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Collective memories of colonialism and acculturation dynamics among Congolese immigrants living in Belgium

Ana Figueiredo^{a,b,*}, Géraldine Oldenhove^a, Laurent Licata^a

^a Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Belgium

^b Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile



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ABSTRACT

Collective memories of the historical past allow group members to make sense of their shared past but also to project themselves in the present and future. In this line, collective memories of colonialism may present consequences for present day intergroup relations and acculturation dynamics, given that they allow processes of meaning making and social positioning when different groups with a shared colonial past interact. Indeed, previous research has shown that collective memories are associated with processes of reconciliation, victimization, and group-based emotions, among others, but, to our knowledge, little research has paid attention to the connections between collective memories of colonialism and acculturation dynamics among groups with a past of colonization. The present study aimed to analyze collective memories of colonialism and acculturation experiences among Congolese immigrants living in Belgium. 43 semi-structured interviews with Congolese participants were content analyzed, using an analytical framework along the two variables of interest. We were able to map distinct aspects of the collective memories of colonialism that Congolese immigrants in Belgium have, as well as their experiences of acculturation in Belgium. Our results suggest that individuals remember their ingroup's past in accordance with their current social identifications and relationships within a given society. The results are discussed in light of their consequences for present day intergroup relations between host and immigrant communities in Belgium.

Introduction

In a recent interview, Calvin Soiresse Njall, the coordinator of “Mémoire coloniale et lutte contre les discriminations” (colonial memory and fight against discrimination), a Belgian association gathering sub-Saharan African immigrants, declared: “The problem is that Belgium never looked its colonial legacy in the face. Unfortunately, we believe that this legacy, if the Belgian State does not pay attention to it, is now exploding in its face, because African migrations are the result of this legacy” (Pointculture, 2015). Similar position takings have multiplied for the last decades among sub-Saharan diasporas in Europe as well as from immigrants from other formerly colonized countries. Some of their representatives established a connection between the colonial past and their social

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* Corresponding author at: Centre de Recherche en Psychologie Sociale et Interculturelle (CRéPSI), Av. F. Roosevelt 50, CP 122, 1050 Brussels, Belgium.

E-mail address: figueiredo.anacm@gmail.com (A. Figueiredo).

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integration in host countries as postcolonial migrants. Indeed, as underlined by the historians [Bosma, Lucassen, and Oostindie \(2012, p. 9\)](#), “the colonial past has left material and non-material legacies, ranging from metropolitan demographics and culture to ongoing ideological and possibly psychological impacts” (p. 9). However, so far, social and cross-cultural psychologists have paid little attention to the specificity of “postcolonial migrants” ([Momodou & Pascoët, 2014](#); [Rothberg, 2013](#)).

In this paper, we report an exploratory study aimed at uncovering connections between Congolese immigrants’ collective memories of Belgian colonialism and their acculturation orientations in the Belgian society. The main objectives of this study are threefold: 1) Examine the content of collective memories of Belgian colonialism among Congolese immigrants living in Belgium; 2) Examine these immigrants’ acculturative strategies; and 3) Uncover the potential connections between collective memories of the past and present day acculturation strategies in our immigrant sample.

Collective memories of the colonial past

Collective memories can be defined as “a shared set of representations of the past based on a common identity to a group” ([Licata & Klein, 2005; p. 243](#)), that allows group members to make sense of their past but also to project themselves in the present and future. In this line, collective memories of colonialism may be connected with present day intergroup relations and acculturation dynamics because they are part of the processes of meaning making and social positioning that take place when different groups with a shared colonial past interact.

Indeed, previous research has shown that collective memories – or social representations of the past – are associated with processes of reconciliation ([Hewstone et al., 2004](#); [Licata, Klein, & Gély, 2007](#); [Manzi & González, 2007](#); [Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi, & Lewis, 2008](#); [Tam et al., 2007, 2008](#); [Volpato & Licata, 2010](#); [Wohl & Branscombe, 2005](#)), victimization ([Wohl & Branscombe, 2004](#); [Zebel et al., 2009](#)), group-based emotions ([Barkan, 2000](#); [Brown et al., 2008](#); [Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998](#)), or even improvements of intellectual performance (e.g. [Bikmen, 2015](#)), among others. These collective memories can be seen as resources for defining and protecting social identities (e.g. [Jovchelovitch, 2012](#); [Licata et al., 2007](#); [Licata & Mercy, 2015](#); [Liu & Hilton, 2005](#); [Liu, Wilson, McClure, & Higgins, 1999](#); [Sani et al., 2007](#)) and for negotiating present day intergroup relations (e.g. [Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Poppe, 2011](#)).

So far, few psychological studies have investigated the content and structure of collective memories of colonialism among formerly colonized groups (for exceptions, see [Cabecinhas & Feijó, 2010](#); [Valentim, 2011](#)), and, to our knowledge, none has systematically addressed the connections between collective memories of colonialism and acculturation dynamics among groups with a past of colonization. A study by [David and Okazaki \(2006\)](#), which showed that distinct dimensions of the colonial mentality construct were negatively correlated with maintenance of the original culture, stands as an exception.

The Belgian colonization of the Congo started at the end of the 19th century. During the Belgian colonial period, the country lived in a highly segregated environment ([Turner, 2007](#)) and the extractive nature of the colonial system, as well as the atrocities committed against the indigenous populations have been well documented (e.g. [Hochschild, 1998](#)). By the end of the 1950’s, the pro-independence and self-determination movements in the country negotiated the independence with the Belgian authorities and, in June 1960, the country, currently named the Democratic Republic of the Congo, became independent under the leadership of Joseph Kasavubu and Patrice Lumumba.

Due to the colonial relations between Belgium and the Congo, even before independence, there were small numbers of Congolese immigrants coming to Belgium, mainly for the purpose of studying and working. The Congolese immigration remained very limited until the 1990’s, when poverty, insecurity, and political instability led more Congolese people to leave their country. At present, there are approximately 40.000 immigrants of Congolese origins living in Belgium ([Schoonvaere, 2010](#)). Although this immigrant community has, on average, higher levels of education (such as university degrees) in comparison with other immigrant communities, they have a very high unemployment rate and they still face racism and discrimination in contemporary Belgian society ([Flahaux, Mangalu, & Rakotonarivo, 2014](#); [Schoonvaere, 2010](#)).

