"Sorry for Congo, Let's Make Amends": Belgians' Ideological Worldviews Predict

Attitudes towards Apology and Reparation for its Colonial Past

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Abstract

In light of the recent steps Belgium has made towards reconciling with its colonial history in Congo (e.g., the King's letter of regret, and the removal of some colonial statues), we examined how Belgians differ in their attitudes towards an official apology, towards (symbolic) reparations (e.g., renaming streets), and towards raising more awareness about the colonial past (e.g., more detailed information in educational books) as a function of their ideological worldviews. We hypothesized that authoritarianism and group dominance would negatively predict these outcome variables, while particularly universal-diverse orientation and egalitarianism would predict them positively. We further hypothesized that these relations would be mediated by relevant intergroup emotions (i.e., group-based guilt, shame, and anger, and especially outgroup empathy). Path model analyses on a sample of 258 Flemish-speaking students provided support for our predictions: (1) universal-diverse orientation was the strongest predictor of all intergroup emotions, (2) empathy – and to a lesser extent group-based anger – were the strongest direct predictors of attitudes towards apologizing, reparation, and awareness, and (3) empathy was the most important mediator explaining the associations of universal-diverse and egalitarian orientations with the outcomes. We discuss the implications of our findings for the current debate regarding reconciliation between groups with a history of colonialism.

Keywords: ideological worldviews, intergroup emotions, repair, apology, awareness, Belgium, Congo

Belgium has a peculiar colonial history. By the time the country became independent in 1830, most other European powers already had colonies. From 1840 to 1850, Belgium's first king, Leopold I, made several unfruitful attempts to acquire overseas territories. A deal to colonize the Kingdom of Hawaii fell apart (Hunnewell, 1869), and an effort to settle in Guatemala did not last long (Feys, 2003), but these endeavors sparked the colonial enthusiasm in his son, King Leopold II. Because the Belgian government viewed colonial expansion as economically and politically risky, Leopold II pursued his ambitions without the support of the government after he was crowned (Ewans, 2017).

Out of a "longlist" of 54 potentially interesting territories[1], Leopold II picked a region rich in natural resources such as ivory and rubber, roughly 76 times larger than Belgium, the then-largely unexplored Congo Basin (Viaene, 2008). From 1885 onwards, King Leopold II of Belgium *de facto* owned the Congo Free State under his personal rule. During those decades, many well-documented atrocities occurred, ranging from unjustified imprisonments to brutal mutilations. The magnitude of the population fall over this period is disputed, but historians estimate it to be between one and fifteen million (Hochschild, 1999). By the turn of the century, the violence against indigenous Congolese and the system of economic exploitation led to diplomatic pressure on Belgium to take official control (Gann, 2015). Hence, Congo became a Belgian colony from 1908 until its independence in 1960.

**To Apologize or Not To Apologize, That is The Question**

Apologies are considered an effective strategy to promote forgiveness and healing, also in intergroup conflicts (Wohl, Hornsey, & Philpot, 2011, but see Hornsey & Wohl, 2013). Although neither the Belgian monarchy, nor the Belgian state has ever officially apologized for the atrocities (Ewans, 2017), some small steps in this direction have taken place. For instance, in

2002, Belgium apologized for its role in the assassination of the Congolese Prime Minister

Patrice Lumumba in 1961. In 2019, Belgium also acknowledged its responsibility for the

segregation policy under which 'metis' (i.e., mixed-race) children were abducted from Congo,

though it remained silent about the other facets of the colonial past. On the 30th of June, 2020,

after exactly 60 years of Congolese independence, Belgium's current king Philippe sent a formal

letter expressing his "deepest regrets" to President Félix Tshisekedi for the "suffering and

humiliation" his nation inflicted on Congolese people while colonizing the region. This letter –

the king could not travel to the Democratic Republic of Congo due to the COVID-19 pandemic –

was seen as historic, but stopped short of an official apology (The Guardian, 2020).

     Under pressure from a growing movement (https://www.sorryisastart.be) that believes

Belgium needs to confront its past, other (symbolic) repair measures to "make amends" have

also been suggested and occasionally applied. Some city councils started changing street names

related to Leopold II, and a square in Brussels was dedicated to commemorating Lumumba. The

latest global wave of George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, and other anti-racism protests has again

triggered rigorous debate about discrimination nowadays and in the past, and discussions

concerning the many colonial-era monuments. As Figure 1 shows, Leopold II memorial statues

and busts can be found across the county (especially in and around the capital), and some have

recently been daubed with red graffiti, defaced, and/or removed. In some cases, a "counter-

statue" of an independence leader or a panel with additional information and contextualization

was put next to Leopold's statue. In the same vein, numerous petitions calling for wider

education and awareness of Belgium's colonial past have been signed and spread.

