



## VALORISATION PROJECT

### TRANSMISSION

A 'TRANSMEMO' Podcast about the social impact of war and occupation on family memories



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## FINAL REPORT

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## 1. SUMMARY

Based on the scholarly work conducted within the framework of the two-years BRAIN project TRANSMEMO (2017-2019), this valorisation project produced a three-episode podcast series in French, called '*Les Transmissions. La guerre en héritage*' ('Transmissions: legacies of the war'). As an interdisciplinary collaboration between historians and social psychologists, TRANSMEMO carried out research about the intergenerational transfer of memories regarding collaboration and resistance during the Second World War in Belgium through interviews and surveys. Besides the scholarly analysis and results, in particular the oral history interviews provided ample opportunities for broader outreach activities, notably also in light of the ongoing societal interest in Belgium about the legacy of this past and the ever growing interest of family members to discover the past of their (grand-)parents. There is a certain discrepancy in the availability on knowledge as well as a public debate about the legacy of resistance and collaboration on a micro level (within families and individual lives) in the French-speaking community in Belgium. This is certainly the case for collaboration. This is why the TRANSMISSION-project opted to focus specifically on the French target audience (and not the Flemish, Dutch speaking audience) in order to spread knowledge but even more to rupture what might still be considered a 'public taboo'.

Based on a careful selection of individual life stories and testimonies, using the scholarly knowledge of TRANSMEMO and in collaboration with professional cultural actors, a three episode podcast series was produced of 20 to 26 minutes each. Each episode is based on one family history and we therefore interviewed members of three families to tell us their life stories and experiences, in two cases intermingled with restored older audio files of interviews from 1981 and 1985. Each family 'case' exemplifies the different scholarly foci of TRANSMEMO. The project TRANSMISSION was coordinated and carried out by historian dr. Florence Rasmont, supported by production company GSARA (Guillaume Abgrall) and with music by Tuur Florizoone.

Unfortunately, the Corona-pandemic after March 2020 has delayed first the finalization and afterwards also the public launch. Ultimately, in a situation of ongoing uncertainty, the decision was made to launch the podcasts in December 2020 which makes the final assessment of overall impact impossible.

## 2. INITIAL OBJECTIVES AND VALORISATION FOCUS

In line with the overall 'valorisation' objective this was primarily a public history project. TRANSMEMO had created an enormous wealth of hours of fascinating life stories, highly usable for the scholarly analysis of collective memories but equally usable to grasp the attention of larger audiences. Out of the many personal contacts of the researchers with the interviewees (including children, grandchildren) and the response of other individuals and families, the TRANSMEMO team also quickly had an acute awareness and conviction that there existed a huge societal urgency around the topic : the need within many families and social groups to openly testify and talk about certain aspects of this past, often still sealed off and considered taboo within larger families and local communities but also within a national public debate 75 years after the end of the Second World War. The choice for a 'podcast' was made to respect the logic and nature of the TRANSMEMO project, seeing as the interviews were available through audio (and not through images). Podcasts were also deemed easy and user-friendly means of communication, ideal for wide and multi-platform distribution.

### **Four main objectives can be distinguished :**

**First**, spreading knowledge about these histories, thereby also drawing attention to the existence of TRANSMEMO and its results (notably the collection of interviews).

**Second**, drawing attention to the collections and activities of CegeSoma/State Archives, including the older interviews in our oral history collection, specifically with a non-academic and younger audience. An added objective here was also to experiment with- and learn about other tools of public outreach than its traditional, often still text-based forms of communication. In terms of 'collection valorisation', TRANSMISSION was used to restore two audio-files from the oral history collection of CegeSoma (interviews from 1981 and 1985 respectively) by the French company VECTRACOM.

**Third**, creating a more nuanced awareness with a larger public about the complex nature of the legacy of this past within many households and families.

