

Political competition of collective memories at school: the Holocaust case  
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Summary

The school is an agent of socialisation in which coexists a plurality of collective memories. The curriculum ensures the transmission of official memory. However, alternative collective memories might also be discussed by students and teachers. This leads to a competition of memories. More specifically, this observation may be made regarding the transmission of the Holocaust in Belgium. This emotional historical fact, classically taught according to the official curriculum, is nevertheless sometimes questioned. This is for example the case for non-Belgian students, who consider other possible memories and want to discuss about these. In order to analyze this possible competition between collective memories, we explored the speeches of young from multiple national origins in relation to the topic of the Holocaust. Two focus groups, differing on the basis of the national origin of the participants, were conducted with young students aged from sixteen to eighteen. The discourse analysis aimed at showing (1) if there is a competition between different collective memories, and (2) to what extent political arguments are mobilized by the students.

Key words: Political socialisation, Memory, Holocaust, Representations, Perceptions

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The school participates in the political socialisation of young people in the sense that it can shape, through the courses offered, their attitudes and behaviour towards the authorities of a political system. Historical events are inscribed in the school's curricula and textbooks, designed in part by the political authorities. In French-speaking Belgium, the French Community is the governing authority over educational matters and thus contributes to the development of these school curricula and textbooks.

In doing so, the authority participates in the transmission of a certain collective memory. Indeed, in presenting particular past events, the school does not claim to be exhaustive. It must choose<sup>1</sup> from among notable past events. This collective memory is also official in the sense that it consists of "all official representations of the past"<sup>2</sup> and, therefore, is an authorised memory revealing a part of the identity of a group all the while being a representation [*mise-en-scène*] of and a showcase for the group<sup>3</sup>.

From amongst past events, the transmission of the memory of the Holocaust occupies a special place in the schools of the French Community of Belgium. Emphasis is placed on historical fact localised both geographically and temporally. However, schools are attended by young people of various origins, each possessing different collective memories.

On this basis, a question arises: At school, could the transmission of the memory of the Holocaust affect young people's image of authorities of a political system? Indeed, one could hypothesise that young immigrants or immigrant-origin youth, when told the story of the Holocaust, would favour their collective memories, and criticize the choice of Francophone Belgian political authorities and thus have a negative image of them. What exactly does this mean?

To answer this question and to confirm or reject this hypothesis, it is first necessary to clarify what is meant by the image of the authorities in a context of political socialisation. As the ideas of young people were obtained using focus groups, details about this methodological approach used are included as well. Finally, a comparison is made between the ideas expressed by young French-speaking Belgians on one hand, and young immigrants or immigrant-origin youth on the other in order to identify the images of political authorities following the transmission of the Holocaust.

### **The double image of political authorities**

David Easton and Jack Dennis define political authorities through system analysis. For these authors, political socialisation trains young people to vaguely support some component of the political system, i.e., the authorities<sup>4</sup>, meaning those who undertake the formulation and administration of daily actions and binding decisions

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<sup>1</sup> Rioux Jean-Pierre, « Devoir de mémoire, devoir d'intelligence », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 2002, n° 73, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Rosoux Valérie et van Ypersele Laurence, « Le passé national belge : entre commémoration et silence », in Luminet Olivier (dir.), *Belgique-België : un État, deux mémoires collectives ?*, Wavres, Mardaga, 2012, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> The other two components are the regime and the political community. Easton David et Hess Robert D., « The Child's Political World », *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, août 1962, vol. 6, n° 3, p. 233 et Easton David et Dennis Jack, *Children in the Political System. Origins of Political Legitimacy*, New York, McGraw-Hill Book, 1969, pp. 58-59.

for a society. According to system analysis, political socialisation is thus conceived as one of the responses of the political system to prevent unwanted pressure being placed upon it<sup>5</sup>.

If the image of the authorities plays a fundamental role in the formation of vague support of political authorities, such support will depend on the double image that young people can have: the cognitive image referring to the representation and symbolic or empirical form they have of authorities, and the affective image referring to the feelings that young people develop towards authority influencing the degree to which they might support it<sup>6</sup>.

