Straddling the Iron Curtain?
Immigrants, Immigrant Organisations, War Memories

Machteld Venken

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To Lew Balder

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).

Foreword

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 whole family to Czechoslovakia during the Easter break of 1990, where we were introduced to a world of words with up to five consonants in a row 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 yet more 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 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' offered by 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, the family would now go to 'safe' France each year, 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, the Russian Federation and Croatia in the following years, Central and Eastern Europe came back into the family.

The doctoral program I started in 2005, financed by the Flemish Fund for Scientific Research (further FWO), offered the opportunity to continue travelling. With the various research stays abroad, either at the University of Warsaw (further UW) or at the Institute for Russian History in Moscow, stays financed by a bilateral program between KUL and UW, and the Russian Academy of Sciences, I undertook journeys that were the reverse of the ones taken by my interviewees, who had migrated from East to West sixty years earlier.

The extended fieldwork I conducted in Belgium between July 2005 and February 2007 also took me on a discovery trip throughout my native country. Of immense value have been the various archivists and informants who opened up a formerly unknown aspect of the world in which I had been brought up. Most thanks should go to the persons who were willing to give me an insight into the way they live and lived;

their stories were of incalculable benefit in helping 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 KUL. I would like to express thanks first of all to my promoter Idesbald Goddeeris. Our cooperation started eight years ago, and he has helped me become a Slavist and a historian. Leen Beyers will certainly recognise her beneficial influence to this work, which springs from our cooperation in arranging the *Families, Constructions of Foreignness and Migration* conference. I am grateful to Louis Vos for keeping a watchful eye over this project. Many thanks also to Frank Caestecker for his constructive ideas during the various discussions of ideas which gradually grew into my dissertation.

Crucial to my thinking have also been the conversations with and comments of other scholars. Members of the Research Unit Modernity and Society 1800-2000 (MoSa) at KUL and the Historical Institute of UW triggered my reasoning during interesting debates on official and officious meetings. In addition, I am grateful to the intellectual generosity of Staf Vos, Anne Morelli, Philippe Rygiel, Marlou Schrover, Marcin Kula, Pamela Ballinger, Louise Ryan, Christoph Thonfeld, Gelinada Grinchenko, Elisabeth Boesen, Joanna Wawrzyniak, Erwan Lannon and Kris Denhaerynck, who read early versions of individual chapters.

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Last words of thanks go to Krzysztof Marcin Zalewski, who one day walked into my life, and ever since has filled it with love, joy and endless inspiration.

Warsaw, Summer 2011

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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	Archief van de Vreemdelingen-politie, individuele vreemdelingendossiers
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	Internationale Vluchtelingen-organisatie
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 sviazeĭ s sootechestvennikami 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
SOMA	Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society in Brussels	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	Ukrainskyï Dopomohovyï 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

Following the end of World War II, around 350 immigrant men from Poland and 4,000 immigrant women from the Soviet Union arrive in Belgium, marry Belgian citizens and settle down. It's an extraordinary story, and yet one that fails to get 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). Nevertheless, this research project reveals their relevancy for current international academic research. This study 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 narratives on war memories articulated by various European nation states, the globalised era, with its international media channels, nowadays enables the swift and widespread proliferation of Holocaust testimonies. To date, scholars have mainly followed these two tracks of memory articulation and focused either on official memory politics, or on oral testimonies. In conducting them separately, academics missed the chance 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 study is about the way newcomers at the fringes of Belgian society interacted with, were offered, or were 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 ubiquitous 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 have tended to 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 can here serve as an example of Western European research. In the former Soviet Union, research is conducted among others by the Russian non-governmental organisation Memorial and the Ukrainian Oral History Institute in Kharkiv (Adamushko, Bogdan and Gerasimov; Grinchenko and Khanenko-Friesen (eds.); Kis'; 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 former Soviet Union and its satellite states. But is its mental space not broader and does it not also include immigrants who ended up in the West after World War II? This study researches whether immigrants 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 book also aims to contribute to the academic field of migration research. Several migration historians focus on the structural integration of immigrants 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 study 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 very much preoccupied with ethnic identification. The people in this study are not so easy to classify ethnically, and have therefore either been written out of overviews of ethnic immigrant populations or have been inadequately approached ethnically.[1]

This book neither researches structural integration, nor starts from ethnically defined categories. At the basis 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 any off-duty 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 grouped together in immigrant organisations and 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 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.

The central question of this study 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'? (Cohen 97). As that refugee world had taken the form of the Cold War, with an Atlantic World, an Iron Curtain and

1 They are silenced in works such as Waegemans 2000 and Kohut, and have been inadequately approached ethnically by Kępa and Ronin 2009.

Warsaw Pact countries, I research the importance of that geopolitical context for the construction and articulation of their war memories. 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 determine the articulation possibilities of former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen in the same way? 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 meta-narrative 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?

Before starting the analysis, I explain the changing concept of ethnicity in migration research and indicate the increasing profile of memory in historical research. Further, I describe the dominant voices, or agencies as I call them, operating in the home and host societies of the people belonging to the two migration streams and articulating representations of war experiences. Later, I show the spaces, or arenas as I call them, in which these agencies articulate their representations. Agencies and arenas form the two main buidling blocks for the framework I developed for this study and that will be displayed in the section 'Memory and Power Dynamics'. Afterwards, I shed light on the units of analysis selected for this study, immigrant organisations, and on the methodology of the research project.

Ethnicity Forever and Ethnification[2]

Until fairly recently many migration scholars used ethnic identity as the basic 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'.[3] 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 a long time before his voice became heard in European historiography (Barth; Schrover, 2002, 14). It first took root in American migration studies, which wrote immigrants 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 seen only from a purely Western or Eastern viewpoint (Friedman 244). Some authors stress that the fear of an interbloc conflict encouraged European societies to homoge-

2 Some of the ideas presented in this introduction have been displayed earlier in Venken 2011 a; Venken 2010a.

3 For Belgium see for instance Martens.

nise 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 primordial ethnic newcomers could become integrated in European host societies; they could gradually be moulded into a society without losing visibility. The authors speak for instance of post-colonial immigrants 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 immigrants 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 immigrants within their societies. The various flows of labour immigrants only received scholarly attention from the 1970s onwards (König and Ohliger 14). The historian Leen Beyers, who researched the integration of immigrants 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 immigrants 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 did we see a boom in European historic studies applying Barth's theory to ethnic identity. Not surprisingly, this was related to the collapse of communism which led to fundamental changes in the geopolitical context. The Cold War was no longer there 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 immigrants 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 immigrants settle, a process researchers redefined as 'integration', are now mainstream (Lucassen, Feldman and Oltmer, 2006).

The Rise of Memory

The historian Dan Diner 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 loci of commemoration (König and Ohliger 11). Diner calls historical paradigms:

> 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, the first shift in historical paradigms took place. Whereas before, the historical paradigm of state had corresponded to a vertically power-inspired and structurised 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 adaption 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 immigrants.

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). He rejects the idea that history and memory are juxtaposed concepts. That history is what happened and what people experienced, and that memory is our perceptions of what happened or was experienced.[4] Diner argues that historiography is not an objective and independent science, 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 (Bergson, 1911, 40). As such, mainstream historians following the historical paradigms of state, and, to a lesser extent, society, have contributed to the current amnesia on Europe's migration past. The encyclopedia with which I started this introduction is worth referring to here. Immigrant historians are opening up Europe's rich migration experience in past pluralistic societies, in this way refutingthe public opinion still present that 'our' society always has been homogeneous (Bade and others; Moch). However, they mostly do so in an ethnified way and offer an ethnified remembering of Europe's migration past. Dan Diner formulates an alternative, although he only applies his argument to immigrants 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 narratives on war 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, 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).

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'

4 See also Jonathan Sacks, *Studies in Renewal*, quoted in Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, 'New Threads on an Old Loom. National Memory and Social Identity in Post-war and Post-communist Poland', in: R. N. Lebow, W. Kansteiner and C. Fogu (eds.), *The Politics of Memory in Post-war Europe*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2006, pp. 177.

(Diner, 2007, 156). The way nation states and elites in power formulated narratives on war memory during the Cold War era was in alignment 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). Jews were perceived to be foreign to the nation state during the first two postwar decades and 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, Dawson, Roper 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. 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. 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. There is, for example, not something like one Displaced Persons' group which over the years autonomously produced a shared war memory. Displaced Persons in the

West were very heterogeneous, having different national and ethnic backgrounds as well as various political convictions. As the migration historian Daniel Cohen formulated, however, 'they all lived in the same standardized refugee world' having experienced migration because of war (Cohen 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 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 war memories, which competed with each other. But Displaced Persons, as one group, and with them their war memories, were not presented. In general historical overviews of Europe's migration history, they also receive very little mention (Bade and Brown; Moch). The attention for Displaced Persons dates from the 1990s (Caestecker 2007). In line with the two dominant thoughts in migration studies, researchers focused on either their societal integration or on their ethnic identification. Scholars focussing on identification researched ethnic groups of Displaced Persons (categorised by these historians) in one nation state over the years. In this process Polish Displaced Persons, Ukrainian Displaced Persons and so on came to existence (Beyers 2007b; Goddeeris 2005a).

Recently, however, Christoph Thonfeld focused on the war memories of some Displaced Persons, thereby breaking through ethnic categorisation and national identification, but introducing the collective label of forced labourers. Using interviews conducted among people who were displaced during the war from Poland because of forced labour, and who after the war migrated to Great Britain, Thonfeld looked for general tendencies in their individual war memories and found they were almost entirely host society oriented (Thonfeld 2008). My research builds further on the ideas of Cohen and Thonfeld. It focuses on the war memories of some specific Displaced Persons settled in Belgium, a category that, in contrast to forced labourers, was institutionalised at the end of World War II.

Not only did the dominant focus used in migration studies for many years lead to an ignorance of the war memories of DPs, but also keystone social memory paradigms contributed their part. Maurice Halbwachs introduced the concept of '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, individuals are living among others, and consciously or not, are always exchanging their representations of experiences (Barash 114; Halbwachs). Halbwachs' concept formed the basis for the later theory of Pierre Nora, who gathered places, objects and symbols that according to him and his collaborators embodied French national memory, and called them lieux de mémoire (sites of memory) (Nora). Above all, his work was influential in making memory a valuable topic of research for historians and other human scientists. In the footsteps of Pierre Nora, many scholars 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. Rituals and traditions during commemoration services which present wartime suffering as a constitutive element of national unity and identification appear to be powerful means to reinforce official war memory. Although influential, his work is also criticized. According to migration scholars, one fundamental problem is that Pierre Nora dictated the nation

state to play a role in choosing sites of memory (Kleist 230-234). As a result, which sites will be detected depends on the way a nation state perceives itself. Whereas some of them do include immigrants, such as the United States of America, most do not, or only in a selective way, such as France (Boesen).

Agencies of War Memory Articulation

Historical research on war memory has thus mainly concentrated on the level of one agency: that of the nation state, without analysing its construction. The characteristics of nation states prescribe the access of people to, and the expressions of war memories in, pre-existing or newly shaped sites of war memory articulation. The extent to which a nation state allows other agencies, civil society movements or other social groups, to debate its official war memory determines the possibilities of tolerating, or even integrating, the articulation of (or aspects of) oppositional memories (Ashplant, Dawson, Roper 61). During the Cold War, nation states and civil society movements 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 (Niven 214-215). These narratives could only be installed because some war experiences were played up while other areas were suppressed. 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 (Suleiman 14; Tumarkin 50).

Despite the contradictory nature of these 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, 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).

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. 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 exclusive privileges for Flemish. In addition, there were Flemish who saw the occupation as a possibility to gain more Flemish autonomy in the future. Nevertheless, in order to stimulate national collective identification, the narrative on war memory of the Belgian nation state made Belgians believe that the whole nation had resisted the Nazi regime (Lagrou, 2000, 5).

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 that paid more attention to the repression, which resulted in an implicit whitewash of war collaboration (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). 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 counteracting the xenophobic opinion of extreme right politicians in the 1980s (Lagrou, 2000, 290).

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 (Figes 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 censured 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.

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 (Figes 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 (perestroĭka), 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 59-60). 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). 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 274). 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.

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, Dawson, Roper 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. 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 from becoming over the years the ultimate byword for (ethnic) victimhood. An interesting debate on the status of the Holocaust was held when historians, politicians and Jewish representatives came together. 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. In 2010, however, a decision was taken to built a Flemish Holocaust Museum inspired by, among others, the one in Washington (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. 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, 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' (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, 2008; 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 left the country during World War II and their descendants. The contributions of overseas survivors of the Holocaust gradually led to the inclusion of the Holocaust experience in the national post-Cold War narrative on war memory and awoke 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). The dialogue between the Third Polish Republic and representatives of ex-combatants living abroad, in addition, 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 each other and what is formulated is often an outcome of negotiation. Arenas have different forms, depending on the power dynamics between the various agencies taking part in the game. The outcomes of negotiation in arenas differ, as power relations and acts of articulation are situational.

Above all, commemorations have been considered the arenas in which nation states publicly articulate their narratives on war memory. In the footsteps of Pierre Nora, many historians have already researched the relationship of national identity and public war commemorations. 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, Dawson, Roper 8, 43). By concentrating on commemorations, historians have long neglected many other war 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 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 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. 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, 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. The political scientist Claudia Lenz for example 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 (Lenz 44, 46, 51). 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). Although women did play active roles during the war, narratives on war memory required women to serve their male heroes.

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 Nora'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 (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, Dawson, Roper 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. mostly oral transmission) (Assmann, 1992). 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; Reddeman; Stelzl-Marx, 2000; Ustnaia historiia). 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 (Kräutler). 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, Dawson, Roper 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.

In this way, however, the third approach, just like the former two, neglects the power dynamics of agencies over time to receive, hold and lose access to arenas of war memory articulation. 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. The psychologist 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).

Memory and Power Dynamics

In order to research the complex mechanisms through which immigrants and elites in power dialogue over the articulation of war memories, I developed a framework that borrows concepts from both migration and memory studies. It presumes that immi-

grants do not receive or demand a place, as was previously assumed in migration studies, in a homogenising society. In line with Pierre Bourdieu, societies are here perceived to consist of various autonomous and interdependent fields (Jenkins 84-85). Depending on the characteristics of the immigrants and the fields, immigrants become familiar with the ones that are relevant for them or for the people that execute power over them (Joppke and Morawska 3). This study focuses on one such field, which I call the cultural field of war memory. I consider this field to contain all the narratives on war memory which are visible in the public sphere of a given society. My framework is completed with ideas from literary and memory studies. Narratives are defined as reformulating an event or experience and helping people to identify themselves, i.e. to find coherence in relation to themselves and others (Abbott 13; Rüsen 254). Following the literary historian Susan R. Suleiman, narratives on war memory are said to mould war survivors' contingent war experiences into a coherent explanation for the present (Suleiman 215). Such narratives on war memory operate as a cultural field within society, where different and changing interests are at stake.

I have already described how such interests are represented by various agencies in various arenas. Dominant agencies in articulating narratives on war memory are nation states and other elites in power, such as civil society agencies. Dominant agencies produce standardised articulations of what, according to them, the war had been. Agencies articulate their narratives on war memory in arenas. There, both dominant and dominated agencies 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 should take. Arenas have different forms, depending on the power dynamics between the various agencies taking part in the game. It is a very broad concept which encompasses the cemeteries or war monuments focused on by 'Nora followers', but also immigrant organisations and their publications, interview settings and so on (Ashplant, Dawson, Roper 16-17).

The memory building of the immigrant men and women described in this study interacted with similar processes of memory construction and articulation in narratives operating in both their host and home societies. This brings me back to migration studies and the focus on societal integration. Migration historians doing sociological research on immigrant organisations are specialists when it comes to various dynamics of inclusion and exclusion of immigrants from society. When re-interpreting their literature using a different historical paradigm, not the one of society, but the one of memory, one can say that the way narratives on war memory of immigrants are constructed and articulated in the public sphere indicates their integration in the host society and transnational contacts with their home society. Depending both on the way home and host societies define 'foreignness' (i.e. how they draw boundaries between 'us' and 'them') and the power and creativity immigrants have to negotiate these boundaries, various paths of integration and transnational practices are possible (Caestecker and others; Lucassen, Feldman and Otlmer). In doing so, my aim is to refocus on the primarily social basis of collective memory research.

Such a broad framework enables migration researchers to go beyond the normative question as to whether immigrants integrate or not, a question commonly answered by the measurement of structural factors. It helps to shed light on the involvement of immigrants in a certain field, to ask if they accepted the dominant tendencies

in this field, to question how their attitudes towards the field developed over the years, whether or not leading to greater representation within the public sphere, and how the field changed because of their presence (Beyers and Venken). In this way, migration research can grow beyond its marginal position within historiography and redraw historiography by using the position of immigrants 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.

Using both archival and oral sources, this study pays attention to the relation of memory and power dynamics over time. For that purpose, it researches how the people concerned gathered in immigrant organisations and how they constructed narratives on war memories within these organisations. It questions 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 immigrants, 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 mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that could enhance or hinder immigrants from publicly articulating war memories.