Acculturation of postcolonial migrants

[Bhatia and Ram \(2001\)](#) have argued that “any discussion about migrant identity must be situated and contextualized in historical terms” (p. 3). In line with this contention, it seems reasonable to expect that immigrant groups who share a past history with their host country will build on their representations of these historical relations when they acculturate to this host country (for a discussion on postcolonial migration see [Bosma et al., 2015](#)).

As [Demart \(2013\)](#) and [Bosma et al. \(2012\)](#) have claimed, Congolese immigrants in Belgium have received little attention in research. For example, most of the social psychological research that has focused on the representations and consequences of colonialism for present day intergroup relations in Belgium have been dedicated to understanding the Belgians’ perspective and experiences ([Caby, 2004](#); [Lastrego & Licata, 2010](#); [Licata & Klein, 2010](#)), with the exception of a study conducted by [Licata and Klein \(2005\)](#), in which they analyzed the representations of Belgian colonialism among former colonizers and former colonized participants. Moreover, little attention has been paid to the acculturation dynamics among Congolese immigrants living in Belgium, as most of the acculturation literature developed in Belgium has focused on other groups of immigrants, such as the Muslim communities (e.g. mainly Moroccan and Turkish, see [Beirens & Fontaine, 2011](#); [Güngör, Bornstein, & Phalet, 2012](#); [Kosic & Phalet, 2006](#); [Saroglou & Mathijssen, 2007](#); [Van Praag, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2016](#)), people originating from other European countries (e.g. [Gkoumasi, 2014](#); [Grigoryev, 2016](#); [Phalet & Swyngedouw, 2003](#)), and Latin American/Hispanic speaking immigrants (e.g. [Gkoumasi, 2014](#)).

Our approach to analyzing collective memories of colonialism focuses on the distributed interpretation of collective memories, assuming that “group members share some representations of the past, without positing that the group itself has a memory” (Licata & Mercy, 2015; p. 194). In this line, we expect that Congolese immigrants will express various representations and points of views about colonialism (for example, positive and negative views of colonialism, distinct consequences of colonialism in the present day, etc.). And we expect to uncover a degree of correspondence between these collective memories of colonialism and their acculturation orientations in the contemporary Belgian society.

We refer to acculturation as a process of cultural change that occurs due to the sustained interaction between the members of two cultures (Berry, Trimble, & Olmedo, 1986; Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Sen & cal, 1997; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). At present, there is a significant body of research about acculturation dynamics between majority and minority groups and about the interactive nature of acculturation processes in terms of acculturation orientations (or strategies and preferences, as defined by different authors) of majority and minority groups in a given society (Bourhis et al., 1997; Brown & Zagefka, 2011; Licata et al., 2011; Tip et al., 2015). More concretely, in the context of immigration, this phenomenon can be analyzed by studying how immigrants choose to uphold and live in accordance (or not) with their culture of origin (in this case, *maintenance of Congolese culture*), while deciding to adopt (or not) characteristics of the host culture of the country in which they live (here framed as *adoption of Belgian culture*).

Interestingly, a study by Ayalon and Sagy (2011) converges with our contention that the historical past helps individuals to make sense of their social identities and shape their preferences regarding their acculturation options. It showed that behavioral acculturation attitudes among Israeli Arab adolescents were connected to the perception of collective narratives about the historical relations between Israel and Palestine: the majority of participants who preferred a separation strategy rejected the Israeli Jewish narrative of the historical events under analysis and adhered more strongly to the Palestinian narrative of the same events (Ayalon & Sagy, 2011). However, the specific connections between collective memories of the colonial past and present day acculturation dynamics between groups with a shared colonial history have never been systematically investigated. In this line, one can expect that immigrants of Congolese descent who hold positive collective memories of Belgian colonialism will present higher levels of Belgian culture adoption and will be more willing to maintain aspects of the Congolese culture, whereas individuals who hold more negative memories of colonialism will show a lower degree of adoption of Belgian culture and a higher degree of maintenance of Congolese culture.

To address our main objectives, we conducted a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with Congolese immigrants and resorted to a thematic content analysis. Following this, we also conducted different quantitative analyses to explore how our variables of interest were connected.

Method

Participants

Forty-three participants took part in the present study. They were recruited mainly through word-of-mouth and existing Congolese organizations in Belgium (such as associations, clubs, and churches). After showing interest for participating in the study, they were contacted by the researchers via email or telephone to fix an appointment for the interview. The recruitment criteria included being from Congolese origin (i.e. being born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and/or have Congolese nationality) and to have been living for at least one year in Belgium at the time of the interview. All participants were born in the Congo, at the exception of two: one was born in Belgium and the other one in Rwanda; both had Congolese nationality. In terms of nationality, 21 participants were Congolese, 20 were Belgian, one had double nationality, and one had Dutch nationality. The age range of the sample was 18–65 years old ($M = 40$, $SD = 11$) and 70% of the participants were male. At the time of the interview, the duration of the participants' stay in Belgium ranged from one year and a half to 40 years ($M = 16$ years, $SD = 12$). Twenty-seven participants had a university degree, 6 had a short-term higher degree (non-university), and 6 completed general secondary education. Of the remaining 4, 2 had completed technical/professional secondary education and the other 2 had completed junior education. In terms of occupation, 19 participants reported to be employees, 9 were students or in training, 5 were self-employed, 5 were unemployed, and 2 were manual workers. Finally, one participant reported to be a manager/executive, one to be an employee in a family business and the remaining one to be retired. For further details about the demographic characteristics of the participants, see Table 1.

