. The former Ostarbeiterinnen's organisation SSG, on the contrary, never found an opportunity during the Cold War era to start a lobby for trauma recognition because dominant narratives on war memory in the home and host societies of Ostarbeiterinnen had censured or silenced their experiences (due to the gender perceptions mentioned above, among other reasons). These conditions greatly impeded them in constructing and articulating their own narratives on war memory.

First, I will discuss the relationship between heroification and victimisation in the narratives of the former soldiers at issue as well as the importance of their organisation's lobbying efforts in ensuring that the bodily harm experienced by their members during the war became recognised as historical war trauma. Second, I will focus on how former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium are now beginning to express their bodily memories and will ask whether their organisation, SSG, although it had never lobbied for trauma recognition in the public sphere, somehow played a role in the articulation of the bodily memories of its members.

### **Former Allied soldiers from Poland**

On 7 December 1976, Stefan Abram, an ex-combatant of the First Polish Armoured Division, addressed the Health and Social Security Department of Newcastle in Great Britain with a request for financial and medical support. In 1926, Stefan Abram had left Poland for Belgium, where he became employed in the Eisden coal mine located in the Flemish Campines (Limburg). There, in the late 1930s, he married the daughter of another Polish miner. During World War II, Stefan Abram enrolled in the First Polish Armoured Division in Scotland. When the division was demobilised in 1947, Stefan Abram accepted the offer to work in the mines in Great Britain, leaving his wife and children in Belgium. Only in 1963, he returned to Belgium. As by that time, his wife lived with another partner, he rented a flat in Antwerp and lived off a monthly Belgian-British pension which he considered to be too small. Stefan had never applied for Belgian citizenship; he had been a Polish citizen before World War II and held the status of Displaced Person afterwards.

Stefan wrote to Newcastle about his war experiences, describing how he had fought against the Wehrmacht at the Albert Canal. According to him, but not to factual reality, he had been there all alone and had conquered it with only one machine gun. He continued the letter in his English:

On that date there I had an Accident but I did not die, but I rather was in a Prison I would not be suffer as I do to day. Sinds I wanted to clear myself I am in danger wher ever I am going. A mat'ter of fact, a death man sinds. To day I am needing urgency Protection and I cannot get anything.<sup>374</sup>

Stefan spoke about 'an Accident' and did not specify it further. Such behaviour is common among people with troublesome war experiences. When describing what happens, they usually elaborate on the circumstances, but only seldom name the war experience itself

---

<sup>374</sup> Archive BVPO, Letter from Stefan Abram to the Department of Health and Social Security Newcastle on 7.12.1976.

(LaCapra 22). Since Abram was applying for support and, later in the letter, was very specific about his illnesses, mentioning that he was suffering from brown lung disease because of his 30-year-long mining career, we may think that the accident he referred to was not a physical, but a psychological one, which was also confirmed by the BVPO's current President.<sup>375</sup> The word 'Prison' which he used a little later only reinforces this suggestion. Stefan had joined the division in Scotland and had only participated in its liberation march through Western Europe, during which not a single division soldier was captured by the German Army as a Prisoner of War. The 'Prison' Stefan spoke about seems rather to relate to a feeling of being shut up. Shut up by remembering what had happened at the Albert Canal, since it seems Stefan wanted to say that he even suffered more at the moment of writing ('to day') than if he had died there during the war. Stefan still struggled with working through his war experience at the Canal, in his language 'I wanted to clear myself', and suggested he had not managed to overcome it. Again, he used death as a metaphor to describe these feelings. After the 'Accident', he wrote that he could not go on living. Instead, he felt danger around him at all times ('I am in danger wher ever I am going').

Stefan's letter is a cry for help ('I am needing urgency Protection') in which it is apparent that the ex-combatant knew his message was difficult to pass on ('I cannot get anything'). It is unclear why Stefan Abram did not receive medical or financial support from Newcastle, since Great Britain was willing to offer financial support to former division soldiers who had settled there after World War II, as discussed in chapter two. Newcastle's Health and Social Security Department might have refused it on the basis of the principle of territoriality; after all, Stefan had spent most of his life in Belgium. He contacted the newly established Belgian Association for Polish ex-combatants (BVPO) in Antwerp to plea his case in Belgium. The organisation found out that Stefan Abram could not receive support from the Belgian state, because it only offered help to foreign ex-combatants who had fought under Belgian command or had been active in Belgian resistance forces. Therefore, the BVPO set up a Solidarity action for Stefan to collect money and organise his daily care. During the last years of his life, members of the BVPO looked after him and supported him financially.<sup>376</sup>

In the late 1970s, the BVPO gathered biographies of former Allied soldiers from Poland in need - like its President who suffered from war invalidity - and started to demand recognition by the Belgian state. The lobby was initially difficult to digest for the other big ex-combatant organisation: the Benelux Circle. Throughout the years, the Circle had concentrated on glorifying the Division's liberation of Flanders. Through erecting various statues and being present at various commemoration services, it had successfully installed a heroification of former division soldiers. Such a heroic narrative was popularly received in combination with the former Allied soldiers from Poland's classification as 'victims of communism' within Belgian society.<sup>377</sup> The status of the 'Polish' war heroes increased through adding a geopolitical category of victimisation, i.e. victims of communism, but refused to be brought down through recognising the inconvenient physical or psychological consequences that could accompany war experiences, i.e. troublesome war memories. Within the Circle, there was no place for presenting heroes as people in need. It perceived 'heroes' and (non-political) 'victims' to be exclusive terms and, as a result, was worried that allowing victimisation in the organisation's narrative on war memory would automatically mean the 'heroic' liberation activities of its members would be belittled. Only in 2002, the Circle - which after the

---

<sup>375</sup> Talk with the BVPO's current President Włocław Styranka on 27.12.2005.

<sup>376</sup> Talk with the BVPO's current President Włocław Styranka on 27.12.2005.

<sup>377</sup> P 5: Interview with Artur on 14 July 2005 (90:91).

collapse of communism had swallowed up the BVPO - engaged in a successful lobby for financial ex-combatant rights in the Belgian Parliament (Verstockt).

An analysis of the interviews I conducted made it clear that the membership of interviewees in either the Circle or the BVPO in the past marks the way they speak about troublesome war experiences in the present. Let us look at the stories of two former division soldiers, one who had always been a member of the Benelux Circle, and one who had joined the BVPO.

On 7 November 2005, I interviewed Czesław Kajpus alone. Although his wife was at home, she preferred to spend time with a family friend who had dropped in, than to join our conversation. Czesław was in a talkative mood and gave me a detailed chronological description of his war, portraying himself as a hero, illustrated by his introductory wording:

what I survived!  
Siberia  
a torpedoing  
and much more<sup>378</sup>

Shortly after the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, Czesław had been captured by the Soviet army and taken to a prisoners' camp in Northern Russia. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Stalin joined the Allies, released Polish POWs and allowed them to form a Polish army on Soviet territory under the command of Władysław Anders. Although most of the former POWs would travel as part of the Anders army through Turkmenistan, Iran, Iraq and Palestine to Italy, where they would fight in the battle of Montecassino, some were transported to South Africa, and from there travelled to Great Britain, to join other Polish Armed Forces in the West, as in the case of the First Polish Armoured Division. In September 1942, Czesław left on the 'Laconia' bound for Great Britain. In the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean, close to Ascension Island, the boat was torpedoed by a German submarine. Czesław belonged to the survivors - from the 3,254 passengers only 975 survived, rescued by German soldiers and brought to a captivity camp in Morocco. After the invasion of Africa by the Allies later that year, Czesław was liberated and brought over to Scotland where he joined the First Polish Armoured Division. Czesław told me 'much more' about how he had fought in France, Belgium and the Netherlands, all in the same heroic way. What he told me lies in line with the way he had written about his war experiences in his monography, *Non omnis moriar. Het verhaal van Czesław Kajpus, officier bij de Eerste Poolse Pantserdivisie en de bevrijding van 1944* (The Story of Czesław Kajpus, officer in the First Polish Armoured Division and the liberation of 1944). That Monday afternoon, Czesław could convince me he was a 'war hero'.

A little later, I saw the Belgian film *Vechten voor geen Vaderland* (Fighting for no Fatherland), a documentary made on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation by Bart Verstockt. Verstockt had also interviewed Czesław, this time in the presence of his wife, and had filmed the following episode:

Wife of Kajpus: it is very unpleasant to say  
but when he slept  
it was always so (she trembles her body)

---

<sup>378</sup> P 18: Interview with Czesław Kajpus on 7.11.2005 (04:07).

Czesław Kajpus: I'll tell you why  
 you know  
 on my tank was a big M-50  
 a heavy machine gun  
 it was the duty of the tank commander  
 to use it from above  
 and that gives of course powerful shocks  
 and  
 from time to time  
 I maybe dreamt that I  
 I didn't feel that  
 but when she says I did so (Verstockt)

Czesław Kajpus' wife casts a different light on her husband's heroic narrative as articulated during my visit and in his manuscript. His wife knew that what she said did not really fit within her husband's story, as she started with 'it is very unpleasant to say'. In explaining that unpleasantness, she did not come further than imitating her husband's behaviour at night, perfectly knowing that it was a consequence of war, since she mentioned it during an interview on that topic. She might not have known the reason for her husband's trembling, which can mean they had never talked about it among themselves, or she might have found it inappropriate to share such intimate information with the interviewer.

Czesław, in turn, was willing to explain what had happened. After he had described his war experience in his quiet and logical manner of speaking, he tried to explain why it had disturbed his sleep after the war. Here, his fluent storyline was disrupted and Czesław continued stuttering only loosely associated groups of words all aimed at moderating his wife's gesture: it had happened 'from time to time', it had been a dream ('I dreamt'), he even questioned whether it had taken place ('maybe'), it was painless and unconscious ('I didn't feel that'). Only after having added these nuances, Czesław was ready to agree with his wife, albeit through putting it into indirect speech ('she says I did so').<sup>379</sup>

Verstockt's documentary centralises the testimonies of surviving former division soldiers. He mainly portrays a heroic picture, and only for one minute in the documentary addresses what he called the 'unmasked visits of war' in post-war life. For that purpose, he gives a voice to the wives of former division soldiers for the only time in the documentary (Verstockt). He clearly needs the women to open up the dark side of war experiences, i.e. to penetrate the heroic narrative on war memory of their husbands. To illustrate the troublesome character of certain war memories, Verstockt offers his viewers three very short interview fragments. Interestingly, in the two cases where wives are present, former division soldiers were members of the Benelux Circle (C. Kajpus and H. Seroka). Only the man, who spoke independently about his troublesome war experiences, was not (B. Recki). Verstockt's portrayal lines up with the conclusion of my analysis, although he is not aware of this. I could detect that the reason as to whether or not interviewees nowadays speak about their troublesome war experiences is linked to their organisational affiliations in the past. Verstockt, however, did not go into the membership of his interviewees articulating troublesome war experiences.

---

<sup>379</sup> In the following interviews, no references to troublesome war experiences were made: P 5: Interview with Artur on 14.07.2005; P 9: Interview with Sławomir on 6.12.2005; P 13: Interview with Waldek on 25.11.2005; P 16: Interview with Jacek on 6.12.2005. In the following interview an indirect allusion comparable to Kajpus' behaviour was made to troublesome war experiences: P 14: Interview with Rafał on 6.12.2005 (22:28).

To further clarify this argument, let us now look at the way a former division soldier belonging to the Benelux Circle's competitor, the BVPO, articulated his troublesome war experiences to me. I asked Dominik when he had visited Poland for the first time after the war. He answered he had done so when he had received Belgian citizenship. Dominik interpreted my question to have a political undertone. As chapter four indicated, visiting the Polish People's Republic or not, and under which status, had functioned as a main indicator for the Benelux Circle to divide former Allied soldiers from Poland into the good 'free Poles' and the bad 'communists', among others, the BVPO. Dominik feared being categorised under 'the communists' by me, since he had been a member of BVPO. Dominik therefore continued that the divide had been of little importance to him, because, and it is worth quoting him here at length:

to be honest, the first twenty years  
 I did not want to bother about politics  
 because I was tensed with head  
 with these ears  
 but the most special is  
 when at night someone started to interrogate  
 here at home came then I said:  
 'I don't SPEAK about it  
 I don't WANT about it speak  
 and I didn't HAVE TO speak about it!'  
 about operation and that  
 and my father in law said:  
 'don't do that  
 because the doctor is black' (a collaborationist - MV)  
 he said: 'he you will kill!'  
 and I had a friend  
 he didn't live far from here  
 and he went for an operation  
 he had almost the same thing as I  
 and he didn't come back from the hospital  
 and I said: 'me they won't see in that hospital!'  
 but now that has become normal  
 wllll!!!!  
 in fact, I became used to  
 always hear a ring<sup>380</sup>

What had occupied the first twenty years of his settlement in Belgium, is for Dominik, as he words it today, not what he thought I was asking for (and what is centralised in the written sources of former Allied soldiers from Poland's organisations), i. e. the juxtaposition of 'free Poles' and 'communists', but his ear problems. The words 'but the most special is' form a transition verse. Dominik is now willing to explain to me how he had lived with his bodily memory in the past. He called that past behaviour 'special', which might indicate that he has worked on how to deal with 'these ears' over the years and now, being able to speak about it, thinks differently about it. Just like Stefan Abram, however, he is still not at the stage that he would name his war experience; he refers to 'with head', 'with these ears', but does not go into what his ears had experienced or what had caused his hearing deficit.

Dominik unfolds a situation for me. He describes how 'someone' came to his house and spoke about Dominik's hearing deficit. This action immediately gave Dominik the feeling that he was being 'interrogated', even in such a safe place as his own 'home'. He reacted by

---

<sup>380</sup> Interview with Dominik on 26.11.2005 (68:92).

fiercely refusing to continue the conversation (expressed in the rhetoric repetition ‘I don’t SPEAK about it I don’t WANT about it speak and I didn’t HAVE TO speak about it!’). The ‘someone’ from Dominik’s description had proposed him to go for an ear operation. I found this out only after Dominik had formulated his refusal of that operation. Dominik uses the words of his father-in-law to express the reason for his refusal, maybe because he indeed remembers they had spoken about it, or maybe only to give authority to his standpoint. Dominik’s father-in-law accused the local doctor of being a collaborator (‘black’), and thus an opponent to Dominik. The way Dominik uses verb tenses here is important. The doctor is not accused of ‘having been’ a collaborator during World War II; for the father-in-law, at least according to Dominik today, he still is at the moment of the described situation. By using the present tense, Dominik indicates he had continued to structure his life in war categories during post-war life. Contemporary research on memory has already demonstrated that the distinction between past and present by means of, for instance, the correct use of verb tenses, is one of the steps in working through trauma. An implosion of tenses, then, shows how a person continues to describe the present world using a past framework (LaCapra 21). As during World War II, Dominik’s world was divided into collaborationists and others.

For Dominik, it is obvious that the doctor was, or ‘is’, a collaborationist who would ‘kill’ him, to cite Dominik’s war vocabulary once more. Dominik continues: ‘and’ he had a friend with a similar hearing deficit who had agreed to be operated on by that doctor and had died during the process. Dominik did not mention his friend’s experiences as a consecutive episode, as the ‘and’ suggests. On the contrary, his friend’s experiences function as an illustration for what he considers to be the evident vindictive behaviour of the doctor. As a consequence, Dominik decided not to be operated on. Here he displays how he let the way he divided the world determine his action, i.e. his way of dealing with his troublesome war experience of physical harm. The hearing defect had to stay as it was. But over time, what Dominik called the tension (‘tensed with head’) went away; it became ‘normal’ to live with it. The normalisation had also enabled Dominik to articulate his bodily memory (formerly locked up) in words and to spontaneously mention it during the interview.<sup>381</sup>

The analysis of the interviews I conducted showed that the past membership of interviewees in either the Circle or the BVPO influenced how they nowadays remember their troublesome war experiences. The BVPO had lobbied for the recognition of its members’ troublesome war experiences from the late 1970s onwards, whereas the Benelux Circle had stuck to a narration of war heroism. Former BVPO members articulate their troublesome war experiences in words, whereas members of the Benelux Circle tend to remain silent about them, unless their wives bring these memories to their husbands’ attention. I thus argue that immigrant organisations can have an influence on the articulation of bodily war memories of their members. As the involvement of women shows, however, not only organisational engagement facilitates or hinders the articulation of bodily war memories. As we now will see, the way former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium dealt with their troublesome war experiences of physical harm was very different.