According to the proponents of system analysis, diffuse support towards authorities is formed through a process involving several steps: politicisation, personalisation, institutionalisation and idealisation<sup>7</sup>. The authors note that there are different variables that influence these processes, including the level of education, political structure, generational influences, gendered differences etc.

### **Methodological developments**

This contribution is based on the ideas articulated during focus groups of students in secondary education in the French Community of Belgium<sup>8</sup>. Two separate groups were formed from which data were collected. The first group consisted of students from Athénée Saucy-Destenay (ASD), a state subsidised public school — part of the official educational system [*réseau officiel*]<sup>9</sup> — and located in the centre of Liege. For the most part, this first group consists of young people from immigrant or foreign-origin families<sup>10</sup> from disadvantaged backgrounds<sup>11</sup>. The second group comes from the Institut Sainte Marie de la Providence (ISMP), a church subsidised free school — not part of the official educational system [*réseau libre*] — located just outside of Liege. The group consists of young people from Belgian families of largely or entirely disadvantaged backgrounds. There are thus two variables differentiating these two groups: the type of education system and the youths' national origins. The

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Easton David et Dennis Jack, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-105.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* See also Niemi Richard I. et Sobieszek Barbara I., « Political Socialization », *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1977, vol. 3, pp. 209-233.

<sup>8</sup> In Belgium, usually after three years in nursery school, students spend six years in primary school (first to sixth) and six years in secondary school (again from first to the sixth secondary). Education is compulsory until the age of 18 years, theoretically until the end of the sixth year of secondary school.

<sup>9</sup> There are two teaching networks in the French Community of Belgium: the official network organized and financed by the French Community of Belgium and the free network organized by a religious or non religious power and subsidized by the French Community of Belgium. The theme of genocide is discussed in the fifth year of secondary school in the free network and in the sixth year in the official network.

<sup>10</sup> At the end of the discussion, a questionnaire was distributed to students to know their main sociological characteristics. In this questionnaire, we have not asked the nationality of the students — but the nationality of the parents — because most students have Belgian nationality. This question is not well seen in Belgium. Children born in Belgium can acquire nationality on the basis of a request. Young had one of the following nationalities or had parents with one or two of these countries: Aramaic, Armenian, Spanish, French, Iraqi, Italian, Moroccan and Nigerian. Two students were of Belgian origin.

<sup>11</sup> Three criteria were used to describe a social environment in the context of our research: the level of education and parental employment, the level of school (by teachers who met us) and the total taxable income municipalities in which youth live, based on a ranking by the Belgian Ministry of Economy.

differences are minimised regarding the education systems as each system uses identical textbooks<sup>12</sup>.

Focus groups were conducted on the basis of an identical research protocol, which helps to ensure consistency in their conduct and facilitates comparisons between their findings. In the first phase, students were presented with a short history recalling the Holocaust<sup>13</sup>.

With the goal of stimulating a discussion amongst them, following the story, students had to imagine four different scenarios including the executioner, victim or witness; this first segment lasted about thirty minutes. Then, a second phase of the discussion set aside the idea of scenarios and instead consisted of asking questions on various topics, such as: the role of various means of socialisation, their views on selected memorials or their ways of looking at the memory of a genocide. Though the protocol provided a structured discussion, some flexibility was also allowed. Thus, young people were able to address some topics more spontaneously thus requiring the facilitator to shift some of the ordering of topics to be discussed. Such adjustments are sometimes necessary when using focus groups<sup>14</sup>.

The young people's ideas expressed during the focus groups have been systematically analysed using WeftQDA (a free qualitative analysis software), based on the researcher's reflective work and following the methodology of Grounded Theory<sup>15</sup> whose central analysis principle is "the constant return to the comparison between the products of analysis and empirical evidence"<sup>16</sup>. As this approach does not force theories onto data, "the researcher is open to the emergence of elements of theory and of concepts that are suggested by the field data throughout the analytical process"<sup>17</sup>.

What we can draw from this rich source of data?