Interview procedures

The data for the present study were collected in 2011 through individual semi-structured interviews after the development of an interview guide covering the main topics of interest. Before the interviews started, participants gave their consent for audio recording the interview. The interviews were conducted by three female interviewers, of which two had Caribbean origins and had partly African phenotypes, and one was Belgian and had a European phenotype. Although this might have influenced participant's responses, we cannot ascertain whether participants perceived some of them, but not others, as members of the same social category as themselves. Because it would be ethically questionable to compose one's team of collaborators as a function of their phenotype, we did not explicitly take this variable into account when designing the study. The three interviewers were trained to conduct the interviews in a similar way. One-way between subjects ANOVAs were conducted to verify whether the individual characteristics of the interviewers had any effect on the quantitative variables of interest. The only significant difference concerned the total number of quotes referring to negative memories of colonialism [$F(2, 40) = 4.46$, $p = .02$]. Post hoc comparisons using the Games-Howell test

Table 1
Overview of participants' demographics.

Interview number	Sex	Age	Duration of stay in Belgium (in years)	Educational level	Type of occupation
01	Male	50	13	University degree	Employee
02	Female	24	15	Secondary education (technical/professional)	Unemployed
03	Male	54	25	University degree	Self-employed
04	Female	18	9	Secondary education (general)	Unemployed
05	Female	33	2.5	Secondary education (technical/professional)	Unemployed
06	Female	58	43	Junior education (general)	Unemployed
07	Female	28	26	Secondary education (general)	Employee
08	Female	40	33	University degree	Employee
09	Male	48	7	University degree	Employee
10	Male	48	25	University degree	Employee
11	Female	31	7	Short-term higher degree (non-university)	Employee
12	Male	57	32	Short-term higher degree (non-university)	Employee
13	Male	48	23	Short-term higher degree (non-university)	Employee
14	Male	19	8	Junior education (general)	Student/In training
15	Male	39	6	University degree	Manual worker
16	Male	35	5.5	University degree	Employee
17	Male	56	14	University degree	Self-employed
18	Male	27	27	Secondary education (general)	Employee in family business
19	Male	43	13	University degree	Employee
20	Male	51	26	University degree	Employee
21	Female	35	25	Short-term higher degree (non-university)	Employee
22	Male	43	10	University degree	Employee
23	Male	23	5	Secondary education (general)	Student/In training
24	Female	43	24	University degree	Employee
25	Male	38	2	University degree	Student/In training
26	Male	43	25	University degree	Manager/Executive
27	Male	65	40	University degree	Retired
28	Male	33	20	University degree	Self-employed
29	Female	33	3	University degree	Student/In training
30	Female	42	33	Secondary education (general)	Employee
31	Male	33	3	University degree	Manual worker
32	Male	37	6	University degree	Employee
33	Male	43	7	University degree	Employee
34	Male	34	1.5	University degree	Student/In training
35	Male	37	15	University degree	Employee
36	Male	35	2	University degree	Student/In training
37	Male	48	8	University degree	Student/In training
38	Male	35	29	Short-term higher degree (non-university)	Self-employed
39	Female	58	30	Short-term higher degree (non-university)	Unemployed
40	Male	23	3	Secondary education (general)	Student/In training
41	Female	35	3	University degree	Student/In training
42	Male	53	24	University degree	Employee
43	Male	42	2.5	University degree	Self-employed

indicated that more negative memories of colonialism were reported to one of the interviewers with Caribbean origins ($M = 10.73$, $SD = 5.22$), than to the interviewer with a European phenotype ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 2.56$); responses to the third interviewer did not differ from the two others ($M = 9.40$, $SD = 4.61$). Given that these differences did not follow the phenotypical differences line, and that no other significant difference was found, it suggests that the phenotypical appearance of the interviewers did not strongly influence the course and content of the interviews.

The length of the interviews ranged between 44 min and 3 h and 11 min. The interviews were semi-structured and allowed the interviewer and the participant to focus on aspects that were most relevant for the participant's experiences. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewer presented herself and the main goals of the study. Next, participants were asked about background variables. Afterwards, the interview was conducted according to the interview guide and, at the end, participants had the chance to discuss and comment the interview. If they wished, the interviewer provided them with an email contact for further feedback about the study. The interview guide covered the following main themes: a) personal information; b) perceptions of current intergroup relations between Belgians and Congolese; c) collective memories of the colonial period (historical periods, attitudes, positive and negative aspects of colonialism, and related emotions); d) positive and negative consequences of colonialism for Belgium and the Congo; e) personal experiences of acculturation and adaptation to life in Belgium; and f) further demographic variables.

Content analysis strategy

After transcribing the interviews, we proceeded to analyse the interviews through a thematic content analysis (Bardin, 2013; Bauer, 2000; Krippendorff, 2004; Smith, 2000). Bardin (2013, p. 47) defined content analysis as “a set of communication analysis

Table 2

Frequencies of coded statements for each of the categories and number of participants who mentioned each category at least once.

	Total frequencies of coded statements	Number of participants who mentioned the category at least once (N = 43)
Negative memories of colonialism	379	43
Positive memories of colonialism	203	40
Lack of recognition of prejudice towards Congolese	46	21
Negative consequences for Congolese	170	38
Negative consequences for Belgians	37	28
Positive consequences for Congolese	64	34
Positive consequences for Belgians	77	41
Maintenance of Congolese culture	465	43
Non-maintenance of Congolese culture	140	40
Adoption of Belgian culture	417	43
Non-adoption of Belgian culture	165	42
Total	2163	–

techniques aiming, through systematic and objective procedures of description of the content of messages, to obtain indicators (quantitative or not) for the inference of knowledge about the conditions of production/reception (inferred variables) of these messages”.

The interviews were uploaded into the Atlas.ti software (version 6). First, we conducted a floating reading of the interviews, allowing us to identify the main themes and ideas present in the corpus. Then, we developed a first categorical analysis grid for coding the interviews. This approach allowed us to analyse the contents of the interviews in-depth by creating a coherent set of categories and sub-categories. Finally, throughout the classification of the text segments relevant for the previously defined categories, smaller adjustments were made (i.e. lesser used categories were removed; some categories were merged; and new ones were added) for reaching a more comprehensive understanding of the interviews’ materials, based on the guiding analytical rules of completeness, exhaustiveness, objectivity, and relevance (Bardin, 2013). In total, 2163 quotes (i.e. statements) were content analyzed (for frequencies of statements coded under each category see Table 2).