## **Former Ostarbeiterinnen**

I was able to set up a meeting with Sandy through the honorary consul of the Ukrainian Embassy in Belgium, Volodymyr Kotliar, who is of Ukrainian descent himself and has

---

<sup>381</sup> See also: B. Recki in Verstockt; P 4: Interview with Mariusz on 2.12.2005 (153:156); P 11: Interview with Damian on 13.02.2006 (164:168).

developed an extensive network of ‘Ukrainian’ migrants over the years. Consul Kotliar is a close friend of Sandy, a former Ostarbeiterin who settled in Belgium after World War II. When Kotliar and I, on 14 February 2006, entered Sandy’s house in La Louvière, I immediately noticed various toys lying around in her living room. ‘Please don’t mind’, Sandy said, ‘I always keep them ready for my grandchildren’, as she led consul Kotliar and me through to the kitchen.<sup>382</sup> There, we joined a man of about fifty years old, who introduced himself by name (I use here the pseudonym Max) and whom I assumed was the father of Sandy’s grandchildren. A dialogue developed between Volodymyr Kotliar, Max and Sandy. Meanwhile, I quietly observed what unfolded before my eyes and ears. Consul Kotliar and Max encouraged Sandy to speak successively about her parents, her life in Germany and her migration to Belgium.<sup>383</sup> Sandy then told of how she enrolled in a hairdressing school shortly after she had arrived in Belgium and subsequently became an independent hairdresser.<sup>384</sup> Later during the interview, she told us how her hairdressing salon functioned as a meeting place where her friends - former Ostarbeiterinnen settled in the neighbourhood - came with their children to have their hair cut and chat.<sup>385</sup> Her friends also regularly asked Sandy to babysit, leaving their children in the salon while going grocery shopping.<sup>386</sup> Soon after she had said this, Max apologised for having to leave. While consul Kotliar and Max were saying goodbye to each other, Sandy bent over to me and, fidgeting with the tablecloth, whispered:

unfortunately in Germany  
they gave shots  
afterwards I could never have children  
I was sterilised  
I was still young  
me, who loves children so much  
I would have liked to have at least four of them

I saw she felt awkward and tried to conceal her uneasiness by pouring some more tea in my cup, before adding:

he is always kind, Max (MV)  
I was married for forty-six years  
then my husband died  
then I stayed all by myself for three years  
and then I got to know his father-in-law  
he stayed five years with me and then also died  
but Max did not abandon me  
he keeps on coming, with his children and all that<sup>387</sup>

Due to Max’s departure, the natural flow of the conversation was interrupted. Sandy used that moment to tell me personally things which, apparently, had been impossible to articulate before in company. While until then, the consul and Max had given order to her course of life through their questions, she now took over the lead and during merely a few seconds, framed the time and importance of topics in a different way. Sandy wanted to explain me her precise relationship with Max, which had previously been unspecified as he had only mentioned his name. In order to make it clear to me that Max was not her son, but her stepson, Sandy started by telling me that she had been sterilised during World War II. She spoke in very general

<sup>382</sup> P 41: Notes on the Interview with Sandy on 14.12.2006.

<sup>383</sup> P 41: Interview with Sandy on 14.12.2006 (1:71).

<sup>384</sup> Idem (72:84).

<sup>385</sup> Idem (219:222).

<sup>386</sup> Idem (165:169).

<sup>387</sup> Idem (175:189).

terms about that war experience, not willing or capable of describing what had happened more than 60 years ago. Just like Dominick LaCapra, referred to in the analysis of interview fragments of surviving former division soldiers, the historian Gisela Schwarze found that survivors silence their actual war experiences. Schwarze researched written testimonies of Ostarbeiterinnen who had given birth in a special Ostarbeiterinnen maternity clinic in Westfalen during World War II, and discovered that they described the life in the clinic in great detail, but that none of them wrote about the central experience, the delivery itself (Schwarze 173).

Instead of focussing on what had happened to her during World War II, Sandy showed me how painful it was for her to live with the consequences afterwards. Through wordings ('afterwards I could never have children', 'me, who loves children so much', 'I would have liked to have at least four of them') and gestures (whispering, fidgeting with the tablecloth and pouring tea) she tried to articulate how she dealt with her troublesome war experiences. Contrary to the way Sandy spoke during the interview before, answering the questions of the consul and Max referring to dates and things they knew Sandy had done in the past, she, for the first and only time during the interview, used family moments to frame time in a chronological order.

Sandy's whisper put the things she had done and said before in a different light. First, from all the former Ostarbeiterinnen I met and heard about during my field work, Sandy was the only one who concentrated on her education after settling in Belgium. Whereas others already were or soon became mothers, which in practice hindered further formal education, Sandy knew she could not have babies and considered it worthwhile investing in her career (Duchen 6). Not surprisingly, she spoke in a detailed way about the hairdressing school.

Her professional activities, second, had not only facilitated former Ostarbeiterinnen in La Louvière to meet up, but also to practise bodily memory. Babysitting and cutting the hair of her friends' children was an opportunity for Sandy to deal with troublesome war experiences of harm to the body. We see here how Sandy's bodily memory did not remain locked up within her body, but became socialised. She and her friends did not speak about Sandy's war experience of sterilisation. Since all of them had been Ostarbeiterinnen, however, they knew that experiences of bodily harm in Germany might have included sterilisation. It was a real possibility they had lived with during World War II. The absence of children in Sandy's post-war life, now, could be remembered through taking care of her friends' children. It provided her with an opportunity to articulate her bodily memory without having to express it in words. Just as a person only becomes aware of his/her swimming movements when returning to swimming after a car accident, Sandy could remember that she was deprived of children in her post-war life because of her sterilisation experience while she was cutting the hair of her friends' children. She used the children to articulate her bodily memory. Therefore, I argue that because of the specific character of Sandy's troublesome war experiences of harm to her body, i.e. the impossibility to reproduce, she practiced the bodily memory of that experience in a socialised context: among the children of her friends - former Ostarbeiterinnen.

Over the years, third, Max had filled in the absence of children in Sandy's family life since, thanks to her second marriage, a child entered the family. By means of actions (toys lying around) and wordings summing his behaviour ('but Max did not abandon me', 'he keeps on coming, with his children and all that'), she suggested Max does everything a family member normally does and that he, in fact, is like a son to her. Interestingly, when the consul joined us at the table later, the conversation continued just as before, as if nothing had been whispered.

The absence of children was the result of Sandy's past experience of harm to her body, which lived on into the future. The nature of her troublesome war experience meant that her bodily memory did not merely remain locked up within her body, as bodily memory until now has been referred to by researchers.<sup>388</sup> In the case of Sandy, bodily memory became articulated within a social entity, whether within her family with Max, or among her group of friends who had lived in similar circumstances. Sandy needed such a children context, symbolising the evidence of reproduction, to, whether intentionally or not, articulate her bodily memory on the impossibility of reproduction in non- narrative actions. Raising or taking care of children, displayed through non-related or even seemingly trivial actions like cutting children's hair or babysitting, became her way of practising bodily memory.

What had happened in Sandy's hairdressing salon had in similar ways also been practised in the SSG in Antwerp. During my talks with various members and my attendance of several meetings in the autumn of 2006, I could notice how members in doing things together practised bodily memory. Debby, for instance, gave me a hint when she told me the shape which choir rehearsals of the SSG took. Her story concentrated on female choir members, until she briefly mentioned a husband had also been present during the gatherings. When I asked her to specify, the following dialogue developed:

I: you spoke about a man who also came to the organisation. What for?

Debby: they came to pick up their wives  
they sat and played cards  
when we are together, that is we separately  
the husbands play cards and wait until it is over  
and then they take their wives home

I: did many husbands come?

Debby: no, only the ones who did not live far  
certainly not in the beginning, because they looked after the children at home  
they could not leave  
those without children joined their wives

I: so there were people who did not have children?

Debby: yes, there were  
not many, but there were (...)  
but we did not speak about  
why they did not have children<sup>389</sup>

Over the months I spent time with SSG members, I developed a good relationship with their choir director Debby. I felt she sometimes offered me the opportunity to ask specific questions about aspects that remained unarticulated in her stories and those of other members. During the interview cited above, I felt for the first and only time that I could ask a member of SSG a general question about whether members had children or not, although I was still afraid that Debby would clam up afterwards. She did not, although the pause she introduced and the fact that, after her words, she switched topic, shows that she found it difficult to answer my question.<sup>390</sup>

<sup>388</sup> See for instance Culbertson; Vassallo.

<sup>389</sup> P 22: Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006 (224:239).

<sup>390</sup> P 22: Notes on the Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006.

Debby revealed that having children or not determined practices of members and their husbands, although one never spoke about this. Husbands without children could come and pick up their wives, whilst others had to stay home to take care of the children. Debby's wording made me think that maybe former Ostarbeiterinnen acted similarly when dividing tasks within their organisation. I therefore gathered all possible information about whether current or already deceased members of the SSG in Antwerp had children or not and then compared these data with the only preserved private collection of the SSG's bulletins, *Sovetskii Patriot*, later *Patriot* (Kizilov, 1992, 38-40, 46-57, 81-83, 96-111).<sup>391</sup> I searched for a link between a member having children or not, and her involvement in organisational activities. It does not come as a surprise that women without children had more free time and therefore engaged themselves more often in the board of the organisation than women with children. However, I could also verify that members without children were specifically involved in activities organised for the children of members, such as the yearly children's party Father Frost ('Ded Moroz', similar to Saint Nicolas), the children's choir and Mothers' Day.<sup>392</sup>

The timetable of SSG's activities allowed for regular occasions when children could be 'exchanged' or 'shared'. Practices of organised babysitting or children's parties were a negotiated outcome reflecting a common remembering of the troublesome war experiences of members, experiences which were indeed different for each former Ostarbeiterin and never articulated in words, but nevertheless undeniable for all, whether in evidence (i.e. those members with children) or imagination (i.e. those without). As such, SSG became an extension to the family life of the latter, filling in the absence of children and offering in this way the possibility to articulate meaning to their troublesome war experiences in actions rather than words. One could, therefore, say that the SSG functioned as a substitute family, a well-protected arena that enabled members having lived in similar war circumstances to practise and regularly repeat bodily memory.

What I have tried to make clear, is that bodily memory did not remain locked up in the bodies of the former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium I researched, i.e. the ones I interviewed and the members of SSG, but that it was locked up within their families and 'substitute families', informal or formal gatherings. During such meetings, bodily memories became socialised among people who had lived in the same war context and therefore knew what possible troublesome war experiences of harm to the body their friends could have endured. They did not have to speak about why fellow members did not have children, simply knowing that it might have been caused by what had happened to them during World War II. In such a family entity, children, being the evidence of reproduction, could function as an articulation of bodily memory of harm caused to reproductive health. In this non-verbal articulation, children became an extension of the female body, and bodily memory could be practised thanks to the presence of their own or somebody else's children. In interpreting bodily memory in this gendered way, I broaden the meaning which it has been given in academic literature to date.

---

<sup>391</sup> P 31: Notes on Participant observation on 19.02.2007.

<sup>392</sup> *Sovetskii Patriot*. Organ Tsentral'nogo pravleniia soiuza sovetskikh grazhdan v Bel'gii. Le Patriote Soviétique. Revue Bimensuelle de l'Union des citoyens soviétiques en Belgique 19/13 (367) 16; 26/516 (4.1971) 21-22; 26/521 (9.1971) 24-25; *Patriot*. Organ Tsentral'nogo pravleniia soiuza sovetskikh grazhdan v Bel'gii. Le Patriote. Revue mensuelle de L'Union des citoyens soviétiques en Belgique 36/628-629 (9-10.1981) 22; 36/630 (11.1981) 18; 39/651-652 (3-4.1984) 21.

Let us leave former Ostarbeiterinnen for a while, and apply that broader interpretation to another context, using a scene from the well-known film *Grbavica* (2006) directed by Jasmina Žbanić. The film depicts Esma, a single mother, who brings up her twelve-year-old daughter Sara in Sarajevo. Esma has problems coming to terms with what she experienced during the war in Bosnia. Sara was fathered when a soldier raped Esma, but Esma had never told her daughter. On a certain day, Esma and Sara are larking around until, all of a sudden, Esma finds herself in the same position as in which she was raped so many years before. She flares up and gets into a fight with her daughter, due to which her daughter finds out about that past. Although Esma tried to silence her troublesome war experience, when faced with the undeniable evidence of it, her body sought a non-verbal articulation.

My finding opens doors to further research in memory studies. It indicates that the process of experiencing bodily memory among survivors of war is gendered. The former soldiers whom I focused on articulated these memories solely by means of their own bodies, although the results of these performances could sometimes be noticed by their environment (think of the wife waking up at night because of her shaking husband). The former Ostarbeiterinnen used a family entity (substitute or own) in which taking care of the ‘evidences’ of reproduction could function as a means of articulating their bodily memory of harm to reproductive health. This may be crucial for war survivors to transmit their memories to following generations. The way survivors of war pass on their memories to their children by means of stories and actions reveals how they want, or even do not want, these experiences to be remembered, thereby determining how the experiences can and will be remembered (Ashplant 43). Such transmission practices differ for men and women, and information on how that functions in families highlights what will remain of survivors of war when they have died. The form of transmission also largely determines whether war memories will be moulded from personal into cultural memory, i.e. a memory in which their children voice the war experiences of their parents as deceased war witnesses. The extent to which these children will speak up for their parents will, in turn, interact with current dominant narratives on war memory in the public sphere.

The information provided to me by interviewees on troublesome war experiences involving harm to the body and bodily memories had seldom, or even never been articulated. The former Ostarbeiterinnen who opened up indeed often mentioned that it was the first time ever they had spoken about it.<sup>393</sup>

As the introduction of this dissertation showed, it is commonly stated by academics researching Ostarbeiterinnen in the former Soviet Union that reimbursement functioned as recognition for historical trauma, which incited Ostarbeiterinnen to open up their memories. However, I argue that this is a superficial viewpoint. First, recognition came from above; Ostarbeiterinnen, contrary to the former Allied soldiers from Poland whom I studied, had not lobbied for it. Because it was a top-down process, it takes time for former Ostarbeiterinnen to identify with it. And second, Ostarbeiterinnen’s faith was researched and reported on in the media in the Russian Federation and Belarus for some years in the mid-1990s, and is continued in Ukraine nowadays (Grinchenko, 2008b) In this way, academics, non-governmental organisations and governmental organisations in Ukraine try to use the troublesome war experiences and memories of Ostarbeiterinnen to create a structural trauma, to constitute a group of peace-loving and anti-communist individuals. Such a tendency is absent in Belgium. That some former Ostarbeiterinnen I listened to articulated their

---

<sup>393</sup> See for instance P 25: Interview with Wendy on 11.11.2006 (110:113); P 27: Interview with Peggy on 18.09.2006 (136:157).

troublesome war experiences to me, is, in my opinion, because the Holocaust increasingly functions as a structural trauma for the society of which they are part.

The current sensitivity for suffering, trauma and victimhood has offered them a linguistic toolkit to articulate their bodily memories which had previously been 'locked up'. Now former Ostarbeiterinnen can see documentaries on television of 'other forgotten victims' of World War II and some think they can also strive for victimhood. In the interviews, one reference was made to that ongoing battle of victimhood in the cultural field on war memory. Debby asked me:

we are now sixty years here  
and if we look to what happened  
then that is not fair  
war was not fair, and how many  
innocent people fell in concentration camps?  
but were they only Jews?  
good, bad for these Jews  
that I don't want to say  
but nothing about the others<sup>394</sup>

Since this call for victimhood remains a single case, one can not yet say that former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium are exaggerating their troublesome war experiences or shaping them to fit dominant narratives on victimhood. I therefore hold the opinion that, at least for the moment, the proliferation of the Holocaust memory only helps former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium to articulate their bodily memories in speech, and does not especially shape their war experiences.

Experiences of possible harm to the body during World War II, as well as the physical rather than verbal articulation of these experiences after the war, characterised the life paths of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium. Recently, however, some expressed their formerly 'locked up' bodily war memories to me, in this way constructing a meaningful relationship between the past and present. Although the SSG had never lobbied for trauma recognition in the public sphere, it had played an important role in the performance of the bodily memories of members in the past. Due to the characteristics of their troublesome war experiences, the bodily memories needed to be practised in family entities. The organisation functioned as a substitute family where former Ostarbeiterinnen with children could 'share' them with childless members.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on the relationship of the construction of trauma among and for migrants from behind the Iron Curtain within their organisations and the way individual migrants nowadays articulate bodily memories in speech. The construction of trauma indicates shifts in meta-narratives on war memory, which culminated after the collapse of communism. War memories formerly articulated in politically inspired narratives were adapted to narratives articulating trauma, victimhood and ethnic genocides, which enabled people whose bodily memories remained non-textual during the Cold War period to come to the fore. I discussed the dynamic relationship between heroification and victimisation in the narratives of former Allied soldiers from Poland and showed that the BVPO's lobby for the recognition of an historical war trauma helps members nowadays to articulate their bodily

---

<sup>394</sup> P 22: Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006 (266:274).

memories. I focused on how former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium are now opening up their bodily memories, revealing that they practised bodily memories within family entities in the past. Their gatherings, like the SSG, had functioned as a substitute family. In interpreting bodily memory as something that can be locked up within a family entity, I broadened the meaning which the concept has been given in academic literature to date. I strongly encourage further research into the gender-sensitive transmission practices in families of war survivors.

## Conclusion

This dissertation concentrates on people from two migration streams entering Belgium in the aftermath of World War II: former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen from the Soviet Union. It focuses on their processes of giving meaning to war experiences in post-war life, processes that are shaped by various factors which not only include the characteristics of the war experiences themselves, but also the changing positions which these immigrant men and women held within their home and host societies. Looking from the perspective of the newcomers from the Polish People's Republic and the Soviet Union, this dissertation unravels the changing processes of integration into and/or exclusion from their home and host societies over time.

For that purpose, I develop a specific toolkit of concepts. Society is narrowed down to the cultural field on war memory. In such a field, I argue, various agencies, or voices, articulate their representation of war experiences. I call these representations narratives on war memory. Agencies find their way to various arenas, spaces so to speak, of war memory articulation. In these arenas, both dominant and dominated voices compete with each other and determine both which war experiences are remembered and which ones are silenced, as well as what shape the articulated and silenced narratives on war memories take. I ask when and under what circumstances the narratives on war memory of people from the two migration streams at issue became integrated in the cultural field on war memory.