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<sup>12</sup> For the official teaching network, see Hasquin Hervé et Jadoulle Jean-Louis, *FuturHist. Le Futur, toute une histoire ! De l'âge industriel à la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, Namur Didier Hatier, 2010, 336 p. For the free teaching network, see Jadoulle Jean-Louis et Georges Jean (dir.), *Construire l'Histoire. Un monde en mutation (de 1919 à nos jours)*, Namur Didier Hatier, 2009, 336 p.

<sup>13</sup> The story read was deliberately vague and confusing to stimulate discussion. Given the time constraints, we preferred reading a relatively short history, by considering the theme of genocide and not specifically referring to the Shoah. For example, the time scale mentioned does not match the historical reality. Moreover, to stimulate debate, certain statements do not correspond to historical reality. To read this story, see Grandjean Geoffrey, *Les jeunes Belges francophones et le génocide des Juifs. Les enseignements d'une perspective de socialisation politique*, Thèse de doctorat, février 2012, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Van der Maren Jean-Marie, « La maquette d'un entretien. Son importance dans le bon déroulement de l'entretien et dans la collecte de données de qualité », *Recherches Qualitatives*, 2010, vol. 29, n° 1, p. 133.

<sup>15</sup> Luckerhoff Jason et Guillemette François, « Méthodologie générale de la théorisation enracinée : un projet épistémologique », in Luckerhoff Jason et Guillemette François (dir.), *Méthodologie de la théorisation enracinée. Fondements, procédures et usages*, Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2012, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Guillemette François, « L'approche de la Grounded Theory ; pour innover ? », *Recherches Qualitatives*, 2006, vol. 26, n° 1, p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

**Rival collective memories**

The Holocaust put into perspective

During the focus group discussions, the young Belgians spoke quite a lot of the Holocaust, of its central figure, Adolph Hitler and the fate of the Jews during World War II. The immigrant and immigrant-origin youths addressed this past event with a lesser degree of familiarity.

In both cases, the young people recognised the primary role of the school in the transmission of knowledge regarding this historical event. Thus, regardless of the group, the participants mention that their history classes allowed them to identify the developments of the genocidal process during the Second World War. To this, the youths also added that school visits to such memorial sites are part of their educational experience, complementing the knowledge transmitted. Of note as well is the youths’ emphasis on the school’s role as a medium of instruction and not of education per se; parents educate the children, the school must, according to the young people, instruct the children.

**Table**

ISMP	ASD
9/11 attacks	Apartheid
Attack in Thailand	Colonization
Belgian conflict	Conflict in Turkmenistan
Israeli-Palestinian Conflict	Korean conflict
Sino-Tibetan conflict	Conflict in Georgia
Expulsion of aliens	Irish conflict
Rwandan genocide	Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
War in Lebanon	Sino-Tibetan conflict
War in Afghanistan	Slavery
Terrorism	Genocide of Kurds
	Genocide in the former Yugoslavia
	Rwandan genocide
	War in Lebanon
	War in Irak
	War in Chechnya
	Franco-Moroccan War
	Struggle for civil rights in the United States
	Massacre of Indians
	Massacre of the Mexicans
	Migration of African immigrants
	Saint Bartholomew

Though the Holocaust was central to the focus group discussions, these young people placed it within the context of other past and current events. Separated into

two groups, the Table shows all the events mentioned by the young people during their discussions<sup>18</sup>.

From the outset, the young people seem to have assimilated the concept of war and conflict with that of genocide. Yet these two concepts should not be confused. To better understand the link these youths have created between the two concepts, it is useful to review the scholastic curricula and textbook content in place in French-speaking Belgium. When the Holocaust is explained in school, it is contextualised within the framework of the Second World War<sup>19</sup> — a difference not easily made between these two concept-events, hence the confusion between the concepts<sup>20</sup>.

Moreover, if all the young people cited numerous past and historical events, it would become clear that the immigrant and immigrant-origin youths mobilise more. It is particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that holds the attention of these young people. The following is an excerpt, from the focus group highlighting an exchange between some youths, in which links are made between Israeli policy and Hitler's methods<sup>21</sup>.