**Fourth** to rupture a certain 'taboo' that exists around the subject in Francophone Belgium, and in doing so to have a 'multiplier'-effect : to help create the conditions for a space in which a more open public debate is allowed and even stimulated

### 3. OVERVIEW EXTERNAL COLLABORATION(S)

The project's main coordinator and researcher is **dr. Florence Rasmont**, who in 2019 defended her PhD at ULB, about the politics of memories regarding the 1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda. For her PdD research, she used in-depth oral history methods and acquired great expertise in conducting research in a highly charged political and public environment. Moreover, she was also one of the TRANSMEMO-researchers and could therefore ensure the integration of the scholarly continuity (as well as quality). She could also fall back on the insights and works of the other TRANSMEMO-researchers, although these were not directly involved, notably prof. dr. Koen Aerts (UGent), dr. Aline Cordonnier and dr. Pierre Bouchat (UCLouvain). The presence of co-promoters prof. dr. Bruno De Wever (UGent) and prof. dr. Olivier Luminet (UCLouvain) for TRANSMISSION, formally ensured this continuity. Dr. Rasmont could therefore directly integrate her own, as well as her colleague's, state of the art results on the macro-level (collective memories). Simplified, the first task was to select the individual cases that could exemplify and narrate the collective insights on a macro-level.

Arguably the most essential part of the project however, was to translate the scholarly insights and the selected stories inside a model that could cater to the interests of a non-academic audience. This process of science-communication and public history outreach, needed to be implemented in every step of the project, including the selection of the initial 'cases' and life-stories. This is why it was necessary to involve production company **GSARA** right from the very outset of the project as a 'full partner' and not as an 'external' partner in a later stage : the decisions on how to make the step to 'cultural outreach' translation needed to be implemented from the outset.

GSARA (vzw/asbl) has extensive experience since 1976 in creating and distributing audiovisual cultural productions, and notably through the work of award-winning documentary- and radio-producer **Guillaume Abgrall** a rich collaboration was launched. Thanks to additional funding obtained by GSARA with the Fonds d'aide à la création radiophonique (FACR) of the Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles, renowned Flemish film music composer **Tuur Florizoone** could be involved to provide the musical score. The trio of Rasmont-Abgrall-Florizoone worked extensively with the selected witnesses and storytellers to create the three episodes.

Further collaboration was foreseen at the launch event, and following the launch event. One example is the collaboration of CegeSoma and dr. Rasmont with the TV-episode 'les enfants de la collaboration', produced by the company 'les gens' and aired by Belgian francophone public TV RTBF on 25 November 2020. CegeSoma/State Archives acted as the scholarly consultant for these series, and dr. Rasmont was one of six experts in the three 'expert-episodes' providing historical context with. The RTBF-show created huge press attention and reactions. However, forced by the ongoing uncertainty of the **Corona-Pandemic in 2020** and the imposed measures of lockdown and others, the podcasts were only launched in the wake of this TV-episode in December 2020.

#### 4. GENERATED PRODUCTS AND IMPLEMENTED APPROACHES

The project led to three episodes in the podcast series '*Les Transmissions. La guerre en héritage*' ('Transmissions: legacies of the war'). Each of the podcasts is made permanently available through Spotify and the institutional website of CegeSoma (cf. links below), as well as through a growing number of other platforms.

**1/ The first episode is entitled 'de mère en fille'** ('From mother to daughter') and lasts 22min.45sec. It recounts the tale of Reine Borms, a woman who was never able to fully recover mentally and physically from the ordeal of her wartime deportation, she suffered as a result of her resistance-activities as a courier in the Armed Partisan movement. A restored interview with Reine Borms from 1985 conducted by prof.dr. José Gotovitch (CegeSoma, ULB) is used in the episode. It is also the tale of her daughter, who lived her life caught between admiration for the ideals and sacrifices of her mother and the problems of growing up with a traumatized parent ; it also tells the tale of a generation conflict of two women caught up in the societal and political challenges of their own times. (CegeSoma-link : <https://open.spotify.com/episode/1f0WYth7sk9dxU6ad49DXb>)

**2/ The second episode is called 'Le secret'** ('The secret') and lasts 20min.27sec. It tells the tale of 'Antoine', who after discovering in 1968 that his father was a military collaborator and part of the Walloon Legion with the Germans wrestles to keep this fact secret for everyone for decades until he finally decides to come out in the open and launch his own personal investigation and quest to come to personal terms with his father. (CegeSoma-link: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/5zLVvEFviEXLxEgdxDFdK>)

**3/ The third episode is entitled 'Bompa'** ('Grandfather'), and lasts 26min.04sec. It tells the tale of Charles Demunter and his family over four generations. Charles was a former communist resistance member who was deported during the war and after his ordeal in the concentration camp and the liberation became heavily involved in the encircled networks of the Brussels communist party. It places the story of wartime trauma in the broader context of a rapidly transforming context of the labour classes and quarters in Brussels.