Such broad concepts offer the opportunity to display many processes of giving meaning to war experiences. Starting from the marginalised position of the former Allied soldiers and Ostarbeiterinnen, this study demonstrates the influence of external dominant voices on group formation in the migration streams, on the nature of the narratives on war memory constructed within the groups, and on the arenas in which groups could articulate their narratives on war memory or not.

From the perspective of the people belonging to these migration streams, this dissertation analyses the dynamic interplay of dominant and dominated voices and the results to which that interplay leads with regard to group formation, creation and performance of group memories, and dealing with trauma in group memories. It also highlights whether, when and how these group memories were articulated in existing or newly shaped arenas of war memory articulation and, as a consequence, were integrated in or excluded from the cultural field on war memory.

What this study makes clear, is that the processes of giving meaning to war experiences of former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen vary considerably. Although both migration streams consisted of Displaced Persons, they ended up in a very different refugee world in the first place. What Daniel Cohen overlooked when he researched the remembering of DPs, is how what he called 'the same refugee world' takes on a vastly different shape for immigrant men and immigrant women. Chapter one goes into these differences and states that various factors like the marriage contract, concepts of gendered citizenship and the dual nature of citizenship form a framework of (sometimes) contradicting possibilities that often turned out to be better for the former Allied soldiers from Poland. The geopolitical situation of the Cold War even enlarged differences, since the former soldiers ended up in an exceptionally advantageous legal situation that shut the door to expulsion,

whereas the former Ostarbeiterinnen were faced with a disadvantageous discrepancy of international laws and could not always escape repatriation.

The same is true for the group formation process and the construction of group memories in both migration streams. Former Allied soldiers from Poland, especially former division soldiers, were the privileged newcomers which over the years helped them become a dominant player in the cultural field on war memory in Belgium thanks to the support of transnational and Belgian agencies on war memory articulation. Former Ostarbeiterinnen, on the contrary, did not grow out of their marginalised position during the Cold War and remained non-presented on both sides of the Iron Curtain, but were still mobilised by transnational agencies on war memory articulation to ensure they did not create their own narrative on war memory that could disturb the way World War II was officially remembered in the Soviet Union. Like in chapter one, gender presuppositions played an important factor in the group formation process and construction of group memories. Similarly, the Cold War provided a context which could lead to the appearance of political opponents, i.e. victims of communism versus communists, in the direct environment of former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen settled in Belgium.

When looking at how group memories were performed, whether in the Polish military cemetery in Lommel or during rehearsals and concerts of the immigrant organisation SSP/SSG, we immediately find both differences and similarities. The members taking part in the performances differ from each other with regard to their visibility within the mainstream Belgian public sphere, the degree of a democratic construction and performance of their group memories and their way of dealing with the overall male symbolisation of war memory. However, it was the geopolitical situation which had a similar influence on the members taking part in the performances. Members did not align their group narratives on war memory with the narratives proposed to them by dominant agencies from their home societies. All former division soldiers gave meaning to their war experiences in line with the symbolisation of the narrative on war memory articulation of the 'anti-communist' Polish Union, and former Ostarbeiterinnen developed an opposing layer of meaning to official propaganda songs.

In the third part of the dissertation that focuses on trauma in group memories, it is not the Cold War itself, but the collapse of communism which turns out to be a decisive factor for the articulation of troublesome war memories. This historical event caused a shift from formerly politically inspired narratives to narratives articulating trauma, victimhood and ethnic genocides, which enabled the subjects of this study, whose bodily memories remained predominantly non-textual during the Cold War period, to come to the fore. Information from the interviews I conducted allows an insight into how bodily memories were articulated in the immigrant organisations to which interviewees belonged in the past. That articulation is again very different for the people of the two migration streams. Whereas the engagement of the Belgian Association for Polish ex-combatants (the BVPO) in lobbying for the recognition of an historical war trauma helps members nowadays to articulate their bodily memories, the lack of such engagement in the Association for Soviet Citizens (the SSG) did not prevent its members from using group gatherings as a substitute family entity in which they could silently articulate bodily memory. In interpreting bodily memory as something that can be locked up not only in a person's body, but also within a family entity, I broaden the meaning which the concept has been given in academic literature to date and encourage further research into the gender-sensitive transmission practices in families of people with troublesome past experiences.

With the fall of communism, the construction and performance of group memories within the two migration streams underwent significant changes. Former Allied soldiers from Poland united their immigrant organisations, and recently merged with an organisation mainly consisting of newly arrived ‘ethnic’ individuals, i.e. ‘Polish’ immigrants. Although agencies plea for the recognition of the ethnically diverse constellation of the First Polish Armoured Division or portray them as the ‘ethnic’ forerunners of peace in (a unified) Europe, the former soldiers themselves seem not to have changed their way of giving meaning to war experiences. The group formation of former Ostarbeiterinnen stayed intact (anno 2008 there is still an Association for Soviet Citizens in Belgium) but the construction and performance of group memories became ethnified.

I am now ready to formulate the answer to the central research question described in the introduction, which referred to the importance of the Cold War for migrants’ war memories. The geopolitical situation of the Cold War was certainly a decisive element for the group formation, construction and performance of group memories in the two migration streams. The war experiences and the characteristics of the migration streams were already very different, but the Cold War context often enlarged these differences by shaping the articulation of war memories through the way the new immigrants were treated by their home and host societies. Former Allied soldiers from Poland undoubtedly enjoyed much more favourable conditions than Ostarbeiterinnen to develop and articulate their war memories.

As such, this study is not primarily about forgetfulness, about giving the marginalised a voice and bringing them from the shadow into the light, which is the purpose of many oral history projects on Ostarbeiterinnen conducted nowadays in Germany, Austria, the Russian Federation and Ukraine (Grinchenko, 2004; Karner and Knat’ko; Reddeman; Ustnaia historii). In that respect, I do not strongly see the need to include former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen settled in Belgium in the *Enzyklopädie Migration in Europa: vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* to which I referred in the opening paragraph of this work (Bade and others). I therefore used the word ‘partly’. What I would like to offer in the first place, is an understanding of the various processes of inclusion and exclusion in the way World War II was remembered over the years during and after the Cold War, both in the home and host societies of the immigrant men and women at issue. I therefore question how power dynamics in the geopolitical situation of the Cold War shaped groups and group narratives on war memory in the two migration streams and influenced the arenas in which these group narratives found articulation. My aim is to present memory as memory in the different ways it occurred and still does. The results of such a presentation offer interesting new insights for the international academic fields of memory of World War II, East-West relations and migration history.

Memory research on World War II still mainly focuses on specific arenas of war memory articulation, such as commemorations or interview settings, and does not investigate the power dynamics that steer certain war memories to articulation or silencing in a specific arena. The bottom-up approach I take brings to light which power dynamics influenced the war memories of people of the two migration streams at issue. It examines the interplay of dominant agencies of war memory articulation, mechanisms of marginalisation, mobilisation or support and the characteristics of war experiences themselves, to display how they led the war memories of the newcomers to articulating or silencing their memories in various arenas. It turns out that only the war memories of former Allied soldiers from Poland found their way to commemoration services. In addition, spaces one would never have imagined appear to have functioned as arenas of war memory articulation. Here I refer for instance to a podium

set up for the proliferation of Soviet propaganda and group gatherings functioning as substitute families, arenas of war memory articulation which I discuss in chapters five and six.

This dissertation widens the frontiers of that geographical space scholars assume to have been affected by the reshuffling of Soviet war memory. Whereas all academics reduce that space to the actual borders of the former Soviet Union, this study, together with the recent work of the German historian Christoph Thonfeld (whose research, however, again solely focuses on the arena of the interview setting) plays a pioneering role in introducing the idea ‘mental space’ to memory research on the former Soviet Union. I consider this a very important issue, and therefore even dedicated the title of this dissertation to it: ‘Straddling the Iron Curtain?’. As this study shows, migrants’ war memories were constructed and performed in constant negotiation with agencies of war memory articulation on both sides of the former Iron Curtain and so can only be researched as such. An interesting conclusion in this respect, is that mobilisation strategies from home societies were, in the end, not of overriding significance for the people at issue in giving meaning to war experiences. This is even despite the fact that such agencies deeply influenced their targets by managing to make people sing or perform official narratives from the Polish People’s Republic or the Soviet Union in the Belgian public sphere.

Also, for many migration scholars this dissertation provides revealing information. Its major conclusion is that the collapse of communism turned political divisions within society into ethnified ones. Former Allied soldiers from Poland only recently became ethnified by ‘fellow’ immigrants and former Ostarbeiterinnen only recently made the switch to ethnic transnationals. Ethnic categorisation ‘from above’, i.e. calling the people I researched ‘Polish men’ and ‘Russian and Ukrainian women’ is widespread in migration research, and if empirical evidence exists for such a categorisation, it usually goes unquestioned. When conceptualising the *Encyclopedie*, the editors had a broad variety of migrant ascriptions in mind (Bade and others 22). It is a pity that so many contributing authors interpreted that in a solely ethnic way.

Finally, I shall outline the current ‘top-down’ framework in which the war experiences and memories of the people I studied find a place for remembering. In other words, after having deconstructed the dominant narratives on war memory and analysed their role for the group memories of former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen in my academic laboratory, I place their war experiences and memories back into ‘the real world’ and concentrate on how they will be remembered, i.e. how they fit into contemporary narratives on war memory.

These narratives have undergone important changes since the collapse of communism. Tony Judt already argued that the events of the late 1980s caused people to rethink the way World War II had been remembered in the Cold War era and came to the conclusion that it had been ‘fundamentally false’ (Judt, 2002, 157). Germans, or more specifically Nazis, had been overloaded with all the guilt of the war, and Germany needed to be denazified. Such a perception worked to the benefit of other Western European nation states in building their nationalist projects on the basis of a collective narrative on war memory overaccentuating resistance movements. In the 1990s, such national narratives came under scrutiny everywhere in Western Europe. Through recognising the collaboration of the Vichy-regime, the French resistance narrative, for instance, fell into decay. Similarly, the general Austrian view that their country had been Hitler’s first victim went into decline and the Italians opened up their communist and fascist past (Assmann, 2006, 261). Flanders is a special case. The authors of

*Collaboratie in Vlaanderen, vergeten en vergeven?* (Collaboration in Flanders. Forgotten and Forgiven?) demonstrated how Flanders, in dealing in a more nuanced fashion with collaborationism, did not ‘diabolise’ collaborators, but aimed at writing ‘Flemish idealism’ out of Nazi atrocities, an attitude that is currently being rethought (Corijn 14; Deneckere 188; De Wever 60). Maybe, Tony Judt argues, we are experiencing an interregnum between old and new narratives on war memory (Judt, 2002, 180). Such narratives are in the making, but often still lack democratic support.

Now that national narratives in Western Europe on war memory are experiencing a crisis, there are historians who stand up for a Europeanised narrative on war memory. They argue, as the famous linguist Susan Suleiman formulated it, that: ‘the memory of World War II, while nationally specific, transcends national boundaries’ (Suleiman 2). But what does such a Europeanisation of war memory mean? Heinrich Boll and Anja Kruke take a minimalist approach and state that it lies in a cross-border exchange and acknowledgement of experiences and the way these experiences have been given meaning (Boll and Kruke 11). Aleida Assmann is more ambitious, pleading to bend ‘national outside borders’ (nationale Aussergrenzen) to ‘European inside borders’ (europäische Binnengrenzen) and to let border regions and migrants function as windows to Europeanisation (Assmann, 2006, 265-266). She even developed a set of rules for such research, of which five are relevant for this study. First, she distinguished memory from argument in order to keep memory away from instrumentalisation and politicisation. Second, she advocates a refusal of victim competition, because she considers the experience (i.e. memory) of having a human right violated is not in need of hierarchical ordering. Third, Aleida Assmann requires historians to move away from mere content analysis of national memory, and to focus on inclusion and exclusion from national memories during the Cold War, because:

The persuasive force of a national myth to a significant extent led to ethnic, regional and social internal differences becoming invisible. Also, class differences, power relations and gender hierarchies could be overlooked (and in that way remain untouched) in a community, since it made the integral, symbolic offer of national unity (Assmann, 2006, 251).

Fourth, she states that war experiences from a same context can be brought together under one umbrella. That facilitates, fifth, the installation of a transnational European meta-narrative on war memory (Assmann, 2006, 266-270).

Such an umbrella was provided in the late 1990s. Disbursement issues for formerly ‘forgotten’ forced labourers from behind the fallen Iron Curtain formed a stimulus to reinterpret the significance of foreign labour in the Third Reich. For the first time, all foreign labourers, both from the West and the East, were collectively referred to as ‘Zwangarbeiter’, a concept often translated into English as ‘forced’ or even ‘slave’ labourers. This categorisation created the impression that a homogeneous group of foreign labourers with similar war experiences existed which could claim the arena of victimhood, until then solely habited by Holocaust victims (Ulrich, 2001, 16-18). I here refer to the recent study *Hitlers Sklaven. Lebensgeschichtliche Analysen zur Zwangarbeit im internationalen Vergleich* (Hitlers Slaves. An international comparison of life history analyses on forced labour) and more specifically to its problematic graph *Zwangarbeiter nach Ländern 1939-1945* (Forced labourers in different countries 1939-1945) (von Plato and others 11). Although it is inaccurate to group together various people who were treated differently by the Nazi regime, the term ‘Zwangarbeiter’ has become an officially institutionalised concept in German and Austrian politics and also increasingly in research (Ulrich, 2001, 16-18). I am fully aware of the fact that the war memories of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium I analysed in my study will be

read by many scholars through the eyes of such a currently dominant premise in war memory research and can only hope that readers will pay attention to the specific place of Ostarbeiterinnen in the concept of Zwangarbeit.

In the former Warsaw pact countries, the re-shuffling of war memory takes a different shape. Whereas, in the former West, national narratives on war memory are imploding, countries that regained independence after the collapse of communism are constructing new nation-state oriented narratives on war memory. In Poland, that narrative constructs victimhood during World War II and aligns it to age-long Polish martyrdom. The Polish historian Annamaria Orla-Bukowska indicates four concepts underpinning that construction: Poland was attacked on 1 September 1939 and was therefore the first official war victim, the country had to fight against totalitarian regimes from both sides, the country was morally superior to all others on the European continent because it never collaborated or ‘formally surrendered’, and, at the cost of its own defeat, saved Europe from Nazism (Orla-Bukowska 179). The war experiences of the former Allied soldiers from Poland I analysed are already placed in a constructed ‘Polish’ army, which was the fourth biggest among the Allies, after the British, American and Soviet armies. All ‘Poles’ who served in Allied army units are grouped to fit into a ‘Europeanised’ narrative on war memory that however, at least until now, solely serves a Polish nationalistic purpose. I refer here for instance to the book *The Poles on the battlefields in the West* (Brodecki, Wawer and Kondracki). These ‘Polish’ soldiers are increasingly the ‘real’ heroes in the national Polish narrative on war memory.

In Ukraine, narratives on World War II memory are pre-eminently determined by political and ideological debates. At least four main conceptions about the country’s war experience exist. Next to a procommunist Soviet ‘successor’ version which repeats the narrative of the Great Patriotic War, a Ukrainian ‘competitor’ creates Soviet Ukrainian heroes. A third one makes a mockery of the Soviet narrative and places World War II in the longer independence battle of Ukraine. A fourth one, still in formation, simply wants to remember ‘all the lost’, and to ‘victimise’ all survivors. In this narrative, Ostarbeiterinnen find a place (Grinchenko, 2008b).

In the 1990s, a plurality of liberal narratives took root in the Russian Federation. Following the engagement of the non-governmental organisation, Memorial, in disbursement issues for Ostarbeiterinnen, the Russian historian Pavel Polian wrote the bestseller *Offers of two dictatorships. Life, work, humiliation and death of Soviet Prisoners of War and Ostarbeiters abroad and in the Motherland* (Polian 2002). Although the book sold out, it is unlikely to be republished. Since Putin came to power, liberal narratives have experienced a gradual fall in proliferation (Sherlock 184). Ostarbeiterinnen might be picked up within the new official nationalistic Russian narrative on war memory, as the recent article titled *Soviet Belgians* in the journal *Sovetskaia Rossiia* suggests.<sup>395</sup> However, they are still completely absent in the *Museum for the Great Patriotic War in Moscow*. The situation in contemporary Belarus is comparable to the one in the Russian Federation (Grinchenko, 2008b).

---

<sup>395</sup> *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 10.

## Appendix 1: 'LENIN | NINEL'<sup>396</sup>

At the SSG gathering on 19 February 2007, Wendy treated her friends to cake in celebration of her 86<sup>th</sup> birthday. In between praising the delicious taste of the cherry pie, the apple pie, and the chocolate cake, the members in turn congratulated Wendy. Lenny, for instance, asked Wendy how it was adjusting to retirement, now that she had turned 68. The others giggled and immediately hooked on to that joke. Kelly complained that she still had a full career ahead, as she was only 28. 'Yes, yes', replied Wendy: 'You've always been a baby'. Her comment stirred up emotion; the members immediately needed to clarify who were the babies and who were the elder among them. Joyful chattering burst out, in which the members said how old they took each other for, before enthusiastically throwing around 'I'm 38!', 'I'm 48!', and then extensively commenting on the differences between estimations and reality. But Becky did not take part in the joy. She sat silently at the corner of the table, got up after a while and went to the bathroom.