Immigrant Organisations

Leo Lucassen and Rinus Penninx already highlighted how immigrant organisations are useful units of analysis to reveal the relationship between immigrants and dominant agencies in both their home and host society. Immigrant organisations are at the meso-level, and are in contact with both macro-dimensions related to the organisation of local governments, nation-states and bilateral state cooperation and micro-dimensions (the individual immigrants) (Lucassen and Penninx 4). Immigrant organisations give an indication as to how immigrants present themselves as being different from the environment surrounding them, or as to how others perceive these immigrants as being different (Cohen, 1985, 685, 693). How immigrants gather or are gathered in groups demonstrates what links them together, and, as Marlou Schrover and Floris Vermeulen formulated it, 'what differences were made important by whom, for whom and for how long' (Schrover and Vermeulen 823).

Research on immigrant organisations has long been practiced following two main perspectives on the settlement process of immigrants. Traditional Chicago school sociologists desired the assimilation of immigrants, and were convinced immigrant organisations could play a role that could facilitate or increase this process (Lucassen and Penninx 4-5, Layton-Henry 109). Ethnic community studies for their part saw immigrant organisations as crystallizations of primordialist ethnicity pertaining to pre-migratory ethnic collective practices (Schoeneberg). Whereas the former studies analysed the influence of the host society (mainly North America) on immigrant organisations, the latter researched such organisations as if they were ethnic entities standing aside of that host society. Recently, migration sociologists and historians overcame this divide and put effort into theorizing research on immigrant organisations. Jose C.

Moya came to the conclusion that neither the civic culture of the host society, nor particular ethno-national traditions play a decisive role in the formation of immigrant organisations, but that the migration process itself boosts the motivation of immigrants to gather (Moya 839). He argues that the characteristics of a migration stream arriving in a country transform this impetus into a concrete demand for immigrant organisations, and that the political opportunity structure, to be understood as the entirety of possibilities offered by dominant agencies in the host and home society of the immigrants, determines the shape of the organisational landscape (Moya; Vermeulen, 2005, 971).

This study makes use of the insights of Moya, and starts with a first chapter highlighting the migration experiences and characteristics of the people belonging to the two migration streams under study, before analysing group formation, group continuation and group practicing. I look at the whole gamut of group gatherings that took place within the two migration streams over time. Such an approach has several advantages. First, contrary to studies on immigrant organisations based on official lists made by the nation state's registered formal organisations, it offers the opportunity to give insights in informal group gathering and to deconstruct the criteria of a given nation state's classification strategy. In Europe, Belgium offers one of the most extreme examples of restriction towards the official formalisation of immigrant organisations. Until 1984, the Belgian nation state only recognised organisations of which at least three-fifths of the founding and active members held Belgian citizenship (Layton-Henry 95). Therefore, in the case of this study, only a bottom-up approach can fully highlight the organisational life of the people belonging to the two migration streams. Second, it enables us to analyse more deeply the practices of immigrant women, who display different participation patterns in organisations than men, often gathering more informally and playing less visible roles in the public sphere (Lucassen 19; Schrover and Vermeulen 827).

Recent studies have made headway in analysing the role of the political opportunity structure for the organisational life of immigrants, and point in this respect to the importance of two elements. First, they consider the influence of the home society on the nature and continuity of immigrant organisations (Schrover 847). Since anthropologists started to spread the concept of transnationalism in the 1990s, the idea was created that the globalised world offers contemporary immigrants the opportunity to stay in touch with their home societies in ways that had never been experienced before (Basch, Schiller, Blanc-Szanton). Migration historians criticize such a vision by demonstrating the various transnational practices of immigrants and agencies in the past (Lucassen and Penninx; Venken 2007a). When I started my research project, it seemed obvious to exclude agencies from the Polish People's Republic and the Soviet Union from my research, as I was focusing on the way immigrants from what become known as the world behind the Iron Curtain were practicing their war memories in immigrant organisations operating on Belgian soil. It seemed unnecessary and superfluous to ask whether home societies in Central and Eastern Europe could influence immigrants settled in the West, given the travel and information obstructions the Cold War entailed, as well as the low popularity of communism in Belgium. Nevertheless I asked whether immigrants from Poland and the Soviet Union, whether their immigrant organisations operating in Belgium, and whether the war memories articulated by their members, did

straddle the Iron Curtain. Were these immigrants thus influenced not only by developments in their host society, but also in their home society? This investigation also found its reflection in the title of this book.

Second, these new researches grow away from a traditional static description of immigrant organisations and try to theorize the fluidity of immigrants' organizational landscapes over time. Most studies distinguish a short initial period in which the influence of home societies is high, which then decreases as soon as opportunities in the host society appear (Layton-Henry 96; Penninx and Schrover 12). Floris Vermeulen's work is innovative in the way it detects different steps in the continuation of immigrants' organizational landscapes over time (Vermeulen 2006). In chapter two and three, I am indebted to his work and show how his steps are helpful, but insufficient, for the description of the group formation processes over time of the people under study.

Although the focus of this project was on immigrant organisations from its start, the interviews I conducted revealed that another entity at the meso-level, the family, had also played an important role for the immigrants in their articulation of war memories. During the analysis of the interviews it became clear that stories about the family, or references to ones' family, almost always popped up when an interviewee tried to articulate the ways in which he or she had been dealing with harm undergone during the war. In the last part of this book, I therefore describe how the interviewees gave meaning to troublesome war experiences in two social entities operating at the meso-level, immigrant organisations and the family, focusing in particular on their interaction.

Methodology

In order to research how former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen gave meaning to their war experiences, this project used a qualitative research approach. 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 always heard in the past, the third approach helps open up their interpretation of social rules. This study aims to find and explain how often marginalised people gave meaning to experiences by unravelling their interpretation through an outlined process of inductive data gathering and data analysis. In between the description of data gathering and data analysis that follows, I provide space to examine my relationship with the interviewees and the languages in which interviews took place.

For this project, I created new oral sources offering people's interpretations on experiences and constantly cross-checked them with existing data in order to embed these oral interpretations in the social contexts in which the interviewees lived and 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 often at the heart of qualitative research studies. Such interviews are not question-answer, but story-telling-listening based (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 61). The study aimed to conduct in-depth interviews which were 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 memories and identifications (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 64). By letting people tell their experiences in their way using their language, I could find out how their narratives differ from others. During my research, I conducted 26 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 by that time, 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.

In this study, 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, 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 the immigrant 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 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 oudstrijders – 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 their 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.

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 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 of theirs 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.[5]

5 All interview and sound recordings are archived in the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society in Brussels.

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 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, 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.

During the research, the people I spoke and listened to perceived me in different ways. 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.[6] My knowledge of Polish 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.[7] I think my presence also hindered them from articulating how they felt about the popularity they enjoyed among Flemish girls during their liberation march.[8]

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.[9] 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, could I 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 men-

6 Interview with Andrzej on 7.11.2005. The interviewees have been given fictitious names.
7 Interview with Mariusz on 2.12.2005.
8 Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006.
9 Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006.

tioned. Even my name had to change. 'Machteld' is Flemish, 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, 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.

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 generally spoke in their mother tongues, whether Polish, Russian or Ukrainian. When explaining how they received Belgian 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'. I tried to interview an interviewee in his or her language, making use of various official languages which an interviewee knew sometimes very well, and sometimes only a little. The interview fragments I quote in this study are translated into English, and part of their meaning is, thus, inevitably lost in translation. The song lyrics I attach in an appendix 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 are published in the way they wrote the lyrics down.

The ATLASti software program was used to analyse the interviews. During the coding process, I concentrated on what experiences interview fragments were about (categories) and how precisely these experiences were reflected in the words of interviewees (properties). I also 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). Between different coding processes, I went back to my archival data and migration periodicals for cross-checking. Later, I searched for relations between the categories and the properties of my database. In the final phase of analysis, the core category of war memory sprang up.

The outcome of my research revealed the importance of war memory for the immigrants under study and their immigrant organisations. The extensive empirical data collection provided in-depth knowledge on the operational processes of 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.

Outline of the Study

This study consists of six chapters. An introductory chapter searches for similarities and differences in the war, arrival and settlement experiences of Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen. After this overview, I concentrate on the representations which former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen constructed from these experiences. The book is divided into three parts focusing on immigrants' 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 focuses on former Allied soldiers from Poland and chapter three centralises former Ostarbeiterinnen.

The second part, 'Performing Group Memories', looks at performances during immigrant group gatherings. 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 Polish 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. I analyse how during performances, memories of individual members interplayed with group memories and show how they exerted an identifying function. The last part of my study, 'Trauma in Group Memories', consists of one chapter that 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 appendices with information about the interviewees and the song lyrics and music I recorded during my research.

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

Above all, this study concentrates on how Allied soldiers from Poland and Ostarbeiterinnen gave meaning to war experiences in their immigrant organisations 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, will be depicted.

War Experiences

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 unities 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, thereby resuming the traditional 19th 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). Can-

didates 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 (Kutzner and Rutkiewicz). 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).[10] 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 managed to break through a German besiegement and hereby opened the way to Paris (Anonymous, 1947, 65-70; Kutzner and Tym). 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).

10 State Archives in Belgium, Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Naturalisation dossiers (further Nat. Dos.). 23495, 24464 and 25552; Interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005.

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 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 (Radomski; Rydel). 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 accepted this offer as the soldiers 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).

Not only division soldiers, but also aviators from the Polish air force, airmen from the Allied air force and night watchers settled in Belgium. On 1 January 1945, aviators of the 131st 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).[11] 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.[12] 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.[13] In this study, I only mention these airmen and night watchers in 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 project.

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 98). This is the

11 *Wolne Słowo* 5/22 (12.1992) 7 and 11/43 (4.1998) 3,7; Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005; Interview with Artur on 14.07.2005 and on 22.10.2005.

12 *Tygodnik Polski* 14/38 (674) 4.10.1970 8; Interview with Damian on 13.02.2006.

13 Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006.

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 (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).

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. 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 and 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; Ruff 76)[14].

Nazi law conceived Ostarbeiter(innen) as Untermenschen and placed them near the bottom rung of the racial ladder, allowing them to precede 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 mostly 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, Ostarbeiterinnen were strictly separated from Germans, from

14 Studies on the working conditions of Ostarbeiterinnen are proliferating. I here refer to a selection of them: Adamushko, Belarussische Republikanische Stiftung 'Verständigung und Aussöhnung'; Bogdan and Gerasimov; Bouresh, Heckert, Kobschenko; Gerlach; Grinchenko, 2004; Kraatz.

Westarbeiter, Western European voluntary workers or labour conscripts who received better treatment, and from prisoners of war (Ulrich, 1986, 286-287).[15] 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, 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; Ostrovskaia 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, 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 (Frewer and Siedbürger). 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; 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

15 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).

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. 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 (Ostrovskaia and Shcherbakova 83).

Arrival in Belgium[16]

In September 1944, 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.[17] 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).[18] 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.[19]

During the time the division functioned as an occupying force, its soldiers could easily come on holiday to Belgium (Kajpus and Van Dam 64).[20] It was not unusual that soldiers married their fiancées as early as in 1945 and 1946 while still holding

16 Part of the analysis that will be provided here was published earlier in Venken 2008 and Venken 2010b.

17 See for instance the interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005 and the interview with Jacek on 6.12.2005.

18 See for instance the interview with Artur on 20.10.2005 and the interview with Waldek on 25.11.2005.

19 Nat. Dos. 23683.

20 Archive Secretary the Benelux Circle, file with members; Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006.

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).[21]

The mixed marriages which the division soldiers contracted with Belgian citizens changed the legal position of the women. Until 1984, Belgian law applied the concept of unity of citizenship in the family 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). 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 property assigned responsibility to the husbands, and not the wives, for administering the family's goods (Van Houtte, Civil Code art. 213). But women were also in an unequal position when they intermarried. The concern about the unity of citizenship in the family 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 (de Hart, 2006, 49).

The Belgian wives of division soldiers upon marriage authomatically received Polish citizenship, but then requested their Belgian citizenship back. Belgium had already in 1922 added an exception to the 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 exceptional.

The Belgian spouses' preference not to permanently change their citizenship can easily be explained by the uncertain staus of the division. Belgian women who married division soldiers officially became Polish citizens before their husbands received Displaced Person's status upon demobilisation. It is 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 is exactly the opposite idea of unity of citizenship in the family. But the citizenship situation of the mixed couples also brought an advantage for division soldiers as it

21 See for instance the interview with Jacek on 6.12.2005.

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.[22] 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).

There was also 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.[23]

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.[24] Later, Ostarbeiterinnen with or without Belgian partners joined the convoys organised by the Belgian Committee for Repatriation to bring Belgian workers back from Germany.[25] Upon arrival, the women and men were interrogated and only the women who could show a German marriage certificate and whose husband was not suspected of collaboration, could join their husbands. because thanks to their married status, they acquired Belgian citizenship.

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, and similar setups existed for example in the Netherlands and France (Coudry, 1995a, 116-118; Luyckx 100-101; Postma 331).

A Belgian partner could only collect his fiancée from a repatriation centre providing he had a temporary residence permit for her, which he could obtain from his municipal administration if he declared that he could support her financially (Luyckx 153-154). Only with such 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.[26]

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22 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.

23 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; Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005; Interview with Adam on 2.12.2005).

24 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 373, 28.5.1945.

25 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 813, 'Rapport sur l'activité du Commissariat Belge au Rapatriement: 8 octobre 1944 – 25 juillet 1945'.

26 See for instance the interview with Kelly on 7.02.2006.

Soviet citizenship law however was not based on the idea of unity of citizenship in the family. 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.[27] 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.

The Right to Stay in Belgium

One may have the impression that marriage guaranteed the right to stay in Belgium for former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen. However, 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.[28] To find a job, they relied on the family networks of their wives and were employed in the business of their family-in-law or their acquaintances. The Belgian Civil Code did not allow women 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).[29] 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.

Division soldiers whose spouse's network could not offer employment signed up for a training program at the Polish Resettlement Corps in Great Britain and planned to join their wives in Belgium afterwards (Zubrycki 655, 664).[30] The return to Belgium

27 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 1040, 11.4.1949.
28 See for instance the interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005.
29 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, Alien file (further Alien file) 2099264.
30 Alien files 2096475, 2194008 and 2293440.

went less smoothly than they had expected.[31] Without a valid Belgian work permit they could only be sent to the Belgian mines, where their Belgian wives, according to the law, needed to follow them.[32] 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 immigrants as miners (Caestecker, 1992, 67; van Wageningen and Żelichowski 11-13).[33] In reality, it was the wives who enabled their husbands to function as family providers. The women better took this responsibility seriously because their own position was at stake. 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 needed to offer a permanent work and residence permit to all Displaced Persons who had already lived in Belgium for three years and to allow 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).

It is difficult to say how many former Allied soldiers from Poland settled in Belgium. Unmarried division soldiers, most division soldiers with a scholarship, and even a few mixed married couples eventually migrated to the Polish People's Republic or overseas (van Wageningen and Żelichowski 11-13).[34] I rely on the two estimates provided by the Presidents of two organisations of Allied soldiers from Poland: 200 and 370.[35] 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 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.[36]

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-

31 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 432 and Alien file 2225180.
32 Alien file 2097894 and 2293440; Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006.
33 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 347, 12.3.1948.
34 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 347, 12.3.1948; Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2006; Interview with Slawomir on 6.12.2005.
35 Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2006; Interview with Artur on 14.07.2005.
36 There is also another source quoting a smaller number, but the author is less infiltrated in the former Allied soldiers from Poland's network. See also *Tygodnik Polski* 14/40 (676) 18.10.1970 7.

Flanders countryside at the end of World War II.[37] In the Belgian mining regions, division soldiers subject to the Belgian miners' recruitment policy could be found. In addition, two division soldiers remained in their student city.[38] 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.[39] 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.

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 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.[40] 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).

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, there is one list with the names of one hundred Ostarbeiterinnen, on the basis of which I could analyse who the Belgian state allowed to stay, to whom it closed its borders and how Ostarbeiterinnen dealt with these decisions.[41]

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.[42] 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.[43]

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37 Interview with Mariusz on 2.12.2005.

38 Interview with Adam on 2.12.2006.

39 Interview with Slawomir on 6.12.2005; Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006.

40 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.

41 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 373, the list of 15.6.1945 contains 231 names. Most were Soviet Prisoners of War.

42 Alien files 2025069, 2028168 and 2029566.

43 *Gazet van Antwerpen* 11.9.1945 1 'Een zeer actueel vraagstuk. Duizenden Oekraïnsche Meisjes kwamen naar België Duizenden Katholieke jongens willen met hen trouwen'; Interview with Peggy on 10.11.2006.