Figure 1

Map of the 17 Leopold II statues in Belgium. Eleven of them were recently vandalized. Two statues were removed, four city councils are considering removal. In four occasions, a "counter-statue" was put in place. A panel with information was added in three cases. [June 13, 2020]
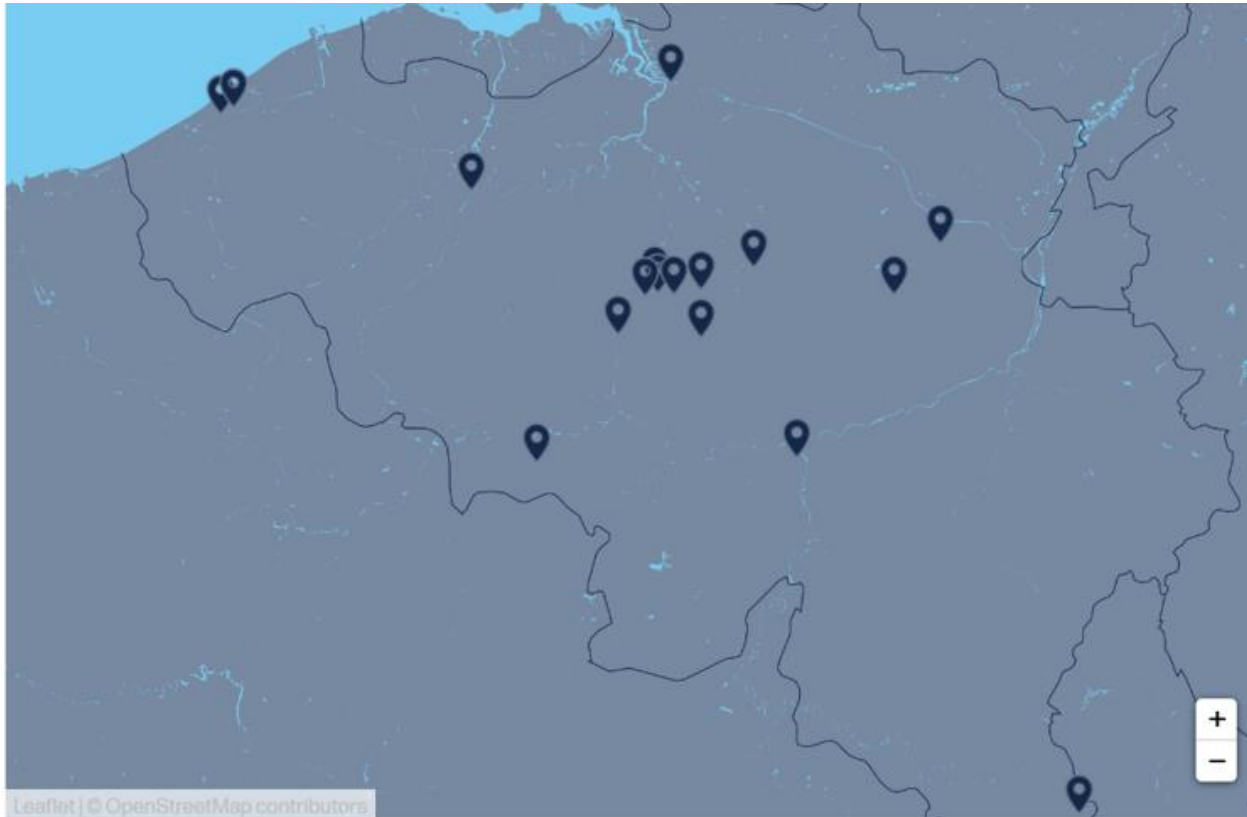
Note: Source: LocalFocus (https://www.localfocus.nl)

In short, a shift in norms is slowly but surely taking place, and it seems like most Belgians are generally ready to "come clean" with their country's colonial history in some way. Such positive attitudes towards "healing" the psychological scars created in the past (Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, & Hagengimana, 2005) can take many forms: it can be done either by endorsing an official apology, by being supportive of reparations (e.g., renaming streets, or donating money to families of victims), or by wanting to create more awareness about the past (e.g., educating children in schools, or investing in books and museum tours). These three forms of healing attitudes are essential steps in the direction of true reconciliation (Staub et al., 2005).

The present study took place against this backdrop, investigating Belgian's willingness to apologize, repair, and create awareness (i.e., looking at the perpetrator perspective; Leunissen, De Cremer, Reinders Folmer, & Van Dijke, 2013). Specifically, we aimed to test the role of individual differences in ideological worldviews and intergroup emotions in accounting for such "sorry"-attitudes.

Who Wants to Make Amends, and Why?

One's ideological worldview for a large part determines one's orientation towards intergroup relations (e.g., Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006). Several frameworks have been proposed, with John Duckitt's (2001) dual-process theory of ideology being one of the most prominent and influential ones. This theory organizes ideological attitudes along two related yet independent dimensions, a social-cultural and an economic-hierarchical one (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010).

The social-cultural dimension reflects attitudes towards the organization of society along 'horizontal' lines. On the conservative end of this dimension, values such as traditionalism, conservatism, group identity, collective security, social order, cohesion and conformity play a crucial role. This pole is best captured in the construct of Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA, Altemeyer, 1981), which embraces a strong adherence to social norms, respect for and obedience to societal authorities, and a tough attitude towards violators of social rules and laws (Duckitt, 2001). On the progressive end of this dimension, which is rarely empirically assessed, values such as open-mindedness, liberalism, universalism, and individual freedom and autonomy play a role. This ideological pole is best represented in the construct of Universality-Diversity Orientation (UDO, Miville et al., 1999), which entails the awareness and acceptance of both the similarities and differences among social groups.

The economic-hierarchical dimension reflects attitudes towards the organization of society along 'vertical' lines. On the conservative end of this dimension, values such as self-enhancement, status, superiority, power distance, though-mindedness, and competition are important. This pole is represented in the Dominance facet of the social dominance orientation construct, which taps into a general preference for social hierarchy (SDO-D, Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). On the progressive end of this dimension, equality, humanitarianism, tendermindedness, self-transcendence, harmony, and compassion are key principles. This pole is represented in the Egalitarianism facet of the SDO-construct, which taps into (anti-)egalitarianism ideals[2] (SDO-E; Ho et al., 2012; 2015). Recent research has provided robust evidence that both SDO-poles are related but relatively distinct, and both yield independent effects on important intergroup outcomes, such as prejudice (Ho et al., 2015), collective action tendencies (Meleady & Vermue, 2019), and support for intergroup apologies (Karunaratne & Laham, 2019).