Kelly, who was my neighbour that day, bowed over to me and whispered: 'Again it's the same! She never wants to say how old she is. Once she said she is from 1926, but maybe...'. Lenny's disapproving look from the other side of the table muzzled Kelly. Her words made me think of what Sandy had told me at the end of our interview. We were about to leave, when the Ukrainian honorary consul mentioned: 'you haven't told her (me - MV) how old you are?' 'Oh, well', answered Sandy, 'I was born on 24 March 1926'. She then waited a while and added: 'for the Belgians'. In reality, she had been born a year later, but since Belgian law did not allow women under 18 to marry, 'somebody' had 'helped' her to change birth dates in her papers.<sup>397</sup> Maybe, that is also what happened with Becky. To 'Belgians', she probably said she had been born in 1926, confirmed by the date mentioned on her Belgian identity card. Among her friends with similar war and migration experiences, however, that possible inaccuracy could have been difficult to defend and she might have considered keeping silent to be a better strategy.

When Lenny stood up to get a second piece of cake, Kelly saw the chance to start gossiping about her. Kelly was visibly bad-tempered because of Lenny's look: 'She wants I don't speak about that', continued Kelly: 'because X (Lenny - MV) also has her thing'. 'She doesn't live with her second, but with her third husband. She was married before Germany and had a baby, but never heard of them later'. Lenny is indeed one of the only members who still has a husband, because she married a younger man after the death of her first Belgian husband. Kelly had managed to formulate her comment during the few seconds Lenny was out of earshot. When Lenny came back, cake again became the dominating topic of conversation.

Gossip does not always contain the truth, in fact, it only rarely does. But, as Allesandro Portelli already stated, even 'wrong statements are still psychologically true and this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts' (Portelli 68). Gossip reveals that reality is not as clear-cut as it appears at a first glance. In this case, we see how the most basic factual information on a person you might receive, i.e. birth date and the number of children, can differ from context to context. Regardless of the truthfulness of Kelly's gossip, she made me aware of a shadow accompanying at least a couple of SSG members.

---

<sup>396</sup> Based on the notes from the participant observation of 19.02.2007 I wrote on the train from Antwerp to Leuven directly after the gathering.

<sup>397</sup> P 41: Interview with Sandy on 14.02.2006, notes.

Sometimes, I could unravel that shadow not through gossip, but through cross-reading materials. One of the SSG members, for instance, had introduced herself to me as ‘babushka Nelly’, which sounded strange to me among all the Anias, Tantias, Nantias, Olias and, of course, Masha. Nelly is simply neither a Russian nor a Ukrainian name, but it is used in Belgium. While reading the SSG’s bulletin *Sovetskii Patriot*, I came across ‘Nelly’. She had not been born as Nelly but as Ninel’.<sup>398</sup> Ninel’ is the mirror image of Lenin, and it functioned as a popular girls’ name in the Soviet Union for a few years after Lenin’s death in 1924. In the organisation’s bulletin, read by other former Ostarbeiterinnen, Ninel’ was Ninel’. For me, however, Ninel’ wanted to be Nelly. During the gatherings I attended, all members had known Nelly was Ninel’, but nobody had felt the need to clarify me their usage of a non-Slavic name and had silently accepted Ninel’s proposition to be called ‘Nelly’, since they all referred to her as ‘Nelly’ in my presence. ‘Machteld’ was too Flemish and needed to change into ‘Masha’, but ‘Nelly’ had to stay ‘Nelly’. Perhaps the ever-present shadow of Ninel’ was too unpleasant to live with among Belgians.

Oral history studies often include a table with basic factual information about interviewees in the appendix. It has led to the common perception that only studies with such a table are academically valid, whereas others lack sound methodology. I refuse to provide a table, since I consider it useless for the scope of this study to squeeze interviewees into categories that do not fit their reality. On 19 February 2007, there were 13 of us and the basic factual information I would have been able to gather from three people, or maybe more, would at the very least be questionable. Designing a table would mean unsuccessfully filling in a silenced memory. The aim of this study, however, was to present silenced memory as silenced, and to leave it like that (Hirsch 244).

---

<sup>398</sup> *Sovetskii Patriot* 26/516 (4.1971) 21-22.

## Appendix 2: Song lyrics

### TRACK 1

#### Мама

##### Original version

Text based on the famous poem: Письмо матери  
(Сергей Есенин)

Ты жива еще, моя старушка?  
Жив и я. Привет тебе, привет!  
Пусть струится над твоей избушкой  
Тот вечерний несказанный свет.

Пишут мне, что ты, тая тревогу,  
Загрустила шибко обо мне,  
Что ты часто ходишь на дорогу  
В старомодном ветхом шушуне.

И тебе в вечернем синем мраке  
Часто видится одно и то ж:  
Будто кто-то мне в кабацкой драке  
Саданул под сердце финский нож.

Ничего, родная! Успокойся.  
Это только тягостная бредь.  
Не такой уж горький я пропойца,  
Чтоб, тебя не видя, умереть.

я по-прежнему такой же нежный  
И мечтаю только лишь о том,  
Чтоб скорее от тоски мятежной  
Воротиться в низенький наш дом.

я вернусь, когда раскинет ветви  
По-весеннему наш белый сад.  
Только ты меня уж на рассвете  
Не буди, как восемь лет назад.

Не буди того, что отмечалось,  
Не волнуй того, что не сбылось,-  
Слишком раннюю утрату и усталость  
Испытать мне в жизни привелось.

И молиться не учи меня. Не надо!  
К старому возврата больше нет.  
Ты одна мне помощь и отрада,  
Ты одна мне несказанный свет.

Так забудь же про свою тревогу,  
Не грусти так шибко обо мне.  
Не ходи так часто на дорогу  
В старомодном ветхом шушуне.

##### Alternative version

Далеко из далекого края  
Шлю Тебе я мамаша привет.  
Как живёшь ты моя дорогая?  
Напиши поскорее ответ.

Я живу близ Северного моря,  
где кончается небо з землей  
Я живу и в тоске, и в горе  
Вспоминаю тебя, дом родной

Привезли нас сюда на работу  
Завели в загороженный двор  
Поместили в холодных бараках  
И поставили строгий надзор

В шесть часов я иду на работу  
А дорогой я очень грущу  
О тебе ты моя мама милая  
Вспоминаю я очень люблю

Прихожу я с работы усталой  
И ложусь на соломенный матрас  
Вспоминаю вас мои родные  
И так засыпая  
Я думаю о вас

Ах зачем ты меня народила  
Ах зачем ты меня родила  
Лучше была меня утопила  
Как в Германию жить отдала

This alternative version is a mix from the three  
alternative war versions mentioned in Danièl',  
Eremina and Zhemkov 125, 126.

**TRACK 2****Горячи бублички****Original version**

Горячи бублички,  
Гоните рублички,  
Гоните рублички  
Всюда (в) скорей  
А я, несчастная,  
Торговка частная  
Гоните рублички  
Всюда (в) скорей

**TRACK 3****Alternative version**

Ночь начинается,  
вагон качается,  
На землю падает  
Спокойный сон  
Страна любимая  
Все вспоминается  
Едет в Германию  
наш эшелон

Вот привезли же нас  
В страну далекую  
И дали хлеба нам  
по двести грамм  
Баланды рединкой  
По поль тарелочки  
И приказали нам  
Что привыкать

Ну знаете словачи  
Парабатители  
Что приближается  
Тот грозный час  
Когда в Берлин придут  
Героям мстители  
И а там мстят они за всех за нас

For a fairly similar alternative war version see Daniël',  
Eremina and Zhemkov 134,135.

**TRACK 4****Катюша****Original version**

Расцветали яблони и груши,  
Поплыли туманы над рекой;  
Выходила на берег Катюша,  
На высокий берег, на крутой.

Выходила, песню заводила

Про степного, сизого орла,  
Про того, которого любила,  
Про того, чьи письма берегла.

(Ой, ты песня, песенка девичья,  
Ты лети за ясным солнцем вслед,  
И бойцу на дальнем пограничье  
От Катюши передай привет.

Пусть он вспомнит девушку простую,  
Пусть услышит, как она поет,  
Пусть он землю бережет родную,  
А любовь Катюша сбережет).

**TRACK 5****Alternative version**

Расцветали яблони и груши,  
Дрожь колотит немца за рекой.  
Это наша русская «катюша»  
Немчуре поет за упокой.

Все мы любим душеньку «катюшу»,  
любим слушать как она поет,  
Из врага выматывает души,  
А бойцам отвагу придает.

Ты лети-лети, как говорится  
На кулички к черту долети  
И таким же разным дохлым фрицам  
От Катюши передай привет.

Немножко не так не сделал  
Это так [...]

Ты лети-лети как говорится  
Ты лети за дальным солнцем вслед  
И таким же

Euh wacht eens even

разным дохлым фрицам  
От Катюши передай привет.

For more alternative war versions see Borisova, 17;  
Lipatov, 81; [www.sovmusic.ru](http://www.sovmusic.ru).

**TRACK 6****Смело мы в бой пойдем****Original version**

(Слушай, рабочий,  
Война началась,  
Бросай своё дело,  
В поход собирайся).

Смело мы в бой пойдём.  
За власть Советов  
И, как один, умрём,  
В борьбе за это.

Рвутся снаряды,  
Трещат пулемёты,  
Но их не боятся  
Красные роты.

(Вот показались  
Белые цепи,  
С ними мы будем  
Биться до смерти.

Вечная память  
Павшим героям,  
Вечная слава  
Тем, кто живёт!)

**TRACK 7****Alternative version**

Смело мы в бой пойдём  
За суп с картошкой  
Фашиста разобьем  
Столовой ложкой

**TRACK 8**

Поем поем за советскую власть поперем

**TRACK 9****In de stille Kempen****Original version**

In de stille kempen, op de purp'ren hei,  
Staat een eenzaam huisje, met een kerk erbij.  
En een zomeravond, in gedroom alleen,  
Kwam ik ongeweten langs dit huisje heen.

Hoe schoon nog de wereld, de zomerse hei,  
Dat is hier op aarde de hemel voor mij!  
Hoe schoon nog de wereld, de zomerse hei,  
Dat is hier op aarde de hemel voor mij!

In het eenzaam huisje, zat een meisje ach!  
Lijk ik nergens anders ooit een meisje zag!  
Door het venster keek ze mij verlegen aan,  
Schoof 't gordijntje toe en is maar opgestaan

Maar wat heeft de liefde, ook hier niet verricht!  
Want nu schuift 't gordijntje nooit nog voor me dicht!  
Door het open venster, dat men vroeger sloot,  
Lach ik op ons kindje op zijn moeders schoot.

**TRACK 10****Russian translation**

Девушка красива смотрит у окна  
Сон остался былью неожиданно  
Полностью стеснения вижу я глаза  
Занавес закрыла и ко мне пришла

Красивые сёла красивые поля  
Здесь счастье на свете здесь доля моя  
Красивые сёла красивые поля  
Счастливые люди и счастлив и я

**TRACK 11****Бухенвальдский набат**

Люди мира, на минуту встаньте!  
Слушайте, слушайте: гудит со всех сторон –  
Это раздаётся в Бухенвальде  
Колокольный звон, колокольный звон.  
Это возродилась и окрепла  
В медном гуле праведная кровь.  
Это жертвы ожили из пепла  
И восстали вновь, и восстали вновь!  
И восстали,  
И восстали,  
И восстали вновь!

Сотни тысяч заживо сожженных  
Строятся, строятся в шеренги к ряду ряд.  
Интернациональные колонны  
С нами говорят, с нами говорят.  
Слышите громовые раскаты?  
Это не гроза, не ураган -  
Это, вихрем атомным объятый,  
Стонет океан, Тихий океан.  
Это стонет,  
Это стонет  
Тихий океан!

## Performance on the Christmas Market (17 December 2006)

### TRACK 12

Gewoon even zeggen wie wij zijn  
 Wat wij zijn dat is niet nodig  
 Dat is al duidelijk  
 Het kozakkengebrul vanuit de ex-Sovjet-Unie  
 U hoort hier de Russische variant van de Buena Vista  
 Social Club  
 Maar in plaats van Cubaanse mannen van boven de  
 tachtig  
 Hoort u hier Russische en Oekraïense vrouwen van  
 boven de tachtig  
 En de Havanasigaar is hier dus vervangen door de  
 wodka  
 Kozakkenliederen, liederen van thuis, liederen uit de  
 ex-Sovjet-Unie,  
 Russische liederen, liefdesliederen  
 Dit alles krijgt u en nog veel meer  
 Zolang de kou en onze stem het ons toelaat

### TRACK 13

#### Ой на горі та жєнци жнуть

Ой на горі та жєнци жнуть  
 А попід горою. Яром-долиною  
 Козаки йдуть  
 Гей долиною гей широкою  
 козаки йдуть

Попереду Дорошенько  
 Веде своє військo військo запорнійське хорошенько  
 Гей долиною гей широкою хорошенько

А позаду Сагайдачний  
 Що проміняв жінку на тютюн та люльку  
 необачний  
 Гей... необачний

Гей вернисья Сагайдачний  
 Візьми свою жінку віддай тютюн люльку  
 необачний  
 Гей долиною гей широкою необачний  
 Мені з жінкою не возиться  
 А тютюн та люлька козаку в дорозі знадобиться  
 Гей долиною гей широкою знадобиться  
 Гей хто в лузі озовися  
 Викрешемо вогню запалимо люльку не журися  
 Гей долиною гей широкою не журися

### TRACK 14

#### То не ветер ветку клонит

То не ветер ветку клонит  
 Не дубравушка шумит  
 То мое мое сердечко стонет  
 Как осенний лист дрожит  
 То мое мое сердечко стонет  
 Как осенний лист дрожит  
 Извела меня кручина  
 Подколодная змея  
 Догорай гори моя лучина  
 Догорю с тобой и я  
 Не житье мне здесь без милой  
 С кем пойду теперь к венцу  
 Знать судил мне рок с могилой  
 Обвенчаться молодцу  
 Расступись земля сырая  
 Дай мне молодцу покой  
 Приюти меня родная  
 В тихой келье гробовой

### TRACK 15

#### Шли по степи

шли по степи полки  
 со славой звонкой  
 и день и ночь со склона  
 и на склон  
 ковильная родимая сторонка  
 Прими от наших  
 Воинов поклон

Эй расцветай и пой наш  
 Дон любимый  
 Гордись своим простором золотым  
 Твоих степей и пашней край  
 Родимый  
 Мы никогда врагу не отдадим.

И если враг нагрянет  
 С новой силой  
 Из ножен шашки  
 Выймен вон  
 Веди нас в бой товарищ Ворошилов  
 Донецкий слесарь боевой нарком.

**TRACK 16****Тонкая рябина**

Что стоишь, качаясь,  
Тонкая рябина,  
Головой склоняясь  
До самого тына?

А через дорогу,  
За рекой широкой  
Так же одиноко  
Дуб стоит высокий.

Как бы мне, рябине,  
К дубу перебраться,  
Я б тогда не стала  
Гнущаяся и качаться.

Тонкими ветвями  
Я б к нему прижалась  
И с его листвою  
День и ночь шепталась.

Но нельзя рябине  
К дубу перебраться,  
Значит сиротине -  
Век одной качаться.

**TRACK 17****На горе-то калина**

На горе-то калина.  
Под горою малина.  
Ну что ж кому дело калина?  
Ну кому какое дело малина?

Там девицы гуляли.  
Там красные гуляли.  
Ну что ж кому дело гуляли  
Ну кому какое дело гуляли

Калинушку ломали.  
Калинушку ломали.  
Ну что ж кому дело ломали  
Ну кому какое дело ломали

Во пучёчки вязали (2)  
Ну что ж кому дело вязали  
Ну кому какое дело вязали

На дорожку бросали (2)  
Ну что ж кому дело бросали  
Ну кому какое дело бросали

**TRACK 18****В путь дорожку дальнюю**

В путь дорожку дальнюю я тебя отправлю  
упадет на яблоню белый цвет зори  
Подари мне сокол на прощанье саблю  
Вместе с острой саблей пику подари.

Я на кончик пики привяжу платочек  
На твои на сини погляжу глаза  
Как взмахнет платочек  
Я всплакну чуточек по дареной сабле побежит слеза.

Затоскует горлица у хмельного тына  
Я к воротам струганным подведу коня  
Ты на стремя станешь  
Поцелуешь сына у зеленой ветки обоймешь меня.

Стану петь я песенку косы я расправлю  
Лучше всех соколиков сокола любя  
Да с дарёной пикой, да с дарёной саблей саблю  
Мимо всей станицы провожу тебя

Так лети мой сокол всех быстрее и краше  
За Кубань за родину отличись в бою  
Пусть тебе мой сокол на прощанье наше  
Ветер в след уносит песенку мою.

**TRACK 19****По долинам и по взгорьям**

По долинам и по взгорьям  
 Шла дивизия вперед,  
 Чтобы с бою взять Приморье -  
 Белой армии оплот.  
 Наливались знамена  
 Кумачом последних ран,  
 Шли лихие эскадроны  
 Приамурских партизан.  
 Этих лет не смолкнет слава,  
 Не померкнет никогда,  
 Партизанские отряды  
 Занимали города.  
 И останутся как в сказке,  
 Как манящие огни,  
 Штурмовые ночи Спасска,  
 Волочаевские дни.  
 Разгромили атаманов,  
 Разогнали воевод,  
 И на Тихом океане  
 Свой закончили поход.

**TRACK 20****Коробейники**

Ой, полна, полна коробушка  
 Есть и ситцы, и парча.  
 Пожалей, моя зазнобушка,  
 Молодецкого плеча!

Выйди, выйди в рожь высокую!  
 Там до ночи погожу,  
 А завизжу черноокою -  
 Все товары разложу.

