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# Bodily memory: Introducing immigrant organizations and the family

Machteld Venken

*Catholic University Leuven Blijde Inkomststraat 21/5 3000 Leuven, Belgium*

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## Abstract

This is an article about war survivors who ended up in migration in the aftermath of World War II: former Division soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen from the Soviet Union who settled in Belgium. It analyzes how these migrants dealt in their post-war lives with experiences of harm to their bodies undergone during the war. Often, attempts to ascribe meaning to the physical and/or psychological remnants of this harm were not made through words, but through non-verbal performances. However, such bodily memory could also, consciously or not, become socialized. In this article, I investigate the performance of bodily memory over time within two of the migrants' social entities: immigrant organizations and families, focusing in particular on their interaction.

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*Keywords:* Bodily memory; Migration; Family; Immigrant organizations

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## 1. Two migration streams

The First Polish Armoured Division was established in Poland in the 1930s and numbered at its peak about 16,000 soldiers. After the invasion of the Soviet Union in September 1939, the Division fled the country and marched through Southern Europe and France. The Division helped to liberate Northern France, Belgium and the Netherlands in 1944. In sixteen days it passed through Flanders (Van Poucke, 1990). During their stay, many soldiers fell in love with young Flemish women. After the Division had passed through the Netherlands, it hoped to march on and liberate Poland, but in February 1945 the Yalta Conference consolidated the Soviet Union's influence on Poland. After the war, the Division was set up as an occupying force in Germany for two years. By the time it was dissolved, about 300 soldiers had married Flemish women (Goddeeris, 2005, 43–50). Most of them settled in the Flemish cities they had helped to liberate.

The second migration stream consisted of young women who were deported to Nazi Germany to do forced labour after the German invasion of the Soviet Union. These Ostarbeiterinnen were mainly Ukrainian, although some were Russian and Belarusian young women. They were the largest group amongst the total of 2.5 million Soviet workers and stood nearly on the bottom rung of the Nazi racial ladder (Ulrich, 1993, 168–171). While at work, the young women met Western European deported workers, volunteers and Prisoners of War. Off duty any contact between the groups was forbidden, but at work there were numerous love affairs. After the end of the war, about 4000 Ostarbeiterinnen chose to travel with their Belgian partners to Belgium rather than be repatriated to the Soviet Union where they could be suspected of collaboration (Tavenier, 2005, 129). A few couples married in Germany, but most married in Belgium, and all settled there (Luyckx, 2005, 153–169; Venken and Goddeeris, 2006, 98).

When these people intermarried, the Belgian citizenship law required the women to exchange their original citizenship for that of their husbands. The Ostarbeiterinnen

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*E-mail address:* [machteld.venken@arts.kuleuven.be](mailto:machteld.venken@arts.kuleuven.be).

thus became Belgian, the former Division soldiers Displaced Persons (and, much later, received Belgian citizenship through naturalization). Marriage was the criterion to stay for the women, although there were initially temporarily exceptions for women who were at least five months pregnant, women whose children were under eighteen months or were in a poor state of health upon arrival.<sup>1</sup> Marriage guaranteed former Ostarbeiterinnen, but not former Division soldiers, the right to settle in Belgium. Only when a Belgian employer could provide employment for at least two years, could a former Division soldier receive a temporary work and residence permit (Caestecker, 1992, 109). The criterion for staying was his usefulness to the Belgian economy, which corresponds with the idea of a male being economically responsible for his family (Creighton, 1996, 310). However, this policy was not always to the advantage of the former Ostarbeiterinnen, since both former Division soldiers and former Ostarbeiterinnen had been free to consent to marriage, but marriage limited the opportunities of former Ostarbeiterinnen, because they signed a contract in which their rights were subordinate to those of their husbands, and former Division soldiers, as heads of the family, became more visible in the public sphere than the women (Pateman, 1988, 155). Thanks to that visibility, among other reasons, the immigrant men were perceived by people in their environment to be less foreign than the former Ostarbeiterinnen.