Reliability

In order to validate the analyses, we asked 7 independent coders to classify 10 extracts (selected on the basis of the diversity of potentially distinct coding categories) from our corpus, and then calculated the Fleiss’ κ . This index is comparable to Cohen’ κ but allows for comparison of more than two judges. It represents the degree of classification agreement between coders, while taking into account the chance factor. According to Landis and Koch (1977), the agreement is considered “almost perfect” for a κ between 0.81 and 1, “significant” for a κ between 0.61 and 0.80, “medium” if it takes a value between 0 and 0.41 0.6, “light” between 0.21 and 0.4, “low” between 0.01 and 0.2, and “poor” if κ is negative. We obtained a κ Fleiss’ κ of 0.72, which demonstrates significant inter-judges consistency. Furthermore, an independent researcher, who joined the team at a later stage (i.e. after the interviews had all been coded and the inter-judges agreement had been), also checked the coded materials to resolve inconsistencies.

Results

For the purpose of simplifying the description of results, we will only present the coding categories relevant to the topics under study (i.e. collective memories of colonialism, consequences of colonialism, and acculturation). We first present a description of the content analysis by defining the thematic categories and subcategories. We provide example quotes for each category and subcategory in Appendix A. The total frequencies of coded statements per category, as well as the number of participants that mentioned each category at least once are presented in Table 2. The qualitative results are presented in two main sections, the first refers to collective memories and present-day consequences of Belgian colonialism, and the second consists of the description of the participants’ acculturative strategies. Secondly, we present quantitative analyses based on the frequencies of the relevant coding categories and their associations with each other.

Qualitative analyses/Coding categories

Part 1: Collective memories of colonialism and present-day consequences

1. Collective memories. Collective memories of colonialism and Belgian colonization of the Congo were addressed through different questions during the interview (see Interview Procedures above). Each thematic category relies directly to these questions. Each of them encompasses subcategories.

1.1. Negative memories of colonialism. Any statement that reflected a negative perception or evaluation of events that happened during the Belgian colonial rule over the Congo. This category comprised distinct subcategories that reflect different types of situations or themes evoked by the participants. This category included 6 subcategories: 1.1.1. *Dehumanization of the Congolese* (i.e.

any statement that referred to the way the Congolese were denied their human rights, with some evoking the colonial exhibitions, where Congolese people were put on display like in a zoo, while others mentioned the degrading treatment of Congolese during the colonial rule); 1.1.2. *Attack to the physical and psychological integrity of the Congolese and restriction of freedom* (i.e. statements that referred to acts directed at exploiting the Congolese and accusations of mutilations, such as “cutting hands”, and punishments, like “the use of the whip”, among others); 1.1.3. *Abuse of power* (which referred to the oppressive and ill-treatment of Congolese by the colonial administration, the Church or former colonials); 1.1.4. *Exploitation of the Congolese and of the country's natural resources* (i.e. the non-legitimate utilization of the people – forced labour – and/or the reserves – minerals, rubber, etc. – of the Congo); 1.1.5. *Differentiation policies* (when participants mentioned that the Belgians and the Congolese were treated differently in political or social terms); and 1.1.6. *Bad behaviours of Belgians* (statements mentioning insults or racist remarks that were not included in the previous subcategories).

The subcategory that was most mentioned by our participants referred to the attack to the physical and psychological integrity of the Congolese and the restriction of their freedom during colonialism, which 34 participants mentioned at least once, closely followed by the differentiation policies (33 participants), and the bad behaviours of Belgians (32 participants) categories.

1.2. Positive memories of colonialism. This category included statements that reflect a positive perception or evaluation of the situation or of events that happened during the Belgian colonization of the Congo. This category comprised eight distinct subcategories (for an overview see [Appendix A](#)), such as the 1.2.1. *Improvement of health/sanitary conditions*, the 1.2.2. *Contribution of religion* (i.e. the introduction of Christianity in the Congo by the Belgians) and 1.2.7. *Economical contribution* (which included statements mentioning the economical gains for the Congo), among others. The most mentioned subcategory of positive memories of colonialism was the 1.2.3. *Contribution of Knowledge* (i.e. any statement that mentioned a positive contribution of Belgium to the Congolese in terms of scientific knowledge and education was coded in this subcategory), with 34 participants mentioning it at least once. Also, the subcategory 1.2.4. *Development of infrastructures* (reflecting the construction and expansion of structures such as roads or industries in the Congo) was mentioned by 21 participants, while the subcategories 1.2.6. *Contribution to order* (i.e. positive aspects brought by the colonial administration in terms of organization) and 1.2.8. *Other positive things* (such as the organization of natural parks and the possibility of Congolese studying in Belgium, among others) were mentioned by 22 participants.

2. Lack of recognition of prejudice towards the Congolese (present day). This category included references to the fact that Belgium or Belgians have not recognized the suffering inflicted to the Congolese during colonialism and that, still today, this reflects prejudice and negative attitudes towards the Congolese, and was mentioned by 21 participants.

Present-day consequences of colonialism

3.1. Negative consequences for the Congolese. This category included statements about different types of negative consequences of colonialism that participants believe to persist for the Congolese in the present day and was composed by 5 subcategories: 3.1.1. *Cultural loss* (i.e. aspects of Congolese culture that were lost due to colonialism; mentioned by 8 participants); 3.1.2. *Present day negative situation of the Congo* (two participants referred aspects of violence, war and/or divisions in the Congo that still exist due to colonialism); 3.1.3. *Lack of preparation and dependence of the Congolese* (i.e. references to the fact that the Congolese were not prepared for independence and that they were dependent on the Belgians was included in this subcategory, which was mentioned by 19 participants); 3.1.4. *Belgian neo-colonialism* (when participants referred that Belgium still intervenes, unjustly, in Congolese affairs in the present day); and 3.1.5. *Other negative consequences* (such as a general negative evaluation of the present-day consequences for the Congolese; mentioned by 11 participants).