All four ideological worldviews (i.e., RWA, UDO, SDO-D, and SDO-E) have been related to intergroup attitudes, but the bulk of these studies focused on only one or two of these predictors, and mostly looked at negative outcomes, such as prejudice (Van Assche, 2019). Some research did focus on positive outcomes, such as intergroup tolerance, socially inclusive behaviors, and reconciliation. UDO, for instance, was shown to be strongly positively related to tolerance of other religious and ethnic-culturral groups (Fuertes, Miville, Mohr, Sedlacek, & Gretchen, 2000; Van Assche & Van De Weghe, 2020). Furthermore, Zhao, Faulkner, and Perry (2020) revealed that RWA and particularly SDO were negatively associated with interpersonal gestures (e.g., saying hello to people from other groups), volunteering to help the disadvantaged (e.g., mentoring people from disadvantaged groups), and political action. Similarly, RWA was

moderately and SDO was strongly negatively related to reconciliation attitudes towards linguistic outgroups among Flemings and Walloons in Belgium (i.e., the Dutch *vs*. the French speaking community; Van Assche, Bostyn, De keersmaecker, Hansenne, & Dardenne, 2017).

Turning to intergroup apologies in particular, Mifune, Inamasu, Kohama, Ohtsubo, and Tago (2019) recently revealed that SDO was negatively correlated with supportive attitudes towards government-issued international apologies of Japan towards countries victimized by Japan during the colonial or occupation eras. Finally, across four studies in the U.S. and Australia, Karunaratne and Laham (2019) showed that specifically the egalitarianism sub-dimension (SDO-E) predicted apology support, more so than the dominance component (SDO-D) and the social-cultural conservatism dimension of RWA. The assertion that especially UDO and SDO-E are predictive of greater tolerance and sorry-attitudes can be traced back to research on the valence congruency effect (Cacioppo, Gardner, & Berntson, 1997), stating that positive predispositions are better predictors of positive attitudes, whereas negative predispositions better predict negative attitudes (see also Pittinsky, Rosenthal, & Montoya, 2011). As such, we assessed two negative (RWA and SDO-D) and two positive (UDO and SDO-E) orientations towards intergroup relations, predicting that particularly the latter ones would be more strongly associated with greater support for an apology, reparations, and awareness policy.

Intergroup Emotions as Mediators

Because public debates confronting a nation with its past, immoral actions rarely take place devoid of affect, in the present study, we also investigated the potential role of group-based emotions (guilt, shame, and anger; see Rees, Allpress, & Brown, 2013) and outgroup-oriented emotions (empathy; see Van Assche et al., 2017) as mechanisms through which ideological worldviews relate to pro-conciliatory attitudes. We focused on guilt and shame as self-conscious

emotions related to a constructive approach orientation following ingroup immoral behavior (Leach & Cidam, 2015), on anger as an intense mobilizing emotion (Leach, Iyer, & Pedersen, 2006), and on empathy, probably the hardest emotion to generate in intergroup relations. Group-based guilt can be defined as feeling remorseful for the illegitimate deeds of one's group, group-based shame is considered as feeling embarrassed about such wrongful behaviors (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998), and group-based anger entails a strong feeling of annoyance and displeasure towards one's group for its harmful actions (Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). Finally, outgroup empathy is usually conceptualized as the affective appreciation of the outgroup's emotional state (i.e., empathic concern) and the cognitive insight into the outgroup's viewpoint (i.e., perspective taking; Davis, 1983).

On the one hand, a small set of studies has linked ideological worldviews to these emotions, exactly because such emotions appeal to the specific motives underlying each worldview (e.g., ingroup protection for those high in RWA, outgroup interest for those high in UDO, status quo protection motivations among those high in SDO-D, and egalitarian values among those high in SDO-E). Hence, higher levels of RWA and SDO have been related to lower levels of outgroup empathy (Bäckström, & Björklund, 2007; Nicol & Rounding, 2013; Van Assche et al., 2017), and greater UDO has been associated with higher outgroup empathy and group-based guilt (Poteat & Spanierman, 2008). Notably, Shepherd and Spears (2013) revealed non-significant relationships of SDO with guilt and shame, and no studies to date have related the separate facets of SDO to these group-based and outgroup-oriented emotions.

On the other hand, numerous studies have pointed to the role of these emotions in predicting apology and repair attitudes towards groups that had been wronged in the past. Where Čehajić-Clancy, Effron, Halperin, Liberman, and Ross (2011) showed that guilt predicted

support for reparative measures in Israel and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Gausel, Leach, Vignoles, and

Brown (2012) showed that shame was a strong predictor of restitution attitudes in Norway.

Allpres, Barlow, Brown, and Louis's (2010) results indicated strong ties of both guilt and shame

with apology and compensation support in the United Kingdom and Australia (see also McGarty

et al., 2005). Furthermore, research revealed that guilt, shame, and particularly anger predicted

more reparation and compensation attitudes towards Iran among British nationals (Shepherd,

Manstead, & Spears, 2013), towards Iraq among American citizens (Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel,

2007), and towards Aboriginal Australians among non-Indigenous Australians (Leach et al.,

2006). In the latter two studies, anger appeared to be the strongest and only significant predictor

in an integrative model that included anger and guilt as well. As such, we predicted that group-

based anger rather than guilt and shame would mediate the worldview-sorry-link.