Besides the winners, I also found thirty-six 'losers'. No marriage automatically meant repatriation. Fifteen of these Ostarbeiterinnen 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. This short analysis 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.[44] 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.[45]

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 local authorities (Coudry, 1995b, 131-132; Grieger, Gutzmann, Schlinkert). 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 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. 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).[46] 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 Belgian husbands, the mixed 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

44 Alien file 2029103.

45 Alien file 2072135.

46 Archive SOMA, Archive of the Commissioner's Office for Repatriation , AA 105, 27.8.1945.

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.[47] 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.[48]

Due to the undocumented migration of many Ostarbeiterinnen settling in Belgium, it is impossible to give their exact amount. A study on Ukrainian immigrants in Belgium estimates there were 2,500, but the author told me he was only in contact with very few former Ostarbeiterinnen (Kohut, 214).[49] A more recent interview-based study on former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium spoke about 5,000 women.[50] The former Ostarbeiterinnen I spoke to mostly estimated their number in Belgium at around 3,500 to 4,000.[51]

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.[52] Moreover, contrary to the former soldiers, Ostarbeiterinnen did not hold membership lists of their immigrant organisations. 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 therefore made a case-study of the city of Antwerp and consulted the city's marriage register.[53] Seventy-nine Russian, Ukrainian or Belarusian girls and young women married Belgians in 1945, but 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.

Although Belgian migration policy had rapidly liberalised during 1945, the number of marriages involving Ostarbeiterinnen in Antwerp each month in 1945 remained stable (from May to October 1945), indicating that this did not directly influence their decision to stay or leave. The influence of the Belgian policy is only 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.[54] This shows that the Belgian exception criteria, allowing pregnant women, women with a baby and sick women to stay, did play a role. One could

47 Alien files 2027856 and 2028415.
48 Archive of the Belgian Aliens Police, file 1040, 13.4.1949.
49 Interview with Mykola Kohut on 15.09.2005.
50 *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 10.
51 See for instance the interview with Elly on 2.01.2007.
52 There were also former Ostarbeiterinnen who followed their Belgian husbands to the Belgian colony Congo. Some spent only a few years in Africa, whereas others only left Congo when it became independent in 1960 (Ronin 2009, 243-245 and 289-295).
53 Eight of the nine contemporary city districts in Antwerp (excluding Wilrijk).
54 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).

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.[55] 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.[56] The women must have known this very well, since the ones who were called up preferred to go into hiding.[57]

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.[58] 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 of their Ostarbeiterinnen-wives. 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.[59] 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).[60]

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55 Marriage 138 on 14 May 1945 in Antwerp.

56 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).

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

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

59 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'.

60 Interview with Cindy on 6.02.2006.

What happened when repatriated Soviet prisoners of war or Ostarbeiter(innen) arrived in the Soviet Union? 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 (Figes 613-618; Polian, 2002, 577). The people who went home also 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 stereotypisation 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 (Ostrovskaia and Shcherbakova 80-81).

Receiving Belgian citizenship

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.[61] 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 was able to trace back, 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.[62] Their involvement showed that, apparently, for many former Allied soldiers from Poland applying individually was too difficult. Following the group application,

61 *Belgian Monitor* 17.12.1932.

62 Nat. dos. 25186.

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 yearly number of applications declined, but requests now came from all over Flanders.

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.[63] 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.[64] A few former Allied soldiers from Poland were exempted from registration costs because their salary was too modest.[65] 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.[66]

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.[67] From the interviews I learned former division soldiers nowadays do not consider their involvement in the resistance important.[68] However Belgians did, since Belgians 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.[69] 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. 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

63 Nat. dos. 26719 and 25186.
64 Nat. dos. 23401.
65 Nat. dos. 22221 and 25175.
66 Nat. dos. 25043.
67 Nat. dos. 24464 and 23495.
68 Nat. dos. 23495 and 25552; See for instance the interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005.
69 Nat. dos. 25552, 25827, 26475 and 29103.

division soldiers had done their duty and therefore enjoyed the privilege of becoming Belgians for free.

Analysing the reasons why former Allied soldiers from Poland applied for Belgian citizenship, I found different results in the application forms and in 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 expensive work permit or could receive subsidies for the structural alterations of their old houses.[70] The interviews revealed two other reasons.

The first reason I found when I asked the interviewees: 'When did you travel to Poland for the first time?' It was most automatically answered: 'When I became Belgian'.[71] 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.[72] Displaced Persons were not allowed to visit their homeland. If they did, they lost their privileged status.[73] 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?

I found evidence that the testimonies of former division soldiers are not all romanticism. Comparing 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 Belgian citizens.[74]

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.[75] A 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.[76] Some former soldiers considered it important

70 Nat. dos. 22307 and 25552.
71 See for instance the interview with Jacek on 6.12.2005.
72 See for instance the interview with Rafał on 6.12.2005.
73 Nat. dos. 35551 and 31688.
74 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.'
75 *Belgian Monitor* 17.12.1932.
76 Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2006.

that when one became a citizen, one was willing to do one's duty for the Belgian nation.[77]

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 wanted European voting rights.[78] 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.[79] 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.[80]

Keeping Belgian citizenship?

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 could retain 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 permanently 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.[81] The husbands also decided whether their children could leave, but as in the 1940s, the Soviet Embassy acted so secretively, that the Aliens Police could not always prevent their departure.[82]

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77 Alien file 2106863.

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

79 *Belgian Monitor* 29.7.1976.

80 *Belgian Monitor* 12.7.1984.

81 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police, file 1040, 'Rapatriement russes'.

82 Alien file 2041765.

After Stalin had died, the Soviet Union also accepted spouses of Soviet citizens to settle on their territory when they gave up their initial citizenship and adopted the Soviet one.[83] 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 for citizenship resignation to a Belgian administration office, the Belgian authorities decided to declare their citizenship change invalid and to allow their return. 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.[84]

Conclusion

Former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen hold much in common. They all came from regions in Central and Eastern Europe situated behind what would become the Iron Curtain, migrated to Belgium in the aftermath of World War II, and married Belgian citizens. Their settlement portrays a rather scattered living pattern, especially when compared to the immigrants' communities in the Belgian mine regions. Their war experiences were very different, the men being soldiers liberating Belgian cities from the enemy, and the immigrant women working for the enemy as Ostarbeiterinnen abroad. However, both the Allied soldiers from Poland and the Ostarbeiterinnen experienced part of their war in the near presence of their future spouses, with whom they could often share their memories later.

Immigrant men and women faced a different Belgian migration policy. The men needed to prove their usefulness for the Belgian economy and the women needed to marry. The temptation is to see the immigrant men as active individuals, and the immigrant women as passive dependents. However, in practice, the men were dependent on the network of their spouses in order to be able to fulfil the criteria. Although the former soldiers did not receive Belgian citizenship after their marriage, they felt more accepted in their environment than the former Ostarbeiterinnen. The fact that most fathers-in-law of the former soldiers had been soldiers themselves during World War I, and that the former Allied soldiers had experienced a part of their war on Belgian soil, made them feel recognised among family and friends. In contrast, although Ostarbeiterinnen received Belgian citizenship thanks to intermarrying, they experienced a form of denigratory stereotyping, were called war whores and prostitutes and were regarded as outsiders.

83 Alien file A345960.

84 Alien file 2048604, 14 June 1956.

The citizenship change did not enable the Ostarbeiterinnen to relinquish their Soviet citizenship, even if they wanted to. In fact, the contradictions between the idea of unity of citizenship within the family 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 Ostarbeiterinnen (even married ones) against repatriation. The Allied soldiers from Poland who had lost their original citizenship and did not have Belgian citizenship (having instead Displaced Persons' status) did not have to fear repatriation.

For former Allied soldiers from Poland, the criteria to stay in Belgium were not the same as they were to receive Belgian citizenship. Research usually concentrates on the consequences of migration policy for men and women, but ignores naturalisation policy (Piper 135). 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). 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.

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. As for 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. For former Ostarbeiterinnen, their mixed marriage was 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. 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. Former Ostarbeiterinnen who returned from the Soviet Union with their husbands could retain their Belgian citizenship, while divorced women had to regain it.

Part 1: Constructing Group Memories

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 agencies 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 (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. This chapter illustrates 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 primordial Polish ethnic organisations in a certain country and divide them into two opposite political camps: anti-communist and communist (Burrell, 69; Dopierała; Friszke; Pula; Turkowski; Ziętara). 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 has questioned this approach. 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 (Moya 857). Most studies on immigrants from Poland in Belgium are written by immigrants themselves or by historians from Poland, who all presuppose immigrant organisations were solely involved in homeland politics (Eder 1983; Kępa; Żmigrodzki). Such studies do not question whether immigrant organisations were also influenced by their host country Belgium (Schrover and Vermeulen 826). The overall historiographical picture is more balanced thanks to the in-depth academic research on migration in for instance the Belgian mines (Beyers, 2007b; Caestecker, 1991; Goddeeris, 2005a).

Nevertheless, studies on immigrants from Poland in Belgium presume immigrant organisations are fixed entities, in this way ignoring the fact that the organisational process of immigrants is a dynamic phenomenon which passes through different stages during the settlement process (Vermeulen 2006). Looking at the whole course of life of immigrant organisations helps indicate how changes in home and host societies over time influence immigrant organisations and how immigrant organisations influence each other (Minkoff, 1995, 3).

Over a period lasting sixty or so years, the group formation process of former Allied soldiers from Poland passed through four phases. I follow the Dutch sociologist Floris Vermeulen in his theoretical approach for their first forty years of settlement, 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 some 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 became decisive. Later, the internal competition dynamics between immigrant organisations came to the fore. Finally, after the collapse of communism, the new geopolitical context redrew their organisational life.

1947-1956[85]

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, 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 and recognised 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.[86] 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.[87] Lieutenant Stanisław Merlo, for instance, who

85 See also Venken 2011b.

86 Archive SPK, file Zebranie Zarządu SPK, Walne zebrania i zebrania Zarządu, kwiecień 1953, p. 3.

87 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.

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, where he joined the First Polish Armoured Division after the liberation.[88]

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'.[89] 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 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.[90] 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.[91]

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. Former Allied soldiers 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[92]

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. Idesbald Goddeeris demonstrated how growing unemployment, the closing-down of the IRO

88 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).

89 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.

90 Goddeeris wrongly mentions Morski (Goddeeris, 2005, 126).

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

92 Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005.

and the friendly migration policy from overseas countries lay at the basis of the decisions made by immigrants to leave Belgium 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.[93]

Marski's quest demonstrates that in the early 1950s, in cities liberated by soldiers of the First Polish Armoured Division, former division soldiers gathered informally without being politically active.[94] 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.[95]

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 immigrants 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.

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 fight-

93 Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005; Interview with Sławomir on 6.12.2005.

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

95 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.

ers, who had been more numerous than People's Guard fighters, were considered a threat to that picture (Wawrzyniak 59-60).[96]

Loose A-political Group Gatherings

Former Allied soldiers from Poland in Belgium in general 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 immigrants from Poland who had been employed in Allied armies and had settled in Belgium at the end of World War II. They went for a beer together or stopped for a chat in a grocery shop ran by a former division soldier.[97] 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.[98] 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, 2007b; 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. In this way, they could meet up in a house allocated to political refugees, where they established 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 immigrants 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 immigrants 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 Government in exile: its treasury.[99] 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.[100] A respondent formulated this exclusion as follows:

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96 Archive of New Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych- further AAN). sygn. 237/XXII/303 Zespól 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.

97 Interview with Mariusz on 2.12.2005; Interview with Andrzej on 7.12.2005.

98 Interview with Artur on 14.07.2005.

99 Interview with Artur on 20.10.2005.

100 Interview with Mariusz on 2.12.2005; Interview with Sławomir on 6.12.2005.

> we all were soldiers
> we had to fight together
> and to lie 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 lain under a tank with you
> we would get along
> everybody marches towards the future
> and we will survive[101]

During the interview, two persons with very little in common came face to face. 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 were also in contact with Belgian ex-combatant circles. 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[102]

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).

1956-1969

The gatherings of people with similar war experiences became formalised during a second phase of group formation. Agencies in the host and home societies of former Allied soldiers from Poland created an opportunity structure enabling them to establish formal organisations in which they could articulate war memories. I analyse how agencies tried to bestow these organisations with their own agenda of war memory and

101 Interview with Rafał on 6.12.2005.
102 Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006.

highlight whether their mobilisation attempts 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, when a large number of Home Army fighters as well as former soldiers who had fought in Allied forces were released from prison and borders became easier to cross, signalled a major shift in Polish politics and geopolitical relations. 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 broadened the content of that narrative and integrated 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 who had, as the narrative creatively put it, all fought, for their 'Motherland' (Wawrzyniak 227; Zaremba, 2001, 238, 290). 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 remigration campaign (Goddeeris, 2005a, 189-190).

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'. As it knew support for communist ideology in Western countries stood at an all-time low, it put itself forward as an organisation that wanted to help immigrants in solving their problems (Cenckiewicz, 2004, 177; Lencznarowicz, 1996, 53-54; Venken 2007a).

For the remigration campaign, the 'Polonia' society designed a threefold strategy. First, it tried to make contact with immigrant organisations and to obtain their membership lists. Then, it sent 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 people to re-migrate (Goddeeris, 2005a, 255). 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 positive response, but no further letters were exchanged.[103]

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

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 the majority of Polish immigrants in Belgium.[104]

The Polish communist party soon realised that 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 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 friendship 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 Fransciszek Skibiński, and hoped that the distribution of it among individual immigrants would stimulate them to donate money for the production of the statue (Skibiński, 1958).[105] 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 immigrants, but from liberated cities, indicates that the action was not a success (Eder 46-56).[106]

However, the action had two indirect consequences. First, members of the SPK became interested in the Polish People's Republic's initiatives, thanks 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.[107] They gathered mostly local political dignitaries who had been involved in the sponsoring of the statue or were Belgian family members of for-

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

105 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 Ambasador 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.

106 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.

107 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.

mer 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.[108] 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. 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 people of Jewish or Ukrainian descent 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 re-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 274).

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 for a holiday in 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.[109]

On the other hand, with the help of the 'Polonia' society, two new organisations were established which gathered 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

108 *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 – Wrzos 4.4.1962 Raport dot. Szygowskiego K. (tajne).

109 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.

that Polish sportsmen could 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).[110] The Olympic Committee organised events commemorating the participation of the First Polish Armoured Division in the liberation of Belgium, and for those occasions could also attract former Allied soldiers who were not members.[111] 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.[112] 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 he knew it favoured Polish ex-combatants above his 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.[113]

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 the city's liberation.[114] Cooperation between the 'Polonia' society and the Luxemburg government in 1968 led to the foundation of a Federation of Allied Combatants of Europe (Fédération des Combattants Alliés en Europe, under which 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, where it gathered exactly the same members as the Belgian-Polish Friendship Association.[115]

The KFKAE's activities in Belgium cannot be called a success. It set up an interesting visit for Moczar, who was supposed to be welcomed by several liberated city councils, but 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 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, highlighting the fact that the Polish People's Republic had provided troops for the invasion of Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring and had contributed to the oppression of

110 *Tygodnik Polski* 17/5 (797) 28.1.1973.
111 *Tygodnik Polski* 18/21 (918) 25.5.1975.
112 Interview with Damian on 13 February 2006.
113 Archive AAN. Archive Towarzystwo Polonia. Correspondence with Belgium, file 529.
114 Archive AAN. Archive Towarzystwo Polonia. Correspondence with Belgium, file 492, 483, 587/2, 717; Archive AAN. Towarzysztwo Łączności z Polonią Zagraniczną 'Polonia'. Zespół Informacji i Dokumentacji, Belgia. Organizacje 1989, 18/44, teczka 4.
115 *Tygodnik Polski* 12/27 (559) 30.9.1968.

people.[116] 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 immigrants 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 25th anniversary of the liberation, Polish immigrant organisations could not block that decision (Goddeeris, 2001, 500). Immigrants 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 ask if members of the PKO and KFKAE endorsed the underpinning political ideology of their 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 cooperating 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 they had received Belgian citizenship. Contrary to what the Polish Consulate stated, it mainly cooperated with Belgian (naturalised) citizens.[117]

Agencies of War Memory Articulation from Belgium

These naturalisation files also revealed that former Allied soldiers from Poland 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.[118] 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. In this way, a local Belgian patriotic organisation encouraged by its city council, managed to lobby for the widening of Belgium's approach.

116 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.

117 Archive MSZ, Consular Department, see for example file 13/73 'Raport konsularny za 1969r.'

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

Pieter Lagrou already came to the conclusion that in Belgium, 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).From the end of the 1950s, 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 did not function 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.

Agencies of War Memory Articulation from Great Britain

In 1964, General Stanisław Maczek paid a visit to Belgium for the 20th 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 Pancernej), established a little earlier in Great Britain. 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 (Kępa 181-183). The new organisation strived for gathering exclusively former division soldiers, erecting statues and other objects of commemoration, and parading at yearly services of commemorations in the liberated cities.[119]

Interested former division soldiers firstly needed to send their curriculum vitae to be checked by the Polish Ministry of Defence in exile, and 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.[120] 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 commemorational objects. In 1967, for example, a specially founded consortium of liberated cities decided to grant a yearly subsidy to the Circle.[121] Throughout the years, the Circle cooperated 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

119 *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.