The podcasts were launched on 1 December through the CegeSoma website. To accompany the podcasts, a small introductory film clip was produced in which dr. Chantal Kesteloot (head of public history at CegeSoma) interviews dr. Florence Rasmont about the podcasts. This small clip was placed on the newly created (November 2020) dedicated youtube channel of CegeSoma, at the same time as the three twenty-minutes films produced by TV-production firm 'Les Gens', to accompany their TV-broadcast produced for the RTBF and aired on 23 November 2020 ('Les enfants de la collaboration'). (CegeSoma-link : <https://open.spotify.com/episode/4L1BYdIOWhDFtgsDQgENm3>)

The introductory interview of dr. Kesteloot with dr. Rasmont :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IN3N2O8ioM&t=488s>



## 5. IMPACT AND ADDED VALUE OF THE VALORISATION ACTION

As stated above, due to outbreak of the Corona-pandemic and lockdown measures in mid-March 2020, the finalization of the three episodes was put on hold for several months and could not be finalized until the summer of 2020. The planned launch-event in October 2020 in specific candidate cultural venues in Brussels, as well as at least one event in the conference room of CegeSoma/State Archives, had to be cancelled as well, due to the imposed 'second wave' semi-lockdown. Another event, where the involved witnesses and family members would be invited and involved in a public hearing and/or moment of encounter, needed to be cancelled as well.

Other events were not yet planned but were envisioned : public hearing events and debates for example. The launch was ultimately postponed until after 25 November 2020. This was the day the RTBF broadcasted the TV-episode ('Les enfants de la collaboration'), in which CegeSoma/State Archives and parts of the TRANSMEMO/TRANSMISSION team (Dr. Rasmont & prof. dr. Koen Aerts) were actively involved as well. The logic was that the public reactions, as well as the three subsequent 'expert-episodes', could create an ideal context in which a launch of the podcasts could receive maximal attention. Launch took place in December 2020.

The three expert-episodes produced by 'Les Gens' accompanying 'Les enfants de la collaboration' :

- (1) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z\\_iypWnUj4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z_iypWnUj4)
- (2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IZ2LDLag9Q&t=237s>
- (3) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6MOFCSrzek&t=11s>

Another intent is to organize one (or more) collective 'listening-moments', where an audience can listen to these podcasts : ideally this can also be done with the families directly concerned in the podcasts as well as other families that were interviewed for the TRANSMEMO project. This could enable the goal of an encounter and open debate among descendants and families : something which needs direct physical presence and cannot be done 'virtually' and was therefore made impossible by the Corona-crisis.

The podcasts have been submitted to the Radio and Audio Festival contest "Longueur d'ondes" in Brest in 2021 (<http://longueur-ondes.fr/>) and will be submitted to the "Brussels podcast festival" on 8 January 2021.

The podcasts-format offers the opportunity for broad dissemination, by external partners. At the moment of launch, they were distributed by Radio Campus (ULB) (<https://www.radiocampus.be/>) on 4, 11 and 18 December 2020 respectively and Brussels radio station Radio Panik (<https://www.radiopanik.org/programme/2020/50/>) in the show "L'heure de pointe" on 8, 15 and 22 December 2020 respectively.

This highly belated launch in the difficult 2020 context means that we lack the adequate indicators to evaluate impact (number of participants in events, number of listeners to the podcasts, reactions and press coverage, results, subsequent activities, etc.).

## 6. MEASURES TO MAINTAIN THE COLLABORATION(S)

There exist two main tracks to ensure further durable collaborations, although both are difficult to fully elaborate in the scope (and the Covid-19 context) of this report.

The first track, are all the further reactions and potential follow-up activities once the podcasts get more widely disseminated. It is to be expected the dissemination will lead to reactions, for example of other families and relatives. We refer to the points above : the belated public launch of the Podcasts in 2020 makes a more concrete appreciation of the potential of these follow-up activities difficult.

A second line of future collaborations, are the further collaborations within the TRANSMEMO project, in whose broader framework these podcasts are embedded (and of which this project is a smaller 'valorisation'-part). While the Podcasts (the TRANSMISSION project) in itself does not have adequate weight to carry durable collaborative networks, the TRANSMEMO will carry durable suggestions for collaboration as elaborated in the final TRANSMEMO-report.

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