3.2. Negative consequences for Belgians. This category included three subcategories (3.2.1. *Too many Congolese immigrants in Belgium*; 3.2.2. *Negative image of Belgium*; and 3.2.3. *Other negative consequences for Belgium*, for an overview see [Appendix A](#)) about different types of negative consequences of colonialism that participants believe to still exist for Belgians in the present day, which were mentioned at least once by 28 of our participants.

3.3. Positive consequences for the Congolese. This category included statements about different types of positive consequences of colonialism that participants believe to still exist for the Congolese in the present day, and was comprised by four subcategories: 3.3.1. *Psychological attributes as legacy of colonization* (i.e. statements about specific attributes of Belgians that were integrated in the life of Congolese people, such as a better family structure); 3.3.2. *Social and material contributions* (i.e. references to techniques, social system, or material inputs); 3.3.3. *Openness to the outside world* (when participants referred that colonization allowed the Congolese to be more open to the outside world; and 3.3.4. *Other positive consequences*).

3.4. Positive consequences for the Belgians. This category included three subcategories (3.4.1. *Economic profit* – such as the diamond business and Belgian exploitation of mines in the present day; 3.4.2. *Important political position internationally* – the important role Belgium has in international politics due to its history of colonialism; and 3.4.3. *Other positive consequences*) encompassing statements about different types of consequences that participants referred as being positive for Belgians in the present day. The most used subcategory was *Economic profit*, with 41 participants mentioning it at least once.

Part 2: Acculturation strategies of Congolese immigrants

4. Acculturation strategies. This set of variables consisted of a combination of different coding categories that referred to participants' responses to questions about aspects of their acculturation processes and outcomes, as experienced throughout their stay in Belgium. For the below mentioned categories, we sub-coded the different aspects of such experiences in terms of whether they belonged to the realm of *values* (i.e. any statement that referred to “conceptions of the desirable that influence the way people select action and evaluate events”, [Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; p. 550](#)), such as aspects of one's family structure, traditions, child rearing practices or modes of communication, among others, *beliefs* (i.e. statements that make reference to a specific belief about either

Congolese or Belgian culture), *knowledge* (i.e. statements referring to knowledge of the Congolese or Belgian cultures in terms of language, traditions, history, customs, etc.), *attitudes* (i.e. every statement that referred to “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour”; Eagly, & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1), *behaviours* (i.e. statements referring to actions related to the maintenance of Congolese culture or to the adoption of Belgian culture, and/or their consequences for the individual), or *identity* (i.e. statements that make reference to the social identity of the individual as Congolese or as Belgian) factors. Each of these categories expresses one of the strategies of acculturation described below (for each of the quotes, we present this sub-categorization in brackets). Given that participants often did not only mention things they did, knew or believed, but also aspects of acculturation they rejected or did not believe to be part of their experiences, we created coding categories referring to aspects of both non-maintenance of Congolese culture and non-adoption of Belgian culture, which could not be covered by the maintenance and adoption categories solely. For the purposes of this study, we treated the maintenance and adoption dimensions separately instead of combining them into specific acculturation profiles. This decision was motivated by the small sample size and the difficulty of creating clear acculturative profiles from a qualitative study.

4.1. Maintenance of Congolese culture. Every statement that made reference to the direct or indirect maintenance and/or adherence to a specific aspect of Congolese culture or cultural heritage was included in this category, which was mentioned at least once by all of our participants.

4.2. Non-maintenance of Congolese culture. This category included statements making reference to the direct or indirect rejection and/or non-adherence to specific aspects of Congolese culture or cultural heritage, such as disagreeing with Congolese cultural practices or not having Congolese friends. Interestingly, only 3 participants did not mention such aspects.

4.3. Adoption of Belgian culture. All of our participants, to some extent, made reference to the direct or indirect adoption and/or adherence to specific aspects of Belgian culture or cultural heritage were coded in this category, which included identification with Belgians, among others.

4.4. Non-adoption of Belgian culture. This category included statements about the direct or indirect rejection and/or non-adherence to a specific aspect of Belgian culture or cultural heritage, such as not identifying with specific characteristics of the Belgians (such as being distant or hypocritical) and was mentioned at least once by 41 of our participants.

5. Spontaneous connections between collective memories and present-day intergroup relations. During the course of the interviews, some participants spontaneously drew connections between collective memories of colonialism and present-day intergroup relations and acculturation dynamics. Example quotes are: “The railways, it is the Congolese, the subway... I tell you a story. There are Congolese who do not pay the subway because they feel it was their grandparents who dug these underground pipes, who died.” (I11); “In our minds, it comes to us that these are our colonizers. These are the people who colonized us. But history is history. We cannot change history anyway.” (I7); “There are those who will tell you “Suffering, we still suffer now too. I wanted us to be still under colonization, to be re-colonized”. But others will tell you “Even if I must die, I prefer it rather than colonization.” (I23); “Another anecdote. If the Congo was the property of the King up to a certain time, (...) then our grandparents are Belgians. (...) If the Congo was the property of the Belgians until independence, then, all of those born before 1960 are Belgians. We saw some Congolese obtain citizenship based on these arguments. Because they said they have letters, birth certificates where it was written Kingdom of Belgium. They requested it and there are some who obtained citizenship and some who didn't. But it seems that, so far, this is a law that is in force. So for me, when I want to tease my friends, I say that if our grandparents were Belgian, then we all are, because we are the descendants of those people.” (I11).

The richness of the quotes presented above shows that collective memories of Belgian colonialism, from the perspective of Congolese immigrants in Belgium, present both negative and positive aspects, namely in terms of the exploitation of the Congo and its people (negative memories), but also in terms of the positive contribution that colonialism brought to the country (positive memories). Interestingly, participants mentioned more negative memories of colonialism (379 quotes in total, and all participants referring to these memories at least once. See Table 2) than positive memories of colonialism (203 quotes, and 40 participants mentioning them at least once).