Finally, outgroup empathy has been shown to predict both apology (Howell, Turowski,

Burrow, 2012) and compensation attitudes (Lu & McKeown, 2018), even after controlling for

guilt and shame (Brown, & Čehajić, 2008). In the same vein, empathy was the only significant

predictor of more willingness to let immigrants take part in university sports in a model including

empathy and guilt (Harth, Kessler, & Leach, 2008). The vital role of outgroup-oriented empathy

over and beyond group-based emotions was also evinced by Van Assche and colleagues' work

(2017), which revealed that empathy (next to anger) mediated the relationship between RWA

and reconciliation, a construct closely related to sorry-attitudes. As such, our hypothesis is that,

together with anger, empathy would be the most important process explaining the worldview-

sorry-associations.

At this point, it must be noted that most prior studies investigated these constructs in a

piecemeal fashion, by only including one or two predictors, mediators, and/or outcomes. The

present research takes a different approach by testing our hypothesis in a unifying model that includes four ideological worldviews (i.e., RWA, UDO, SDO-D, and SDO-E) as predictors, four intergroup emotions (i.e., guilt, shame, anger, and empathy) as mediators, and three healing attitudes towards Congo (repair, apology, and awareness) as outcomes (see Figure 2).

Method

Participants

We recruited an undergraduate student sample from Ghent University to test the proposed model. Two hundred and seventy-seven Flemish (75.5% women, $M_{age} = 18.92$ years, $SD_{age} = 2.95$) respondents were invited to the lab to participate in an online study in return for partial course credits. The present study was part of a larger data collection for an unrelated project including other variables (i.e., intergroup contact, outgroup attitudes, collective action intentions, and affirmative action attitudes) as well. No prior information was given before the survey, but a detailed debriefing about the purpose of the study was provided afterwards. Data from seven participants were omitted from further analyses because they did not have the Belgian nationality, twelve others were omitted because they had a migration background. The final sample of 258 students completed the full questionnaire, yielding no missing data.

Measures

All measures were rated on 7-point Likert scales anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree). The means and standard deviations are included in Table 1.

Ideological worldviews.

First, the conservative and progressive ends of the social-cultural dimension of ideological orientations towards intergroup relations were measured. Participants responded to a 9-item version of the Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, and Heled's (2010) RWA-scale. An example

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item is: *'Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn'* ($\alpha = .80$). UDO was assessed with the 15-item Short Form of the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale (Fuertes et al., 2000). An example item reads *'I would like to join an organization that emphasizes getting to know people from different countries'* ($\alpha = .80$).

Next, the conservative and progressive ends of the economic-hierarchical ideology dimension were assessed. To measure SDO-D and SDO-E, a 4-item SDO_7 scale (Ho et al., 2015) was administered. The two SDO-D items were highly interrelated ($r = .52$, $p < .001$; example item: *'Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups'*), as were the two SDO-E items ($r = .57$, $p < .001$; reverse-coded example item: *'Group equality should not be our primary goal'*). We then created two composite measures based on the two items for each of the SDO-dimensions.

Intergroup emotions.

Group-based guilt was measured with three items, taken from Rees and colleagues (2013) and adapted to the Belgian-Congolese context. An example item is *'Even if I have done nothing bad, I feel guilty for the negative things Belgians have done in Congo in the past'* ($\alpha = .98$). Five items tapped into group-based (moral) shame (see Rees et al., 2013). An example item reads *'I feel ashamed for the damage done by Belgians in Congo'* ($\alpha = .97$).

Group-based anger was measured with two items, adapted from Van Assche and colleagues (2017). Both items were highly interrelated ($r = .58$, $p < .001$; example item: *'Thinking about how Belgians have treated the Congolese makes me feel angry and irritated'*). Finally, outgroup empathy was measured with two items (see Van Assche et al., 2017). Again, both items were strongly interrelated ($r = .52$, $p < .001$; example item: *'I feel sympathy for the Congolese community'*).

Pro-conciliatory attitudes.

Attitudes towards reparation, an official apology, and awareness programs were each measured with three items. These items were based on scales by Brown, González, Zagefka, Manzi, and Čehajić (2008), and Van Assche, Politi, Van Dessel, and Phalet (2020). Some specific items (e.g., concerning street names) were added to better represent the current debate. The exact item wordings for repair attitudes are '*I think Belgium should donate money to the families of the Congolese victims of the colonization*', '*I think Belgium should change certain street names to the names of important Congolese freedom fighters*', and '*I think Belgium should take immediate measures to repair the damage of its colonial past*' ($\alpha = .80$).

For apology attitudes, the items read '*Our government should apologize for all the maltreatment and deprivation we've caused during the colonization of Congo*', '*I think Belgium should officially apologize to the families of the Congolese victims*', and '*An official apology is an important step towards the reconciliation between Belgium and Congo*' ($\alpha = .93$).