## 2. War memories and the Cold War

In post-war life, the migrants tried to give meaning to what had happened to them during the war in order to find coherence in relation to themselves and to others (Rüsen, 2001, 254). Giving meaning to their war experiences through the construction and articulation of a representation of these experiences was a procedure for finding such coherence. Following the linguist H. Porter Abbott, I call such a representation in words, images or other practices, a ‘narrative on war memory’ (Abbott, 2002, 13). Through representing, i.e. performing, narratives, they could mould past events into a coherent and meaningful explanation for the present. As such,

practices like speaking, writing, crying and so on, could articulate a meaning given to a war experience.

After World War II, various voices formulated narratives on war memory. During the Cold War, dominant voices in articulating war memories, such as nation states and civil society agencies, 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, Graham and Roper, 2000, 61; Niven, 2007, 214–215). These narratives could only be installed because these voices deliberately played up some parts 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, 2006, 14; Tumarkin, 1994, 50).

Despite the contradictory nature of the anti-totalitarian and anti-fascist narratives, they hold the silencing of ‘foreign’ people, also immigrants, in common. The heroes and victims focused on 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). Former Division soldiers and former Ostarbeiterinnen initially did not find a place in dominant narratives on war memory articulated in their home and host societies. Throughout the years, however, former Division soldiers successfully lobbied for their place within public war memory in Belgium and became, after the death of Belgian ex-combatants of World War I and because of a lack of Belgian soldiers who had fought in World War II, depicted as ‘our’ heroic liberators of Flanders and political victims of communism. Former Ostarbeiterinnen remained less visible, and in the rare cases when they spoke up in the public sphere, they mainly had to defend themselves against dominant negative stereotyping as political opponents: ‘communists’.

<sup>1</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.

### 3. War memories and the body

Regardless of their (in)visibility within the public sphere, war survivors feel deprived of words when remembering memories of experiences of harm to the body. They fall silent and simply omit war experiences of bodily harm in their verbal narratives on war memories. Constructing a narrative of war memory and expressing that narrative in words would demand working through the past. 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, 2001, 1313). However, attempts to stifle these memories do not lead to their obliteration since war experiences of bodily harm search for their articulation and leave their marks in the present in non-verbal forms (Culbertson, 1995, 169–170). As a result, such disturbing war experiences related to the body are often remembered by and through non-verbal actions of 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, 1989, 72; Halbwachs and Elchardus, 1991). According to him, memory always happens by, through and with the body. He argues that researchers often have neglected this, and, as a consequence, exert biased views towards the body. In the linguistic fashion, for instance, 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, 2004, 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, 1989, 103). Often, only by doing something, the body remembers a past experience. Only then, do we realize that we remember (Roodenburg, 2004, 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 article, I have narrowed the definition of bodily memory down to the way the body remembers a feeling of harm to the body experienced during war.

Although bodily memories are a common 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.

LaCapra shows how survivors can help historians to understand the articulation of bodily memories. Over time, survivors may have worked through their war experiences of harm to the body 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, 2005, 86–89). In this article, I show how former Division soldiers and former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium started to name their bodily memories, whether or not helped by the way war trauma became constructed and recognized in their immigrant organizations and families. Before that, let me first go into the construction of war trauma during the settlement process of former Division soldiers and former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium.

### 4. The construction of war trauma

After war, survivors can have difficulties in coming to terms with their war experiences of harm to the body. 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. In the past, people distinguished victims from perpetrators on a moral basis. It was only in the 19th century that two interesting phenomena caused a change. The 1864 Geneva Convention, by introducing humanitarian law, recognized that the experience of modern war could be traumatic, whether witnessed as a perpetrator or a victim. The concept of war trauma then became centralized 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, 2007, 2). Two events in the 20th 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, but it remained censured by the Soviet Union and its satellite states which considered all Slavic people to be victims of Nazism and therefore refused to specifically spotlight Jews as victims of fascist atrocities (Tumarkin, 1994, 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, 2006, 191; Suleiman, 2006, 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 here. In the Atlantic World, the counter narrative on the Holocaust led again to questions of responsibility for wartime crimes. This could have re-introduced the moral perpetrator–victim relationship from before (Withuis, 2005, 418), however, in the 1980s, a second event provided counterbalance. Ex-combatants from the Vietnam War and American feminists successfully lobbied for the recognition of 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 memory work therapy, i.e. uncovering non-verbal war memories (Stanley, 2000). 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 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, 2006).