In addition, participants mentioned several consequences of colonialism for Belgium and the Congo in the present day, both in positive and negative terms. However, participants mentioned more negative consequences of colonialism for the Congolese in the present day (170 quotes; 38 participants) than negative consequences for Belgians (37 quotes; 28 participants) or positive consequences for the Congolese (64 quotes; 34 participants) and for the Belgians (77 quotes; 41 participants).

Finally, we were able to better understand distinct aspects of the acculturation dynamics experienced by our participants. All participants ($N = 43$) reported aspects related to the maintenance of their original (Congolese) culture and referred to adopting characteristics of the Belgian culture. They made more references to the maintenance of Congolese culture (465 quotes) than to the adoption of Belgian culture (417 quotes), although this difference was small. We will further reflect upon the significance and meaning of these findings in the Discussion section.

Correlational analysis

To better understand how our qualitative variables of interest related to each other, we further created quantitative variables reflecting our constructs of interest and conducted correlational analyses. Unless otherwise explained, these variables represent the sum of the frequencies per participant of all subcategories that form each of the coding categories under analysis (e.g. Negative memories of colonialism, Positive consequences for Congolese, etc.).

Given the limited number of participants and the fact that our variables did not follow a normal distribution, we conducted a series of Spearman's rank-order correlations to assess the levels of associations between the variables of interest (see Table 3),

Table 3
Spearman's rank-order correlations between the variables of interest.

	Gender	Age	Duration of stay	Neg. mem.	Posit. mem.	Lack rec. prej.	Neg. Cons. Cong.	Neg. Cons. Bel.	Posit. Cons. Cong.	Posit. Cons. Belg.	Maint. Cong.	Adop. Belg.
Gender	–	–0.22	0.20	–0.32*	–0.26	–0.01	–0.23	–0.34*	–0.07	–0.32*	–0.14	0.05
Age		–	0.47**	0.10	0.33*	–0.05	0.01	0.09	0.08	0.35*	0.36*	0.34*
Dur. stay			–	–0.05	–0.29	0.11	–0.22	–0.16	–0.04	0.27	0.18	0.45**
Neg. mem.				–	0.12	0.51**	0.44**	0.23	–0.18	0.32*	0.35*	–0.44**
Posit. mem.					–	–0.09	0.14	0.39**	0.23	0.07	–0.01	0.09
Lack rec. prej.						–	0.50**	0.06	–0.17	0.31*	0.31*	–0.18
Neg. Cons. Cong.							–	0.33*	–0.10	0.05	0.36*	–0.29
Neg. Cons. Bel.								–	0.18	0.22	0.18	–0.07
Posit. Cons. Cong.									–	0.18	–0.02	0.07
Posit. Cons. Belg.										–	0.39*	0.07
Maint. Cong.											–	0.03
Adop. Belg.												–

*Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$, **Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$.

namely: sex, age, duration of stay in Belgium, maintenance of Congolese culture (see description below), adoption of Belgian culture (description of variable below), positive memories of colonialism, negative memories of colonialism, lack of recognition of Congolese (present day), negative consequences for Congolese, negative consequences for Belgians, positive consequences for Congolese, and positive consequences for Belgians.

Maintenance of Congolese culture. To create an aggregate score of level of maintenance of Congolese culture for each participant, we subtracted the number of quotes belonging to the non-maintenance of Congolese culture category from the number of maintenance of Congolese culture quotes. Thus, a positive value means a higher level of maintenance of Congolese culture, while a negative value in this variable means a higher level of rejection of Congolese culture ($M = 7.56$, $SD = 5.87$).

Adoption of Belgian culture. This aggregate score of the level of adoption of Belgian culture was created by subtracting the total number of quotes existent in the category of non-adoption of Belgian culture from the total number of quotes each participant had referring to aspects of adopting Belgian culture. Thus, a higher value means a higher level of adoption of Belgian culture, while a negative value in this variable means a higher level of rejection of Belgian culture ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 6.56$).

A two-tailed test of significance indicated that sex was significantly and negatively associated with negative memories of colonialism, and negative and positive consequences for Belgians: during the interviews, men tended to refer more these aspects than women. In turn, age was significantly and positively associated with the length of the participants' stay in Belgium, maintenance of Congolese culture, adoption of Belgian culture, positive memories of colonialism and positive consequences for Belgians (present day). This means that older participants tended to have lived longer in Belgium (not surprisingly) and to mention positive memories of colonialism more frequently than younger participants. Furthermore, older participants had higher levels of maintenance of Congolese culture while, at the same time, they also expressed higher levels of adoption of Belgian culture. Finally, older participants mentioned more positive consequences of colonialism for Belgians in the present day. We also observed a significant correlation between the duration of stay in Belgium and adoption of Belgian culture: the longer participants lived in Belgium, the more they tended to adopt Belgian culture.

Our results also showed that positive memories of colonialism were significantly associated with mentioning more negative consequences of colonialism for Belgians in the present day. In turn, negative memories of colonialism were positively associated with mentioning the lack of recognition of prejudice towards Congolese, and with more references to the negative consequences of colonialism for Congolese and the positive consequences of colonialism for Belgians in the present day. Interestingly, positive and negative memories of colonialism were not significantly associated, suggesting that mentioning negative memories did not prevent them from also evoking positive aspects of colonialism.

Participants who tended to stress the lack of recognition of existent prejudice towards Congolese in the present day also more often mentioned the negative consequences of colonialism for the Congolese and the positive consequences of colonialism for Belgians in the present day. Finally, participants who mentioned more current negative consequences of colonialism for the Congolese, also more often pointed to the negative consequences of colonialism for Belgians in the present say, which suggests that they focused on the negative aspects of the aftermath of colonialism in general.

A higher maintenance of Congolese culture was associated with more negative memories of colonialism, a more accentuated concern with the lack of recognition of prejudice towards Congolese in the present day, and a higher level of reference to the negative consequences of colonialism for Congolese in the present day, and to the positive consequences of colonialism for Belgians in the present day. In contrast, adoption of Belgian culture was negatively associated with negative memories of colonialism: the more participants adopted Belgian culture, the less they evoked negative memories of Belgian colonialism.