Цены сам платил немалые,  
 Не торгуйся, не скупись:  
 Подставляй-ка губы алые,  
 Ближе к милому садись.

Вот и пала ночь туманная,  
 Ждет удамый молодец.  
 Чу, идет! - пришла желанная,  
 Продает товар купец.

Катя бережно торгуется,  
 Все боится передать.  
 Парень с девицей целуется,  
 Просит цену набавлять.

Знает только ночь глубокая,  
 Как поладили они.

Распрямись ты, рожь высокая,  
 Тайну свято сохрани!

**TRACK 21****Розпрягайте хлопці коні**

Розпрягайте, хлопці, коні  
 Та лягайте спочивать,  
 А я піду в сад зелений,  
 В сад криниченьку копать.

Копав, копав криниченьку  
 У вишневому саду  
 Чи не вийде дівчинонька  
 Рано-вранці по воду?

Вийшла, вийшла дівчинонька  
 В сад вишневий воду брать,  
 А за нею козаченько  
 Веде коня напувать.

Просив, просив відеречка —  
 Вона йому не дала,  
 Дарив, дарив з руки перстень  
 Вона його не взяла.

Знаю, знаю, дівчинонько,  
 Чим я тебе розгнівив:  
 Що я вчора ізвечора  
 Кращу тебе полюбив.

**TRACK 22****На рыбалке**

На рыбалке у реки тянут сети рыбаки  
 На откосе плещет рыба точно глыба серебра

Больше дела меньше слов нынче выпал нам улов  
 Будет селам и столицам вдоволь рыбы ой ой ой  
 Больше дела меньше слов нынче выпал нам улов  
 Будет селам и столицам вдоволь рыбы ой ой ой

Над рекою под водой плавал месяц молодой  
 Не меня ли ты ласкала называла милый мой

На рыбалке у реки тянут сети рыбаки  
 Тянут песни распевая а милая не со мной

## List of References

### Archives

#### Archives in Belgium

##### Official Archives

Archive KADOC (Documentation and Research Center for Religion, Culture and Society)  
 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police (individual files)  
 Archive Directory-General War Victims (Archief Directie-generaal Oorlogsslachtoffers)  
 Archive the City of Lommel  
 Archive SOMA (Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society)  
 State Archives, Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Archive Naturalisation  
 State Archives, the Belgian Aliens Police

##### Organisational and Private Archives

Former Allied soldiers from Poland

Archive BVPO, Scheidreef 15, Kapellen  
 Archive President the Benelux Circle, Ijskelderstraat 26, Ghent  
 Archive Secretary the Benelux Circle, Pastoor Steenssensstraat 109, Beveren (Waas)  
 Archive Treasurer the Benelux Circle, Truweelstraat 108, Saint-Niklaas  
 Archive SPK, Biblioteka i Dom Polski, Rue Armand Campenhout 72, bte 7, Brussels  
 Archive ZPB, Pools huis, Laan op Vurten, Beringen  
 Private archives of the interviewees Adam, Andrzej, Damian, Jacek, Mariusz, Rafał, Robert, Sławomir and Waldek

Former Ostarbeiterinnen

Archive of the Ghent choir conductor, Hospitaalstraat 3, Ghent  
 Archive belonging to the Antwerp choir conductor and her daughter, Plantin Moretuslei 128/6, Antwerp Berchem  
 Private archives of the interviewees Amanda, Brenda, Elly, Kelly and Sandy

#### Archives in Poland

Archive AAN (Archive of New Acts)  
 Archive IPN (Institute of National Remembrance)  
 Archive MSZ (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

#### Archives in the Russian Federation

Archive Memorial  
 Archive the 'Motherland' Association (Obshchestvo 'Rodina')

### Fieldwork

Interviews with 12 former division soldiers and 12 former Ostarbeiterinnen  
 Participant Observation at the annual commemoration service in Lommel, 2005  
 Participant Observation in SSG (The Association for Soviet Citizens) for six months, 2006-2007  
 Formal and informal talks with various informants over the past four years. In this dissertation I only explicitly refer to:

Telephone call with Wim Verkammen, the former city secretary of Lommel, on 20.4.2006  
 Talk with the current President of the BVPO, Władysław Styrańka on 28.11.2005  
 P 35: Interview with Mykola Kohut on 15.09.2005

## Periodicals

### Articles in Belgian newspapers

*Belgian Monitor* (Belgisch Staatsblad) 17.12.1932, 20.1.1945 annex 90, 9.3.1946 nr 592, 31.10.1953 nr 2856, 17.1.1963 nr 275, 29.7.1976, 11.8.1983, 12.7.1984, 25.3.1995, 31.12.2002  
*De Nieuwe Gazet* 19.3.1981  
*Gazet van Antwerpen* 11.9.1945  
*Gazet van Zurenborg* 2 (3.2006), 3 (7-8.2006)  
*Het Nieuwsblad* 1.9.2004  
*Het Strijdersblad* 20.12.1978 (Archive BVPO)  
*Het Volk* 13-14.9.1980, 24.5.1982, 4.12.2004  
*Het vrije waasland* 3.4.1981 (Archive BVPO)  
*Kerk en Leven* 17.1.1985

### Organisational periodicals edited in Belgium

#### On former Allied soldiers from Poland

The Benelux Circle: *Bulletin* (1964-2005, a regular quarterly), Ijskelderstraat 26, Ghent

The Belgian-Polish Friendship Association: *Polen van heden, Tijdschrift van de Belgisch-Poolse vriendschap* (1954 – 1959, six times a year, published irregularly), Belgian National Library

The BVPO:

*Buletijn* (1976-1989, a regular quarterly)  
*Komunikat* BVPO (1995-2004, a regular quarterly)  
*Komunikat* Verbond van Poolse Oud-strijders en Veteranen van de 1<sup>ste</sup> Poolse Pantserdivisie van Generaal Maczek in België / Związek Polskich Kombatantów i Weteranów 1 Dywizji Panczernej Generała Maczka w Belgii vzw (2005-..., a regular quarterly), Scheidreef 15, Kapellen

The SPK:

*Komunikat Informacyjny* (1 3.1960 – 1987, an irregular weekly)

*Wolne Słowo*, Informator Polskich Organizacji Niepodległościowych w Belgii, Périodique des Polonais Libres, Tijdschrift van Vrije Polen (1988-..., a regular monthly), Biblioteka i Dom Polski, Rue Armand Campenhout 72, bte 7, Brussels

A periodical edited by newly arrived 'Polish' immigrants: *Novum. Bezpłatny miesięcznik polonijny* (2005-..., a regular monthly), retrieved from [www.novumpolonia.net](http://www.novumpolonia.net) on 31.12.2006

#### On former Ostarbeiterinnen

Eastern Ecumenical Centre Brussels: *Tijdingen van het Tehuis voor oostkristenen* (1956-1990, a regular monthly), Archive KADOC

The Association for Soviet Patriots/Citizens: *Sovetskii Patriot. Organ Tsentral'nogo pravleniia soiuz sovetskikh grazhdan v Bel'gii. Le Patriote Soviétique. Revue Bimensuelle de l'Union des citoyens soviétiques en Belgique:*

3/12-13 (11.1947), Russian National Library  
 19/13 (367) (1964), 23/453 (6.1968), 26/516 (4.1971), 26/517 (5.1971), 26/518 (6.1971), 26/521 (9.1971), 26/522 (12.1971), 27/523 (1.1972), 27/530 (10.1972), 27/532 (12.1972).19/13 (367) (1964) 16; 26/516 (4.1971) 21-22; 26/521 (9.1971) 24-25, a regular monthly, Hospitaalstraat 3, Ghent

*Patriot. Organ Tsentral'nogo pravleniia soiuzs sovetskikh grazhdan v Bel'gii. Le Patriote. Revue mensuelle de L'Union des citoyens soviétiques en Belgique* (35/619 (12.1980), 36/619-620 (1-2.1981), 36/628-629 (9-10.1981), 36/626-627 (7-8.1981), 36/630 (11.1981), 37/637-638 (7-8.1982), 38/643 (3.1983), 38/644 (4.1983), 39/651-652 (3-4.1984), 39/656 (6.1984), 39/650 (10.1984), 40/663 (3.1985), 40/670 (10.1985), Hospitaalstraat 3, Ghent

The Belgian-Soviet Friendship Association: *Belgique URSS Magazine/ België URSS Magazine*, an incomplete collection of this monthly from 1978 to 1987 can be consulted at Hospitaalstraat 3, Ghent

*De Sovjet-Unie. Wekelijksch Orgaan der Belgisch-Sovjetische Vereeniging* (1944-1946, a regular monthly), Belgian National Library

### **Organisational periodicals edited in exile**

*Dziennik Polski Londyn* (30.7.1968), Archive SPK

*Kombatant Polski w Beneluxie. Organ Stowarzyszeń Polskich Kombatantów w Belgii i Holandii* (1964-1968, a regular monthly), edited in Breda (The Netherlands), Biblioteka i Dom Polski, Rue Armand Campenhout 72, bte 7, Brussels

*Narodowiec. Quotidien démocrate pour la défense des intérêts sociaux et culturels de l'immigration polonaise* (1947-1989), edited in Lens (France), Belgian National Library

*Tygodnik Polski* (1957-1976, a regular weekly), edited in Paris (France), Polish National Library

### **Organisational periodicals edited in the Polish People's Republic**

The 'Communist' Polonia Society: *Nasza Ojczyzna* (1956-1978, a regular monthly), Polish National Library

*Panorama Polska* (1978-1990, a regular monthly). This periodical merged *Nasza Ojczyzna* and *Tygodnik Polski*, Polish National Library

### **Periodicals edited in the Soviet Union and in the Russian Federation**

An article in a Russian newspaper: "Sovetskie Bel'giiki. Pis'mo iz Briussela" in *Sovetskaia Rossiia..Otechestvennyĭ zapiski*, vol. 93, no. 4.3.2006, pp. 10-13.

An article in a Ukrainian newspaper: *Kremenchuts'ka zoria* 95/13855 (9.8.1988) 3.

The 'Motherland' Association:

*Za Vozvrashchenie na Rodinu!* (1955-1959, a regular weekly)

*Golos Rodiny* (1960-1995, a regular weekly, renewed in 2007, a regular monthly), Archive the 'Motherland' Association

### **Books and articles**

Abbott, H. P. 2002, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Acton, E. ed., Cherniaev, V. Iu. ed., & Rosenberg, W. G. ed. 2001, *Critical Companion to the Russian revolution 1914-1921*, 2 edn, Arnold, London.

Adamushko B.I., Bogdan M.I., & Gerasimov V.Ia.(eds.) 1996, *Belorusskie ostarbaŭtery. Ugon naseleniia Belarusi na prinuditel'nye raboty v Germaniiu. Dokumenty i materialy*, Komitet po archivam i deloproizvodstvu Republiki Belarus, Minsk.

Aldrich, H. 1999, *Organizations Evolving*, SAGE Publications, London.

Alexander, J. 2004, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma" in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, J. Alexander, ed., University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 1-30.

- Alpern Engel, B. 1998, "Women Remember World War II" in *Russia at a Crossroads. History, Memory and Political Practice*, N. Schleifman, ed., Frank Class, London, pp. 125-146.
- Alymov, S. Ja. 1966, "Iz istorii pesen 'Po dolinam i po vzgoriam'", *Molodëzhnaia Èстрада*, vol. 4, pp. 135-142.
- Andriianov, V. & Kuznetsov, A. 2005, *Pesni voïny i pobedy*, Izdatel'skiï dom 'Tribuna', Moscow.
- Anonymous (Praca Zbiorowa) 1947, *I. Dywizja Pancerna w walce*, La Colonne, Brussels.
- Anonymous 1953, *Ukrains'ka narodna poeziia pro Velyku Vitchyznianu Viïnu*, Kiev.
- Anonymous, 1983, *Polegli na polu chwały. Killed in action. I. Polska Dywizja Pancerna. 1st Polish Armoured Division* General Maczekmuseum, Breda.
- Asher, H. 2003, "The Soviet Union, the Holocaust, and Auschwitz", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 882-912.
- Ashplant, T. G., Dawson G., & Roper M. 2000, "The politics of war memory and commemoration. Contexts, structures and dynamics" in *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, T. G. Ashplant, Dawson Graham, & Michael Roper, eds., Routledge, London and New York, pp. 3-85.
- Assman, J. & Czaplicka, J. 1995, "Collective memory and cultural identity", *New German Critique*, vol. 65, pp. 125-133.
- Assmann, A. 1999, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, C.H. Beck, München.
- Assmann, A. 2006, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, C.H. Beck, München.
- Assmann, J. 1992, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, C.H. Beck, München.
- Augé, M. 1998, *Les formes de l'oubli*, Payot & Rivages, Paris.
- Augustine-Adams, K. 2006, "Constructing Mexico: Marriage, Law and Women's Dependent Citizenship in the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries", *Gender & History*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 20-34.
- Bade, K. J. & Brown, A. 2003, *Migration in European History*, Blackwell, Malden.
- Bade, K. J., Emmer, P. C., Lucassen, L., & Oltmer, J. 2007, *Enzyklopädie Migration in Europa: vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Schöningh, Paderborn.
- Bagdasarian, V. E. a. o. 2007, *Sovetskoe Zazerkal'e. Innostrannyï turizm v SSSR v 1930-1980 - e godu* Forum, Moscow.
- Baily, J. & Collyer, M. 2006, "Introduction: Music and Migration", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 167-182.
- Ballinger, P. 2002, *History in Exile. Memory and Identity at the borders of the Balkans* Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.
- Barash, A. 2008, "Analyzing Collective Memory," in *On Memory. An Interdisciplinary Approach*, D. Mendels, ed., Peter Lang, Oxford, pp. 100-116.
- Barth, F. 1969, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the Social Organisation of Culture Difference*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø.

- Bartlett, J. C. & Snelus, P. 1980, "Lifespan Memory for Popular Songs", *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 93, no. 3, pp. 551-560.
- Beijk, L., van Lopik-de Vet, E., Dolman, A., & Verzijden, J. 2004, *Uit Heimwee Geboren. 35 jaar Kalinka Russisch-Oekraïens Zang- en Dansensemble Kalinka*, Rotterdam.
- Bergson, H. 1911, *Matter and Memory*, George Allen and Unwin, London.
- Bernard-Donals, M. 2001, "Beyond the Question of Authenticity: Witness and Testimony in the Fragments Controversy", *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, vol. 116, no. 5, pp. 1302-1315.
- Bertaux-Wiame, I. 1979, "The Life History Approach to the Study of Internal Migration", *Oral History*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 26-32.
- Beyen, M., De Wever, B., Hellemans, H., Lagrou, P., Saerens, L., Somers, E., van den Berghe, G., & Van Doorslaer, R. "Een museum met een breed perspectief", *De Standaard*, 13.12.2005.
- Beyers, L. & Venken, M. 2006, "Geschiedenis van integratie? Een historische kijk op vestigingsprocessen na migratie", *Mededelingenblad van de Belgische Vereniging voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, vol. XXVIII (December 2006), no. 4, pp. 13-20.
- Beyers, L. 2007a, "Unfolding Urban Memories and Ethnic Identities: Narratives of Ethnic Diversity in the Limburg Mining Towns, Belgium," in *Testimonies of the City. Identity, Community and Change in a Contemporary Urban World*, J. Herbert & R. Rodger, eds., Ashgate Press, Aldershot, pp. 119-138.
- Beyers, L. 2007b, *Iedereen zwart : het samenleven van nieuwkomers en gevestigden in de mijncité Zwartberg, 1930 – 1990*, Aksant, Amsterdam.
- Beyers, L. 2008, "From Class to Culture: Immigration, Recession, and Daily Ethnic Boundaries in Belgium, 1940s–1990s", *International Review of Social History*, vol. 53, pp. 37-61.
- Bezemer, J. W. 1994, *Van Rurik tot Gorbatsjov. Een geschiedenis van Rusland*, 4 edn, Uitgeverij G.A. van Oorschot, Amsterdam.
- Biller, J. 2001, "Die Repatriierung und das Leben in der Sowjetunion" in *Häftlinge aus der USSR in Bergen-Belsen. Dokumentation der Erinnerungen. 'Ostarbeiterinnen' und 'Ostarbeiter', Kriegsgefangene, Partisanen, Kinder und zwei Minsker Jüdinnen in einem deutschen KZ*, H.-H. Nolte, ed., Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, pp. 205-225.
- Bingen, D., Borodziej, W., & Troebst, S. 2003, *Vertreibungen europäisch erinnern? Historische Erfahrungen - Erinnerungspolitik – Zukunftskonzeptionen*, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden.
- Blommaert, J. 2006, "Applied ethnopoetics", *Narrative Inquiry*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 181-190.
- Bock, G. 1986, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus. Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik*, Westdeutscher Verlag, Wiesbaden.
- Boll, F. & Kruke, A. 2008, *Forced Migration in 20th Century Europe. Remembrance Culture on the Road to Europeanization*, retrieved from <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/netzquelle/03542-einleitung-en.pdf> on 22.10.2008.
- Boni, A. 1945, *Pioniers in Canada: de Belgische Rhedemptoristen in de provincies Québec, Manitoba en Saskatchewan*, De Kinkhoren, Bruges.
- Borisova, A. G. 1990, *Vspomnim dni pochodnogo privala. Fol'klor perioda Velikoï Otechestvennoï voïny* Mordovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, Saransk.
- Brettell, C. B. & Hollifield, J. F. 2000, "Introduction," in *Migration Theory. Talking across Disciplines*, C. B. Brettell & J. F. Hollifield, eds., Routledge, New York, pp. 1-25.