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 collectives of traumatized people, therefore attracting the interest of sociologists (Erikson, 1994, 231). According to one sociologist, 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, 2004, 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 voices articulating narratives on war memory (Alexander, 2004, 2). By referring to victims – people experiencing war trauma – not as a psychological, but a social category, they 'move from psychology to history' (LaCapra, 2005, 79; Levy and Sznajder, 2007, 3).

History, indeed, since at the core of this research lies the question as to what the past experiences and the memories of war victims mean for society today; 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, 2005, 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 et al., 2000, 44; Bingen, Borodziej and Troebst, 2003, 19; Hass, 2004, 33).

## 5. A universal war trauma

As such, war experiences of harm to the body 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 a broader society identifying (or, at least, supposed to identify) with it (Levy and Sznajder, 2007, 7). War experiences of harm to the body 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, 2004, 33; Levy and Sznajder, 2007, 5). Jolande Withuis, on her part, states that at the origin of this process lies the installation of the welfare state, which incited public interest and responsibility in the experiences of harm to the body of war survivors (Withuis, 2005, 18, 420).

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 are currently experiencing a boom in publications and documentaries based on the reported memories of survivors, in which trauma and victimhood are centralized and which easily find a worldwide readership or

viewing public through internationally interconnected media channels (Ashplant et al., 2000, 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 war experiences of harm to the body 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 war experiences of bodily harm 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 victimization of Holocaust survivors. Such stories can help to gain the attention of others and even facilitate recognition as war victims. 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 be acknowledged to suffer from war traumas and, as a result, are considered to be war victims, whereas others remain in the margins. Today is indeed a busy time as various formerly unheard war survivors strive for the recognition of victimhood due to their experiences of bodily harm.

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, 2001, 664). In many cases, although war experiences had been similar for men and women, only the men's experiences were commemorated. For example, the French historian Hannah Diamond showed that French women had been as active in resistance as men, but that commemoration after the war centred around the organized resistance in which more men had been active (Diamond, 1999). 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 symbolizing 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 centralized was their bravery, and not their suffering. Due to the moral decline during the war and

the possibility of both fraternization and sexual harassment, the bodily harm experienced by women, in turn, was associated with shame (Schwegman, 1995, 147). A woman's body symbolized the reproduction of the nation, and sexual deviation from moral norms stood for the violation of the nation itself (Noakes, 2001, 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, 2008, 11).

Until the 1990s, a split was also noticeable between the way the Holocaust was publicly commemorated and how various female Holocaust survivors privately articulated their memories (Ringelheim, 1997, 18). Within these commemorations, there was no place for the specific 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 sterilization (Duchen and Bandhauer-Schöffmann, 2000, 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, 2005, 238).

## 6. Immigrant organizations and families

In this article, I provide a gendered analysis of the place which bodily memories of former Division soldiers and former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium occupy within their immigrant organizations and families. The research is based on 24 life interviews and participant observation in immigrant organizations which I conducted with former Division soldiers and former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium between July 2005 and February 2007 (Venken, 2008). There is a specific reason to focus on these two social entities. Due to migration, immigrant organizations and families were constructed very differently to the traditional models in the home countries of the migrants at issue and, contrary to the situation behind the Iron Curtain, provided a place for their members to articulate non-verbal bodily memories.