Discussion

The present study aimed at uncovering the collective memories of colonialism, as well as its perceived consequences on the present day, among Congolese immigrants living in Belgium, and to explore their connections with their main acculturation strategies (i.e. maintenance of Congolese culture and/or adoption of the Belgian culture). Our results showed that participants referred to various aspects of colonialism and its consequences in the present day. Although both positive and negative aspects of colonialism were evoked, negative representations clearly dominated. More concretely, when referring to negative memories of Belgian colonialism, participants referred to various patterns of behaviours of the colonizers, such as the dehumanization of Congolese people, as well as attacks to their physical and psychological integrity, which was the most mentioned subcategory in this study. Moreover, participants mentioned abuses of power by the Belgian colonial system, the existence of differentiation policies aimed at discriminating the Congolese, and the exploitation of the country's natural resources and labour force as the main negative aspects of the Belgian colonialism in the Congo. Regarding the positive collective memories of Belgian colonialism, the most referred subcategory was the contribution to knowledge, followed by the economical contribution and contribution to order. Participants also evoked positive aspects such as the positive contribution of religion, the educational system, as well as the development of infrastructures and the economy, and the improvement of the living conditions of the Congolese. Our results are also in line with previous research conducted in different countries with a colonial past, showing that representations of colonialism can be mapped through two main dimensions: the exploitation (of the country's resources and native peoples) and the development (of infrastructures and educational and health systems) brought by colonial systems in different parts of the world (Licata et al., *under review*).

Interestingly, many of the themes referred to by our participants have also been reported in different outlets of research (see for example Licata & Klein, 2005; Licata et al., 2014). In terms of negative memories of colonialism, they mostly mentioned human rights violations of the Congolese population and the exploitation of the country's natural resources, something that was strongly denied among older Belgian participants who lived in the Congo during the colonial period (see Caby, 2004; Licata & Klein, 2005), but that tended to be acknowledged by younger generations of Belgians (see Licata & Klein, 2010; Stanciu, 2003) in previous research. Moreover, our Congolese participants mentioned positive aspects of the colonization of Congo that have also been reported in research conducted with former Belgian colonials, such as the development of infrastructures (educational and health-related, among others), evangelization, and the improvement of their living standards (Licata & Klein, 2005). Our results also showed that Congolese immigrants' collective memories of colonialism are permeated by both negative and positive aspects of colonialism, a pattern previously found by Licata and Klein (2005). In this study, Congolese immigrants in Belgium who had lived in the Congo during colonialism referred, for example, to the improvement of the educational and health systems, but also to the exploitation of the country's people and resources. A recent study by Bentrovato (2016) showed that, among young Congolese people living in the Congo, some representations about Belgian colonialism as the beginning of civilization and progress are still present, although the most prevalent representations are in line with prevailing nationalist anti-colonial discourse and a narrative of Congolese victimhood and patriotism, focusing on Belgian colonialism as the beginning of Congo's suffering, the misdeeds and abuses of Belgians during colonialism, and the blame put on colonizers in relation to the present-day problems in the Congo. This points to the idea that different generations may indeed hold different representations and memories of colonialism, a pattern that should be further researched, both in former colonizer and former colonized populations.

When asked about the negative consequences of Belgian colonialism, some of our participants mentioned the cultural losses, the present-day situation in the Congo, the lack of preparation and dependence of the Congo towards Belgium, as well as the interference of Belgium in current affairs of the Congo (neo-colonialism) as direct legacies of the colonial system for present day Congolese society. Some of them also mentioned that Belgium currently suffers from a negative image on the international scene due to its colonial action, and, ironically, the influx of Congolese immigrants in Belgium, as downsides of colonialism. In turn, participants mentioned the social and material contributions of colonialism, the acquisition of some psychological attributes (such as respect for family life) and the openness to the outside world as positive consequences of colonialism for the contemporary Belgians, while stressing that Belgium gained an important political position on the international scene and still currently benefits economically from colonialism. In brief, our participants tended to mention more negative than positive memories of colonialism during the interviews. Nevertheless, it is relevant to underline that all 43 participants mentioned at least once negative memories of colonialism, but that 40 mentioned at least once positive memories of colonialism.

Interestingly, 21 of our participants highlighted the lack of recognition of prejudice that prevails today in Belgian society towards Congolese immigrants. This may be directly related with potential first-hand experiences of discrimination felt by these participants.

In this study, we were also able to better understand our participants' experiences of acculturation in Belgium, by focusing on aspects of maintenance of their original culture and the degree of adoption of different aspects of Belgian culture. All our participants valued and adhered to certain aspects of their Congolese culture, through the preservation of specific Congolese values and beliefs, and they generally reported a sense of connectedness with other Congolese people (shared knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours), while rejecting other aspects of the Congolese culture such as the lack of rules: 40 participants mentioned at least once specific

aspects of non-maintenance of their original culture. Some of them stressed their lack of information about colonialism and the history of the Congo. In turn, although the number of quotes referring to the adoption of Belgian culture was lower than the number of quotes referring to the maintenance of Congolese culture, all participants also expressed their adoption of certain aspects of Belgian culture, for example by claiming that they behaved and felt as Belgians. However, they also rejected (non-adoption) some perceived negative characteristics of Belgians, such as being hypocritical and closed to other people.

As explained above, we decided not to define acculturation profiles by combining the degree of adoption of Belgian culture and the degree of maintenance of Congolese culture, thus not categorizing our participants in acculturation patterns, such as integration, assimilation, marginalization, separation, or individualism (Bourhis et al., 1997). This decision was motivated by the small sample of the study and the difficulty of creating clear-cut categories derived from a content analysis. Furthermore, other authors (for a discussion on this topic, see Brown & Zagefka, 2011) have also treated the maintenance and adoption dimensions separately, providing evidence of their independent and combined effects on distinct variables of interest.

Furthermore, using the frequencies of the different categories of responses, we conducted correlational analysis to explore the connections between the variables of interest. Negative memories of colonialism were associated with the perception of more negative consequences of colonialism for the Congolese and with more positive consequences for Belgians in the present day.