120 Archive Secretary the Benelux Circle. Ledenmap.

121 Archive Treasurer the Benelux Circle. Kasboek.

First Polish Armoured Division in the liberated cities (Kępa 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[122]

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 '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 aniversary 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 founded a circle of Belgian friends (Vriendschapscircle van Poolse Vliegeniers / Koło Przyjaciół Polskich Lotników).[123]

1976-1989

After the foundation of the SPL at the end of the 1960s, no new organisations arose any more; 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, in which the internal competition between the organisations stood central.

Initially, 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 immigrants 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).

122 Interview with Artur on 14.07.2005.

123 *Wolne Słowo* 5/20 (8.1992) 10; Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005.

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.[124] 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.[125] It therefore made contact with the Polish Consulate in Antwerp and local Belgian patriotic organisations: the Coordination Committee 1940-1945 (Coordinatie 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 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.[126]

The KKA stated its members should receive the same rights 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. The contact with Belgian patriotic organisations had shown former Allied soldiers from Poland they did not enjoy the same privileges as Belgian

124 Archive the Belgian Association for Polish ex-combatants (de Belgische vereniging voor Poolse oud-strijders – further BVPO). In Memoriam Edmund Kaczyński.

125 Archive BVPO. 1e Sprawozdanie z zebrania Polskich kombatantów. 1976.

126 Notes on the Interview with Rafał on 6.12.2005; See also the interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005.

ex-combatants, whose years of service in the army were taken into account in their pension and received a discount on public transportation, financial compensation in case of war invalidity, and cheaper health care.[127]

Kaczynski's daughter started to write letters to Belgian ministries, but 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 had fought under British command and therefore, needed to address their question to the British authorities.[128] 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.[129] 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.[130] It 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, also revealed 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.[131]

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 what he called the whole Polish community and to increase cooperation with Belgian ex-combatant organisations.[132] 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. 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.[133] Second, the KKA, as the only organisation gathering former Allied soldiers from Poland, transformed itself into an

127 Archive BVPO. Letter of Pools oudstrijderscircle van België to Jacques Noel, advisor to the Prime Minister on 25.4.1977.

128 *Idem*. Letter of Marcel Plasmans (Ministry for Social Issues) to BVPO on 13.5.1977.

129 *Idem*. Letter of PVV to BVPO on 18.3.1980. The PVV was the forerunner of the contemporary Flemish liberal party VLD.

130 *Idem*. Letter of the Minister of Defence to BVPO on 13.4.1977.

131 *Idem*. Letter of the Minister of Retirement Pays to BVPO on 22.6.1977.

132 *Idem*. Letter of Jacques Noel to BVPO on 10.6.1977; Archive BVPO. *Het Strijdersblad* 20.12.1978.

133 *Idem*. Letter to the 1st Polish Armoured Division on 12.5.1979 and an answer from Maczek on 14.6.1979.

association recognised by the Belgian state: the Belgian Association for Polish ex-combatants (de Belgische vereniging voor Poolse oud-strijders – further BVPO). Following the advise of Jacques Noel did not yield any result. The 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.[134]

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.[135] 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. 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.[136]

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.[137] 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:

> 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.[138]

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

134 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.
135 *Belgian Monitor* 11.8.1983.
136 *Idem*. Registered list from BVPO to Ministry of Defence on 20.1.1984 with names.
137 *Idem*. Lista członków.
138 *Idem*. Bulletin of the BVPO. *Buletijn* 1984/4 p 1.

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[139]

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, 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.[140] 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.[141] Second, in that same period, most common 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 and despite the disapproval of the board and the Polish Consulate, supported a demonstration requesting political asylum for a Polish sailor who had escaped from his ship in the harbour of Antwerp.[142]

1989-2008

After the collapse of communism, 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 of communist rule

139 Interview with Ryszard Łuczak on 14.07.2005.
140 Archive BVPO. Letter from Mark Bienstman, representative of the Minister of Finances to BVPO on 3.4.1983.
141 *Idem*. Letter of François-Xavier de Donnea, Minister of Defence to BVPO on 30.1.1986.
142 *Idem*. Letter of Zbigniew Rosiński to his friend Romek from the 24th Pułk Ułanów in Great-Britain in 3.1985.

(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.[143] 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).[144] However, in 2004, on the 60th anniversary of the liberation, that decision was revoked, because the soldiers had not had Belgian citizenship during the war.[145] Pieter De Crem and Magda de Meyer, both politicians from liberated cities, lobbied for a change, and after a disruption of four months, twenty former Allied soldiers from Poland again received their financial compensation.[146]

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.[147]

Members of the Benelux Circle kept a distance from the newly arriving Polish immigrants. They realised that the status of exotic foreigner on which they had been able to build their exclusiveness, now all of a sudden could also be a threat, and 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[148]

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 immigrants mostly worked illegally. Former division soldiers had Belgian wives, 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' com-

143 A special Polish foundation was set up. It took care of the selection, installation and inauguration of the statue. See its leaflet: *Fundacja Upamiętnienia Pierwszej Dywizji Pancernej*.
144 *Belgian Monitor* 31.12.2002.
145 *Het Nieuwsblad* 1.9.2004.
146 *Het Volk* 4.12.2004.
147 *Belgian Monitor* 25.3.1995; Talk with the current President of the BVPO, Władysław Styranka on 28 December 2005.
148 Interview with Rafał on 6 December 2005.

pany (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 gotten along for more than 60 years, suddenly could not find a common language any longer.[149]

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. It had been convenient for the former division soldiers that the way World War II had been remembered during the Cold War, had centred around their postwar political anticommunist conviction. In addition, the fact that each year, they remembered the liberation of the cities in which they had settled, had emphasized this 'safe' and common aspect of their war experiences. Detailing the whole of their war experiences turned out to open up 'unsafe' information and to divide them. The ones, who did not join the Division in 1939, would have to justify their possible engagement with the Nazi Army. The members of the Benelux Circle were unable to reach an agreement as to whether they could allow having their individual war experiences checked.

Therefore, they finally decided to ally with the BVPO. In 1995, the BVPO resumed activity. Deprived of most of its former division soldiers-members, it had addressed itself to new Polish immigrants, and as a consequence, became a social meeting point for people of proclaimed ethnic Polish descent.[150] In the end, the 'Benelux

149 *Komunikat* BVPO nr 96. Sprawozdanie z walnego zebrania 3.3.2003, 3; Interview with Waldek on 25.11.2005; Interview with Robert on 13.02.2006.

150 *Belgian Monitor* 25.3.1995.

Circle' members decided to merge with the new Polish immigrants of the BVPO whom they had kept away from before.

In the BVPO, former division soldiers were welcomed with open arms. Their presence in fact provided the new Polish immigrant-members with an extremely good argument to defend their stay in Belgium. Many new Polish immigrants felt inferior to Belgians and other EU citizens because they were not granted the same rights on the Belgian labour market, and the narrative they developed on their presence in Belgium aimed to compensate this feeling.[151] That narrative identified former division soldiers as fellow-ethnics. In a speech, for example, the Secretary of the BVPO addressed members during a honorary meeting for the former division soldiers in the following way:

> Again we are gathered to honour some of our ex-combatants. About their role in the battles at all fronts of the Second World War has been said and written a lot. Today, I want to say something else. [I want to speak] about your impression, dear ex-combatants, on all of us who live abroad. We are all immigrants and although the reasons [for migration] differ, for nobody it was easy, especially not emotionally. The history of all of us is different. But there is something that binds us together: our love for our language, culture and traditions. I think I can say, in my name, but also in the name of the many Poles in Belgium: "Your lives, dear ex-combatants, were and are for us the example of a Polish immigrant".[152]

The self-evident ethnified link new Polish immigrant-members create between themselves and former division soldiers, is added with themes of Europeanisation and freedom. After all, had these former division soldiers not been the forerunners of peace in Europe and did the new Polish immigrant-members not have to continue to build a unified and peaceful Europe? The President of the BVPO wrote the following about the merger:

> 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.[153]

The President's interpretation of war memory transcends a nation-oriented focus. He encourages all members to function as heralds of peaceful Europeanization in the footsteps of the former division soldiers. He bestows an important mission on the members, one that can justify their presence in Belgium for another than merely labour related reason. That mission is articulated in memory practices on a visible touchstone of the past: the war cemetery in Lommel, where those division soldiers who died during the liberation of Belgium, are buried. Immigrant press articles for example speak about the duty to go to the cemetery and to remember the fallen former division soldiers. An article in the popular *Gazette* from November 2007 reads:

> All Saints' and All Souls' Day we associate in the first place with visiting cemeteries, burning candles and praying for our deceased family members, friends and acquaintances (…). It

151 Elżbieta Kuzma, *Listy z daleka* 72/11/2009.

152 *Komunikat* Verbond van Poolse Oud-strijders en Veteranen van de 1ste Poolse Pantserdivisie van Generaal Maczek in België vzw / Związek Polskich Kombatantów i Weteranów 1 Dywizji Pancernej Generała Maczka w Belgii vzw 30: 1, 2008/2009, 3. The speech was held by Secretary Aleksandra Czacka.

153 *Idem*, 27: 1, 2005, 4.

> is also the time we remember our ancestors, thanks to whom we exist. We tell our children about our family members, whom they never knew nor remember, but whom we don't want them to forget. We remember those who are already not among us, but will remain in our hearts and memories. It is also a special moment for reflection on our own life and destiny. Those of us, who live in a foreign country, travel to their homeland or try to experience those days according to Polish tradition (…). If we cannot travel to our homeland, let's go to Belgian cemeteries. Let's search the graves of our countrymen, who stayed forever on Belgian soil. Let's go to the cemetery of Polish soldiers in Lommel and let's burn a candle on the graves of those, who gave their life for the freedom of Europe.[154]

Conclusion

The group formation dynamics of former Allied soldiers from Poland passed through four distinct phases. 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 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 and 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.[155]

During a 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 131st wing of the Polish air force. The biggest organisation, the Benelux Circle, 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 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. 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. 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

154 Karolina Krakowska, 'Dzień Wszystkich Świętych a Halloween', *Gazetka* 66: 11, 2007, 12.

155 This conclusion runs counter to the exploratory research findings of Idesbald Goddeeris, who wrote about former soldiers of the First Armoured Polish Division in the margin of his study on Polish immigrants in Belgian cities and mine regions (Goddeeris, 2005a, 43-50).

exclusive entrance policies cooperating with agencies from Great Britain. Nevertheless, they could offer Mieczysław Moczar support for his internal 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 some Belgians aware of the exclusiveness of former Allied soldiers from Poland. City councils and individual World War I ex-combatants, but not Belgian patriotic organisations remembering World War II, became 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 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 small, local but prestigious 'Polish ex-combatant' pillar within the cultural field on war memory in Belgium. This phenomenon 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 their own small local 'Polish ex-combatant' pillar was therefore a first step on the path of integration.

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 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, 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, 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, this 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.

During the Cold War, former division soldiers were incorporated based on their political (anti-communist) narratives on war memory. When the geopolitical context changed, that political narrative came under scrutiny and a dark page in the history of

the division hinting to collaborationism, was opened. As a consequence, former division soldiers lost the sympathy of Belgian patriotic organisations, but found new support among freshly arrived immigrants from Poland who construct them as the forerunners of peace in Europe. Such a presentation endowed them with the mission to safeguard peace in the contemporary enlarged European Union. As this entity embraces both Belgians and Poles, that presentation calls on equal treatment, which the new Polish immigrants for a long time did not enjoy in their professional lives. The merger of the Benelux Circle with new immigrants from Poland could therefore perhaps be a contemporary form of integration in a Europeanised narrative on war memory.

Making use of the insights of both memory and migration studies while looking at the integration of former Allied soldiers from Poland in Belgium turned out to be a fruitful exercise, because the evolution of their integration, from local to national, and later to European, points to an interesting change over time. Because of a shift in geopolitical context, the integration former soldiers had found earlier had to be renegotiated. While sympathy of Belgian patriotic organisations decreased, cooperation with new immigrants from Poland, who are not considered to be integrated according to Belgian public opinion, increased.

3: 'You Still Live Far from the Motherland, But You Are Her Daughter'

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. 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).[156] 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 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 immigrants, this chapter adds new elements to the recent research concerning the counter narratives on war memory within the former Soviet Union as performed for example 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.

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

156 *Belgian Monitor* 20.1.1945 annex 90, 9.3.1946 nr 592, 31.10.1953 nr 2856, 17.1.1963 nr 275.

society were decisive. The monopoly position of SSG however, led to an absence of internal competition dynamics between various immigrant organisations. Interestingly, in the last phase (after the fall of communism), the organisational landscape was not redrawn, although the narratives on war memory articulated in the SSG noticeably changed.

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'. However, their attempts did not yield much and most former Ostarbeiterinnen during the first years of settlement preferred to gather informally.

Estimations suggest that around 1945, about 20,000 immigrants of Russian descent lived in Belgium.[157] 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 Iuriĭ Voĭchekhovskiĭ, the de facto leader of Russian immigrant organisational life (Coudenys, 2004, 138-155). Voĭchekhovskiĭ 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. After liberation, within the Russian immigrant organisational life, anti-communism was equated with collaborationism and the Voĭchekhovskiĭ club was charged with heresy. 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 immigrants 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, 258, 273). 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.[158] When, in 1950, a consortium of thirteen Russian immigrant organisations, including the UIGR, applied for subsidies at the International Refugee Organisation, they men-

157 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police 813. Réfugiés russes (établis en Yougoslavie) 1930-1960. Memorandum sur les activités philantropiques, 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.

158 Interview with Elly on 2.02.2007.

tioned in their application that they did not seek or maintain contact with what they called Soviet immigrants.[159]

However, a few former Ostarbeiterinnen found their way to a new Russian immigrant organisation, the SSP 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 (Ronin 46-47).[160] 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.[161] Given the risk of repatriation which former Ostarbeiterinnen faced due to their dual citizenship, eyebrows might be raised at such 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, *Sovetskiĭ Patriot*.[162] 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 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.[163]

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.[164]

After World War II, a Ukrainian immigrant organisation also tried to get in touch with the arriving Ostarbeiterinnen. In the interwar period, Ukrainian immigrants 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

159 Archive the Belgian Aliens Police 813. Réfugiés russes, p. 8.

160 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 3/12-13 (11.1947) 5.

161 *Idem* 3/12-13 (11.1947) 9; Interview with Wendy on 6.11.2006.

162 *Ibidem*; Archive of the Ghent choir conductor, report 'Soiuz Sovetskikh Grazhdan v Bel'gii', s.d., 3 p. In 1980, *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* would change to *Patriot.*

163 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 3/12-13 (11.1947) 8.

164 *De Sovjet-Unie. Wekelijksch Orgaan der Belgisch-Sovjetische Vereeniging* 2/17 (4.5.1945) 7; 2/38 (28.9.1945) 8; Interview with Wendy on 6.11.2006.

immigrants sprang up, whereas in big cities, organisational life was based around nationality-type groups consisting of 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 (Ukrainskyï Dopomohovyï Komitet – further UDK) tried to unite all factions of Ukrainian immigrants around one central point: helping what they called 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 (Venken and Goddeeris 104-106). 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 because it feared Soviet infiltration (Luyckx 160).

The Rhedemptorist Fathers in turn were interested in the former Ostarbeiterinnen for religious reasons. In 1913, the Belgian Rhedemptorists had accepted Metropolitan Andreï Sheptytskyï's request to reassign Belgian Fathers who had been active among Ukrainians in Canada since 1899 to Galicia (Lukie and Chernoff). As fewer Ukrainian immigrants were arriving in Canada, the Metropolitan considered the Rhedemtorist Fathers' help more necessary in the region where these immigrants were coming from (Boni 278). What is now Western Ukraine, was in 1913 part of the 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 (Ceyssens 54; Houthaeve). 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.[165]

The Rhedemptorists launched a baptism campaign and went to more than one hundred Flemish cities where they preached the word of God.[166] The notebook of Karel Bilcke shows that parents-in-law welcomed the initiative far more enthusiastically than the former Ostarbeiterinnen themselves.[167] 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.[168] Bilcke

165 Archive KADOC, Archive of the Rhedemptorist Fathers, 5.3.1. Bilcke Karel and Regaert Louis; *Kerk en Leven* 17.1.1985 11.

166 *Idem*, 210 Louis Vangansewinkel, folder 3, 'De huismissie verovert Vlaanderen. De 103 huismissies van de paters Rhedemptoristen: 1946-1953. Met missiekaart, huis- en nabezoeken'.

167 *Idem*, 5.3.1. Bilcke Karel, folder 8, Notebook.

168 Interview with Debby on 20 July 2006.

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.[169]

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.[170]

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.[171] All of them were automatically subscribed to Posnoff's bulletin.

During the interviews I conducted, it became clear that the various existing civil society organisations interested in the former Ostarbeiterinnen could not count on the numerous support of former Ostarbeiterinnen. Instead, the women 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.[172] Brenda 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.[173]

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 what they called 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.[174] News from home, no matter how scarce and distorted, was always a big event.[175] Letters that reached Belgium were in line with the official Stalin doctrine, articulating the Soviet narrative on war memory. Various agencies in the direct environment of former Ostarbeiterinnen and Belgian public discourse spoke badly of the Soviet Union and Stalin and challenged the narrative 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 never-

169 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.
170 *Idem*, 5.3.1. Bilcke Karel, folder 8, Notebook, Olga Lewtschenko.
171 *Idem*, 5.3.1. Bilcke Karel, folder 3 and 8; 171 Jozef Deweerdt, folder 2.
172 Interview with Sandy on 14.02.2006.
173 Interview with Brenda on 13.11.2006.
174 *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 11.
175 Interview with Kelly on 7.02.2007.

theless continued to give more credit to the words of their relatives at home than to what their Belgian environment told them.[176] It is therefore worth briefly describing how World War II was remembered in the Soviet Union at that time.

The Stalin doctrine propagated a war discourse of loyalty towards what it called the Motherland and spoke about universal brotherhood, two forces which had led to the Soviets' victory over Germany. That victory 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 been forced to offer people more freedom of initiative (Figes 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 many dissidents (Merridale, 2007, 369-370).

1956-1991

The Motherland Calls

Former Ostarbeiterinnen would find out to what atrocities Stalin's policy had led in 1956, 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 people who had migrated from the USSR, and led to a dramatic change in the Soviet Union's policy (Figes 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. The Communist Party was now 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 (Figes 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. Just like the

176 See for instance the interview with Kelly on 7.02.2007 and the interview with Amanda on 18.07.2006.

'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.[177]

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.[178] 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 remigration campaign from the early post-war years (Stelzl-Marx, 2003, 46).[179] 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.[180]

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 has written that until the mid-1960s, Soviet authorities used the Russian

177 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 sviazeĭ s sootechestvennikami za Rubezhom – further KVRRKSSR). In 1963, KVRRKSSR would become The Soviet Committee for cultural ties with countrymen living abroad (Sovetskiĭ Komitet po kul'turnykh sviaziam s sootechestvennikami 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 sviaziam s sootechestvennikami 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 sviaziam s sootechestvennikami za Rubezhom – Assotsiatsiia 'Rodina'- further the Motherland Association (Archive the Motherland Association, 50 Let Sluzheniia Rodine 3, 5, 6).

178 Participant Observation on 25.09.2006. In 1960, *Za Vozvrashchenie na Rodinu*! became *Golos Rodiny* (The Voice of the Motherland).

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

180 *Idem* 4/86 (277) (11.1958) 1.

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.[181]

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 that 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.[182] That her neighbour's impression about the Soviet Union was so roseate does not come as a surprise, since one had developed a special method to manipulate foreigners ideologically and it was the task of the official tourist agency Intourist to overwhelm tourists with typical Soviet successes such as impressive buildings and its social security policy (Bagdasarian and others 121, 159).[183] One has the impression the Committee used the letter from Irena to show Soviet immigrants living abroad that each of them could help to change the convictions of their direct environment. The bulletin, indeed, reads like a cookbook with various basic recipes on how to be a communist in the Atlantic World.[184]

The ideological education aimed to counteract the disillusions which former Ostarbeiterinnen from Belgium experienced during their holidays in the Soviet Union. On the way to their first visits, their heads were full of questions, as they found themselves straddled between the fear of communism reigning in their Belgian 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

181 Archive the Motherland Association, D-085 Bel'giia. Perepiska s otdel'nymi litsami; *Golos Rodiny* 7/41 (528) (5.1961) 3.
182 *Golos Rodiny* 7/45 (542) (6.1961) 3.
183 *Idem* 7/44 (541) (6.1961) 3.
184 See for instance *Idem* 7/41 (538) (5.1961) 3; 7/44 (541) (6.1961) 3.

I: And did they drink coffee at home after the war?

I've heard my mama saying
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!'[185]

During Peggy's 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 drunk coffee before she had met Peggy's father, a Ukrainian workman from the Kiev region.[186] 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.[187] 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 to do. 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 her the coffee her mother had drunk when she was young must have been similarly bad and that insight refuted Peggy's childhood imagination on the subject of luxury. Peggy now realised she knew how to drink coffee better than her mother and used that perception to value her life style in Belgium more highly than in the Soviet Union, a perception that dominated during the whole interview.

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 an official criterion mentioned on the visa form for completion.[188] Not surprisingly, the SSG's membership roll started to grow, and in Ghent counted 20 members in 1955, and 80 in 1957.[189] 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,

185 Interview with Peggy on 15.10.2006.
186 Interview with Peggy on 14.09.2006.
187 Interview with Peggy on 18.09.2006.
188 See for instance the interview with Maddy on 22.09.2005.
189 Archive the Ghent choir conductor, report 'Soiuz Sovetskikh Grazhdan v Bel'gii', s.d., p. 3.

Denderleeuw, Liège, Moeskroen-Kortrijk, Charleroi, Mons, Namur, Tournai and La Louvière.[190]

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 friend's 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 and after she had approved that, Becky told me, her friend could finally leave for a holiday in the Soviet Union.[191]

Not only the Soviet Embassy, but also the KVRRKSSR/ 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 KVRRKSSR/ the 'Motherland' Organisation on an organised holiday.[192] Every year, the KVRRKSSR/ 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 KVRRKSSR/ 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 and articles which glorified Soviet victory, and organising activities such as remembrances of the Soviet Army.[193] 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 KVRRKSSR started to invite also non-board members.[194]

Due to the good cooperation between the SSG, the KVRRKSSR/ the 'Motherland' Organisation and the Soviet Embassy in Belgium, it was in the interest of former Ostarbeiterinnen to behave as loyal members and to not 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 organisational landscape of former Ostarbeiterinnen was far more diverse (Beijk and others, 2004, 65; Harms 34-35).[195]

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190 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 19/13 (367) (1964) 13.

191 Participant Observation on 22.01.2007.

192 Archive The Motherland Association, Map D-053 Bel'giia SSG – Spravki i kharakteristiki na otdel'nych lits, Spravka na SSG gor. Booma 13.9.1965.

193 Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006, Archive The Motherland Association, Map Bel'giia 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.

194 Archive The Motherland Association, D-053 Bel'giia SSG – Spravki i kharakteristiki na otdel'nych lits, Spravka Chentsovoĭ E.N. (1973) 3.

195 *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 12; Archive the Motherland Association, 50 Let Sluzheniia Rodine 5.

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, and the communist party became an innocuous onlooker in politics (Lagrou, 1997a, 125). Those inspired by communism were 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. From the 1950s onwards, 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.[196] 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 and apart from attending the Chaĭkovskiĭ 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.[197] 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 what it called the irreligious East and catholic West.[198] Through the establishment of a centre for Eastern Christians in Brussels under the direction of Irène Posnoff, it aimed to attract people from behind the Iron Curtain in Belgium to attend Catholic masses in Byzantine style and to disperse Catholic books edited in Russian in the Soviet Union.[199] 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.[200] 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 intellectual discussions on Catholic missionary in Marxist countries were held.[201] To that purpose, it also offered members who travelled

196 *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 12.
197 *Ibidem*.
198 *Tijdingen van het Tehuis voor oostkristenen* 3/2 (4.1958) 9-12.
199 *Idem* 1/1-2 (Herfst 1956) 8; 9/25 (6.1964) 8.
200 *Idem* 3/2 (4.1958) 3; 5/2 (Pasen 1960); 17/57 (2-4.1972) 8).
201 *Idem* 29/102 (1-3.1984) 6.

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.[202]

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.

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 in Europe. 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).[203] 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.[204]

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.[205] Such articles were copied from Soviet papers, such as *Pravda*, and articulated 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 vic-

202 *Tijdingen van het Tehuis voor oostkristenen* 10/28 (1965) 11.

203 *België URSS Magazine* (11.1978) 20; (6.1985) 14; (3.1986) 13; Participant Observation on 6.11.2006.

204 Archive the Motherland Association, Map Bel'giia SSG Spravki na Organisatsiiu D- 055, Spravka na SSG v Bel'gii na 1.10.1974, 2.

205 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 26/516 (4.1971) 1-3.

tory 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*, in which he ascribed the 1943 successful fighting around Novorossiĭsk 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 reinstalled (Mikolchak 1; Tumarkin 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, the 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 symbol for the Soviet Union's contribution to world peace (Figes 638).

The official Brezhnev Soviet narrative on war memory also found a place within the bulletin, as the following fragment on the occasion of Victory Day in 1967 shows:

> 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.[206]

The text 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 worked 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 *Sovetskiĭ 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 55th 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

206 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 13/88 (6.1967) 3.

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.[207] 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 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 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot*. 'One has the impression they only have parties', reads a document from those days.[208] It therefore influenced the appointment of a new chief editor for *Sovetskiĭ Patriot*, the former Ostarbeiterin Halina Fedoseevna, who could assure that contributions would be more in line with the 'Motherland' Organisation's expectations.[209] 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.[210] 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 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* fell dramatically.[211]

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 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* and switched preferences, oddly enough, to *Golos Rodiny*, the bulletin of the 'Motherland' Organisation itself.[212] The stricter editorial policies of *Sovetskiĭ 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 *Sovetskiĭ 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

207 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 27/532 (12.1972) 15-16.
208 Archive The Motherland Association, Map D-053 Bel'giia SSG – Spravki i kharakteristiki na otdel'nych lits, Spravka o zhurnale 'Patriot' 15.3.1977, p. 1.
209 *Idem*, Otchet o rabote s delegatsieĭ na Bel'gii, p. 1.
210 See for instance *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 36/619-620 (1-2.1981) 15-18.
211 *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 13; Archive The 'Motherland Association, Map D-053 Bel'giia SSG – Spravki i kharakteristiki na otdel'nych lits D-053, Spravka na 'Soiuz Sovetskikh Grazhdan' v Bel'gii na 1.10.1974.
212 Participant Observation on 25.09.2006.

counted at least two letters from regular members of the SSG in Belgium.[213] Through publishing a reader's letter, *Golos Rodiny* in 1977 revealed for the first time that a immigrant living in the Atlantic World had been deported to Germany to do forced labour during World War II.[214] 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. 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 organisation.[215] 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.

> 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

213 Archive the Motherland Association, 50 Let Sluzheniia Rodine 5.
214 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 23/17 (2057) (5.1977) 10.
215 *Golos Rodiny* 24/54 (2104) (12.1978) 10.

> I am not allowed to say so
> we were not uprooted
> we were deported because of war
> and yet that is a big difference[216]

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 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 *Sovetskiĭ 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. 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.

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

216 Interview with Peggy on 18.09.2006.

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, Kenny was the husband of Kimberley – 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
> 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[217]

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 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. 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

217 Interview with Wendy on 6.11.2006.

before October 1942, were after the war considered to have been voluntary workers unless they could offer proof of penal servitude (Lagrou, 2000, 5). 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. 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 are all in alignment 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.[218] 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 cannot say whether Kenny was convicted of collaboration 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, but their husbands did not. The case study of Antwerp elaborated on in chapter one showed that the majority of Ostarbeiterinnen's 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. The magazine now used its readers' column to popularise its propaganda articles. Zinaĭda 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.[219]

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.[220] 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 magazine, in which the members' reports on Mother's Day and Father Frost were visibly written with much more enthusiasm than the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, in which

218 Interview with Kelly on 7.02.2007 and interview with Amanda on 18.07.2006.
219 *Golos Rodiny* 26/22 (2218) (6.1980) 11.
220 *Idem* 26/22 (2218) (6.1980) 11; 27/45 (2293) (11.1981) 10.

recipes were exchanged and children received their own corner.[221] *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 Mikhaĭl 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 (perestroĭka) (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 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).

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 centralized Ostarbeiterinnen and advocated the widening of war memory. In a speech, the SSG's President Vera Kushnarëva accentuated the enthusiasm with which members demanded world peace.[222] However, her words were not convincing, since former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium thought that peace could safeguard against forced labour, whereas the official Soviet narrative on war memory still portrayed it as a value for which Soviet citizens had to keep on fighting fascism in the Atlantic World.

In *Golos* Rodiny, Ostarbeiterinnen were no longer mentioned. It covered 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.[223]

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

221 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.

222 *Patriot* 40/670 (10.1985) 8-14. For a closer analysis of Vera Kushnarëva's narratives over time, see Venken 2011c.

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

war.[224] 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. 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 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. 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). 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 in Belgium 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 and their membership did not fall significantly. In 2011, there is still an 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. In contrast with Soviet times, holding 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.[225]

224 *Kremenchuts'ka zoria* 95/13855 (9.8.1988) 3.
225 *Golos Rodiny* 37/2 (2821) (1.1992) 3.

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 lining 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, and by including war experiences of Ostarbeiterinnen. 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). For the occasion, the Russian Embassy had invited Nina Raspopova to Brussels, a female war pilot who 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 – what was by this time called – 'Russia's' war victory:

> In the room, the atmosphere was charged with unrepeatable pride for our women, and for all it became clear: such a nation you cannot vanquish.[226]

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.[227] Such a 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 and such issues opened the door to the articulation of troublesome war experiences.[228] 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).[229]

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. According to her, it helped the members to concentrate on 'something positive'.[230]

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

226 *Golos Rodiny* 40/19 (2986) (7.1995) 4.
227 Interview with Elly on 2.02.2007; Participant Observation on 6.11.2006.
228 Interview with Wendy on 6.11.2006; Participant Observation on 27.11.2006.
229 Archive Memorial, Internationales Sklaven- und Zwangarbeiter Befragungsprojekt 'Memorial' Moskva, Interview with Valentina Pavlovna Gdrichinaia 15.6.2005 Rostov – na – Don, p 3.
230 Participant Observation on 4.09.2006.

Belgian and Russian journalists, 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.[231]

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 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 us 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.[232]

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', and over the following months, some of them gradually started to specify some formerly silenced war experiences.

Second, with support of the Russian embassy, a first review article about SSG was published in the Russian 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.[233]

The article fits well into the current re-appreciation of the Soviet past within the Russian Federation started under Vladimir Putin and continued under Dmitriĭ Medvedev. Under Putin, the liberal narratives on war memory from the perestroĭka and El'tsin era faced pressure and the Soviet Union is increasingly remembered as a time of stability and cohesion. It is not only a political decision to break with the chaotic liberalism of the 1990s; the 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*, the 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

231 *Gazet van Zurenborg* 2 (3.2006) 4-5.
232 *Idem* 3 (7-8.2006) 6.
233 *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 10.

German soldiers.[234] 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 Velikoĭ 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 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. 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 KVRRKSSR/ '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 re-

234 *Golos Rodiny* 1 (3005) (5.2007) 7.

search showed that during the Brezhnev era, following the centralization of the Soviet narrative on war memory within Soviet society, the KVRRKSSR/ '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 live 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 focus on some of these members' memory practices in the following chapters.

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, while 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 later.

Part 2: Performing Group Memories

4: 'Was There Only a Cross in the Cemetery?'

Until today, traces 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 attempted to establish group memories. Participating in commemoration services enabled them 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.[235] 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. 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. 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. The practice of remembering provided a context in which the memories of participants were shaped (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 practices 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, but also by the impact of the organisations' activities on the memory practices 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.

The performative turn 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 such as statues, should be researched in combination with the practices around them: how memory objects are con-

235 An earlier version of this chapter appeared in Venken 2007b and Venken 2007c.

structed, 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).

I consider members of immigrant organisations are involved in group memory and experience group identification during occasions of performance. However, I do not agree that identifications are exclusively constructed by participants during performances. This study shows that identifications are not only shaped by insiders during performances, but also by outsiders who facilitate or hinder the group formation of immigrants (Burke 42-43).

A focus on performance requires a search for other methods and definitions. While interviewing, I discovered the importance former Allied soldiers from Poland attached to the Polish military cemetery in Lommel. I therefore started to include specific questions on the commemoration services in Lommel in my interviews, asking every former soldier if he could describe 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. I also attended a yearly commemoration service at the cemetery in Lommel. 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).

So far I have used the concept of narrative only in reference to a text or a sequence 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 how narratives are often defined in linguistic studies. Some linguists 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. Such performances represent the war experiences of the participating members of immigrant groups.

This chapter focuses on four questions: first, how the cemetery was created and modified over the years; and second, which narratives on war memory fought for legitimacy and how they were articulated during commemoration services. To answer this first set of questions, I relied on archival sources about the cemetery from the City Archive of Lommel, private archives of immigrant organisations, and articles from immigrant press publications. The third question higlights when former Allied soldiers from Poland visited Lommel and how they participated in the services; and the last one how those who are still alive today remember the cemetery and the commemoration

services. Here, my analysis from the interviews and the participant observation plays a crucial role.

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.[236]

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.[237] 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.[238] 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. Szelągowski 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 was 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.[239]

The dispute brought the following 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

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

237 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.

238 Archive of the City of Lommel, 547.73 Pools militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1947-1967. Briefwisseling 1947-1948.