Unlike the Division soldiers who settled in the Polish People's Republic, former Division soldiers developed a wide range of immigrant organizations throughout the years of their settlement in Belgium. All of them

received formal status thanks to the support of dominant voices in the articulation of war memories, such as Belgian city councils. Initially, these organizations, with the Benelux Circle being the biggest one, concentrated on glorifying the Division's liberation of Belgium. Through erecting various statues and being present at various commemoration services in the liberated cities, they successfully installed a heroification of former Division soldiers. The status of these war heroes increased through adding a geopolitical category of victimization, i.e. victims of communism, but refused to be brought down through recognizing the inconvenient physical or psychological consequences that could accompany war experiences. There was no place for presenting heroes as people in need. 'Heroes' and (non-political) 'victims' were perceived to be exclusive terms and, as a result, allowing victimization in the organizations' narrative on war memory would automatically mean the 'heroic' liberation activities of its members would be belittled. With the collapse of communism, former Division soldiers from Belgium could enlarge their territory of heroification to include Poland, erecting statues, receiving medals and parading in commemoration services.

In the late 1970s, the new immigrant organization, the Belgian Association for Polish Ex-Combatants (Belgische Vereniging voor Oud-Strijders — further BVPO), started a successful lobby for the recognition of war trauma for its members in Belgium. The BVPO gathered biographies of members in need and demand equal rights as Belgian ex-combatants, in this way striving for recognition not on a local, but on a national level. As a consequence, it grew to become the second biggest immigrant organization of former Division soldiers. These immigrant men received symbolic recognition as ex-combatants from the Belgian state in 1983, and financial recognition in 2002.

As literature examining invisible people during communism and opposition under Stalin holds strong doubts that civil organizations uniting former Ostarbeiterinnen in the Soviet Union existed at all, researching immigrant organizations of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium is particularly interesting (Kuromiya, 2004, 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 (Merridale, 2007). In Belgium, a formal organization existed, the Association of Soviet Citizens (Soyuz Sovetskikh Grazhdan — further SSG), but it never found an opportunity to start a lobby for trauma recognition, due to, among other reasons, the geopolitical context and the gender perceptions mentioned

above. Members felt greatly impeded to articulate their own narrative on war memory to the outside world. My research focuses on what role, if any, the SSG played in articulating the bodily memories of its members within the organization itself and within its members' families.

Former Ostarbeiterinnen started to become more visible in the public sphere after the collapse of communism. Germany and Austria were able to pay a war pension to the last segment of people who had been employed in its war industry, Soviet Prisoners of War and Ostarbeiterinnen. Disbursement issues aroused the interest of academics 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, where all foreign labourers are collectively referred to as 'Zwangarbeiter' (Von Plato, Leh and Thonfeld, 2008). In the former Soviet Union, the uncovering of previously silenced war experiences stimulated research, mostly done by non-governmental movements like Memorial, which pushed 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' (Polian, 2002; Smith, 1996). Because this is a top-down process, it takes time for former Ostarbeiterinnen to identify with it. The war experiences of Ostarbeiterinnen were reported on systematically in the media for some years in the mid-1990s in the Russian Federation and Belarus, and is continued in Ukraine nowadays, resulting in more Ostarbeiterinnen speaking up, but such a tendency is absent in Belgium (Grinchenko, 2008). That some former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium opened up to me is probably because the Holocaust increasingly functions as a structural trauma for the society of which they are part. The information they provided me on war experiences of harm to the body had, indeed, seldom or even never been articulated before.<sup>2</sup>

Also, the families of former Division soldiers and former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium were different from their counterparts on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Contrary to their colleagues who returned home after World War II, the people from both migration streams intermarried with Belgian citizens whom they had met during World War II. Their partners knew of the war

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance: interview with Wendy on 11 November 2006 (110:113); interview with Peggy on 18 September 2006 (136:157). All of the informants have been given fictitious names.

conditions the migrants had lived through. As a consequence, the couples did not always have to speak about their war experiences in order to make them comprehensible. Orlando Figes' study *The Whisperers* shows that in the Soviet Union, there were former Ostarbeiterinnen who withheld their war experiences from their families (Figes, 2007, 2). Moreover, as pregnancy or having children was a criterion for former Ostarbeiterinnen to settle upon arrival in Belgium, memories related to family often originated in war experiences.