Finally, attitudes towards assistance and awareness measures were assessed as follows: '*I would like schools to invest in books and other school materials that would help students to better understand the Belgian colonial past*', '*I think we should systematically intervene and make Belgians aware of the colonial history of Belgium*', and '*It is important to make Belgians aware of the immoral behavior towards Congolese during the colonization*' ($\alpha = .90$).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

First, the correlations among all study variables were calculated (see Table 1). The four ideological orientations were all interrelated in the expected direction, with negative relationships between the positive and negative ends of the social-cultural (i.e., UDO and RWA),

and economic-hierarchical dimensions (i.e., SDO-D and SDO-E), respectively, and with positive

associations among the positive (i.e., UDO and SDO-E) and negative orientations (i.e., RWA

and SDO-D). Next, the four intergroup emotions were all strongly positively interrelated, and

each of them had a positive relationship with UDO. Unexpectedly, the emotions were not

significantly related to RWA, SDO-D, and SDO-E, with the exception of two small associations

of outgroup empathy with authoritarianism (negative direction) and egalitarianism (positive

direction). Finally, the three outcomes were strongly interrelated and showed positive

associations with all four intergroup emotions. Again, the only ideological orientation that was

consistently related to sorry-attitudes was UDO, with the other positive orientation (i.e., SDO-E)

also showing small-to-medium positive associations with apology and awareness attitudes.

Notably, repair attitudes were also slightly negatively related to RWA, and apology attitudes

were slightly negatively associated with both RWA and SDO-D.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Study Variables.

| Measure	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. RWA	2.85	0.89	-									
2. UDO	5.02	0.71	$-.26^{***}$	-								
3. SDO-D	2.60	1.32	$.41^{***}$	$-.15^{*}$	-							
4. SDO-E	5.22	1.53	$-.22^{***}$	$.27^{***}$	$-.48^{***}$	-						
5. Guilt	3.91	1.72	$-.04$	$.23^{***}$	$-.04$	$.12^{a}$	-					
6. Shame	3.69	1.60	$-.05$	$.29^{***}$	$-.03$	$.11^{a}$	$.86^{***}$	-				
7. Anger	3.88	1.49	$-.07$	$.23^{***}$	$-.11^{a}$	$.11^{a}$	$.64^{***}$	$.70^{***}$	-			
8. Empathy	5.09	1.18	$-.19^{**}$	$.29^{***}$	$-.05$	$.22^{***}$	$.50^{***}$	$.55^{***}$	$.57^{***}$	-		
9. Repair	3.79	1.30	$-.14^{*}$	$.29^{***}$	$-.09$	$.12^{a}$	$.43^{***}$	$.45^{***}$	$.45^{***}$	$.43^{***}$	-	
10. Apology	4.86	1.47	$-.15^{*}$	$.38^{***}$	$-.16^{*}$	$.21^{***}$	$.48^{***}$	$.51^{***}$	$.48^{***}$	$.49^{***}$	$.62^{***}$	-
11. Awareness	4.66	1.34	$-.04$	$.39^{***}$	$-.06$	$.20^{**}$	$.46^{***}$	$.52^{***}$	$.50^{***}$	$.54^{***}$	$.47^{***}$	$.54^{***}$

Note: [a]: $p < .10$; [*]: $p < .05$; [**]: $p < .01$; [***]: $p < .001$

Main Analyses

The correlations already revealed some interesting patterns, pointing to the crucial role of UDO and empathy in predicting pro-conciliatory attitudes. These were further analyzed in a unifying path model using the MPlus package (version 8.1; Muthén & Muthén, 2017). This path model revealed a clear and consistent pattern (see Figure 2)[3]. First, UDO was a strong and positive predictor of all intergroup emotions. RWA (positively) and SDO-E (negatively) also predicted outgroup empathy. Second, outgroup empathy – and to a lesser extent group-based anger – were the strongest positive predictors of apology, reparation, and awareness attitudes. Indeed, group-based anger positively predicted support for repair and awareness efforts, but not apology support. Empathy positively predicted all three outcomes, and UDO also had direct effects on all three sorry-attitudes (even after controlling for all other predictors in the model). Third, the results of our mediation model – which tested the association of ideological worldviews with healing attitudes via intergroup emotions (see Table 2) – showed that empathy was also the most important mediator explaining the associations of both positive intergroup orientations (i.e., UDO and SDO-E) with the dependent variables. Finally, although they did not reach traditional significance levels, three other (i.e., borderline significant) indirect effects are worth noting: to a minor extent, empathy (partly) explained the negative relationship of RWA with awareness, and anger (partly) mediated the links of UDO with repair and awareness attitudes.