- Brodecki, B., Wawer, Z., & Kondracki, T. 2005, *Polacy na frontach II Wojny Światowej. The Poles on the Battlefields of the Second World War* Bellona, Warsaw.
- Brubaker, R. 2004, *Ethnicity without Groups*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London (England).
- Buckley, M. 1989, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo.
- Burke, P. 2005, "Performing History: The Importance of Occasions", *Rethinking History*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 35-52.
- Burrell, K. 2004, "Homeland memories and the Polish Community in Leicester," in *The Poles in Britain 1940 - 2000. From Betrayal to Assimilation*, P. D. Stachura, ed., Portland Or. Frank Cass, London, pp. 69-85.
- Caestecker, F. 1991, "Le multiculturalisme de la Belgique. Une analyse de la politique de scolarisation des enfants polonais en Belgique 1923-1940", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis / Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, vol. 21, no. 3-4, pp. 535-573.
- Caestecker, F. 1992, *Vluchtelingenbeleid in de naoorlogse periode* VUB Press, Brussels.
- Caestecker, F. 2000, *Alien Policy in Belgium, 1840-1940. The Creation of Guest workers, Refugees and Illegal Aliens* Berghahn, New York-Oxford.
- Caestecker, F. & Rea, A. 2001, "De Belgische nationaliteitswetgeving in de twintigste eeuw. Een terugkeer naar de zelfbewuste natie of het koesteren van het wantrouwen?," in *Naar de Belgische nationaliteit. Een jaar toepassing van het nieuwe wetboek van de Belgische nationaliteit (wet van 1 maart 2000) / Devenir belge. Un an d'application du nouveau code de la nationalité belge (loi du 1 mars 2000)*, M.-C. Foblets, R. Foqué, & M. Verwilghen, eds., Brussels-Antwerp, pp. 69-118.
- Caestecker, F. 2003, "Historiografie van de migratie, mainstream geschiedschrijving of onderzoek in de marge?," *Mededelingenblad van de Belgische Vereniging voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, vol. 25, pp. 13-20.
- Caestecker, F. 2007, "'Displaced Persons' (DPs) in Europa seit dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs," in *Enzyklopädie Migration in Europa : vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, K. J. Bade et al., eds., Schöningh, Paderborn, pp. 529-535.
- Calavita, K. 2006, "Gender, Migration, and Law: Crossing Borders and Bridging Discipline", *International Migration Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 104-132.
- Canning, K. & Rose, S. O. 2001, "Gender, Citizenship and Subjectivity: Some Historical and Theoretical Considerations", *Gender & History*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 427-443.
- Carlson, M. 2002, "What is performance?," in *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, M. Huxley & N. Wetts, eds., Routledge, London, pp. 10-17.
- Cenckiewicz, S. 2004a, *Oczami Bezpieki. Szkice i materiały z dziejów aparatu bezpieczeństwa PRL* Arcana, Kraków.
- Cenckiewicz, S. 2004b, "Geneza, działalność i udział rozgłośni 'Kraj' w akcji remigracyjnej (1955-1957). Przyczynek do studiów nad polityk władz PRL wobec emigracji i Polonii", *Niepodległość. Czasopismo poświęcone najnowszym dziejom Polski*, vol. 53-54, no. 1, pp. 114-228.
- Cenckiewicz, S. 2005, "Udział aparatu bezpieczeństwa PRL w drugiej kampanii remigracyjnej (1955-1957)," in *Aparat Bezpieczeństwa wobec emigracji politycznej i Polonii*, R. Terlecki, ed., Institute of National Remembrance, Warsaw, pp. 241-283.
- Ceyssens, L. W. 1945, *Louis Vangansewinkel [1892-1968], Rhedemptorist van Linde-Peer Missionaris onder de Oekraïners* Heemkundige Kring Peer, Peer.

- Closset, C.-L. 1970, *Traité pratique de la nationalité belge* Bruylant, Brussels.
- Cohen, G. D. 2006, "Remembering Post-War Displaced Persons. From Omission to Resurrection," in *Enlarging European Memory. Migration Movements in historical perspective*, M. König and R. Ohliger, eds., Jan Thorbecke Verlag, Ostfildern, pp. 87-97.
- Cohen, R. 1997, *Global Diasporas*, UCL Press, London.
- Connerton, P. 1989, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Coplan, D. B. 2006, "'I've Worked Longer Than I've Lived': Lesotho Migrants' Songs as Maps of Experience", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 223-241.
- Corijn, E. 2002, "Met welk verleden wil Vlaanderen de toekomst tegemoet?," in *Collaboratie in Vlaanderen. Vergeten en vergeven?*, E. Corijn, ed., Manteau, Antwerpen, pp. 11-28.
- Coudenys, W. 2000, "Een wegbereider van de Belgo-Sovjetrelaties: de Cercle des Relations Intellectuelles Belgo-russes (1921-1926-1931-1939)," in *Rusland - België 1900- 2000. Honderd jaar liefde - haat. Feestbundel aangeboden aan Prof. em. Hugo Benoy bij zijn zeventigste verjaardag. (ill. Vladimir Nenasjev).*, E. Waegemans, ed., Benerus, Antwerpen, pp. 101-118.
- Coudenys, W. 2004, *Leven voor de Tsaar. Russische ballingen, samenzweerdere en collaborateurs in België* Davidsfonds, Leuven.
- Coudry, G. 1995a, "Le regroupement des ressortissants soviétiques en France à la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale: l'accord de Moscou du 29 juin 1945", *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, vol. 45, pp. 105-131.
- Coudry, G. 1995b, "Le rapatriement des ressortissants soviétiques de 1945 à 1947, avatars de la réciprocité", *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, vol. 45, pp. 119-140.
- Creighton, C. 1996, "The Rise of the Male Breadwinner Family: A Reappraisal", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 310-337.
- Culbertson, R. 1995, "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self", *New Literary History*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 169-195.
- Daniël', A. Iu., Eremina, L. S., & Zhemkov E.B 1998, *Preodolenie rabstva. Fol'klor i iazyk Ostarbaïterov 1942 - 1944 Zven'ia*, Moscow.
- Davies, N. 1986, *God's Playground: a History of Poland* Clarendon, Oxford.
- de Hart, B. 2003, *Onbezonnen vrouwen. Gemengde relaties in het nationaliteitsrecht en het vreemdelingenrecht* Aksant, Amsterdam.
- de Hart, B. 2006, "The Morality of Maria Toet. Gender, Citizenship and the Construction of the Nation-state", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 49-68.
- De Wever, B. 2002, "Goede Belgen, Foute Vlamingen, Grijs Nederlanders," in *Collaboratie in Vlaanderen. Vergeten en vergeven?*, E. Corijn, ed., Manteau, Antwerpen, pp. 51-62.
- Deneckere, G. 2002, "De verantwoordelijkheid om niet te vergeten en de ethiek van de historicus," in *Collaboratie in Vlaanderen. Vergeten en vergeven?*, E. Corijn, ed., Manteau, Antwerpen, pp. 187-194.
- Diamond, H. 1999, *Women and the Second World War in France 1939-1948. Choices and Constraints* Pearson Education, Harlow.
- Diederichs, M. 2006, *Wie geschoren wordt moet stilzitten. De omgang van Nederlandse meisjes met Duitse militairen* Boom, Amsterdam.

- Diner, D. 2007, "From Society to Memory: Reflections on a Paradigm Shift," in *On Memory. An Interdisciplinary Approach*, D. Mendels, ed., Peter Lang, Oxford, pp. 149-163.
- Diner, H. 2000, "History and the Study of Immigration: Narratives of the Particular," in *Migration Theory. Talking across disciplines*, C. Bretell, ed., Routledge, New York and London, pp. 27-42.
- Dirks Herbert (ed.) 2000, *Ugnali v Germaniiu! Byvshie maloletnie usniki kontslageria Hoiendamme iz Sovetskogo Soiuza vspominaiut* Temmen, Bremen.
- Dokter, D. ed. 1998, *Arts Therapists, Refugees and Migrants. Reaching Across Borders*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.
- Dopierała, K. 2003, *Encyklopedia Polskiej Emigracji i Polonii*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Kucharski, Toruń.
- Duchen, C. and Bandhauer-Schöffmann, I. 2000, "Introduction" in *When the War was Over: Women, War and Peace in Europe, 1940-1956*, C. Duchon and I. Bandhauer-Schöffmann, ed., Leicester University Press, London, pp. 1-12.
- Dumoulin, M. & Goddeeris, I. eds. 2005, *Intégration ou représentation? Les exiles polonaise en Belgique et la construction européenne. Integration or representation? Polish exiles in Belgium and the European construction*. Bruylant-Academia s.a., Louvain-la-Neuve.
- Eder, W. 1983, *Dzieje Polonii Belgijskiej 1919-80 (w zarysie)*, Epoka, Warsaw.
- Erdmans, M. P. 1998, *Opposite Poles. Immigrants and Ethnic in Polish Chicago, 1976-1990*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania, University Park.
- Erikson, K. 1994, *A New Species of Trouble: Explorations in Disaster, Trauma, and Community* Norton, New York.
- Feld, S. 1996, "Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea," in *Senses of Place*, S. Feld & K. H. Basso, eds., School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, New Mexico, pp. 91-135.
- Figes, O. 2007, *Fluisteraars. Leven onder Stalin*. Nieuw Amsterdam Uitgevers - Standaard Uitgeverij, Amsterdam-Antwerp.
- Finkelstein, N. 2000, *De Holocaust-industrie. Bespiegelingen over de exploitatie van het joodse lijden*, Mets en Schilt, Globe, Amsterdam and Ghent.
- Flam, G. 1992, *Singing for Survival. Songs of the Lodz Ghetto, 1940-45*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.
- Foner, N. 2000, *From Ellis Island to JFK. New York's Two Great Waves of Immigrant*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.
- Frankenberger, T. 1997, *Wir waren wie Vieh. Lebensgeschichtliche Erinnerungen ehemaliger sowjetischer Zwangarbeiterinnen*, Westfälisches Dampfboot, Münster.
- Friedman, J. 1998, "Transnationalization, Socio-political Disorder, and Ethnification as Expressions of Declining Global Hegemony", *International Political Science Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 233-250.
- Frizke, A. 1999, *Życie polityczne emigracji*, Wydawnictwo Więzi, Warsaw.
- Fürst, J. 2004, "A final reply", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 56, no. 2, p. 314.
- Gedi, N. & Elam, Y. 1996, "Collective Memory – what is it?", *History and Memory*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 30-50.
- Gerlach, C. 1998, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrussland 1941 bis 1944*, Hamburger Edition, Hamburg.

- Ginsburgs, G. 1983, *The citizenship law of the USSR* Nijhof, The Hague.
- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. 1967, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Strategies for Qualitative Research. Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago.
- Glaser, B. G., Strauss, A. L., & others 2007, *Grounded Theory Reader*, ZHSF, Cologne.
- Goddeeris, I. 2001, *De verleiding van de legitimiteit. Poolse exilpolitiek in België, 1830-1870 en 1945-1980*, Unpublished Dissertation at the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven).
- Goddeeris, I. 2003, "Exilpolitiek of identiteitsvorming? Manifestatie van Poolse ballingen in België, 1950-1980", *Tijdschrift voor sociale geschiedenis*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 281-300.
- Goddeeris, I. 2005a, *De Poolse migratie in België 1945-1950. Politieke mobilisatie en sociale differentiatie*. Aksant, Amsterdam.
- Goddeeris, I. 2005b, "Stefan Glaser. Collaborator in European umbrella organizations," in *Intégration ou représentation? Les exilés polonaises en Belgique et la construction européenne. Integration or representation? Polish exiles in Belgium and the European construction.*, M. Dumoulin & I. Goddeeris, eds., Bruylant-Academia s.a., Louvain-la-Neuve, pp. 79-98.
- Grinchenko, G. 2004, *Nevygadane. Usni istorii ostarbaïteriv* Instytut Istorii Ukraïny Natsional'noï Akademii Nauk Ukraïny, Kharkiv.
- Grinchenko, G. 2008a, "Ehemalige 'Ostarbeiter' berichten. Erste Auswertungen eines Oral-History-Projektes aus der Ostukraine," in *Hitlers Sklaven. Lebensgeschichtliche Analysen zur Zwangarbeit im internationalen Vergleich*, A. Von Plato, A. Leh, & C. Thonfeld, eds., Böhlau Verlag, Wien, Köln, Weimar, pp. 230-240.
- Grinchenko, G. 2008b, Ukrainian Ostarbeiters of the Third Reich: Remembering Patterns on Forced Labour in Nazi Germany (Past Soviet vs Contemporary National Discourses) - speech on the Seventh European Social Science History Conference in Lisbon on Friday 29 February 2008.
- Grinchenko, G. 2008c, "Oral Histories of Former Ukrainian 'Ostarbeiter'. Preliminary Results of Analysis," in *Hitler's Sklaven*, A. e. a. Von Plato, ed., Vienna, pp. 194-203.
- Grinchenko, G. 2009, *Ukraïns'ki ostarbaïtery u natsysts'kiï Nimechchyni: kolektivna pam'iat' ta individual'ni interpretatsii primusovogo dosvidu*, Kharkiv.
- Gross, J. T. 2003, *Neighbours: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Grossmann, A. 1986, "Fremd- und Zwangarbeiter in Bayern 1939-1945", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 34, pp. 481-521.
- Grynblat, M. Ia. 1972, *Belaruskaia Ėtnografiia Fal'klarystyka (1945-1970)* Minsk.
- Halbwachs, M. & Elchardus, M. 1991, *Het collectief geheugen* Acco, Leuven.
- Hansen, R. & Weil, P. 2001, "Introduction: Citizenship, Immigration and Nationality: Towards a Convergence in Europe?" in *Towards a European Nationality: Citizenship, Immigration and Nationality Law in the EU*, R. Hansen & P. Weil, eds., Palgrave, London.
- Harms, I. 1986, "Russische Vrouwen in Nederland. Portret van de verloren dochters van vader Stalin", *Vrij Nederland* no. 1.3., pp. 2-36.
- Hass, M. 2004. The Politics of Memory in Germany, Israel and the United States of America. Working Paper series 9, The Canadian Center for German and European Studies, Montreal.
- Havlikova, J. & Vondryskova, L. 2004, *Bestimmungsort: Saarland. Tschechische Zwangarbeiter erinnern sich*, Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft Lebendige Erinnerung, Prague.

- Herzog, D. 2005, "Sexuality, Memory, Morality", *History & Memory*, vol. 17, no. 1/2, pp. 238-266.
- Hirsch, M. 1997, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), London.
- Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T. 2005, *The Invention of Tradition*, 13 edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Hoerder, D. 1998, "Cultural retention or assimilation?," in *Ethnicity. Culture. City. Polish-Americans in the USA. Cultural Aspects of Urban Life, 1870-1950 in Comparative Perspective*, T. Gladsky, A. Walaszek, & M. M. Wawrzykiewicz, eds., Oficyna Naukowa, Polska Akademia Nauk, Komitet Badania Polonii, Warsaw, pp. 29-49.
- Hoerder, D. 2002, *Cultures in contact: world migrations in the second millennium*, Duke University Press, Durham.
- Hoffmann, K. 2001, "Schichten der Erinnerung, Zwangarbeitererfahrungen und Oral History" in *Zwangsarbeit in Deutschland 1939-1945. Archiv- und Sammlungsgut, Topographie und Erschließungsstrategien*, W. Reininghaus & N. Reimann, eds., Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, Bielefeld, pp. 62-75.
- Hondius, D. 2001, *Gemengde huwelijken, gemengde gevoelens :hoe Nederland omgaat met etnisch en religieus verschil*, 2nd edn, Sdu., Den Haag.
- Hosking, G. 2002, "The Second World War and Russian National Consciousness", *Past & Present*, vol. 175, no. 1, pp. 162-187.
- Houthaeve, R. 1990, *De gekruisigde Kerk van de Oekraïne en het offer van Vlaamse missionarissen*, Hochepeid, Moorslede.
- Huwel, R. 2000, "Prof. em. Hugo Benoy: een portret" in *Rusland - België 1900- 2000. Honderd jaar liefde - haat. Feestbundel aangeboden aan Prof. em. Hugo Benoy bij zijn zeventigste verjaardag*, E. Wegemans, ed., Benerus, Antwerpen, pp. 13-42.
- Huyse, L. & Dhondt, S. 1994, *Onverwerkt verleden. Collaboratie en repressie in België 1942-1952*, Kritak, Leuven.
- Imre, A. 2006, "Play in the Ghetto. Global Entertainment and the European 'Roma Problem'", *Third Text*, vol. 20, no. 6, pp. 659-670.
- Iwanowski, W. 1979, "Poles and the liberation of Belgium (September 1944)", *Polish Perspectives*, vol. 22, no. 11, pp. 43-46.
- Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, A. D. 2004, *The Exile Mission. The Polish Political Diaspora and Polish Americans, 1939-1956*, Ohio University Press, Athens.
- Järviluoma, H., Moisala, P., & Vilkkko, A. 2003, *Gender and Qualitative Methods*, Thousand Oaks and Sage Publications, London and New Delhi.
- Jenkins, R. 2002, *Pierre Bourdieu*, Routledge, London.
- Joppke, C. & Morawska, E. 2003, "Integrating Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States: Policies and Practices," in *Towards Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States*, C. Joppke & E. Morawska, eds., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp. 1-36.
- Jovchelovitch, S. & Bauer, M. W. 2000, "Narrative Interviewing" in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound. A Practical Handbook*, M. W. Bauer & G. Gaskell, eds., SAGE Publications, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, pp. 57-73.
- Judt, T. 2002, "The Past is another country: myth and memory in post-war Europe" in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe. Studies in the Presence of the Past*, J.-W. Müller, ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 157-183.