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

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.[240] 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 soldiers of the first Polish Armoured Division had been 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.[241] 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).[242] 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.[243] 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.[244] Initially, this focused around a battle for participants.[245] 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.[246] In the mining regions, representatives of the Polish Union even went

240 Archive ZPB. Książka Protokułowa ZPB Okręg Limburgia 1949-1969. p. 1: Sprawozdanie 27.11.1949.

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

242 Archive ZPB. Książka Protokułowa ZPB Okręg Limburgia 1949-1969. p 19: Sprawozdanie 27.5.1951.

243 Telephone call with Wim Verkammen, the former city secretary of Lommel, on 20.4.2006.

244 Two examples of sources in which the other organiser is blackened: Archive ZPB. Idem. p 22: Sprawozdanie15.7.1951; Archive MSZ. DK 22/263. Zagadnienie polonijne. p 2-3.

245 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.

246 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.

door-to-door to mobilize not only their own backing, but also supporters of the other 'camp'.[247] 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.[248] 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.[249]

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. There, the rector of the Polish Catholic Mission celebrated a Holy 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.[250] 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.[251] 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

247 Archive of New Acts (Archiwum Akt Nowych – further AAN). Sygn. 237/XXII/313. Belgia. Położenie i działalność organisacyjna Polonii. Raporty, korespondencja: 1949-1953. Raport Polonii Belgijskiej 1950. p. 71; Archive MSZ. DK 22/263. Sprawy Polonijne. Działalność organisacji 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.

248 Interview with Robert on 13.2.2006.

249 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.

250 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.

251 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).

Saint's Day.[252] 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.[253] 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 intellectual level' and whose engagement only yielded 'miserable effects', according to the Consulate.[254] After a few unsuccessful attempts of cooperation with immigrants, 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 immigrants the Consulate was aiming for: former Home Army fighters and ex-combatants (Goddeeris, 2005a, 93-94).[255] The Consulate and the Friendship organisation 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 immigrants in Belgium (Skibiński, 1958).[256] The leaflet asked immigrants to offer a financial contribution for a statue that would be imported from the Polish People's Republic. In the end, the statue was paid for mainly by the Polish People's Republic, some Belgian politicians and cities liberated by the First Polish Armoured Division (Eder, 1983, 46-56).[257]

252 Archive MSZ. DK 24/288. Wydział do spraw Polonii za granicą. Sprawozdania polonijne (Belgia) 1952 r.

253 *Idem*. 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'.

254 *Idem*. Departament IV 10/79 Belgia. Cmentarz polski w Lommel 1957/64. Idem.

255 *Idem*. Departament IV 6/76 Belgia. Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Belgijsko-Polskiej (1947/55/59-64/66/68).

256 *Idem*. 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.

257 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 Teraardebestelling der Slachtoffers van de Oorlog to the mayor of Lommel on 24.9.1959; Idem. Letter of the city council to Amitiés Belgo-Polonaises op 26.5.1959; Idem. Pools militaire begraafplaats: oprichting gedenkteken. Letter of the Belgisch-Poolse vriendschapsorganisatie (Amitiés Belgo-Polonaises) 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.

Nevertheless, 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. [258]

The Polish Union initially did not face problems of support for its commemoration service initially. These only started after the Thaw of 1956, when 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 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.[259]

In that same period of time, rumours about the installation of a statue reached the members of 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.[260]

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 Internal 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 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 immigrant organisation, were noticed for the first time.[261]

The statue was a massive rectangular piece of stone that named the cities and municipalities liberated by the First Polish Armoured Division, and linked those names to the old Polish maxim 'For your freedom and ours'. In front of the rectangle, a social

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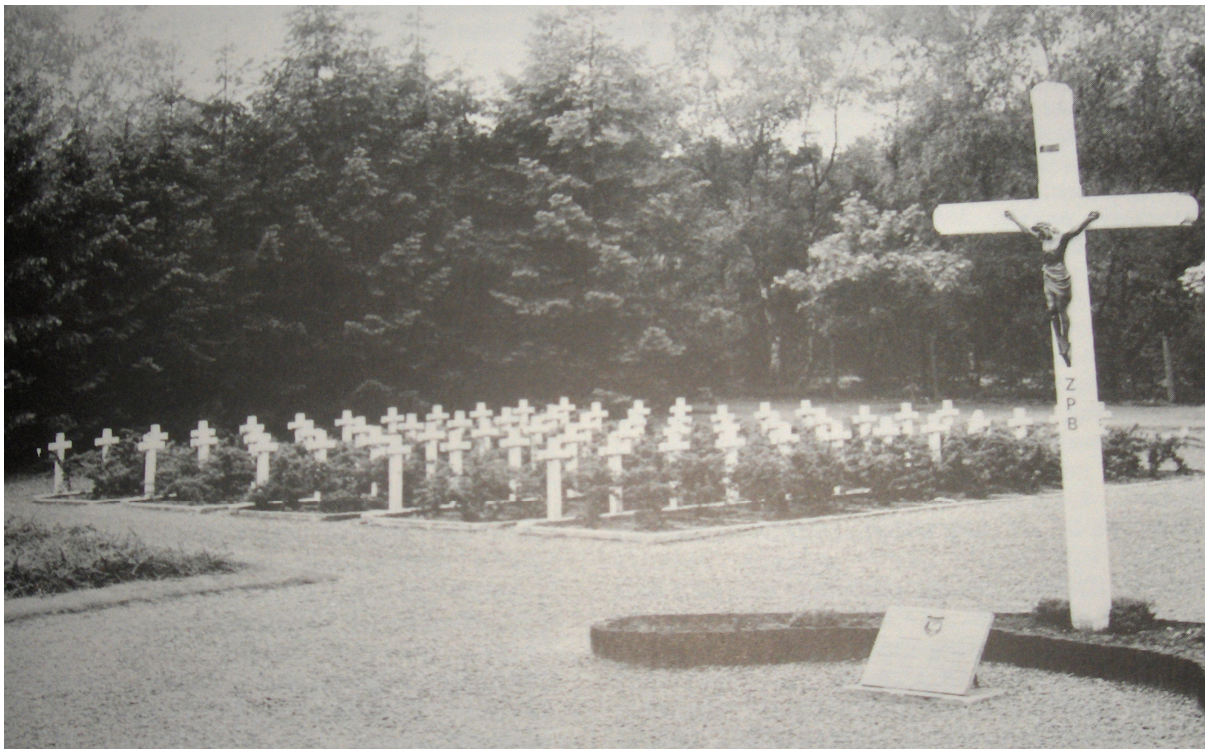
258 Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – IPN). 0236/67 t 1-6 Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów na Zachodzie Kryptyk 'Ulik'. Teczka 4. p. 53-59 Miles 10.9.1959 SPK Ścisłe tajne; p. 134-136 Wir (Wrzos) 5.12.1961 Raport dot. SPK na terenie Belgii.

259 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).

260 *Idem*. 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.

261 *Idem*. 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); Interview with Edward on 17.11.2005.

realistic version of the Mother pièta was placed, personifying the Motherland crying for her deceased children.



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).

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.[262] 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 also around the cross.[263] 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 the immigrants present.[264] In the

262 Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.73 Pools militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1947-1967. Speech of Jadwiga Pomorska (1959).

263 Archive ZPB. Książka Protokułowa ZPB Okręg Limburgia 1949-1969. p. 84: Sprawozdanie 4.10.1959. *Narodowiec.* 6-7.11.1960 p. 4 and 8.11.1960 p. 5.

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

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'.[265] 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.

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

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).[266] Since the statue stood

265 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.

266 *Idem*. 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.

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.[267]

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.[268] 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.[269]

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.[270] 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 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.[271] 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 soldiers, both in the distant and recent past, had fought (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' and the 'Polish People's Republic' was seen as a contemporary embodiment of that concept, although it was no longer said in so many words.

The Polish Union also developed its own symbolic meaning of the cemetery. Starting in 1961, it organised every year an academic meeting dedicated to the Feast of

267 Archive of the city of Lommel. Foto-archief. Poolse militaire begraafplaats. Zicht 1980.

268 *Idem*. 547.73 Poolse militaire begraafplaats. Plechtigheden op Pools militaire begraafplaats 1949-1967. Letter of the city council to ZPB on 7.10.1960.

269 *Idem*. 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.

270 *Tygodnik Polski* 45/161 13.11.1960 p. 5.

271 Interview with Damian on 13.2.2006.

Our Lord Jesus Christ the King.[272] By doing so, its narrative on war memory shifted the focus away from the recognition of the Polish People's Republic and placed the importance of Catholicism first. This change was also visible in its invitations to commemoration services. From the middle of the 1960s onwards, no longer were *all independent Polish organisations* and *all free Poles* of Belgium kindly requested to take part in the ceremony, but *all independent Polish organisations* and *all Poles* were welcomed to the cemetery.[273] The Polish Union still expected 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.[274] 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.[275] Both initiatives show that the independence of immigrant organisations was an elastic concept. Also, the focus on Catholicism was not so well-chosen. As the number of individual immigrants attending the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate dropped, it gained popularity among the Catholic church-goers.[276] The ideological weakening of immigrants 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 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.[277] Each year, the organisation brought former sol-

272 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.

273 Archive ZPB. Persoonsarchief Paweł Maj. Map ZPB Sprawy Lommel. Invitations from 1965 onwards.

274 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.

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

276 Interview with Edward on 17.11.2005.

277 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

diers 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 issued by the Ministry of Defence of the Polish Government in London, could amply compensate the disaffection of immigrants from the mine regions.[278]

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.[279] 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.[280]

During my interviews with twelve former division soldiers, I managed to gain an insight on the impact of this mobilization. Here I first describe the profile of the interviewees, their knowledge about the fact that they were mobilized, and about 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)

Maczek to the mayor of Lommel on 14.11.1969. Archive Benelux Circle. Vereniging van de Eerste Poolse pantserdivisie – kring België. Map met ledenlijsten.

278 Interview with Robert on 13.2.2006.

279 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.

280 Archive BVPO. Letter of the BVPO to the Polish Consulate on 1.6.1977.

we said, laughing,
that the Ambassador had to fulfil the 'communist norm'
that he needed to convince x-amount of soldiers[281]

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 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.[282] 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.[283] 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 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, and that this had to be remembered.[284]

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 ex-combatant organisations use strong language, depicting the people attending the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate as 'enemies' and 'areligious people'.[285] 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.

281 Interview with Artur on 14.7.2005.
282 Interview with Mariusz on 2.2.2006; Interview with Waldek on 25.11.2005; Interview with Robert on 13.2.2006.
283 Interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005; Interview with Sławomir on 6.2.2006; Interview with Jacek on 6.2.2006.
284 See for instance the interview with Robert on 13.2.2006.
285 Interview with Artur on 14.7.2005.

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 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, as one interviewee formulated it.[286] 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.

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 the narrative uttered 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.[287] Three interviewees thought that immigrants from Brussels or from the mine regions had erected the statue.[288] 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)

286 See for instance the interview with Mariusz on 2.2.2006.
287 Interview with Artur on 14.7.2005, Interview with Rafał on 6.2.2006.
288 Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005; Interview with Sławomir on 6.2.2006; Interview with Andrzej on 7.11.2005.

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[289]
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![290]

The interviewee had described the cemetery and the course of the ceremony in line with the way it was set by the Polish Union, without mentioning the statue. When I asked him if 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 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?'[291]

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. 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.[292] 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'.[293] The interviewee who once made a mistake and accidentally attended the commemoration service of the

289 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 (Kępa, 2004, 105-106 and 258-260; Goddeeris, 2005b, 79-98).

290 Interview with Tomasz on 8.12.2005.

291 Interview with Jacek on 6.2.2006.

292 Interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005; Interview with Robert on 13.2.2006.

293 Interview with Mariusz on 2.2.2006.

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 had a meaning.[294]

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 also corresponds to their ignorance of the statue. The forgetting of the statue might even 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.[295] 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[296]

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'.[297] Another one added to his description, which had been in line with the course of the commemoration service of the Consulate:

> there was also a cross
> I have been in front of that cross
> but there were never flowers[298]

For him, the absence of flowers had made it less appealing than the statue. Only one interviewee was convinced that there had never been a cross in the cemetery.[299] 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?

294 Interview with Waldek on 25.11.2005.
295 Interview with Rafał on 6.2.2006; Interview with Jacek on 6.2.2006; Interview with Andrzej on 7.11.2005.
296 Interview with Rafal on 6.2.2006.
297 Interview with Damian on 3.2.2006.
298 Interview with Mariusz on 2.2.2006.
299 Interview with Dominik on 26.12.2005.

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[300]

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 areligious communists, with which he did not want to agree. He therefore referred to his loyal presence on the yearly pilgrimage of immigrants to Scherpenheuvel, where, according to his wife 'all Poles, all catholic Poles', gathered.

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

300 Interview with Damian on 13.2.2006.

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'.[301]

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 of these symbols, it turned out they did not know where the statue, 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 Agencies 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 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

301 Interview with Robert on 13.2.2006.

the commemoration service of the Polish Consulate in Lommel, the answer was negative.[302]

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.[303] Through the publication of her request, she came into contact with a Belgian hobbyist specialised in war cemeteries.[304] George Spittael 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.[305] She then wrote the following request to the mayor of Lommel:

> 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.[306]

The city council successfully lobbied the Polish Consulate to allow such a change, albeit at the personal cost of Rosa Rosen.[307] 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.[308] 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).[309] 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.[310] Currently, the cemetery in Lommel contains three Stars of David, which are centralized during regular family ceremonies.[311]

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

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302 Archive BVPO. Letter of Colonel P.Eygenraam to Edmund Kaczyński on 11.4.1987.
303 *Het Volk* 13-14.9.1980 'Israeli's zochten naar gesneuvelde Pool. Een stap naar het Paradijs'.
304 *Idem*. 24.5.1982 'Israëlische zocht 40 jaar naar graf van in België gesneuvelde broer'.
305 Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.42 Poolse militaire begraafplaats 1980-. Letter of George Spittael to the mayor of Lommel on 13.5.1982.
306 *Idem*. Letter of Frieda Warda to the mayor of Lommel on 21.4.1981.
307 *Idem*. 547.42. Letter of George Spittael to the mayor of Lommel on 9.4.1981.
308 *Idem*. 547.42. Letter of George Spittael to the mayor of Lommel on 31.8.1981.
309 *Idem*. 547.42 Letter of George Spittael to the mayor of Lommel on 17.6.1981.
310 Participant observation during the Lommel commemoration service in 2006.
311 *Idem*.

shrivel. At the same time, another agency 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 created a homogeneous character of the First Polish Armoured Division, silencing 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 this big change.

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. 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'.[312] Speeches and floral tributes from then on took place in front of the statue. In 1991, the Polish President Lech Wałęsa visited the cemetery and recognised the division soldiers' efforts in the battle for what he called 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 participants could identify.[313]

Over the years, the narrative on war memory articulated in speeches changed. During the commemoration service in Lommel in 2006, for instance, the Polish Ambassador Iwo Byczewski addressed his 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.[314]

According to him, Belgians and Poles had fought together for independence in the past. By leaving that 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', Belgians and former division soldiers who settled in Belgium had strived together for an independent Poland. 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 organisa-

312 Archive of the city of Lommel. 547.43. Letter of ZPB to the mayor of Lommel on 26.8.1990.

313 Archive Benelux Circle. Map 1990-…. Speech of Lech Wałęsa in Lommel on 3.7.1991.

314 *Novum Polonia* 19.11.2006 p 11. Przemówienie p. Ambasadora RP Iwo Byczewskiego podczas uroczystości w Lommel.

tions, Poland cooperates with countries from the former East and West, in organisations such as the European Union and the Council of Europe.

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'.[315]

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 belonging to immigrant organisations 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 memory by means of speeches, their own monuments (respectively a statue and a cross), and their own rituals centralized around their monuments. 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

315 Participant observation during the Lommel commemoration service in 2006.

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 immigrants in Limburg, both organisers shifted their focus. The legitimacy of their ceremonies could no longer be measured by the presence of immigrants 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 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 some former division soldiers with a joke.

5: ‘Let’s Sing, Let’s Sing, for Soviet Authority We’ll Die’[316]

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[317]

On 22 January 2007, Becky told me about her experiences during World War II. After deportation, Becky had ended up in an industrial area, where she lived in a barracks surrounded with barbed wire which initially she was only allowed to leave under guidance to go to work. Becky told me how she had sung the song ‘Let’s sing, let’s sing, for Soviet authority we’ll die’ together with other Ostarbeiterinnen when marching in lines from their barracks to the factories where they worked. Becky related how the Ostarbeiterinnen she lined up with (‘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 humiliation (‘Schweinerei’) and the danger the singing provoked (‘Ich werde schiessen’), Ostarbeiterinnen wanted to make their oppressors (‘them’) angry and worked all together (‘helped’) for that purpose.