Figure 2

Standardized Results of the Model testing the Association of Ideological Worldviews with "Sorry"-Attitudes via Intergroup Emotions.
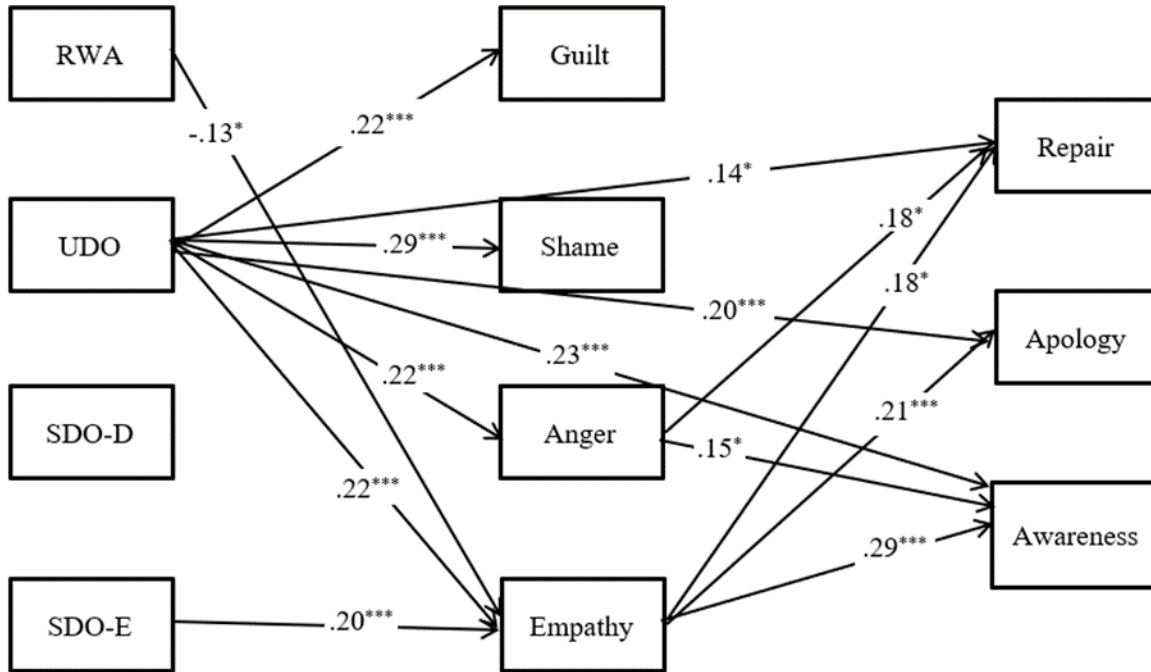
Note: * p <.05; ** p <.01; *** p <.001. For the sake of parsimony, only significant paths are portrayed. Full results are available on the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/ypbkr).

Table 2

Unstandardized Estimates (Standard Errors in Brackets) of the Mediation Model Testing the Association of Ideological Worldviews with "Sorry"-Attitudes via Intergroup Emotions

From RWA	Via Guilt	Via Shame	Via Anger	Via Empathy
To Repair	.01 (.02)	.00 (.01)	.01 (.02)	-.03 (.02)
To Apology	.01 (.01)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	-.05 (.03)
To Awareness	.00 (.01)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	**-.06ª (.03)**
From UDO	Via Guilt	Via Shame	Via Anger	Via Empathy
To Repair	.06 (.05)	.03 (.06)	**.08ª (.04)**	**.07* (.04)**
To Apology	.05 (.05)	.09 (.06)	.06 (.04)	**.10* (.04)**
To Awareness	.01 (.04)	.10 (.06)	**.06ª (.04)**	**.12** (.05)**
From SDO-D	Via Guilt	Via Shame	Via Anger	Via Empathy
To Repair	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.02)	.02 (.02)
To Apology	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	.03 (.02)
To Awareness	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	.04 (.02)
From SDO-E	Via Guilt	Via Shame	Via Anger	Via Empathy
To Repair	.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	**.03ª (.02)**
To Apology	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	**.04* (.02)**
To Awareness	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	**.05* (.02)**

Note: ª: *p*< .10; *: *p*< .05; **: *p*< .01; ***: *p*< .001. Significant effects in boldface.

Discussion

The current research aimed to contribute to the recent public and political debates about Belgium's past colonization of Congo, the acknowledgment of the atrocities during this period, and the potential ways to make amends and restore the historically tense international relations between the two countries. In particular, we investigated which ideological worldviews and intergroup emotions best predicted support for repair, apology, and awareness efforts. The model test revealed a straightforward pattern, leading to three takeaway points. First, UDO, an indicator of social-cultural open-mindedness and a generally positive orientation towards intergroup relations, appeared to be the strongest predictor of all intergroup emotions (i.e., group-based guilt, shame, anger, and outgroup empathy). Second, outgroup empathy, reflecting sympathy for and understanding of the suffering of the Congolese and the ability to take their point of view on

the colonial past, was found to be the strongest predictor of all three sorry-attitudes. Third, and most importantly, this emotion of empathy was also the most important process explaining the associations of UDO with supportive attitudes towards all forms of healing.

The Road to Intergroup "Healing"

A number of lessons can be drawn from these findings, both theoretically and practically. First, by focusing on positive intergroup outcomes, our study responded to recent calls by Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi, and Lewis (2008) and Pittinsky and colleagues (2011) for a shift in research interest from negative intergroup attitudes to the determinants of intergroup harmony. Indeed, our understanding of how to actively promote positive outcomes within intergroup relations is less well developed. Studying the social-psychological processes related to such positive outcomes is important because it could provide new insights for planning real-life interventions aimed at improving intergroup relations rather than simply reducing prejudice and conflict between groups (González, Manzi, & Noor, 2011). When it comes to "healing" intergroup tensions between Belgium and Congo, our results point to the key role of a universal-diverse orientation and egalitarian values, rather than the typically-studied authoritarianism and social dominance worldviews. Realizing and accepting that other groups are different than and at the same time similar to you and your ingroup, broadens your worldview (Miville et al., 1999), and stimulates egalitarian principles (Pratto et al., 2006). In a way, this is an interesting finding in the prospect of reconciliation between Belgium and Congo, because – at least according to these results – it is more advisable to try to encourage these 'progressive' intergroup orientations (i.e., UDO and SDO-E) than to change the negative attitudes stemming from the 'conservative' ideological worldviews (i.e., RWA and SDO-D).