- Judt, T. 2006, *Na de Oorlog. Een geschiedenis van Europa sinds 1945* Contact, Amsterdam/Antwerp.
- Kajpus, C. & Van Dam, O. 1996, *Non omnis moriar. Het verhaal van Czeslaw Kajpus, officier bij de Eerste Poolse Pantserdivisie en de bevrijding van 1944* Kritak, Leuven.
- Karner, S. & Knat'ko, G. 2003, *Ostarbeiter. Weißrussische Zwangarbeiter in Österreich / Ostarbaŭtery. Prinuditel'nyĭ trud belorusskogo naseleniia v Avstrii*, Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Kriegsfolgen-Forschung, Belorusskii respublikanskiĭ fond 'Vzaïmoponimanie i primirenĭe', Graz-Minsk.
- Kępa, J. 2004, *Ocalić od zapomnienia, od zapomnienia, od zapomnienia. Materiały do dziejów Polonii belgijskiej*, Stowarzyszenie Wspólnota Polska, Warsaw.
- Kirdan, B. I. 1953, *O znachenii narodno-poèticheskogo tvorchestva v obshchestvennoĭ zhizni sovetskogo naroda v godu velikoĭ otechestvennoĭ voĭny* Institut Mirovoĭ literatury im. A.M. Gor'kogo AN SSSR, Moscow.
- Kirschenbaum, L. 2000, "'Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families': Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda", *Slavic Review*, vol. 59, no. 4, pp. 825-847.
- Kizilov, M. 1992, *Bol' korotkikh vstrech* Pressa, Moscow.
- Kohut, M. 1994, "Ukrainians in Belgium," in *Ukraine and Ukrainians throughout the World: A Demographic and Sociological Guide to the Homeland and Its Diaspora*, A. Lenczyk Pawliczko, ed., University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo, London, pp. 214-230.
- Kondracki, T. 1996, *Historia Stowarzyszenia Polskich Kombatantów w Wielkiej Brytanii (History of the Polish Ex-combatants Association in Great Britain 1946-1996)* Zarząd Główny Stowarzyszenia Polskich Kombatantów w Wielkiej Brytanii, London.
- Koopmans, R. & Statham, P. 2000, "Migration and ethnic relations as a field of political contention: an opportunity structure approach," in *Challenging immigration and ethnic relations politics: comparative European perspectives*, R. Koopmans & P. Statham, eds., Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 13-56.
- Koopmans, R. & Statham, P. 2003, "How national citizenship shapes transnationalism: a comparative analysis of migrant and minority claims-making in Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands," in *Towards Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States*, C. Joppke & E. Morawska, eds., Palgrave, London, pp. 195-238.
- Kozłowska, K. 1978, *Odzew na hasło 'żonkil'*, Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, Warsaw.
- König, M. & Ohliger, R. 2006, "Facing Migration History in Europe. Between Oblivion and Representation," in *Enlarging European Memory. Migration Movements in historical perspective*, M. König and R. Ohliger, eds., Jan Thorbecke Verlag, Ostfildern, pp. 11-19.
- Kraef, E. 2003, "Wir hatten uns alles etwas einfacher vorgestellt. Die Berliner Koordinierungsstelle für die Zwangarbeiterentschädigung," in *Zwangsarbeit in Berlin 1938-1945*, H. Bräutigam, D. Fürstenberg, & B. Roder, eds., Metropol, Berlin, pp. 321-326.
- Kuhn, A. 2002, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, Verso, London.
- Kuromiya, H. 2004, "Re-examining Opposition under Stalin: Further Thoughts", *Europe-Asia Studies* no. 2, pp. 309-314.
- LaCapra, D. 2001, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, London.
- Lagrou, P. 1997a, "Een oorlog achter de rug, een oorlog voor de boeg 1944-1965," in *Oost West West Best. België onder de Koude Oorlog (1947-1989)*, M. Van den Wijngaert & L. Beullens, eds., Lannoo, Tielt, pp. 125-136.

- Lagrou, P. 1997b, "Welk vaderland voor de vaderlandslievende verenigingen? Oorlogsslachtoffers en verzetsveteranen en de nationale kwestie, 1945-1958", *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis* no. 3, pp. 143-161.
- Lagrou, P. 2000, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation. Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Lencznarowicz, J. 1996, "Rola Towarzystwa Polonia w polityce PRL wobec Polonii w krajach zachodnich", *Przegląd Polonijny*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 43-60.
- Lencznarowicz, J. 2002, "Polityka PRL wobec Polonii w latach siedemdziesiątych XX wieku," in *W Służbie Polsce i Emigracji. Księga dedykowana Profesorowi Edwardowi Szczepankowi*, L. Nowak & M. Szczerbiński, eds., Instytut Kultury Fizycznej Poznańskiej, Gorzów, pp. 173-184.
- Lencznarowicz, J. 2007, "Zwycięski wódz i zdradziecki watażka. Postać Władysława Andersa w mitologii politycznej polskiej emigracji pojałtańskiej", *Przegląd Polonijny*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 5-40.
- Lenz, C. 2003, *Haushaltspflicht und Widerstand: Erzählungen norwegischer Frauen über die deutsche Besatzung 1940 - 1945 im Lichte nationaler Vergangenheitskonstruktionen*, Diskord, Tübingen.
- Levy, D. & Sznajder, N. 2007, *The Politics of Commemoration: The Holocaust, Memory and Trauma*. Retrieved from <http://www.sunysb.edu/sociology/faculty/Levy/> on 21.09.2008.
- Lipatov, V. 2006, *Soldat i pesnia: 300 let vmeste* Izdatel'stvo Gumanitarnogo Universiteta, Ekaterinburg.
- Lister, R. 1997, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Lucassen, L. & Lucassen, J. 1997, "Introduction," in *Migration, migration history, history. Old paradigms and new perspectives*, L. Lucassen & J. Lucassen, eds., Peter Lang, Bern, pp. 1-38.
- Lucassen, L. 2004, "Migrantenorganisaties vroeger en nu: een inleiding," in *Amsterdammer worden. Migranten, hun organisaties en inburgering, 1600-2000*, L. Lucassen, ed., Vossiuspers UvA, Amsterdam, pp. 9-22.
- Lucassen, L., Feldman, D., & Oltmer, J., eds. 2006, *Paths of Integration. Migrants in Western Europe (1880-2004)* Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam.
- Lukie, D. & Chernoff, R. 1982, *Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Ukrainian Rite Rhedemptorists, 1906-1981* Friesen Yearbooks, Winnipeg.
- Luyckx, L. 2005, *De gedwongen repatriëring van Sovjetburgers aan de vooravond van de Koude Oorlog (1944-1949)*, Unpublished Master thesis, University of Ghent, Ghent.
- Machcewicz, P. 1999, *Emigracja w polityce międzynarodowej*, Wydawnictwo Więzi, Warszawa.
- Maczek, S. 1990, *Od podwody do czołga*, Orbis Books Ltd. - Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, London-Lublin.
- Majka, J. 2005, *Generał Stanisław Maczek*, Wydawnictwo Libra, Rzeszów.
- Mak, G. 2001, "Seksueel vreemdelingenverkeer", *Gaan & Staan, Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis*, vol. 21, pp. 101-121.
- Marchal, J.-P. 1980, *De bevrijding van Gent* J. Verbeke, Ghent.
- Martens, A. 1976, *Les immigrés: flux et reflux d'une main-d'oeuvre d'appoint : la politique belge de l'immigration de 1945 à 1970* Presses universitaires de Louvain, Louvain.
- Mayring, P. 1983, *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Grundlagen und Techniken* Beltz, Basel.

- McDowell, L. 2004, "Cultural memory, gender and age: young Latvian women's narrative memories of war-time Europe, 1944–1947", *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 30, pp. 701-728.
- Meire, J. 2003, *De stilte van de Salient. De herinnering aan de Eerste Wereldoorlog rond Ieper* Lannoo, Tielt.
- Mel'ts, M. Ia. 1964, *Russkiĭ fol'klor Velikoĭ Otechestvennoĭ voĭny* Leningrad.
- Merksplas Oorlogsboek. 1984, Marcblas. Heemkundige Kring, Merksplas.
- Merridale, C. 2000, *Night of Stone. Death and Memory in Russia*, Granta Books, London.
- Merridale, C. 2003, "Redesigning History in Contemporary Russia", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 13-28.
- Merridale, C. 2007, *Ivans Oorlog. Leven en dood in het Rode Leger, 1939-1945*, Manteau, Nieuw Amsterdam.
- Mieczkowski, Z. 1989, *Pomniki Pierwszej Dywizji Panczernej. Monuments of the Polish Armoured Division*, Veritas Foundation, London.
- Mieczkowski, Z., with the collaboration of Wyganowski, S., & Zakowski, W. 2003, *Żołnierze Generała Maczka* Fundacja Upamiętnienia Pierwszej Polskiej Dywizji Panczernej Generała Stanisława Maczka. Foundation for the Commemoration of General Maczek First Polish Armoured Division, Warsaw - London.
- Mikolchak, M. 2007, *World War II: Collective Memory in Russia* Seventh Congress, Hiroshima, Japan November 08, 2007.
- Minkoff, D. 1995, *Organizing for equality: the evolution of women's and racial-ethnic organizations in America, 1955-1985* Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick.
- Mints, S. I., Grechina, O. N., & Dobrovol'skiĭ, B. M. 1964, "Massovoe Pesennoe Tvorchestvo," in *Russkiĭ Fol'klor Velikoĭ Otechestvennoĭ Voĭny*, V. E. Gusev, ed., Izdatel'stvo 'Nauka', Akademiia NAUK SSSR, Moscow-Leningrad, pp. 103-147.
- Mironets, N. I. 1988, *Revoliutsionnaia poëziia oktiabria i grazhdanskoĭ voĭny kak istoricheskiĭ istochnik* Izdatel'stvo pri Kievskom Gosudarstvennom Universitete Izdatel'skogo Ob'edineniia 'Vyshcha shkola', Kiev.
- Misztal, B. A. 2003, *Theories of social remembering*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, Berkshire, England, Philadelphia, PA.
- Moch, L. P. 1992, *Moving Europeans: migration in Western Europe since 1650*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Morawska, E. 1990, "The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration" in *Immigration Reconsidered. History, Sociology and Politics*, V. Yans-McLaughlin, ed., Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 187-240.
- Morelli, A. 1998, *Les émigrants belges : réfugiés de guerre, émigrés économiques, réfugiés religieux et émigrés politiques ayant quitté nos régions du XVIème siècle à nos jours* EVO, Brussel.
- Morelli, A. 2004, ed. *Histoire des étrangers et de l'immigration en Belgique* Couleur livres, Brussels.
- Moya, J. C. 2005, "Immigrants and Associations: A Global and Historical Perspective", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 31, no. 5, pp. 833-864.
- Müller, J.-W. 2002, "Introduction: the power of memory, the memory of power and the power over memory," in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe. Studies in the Presence of the Past*, J.-W. Müller, ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 1-35.
- Nettl, B. 2005, *The Study of Ethnomusicology. Thirty-one Issues and Concepts* University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.

- Nicolosi, A. M. 2001, "We Do Not Want Our Girls to Marry Foreigners: Gender, Race, and American Citizenship", *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 1-21.
- Niven, B. 2007, *The Buchenwald Child. Truth, Fiction and Propaganda* Camden House, Rochester, New York.
- Noakes, L. 2001, "Review: Gender, War and Memory: Discourse and Experience in History", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 36, no. 4.
- Nora, P. 1984-1997, *Les lieux de mémoire*, 1-7 edn, Gallimard, Paris.
- Nye, R. A. 2007, "Women, Work and Citizenship in France since 1789", *Gender & History*, vol. 19, pp. 186-191.
- Obens, H.-U. 2003, *Wir hatten viel Hunger. Fremdarbeiter Ostarbeiter Zwangsarbeiter. Die Standard-Metallwerke zu Werl und ihre ausländischen Arbeitskräfte im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, A. Stein'sche Buchhandlung, Werl.
- Olzak, S. & West, E. 1991, "Ethnic Conflicts and the Rise and Fall of Ethnic Newspapers", *American Sociological Review*, vol. 56, no. 4, pp. 458-474.
- Omtzigt, M. 1995, "Belastende bevrijding. Brabantse vrouwen en geallieerde militairen in het bevrijde Zuiden 1944-1945", *Klein Den Haag*, vol. 36, pp. 41-47.
- Orla-Bukowska, A. 2006, "New Threads on an Old Loom. National Memory and Social Identity in Post-war and Post-communist Poland" in *The Politics of Memory in Post-war Europe*, R. K. W. F. C. ed. Ned Lebow, ed., Duke University Press, Durham and London, pp. 177-209.
- Ostrowskaia, I. S. & Shcherbakova, I. L. 2007, "Opyt prinuditel'novo Truda v ustnykh svidetel'stvach byvshich ostarbaïterov." in *Ustnaia istoriia (Oral History): teoriia i praktika. Materialy vserossiïskovo nauchnovo seminaria (Barnaul, 25-26 sentiabria 2006 g.)*, Barnaul'skiï Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, Barnaul, pp. 75-83.
- Pateman, C. 1988, *The Sexual Contract*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California.
- Pauwels, J. R. 2004, *De Canadezen en de bevrijding van België 1944-1945* EPO, Berchem.
- Penninx, R. & Schrover, M. 2001, *Bastion of bindmiddel? Organisaties van immigranten in historisch perspectief* Instituut voor Migratie- en Etnische Studies, Amsterdam.
- Pinet, T. 1994, "L'action de la première division blindée polonaise vue par la population belge" in *La Première Division Blindée du Général Maczek dans le cadre de la libération de la Belgique en 1944. Programme Colloque Polono-Belge Zagan, 25 juin 1994*, Institut d'Histoire de l'Armée Polonaise et le Centre de Documentation Historique des Forces Armées Belges, ed., Zagan.
- Piper, N. 2006, "Gendering the Politics of Migration", *International Migration Review*, vol. 40, pp. 133-164.
- Polian, P. 2001, *Deportiert nach Hause. Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im 'Dritten Reich' und ihre Repatriierung*, R. Oldenbourg Verlag, München, Wien, Oldenbourg.
- Polian, P. 2002, *Zhertvy dvuch diktatur. Zhizn', trud, unizhenie i smert' sovetskikh voennoplennykh i ostarbaïterov na chuzhbine i na rodine*. Rosspeñ, Institut Geografii Rossiïskoi Akademii Nauk, Moscow.
- Portelli, A. 1998, "What Makes Oral History Different?" in *The Oral History Reader*, R. Perks & A. Thomson, eds., Routledge, London, pp. 63-74.
- Postma, F. H. 2003, *De repatriëring van Sovjetonderdanen uit Nederland 1944-1956. Mythe en Waarheid*, De Bataafsche Leeuw, Amsterdam.
- Pozhidaeva, G. 1970, *Muzyka na frontach Velikoï Otechestvennoï Voïny. Stat'i. Vospominaniia*. Izdatel'stvo 'Muzyka', Moscow.

- Pula, J. S. 1995, *Polish Americans. An Ethnic Community*, Prentice Hall International, New York.
- Radcliff, P. B. 2001, "Imagining Female Citizenship in the 'New Spain': Gendering the Democratic Transition, 1975-1978", *Gender & History*, vol. 13, pp. 498-523.
- Raskin, E. 2005, *Elisabeth van België. een ongewone koningin* Houtekiet, Antwerp.
- Reddeman, K. 2001, "'...Nach Deutschland'. Zwangarbeiter/innen aus Belarus/Weißrussland. Befragungen und Aktenbefunde" in *Zwangarbeit in Deutschland 1939-1945. Archiv- und Sammlungsgut, Topographie und Erschließungsstrategien*, W. Reininghaus & N. Reimann, eds., Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, Bielefeld, pp. 76-83.
- Reiter, R. 1993, *Tötungsstätten für ausländische Kinder im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Zum Spannungsverhältnis von kriegswirtschaftlichen Arbeitseinsatz und nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik in Niedersachsen*. Hahn, Hannover.
- Reyes Schramm, A. 1986, "Tradition in the guise of innovation: music among a refugee population" in *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, no. 18, pp. 91-101.
- Reyes, A. 1999, *Songs of the Caged, Songs of the Free*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
- Ringelheim, J. M. 1997, "Genocide and gender: a split memory" in *Gender and Catastrophe*, R. Lentin, ed., Zed Books, London, pp. 18-35.
- Ronin, V. 1982, Dorogie druz'ia iz Rossii, dobro pozhalovat' v Antverpen! Antwerp.
- Roodenburg, H. 2004, "Pierre Bourdieu. Issues of Embodiment and Authenticity", *Etnofoor*, vol. 17, no. 1-2, pp. 215-226.
- Rose, S. O. 1998, "Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in World War II Britain", *American Historical Review*, vol. 103, pp. 1147-1176.
- Rüsen, J. 2001, "Holocaust Memory and Identity Building: Metahistorical Considerations in the Case of (West) Germany" in *Disturbing remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century*, M. S. Roth & C.G. Salas, eds., Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, pp. 252-270.
- Sadie, S. & Tyrrell, J., eds., 2001, *The new Grove dictionary of music and musicians*, Macmillan, London.
- Schleifman, N. 2001, "Moscow's Victory Park. A Monumental Change", *History & Memory*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 5-34.
- Schönfeld, M. 2003, "Von der Abwesenheit der Opfer zu einer später Erinnerung. Denkmale für Zwangsarbeiterinnen und Zwangarbeiter in Berlin" in *Zwangarbeit in Berlin 1938-1945*, H. Bräutigam, D. Fürstenberg, & B. Roder, eds., Metropol, Berlin, pp. 281-308.
- Schrover, M. 2002, *Een kolonie van Duitsers. Groepsvorming onder Duitse immigranten in Utrecht in de negentiende eeuw*, Aksant, Amsterdam.
- Schrover, M. & Vermeulen, F. 2005, "Immigrant Organisations", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 31, no. 5, pp. 823-832.
- Schrover, M. 2006, "Whenever a dozen Germans meet . . ." German organisations in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 32, no. 5, pp. 847-864.
- Schütze, F. 1992, "Pressure and guilt: war experiences of a young German soldier and their biographical implications", *International Sociology*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 187-208.
- Schwarze, G. 1997, *Kinder, die nicht zählten. Ostarbeiterinnen und ihre Kinder* Klartext Verlag, Essen.