Interestingly, we found some significant relations between dimensions of acculturation and collective memories of colonialism: maintenance of Congolese culture was positively associated with more negative memories of Belgian colonialism, whereas adoption of the host country's culture was negatively associated with negative memories of Belgian colonialism. It is worth noting that, contrary to our expectations, adoption of Belgian culture was not associated with more positive memories of colonialism. Our results indicate that, when people have higher levels of adoption of the host culture, rather than focusing on the positive aspects of colonialism, they tend to focus less on its negative aspects.

We also found that men tended to focus more than women on negative memories of colonialism, as well as on the negative and positive consequences of colonialism for Belgians in the present. These are interesting and unexpected findings, for which we have no explanation. Female participants were, on average, younger than male ones, which may also account for this observed difference. The limited size of our sample does not allow us to disentangle the effects of age and sex.

In addition, older participants tended to evoke more positive memories of colonialism and to adopt more aspects of Belgian culture, while also maintaining aspects of their Congolese culture. In terms of collective memories of colonialism, these results reflect a similar pattern to the ones found by Licata and Klein (2010) among Belgian respondents: older participants (grandparents) tended to hold more positive representations of Belgian colonialism, while younger generations (grandchildren) thought more negatively of Belgian colonialism, with the intermediate generation (parents) presenting ambivalent ideas about the topic.

Moreover, in terms of acculturation, our results seem to connect with the suggestion made by Bourhis et al. (1997) that there may be age differences in terms of acculturation preferences among majority and minority group members. Indeed, previous studies by Bourhis and colleagues (e.g. Barrette, Bourhis, Personnaz, & Personnaz, 2004; Bourhis, Barrette, El-Geledi, & Smith, 2009; Bourhis & Dayan, 2004; among others) have shown that younger participants (mainly undergraduate students) from majority as well as minority groups, besides adhering strongly to integrationism, also preferred an individualistic acculturation strategy, highlighting the specific characteristics of individuals, rather than group-based characteristics. The fact that, as age increases, there was a higher tendency to adopt aspects of Belgian culture, while maintaining aspects of Congolese culture, may also relate indirectly with a more individualistic acculturation orientation among younger generations. Further research should explicitly analyse how and when these age differences occur.

Our results indicate that collective memories do play a role in present-day acculturation dynamics between former colonizer and colonized groups and, perhaps, between distinct majority and minority groups that share a common past. This is fully in line with the claim that “understanding the construction of self and identity in terms of colonial histories and present day transnational migration has tremendous relevance for understanding issues related to acculturation and immigrant identities” (Bhatia & Ram, 2001, p. 2) and further research should continue addressing the interconnections between representations of colonialism and present-day dynamics of immigration.

Limitations and further research

The present study was a first attempt at connecting collective memories of colonialism and acculturation experiences of Congolese immigrants living in Belgium. Given the qualitative nature of the study and the limited number of participants, we cannot draw strong generalizations to other segments of this or other immigrant populations, although we were able to show that there seems to be connections between the way immigrants remember their country's colonial past and the ways they adapt to their life in the former metropolis. Further studies are needed to systematize and analyse these patterns of results through quantitative methods.

As it is true for every study relying on in-depth interviews, the individual characteristics of the interviewees could have influenced the flow of the interview and the willingness of participants to share some of their opinions and perceptions. When dealing with colonialism, the perceived origins of the interviewer are probably worth taking into account, given that the interviewer's perceived social category membership may have affected participant's answers. In the present case, none of the three interviewees shared the Congolese origin with the participants, although two of them had remote African origins. Even though we found a significant difference on one of the variables of interest-negative memories of colonialism-between two of the interviewees (i.e. one with European phenotype and one with African phenotype), the phenotypical differences between the interviewees did not strongly influence the results.

The correlational analyses we conducted do not allow us to infer causal relations between the variables of interest. According to

social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), people strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem through their social identities. In this line, group members' current needs and wishes could shape the way they remember and make sense of their group's past. For this reason, we could argue that acculturation preferences shape the group members' collective memories about their group's history of interactions with other groups (e.g. Licata, Klein, & Gély, 2007; Licata & Mercy, 2015). However, one could also claim that pre-existent collective memories of the historical past can influence the way people live in the present, thus having an impact on present day intergroup relations and acculturation dynamics. Experimental or longitudinal studies are needed to shed some light on the possible mechanisms through which collective memories of the past intergroup history relate to current intergroup relations and acculturation dynamics. Research on intergenerational differences is also necessary for better understanding how age and duration of stay in a country influence people's perceptions of the past and their acculturative strategies. Additionally, given that acculturation dynamics involve an interplay between the needs and wishes of the host country's community and the incoming communities (Brown & Zagefka, 2011), further research should also focus on understanding how the collective memories held by the host community are related with their acculturation preferences.

Recently, the Ecologist Party in Brussels Region's government has proposed a resolution that "first seeks to establish the facts and then allow the recognition of responsibilities of the various Belgian institutions in the colonization of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi", arguing that "despite the time elapsed since the end of the Belgian colonization, the Belgian State and state-institutions involved in the colonial process did not, to date, take any official step in order to accomplish a real work of memory and recognition of their colonial past", and demanding "the implementation of an international and interdisciplinary research to establish the facts and responsibilities of the various Belgian institutions on the crimes committed between 1885 and 1962" (Hellings, 2016). This resolution, if approved, would be the first of its kind in Belgium and could significantly influence the development of further research on this topic, not only in Belgium but also in other former colonizing countries. How this resolution will (or not) be accepted by Belgian society and its potential implications for present-day intergroup relations between former colonizer and colonized groups is also worth investigating.

Conclusion

Social psychologists have recently begun investigating the interconnections between history and present day social interactions and cultural phenomena. Our results further stress the need to addressing the ways in which individuals remember their group's past, as a means to shed light on their current social identifications and relationships within a given society (Licata, Klein, & Gély, 2007; Licata & Mercy, 2015; Liu & Hilton, 2005). More concretely, further efforts should be devoted to investigating how representations of the colonial past interacts with present day intergroup relations and acculturation dynamics between postcolonial migrants and formerly colonizing host countries.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.03.004>.

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