Secondly, our results indicate that outgroup empathy (and group-based anger) also seem crucial components, much more than the typically-studied group-based emotions of guilt and shame. Other scholars (e.g., Iyer, Leach, & Pedersen, 2004) have also advised to look beyond guilt and shame, suggesting that outgroup sympathy and moral outrage might play a more vital role. Guilt and shame might promote group apologies and material compensations, but these emotions do not work beyond empathy and anger, and they do not form a solid basis for general opposition to inequality (as signposted in the correlation table). Corroborating the key role of empathy, Noor and Halabi (2018) revealed that experimentally inducing empathy towards outgroup members (even violent ones, such as terrorists) among Israelis can foster forgiveness.

Based on the present findings, interventions aiming at boosting a universal-diverse orientation and increasing a sense of empathy for the suffering of the victim group seem most encouraging to bolster reconciliation (see Seppälä et al., 2017). Such interventions incite a more broad-minded cultural openness and curiosity, which is the one of the key motives behind empathic concern. For instance, multicultural trainings have been related to improved UDO-levels (Yeh & Arora, 2003), reading a letter from a Jewish person increased Arab's empathy towards Israelis (Schechtman & Tanus, 2006), and watching a short video on institutional racism augmented empathy (and racial awareness) among White Americans (Soble, Spanierman, & Liao, 2011). Finally, making individuals focus on the disadvantage suffered by an outgroup evokes empathy, as such increasing support for efforts at equality between the groups (Harth et al., 2008).

Translating these prior research findings to the Belgian-Congolese context, multicultural training interventions might open Belgians' eyes, broaden their worldview, and as such make them more aware of the colonial past. Moreover, the usefulness of small and inexpensive

interventions like reading a letter or watching a short video-clip might be even more promising. Merely providing Belgians with the opportunity to read King Philippe's letter of regret, or to read the many online testimonials by Belgian-Congolese people (that were also published in some newspapers), could equally create awareness and support for further reconciliatory steps. In the same vein, the recent documentary "Kinderen van de kolonie" (["Children of the Colony"]; Canvas, 2018) might have had a similar impact on its viewer audience. Future studies could evaluate this, for example, by using the innovative field work methodology proposed by Betsy Paluck (2009) in the context of Rwanda.

What Could Be the Next Steps?

Our results also highlight promising next steps to further restore the relations between Belgium and Congo. Els Van Hoof, leading the Belgian Chamber of Representative's Foreign Affairs Committee, reacted to the monarch's letter as follows: "It's the beginning of a process […] and it's a process in parliament but also in society." In the federal parliament, a commission to investigate Belgium's colonial past has been officially installed, comparable to the Truth & Reconciliation Commission carried out in South Africa after the fall of the Apartheid regime (Gibson, 2006). Such an initiative can foster cohesion between groups previously in conflict, mainly through the empathic acknowledgement of blame and the articulation of feelings of guilt, shame, and – indeed – even anger towards past wrongdoings and injustices.

Nevertheless, studies on the "Gacaca" (i.e., the Truth and Reconciliation procedure developed in Rwanda after the genocide) indicate that such a view of transitional justice potent enough to heal deep psychological wounds might be too idealistic (Rimé, Kanyangara, Paez, & Yzerbyt, 2012). Indeed, victims who participated in Gacaca afterwards often showed renewed/reactivated feelings of anger, were less inclined to forgive the perpetrators, were more

revengeful, and opted more for intragroup and less intergroup contact (Kanyangara, Rimé, Paez, & Yzerbyt, 2014). These findings are also reflected in the recommendation of Bloomfield (2003), who stated that one cannot expect Truth and Reconciliation procedures to provide reconciliation as such. Rather, they offer the ingredients that pave the way to reconciliation, while it remains essential to avoid the potential pitfalls and to learn from the experiences in other Truth and Reconciliation committees.

In this respect, the federal reconciliation commission could eventually advise the Belgian government to officially apologize. Such an apology, a speech act with the aim of promoting reconciliation between two (or more) parties (Tavuchis, 1991), should not only include a statement of regret or remorse and the recognition of suffering of the victim group (which King Philippe already did), as these are just two criteria that constitute a "comprehensive" apology (Tavuchis, 1991). According to Blatz, Schumann, and Ross (2009; also see Scher & Darley, 1997), a comprehensive apology should also comprise an acceptance of responsibility by the perpetrator group, a promise of non-repetition, and an offer of reparations, elements that were not present in the King's letter (The Guardian, 2020).

In society, the restoration process is also ongoing, as demonstrated in the petitions, the testimonials, the adaptation of street names, other forms of solidarity-based collective action, and even in the protests and destructions of Leopold II statues. These are all signs that Belgians might be ready to make amends and face the colonial past. Indeed, as can be deduced from the mean ratings for each outcome, support for apologies and awareness policies seems relatively high. While we did not assess the other side of the acknowledgement coin, i.e., denial, we can expect that most Belgians do recognize the past wrongdoings and levels of denial would be fairly low (although we should be careful with extrapolations based on the average scores in the

outcomes found in the current Flemish student sample). We can also expect that individual

differences in worldviews and emotions would predict individual differences in such denial.