The Ostarbeiterinnen chose a lyric they had known from childhood: ‘let’s sing, let’s sing, for Soviet authority we’ll die’. Originally a Soviet propaganda song, it had arisen in the first years after the Russian Revolution, during the Civil War, when Bolshevists were still fighting with their opponents from the White Guard. The song served as a march for the Bolshevists going to battle and aimed to convince them they

316 A shorter version of this chapter appeared earlier in Venken 2010c.
317 Sound recording with Brenda on 13.11.2006. See the appendix for the original version: Track 8.

were doing the right thing: defending Soviet authority. Ostarbeiterinnen knew the song thanks to the intensive music training they had received within the Soviet educational system. They were the first generation to have grow up with the revolutionary ideas of the young Soviet state. During the obligatory music lessons at school, they had learned to believe in Soviet power and to be prepared to die for it.

Becky showed me how Ostarbeiterinnen in Nazi Germany had experimented with ways to add a second layer of meaning to existing song lyrics by means of performance, a layer that helped them to cope with their war experiences. Through performing the Soviet propaganda song 'Let's Sing' during their marches to work, Ostarbeiterinnen were able to lace its lyrics with a sarcastic meaning. Only thanks to the collective performance of Ostarbeiterinnen could the song be sung, and provide a means to articulate resistance against forced labour duties.

Through performing the song, Becky and other Ostarbeiterinnen could articulate resistance against the blind-alley they found themselves in during World War II. They performed the song while marching to factories to do forced labour, in the knowledge that the treatment they received there would frequently be so bad that it might eventually lead to their death (Polian, 2002, 257-258). 'For Soviet authority we'll die' is thus used ironically: the 'we' refers to Becky and her fellow Ostarbeiterinnen, who were, of course, far from 'willing' 'to die' not for Soviet, but Nazi authority. But their singing performance also contains another meaning. Becky and other Ostarbeiterinnen performed the song while marching to factories where they knew they were involved in producing war equipment that was to be used in the Nazi battle with the Soviet Union, i.e. directly against their relatives and fellow citizens at home.[318] As such, they were consciously but unwillingly helping the Nazis to kill their fellow citizens. Therefore, the 'we' of 'For Soviet authority we'll die' also refers to 'we' as 'our' relatives, 'our' Soviet fellow citizens, who can be killed as a consequence of Ostarbeiterinnens' work, but only because these relatives and fellow citizens did not surrender and stayed loyal to 'Soviet authority'. 'Let's sing', suggests the song's refrain. Only through the collective act of performing singing could the opposing meaning of the phrase 'for Soviet authority we'll die' be ventilated.

Singing Practices

This chapter is about singing practices, and more specifically, about the way they enabled former Ostarbeiterinnen to give meaning to their war experiences in post-war life. Giving meaning to war experiences was a procedure for finding coherence in relation to themselves and to others. They were able to do so through the construction and articulation of a representation of these war experiences. Through representing narratives, former Ostarbeiterinnen could mould past events into a coherent and meaningful explanation for the present. The analysis focuses on how members of an immigrant organisation consisting of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium together practised war remembering through singing. I focus on how during the choir rehearsals and concerts

318 Interview with Amanda on 18 July 2006.

of the immigrant organisation, a group memory was constituted which gave meaning to the war experiences of its members.

Throughout more than 60 years of its existence, the SSP/SSG brought together former Ostarbeiterinnen 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 its regional choirs (such as Antwerp, Ghent and so on) attracted a high number of members. For years, choir rehearsals took place on a weekly basis and performances happened between four and twelve times a year. Nowadays, the regional SSG branches still gather and sing on a weekly basis, but their membership has shrunken to a handful because of their advanced years.

The Soviet Embassy and the 'Motherland' Association in Moscow intensively controlled the SSP/SSG's activities, because they were afraid former Ostarbeiterinnen who travelled to the Soviet Union would disperse a counter-narrative to the hegemonic official Soviet narrative on war memory. They made sure that the repertoire of SSP/SSG mainly consisted of Soviet propaganda songs articulating the official Soviet narrative on war memory, and that members were willing to sing them, by making active participation in the SSP/SSG a condition for receiving a visa to travel home.[319] Nevertheless, the SSP/SSG members, through singing, were able to develop an own narrative on war memory. Within the fixed framework of control, they searched for ways of manoeuvre. Just like Becky and her colleagues Ostarbeiterinnen had developed an opposing meaning to a Soviet propaganda song during the war, choir members in post-war life performed their own meaning to official propaganda songs. Here I research how former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium, within their organisation the SSP/SSG, formulated their narrative on war memory, making use of Soviet propaganda songs, but turning upside-down the literal meaning of the song lyrics in favour of music therapy or interaction with Belgian narratives on war memory.

Methodology

A focus on performance in historiography requires a search for new methods and definitions. Ethnomusicology, a discipline that analyses music within its context of performance and reception, can help to do so. Ethnomusicologists believe that music can operate as a carrier of meaning. Depending on the situation and on the listener, singing can help to connect the experienced sensations of music to individual or shared emotions and memories. In order to reveal mechanisms of formulating and articulating meaning at work, ethnomusicologists combine written source readings with fieldwork. Pre-eminently, their conclusions are grounded in empirical data gathered through oral history and participant observation (Nettl 9-11, 133-148).

Between September 2005 and February 2007, I conducted twelve life-interviews with individual former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium. I interviewed both the choir directors from Antwerp and Ghent. After a first meeting, we concentrated on singing. They tried to explain to me which songs they had sung in the SSP/SSG, how these songs had been chosen, how they had been performed, for which occasions and so on. During the

319 See for instance the interview with Maddy on 22.09.2005.

interviews, I took special care to allow space for them to freely associate with music. While looking at their song materials, they jumped from song to song, from melody to melody, in this way actively remembering music and its meaning. Every once in a while, they paused to explain to me the meaning of their songs. These songs, as well as the reflections of the choir directors on them, were vital sources for this research.

In addition, I closely followed the activities of the SSP/SSG in Antwerp, participating eleven times in choir rehearsals and concerts. 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 my 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.[320] 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*.[321] 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.[322]

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 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.[323]

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

320 Participant Observation, Notes on a talk with the accordionist on 6.11.2006.
321 Sound Recording with Debby on 20.11.2006.
322 Notes on the sound recording with Debby on 20.11.2006.
323 Participant Observation on 27.11.2006.

needed some time for that, she said, because the words were 'almost buried in my memory'.[324] 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*.[325] 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'.[326] Interestingly, the President of the SSG's headquarters in Brussels remembered there was yet another alternative version of that same song.[327] In the end, I gathered the lyrics of six alternative war songs and recorded five of them.[328] 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.

Next to oral sources, I used archival materials of the SSP/SSG and of the 'Motherland' Association in Moscow and consulted various immigrant bulletins. In Moscow, I read the few existing works on the singing culture of Ostarbeiterinnen, works that also include song lyrics.[329] 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 official 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 Dobrovol'skiĭ 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.

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 (Grinchenko, 2004, 114-115; Obens, 92-93; Stelzl-Marx, 2000, 188-207). To date, the most important book on Ostarbeiterinnens' war songs is 'Fol'klor i iazyk Ostarbaĭterov', 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 (Danièl', 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

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324 Participant Observation on 27.11.2006.

325 Sound Recording with Becky on 22.01.2007.

326 Participant Observation during the Christmas Market on 17.12.2006; *Gazet van Zurenborg* 4.2006 4-5, 'Elke week een stukje Rusland in Zurenborg'.

327 Interview with Elly on 2.01.2006.

328 *Bravely We Go to Battle, Little Blue Scarf, Katiusha, Pretzels, Let's Sing* and *Mama*.

329 Immigrant bulletins: *Belgique URSS Magazine; Golos Rodiny; Patriot; Sovetskiĭ Patriot; Za vozvrashchenie na Rodinu!*.

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 poems and songs he/she came across, but also of the Germanisms that started to 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, Ostarbeiterrinnen set up an informal network to exchange experiences and provide each other with feedback on what had failed to pass censorship (Danièl', 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 (Danièl', 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).

Through comparing the existing literature with the results of my fieldwork, I could discover songs with a second layer of meaning which had been composed in Germany, sometimes expressed through performance, similar to the song Becky had spoken about, sometimes articulated through using alternative war lyrics to existing songs.[330] The books and articles mentioned enabled me to compare the lyrics which choir members could still remember more than 60 years after World War II with the exact words written down in the early 1940s, as well as to reconstruct how choir members who were reluctant to reveal their wartime singing culture during the gatherings to me, along with choir members who had already passed away, had given meaning to their 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 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 were more diverse than sources and literature had hitherto suggested. By analysing how members experienced singing, we can now establish how singing practices opposed the official Soviet narrative on war memory as read from the song lyrics.

Choosing Songs

Officially, choir conductors were responsible for choosing the choirs' repertoire. They were helped by the 'Motherland' Association, which 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

330 *We Go to Battle, Little Blue Scarf, Katiusha, Pretzels, Let's Sing*, *Mama*, *Country Girl, Little Fire* and *The Sea Stretches out Widely.*

Union for a music course.[331] There, Soviet composers such as Mikhail Ul'ianov taught them new propaganda songs and provided them with scores and recordings.[332]

The new Soviet propaganda songs also found their way into the choirs' repertoire 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, such as the one from Antwerp, the one from Ghent and so on, 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.[333] Consequently, SSP/SSG choir conductors all over Belgium dedicated for instance their October rehearsals to practising revolutionary songs.

Interestingly, however, at every concert at least one song with a second layer of meaning was included in the programme. During the interviews, it became clear that there was not a single member who remembered all the alternative war lyrics holding a second layer of meaning I was able to collect. An individual former Ostarbeiterin could never have gathered all those alternative war lyrics, since Ostarbeiterinnens' singing culture during World War II had been different depending on the place they worked, and also due to the fact that choir members had, after World War II, kept silent about their singing experiences during the war, not even referring to it amongst themselves.[334] By conducting the songs with alternative war lyrics, the choir conductors had allowed silent negotiation, which had led to all songs with a second layer of meaning silently being included.[335]

Each member therefore had an individualised understanding of the second layer of meaning articulating their war experiences in the propaganda songs which made up the SSP/SSG's choirs' repertoire. 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 all 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 them innumerable times without ever speaking about their hidden contents.

331 *Golos Rodiny* 8/1 (598) (1.1962) 3; 22/44 (2032) (11.1976) 8-9.

332 Archive of the Ghent choir conductor, map with songs, visiting card; Archive the 'Motherland' Organisation, Map D-053 Bel'gia SSG – Spravki i kharakteristiki na otdel'nykh lits, Zapis' besedy s rukovoditeliami progressivnykh organizatsii sootechestvennikov v Bel'gii i Avstrii (1968) and Spravka o kandidatach, predlozhennykh Konsul'skym otdelom Posol'stva SSSR v Bel'gii dlia poezdki v Sovetskiĭ Soiuz (1971).

333 *Sovetskiĭ 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).

334 See for instance Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006.

335 For information about the choirs' repertoire see *Sovetskiĭ 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.

Singing an Own Narrative on War Memory

The choir members' narrative on war memory was articulated through Soviet propaganda songs, whether or not with the hidden variants which were sung in Germany. However, singing practices enabled choir members to transform the meaning of official Soviet songs to their own narrative on war memory. Therefore, through singing, choirs did not merely take on the official Soviet war memory narrative, but made the narrative they received from their home society fit the path of integration they were walking in Belgian society. 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, namely the Jews from the Łódź ghetto, established that these survivors did not use the songs they 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 into 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 Soviet 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 war 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). During singing, SSP/SSG choir members with different war experiences went into negotiation. This process yielded different outcomes at rehearsals and concerts. In what follows, I will successively illustrate the construction of former Ostarbeiterinnens' own narrative during rehearsals and concerts, twice giving two examples.

Rehearsing Together

Through rehearsing together, choir members created a space of war memory 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.[336] Through bestowing lyrics with an individualised second layer of meaning and singing

336 See for instance the interview with Brenda on 13 November 2006.

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'.[337]

After the war, the songs with a second layer of meaning became evergreens in the choirs' repertoire, expressing a war memory that stood the closest to the choir members' personal experiences. Singing the original propaganda versions of the alternative lyrics made it possible for choir members to silently remember and articulate their daily war experiences; the hidden layer provided the songs with meaning.

Alternative Song Lyrics

The lyrics of these second layer songs can be grouped into three categories: feelings of homesickness or humiliation, calls to battle, and satire. The first category is the most numerous, while the other two categories number fewer songs.[338] 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. 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 such a satirical song 'Bravely We Go to Battle'. 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[339]

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 Bolshevist 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 Bolshevists' fighting,

337 Interview with Peggy on 10 November 2006.

338 The first category contains the songs *The Sea Stretches out Widely* (Borisova 34, 72-73,108, 141; Danièl', 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* and *Pretzels* (Danièl', Eremina and Zhemkov 134-135). The second category is represented by the famous song *Katiusha* (Borisova 3; Danièl', Eremina and Zhemkov 44; Lipatov 79; Mints 123; *Golos Rodiny* 40/14 (2981) (6.1995) 7; Participant Observation on 11 September 2006 and on 25 September 2006. The third category is represented by *Little Blue Scarf, Bravely We Go to Battle* and *Let's Sing* (Danièl', Eremina and Zhemkov 137-138).

339 Sound recording with Debby on 20 December 2006.

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 (Figes 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[340]

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 encouraging to hit and to overcome 'the fascists' with one of the few things Ostarbeiterinnen had, a 'soup spoon'.

Gendering Soviet Propaganda Songs

The official Soviet narrative on war memory centralised the war experiences of soldiers, 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, as victims mourning their male relatives killed in action, or brought women's virtue into question (Buckley; Hosking 172). In these narratives, the war experiences of former Ostarbeiterinnen hardly found a place. Therefore, they were mostly silenced.

The Soviet ethnomusicological study by Mints and others is one of the only places where the war experiences of Ostarbeiterinnen are mentioned. Interestingly, the authors defend the virtuousness of Ostarbeiterinnen who had been placed under scrutiny and argue that songs had successfully exhorted Ostarbeiterinnen to maintain their female and national virtuousness, using 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)

340 Sound recording with Debby on 20 November 2006.

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 for instance take a closer look at the song 'Do Russians Want War?' written by the poet Evgeniĭ Evtushenko. The lyrics were written after Nikita Khryshchëv had made it possible to make references to the suffering of ordinary people endured 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[341]

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 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 repertoire 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.[342]

Performing During Concerts

During concerts, the choirs' narrative on war memory interacted with that of the audience. Choir 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.[343]

341 Interview with Peggy on 10 November 2006.

342 See for instance *In the Park at Mamaev Kurgan* and *Victory Day*.

343 *Belgique URSS Magazine*, see for instance 11.1978 19; 6.1985 14-15; 3.1986 13-14; *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 23/453 (6.1968) 9, 12; Archive of the choir conductor from Ghent, 'Soiuz Sovetskikh

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[344]

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 war 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 quickly. Also the words 'and so' indicate she quickly wanted to it get over with. Afterwards, she sighed heavily (3 sec) and almost whispered 'adapt'. I clearly saw how she experienced difficulties admitting to me she had done so.

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. war propaganda songs.[345] Through her wording and non-verbal communication, the choir conductor from Ghent made very clear which performances she (had) preferred, or was supposed to prefer by the Soviet Embassy and the 'Motherland' Association.

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.[346] 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.[347]

Grazhdan' (report from 1960); Archive of the choir conductor from Ghent, 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.

344 Interview with Peggy on 10 November 2006.

345 *Idem*.

346 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 23/453 (6.1968) 12; Archive of the Ghent choir conductor, 'toespraak Heer de Mits'.

347 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'; Interview with Brenda on 13 November 2006.

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. I will now give two examples of how choirs presented themselves for a Belgian public.

Singing a Belgian Song

In the choirs' repertoire, there is a song indicating that choir members liked to conform to the normative stereotyping of virtuousness in post-war Belgium. 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[348]

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.[349] When I asked her to tell me about the Russian translation, the choir conductor told me:

> 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[350]

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.[351]

A Deviating Performative Meaning

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

348 Sound recording with Peggy on 10 November 2006.
349 Archive of the daughter of the SSG Antwerp choir conductor, map with songs, '1974-1980' (performance list), p. 1-5; Interview with Peggy on 15 October 2006; Interview with Amanda on 18 July 2006.
350 Interview with Peggy on 10 November 2006.
351 See for instance the interview with Amanda on 18 July 2006.

the meaning to war experiences, choir members could blur the propaganda message of a Soviet song for the benefit of an alternative meaning made visible on stage.

The Soviet propaganda song 'Buchenvald 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 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 (Niven 69-70). The new Soviet song 'Buchenvald alert' underpinned that idea as follows:

> 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
> and arise
> and arise again![352]

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 super heroes. 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, are we?[353]

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. This song for the first time offered the possibility to sing in Russian about prisoners of war, and

352 Sound recording with Peggy on 10 November 2006.
353 Interview with Peggy on 15 October 2006.

that was exactly how concentration camp outfits were associated in Belgium in those years. Belgian husbands of Ostarbeiterinnen, dressed in concentration camp outfits, accompanied the choir members' performance of 'Buchenvald Alert' on stage, because, as the choir conductor of Ghent said, not these men, but the Ostarbeiterinnen themselves 'went through that'. Some Ostarbeiterinnen had indeed not only lived in work camps, but also in concentration camps.[354] The choir members somehow felt prevented from presenting their own war experiences with concentration camps themselves, and enlisted the help of their husbands. This male representation of war lines up with 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 choir members also 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 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 doing nothing wrong with that, are we?'.

