

# TRANSMEMO

## The Sorrows of Belgium: WWII memories and family transmission

DURATION  
15/01/2017 – 14/04/2019

BUDGET  
571 000 €

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

While academics in the last two decades deconstructed several, persistent myths surrounding the national history of WWII in Belgium, its legacy endures as a divisive factor between the main political families and language communities. The striking absence of any unifying national or patriotic memory of the war contrasts with the still dominant but historically incorrect dichotomist perception of a collaborationist Flanders and a resistant Wallonia. The origins and development of these divisive memories has been studied extensively in a variation of top down analysis, focusing on how memories were promoted and authorized into the public domain. To better understand the mechanisms and durability of these diverging memories the TRANSMEMO project focuses on a domain that has remained largely unexplored until now: the intergenerational transmission of memories within families, placed within the evolving temporal and spatial contexts of Belgian society.

Firmly set within the field of memory studies and in particular the model of communicative and cultural memory, TRANSMEMO connects several discipline - history, social and cognitive psychology and political sciences - to analyse the mechanisms of intergenerational memory-transfer and its social impact. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the project pursues multiple objectives, revolving around three main research domains:

1. How does intergenerational, intrafamilial memory transmission create and consolidate family and collective public memories? Are there differences between Flanders and Francophone Belgium? Are there differences between families where the first generation was a resister or a collaborator? How these two factors (linguistic belonging and type of family) will interact for predicting the extent and the content of transmitted memories?
2. Can we establish parallels between the historical narratives created and distributed through historical interviews and those we detect in the family memories of children and grandchildren? If so, what does this reveal about the link between the individual and the collective, the communicative and the cultural? This will mean activating a rich wealth of Belgian war heritage (oral sources).
3. A third objective is to use this project as a practical test-case to investigate the conditions that can either stimulate or obstruct reconciliatory processes between different groups with diverging memories.

To achieve these aims, TRANSMEMO uses an interdisciplinary approach to investigate memories and knowledge of specific Belgian topics/events of World War II, from 3 generations of 80 families of Belgian resisters and collaborators. The methodology combines semi-structured interviews with questionnaires, as interviews allow in-depth and more qualitative analyses whereas questionnaires provide more direct answers to questions and quantitative analyses. Other innovative methods are also implemented, notably the group talks and the merged analysis of previously collected interviews from the unique federal heritage collection of historical oral sources at CegeSoma. Lastly, the reconciliation aspect of the project is mostly made concrete in one (or several) final meetings where we will bring together the families of collaborators and resisters. During that meeting, we will present the project and its results, communicate some of the interviews and the testimonies, create the opportunity for the families themselves to convey their experiences and opinions, and provide the framework in which they can detect mutual ground in dialogue.



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TRANSMEMO will have a broad impact for science, society and for decision making. First, the academic output will contribute to a better understanding of the functioning of collective memory and transition of memory within families, as well as a better understanding of the historical role of transmission within families of resisters and collaborators across the Belgian linguistic border. This project also has the larger potential to address more universal questions on why history and subsequent memories can become such a factor of division, and how the failure to reconcile opposing historical narratives can become so strong that they ultimately determine the political fate of a country. As such, this project also appeals to the more broader intention expressed in the call to use Belgium as a stepping-stone for more general reflection, in relation to international literature on reconciliation.

TRANSMEMO will lead to several 'days of encounter', where we will bring together groups of descendants from collaborators and members of the resistance with the aim to create a unique dialogue between these groups of people. Through this encounter, we hope to modify attitudes, behaviours and feelings toward the other group, such as lowering antagonism or increasing interpersonal cognitive attitudes. We expect that this trajectory will have social reverberations that will sound long after the project has ended. In any case, more critical and reflective academic work will also be done on this trajectory.

Finally, the partners will author a final report, containing policy recommendations on education, commemorations, and different strands of politics of memory/history.

Therefore, the finished product of the TRANSMEMO project will include several peer-reviewed articles in renowned academic journals, a final report with recommendations and organized encounters between Belgian families.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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## LINKS

<http://www.arch.be/index.php?!=fr&m=nos-projets&r=projets-de-recherche&pr=projet-transmemo-memoire-de-la-collaboration-et-de-la-resistance-pendant-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale>