

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# When collective memories of victimhood fade: Generational evolution of intergroup attitudes and political aspirations in Belgium

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Received: 13 December 2013

Accepted: 18 January 2015

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2104>

**Keywords:** collective memories,  
generations, collective victimhood,  
intergroup conflict, social context

## Abstract

Collective memory theories propose that groups' remembrances of their past depend upon their current social situation. In Belgium, a significant proportion of Dutch speakers share a collective memory of past victimisation by French speakers and fight for an ever-larger autonomy of their region. Yet, as the respective economic, political and social situations of the linguistic regions of Belgium recently evolved with a reversal of fortunes, the current experience of younger Dutch speakers does not fit the traditional memory anymore. We thus predicted that the collective memories of victimhood would decline amongst them, thus bringing changes in intergroup attitudes and political aspirations. Three generations were compared in a survey of 1226 French-speaking and 1457 Dutch-speaking individuals. For both groups, younger generations evidenced less regionalist and more integrative positions than older ones. However, these effects were stronger for Dutch-speaking respondents, and for them, collective memory of victimhood mediated the relation linking age and identification with Belgium, intergroup attitudes and political aspirations. We concluded that the current social context has decisive consequences for collective remembrances, which, in turn, impact intergroup relations and political attitudes and choices.

*'As we remember the past, we reconstruct it in accordance with our present ideas of what is important and what is not'* —Peter Berger (1963, p. 54)

## COLLECTIVE MEMORIES

Collective memories can be defined as “representations of the past in the minds of members of a community that contribute to the community's sense of identity” (Manier & Hirst, 2008, p. 253). In this sense, collective memories are not simply representations of the past shared across a social group. They must also serve a function for this group. Nations and ethnic groups often, if not always, base the definition of their identity on representations of their history (László, 2013; Pennebaker, Paez, & Rimé, 1997). In addition, collective memories have a normative function. They operate as *charters* that help define the course of action that a group should follow as a function of its past. For example,

memories of past immoral actions committed by a nation may prevent it from participating in new military actions. Given its role in World War II, Germany was reluctant to join other Western nations in a military intervention in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Conversely, memories of past victimisation may inspire mistrust in contemporary intergroup relations. For example, scholars have described the development of a “siege mentality” amongst some Israeli Jews (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992), inspired by their interpretation of the Holocaust (Klar, Schori-Eyal, & Klar, 2013).

So far, social psychological scholars have mainly addressed collective memory issues following two distinct, though intertwined, paths. On the one hand, the main bulk of research focused on the way representations of the past affect present psychological states. Indeed, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the group-based emotions that are triggered by reminders of the in-group's past immoral actions (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004; Iyer & Leach, 2008) or to the influence of

memories of past collective victimisation on current intergroup attitudes (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012; Vollhardt, 2008). On the other hand, relatively less attention has been devoted to the way current social psychological factors influence the reconstruction of the past. For example, Sahdra and Ross (2007) showed that, amongst Hindu and Sikh respondents, high in-group identifiers tended to recall fewer incidents of in-group violence against the out-group than low identifiers. Another study conducted amongst Christian Maronite participants in Lebanon also showed that their level of identification with the Maronite in-group was associated with collective memories that attributed responsibility for the civil war to Muslims, whereas identification with the superordinate Lebanese group had the opposite effect. In turn, these memories were associated with more negative attitudes towards contemporary Muslims (Licata, Klein, Saade, Azzi, & Branscombe, 2012). These two studies provided evidence that current psychological states (i.e., present social identification) can affect either the accessibility or the contents of collective memories.

However, to our knowledge, the contention that collective memories are shaped by the social situation in which group members live has not been empirically addressed in social psychology studies. Yet, this idea was clearly enunciated by the founders of collective memory studies. Hence, according to the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory “retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive” (Halbwachs, 1950/1980, p. 80). Similarly, Frederic Bartlett, who introduced memory studies in psychology, stated that “with the individual as with the group, the past is continually re-made, reconstructed as a function of present interests” (1932, p. 309). In other words, one should expect that changes in the social political context in which group members live would find a match in changes in the way they remember their group’s past. More precisely, collective memories that fulfil a function in a particular social context should gradually disappear when changes in this context render them irrelevant.

### COLLECTIVE NARRATIVES OF VICTIMHOOD

In some societies, collective memory may be dominated by a sense of collective victimhood. Perceived collective victimhood can be defined as “a mindset shared by group members that results from a perceived intentional harm with severe and lasting consequences inflicted on a collective by another group or groups,

a harm that is viewed as undeserved, unjust and immoral and one that the group was not able to prevent” (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009, p. 238). Group members may experience this sense of victimhood on the basis of their identification with the group, which facilitates empathy with other in-group members’ suffering (Bar-Tal *et al.*, 2009). As a consequence, this sense of victimhood can be experienced vicariously, even when the harm happened generations ago (Vollhardt, 2012).

In this respect, the transgenerational transmission of collective victimhood plays a crucial role in shaping societal beliefs. As noted by Staub and Bar-Tal, (2003) “Groups encode important experiences, especially extensive suffering, in their collective memory, which can maintain a sense of woundedness and past injustice through generations” (2003, p. 722). Research has shown that once a group has been victimised in the past, these collective memories are then drawn upon for making sense of new events, which tend to be viewed as similar to, or as a continuation of, historical victimisation (Noor *et al.*, 2012; Schori, Klar, & Roccas, 2009). As a consequence, these collective memories can play an active role in the onset and/or the perpetuation of intergroup conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2000). Hence, research showed that reminders of historical victimisation led to more distancing towards members of the past perpetrator group (Wohl & Branscombe, 2005) or even alleviated collective guilt for harmful actions committed by the in-group towards a third group (Wohl & Branscombe, 2008).

### COLLECTIVE MEMORIES AND NEW GENERATIONS

Although collective memories are often carefully transmitted via parallel channels to new generations, each generation grows up in a different social and historical setting, which profoundly influences its shared representations, attitudes and values (Ester, Vinken, & Diepstraten, 2002). Transmission processes help explain “how the past weighs on the present” (Liu & Hilton, 2005, p. 537). Thus, collective memories are collective not only in that they are shared but also, and more importantly, in a process of social transmission that shapes their content. However, as mentioned earlier in the text, collective memories are not only inherited from the past but they are also moulded by group members’ current experiences. They are maintained as long as group members can use them to make sense of their present reality.

Mannheim (1928/1952) precisely defined a generation as a group of people with similar perceptions and

similar memories. He stressed that different generations have different memories of the historical past. As a consequence, collective memories can vary from one generation to the next as a function of the social reality in which members of each generation grow up. In an investigation conducted in line with Mannheim's (1928/1952) concept, Schuman and Scott (1989) asked Americans to describe national and world changes that were especially important during the past 50 years. They observed an important effect of age: Respondents older than 44 years listed the Second World War more often than the Vietnam War, whereas the opposite trend was obtained for respondents aged less than 40 years. Schuman and Scott concluded: "memories are strongest for those in their youth at the time of the event" (Schuman & Scott, 1989, pp. 365–366). In a study with a large sample of Dutch respondents, Ester *et al.* (2002) noted that recollection of events did not differ between the Dutch generations. However, the interpretation and attribution of significance of these events did. Licata and Klein (2010) also showed that representations of the colonisation of the Congo were markedly different over three generations of Belgians. Young adults mainly retained the ruthless exploitation of the Congolese by the Belgians, whereas grandparents held a paternalistic representation of colonialism. Parents stood between these opposing trends. Given the surge of interest for collective memory in the past decade, it may come as a surprise that so little work in our discipline has addressed change across generations in representations of the past.

The fact that different generations share different experiences and different realities raises an interesting question with regard to the impact of intergenerationally transmitted collective memories. What happens when the collective heritage transmitted to the new generation by their parents and grandparents is inconsistent with the world or society that members of this new generation commonly experience in the present? Would new generations differ from their predecessors in the way they remember their in-group's past? And, in turn, would this change in collective memories influence their social identifications, intergroup attitudes and the political projects they support? To our knowledge, such an intergenerational shift in collective memories has never been investigated. The current sociopolitical situation of Belgium offers a relevant case that lends itself to empirical investigation.

## THE BELGIAN CASE

Over the past decades, Belgium has unceasingly transformed its structures in attempts at resolving a conflict

as old as its origin as a nation state. And yet in 2010–2011, the country faced an unprecedented political crisis with a 541-day government vacancy considered a world record (Delvaux & Coppi, 2011). In the 2014 elections, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, a Dutch-speaking nationalist party that supports the secession of Flanders from Belgium, has further progressed and currently represents the first political force in Flanders (31.9%) and the whole country (20.3%) (Le Soir, 2014). Many observers believe the division of the country to be near. Under the heading "Belgium (finally) splits up," the *New York Times* (Jacobs & Khanna, 2012) named Belgium amongst the few states of the world where borders would soon be reconfigured.

According to several observers (Luminet *et al.*, 2011; Vos, 2002), the mistrust towards the Belgian state and the support for separatism that is present in a significant part of the Dutch-speaking public opinion are partly rooted in collective memories of past Francophone domination. According to these memories, Dutch speakers were victims of cultural, political and economic oppression from the French-speaking elites starting from the creation of Belgium in 1830 to the 1960s. However, in recent years, the living conditions for Dutch speakers have steadily improved because of a reversal of the two main regions' economic statuses and to the Belgian federalisation process that brought cultural recognition and broad political autonomy to the regions. Because of this evolution, younger generations of Dutch-speaking Belgians are now exposed to a social, economical and political situation that stands in contrast with the one of their predecessors. This situation offers a framework to examine to what extent the current conditions in which individuals live can affect the content of their collective memory. We therefore assessed the extent to which the collective memory of the younger generation of Dutch-speaking Belgians differed from that of previous ones. In addition, because the collective memory helps to define the course of action that the group should follow based on its past, we examined the extent to which intergroup attitudes and political aspirations of this younger generation differed from those of their predecessors. But before developing the hypothesis of this study further, it is necessary to develop in more detail the Belgian intergroup situation upon which the study relies.

## BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In 1830–1831, Belgium seceded from the Netherlands to form an independent nation state comprising two cultural groups. Northerners spoke Flemish dialects that were to gradually evolve towards a unified language

modelled on Dutch. Southerners spoke Roman dialects called “Walloon” that would progressively be supplanted by the French language (Hooghe, 2004). On both sides, the move towards a unified language lasted more than a century. In the new state, the northern region faced economic, political and social disadvantages compared with the south. Economically, the north was mainly composed of small farming communities with very low incomes. By contrast, at the end of the 19th century, the southern region ranked third worldwide for industrialisation (Zolberg, 1974). On the political front, the northern region was in the hands of a dominant class who spoke French, as was the fashion in these classes in many European countries in the 19th century. In social terms, the northern region suffered from a serious lack of integration because of the many local Flemish dialects. The Flemish population experienced economic misery, lack of control and exposure to an arrogant ruling class who imposed a different language upon them. Narratives depicting this unfortunate situation spread across Flemish generations (Martiniello, 1998). They fuelled a collective memory of frustration and humiliation (Klein, Licata, Van der Linden, Mercy, & Luminet, 2012), as is typically the case when a sense of collective victimhood develops (Bar-Tal *et al.*, 2009; Vollhardt, 2012). Such collective narratives have fed a powerful sociopolitical movement aimed at protecting their language and territory against invasion by the French. By favouring a linguistic unification around a common language, this “Flemish movement” enhanced northerners’ capacity for action. In the second half of the 20th century, Flemish people had acquired the unity and strength to claim a change in the structure of Belgium. Up until today, an ever-larger political, economical, cultural and social autonomy remains a central claim in current Flemish political discourse (Swenden & Jans, 2006). By contrast, the French speakers are generally favourable to the maintenance of Belgian integration.

From the 1960s onward, political conflicts followed by compromises gradually led to a radical transformation of Belgium. The country progressively turned into a federal state. In 1962, a linguistic border delimiting the territory of each group was determined. In 1993, regional parliaments (for Flanders, Wallonia and bilingual Brussels) were installed. New capacities allowed the regions to develop their own policies of international relations. Whereas French-speaking people considered this evolution as sufficient, Dutch-speaking political parties wanted more constitutional reforms (Hooghe, 2004). This disagreement has led to the recent political crisis.

In the last decades, the respective situation of the two linguistic regions of Belgium evolved considerably.

Northerners (i.e., Dutch speakers) are now in markedly improved economic, political and social conditions. In political terms, since the fixing of the linguistic border and the promulgation of federalism, northerners retain both large administrative autonomy and important power in the federal state. Because of their numerical majority, the head of the Belgian Government has been a Dutch speaker for the last 40 years (Luminet *et al.*, 2011). This changed in December 2011 with the appointment of the French-speaking Elio Di Rupo as Prime Minister (followed by Charles Michel, another French speaker). The present study was conducted before this appointment.

Economically, a complete reversal of fortunes occurred. Southerners, who lost most of their rich industries, fell into a deep recession with high levels of unemployment and impoverishment. In contrast, northerners successfully developed small-sized and medium-sized enterprises (Quévit, 1982). Their employment and standard of living are now much more favourable than that of their southerner neighbours. Besides, the Flemish identity has been consolidated by linguistic unification, by successful political struggles and by greater autonomy. Simultaneously, the French language is no longer the prestigious language that diplomats, intellectuals and wealthy people spoke in the past. However, its ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977) remains higher than that of Dutch, which explains why it may still be perceived as threatening.

## SUMMARY OF AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

The younger Dutch-speaking generations are thus no longer exposed to the political, economic and social conditions that fed the frustration and humiliation of previous generations and their struggles for emancipation. They live in an economically privileged, politically independent and socially integrated region compared with their French-speaking neighbours who face a difficult economic and social situation. In sum, in the newer generations of Dutch-speaking inhabitants of Belgium, the collective memory of victimhood is no longer consistent with their observable contemporary situation. Insofar as this memory was one of the main factors underpinning the aspiration to autonomy of previous generations, such aspiration should now be in significant decline amongst the newer generations when compared with the older ones. Such a cross-generation evolution is expected to be specific to Dutch-speaking Belgians and should thus not be observed amongst their French-speaking counterparts who were dominant in the country until a recent past, who did not build their

identity on a collective memory of victimisation and who did not have aspirations for autonomy.

This study will compare three generations of Dutch-speaking and French-speaking Belgians on a number of dependent variables assessing their current memories and attitudes with regard to intergroup conflict. The data were collected using large samples of French-speaking and Dutch-speaking Belgian respondents, within which three generations characterised by distinct experiences of the Belgian intergroup situation were distinguished. For doing so, we relied upon the first part of Mannheim’s (1928/1952) concept according to which a generation refers to individuals who shared similar youth experiences in their formative years, that is, according to this author, the period between the ages of 8 and 16 years. Our first group thus comprised respondents born between 1920 and 1957. Those at the younger end of this group had reached the age of 16 years in 1973 corresponding to the beginning of the transformation of Belgium into a federal state. In this age group, the common experience was thus essentially traditional prefederal Belgium. Next, we grouped respondents born between 1958 and 1982. At the older end of this group, the formative period began in 1966 or soon after a linguistic border was decided. At the younger end, the age of 16 years was reached in 1998. Members of this age group had their formative years throughout the period of the federal transmutation. Finally, we gathered respondents born in 1983 or later. Aged 8 years in 1991 for the oldest amongst them, participants in this age group had the sole experience of a federal state in their formative years.

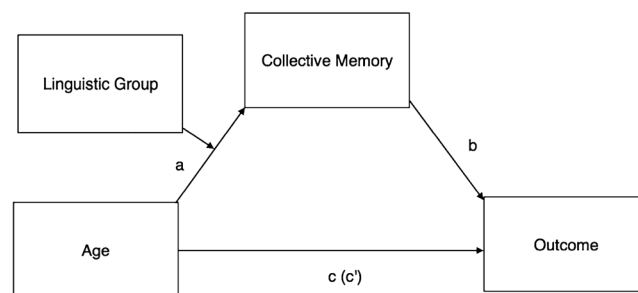
Predictions of our study arise from the reversal of the economic, political and social conditions of the Belgian linguistic regions and from the considerable improvement of the situation of Dutch-speaking individuals in recent decades. Because of this evolution, we hypothesised that the collective memories of perceived victimhood prevalent in older Dutch-speaking generations would lack relevance for members of the newer generations. Consequently, we expected to observe in

our Dutch-speaking participants generational differences on our dependent variables assessing collective memories of victimhood and intergroup attitudes. More specifically, compared with the former generations of Dutch-speaking people, members of the younger generation were expected to manifest the following: (H1) regarding collective memories, less consensual memory of the origins of the Belgian intergroup conflict and less perception of victimhood; (H2) regarding collective identification, a decline in identification with their own linguistic group and an enhanced identification with Belgium; (H3) regarding attitudes towards the out-group, less distancing and higher conciliation; (H4) regarding preferred evolution of the country, a lower prospect of Radical Separation and a higher prospect of Augmented Integration; and (H5) regarding preferred political actions for resolving the intergroup conflict, higher support for mutual concessions and lower support of Unilateral Decisions and Direct Confrontation. No such effects were expected amongst French-speaking respondents who will thus constitute a control group. Consequently, generation by language group interaction effects are predicted for H1 to H5. In addition, collective memory of past victimhood was expected to mediate all the effects observed in the Dutch-speaking group. Thus (H6), a moderated mediation was predicted (Figure 1): Within the Dutch-speaking group only, the younger generations will display more positive attitudes towards their country, and this will occur because they perceive that their group has suffered less in the past at the hands of the other linguistic group. In the French-speaking group, such a generational effect is not expected as such a long-standing memory of suffering is absent.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

A total of 2802 respondents validly completed the online questionnaire. Their language group was



**Fig. 1:** Hypothesised moderated mediation

established by their response to an item asking: "What is your mother tongue? (French, Dutch, both or other)." A small number of participants answered "both" ( $N=82$ ) or "other" ( $N=37$ ). They were not included in the analyses. The study sample ( $N=2683$ ) thus comprised 1226 French-speaking (45.7%) and 1457 Dutch-speaking (54.2%) respondents. The average age was 37.57 years ( $SD=16.13$ ) amongst French-speaking respondents and 37.82 years ( $SD=15.26$ ) amongst Dutch-speaking respondents,  $t(2681) < 1.0$ . Some 96% of respondents provided information on their education level: 40.5% of the French-speaking respondents and 41.6% of Dutch-speaking respondents had achieved either primary school or secondary school or a nonuniversity degree while, respectively, 59.5% and 58.4% had completed studies at the university level, which indicates an equivalent educational level across the two samples,  $\chi^2(1, N=2576) < 1.0$ . A significant difference was found between the two language groups for the distribution of gender, with 47.1% of female respondents amongst the French-speaking and only 29.9% amongst the Dutch-speaking,  $\chi^2(1, N=2683) = 84.1$ ,  $p < .001$ . All provinces and regions of the country were represented amongst respondents.

As most of the participants ( $N=2242$ ; 78.3%) mentioned the party of their choice in federal elections, we were able to examine the representativeness of the collected sample with regard to political orientation. This was carried out with particular attention to nationalist orientation. It should be specified that, in the current Belgian context, the notion of "nationalist party" covers a regionalist orientation and implies an aspiration for separation from the Belgian state and autonomy of one's linguistic region. This political orientation is specific to the Dutch-speaking population. There is currently no French-speaking separatist party. As indecision is frequent before elections, respondents were allowed to express several possible voting choices. A large majority ( $N=1766$ ; 78.8%) of those who answered expressed only one vote. Their choices were then gathered according to four classes of voting orientations: Dutch-speaking nationalist parties (Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, Vlaams Belang and Libertair; Direct; Democratisch;  $N=555$ ), Dutch-speaking and French-speaking green parties (Groen and Ecolo;  $N=383$ ), and Dutch- and French-speaking "traditional" parties (Socialist, Humanists and Christian democrats and Liberals;  $N=699$ ) and others ( $N=129$ ). Compared with the results of the June 2011 votes for the House of Representatives ( $N=6527367$ ), respondents expressing a Dutch-speaking nationalist choice were slightly but significantly in excess ( $N=555$  or 31.43%, vs. 27.47% at House elections) respective to those

who chose non-nationalist parties (green; traditional),  $\chi^2(1, N=6527367) = 10.06$ ,  $p = .001$ . We concluded that regarding nationalist orientation, the collected sample matched reasonably well with the choices expressed at elections by the Belgian population.

### Split into Three Generations

We decided to use a categorical predictor—generation—to maximise construct validity. Indeed, this construct presumes the existence of discontinuities from one generation to the next contrary to age—a continuous predictor. In practice however, conducting multiple regressions with continuous predictors yielded equivalent results. Adopting the cut off points defined in the introduction, respondents born between 1920 and 1957 included 264 Dutch-speaking people and 244 French-speaking ones. Respondents born between 1958 and 1982 included 621 Dutch-speaking participants and 443 French-speaking ones. Finally, respondents born in 1983 or later included 572 Dutch-speaking persons and 539 French-speaking ones. Table 1 summarises the composition of the three-generation subsamples.

The three generations differed in their education levels: For example, in the older generation, 22% of respondents achieved a high school education or lower compared with 38.2% in the younger generation. To consider whether this could affect the analyses, we created a four-level variable based on the Belgian

**Table 1.** Composition of the three generations subsamples

	Generations (date of birth)		
	Older generation (1920–1957)	Median generation (1958–1982)	Younger generation (1983 and later)
Age range in 2011	54–91 years old	29–53 years old	18–28 years old
State experience in formative years	Prefederal	Federalization	Postfederal
Dutch speaking			
<i>N</i>	264	621	572
Mean age	62.70	40.66	23.26
<i>SD</i>	6.12	7.26	3.42
French speaking			
<i>N</i>	244	443	539
Mean age	63.34	41.17	22.94
<i>SD</i>	6.22	7.03	2.84
Total sample			
<i>N</i>	508	1064	1111
Mean age	63.01	40.87	23.11
<i>SD</i>	6.17	7.17	3.16

educational system (1 = "secondary or lower education", 2 = "college", 3 = "university", 4 = "postgraduate or doctoral"). A log-linear analysis revealed no interaction between generation and language group on this variable,  $LR(6) = 5.00, p = .54$ , but that there was indeed (and only) an effect of generation,  $LR(6) = 311, p < .001$ . However, introducing this variable as a covariate in the analyses did not affect the outcomes reported in the rest of this paper.

## Procedure

Most of the survey questionnaire was pretested in a preliminary study conducted online with a similar procedure 1 year before (4 May to 27 May 2010) and to which 1450 respondents took part. The survey questionnaire of the present study was posted online in a bilingual form in which the successive items were presented in different colours depending on the language. A strict alternation in the order of appearance of the two languages was respected to avoid precedence. Students from various universities involved in the project were informed of the link via email. They were urged to forward this link to their family and relatives, thereby ensuring that adults of different ages would contribute. In addition, daily newspapers mentioned the link on their website. The survey link was accessible from 6 May 2011 to 3 June 2011.

## Questionnaire

### General Information

Respondents indicated their age, sex, education and occupation, the postal code of their residence and their mother tongue.

### Collective Memories

Two indicators were used to assess the intergenerational evolution of collective memories. First, respondents dated the beginning of the Belgian conflict: "In your opinion, in what year did the conflict between Dutch-speakers and French-speakers start?" Second, two items on 7-point rating scales (1 = *totally disagree* to 7 = *totally agree*) measured the respective sufferings endured by the in-group and the out-group. Thus, the first of these items assessed the collective memory of past in-group victimhood: "Historically, the French-speaking/Flemish (in-group) people have suffered from the behaviour of Flemish/French-speaking (out-group) people," whereas the second one assessed the collective memory of past out-group victimhood: "Historically, the Flemish

/French-speaking (out-group) people have suffered from the behaviour of the French-speaking/Flemish (in-group) people."

### Identification with Belgium and with the Linguistic In-group

Two items rated on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*) assessed the extent to which respondents identified with Belgium: (1) "I am proud to tell my friends that I am Belgian" and (2) "Most of the time, I like to think of myself as a Belgian." Given the internal consistency of the two items ( $\alpha = .89$  for French respondents and  $.94$  for Dutch respondents), an average score of identification as Belgian was calculated for each respondent. Next, two items using similar scales measured the extent to which respondents identified with their language group: (1) "I am proud to tell my friends that I am French-/Dutch-speaking" and (2) "Most of the time, I like to think of myself as a French-/Dutch-speaker." Given the internal consistency of the two items,  $\alpha = .86$  for French-speaking and for Dutch-speaking respondents, an average score of in-group identification was calculated.

### Attitudes Towards the Out-group

An attitude scale introduced by the prompt: "Indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements" proposed nine items rated on 7-point scales (not at all/very much). These items were drawn from the forgiveness scale developed by Wade (1989) comprising 83 items that yielded a nine-factor solution using factor analysis. Of the nine subscales, we adopted the *distancing* subscale consisting of five items assessing the extent to which the respondent adopted an avoidant stance with out-group members (e.g., "I have no desire to approach them"; "I have no confidence in them") and the *conciliation* subscale involving four items assessing the extent to which the respondent took a position of openness and dialogue with out-group members (e.g., "I want to forget what happened and concentrate on the future of our relationship"; "I think that peaceful coexistence with them is possible"). Given the internal consistency of the distancing attitude scale, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$  for French-speaking respondents and  $.82$  for the Dutch-speaking respondents, as well as the conciliation attitude scale, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$  for French-speaking respondents and  $.78$  for Dutch-speaking respondents, an average score across corresponding items was established for each. The correlation between distancing and conciliation scores was  $r(1224) = -.45, p < .001$  for French-

speaking respondents and  $r(1455) = -.48, p < .001$  for Dutch-speaking respondents.

#### Preferred Political Evolution of the Country

Three items assessed three contrasted perspectives about the future evolution of the intergroup situation in Belgium: "Please indicate the extent to which you find the following potential events desirable" (1 = *not at all desirable*; 7 = *very much desirable*): (1) "Belgium will split into two independent states" (named hereafter Radical Separation); (2) "The linguistic regions will become increasingly autonomous, but the Belgian state will endure" (Expanded Federalisation); and (3) "The linguistic regions will come together to establish a more unified government" (Augmented Integration). Whereas items (1) and (3) had the clear purpose of assessing segregative and integrative intergroup attitudes, respectively, item (2) was introduced with the specific purpose to assess an attitude at the heart of the Belgian intergroup conflict. Indeed, whereas an overwhelming majority of Dutch-speaking inhabitants of Belgium are in favour of an expanded federalisation that they view as protecting their in-group interests, French-speaking inhabitants fear such a process as they view it as opening a door for the future disintegration of the country (Swenden & Jans, 2006).

#### Preferred Political Actions

An additional set of three items addressed preferred actions for resolving the Belgian conflict introduced as "The next statements relate to possible actions for French-speaking/Dutch-speaking people to solve the conflict." Participants indicated level of agreement with the following statements (1 = *not at all* and 7 = *very much*): (1) "French-speaking/Dutch-speaking people (the in-group) should be ready to make concessions to reach a compromise and resolve the conflict" (mutual concessions); (2) "If reasonable solutions cannot be reached, French-speaking/Dutch-speaking people (the in-group) must be prepared to make decisions without consulting the Dutch-speaking/French-speaking people" (Unilateral Decisions); and (3) "If reasonable solutions cannot be reached, French-speaking/Dutch-speaking people must be prepared to resort to force" (Direct Confrontation).

#### Political Orientation

In Belgium, it is politically incorrect to directly ask people the political party they would vote for. Instructions thus read: "If you do not want to answer this question,

skip to the next question" followed by "Which of the following political parties do you feel closest to?", accompanied with a list of 13 most common political parties with a checkbox. An additional box mentioned "other."

#### Statistical Analyses

In general, we tested our hypothesis using ANOVAs with language groups, generations and gender as between-subjects factors. In a first model, we introduced only the main effects of the between-subject factors. In a second model, we introduced the focal language by generation interaction and the gender by generation interaction as there was an imbalance in the gender distribution across generations. Gender was thus introduced as a control variable, and the effects involving this variable will not be reported, as they are not relevant to the hypotheses. This sequential procedure was adopted because the between-subjects factors were not independent and main effects may therefore be influenced by the introduction of the interaction terms (Judd, McClelland, & Ryan, 2009). Hence, when we consider main effects in the text, they pertain to the first model only.

## RESULTS

### Collective Memories (H1)

We first examined whether the main building block of our argument holds true: Is there a cross-generational evolution of the collective memories amongst Dutch-speaking respondents? The first indicator addressed the date of the start of the Belgian conflict. No formal notion exists in the country in this respect. However, many Dutch-speaking nationalists view the conflict as originating with the creation of Belgium as an independent state, that is, in 1830/1831. We thus counted the occurrence of these dates in respondents' answers. In line with the absence of a formal notion, responses were scattered with 104 different dates amongst French-speaking respondents and 99 amongst Dutch speakers. They also confirmed the existence of a higher consensus for 1830/1831 amongst Dutch-speaking respondents as 478 (32.8%) of them proposed this response compared with 230 (18.8%) amongst French-speaking respondents,  $\chi^2(1, N = 2683) = 67.66, p < .001$ . French speakers viewed the conflict as more recent (median = 1930) than Dutch speakers (median = 1830). No significant generational evolution occurred amongst French-speaking respondents in their adoption of 1830/1831 (17.2%, 22.8% and 16.1%, respectively, from the older generation



to the younger). Amongst Dutch speakers, in support of H1 predicting a lower consensus for these dates amongst respondents belonging to the newer generation compared with older, the former manifested a much smaller consensus in adopting 1830/1831 (24.2%) than did the respondents of the median generation (38.2%) and those of the older one (38.6%),  $\chi^2(2, N = 1457) = 30.9, p < .001$ .

Our second approach for collective memories rested upon estimations of respective collective victimhood. Traditionally, Dutch-speaking people view themselves as having suffered very much from French-speaking people. Our hypothesis of the decline of collective memories in the Dutch-speaking younger generations predicts collective memory of past in-group victimhood as lower amongst the latter than their predecessors. The two measures of suffering (i.e., endured by the in-group and endured by the out-group) were introduced in a mixed ANOVA with language groups, generations and gender as between-subjects factors and with targets of sufferings (in-group vs. out-group) as a within-subject factor.

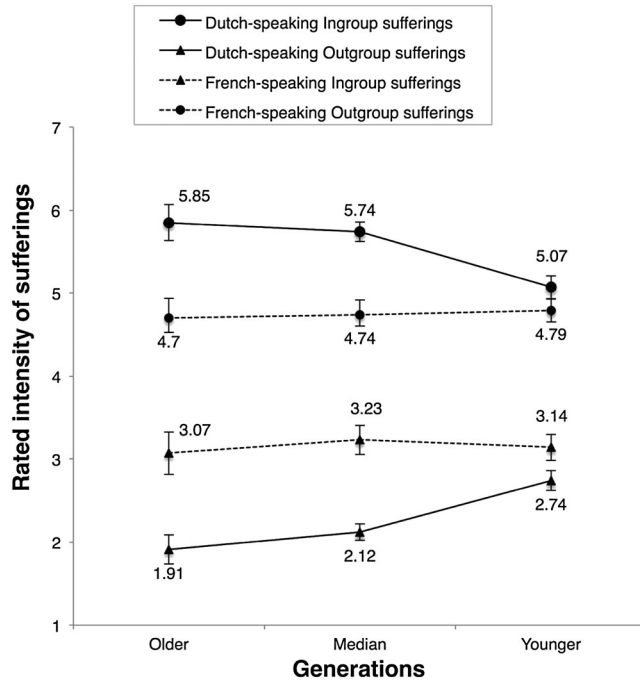
In line with the approach described earlier in the text, we first tested a model including only main effects and the interactions involving within-subject factors. Whereas no significant effects were observed for the between-subjects factors alone, significant values were recorded for every effect involving the within-subject variables. First, a main effect of targets of suffering (in-group vs. out-group),  $F(1, 2676) = 215.31, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .074$ , showed that the sufferings experienced by the in-group were estimated as higher than those endured by the out-group, respectively,  $M = 4.43 (SD = 2.13)$  and  $M = 3.43 (SD = 2.00)$ . But this effect was qualified by a significant interaction of language group  $\times$  targets of sufferings,  $F(1, 2676) = 2275.51, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .460$ . In line with traditional views, it confirmed that Dutch-speaking respondents estimated their own sufferings at a much higher level than those they placed in the out-group, respectively,  $M = 5.50 (SD = 1.71)$  and  $M = 2.32 (SD = 1.44)$ , whereas the reverse occurred for French-speaking respondents,  $M = 3.16 (SD = 1.87)$  and  $M = 4.75 (SD = 1.75)$ , respectively. A significant interaction of generations and targets of sufferings,  $F(2, 2676) = 24.65, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .018$ , showed that the suffering experienced by the in-group was generally estimated at a lower level by the younger generation,  $M = 4.13 (SD = 1.98)$ , compared with the older ones,  $M = 4.69 (SD = 2.15)$  and  $M = 4.52 (SD = 2.32)$ , respectively, whereas those experienced by the out-group were generally estimated at a higher level by the younger generation,  $M = 3.73 (SD = 1.86)$ , compared with the two older ones,

$M = 3.21 (SD = 2.02)$  and  $M = 3.25 (SD = 2.14)$ , as indicated by Tukey's honest significant difference test.

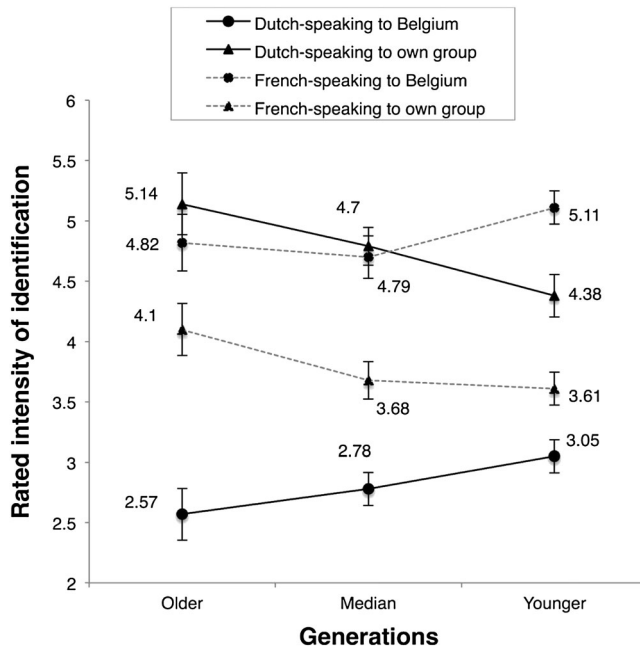
Turning now to the second model including interactions between generation and language group, the triple interaction involving language groups, generation and target of sufferings was significant,  $F(2, 2672) = 21.19, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .016$ . Figure 2 reveals the total absence of generational differences amongst French-speaking respondents, both for their evaluation of sufferings experienced by the in-group and by the out-group, both  $F_s(2, 1221) < 1.0$ . In contrast (Figure 2), amongst the Dutch-speaking respondents, one-way ANOVAs followed by Tukey's post hoc comparisons evidenced the younger generation to stand out from the other two generations with a lower estimation of in-group sufferings,  $F(2, 1454) = 31.0, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .041$ , and with a higher estimation of out-group sufferings,  $F(2, 1454) = 43.34, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .056$ . Thus, H1 is doubly supported. Not only did younger Dutch speakers estimate the sufferings experienced by their own group as less severe than did Dutch speakers of older generations but they also estimated the sufferings endured by the out-group as more severe than did the latter. In sum, all the results with our variables assessing collective memories supported H1.

### Identification with Belgium and with the Linguistic In-group (H2)

The results for group identifications are summarised in Figure 3. In the first model, the ANOVA conducted on identification with Belgium revealed a main effect of language group,  $F(1, 2675) = 570.57, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .176$ , showing a much higher identification amongst French-speaking,  $M = 5.08 (SD = 1.84)$ , than amongst Dutch-speaking respondents,  $M = 3.12 (SD = 2.08)$ . This effect was consistent with the historic distancing manifested in the Dutch-speaking population with regard to Belgium. Yet, there was also a main effect of generation,  $F(2, 2675) = 22.27, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .016$ , indicating a higher identification with Belgium in the youngest generation ( $M = 4.43, SD = 2.07$ ) compared with the older ones,  $M = 3.79 (SD = 2.32)$  and  $M = 3.69 (SD = 2.21)$ . Turning to model 2 (that includes interactions involving language and generation), we found this effect to be qualified by a significant language by generations interaction,  $F(2, 2671) = 4.96, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .004$ . Amongst Dutch-speaking respondents, a continuous increase in level of identification with Belgium occurred from the older to the younger generation, whereas amongst French-speaking ones, an increase was observed only from the median to the



**Fig. 2:** Results of mixed ANOVA with language groups and generations as between-subjects factors and targets of sufferings as within-subject factor. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals



**Fig. 3:** Results of 2 × 3 ANOVA (language groups and generations as between-subjects factors) on identification with Belgium and with the linguistic in-group. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals

younger generation (Figure 3). This result partially supports H2.

Next, for identification with one’s own region, there were also two main effects. As expected from

history, the language group effect,  $F(1, 2678) = 194.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .068$ , indicated higher identification with the linguistic group amongst Dutch-speaking than amongst French-speaking respondents,  $M = 4.69$

( $SD=1.78$ ) and  $M=3.73$  ( $SD=1.69$ ), respectively. The generation effect,  $F(2, 2678)=22.28$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.016$ , showed that the regional identification decreases from one generation to the next,  $M=4.64$  ( $SD=1.89$ ), 4.33 ( $SD=1.82$ ), and 4.01 ( $SD=1.70$ ), respectively. The interaction failed to reach the significance level,  $F(2, 2674)=2.03$ ,  $p=.13$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.002$ .

Overall, these results thus confirmed the marked differences between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking respondents on these variables—Dutch-speaking respondents identified with their own region much more than French-speaking respondents and identified less with Belgium than French speakers. Yet, more detailed analyses of these direct measurements of group identifications revealed effects that support our two hypotheses. Next, we introduced the level of identification (Belgian or to one’s own linguistic group) as a within-subject factor in mixed ANOVAs based on models 1 and 2. All effects involving level of identification, language and generation yielded significance (all  $p$ ’s $\leq$ .01) except for language group  $\times$  generation. Of direct relevance to our hypothesis, a significant triple interaction,  $F(2, 2674)=5.87$ ,  $p=.003$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.004$  reflected both an overall generational evolution and a generational evolution specific to Dutch-speaking respondents. In the latter group, the generational evolution was important

(Figure 3): The difference between linguistic identification and identification with Belgium amounts to 2.47 for the older generation, lowers to 1.95 for the middle generation, and drops to 0.75 for the younger generation. Amongst the French-speaking respondents for whom identification with Belgium is generally higher than linguistic identification, there was also a reduction in the latter and an enhancement of the former, but the gaps were much less marked.

In sum, all the results of the conducted tests supported H2. However, variables examined in this section also revealed significant effects of generation amongst French speakers, although these effects were significantly milder than those observed amongst Dutch speakers.

### Intergroup Attitudes (H3)

Table 2 displays the results observed for intergroup attitudes and future prospects. Regarding intergroup attitudes, a significant main effect of language group was observed for the two variables. Dutch-speaking participants scored higher than French-speaking ones for distancing whereas French-speaking participants scored higher for conciliation. For distancing, a main effect of generation was obtained showing this attitude to be generally less adopted by the younger generations,

**Table 2.** Results for intergroup attitudes and future prospects as a function of language groups and generations

	Dutch speaking			French speaking			Language $F(1, 2678)$ ( $p\leq$ )	Generation $F(2, 2678)$ ( $p\leq$ )	Interaction $F(2, 2674)$ ( $p\leq$ )	
	Older ( $N=264$ )	Median ( $N=621$ )	Younger ( $N=572$ )	Older ( $N=243$ )	Median ( $N=443$ )	Younger ( $N=540$ )				
<i>Attitudes</i>										
Distancing	<i>M</i>	2.73 <sub>a</sub>	2.35 <sub>b</sub>	2.00 <sub>c</sub>	2.34 <sub>b</sub>	2.08 <sub>c</sub>	1.95 <sub>c</sub>	7.16	27.58	3.46
	<i>SD</i>	1.54	1.34	1.18	1.39	1.25	1.08	<i>0.008</i>	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.03</i>
Conciliation	<i>M</i>	3.66	3.72	4.09	4.45	4.65	4.83	174.10	11.62	0.90
	<i>SD</i>	1.64	1.51	1.44	1.59	1.49	1.28	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.001</i>	—
<i>Preferred evolution</i>										
Radical separation	<i>M</i>	3.71 <sub>a</sub>	3.63 <sub>a</sub>	2.73 <sub>b</sub>	1.97 <sub>c</sub>	2.01 <sub>c</sub>	1.67 <sub>c</sub>	240.37	20.74	6.15
	<i>SD</i>	2.52	2.51	2.32	1.77	1.76	1.44	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.001</i>
Expanded federalization	<i>M</i>	4.55 <sub>b</sub>	4.94 <sub>ab</sub>	5.05 <sub>a</sub>	4.94 <sub>ab</sub>	4.38 <sub>b</sub>	3.89 <sub>c</sub>	67.96	3.97	25.39
	<i>SD</i>	2.17	2.05	1.89	1.98	1.97	1.96	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.01</i>	<i>0.001</i>
Augmented integration	<i>M</i>	3.05	3.58	4.53	4.04	4.64	5.46	97.33	69.82	<1.0
	<i>SD</i>	2.35	2.43	2.35	2.33	2.24	1.95	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.001</i>	—
<i>Preferred actions</i>										
Reciprocal concessions	<i>M</i>	3.10 <sub>a</sub>	3.46 <sub>b</sub>	4.09 <sub>c</sub>	4.28 <sub>cd</sub>	4.27 <sub>cd</sub>	4.41 <sub>d</sub>	58.76	14.15	8.92
	<i>SD</i>	2.21	2.16	2.04	1.93	1.90	1.75	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.001</i>
Unilateral decisions	<i>M</i>	5.06 <sub>a</sub>	4.95 <sub>a</sub>	3.77 <sub>c</sub>	4.29 <sub>b</sub>	3.72 <sub>c</sub>	3.00 <sub>d</sub>	92.52	67.71	2.05
	<i>SD</i>	2.34	2.18	2.24	2.14	2.14	1.91	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.13</i>
Direct confrontation	<i>M</i>	1.59	1.45	1.33	1.64	1.60	1.54	15.91	2.37	<1.0
	<i>SD</i>	1.41	1.21	1.02	1.53	1.40	1.27	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.09</i>	—

Note: In case of significant interaction, post hoc Student–Newman–Keuls tests were conducted after a one-way ANOVA with the six groups as factor. Values in the same row with shared subscripts do not differ at the  $p < .05$  level as evidenced by such tests. The italicized values in the last three columns indicate levels of statistical significance.

$M=2.54$  ( $SD=1.48$ ),  $2.24$  ( $SD=1.31$ ), and  $1.97$  ( $SD=1.14$ ), respectively. This result was qualified by a significant interaction. In support of H3, the decrease observed for distancing was steeper amongst Dutch-speaking respondents than amongst French speakers. For conciliation, data yielded a main effect for generations but no significant interaction. This attitude was increasingly adopted amongst the newer generations,  $M=4.04$  ( $SD=1.66$ ),  $4.11$  ( $SD=1.57$ ), and  $4.45$  ( $SD=1.41$ ), respectively.

Thus, only one of the two tests conducted in this section supported H3. Additionally, overall generational effects occurred for both dependent variables, indicating in both cases higher integrative attitudes in the younger generation compared with the older ones.

#### Preferred Political Evolution (H4)

Regarding preferred evolution of the intergroup situation, significant effects of language groups were found for all three variables (Table 2). Whereas Dutch-speaking respondents scored higher than French-speaking ones for Radical Separation and for Expanded Federalisation, the reverse occurred for Augmented Integration. Significant effects of generation were also found for all three variables. They indicated that respondents from the younger generation scored lower than the older ones for Radical Separation and for Expanded Federalisation, whereas they scored higher for Augmented Integration.

For Radical Separation, the significant language group  $\times$  generation interaction supported H4: According to post hoc tests (Table 2), there was no difference between generations amongst French-speaking respondents, while on the Dutch-speaking side, the prospect of separation was adopted less by the younger generation than by the two older ones. As explained in the method section, Expanded Federalisation was introduced as an additional variable not intended to test H4 proper but to capture the crux of the current Belgian conflict. The significant language group  $\times$  generation interaction recorded for this variable confirmed the contrasted positions of the two groups on this critical matter. Amongst Dutch speakers, the desire for Expanded Federalisation—and thus for greater empowerment of linguistic regions—grew with newer generations, whereas amongst French speakers, the opposite occurred. French speakers generally perceive the Dutch speakers position on federalisation as a sign of separatist tendencies and thus as a threat to the survival of Belgium. That this might be a misperception was suggested by data collected for Augmented Integration—a variable that clearly indexes nonseparatist perspectives as it taps the view that the two linguistic regions will evolve towards their rapprochement in the future. Indeed, for French speakers, Augmented

Integration was negatively correlated with greater autonomy for the regions  $r(1224) = -.22$ ,  $p < .01$ , whereas, for the Dutch speakers, it was positively correlated  $r(1455) = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Regarding Augmented Integration, H4 was not supported as it evidenced a main effect of generations with no interaction. It showed that both for Dutch speakers and French speakers, the desire that the regions will become closer grew considerably from the older to the younger generation, respectively,  $M=3.53$  ( $SD=2.39$ ),  $4.02$  ( $SD=2.41$ ), and  $4.98$  ( $SD=2.21$ ).

To conclude, H4 was supported for Radical Separation but not for Augmented Integration. For the latter variable, an overall generational effect revealed a higher integrative orientation in the younger generation compared with the older ones.

#### Preferred Political Actions (H5)

Significant effects of language group again occurred for all three variables assessing preferred future actions (Table 2). They indicated that Dutch-speaking respondents scored higher than French-speaking ones for Unilateral Decisions whereas the reverse occurred for Reciprocal Concessions and for Direct Confrontation. For Reciprocal Concessions, a significant effect of generation indicated that this attitude was adopted more by the younger respondents than by the older ones. However, a significant interaction and the accompanying post hoc tests showed that while no difference occurred across French-speaking generations, Reciprocal Concessions were increasingly adopted from one generation to the next on the Dutch-speaking side. This result thus supported H5.

Unilateral Decisions yielded a significant generation effect showing that this perspective was endorsed less by younger generations than by the older ones,  $M=4.69$  ( $SD=2.27$ ),  $4.34$  ( $SD=2.25$ ), and  $3.40$  ( $SD=2.12$ ), respectively. A significant language group  $\times$  generation interaction indicated the decrement to be steeper amongst Dutch-speaking than amongst French-speaking participants.<sup>1</sup> This result again supports H5. Finally, for Direct Confrontation, a main effect of generation revealed a decrement of this attitude from the older to the younger generation,  $M=1.61$  ( $SD=1.47$ ),  $M=1.51$  ( $SD=1.30$ ), and  $M=1.43$  ( $SD=1.15$ ), respectively, and the interaction was not significant. Thus, though already very low overall, the perspective of an open conflict vanished even more with generations.

<sup>1</sup>Note that the level of significance for this effect drops below conventional levels of significance ( $p = .06$ ) when gender is entered as a covariate.

We computed the number of people who chose separatism as their favourite option and compared the frequency of this choice through a generation  $\times$  linguistic group log-linear analysis. This revealed an effect of language group,  $LR(1) = 145.80$ ,  $p < .001$ : 25.8% of Dutch speakers and 8.5% of French speakers favoured this option. There was also an effect of generation,  $LR(2) = 47.89$ ,  $p < .001$ : In the younger generation, only 11.7% of participants favoured separation over the other possibilities whereas this number rose to 21.6% and 23.5% in the middle and older generations, respectively. There was no interaction,  $LR(2) = 1.03$ ,  $p = .596$ .

In conclusion, H5 was supported for two of the three variables considered in this test, namely, Reciprocal Concessions and Unilateral Decisions. Additionally, we observed overall generational effects for two of the three variables, namely, Unilateral Decisions and Direct Confrontation, both indicating a higher integrative orientation amongst younger compared with older respondents.

### Political Orientation and Age

The generational hypothesis upon which the study rests predicted that Dutch-speaking respondents who express voting intentions for a nationalist party would be more advanced in age than those who would vote for other parties. As the information regarding voting intention was available for some of our respondents, we decided to test this prediction amongst our Dutch-speaking respondents who expressed one single voting intention. Thus, amongst the 281 respondents who expressed a choice in favour of a traditional party, the mean age was 37.18 ( $SD = 15.95$ ); amongst the 127 respondents who favoured the ecologist party, the mean age was 32.80 ( $SD = 13.23$ ); and amongst the 550 participants in favour of a nationalist party, the average age was 41.61 ( $SD = 15.70$ ). A one-factor ANOVA revealed that these averages differed significantly,  $F(2.955) = 19.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .030$ . A Student–Newman–Keuls post hoc test confirmed that individuals who would vote “nationalist” were significantly older than those inclined to vote traditional, who themselves were significantly older than those inclined to vote “ecologist”. These data thus supported this extension of our hypothesis proposing specific generational effects amongst Dutch-speaking participants.

### Moderated Mediation (H6)

Our hypotheses suggested that, within the Dutch-speaking group only, the younger generations will display more positive attitudes towards their country and that this will occur because they perceive that their

group has suffered less in the past at the hands of the other linguistic group. In the French-speaking group, we do not expect such a generational effect because such a memory of suffering is not present. This hypothesis corresponded to a moderated mediation (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005; Figure 1).

The hypothesis presupposed an interaction between age and linguistic group on collective memory of past in-group victimhood. We thus ran a regression entering dummy-coded language (1 = French speakers, 2 = Dutch speakers), age (as a continuous variable) and their product. The coefficient associated with the latter predictor, which tests for an interaction, was indeed reliably different from zero,  $\beta = .41$ ,  $F(1, 2679) = 54.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ . To better assess the nature of this interaction, we conducted separate regressions for the two linguistic groups. For French speakers, age did not predict collective memory of past victimhood, but it did for Dutch speakers ( $\beta_{\text{French}} = .01$ , *ns*,  $\beta_{\text{Dutch}} = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Second, we directly tested the moderated mediation using the Process Macro (model 7) developed by Hayes (2013) with 1000 bootstrap samples on all of our dependent variables. The results are presented in Table 3, which displays for each dependent variable the index of moderated mediation proposed by Hayes (2014). We note that, for all variables, the confidence interval for this index does not include 0, which indicates the presence of moderated mediation. Next, we tested for simple mediation within each linguistic group separately. For the Dutch speakers, the indirect effect of age through collective memory of past in-group victimhood on the dependent variable was significant for all variables except augmented federalization. As seen in Table 3 looking at the “b” path, collective memory of past in-group victimhood was associated with lower identification with Belgium, with less conciliation and more distancing, with greater aspirations towards separation, a lower willingness to engage in greater integration and to make concessions, as well as a stronger endorsement of Unilateral Decisions and Direct Confrontation. The coefficient for the direct path (c column) from identification to the dependent variable decreased when the mediator (c' column) was included in the model. Unsurprisingly, because age did not predict experiences of historical suffering for the French speakers, no reliable indirect effect emerged, although collective memory of past in-group victimhood is generally associated with less conciliatory orientations towards Dutch speakers.

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

Halbwachs (1925/1992) and Bartlett (1932), founders of collective memory studies, both considered that

**Table 3.** Results of moderated mediation

	a	b	c'	c	Sobel's Z	Index of moderated mediation	95% CI
Identification						−0.015	[−0.190, −0.010]
French speaking	0.01	−0.10**	−0.06*	−0.06*	0.25		
Dutch speaking	0.27**	−0.56**	−0.04*	−0.19**	9.70**		
<i>Attitudes</i>							
Distancing						0.005	[0.003, 0.006]
French speaking	0.01	0.19**	0.12**	0.12**	0.26		
Dutch speaking	0.27**	0.45**	0.08*	0.20**	9.15**		
Conciliation						−0.008	[−0.011, −0.006]
French speaking	0.01	−0.18**	0.10**	−0.10**	0.26		
Dutch speaking	0.27**	−0.47**	0.01	−0.12*	9.23**		
<i>Future prospects</i>							
Expanded Federalization						0.001	[0.000, 0.003]
French speaking	0.01	−0.07**	0.22**	0.22**	0.24		
Dutch speaking	0.27**	−0.04	−0.07*	−0.08**	1.53*		
Radical Separation						0.014	[0.010, 0.019]
French speaking	0.01	0.12**	0.08**	0.08*	0.25		
Dutch speaking	0.27**	0.60**	0.02	0.17**	9.74**		
Augmented Integration						−0.012	[−0.015, −0.008]
French speaking	0.01	−0.05	−0.24**	−0.24**	0.23		
Dutch speaking	0.27**	−0.56**	−0.09**	−0.24**	9.72**		
<i>Possible actions</i>							
Concessions						−0.011	[−0.014, −0.007]
French speaking	0.01	−0.16**	−0.03	−0.02	0.26		
Dutch speaking	0.27**	−0.57**	−0.021	−0.17**	9.73**		
Unilateral Decisions						0.013	[0.010, 0.017]
French speaking	0.01	0.16**	0.26**	0.26**	0.26		
Dutch speaking	0.27**	0.63**	0.07**	0.23**	9.92**		
Direct Confrontation						0.002	[0.001, 0.002]
French speaking	0.01	0.17**	0.03	0.03	0.26		
Dutch speaking	0.27**	0.21**	0.04	0.09**	6.37**		

Notes: a: path from age to mediator (collective memory); b: path from mediator to dependent variable; c: direct path without mediator; c': direct path with mediator (Figure 1). Coefficients are standardised regression coefficients. The index of moderated mediation is significant if its confidence interval (95%) does not include 0. The bootstrapping test of indirect effects proposed by PROCESS was consistent with the Sobel test and is therefore not reported for reasons of space. \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

changes in the context in which group members live should bring about changes in the way they remember their group's past. Until now, however, this important contention had not been empirically addressed. We examined how far new generations' remembrances of their in-group's past diverged from their predecessors. Generational differences were expected to occur if the collective heritage the latter received is inconsistent with the social world they currently experience. Our study was conducted in the framework of the intergroup conflict that has endured for nearly two centuries in Belgium. Demands for greater autonomy manifested in the Dutch-speaking part of the country are met with the French speaker's reluctance. Given the political situation, the prediction that Belgium will split up is now widespread. At our introduction, we noted that Dutch-speaking people's requirements for greater autonomy partly stemmed from their collective memory of

victimisation. We emphasised that because of a reversal of fortunes in the country, the current experience of newer Dutch-speaking generations no longer supports such a collective memory. Our hypothesis H1, which tested such an evolution, has been confirmed for all three relevant measures. Thus, compared with previous generations, the new generation of Dutch-speaking respondents demonstrated less consensus for the date of onset of the conflict, expressed a reduced perception of victimisation of the in-group and an increased perception of victimisation of the out-group. The latter result is particularly indicative that a new reading of Belgian intergroup relations is underway in this generation.