Interestingly, you here see similar dynamics at work as in the construction of Holocaust memory. The war experiences of Jewish and Polish men came, among others, to the fore thanks to the gathering of war survivors in formal organizations which lobbied for their case, whereas the war experiences of Jewish and Soviet women came into the public 'from above', pushed forward by gender researchers. In what follows, I use this insight to analyze how the immigrant men and women at issue were able to articulate their bodily memories in two social entities, their organizations and families, and how the two entities interacted with one another. First, I will discuss the relationship between heroification and victimization for former Division soldiers, their organizations and families, as well as the importance of the BVPO's lobbying efforts in ensuring that the bodily harm experienced by their members during war became recognized as historical war trauma. Second, I will focus on former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium who now begin to verbally articulate their bodily memories and in this way, provide information on their non-verbal articulation from before in immigrant organizations and families.

## 7. Former Division soldiers

On 7 December 1976, Stefan Abram, a former Division soldier, 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 demobilized 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 afterwards held the status of Displaced Person.

Stefan wrote to Newcastle about his war experiences, describing how he had fought against the Wehrmacht at the Albert Canal in the neighbourhood of Ghent. 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>3</sup>

Stefan wrote down the word 'Accident' and did not specify it further. Such behaviour is common among people with war experiences of harm to the body. When describing what happens, they usually elaborate on the circumstances, but only seldom name the war experience itself (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>4</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 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

<sup>3</sup> Archive BVPO, Letter from Stefan Abram to the Department of Health and Social Security Newcastle on 7.12.1976.

<sup>4</sup> Talk with the BVPO's current President Włocław Styranka on 27.12.2005.

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. 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 new BVPO in Antwerp to plea his case in Belgium. The organization 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 organize his daily care. During the last years of his life, members of the BVPO looked after him and supported him financially.<sup>5</sup>

An analysis of the interviews I conducted made it clear that interviewees' membership with the BVPO in the past marks the way they speak about war experiences of harm to the body in the present. Let us look at the stories of two former Division soldiers, one who had always been a member of the BVPO, and one who had joined its rival the Benelux Circle.

A former Division soldier belonging to the BVPO described me his bodily harm in the following way. When I asked Dominik about when he had visited Poland for the first time after the war, he answered he had done so on receiving Belgian citizenship. Dominik interpreted my question as having a political undertone. Visiting the Polish People's Republic or not had functioned as a main indicator among former Division soldiers to divide themselves into the good 'free Poles' and the bad 'communists' (Venken, 2007). As the BVPO had contacts at the Polish Consulate in Belgium, Dominik feared being categorized under 'the communists' by me. He 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  
wlllll!!!!  
in fact, I became used to  
always hear a ring<sup>6</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 centralized in the written sources of former Division organizations in Belgium), 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

<sup>5</sup> Talk with the BVPO's current President Właclaw Styranka on 27.12.2005.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Dominik on 26 November 2005 (68:92).

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 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 a collaborator 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 into war categories determine his action in the present. 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 normalization had also enabled Dominik to articulate his bodily memory in

words and to even spontaneously mention it during the interview in reply to a non-related question.<sup>7</sup>

Former Division soldiers who did not belong to the BVPO, articulated their war experiences differently. I here give the example of Czesław Kajpus, whom I interviewed alone on 7 November 2005. 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>8</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 — out of the 3254 passengers only 975 survived. He was 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 corresponds with the way he had written about his war experiences in his monography (Kajpus and Van Dam, 1996). That Monday afternoon, Czesław could convince me he was a war hero.

<sup>7</sup> See also: Interview with Mariusz on 2 December 2005 (153:156); Interview with Damian on 13 February 2006 (164:168).

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Czesław Kajpus on 7 November 2005 (04:07).

A little later, I saw *Vechten voor geen Vaderland* (Fighting for no Fatherland), a documentary made by Belgian film director Bart Verstockt on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation. 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)  
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, 2004).

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 heroic 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 bodily 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 could mean that 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>9</sup>

Verstockt's documentary centralizes the testimonies of former Division soldiers. He mainly presents a heroic picture, and only for one minute in the documentary addresses what he called the 'unmasked visits of war' in post-war life. Interestingly, for that purpose, he gives voice to the wives of former Division soldiers for the only time in the documentary (Verstockt, 2004). 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 way of coping with war experiences of harm to the body, 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. Only the man who spoke independently about his war experience of harm to the body was not.

The analysis of the interviews I conducted showed that the past membership of interviewees in either the Benelux Circle or the BVPO influenced how they nowadays remember their war experiences of harm to the body. The BVPO had lobbied for the recognition of its members' war experiences of bodily harm from the late 1970s onwards, whereas the Benelux Circle had stuck to a narration of war heroism. Former BVPO members articulate their war experiences of bodily harm in words, whereas members of the Benelux Circle tend to remain silent about them, unless their wives bring these memories to their husbands' attention. Immigrant organizations can thus have an influence on the articulation of bodily war memories of their members. As the involvement of women shows, however, not only organizational engagement, but also families, can facilitate or hinder the articulation of bodily war memories. As we will see, the way in which former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium dealt with their war experiences of harm to the body was very different.

<sup>9</sup> In the following interviews, no references to war experiences of harm to the body were made: Interview with Artur on 14 July 2005; Interview with Sławomir on 6 December 2005; Interview with Waldek on 25 November 2005; Interview with Jacek on 6 December 2005. In the following interview an indirect allusion comparable to Kajpus' behaviour was made to war experiences of harm to the body: Interview with Rafał (22:28).

## 8. 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 a migrant himself and has developed an extensive network of migrants from Ukraine 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 entered Sandy's house in La Louvière on 14 February 2006, 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 us through to the kitchen.<sup>10</sup> There, we joined a man of about fifty years old, who introduced himself (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 me. Consul Kotliar and Max encouraged Sandy to speak successively about her parents, her life in Germany and her migration to Belgium.<sup>11</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>12</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 wider neighbourhood – came with their children to have their hair cut and to chat.<sup>13</sup> Her friends also regularly asked Sandy to babysit, leaving their children in the salon while going grocery shopping.<sup>14</sup> Soon after she had said this, Max apologized 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 sterilized  
 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 into my cup, before adding:

he (Max — MV) is always kind,  
 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>15</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 first 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 sterilized during World War II. She spoke in very general terms about that war experience, not willing or capable of describing what had happened more than 60 years ago. Just like Dominick LaCapra, 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, 1997, 173).

Instead of focusing 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 war

<sup>10</sup> Notes on the Interview with Sandy on 14 February 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Sandy on 14 February 2006 (1:71).

<sup>12</sup> *Idem* (72:84).

<sup>13</sup> *Idem* (219:222).

<sup>14</sup> *Idem* (165:169).

<sup>15</sup> *Idem* (175:189).

experience of harm to the body. 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. 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, in this way creating an informal immigrant organization, but had also enabled Sandy to cope with her experience of sterilization. It appears that babysitting and cutting the hair of her friends' children, consciously or not, functioned as coping strategies to deal with her war experience of bodily harm in post-war life. We see here how such strategies could only take place through bodily practices in a social entity; Sandy needed others, and very specific ones, at that: the children of her Ostarbeiterinnen friends. Her friends all had worked in Germany and knew that experiences of bodily harm might have included sterilization. It was a real possibility they had lived with during World War II and they did not have/want to speak about it in post-war life. Through taking care of her friends' children, Sandy could cope with the absence of children in her post-war life. It provided her with an opportunity to articulate her bodily memory without having to articulate 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 sterilization experience while she was cutting the hair of her friends' children. Because of the specific character of Sandy's war experience of harm to her body, i.e. the impossibility to reproduce, she found a way to practise the bodily memory of that experience in a socialized context: among the children of her Ostarbeiterinnen friends.

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 consul Kotliar 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 war experience made her articulate her bodily memory within social entities, whether within her family with Max, or within an informal immigrant organization (among her group of friends who had lived in similar circumstances). Sandy needed such a children context symbolizing the evidence of reproduction in which she could – intentionally or not – articulate her bodily memory on the impossibility of reproduction in non-textual practices. Raising or taking care of children, displayed through practices 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 several meetings which I attended 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 organization. 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>16</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>17</sup>

Debby revealed that having children or not determined practices of members and their husbands, although they never spoke about this. Husbands without children could come and pick up their wives, whilst others stayed home to take care of the children. Debby's wording made me think that perhaps former Ostarbeiterinnen acted similarly when dividing tasks within their organization. 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>18</sup> I searched for a link between a member having children or not, and her involvement in organizational 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 organization than women with children. However, I could also verify that members without children were specifically involved in activities organized 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>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Debby on 20 July 2006 (224:239).

<sup>17</sup> Notes on the interview with Debby on 20 July 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Notes on participant observation from 19 February 2007.

<sup>19</sup> *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 19/13 (367) 16; 26/516 (4.1971) 21–22; 26/521 (9.1971) 24–25; *Patriot*. Organ Tsentral'nogo pravleniia soiuz 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.

Many organizations offer a public place where members and their families can enjoy family life. Amateur football clubs do not only focus on football, but also have their institutionalized family gatherings. However, in the case of SSG, women with a specific shared past regularly met up. Since all were aware of the fact that not having children could have been caused by sterilization during war, the family gatherings of SSG had a different atmosphere. The timetable of SSG's activities allowed for regular occasions when children could be 'exchanged' or 'shared'. Practices of organized babysitting or children's parties were a negotiated outcome reflecting a common remembering of the 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. some of 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 war experiences of harm to the body in practices other than words. One could, therefore, say that the SSG functioned as a substitute family, a place that enabled members having lived in similar war circumstances to practise and repeat bodily memory.

What I have tried to make clear is that the former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium I researched practised bodily memory not only by means of their own bodies. During organizations' gatherings and within families, bodily memories became socialized among people who had lived in the same war context and therefore knew what possible war experiences of harm to the body their friends or partners 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 social entities, children, being the evidence of reproduction, could function as an articulation of bodily memory of harm caused to reproductive health. Through such non-verbal articulation, children became an extension of the female body, and bodily memory could be practised thanks to the presence of women's own or else's children.

## 9. In lieu of a conclusion

This article focused on the relationship of constructions of foreignness and the visibility of immigrant men and women in Belgium from behind the Iron Curtain, and the way these immigrants articulate(d) bodily memories within their organizations and families. I

discussed the dynamic relationship between heroification and victimization in the narratives of the ‘visible’ former Division soldiers and showed that the BVPO’s lobby for the recognition of historical war trauma helps members nowadays to articulate their bodily memories, whereas others needed to be helped by their wives to articulate war experiences of bodily harm. I concentrated on how the ‘invisible’ former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium are opening up their bodily memories in speech since the collapse of communism, revealing that they practised bodily memories within family and immigrant organizations in the past, the latter ones functioning as substitute families.

The process of experiencing bodily memory among survivors of war is gendered and social entity specific. This may also be crucial for war survivors to transmit their memories to following generations. The way survivors of war pass on their memories to their children reveals how they want, or even do not want, these experiences to be remembered, thereby determining how the experiences can and will be remembered. Such transmission practices differ for men and women, and information on how such practices function within social entities 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. For this reason, I strongly encourage further research into the gender-sensitive transmission practices in immigrant organizations and families of war survivors.

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## Fieldwork

Interviews with 12 former Division soldiers and 12 former Ostarbeiterinnen. Participant Observation in SSG for six months, 2006–2007. Formal and informal talks with various informants over the past four years.