Results from previous studies in fact mirrored this claim, by demonstrating that denial is fueled

by system-justifying worldviews such as RWA and SDO (Sibley, Liu, Duckitt, & Khan, 2008)

and by indicating that the group-based emotions under study here (e.g., guilt and shame) can

form a barrier against such denial (see Bilali, Iqbal, & Freel, 2019). That said, support for repair

measures seems lower (though it is still around the theoretical scale mean[4]). Just like the Belgian

government, the Belgian population seems rather hesitant to make monetary and other

compensations towards the Congolese, perhaps due to political and legal considerations (e.g.,

fear that the money would be misused, given the recent allegations of deep-rooted corruption

within the regime; see Matti, 2010). One potential way to overcome this hesitation, is starting a

conversation with (the families of) the actual victims, without shifting onus obligations onto

them (Zaiser & Giner-Sorolla, 2013). Such open conversations might help to overcome fears and

threat perceptions that impede current repair initiatives.

　　　Future research should consider whether it is truly the realistic-economic threat concerns

that drive Belgians' attitudes, or whether a symbolic sense of threat pertaining to pride of one's

ingroup culture and image also plays a role. Such studies could examine these threat processes in

the long run, whilst at the same time including (changes in) intergroup emotions over time. It

also remains the question if these results would replicate in a representative adult sample, which

would typically be lower in education and in open-minded ideological worldviews (Franssen,

Dhont, & Van Hiel, 2013). Importantly, previous work (e.g., Licata & Klein, 2010) also

indicated that older Belgians typically have a more positive, paternalistic representation of the

colonial era, as evinced in lower levels of collective guilt and lower support for reparative

actions. Future studies should thus include older generations to examine if ideological

worldviews and intergroup emotions play a similar role in this group. Although generational

mean differences in healing attitudes might be observed (e.g., due to older people's identity

being more threatened, their knowledge of the past being more elaborated, or their interpretation

of the history being more paternalistic), equivalent associations with worldviews and emotions

are expected in both young and old populations.

In the same vein, it should be investigated whether our findings are generalizable to the

French-speaking community in Belgium. Perceptions of victimhood with regards to the Belgian

linguistic conflict are found to be higher among Dutch-speaking Belgians, and especially (again)

among the older generations (Rimé, Bouchat, Klein, & Licata, 2015). This subsample of older

Flemings showed particularly lower levels of national identification and greater support for

radical separation of the country. Such perceptions cannot be seen independently from the

economic, political, and colonial background in which this generation was brought up and

socialized. Indeed, the power hierarchy between the linguistic groups was different during the

colonial epoch, with French-speaking Belgians having more economic and political control. As

older Dutch-speaking individuals might feel like their group was not the prime perpetrator in

Congo, one could expect a large generational difference in a Flemish sample (with especially

older individuals being opposed to an apology or another form of reparation), while a smaller

generational difference would be expected in a Walloon sample (with younger and older people

being relatively in favor of healing, depending on their social-ideological makeup). This tentative

hypothesis could be explored in future research.

Finally, future work should also investigate what the Congolese think about this issue.

This study only considered the perspective of Belgium (the perpetrator group), but it is also

relevant to examine the perspective of Congo (the victim group). For example, is there a need for an apology among Congolese citizens nowadays? Are they willing to receive and/or accept an apology (cf. Leunissen et al., 2013)? After all, recovery and reconciliation are processes that take place in the context of (at least) two parties (both perpetrator and victim). This victim perspective is therefore also something that should be addressed in further research.

Conclusion

To summarize, the present findings add nuance to the heated and polarized discussions on how Belgium can fully reconcile with Congo, and can be applied to offer a more detailed picture on how other collective movements around the globe are presently fighting to make amends with past misconducts and "bury the hatchet". Our findings indicate that open-minded individuals, in particular the ones embodying a universal and inclusive worldview towards social-cultural outgroups, seem to be the ones most willing to apologize to Congo, repair the immoral behaviors in some way, and create more awareness about this dark page in Belgium's history, exactly because they feel more empathic concern for the historical outgroup sufferings.

By supporting this notion of "sorry", these Belgians solicit the Congolese nowadays to forgive, although it is unlikely that they will ever forget, as summed up in Lumumba's (1960) original Independence Speech: "Although this independence of the Congo is being proclaimed today by agreement with Belgium, an amicable country, with which we are on equal terms, no Congolese will ever forget that independence was won in struggle."

Notes

[1] Belgium also controlled large parts of Rwanda and Burundi from 1922 to 1962 and had a small concession in Tianjin, China (Nield, 2015).

[2] Until recently, SDO was assessed globally as a unidimensional construct (not explicitly distinguishing between SDO-D and SDO-E). Note that SDO-E is usually interpreted as the *anti*-egalitarianism sub-dimension of social dominance orientation. For the purpose of this study, however, we reversed the items of the SDO-E scale and considered it a *pro*-egalitarianism measure, as such presenting an ideological worldview involving a positive (economic-hierarchical) orientation towards intergroup relations.

[3] Analyses controlling for age and gender yielded almost identical results (i.e., all significant effects remained significant, and all effects that were not significant remained not significant), with one small exception: the significant indirect effect of UDO on repair attitudes via empathy no longer reached the conventional significance threshold after controlling for age and gender.

[4] The data had already been collected before the 60th anniversary of the Congolese independence, and the events that surrounded this commemoration (e.g., King Philippe's letter, and the removal of Leopold II statues).

Data availability statement

Data are available on https://osf.io/ypbkr/.

Competing interests statement

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Authors' contributions statement

J.V.A. conceived of the presented idea, J.V.A. and A.R. made substantial contributions to the design of the work. J.V.A. performed data acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of the results. J.V.A. drafted the manuscript, A.R., T.H., and M.N. provided several critical revisions. All authors approved the final version of this paper.

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