As collective memories are expected to define the course of actions that a group should follow as a function of its past, we then assessed how far changes in collective memories correspond with

changes in social identifications, intergroup attitudes and support for political projects across generations. Our hypotheses H2 to H5 predicted the newer generations of Dutch-speaking people to be less prone to regionalist aspirations than their predecessors. In our research design, the French-speaking respondents were expected to play the role of a control group devoid of cross-generation evolution with regard to the study variables. Until recently, French-speaking Belgians were dominant in the country, they did not build their identity on a collective memory of victimisation, and they did not manifest aspiration for autonomy. The cross-generation evolution was thus predicted to be specific to Dutch-speaking Belgians. Yet, as discussed later, most of our results evidenced an unexpected generational evolution opposing regionalism in both French-speaking and Dutch-speaking participants. Overall thus, compared with their older counterparts, younger respondents manifested a stronger identification with Belgium and a weaker identification with their linguistic group (H2), less distancing attitude towards the out-group (H3), a lower support for the Radical Separation of the country (H4) and a higher endorsement of Reciprocal Concessions (H5). Nevertheless, our prediction of specific effects for the Dutch-speaking population was largely supported by the widespread presence of significant language group by generation interactions in these analyses. They showed that the generational evolution was generally more marked amongst Dutch-speaking than French-speaking respondents.

Three additional results provided support to our general hypothesis that a regionalist attitude would be more characteristic of older than of younger people in the Dutch-speaking group. First, the number of Dutch-speaking respondents who chose separatism as their favourite option was at a comparable level in the two older generations (34% in the oldest and 33% in the “middle” generation), but it was much lower (16%) in the younger generation. Second, amongst Dutch-speaking respondents, those who expressed a nationalist voting intention were significantly older than those who expressed a traditional vote. Finally, we directly addressed the core of our theorising by conducting a moderated mediation analysis testing the mediating role of collective memory of in-group victimisation in the observed relationships across generations and linguistic groups. For Dutch-speaking respondents, the mediational hypothesis was consistently supported whereas for French-speaking respondents, it was not. Note, however, that because of the correlational nature of the findings,

other directional paths (e.g., identification as a mediator) cannot be excluded.

### A General Decline of Regionalist Aspirations

As mentioned earlier, most of our results supported an unexpected generational evolution opposing regionalism in both French-speaking and Dutch-speaking participants. This observation suggests the existence of a general decline in regionalist aspirations amongst younger Belgian generations. Such results are surprising given the many regionalist movements that have spawned in the world since the mid-1980s (e.g., Mansfield & Milner, 1999). The question of the emergence of regionalism in the context of globalisation is widely debated amongst economists (e.g., MacLeod, 2001). Yet, besides economic processes, the movement must involve psychological factors proper to account for the rise of regional concerns in public opinions and voters. Hettne (1999) probably tapped one such factor when stating: “Globalization is increasingly turbulent and contradictory (...). The old order is dying and the new not yet born” (p. 3). Globalisation might affect people in opposite directions depending on their generation. For older generations, globalisation might represent a scary changing world and the loss of one’s bearings. A natural response to this would involve promoting one’s familiar environment. On the contrary, for younger people who have experienced globalisation throughout their formative period, globalisation is the familiar world carrying a positive meaning of openness and pleasurable exchanges. In any case, these observations highlight the need for studies comparing generations in places where public opinion is particularly favourable to regionalism.

In sum, with regard to the question of the possible evolution of Belgium towards its separation, our results provide a clear negative answer as far as the evolution of generations could help predicting the future. In our data indeed, the younger generations have positions far less favourable to regionalism and far more favourable to concessions and integration than older generations. In addition, in the Dutch-speaking population, who traditionally advocated greater autonomy, the generational change just mentioned was much more pronounced than in the French population.

### Limitations

To what extent can we trust the results from this study? Our data were collected from a large sample of respondents comprising 46% of French-speaking and 54% of Dutch-speaking participants, a proportion close to estimates in the Belgian population—from 40% to 43% of

French-speaking and 56% to 60% of Dutch-speaking participants (languages of Belgium, n.d.; L'Etat belge, n.d.). All provinces and regions of Belgium were represented. Respondents in both language groups were comparable in age, but the proportion of female respondents was higher in the French-speaking group. However, controlling for gender in our statistical analyses did not affect the results in a significant manner. Regarding political orientation, respondents who reported voting for nationalist parties outnumbered the distribution of such votes in the last elections of the House of Representatives. However, this excess ran contrary to our hypotheses. As most of our participants were students and their families, the sample comprised a high proportion of respondents with a university education. To what extent could this account for the findings? The two language groups did not differ on this variable. Regarding age groups, the proportion of university respondents was exactly the same (53%) in the group of older and in the group of younger respondents—the middle group had more people with a university education (67%). With the two extreme age groups being comparable for this variable, education cannot explain their divergent results. Finally, the three age groups compared clearly corresponded to three different experiences of the Belgian state during their formative years—the experience of the unitary state, of the state in the federalisation process, and of the well-established federal State.

### Collective Memories and Formative Years

In line with Halbwachs (1950/1980) contention that collective memories are maintained only when group members can use them to make sense of their current experience, our study confirmed that the transmission of collective memory is not an inexorable process for a group. In addition, the study confirmed that when a collective narrative fades away, the related intergroup attitudes also wane and leave room for opposing attitudes. These observations may have important implications for action. They suggest that, to the extent that one can change the current experience of members of a group, one could also alter the burden of collective narratives shared thus far in this group. Yet, our data also suggest that such changes would have a limited impact in the target group. The different experience would affect the sole generation exposed to it during their formative period, that is to say, according to the concept proposed by Mannheim (1928/1952), between the ages of 8 and 16 years. Rubin and Schulkind (1997) also stressed the importance of the formative period in the construction of memory. They indeed demonstrated that the temporal distribution of

autobiographical memories often reveals an overrepresentation of events that occurred between 10 and 30 years of age. In the present study, the Dutch-speaking people of the two older generations also had the current experience of a reversal of fortunes in the country, as did those of the younger generation. And yet, the latter evidenced a modified collective memory and corresponding changes in intergroup attitudes. This result highlights the importance of the generational concepts formulated by Mannheim in relation to the study of collective memory.

### Political Implications

At a political level, the study highlighted various facts of considerable potential importance for the evolution of intergroup relations in the investigated country. First, our data show that the French-speaking respondents recognise the sufferings historically inflicted by their community to the Dutch-speaking community. As emphasised, such recognition has never been explicitly formulated in Belgium. It could bring important positive consequences for intergroup relations in this country (Alarcón-Henriquez *et al.*, 2010). Second, the data evidenced a trend towards a reversal of the perception of the relative victimisation between the two groups amongst members of the younger Dutch-speaking generation. In the latter, indeed, the perception of victimisation inflicted by their community to French-speaking people was significantly enhanced compared with their predecessors' view. Here too, an open acknowledgment of such a perception could have positive effects on intergroup attitudes in both communities. Thirdly, the data revealed a single case of generational change in markedly divergent directions in the two groups studied. It concerns the question of enlarged autonomy of regions for which the generational change was in a positive direction in Dutch-speaking respondents and a negative one in French-speaking respondents. We emphasised that a misunderstanding lies behind this divergence. French speakers interpreted the Dutch speakers' desire for enlarged autonomy as separatist tendencies whereas our data clearly evidenced a generational evolution in favour of closer regions amongst the latter. A final observation of political relevance in this study lies in the endorsement of the attitude of Direct Confrontation in the country. This variable was almost at floor level for the two language groups, and the generational evolution was still dropping. This observation seems to promise peaceful sociopolitical developments in Belgium.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was conducted within the framework of COST Action IS1205 “Social psychological dynamics of historical representations in the enlarged European Union”.

The database for this study was developed as part of a continuous interuniversity research programme on “Emotions and attitudes in the relations between linguistic communities in Belgium,” in collaboration between the authors of the present study and members of the Center for Social and Cultural Psychology, KULeuven, especially Batja Mesquita, Ellen Delvaux and Norbert Vanbeselaere. Without the contributions of these colleagues to the creation of the database, this study could not have been conducted.

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