Our Buena Vista Social Club[355]

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[356]

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

354 Interview with Josy on 15 September 2006.
355 I described this participant observation experience also in Venken 2010d.
356 Sound recording on 17.12.2006 (Track 12).

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 this entailed, they simplified it to 'Russians'; 'Ukrainian' was never used as a separate identifier. Lastly, the 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 was the presentation radically different from what the choir had performed during the Cold War, but also the repertoire, as the grandson of the former choir conductor asked the choir members of Antwerp to sing 'songs of the old days'.[357] 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 performed neither 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 immigrants 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.[358] 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.[359] 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'.[360] That is also how a choir member articulated the relation between

357 Notes on my conversation with the grandson of the choir conductor on 6.11.2006.

358 Sound recording: 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).

359 Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006.

360 Participant Observation on 17.12.2006.

the musicians and singers: 'they do not see, but they feel the music, just like we do'.[361] 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 immigrants 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 those days shall never dim' recalling the victory of Bolshevist partisans over the White Guard, as the words were cloaked in Roma motifs (Alymov 135-142). 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 clarinettist 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 folkmusic 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.[362]

Conclusion

Intensive music training in the 1920s enabled Soviet propaganda songs to become a means of making sense of life for the former Ostarbeiterinnen. When during World

361 Participant Observation on 17.12.2006.

362 Interview with Debby on 20.07.2006.

War II, Ostarbeiterinnen faced experiences unarticulated in these songs, they composed alternative lyrics or searched for alternative singing practices in order to give meaning to their war experiences. They thus still used Soviet propaganda songs with their hollow Soviet slogans and symbols, but searched for ways to sing beyond them. Later, when migrated to Belgium, former Ostarbeiterinnen continued to sing the original propaganda songs within their choirs, in this way silencing but not forgetting the accompanying second layer of meaning. By doing so, choir members were able to construct their own narrative on war memory despite the strict control from Soviet authorities to solely articulate the official Soviet narrative on war memory. During rehearsals, singing could function as music therapy, making the unpronounceable pronounceable. During concerts, choir members interacted with Belgian audiences by singing a Belgian song or presenting their war experiences through a recognisable (for Belgians) male lens of political war imprisonment. In this way, the appeal to be integrated into Belgian narratives on war memory was uttered in vain, because of the silencing of Ostarbeiterinnens' faith in dominant narratives on war memory on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Following the reform of the choir in Antwerp 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 itself into a post-cold war ethnic narrative that has replaced the narratives on war memory from the Cold War era.

Part 3: Trauma in Group Memories

6: ‘I Don’t Speak About It’

This chapter analyzes how former Allied soldiers from Poland Division and former Ostarbeiterinnen from the Soviet Union who settled in Belgium dealt in their post-war lives with experiences of harm to their bodies undergone during the war.[363] 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. I investigate the performance of bodily memory over time within two of the immigrants’ social entities: immigrant organizations and families, focusing in particular on their interaction.

War Memories and the Body

War survivors often 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

363 This chapter found its place earlier in Venken 2009a and Venken 2009b.

have unconsciously practised so many times before, meticulously examining what you are actually doing. In this chapter, 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 chapter, 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.

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 Sznaider, 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 nonverbal 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 warmemory (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 Sznaider, 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 andWorldWar 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, Dawson, Roper 44; Bingen, Borodziej and Troebst, 2003, 19; Hass, 2004, 33).

A Universal War Trauma

As such, war experiences of harm to the body and war memories are no longer perceived to cause trauma only 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 Sznaider, 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 Sznaider, 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, Dawson, Roper 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).

Immigrant Organizations and Families

In this chapter, I provide a gendered analysis of the place which bodily memories of former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium occupy within their immigrant organizations and families. 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 immigrants at issue and, contrary to the situation behind the Iron Curtain, provided a place for their members to articulate non-verbal bodily memories.

Within the immigrant organisations of the former soldiers, there was no place for presenting heroes as people in need. 'Heroes' and (nonpolitical) '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. Soviet agencies tried to prevent voices from contradicting the official Soviet narrative on war memory in the biggest immigration organisation of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium, the Association for Soviet Citizens. That some former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium during the interviews for this study opened up their bodily memories practiced within that organisation, 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.[364]

Also, the families of former Allied soldiers from Poland 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 conditions the immigrants 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 soldiers, their organizations and families, as well as the importance of an immigrant organisation'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.

Former Allied Soldiers from Poland

On 7 December 1976, Stefan Abram 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 citizen-

364 See, for instance: interview with Wendy on 11 November 2006; interview with Peggy on 18 September 2006.

ship; 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.[365]

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.[366] 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 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

365 Archive BVPO, Letter from Stefan Abram to the Department of Health and Social Security Newcastle on 7.12.1976.

366 Talk with the former BVPO's President Włacław Styranka on 27.12.2005.

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.[367]

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'. 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 felt tense in the head
> in these ears
> but the most special is
> when at night someone came here to my home
> started to interrogate me
> here at home came then I said:
> 'I don't SPEAK about it
> I don't WANT to speak about it
> and I didn't HAVE TO speak about it!'
> about the operation and that
> and my father in law said:
> 'don't do that
> because the doctor is black' (a collaborationist —MV)
> he said: 'he will kill you!'
> 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: 'They won't see me in that hospital!'
> but now that has become normal
> wllll!!!!
> in fact, I became used to
> always hearing a ring[368]

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 organizations of former Allied soldiers from Poland in Bel-

367 Talk with the former BVPO's President Włacław Styranka on 27.12.2005.

368 Interview with Dominik on 26 November 2005.

gium), 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 'in the head', 'in 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 to speak about it 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 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 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 ('tense in the head') went away; it became 'normal' to live with it. The normalization had also enabled Dominik to articulate his bodily memory in words and even to mention it spontaneously during the interview in reply to a non-related question.[369]

369 See also: Interview with Mariusz on 2 December 2005; Interview with Damian on 13 February 2006.

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[370]

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 monograph (Kajpus and Van Dam, 1996). That Monday afternoon, Czesław could convince me he was a war hero.

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

370 Interview with Czesław Kajpus on 7 November 2005.

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').[371]

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 'unasked 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

371 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.

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.

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 immigrant himself and has developed an extensive network ofimmigrants 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.[372] 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. Sandy then told of how she enrolled in a hairdressing school shortly after she had arrived in Belgium and subsequently became an independent hairdresser. 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. Her friends also regularly asked Sandy to babysit, leaving their children in the salon while going grocery shopping. 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

372 Notes on the Interview with Sandy on 14 February 2006.

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[373]

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 (Link 449-464). 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 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

373 Interview with Sandy on 14 February 2006.

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 her choice of wording when summing up 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 quasi-maternal 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[374]

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.[375]

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). 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.[376]

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 with-

374 Interview with Debby on 20 July 2006.
375 Notes on the interview with Debby on 20 July 2006.
376 *Sovetskii Patriot* 19/13 (367) 16; 26/516 (4.1971) 21–22; 26/521 (9.1971) 24–25; *Patriot* 36/628–629 (9–10.1981) 22; 36/630 (11.1981) 18; 39/651–652 (3–4.1984) 21.

out). 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.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

This chapter focused on the relationship of the construction of trauma among and for immigrants from behind the Iron Curtain within their organisations and families, and the way individual immigrants nowadays articulate bodily memories in speech. I discussed the dynamic relationship between heroification and victimization in the narratives of former Allied soldiers from Poland 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 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 encourage further research into the gender-sensitive transmission practices in immigrant organizations and families of war survivors.

Conclusion

This book 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 study unravels how they gathered in groups remembering their war experiences and how they were integrated into and/or excluded from their home and host societies over time.

Therefore, the following specific toolkit of concepts is used. 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 agencies 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 people from the two migration streams at issue formed immigrant organisations uttering collective narratives on war memory, and to what extent these narratives became integrated in the cultural field on war memory of their host and home societies.

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 for example the influence of external dominant agencies 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. In addition, the study analyses the dynamic interplay of dominant and dominated agencies and the results to which that interplay leads with regard to group formation, creation and performance of 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 Displaced Persons, is how what he called 'the same refugee world' takes on a vastly different shape for the both migration streams at issue. Chapter one goes into these differences and states that various factors like war experiences, migration policy and naturalisation policy 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 enlarged these differences, since the former soldiers, for example, 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 Belgian and Soviet laws and could not always escape repatriation.

Also the group formation process and the construction of group memories in both migration streams differed. Some former Allied soldiers from Poland lobbied for their place within the cultural field on war memory in Belgium, with a lot of success on a local level, and at a later stage also with limited success on a national level. Over the years, they built up a special local 'Polish ex-combatant pillar' that, with the help of World War I ex-combatants and local politicians, received its own small place beside other big 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 small and local but nevertheless dominant agency 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 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.

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. 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.

Clearly, during the group formation process, the geopolitical context also enlarged the differences between both migration streams. Former Allied soldiers from Poland lobbied to become remembered within Belgium as Catholic, brave 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 only in rare cases spoke up in the public sphere, and then often had to defend themselves against dominant negative stereotypisation as war whores or communists. Let us also remember that this research mainly 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 stereotypisation. The good and the bad stereotypes were constructed as two sides of the same coin.

Interestingly, Belgian dominant agencies articulating war memory only became aware of the exclusiveness of former Allied soldiers from Poland thanks 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 immigrant 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 their home society conducted successful mobilisation among the latter, aiming to ensure former Ostarbeiterinnen did not create their own narrative on war memory that could disturb the way World War II was officially remembered in the Soviet Union. The close cooperation between the Soviet Consulate, the 'Motherland' Organisation, and the Association for Soviet Patriots (Later Citizens gathering former Ostarbeiterinnen (SSP/SSG), 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.

The second part of the study concentrates on the performance of group memory in immigrant organisations and highlighted how members 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. In chapter four, I analyse 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. 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 Polish immigrants in Belgium, and the Polish Consulate. The two different commemoration services of the 'anti-communist' Polish Union and the Polish Consulate propagated diametrically opposed narratives, either denouncing or glorifying communism. The former Allied soldiers were only mobilised to endorse their narratives on war memory at a later moment in time. 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.

In chapter five, I researched the choir rehearsals and concerts of SSP/SSG, an immigrant organisation consisting of former Ostarbeiterinnen. 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 in the mainstream Belgian public sphere. The analysis revealed that singing was not primarily an ethnic folklore activity, or a political activity, but that 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 their own 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, and to balance between both dominant Soviet and Belgian narratives on war memory.

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, there are also similar mechanisms at work. During communist times, members were influenced, but 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 Soviet propaganda songs.

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 among Belgian patriotic organisations, but found new support in Poland and among what they call ethnic fellows, namely the recently arrived immigrants from Poland, who construct them as the forerunners of peace in Europe and firmly place them within the cultural field on war memory in Poland as war heroes. One can therefore say that dominant agencies reformulated the ex-combatants' narrative on war memory and led it to switch its point of gravity to the other side of the former Iron Curtain. The former division soldiers still gather once a year at the war cemetery in Lommel. Despite the more ethnically diverse and Europeanised narratives articulated after the collapse of communism, they still seem to give meaning to the Polish war cemetery in Lommel in the same way as during communist times.

The group formation of former Ostarbeiterinnen stayed intact (anno 2011 there is still an Association for Soviet Citizens in Belgium) but the construction of group memories became ethnified. Former Ostarbeiterinnen 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. Unlike the former division soldiers, SSG members agreed with the post-Cold war narrative that was offered to them 'from above' and through portraying themselves as ethnic transnationals during performances they were ensured a relatively easy path of integration into their host society.

In the third part of the study that focuses on trauma in group memories, it is not the Cold War context 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 and victimhood, which enabled the people 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 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 social entities, such as immigrant organisations and the family, I broaden the meaning which the concept has been usually given and encourage further research into the gender-sensitive transmission practices of people with troublesome past experiences.

I am now ready to formulate the answer to the central research question of this study, which referred to the importance of the Cold War for immigrants' group formation and performance around their war memories. The geopolitical situation of the Cold War was certainly an important 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 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 historiia). 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 insights for the international academic fields of memory of World War II, East-West relations and migration history.

Memory research on World War II 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 songs and group gatherings functioning as substitute families, arenas of war memory articulation which I discuss in chapters five and six.

This study widens the frontiers of that geographical space scholars assume to have been affected by the reshuffling of Soviet war memory. Whereas 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, 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 dedicated the title of this book to it: 'Straddling the Iron Curtain?'. As this study shows, immigrants' 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. Agencies from the home and host society of the people under study deeply influenced their targets by managing to make them sing or perform official narratives from the Polish People's Republic or the Soviet Union in the Belgian public sphere, but immigrants always found room, how limited it was, for counternarration.

This study also provides revealing information for migration scholars. First, an important 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. Second, the close analysis of the group formation and group continuation process within the both migration streams offered a contribution to the recent literature on immigrant organisations, that tries to theorize the fluidity of immigrants' organizational landscapes over time. Former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen displayed organizational phases similar to the ones indicated by Floris Vermeulen, but showed interesting reshufflings after the change in geopolitical context.

After having deconstructed narratives on war memory and analysed their role for the articulation of former Allied soldiers from Poland and former Ostarbeiterinnen in their immigrant organisations, I place them back into 'the real world' and concentrate on how they are articulated in 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 (Judt, 2002, 157). Germans, or more specifically Nazis, had been overloaded with all the guilt of the war and 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, these national narratives came under scrunity 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, since it dealt in a more nuanced fashion with collaborationism and aimed at writing what they called Flemish idealism out of Nazi atrocities, an attitude that is currently been rethought. 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 lack democratic support.

Now that national narratives on war memory are experiencing a crisis, there are historians who stand up for a Europeanised narrative on war memory. They argue, as 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?. Some 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; Pakier and Stråth). 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 immigrants function as windows to Europeanisation (Assmann, 2006, 265-266). She 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. In this way, war experiences from a same context can be brought together under one umbrella, which facilitates the installation of a transnational European meta-narrative on war memory (Assmann, 2006, 266-270).

Such an umbrella was provided in the late 1990s, when disbursement issues for formerly forgotten forced labourers from behind the fallen Iron Curtain formed a stimulus to reinterpret the significance of foreign labour during World War II. For the first time, all foreign labourers 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 study *Hitler's Slaves: Life Stories of Forced Labourers in Nazi-Occupied Europe* and more specifically to its graph *Forced labourers by country* (von Plato, Leh, Thonfeld (eds.) 6). 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 (Seidel and Tenfelde; Zumbansen). The war memories of former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium I analysed in my study will be read by many through the eyes of this currently dominant European premise in war memory research and I 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. 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. 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 is imagined to have been 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).

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 and later Medvedev came to power, liberal narratives have experienced a gradual fall in proliferation. 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.[377] The situation in contemporary Belarus is comparable to the one in the Russian Federation. 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.

377 *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (4.3.2006) 10.

Appendix One: 'LENIN | NINEL'[378]

At the SSG gathering on 19 February 2007, Wendy treated her friends to cake in celebration of her 86th 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.[379] 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 doesn't want me to 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

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378 Based on my notes from the participant observation of 19.02.2007, I wrote on the train from Antwerp to Leuven directly after the gathering. This observation has also been described in Venken 2010e.

379 Interview with Sandy on 14.02.2006, notes.

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.

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, Tanias, Nadias, 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 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot*, I came across 'Nelly'. She had not been born as Nelly but as Ninel'.[380] 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 decided not 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. In this study, however, I preferred to present silenced memory as silenced, and to leave it like that (Hirsch 244).

380 *Sovetskiĭ Patriot* 26/516 (4.1971) 21-22.

Appendix Two: Song Lyrics[381]

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.

381 All sound recordings are archived in the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society in Brussels.

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 наближается
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 Danièl', 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 дальшем 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 сделав
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; ww.sovmusic.ru.

TRACK 7

Alternative version

Смело мы в бой пойдём
За суп с картошкой
Фашиста разобьем
Столовой ложкой

TRACK 8

Поем поем за советскую власть помрем

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 ver-
richt!
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 торон –
Это раздается 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 женци жнуть*

Ой на горі та женци жнуть
А попід горою. Яром-долиною
Козаки йдуть
Гей долиною гей широкою
козаки йдуть

Попереду Дорошенько
Веде своє військо військо запорнйзьке
хорошенько
Гей долиною гей широкою хорошенько

А позаду Сагайдачний
Що проміняв жінку на тютюн та люльку
необачний
Гей... необачний

Гей вернись Сагайдачний
Візьми свою жінку віддай ттютюн 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
ковьильная 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
Гнуться 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 чтож 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 быстрей 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.
Наливалися 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 завижу черноокую –
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 удалый 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

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