Schwegman, M. 1995, "Oorlogsgeschiedschrijving en seksueel geweld. Het probleem van de historisering van het vrouwelijke slachtofferschap", *Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis*, vol. 15, pp. 145-152.

Sherlock, T. 2007, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia. Destroying the Settled Past, Creating an Uncertain Future* Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Shilova, I. S. 2007, "Zhenshchina v voi(!)ne," in *Ustnaia istorija (Oral History): teoriia i praktika. Materialy vsrossiiskovo nauchnovo seminaria (Barnaul, 25-26 sentiabria 2006 g.)*, Barnaul'skiĭ Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, Barnaul, pp. 111-114.

Skibiński, F. 1958, *De deelname van de Polen aan de bevrijding van België - september 1944*, Belgisch-Poolse Vereniging, Brussels.

Smith, A. L. 2006, *Colonial memory and postcolonial Europe. Maltese settlers in Algeria and France*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

Smith, K. E. 1996, *Remembering Stalin's Victims. Popular Memory and the End of the USSR* Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London.

Stanczyk, H. 1994, "L'itinéraire de combat de la Première Division Blindée de Falaise jusqu'à Willemshaven. Juillet 1944-mai 1945" in *La Première Division Blindée du Général Maczek dans le cadre de la libération de la Belgique en 1944. Programme Colloque Polono-Belge Zagan, 25 juin 1994*, Institut d'Histoire de l'Armée Polonaise et le Centre de Documentation Historique des Forces Armées Belges, ed., Zagan.

Stanley, J. 2000, "Involuntary commemorations: post-traumatic stress disorder and its relationship to war commemoration" in *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, T. G. Ashplant, G. Dawson & M. Roper, eds., Routledge, London and New York, pp. 240-260.

Steiner, L. 2003, "Der lange Weg zur Anerkennung ehemaliger Zwangarbeiter als Opfer des Nationalsozialismus" in *Ostarbeiter. Weißrussische Zwangarbeiter in Österreich / Ostarbaĭtery. Prinuditel'nyĭ trud belorusskogo naseleniia v Avstrii*, G. Knat'ko & S. Karner, eds., Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Kriegsfolgen-Forschung, Belorusskiĭ respublikanskiĭ fond 'Vzaĭmoponimanie i primirenĭe', Graz-Minsk, pp. 325-329.

Stelzl-Marx, B. 2000, *Zwischen Fiktion und Zeitzeugenschaft. Amerikanische und sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Stalag XVII B Krems-Gneixendorf*, Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, Tübingen.

Stelzl-Marx, B. 2003, "Die Heimat wartet auf Euch... Zur politisch-agitatorischen Arbeit unter ehemaligen weißrussischen Zwangarbeitern" in *Ostarbeiter. Weißrussische Zwangarbeiter in Österreich / Ostarbaĭtery. Prinuditel'nyĭ trud belorusskogo naseleniia v Avstrii*, G. Knat'ko & S. Karner, eds., Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Kriegsfolgen-Forschung, Belorusskiĭ respublikanskiĭ fond 'Vzaĭmoponimanie i primirenĭe', Graz-Minsk, pp. 44-61.

Straub, J. 2002, "Personal and Collective Identity. A Conceptual Analysis," in *Identities. Time, Difference and Boundaries*, H. Friese, ed., Berghahn Books, New York, pp. 56-76.

Strzałkowski, W. 2001, *Grób Nieznanego Żołnierza*, Dom Wydawniczy Bellona, Warsaw.

Stychin, C. F. 2000, "A Stranger to Its Laws: Sovereign Bodies, Global Sexualities, and Transnational Citizens", *Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 27, pp. 601-625.

Stynen, A. 2005, *Een geheugen in fragmenten. Heilige plaatsen van de Vlaamse beweging* Lannoo, Tielt.

Suleiman, S. R. 2006, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England.

Sword, K. R. 1986, "Their Prospects Will Not Be Bright': British Responses to the Problem of the Polish 'Recalcitrants' 1946-49", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 367-390.

- Tavenier, R. 2005, "Russen in België na 1945" in *Russische beer en de Belgische leeuw: drie eeuwen Russische aanwezigheid in België*, E. Waegemans, ed., Davidsfonds, Leuven, pp. 129-147.
- Thomson, A. 1994, *Anzac memories: living with the legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, Vic.
- Thomson, A. 2006, "Anzac Stories: Using Personal Testimony in War History", *War & Society*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 1-21.
- Thonfeld, C. 2008a, "Ehemalige NS-Zwangsarbeiter als Einwanderer in England nach 1945" in *Hitlers Sklaven. Lebensgeschichtliche Analysen zur Zwangsarbeit im internationalen Vergleich*, A. Von Plato, A. Leh, & C. Thonfeld, eds., Böhlau Verlag, Wien, Köln, Weimar, pp. 298-310.
- Thonfeld, C. 2008b, "'Ein Moment der Freude... und schmerzvoll'. Heimkehr ehemaliger NS-Sklaven- und Zwangsarbeiter am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *Hitlers Sklaven. Lebensgeschichtliche Analysen zur Zwangsarbeit im internationalen Vergleich*, A. Von Plato, A. Leh, & C. Thonfeld, eds., Böhlau Verlag, Wien, Köln, Weimar, pp. 360-370.
- Tollebeek, Jo. 2002, "De conjunctuur van het historisch besef" In: *De horizonten van weten en kunnen. Lessen voor de eenentwintigste eeuw* B. Raeymaekers & G. van Riel, eds., Leuven, Davidsfonds, Universitaire Pers Leuven, pp. 167-193.
- Tumarkin, N. 1994, *The Living & The Dead. The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*, Basic Books, New York.
- Turkowski, R. 2001, *Parlamentaryzm polski na uchodźstwie 1945-1972*, Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warsaw.
- Ulrich, H. 1986, *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des "Ausländer-Einsatzes" in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches.*, 2 edn, Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf. GmbH, Berlin-Bonn.
- Ulrich, H. 1993, "Zwangsarbeiter in Der Deutschen Kriegswirtschaft 1939-1945. Ein Überblick" in *De Verplichte tewerkstelling in Duitsland. Le Travail Obligatoire en Allemagne, 1942-1945*, Navorsings- en Studiecentrum voor de Geschiedenis van de Tweede Wereldoorlog (CEGES-SOMA), Brussels, pp. 165-180.
- Ulrich, H. 2001, "Zwangsarbeit im 'Dritten Reich'. Kenntnisstand, offene Fragen, Forschungsprobleme" in *Zwangsarbeit in Deutschland 1939-1945. Archiv- und Sammlungsgut, Topographie und Erschließungsstrategien*, W. Reininghaus & N. Reimann, eds., Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, Bielefeld, pp. 16-37.
- Ustnaia istoriia (Oral History). 2006, *Ustnaia istoriia: teoriia i praktika. Materialy vserossiiskovo nauchnovo seminaria (Barnaul, 25-26 sentjabrja 2006 g.)* Barnaul'skiĭ Gosudarstvennyĭ Universitet, Barnaul.
- Van Alphen, J. ed. 1983, *Polegli na polu chwały. Killed in Action. 1. Polska Dywizja Pancerna. 1st Polish Armoured Division*, Generaal Maczekmuseum, Breda.
- Van den Wijngaert, M. & Beullens, L. ed. 1997, *Oost West West Best. België onder de Koude Oorlog (1947-1989)*, Lannoo, Tielt.
- Van den Wijngaert, M., Beullens, L., & Decat, F. 1997, "De Buitenlandse en Militaire politiek van België in een gebipolariseerde wereld" in *Oost West West Best. België onder de Koude Oorlog (1947-1989)*, M. Van den Wijngaert & L. Beullens, eds., Lannoo, Tielt, pp. 53-66.
- Van Houtte, J. 1947, *Burgerlijk wetboek. Officieele tekst*, 4 edn, Manteau, Brussels.
- Van Poucke, G. 1990, *La première division blindée polonaise en Belgique, septembre 1944*, Union des fraternelles de l'Armée secrète, Pygmalion, Brussels.
- Van Poucke, G. 1994, "L'aide apportée aux actions de la 1ère Division Blindée polonaise par la résistance belge" in *La Première Division Blindée du Général Maczek dans le cadre de la libération de la Belgique en 1944. Programme Colloque Polono-Belge Zagan, 25 juin 1994*, Institut d'Histoire de l'Armée Polonaise et le Centre de Documentation Historique des Forces Armées Belges, ed., Zagan.

- van Wageningen, C. & Żelichowski, R. 2006, "Akcja rekrutacyjna wśród polskich żołnierzy i dipisów do pracy w kopalniach holenderskich w latach 1945-1948", *Przegląd Polonijny*, vol. 32, no. 2 (120), pp. 1-34.
- Vassallo, H. 2008, "Embodied memory: war and the remembrance of wounds", *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 189-200.
- Venken, M. & Goddeeris, I. 2006, "The Nationalization of Identities: Ukrainians in Belgium, 1920-1950", *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 89-115.
- Venken, M. 2007a, "The Communist 'Polonia' Society and Polish Immigrants in Belgium, 1956-90", *Journal of Intercultural Studies. A forum on Social Change & Cultural Diversity*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 25-37.
- Venken, M. 2007b, "Konstrukcja i recepcja pamięci zbiorowej wśród polskich dywizjonistów w Belgii. Zimna wojna w praktyce", *Przegląd Polonijny*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 41-62.
- Venken, M. 2007c, "Constructie en receptie van het collectieve geheugen bij enkele gewezen divisiesoldaten in België. De Koude Oorlog in praktijken", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis / Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, vol. 37, no. 3-4, pp. 387-417.
- Venken, M. 2008, "Gemengd huwen, nationaliteit en de verschillen voor mannen en vrouwen. Poolse oudgedienden en Ostarbeiterinnen in België tijdens de Koude Oorlog", *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 23-48.
- Venken, M. 2009, "Polish Liberators and Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium During the Cold War: Mixed Marriages and the Differences for Immigrant Men and Women" in *Gender and Migration in global, historical and theoretical perspective*, M. Schrover and E. Yeo, eds., Routledge, London.
- Venken, M. 2009, "Singing meaning to war experiences" in *Migration et mémoire. Concepts et méthodes de recherche/ Migration und Erinnerung. Konzepte und Methoden der Forschung*, E. Boesen & F. Lentz, eds., LIT Verlag, Luxemburg, forthcoming.
- Venken, M. 2009, "Bodily Memory: bringing the Family in", *History of the Family. An International Quarterly*.
- Verbeeck, G. 2006, "Getouwtrek rond een 'Holocaustmuseum' in Vlaanderen", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, vol. 120, no. 2, pp. 233-238.
- Verbeke, R. V. a. o. 1984, *De Eerste Poolse Pantserdivisie en de bevrijding van Vlaanderen in september 1944*, Gelegenheidsbrochure Vlaamse Steden herdenking september 1984.
- Vermeersch, P. 2006, *The Romani movement: minority politics and ethnic mobilization in contemporary Central Europe*, Berghahn, New York.
- Vermeulen, F. 2005, *The Immigrant Organising Process. The emergence and persistence of Turkish immigrant organisations in Amsterdam and Berlin and Surinamese organisations in Amsterdam, 1960-2000*, Doctoral thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Amsterdam.
- Vertovec, S. 1999, "Minority associations, networks and public policies: re-assessing relationships", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 21-42.
- Verwilghen, M. 1985, *Le code de la nationalité belge*, Bruylant, Brussels.
- Vinnikov, V. V. 1969, *Muzyka Vano Muradeli*, Moscow.
- Von Plato, A., Leh, A., & Thonfeld, C. 2008, *Hitlers Sklaven. Lebensgeschichtliche Analysen zur Zwangarbeit im internationalen Vergleich* Böhlau Verlag, Wien, Köln, Weimar.
- Vos, L. d. a. o. 1994, *De bevrijding. Van Normandië tot de Ardennen*, Davidsfonds, Leuven.
- Vögel, B. 1999, *Entbindungsheim für Ostarbeiterinnen. Braunschweig, Broitzemer Strasse 200*, Inter-Abobetreuungs-GmbH, Hamburg.

Waegemans, E. 2000, *Rusland - België 1900- 2000. Honderd jaar liefde - haat. Feestbundel aangeboden aan Prof. em. Hugo Benoy bij zijn zeventigste verjaardag* Benerus, Antwerp.

Waldinger, R. & Fitzgerald, D. 2004, "Transnationalism in Question", *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 109, no. 5, pp. 1177-1195.

Wawrzyniak, J. 2007, *Ofiary, męczennicy i bohaterowie II wojny. Studium dynamiki pamięci społecznej na przykładzie organizacji kombatanckiej ZBoWiD*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Warsaw, Warsaw.

Weiner, A. 1996, "The Making of a Dominant Myth: The Second World War and the Construction of Political Identities within the Soviet Polity", *Russian Review*, vol. 55, no. 4, pp. 638-660.

Weiner, A. 2001, "In the Long Shadow of War: The Second World War in the Soviet and Post-Soviet World", *Diplomatic History*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 443-456.

Welzer, H. & Lenz, C. 2007, "Opa in Europa. Erste Befunde einer Vergleichenden Tradierungsforschung" in *Der Krieg der Erinnerung. Holocaust, Kollaboration und Widerstand im europäischen Gedächtnis*, H. Welzer, ed., Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main.

Wieviorka, A. 2003, *Déportation et génocide. Entre la mémoire et l'oubli*, Hachette 'Pluriel', Paris.

Winter, J. 1995, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Withuis, J. 2006, "De onstuitbare opmars van het psychotrauma", *De Volkskrant, Het Betoog*, 13.5.2006.

Wolfe Thomas C. 2006, "Past as Present, Myth, or History? Discourses of Time and the Great Fatherland War," in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, Ned Lebow, ed., Duke University Press, Durham and London, pp. 249-283.

Yuval-Davis, N. 2003, *Gender & Nation*, Sage, London.

Zaremba, M. 2001, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*, Wydawnictwo TRIO - Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warsaw.

Zaremba, M. 2004, "Społeczeństwo polskie lat sześćdziesiątych - między 'małą stabilizacją' a 'małą destabilizacją'" in *Oblicza Marca 1968*, K. Rokicki & Sł. Stępień, eds., Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Warsaw, pp. 24-51.

Zegenhagen, E. 2004, "Facilities for Pregnant Forced Laborers and Their Infants in Germany (1943-1945)" in *Children and the Holocaust. Symposium Presentations*, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, ed., United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, pp. 65-76.

Ziętara, P. 2001, *Emigracja wobec Października. Postawy polskich środowisk emigracyjnych wobec liberalizacji w PRL w latach 1955-1957*, LTD, Warsaw.

Żmigrodzki, M. 1986, "Polonia w krajach Beneluksu," in *Polacy w świecie. Polonia jako zjawisko społeczno-polityczne, Cz. 1-3*, A. Koprucki & W. Kucharski, eds., Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Międzyuczelniany Instytut Nauk Politycznych, Lublin, pp. 261-276.

Zubrzycki, J. 1979, "Polish Emigration to British Commonwealth Countries: A Demographic Survey", *International Migration Review*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 649-672.

## Others

### Films

Kizilov, M. 1990, *Alënushka iz Briussela* Goskino, Studia Dokumental'nykh filmov, Moscow.

Verstockt, B. 2004, *Vechten voor geen Vaderland*, Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds, co-production Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroep.

Wenders, W. 2000, *Buena Vista Social Club*, RCV Film Distribution.

Žbanić, J. 2006, *Grbavica*. Bosnia-Hercegovina.

### Two leaflets

50 Let Sluzheniia Rodine. Assotsiatsiia po sviaziam s sootchestvennikami za Rubezhom, Assotsiatsiia po sviaziam s sootchestvennikami za Rubezhom - Assotsiatsiia 'Rodina', 2005, Moscow (Archive the Motherland Association)

Fundacja Upamiętnienia Pierwszej Dywizji Pancерnej / Foundation for the Commemoration of General Stanisław Maczek's First Polish Armoured Division. Pomnik Pierwszej Dywizji Pancерnej w Warszawie / Monument of the 1st Polish Armoured Division on Warsaw, 1995, Warsaw.

### An index

Index of the Belgian Law Gazette on Judgements of Processes against Belgians who Collaborated with the German Occupier during World War II, Archive SOMA.

### A website

[www.sovmusic.ru](http://www.sovmusic.ru), lastly consulted on 22.10.2008