Cheikh [...] not that long ago, I saw on TV, in some Jewish schools in Israel, they teach students that it's the Palestinians who are foreigners in their country. [...].

Host: And you, what do you think about that?

Cheikh: Oh, it's tactics.

Chirine: Hitler, again, this is really it.

Cherazade: It's crazy but.

Chirine: It has already happened once, and it's happening a second time.

Speaking about the young French-speaking Belgians, it is interesting to note the links connected to Belgium's inter-community conflict. These young people are concerned about the state of relations between the two major linguistically-defined communities present in Belgium: Dutch-speakers in the north and Francophones in the south. They then not hesitate to draw a parallel between the present and the past. Hubert confided his concern to the group: "when you see the Dutch-speakers coming to Parliament with banners to protest against us, it reminds me of what was happening before because it was a hatred between people that created that. As

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<sup>18</sup> The table shows the terms as expressed by young people.

<sup>19</sup> See Hasquin Hervé et Jadouille Jean-Louis, *op. cit.* et Jadouille Jean-Louis et Georges Jean (dir.), *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Although these concepts should not be confused. Jean-François Bossy distinguished war of genocide on the basis of several criteria. So while the war assumed an enemy, the genocide pretext a part of humanity declared harmful. While the action in the context of war is a battle, it is a "operation" in the case of genocide. As the war assumed heroic virtues and a spirit of sacrifice, genocide requires skills such as method, organization, dedication, cold blood or efficiency. Finally, while the end of the war is a time seeing the cries of victory and tears of the vanquished, muffler and incomparable disaster succeeds genocide. Bossy Jean-François, *Enseigner la Shoah à l'âge démocratique. Quels enjeux ?*, Paris, Armand, Colin, coll. « Débats d'école », 2007, p. 166. If these two concepts should not be confused, however, they are linked because "genocide begins when the war ends". Bruneteau Bernard, « Génocide. Origines, enjeux et usages d'un concept », in Lefebvre Barbara et Ferhadjian Sophie, *Comprendre les génocides du XXe siècle. Comparer-Enseigner*, Rosny-sous-Bois, Bréal, 2007, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> All names used in the extracts are borrowing names to remain anonymous. The gender of the student is respected according to names.

we're in the same country, and even now there are some who come with banners against us and they are racist towards us, inevitably, it reminds us of the past"<sup>22</sup>.

This excerpt is interesting because it recalls the importance of context when examining the political socialisation of young people. In this case, the absence of a national government for 541 days following the June 13, 2010 federal election must be taken into account in the analysis<sup>23</sup>. In addition, it is worth noting that Belgium's inter-community conflict was only mentioned by those Belgian young people neither immigrants nor of immigrant background. As a corollary, the young Belgians said first-and-foremost of importance were conflicts that directly affected them before worrying about other, foreign conflicts. Hubert said that "it is necessary to worry about the problems that are happening here, with the Flemish [...] and then you have to worry about what is happening in the world."

### Developing a feeling of minorisation

At this point, a fundamental question arises: why are the young immigrant and immigrant-origin youths more likely to draw on memories of other past or current events? To understand this, we must remember that the collective memory is involved in the construction of individual identities and the groups to which they belong. It defines the group, its values and actions<sup>24</sup>. Putting into perspective the memory of the Holocaust, immigrant youth and those of immigration background draw on memories of other past or current events, which constitute their identities. The remark of a young girl, Chafika, also corroborates this. While the focus group facilitator asked students the reasons for mentioning multiple past and current events, the girl responded: "Of course, everyone will first talk about their country and then others. When you ask this question, everyone will first talk about their own country", thus demonstrating the importance of their reference group.

What can we extract from the plurality of drawn-upon memories by these young people? We must consider that, at school, there is the formal transmission of memories of past events related to the history of Belgium, namely the Holocaust, elicited in these young immigrants and immigrant-origin youths a sense of minorisation or even the denial of their identities. As the school does not transmit memories of past or current events of these students' own identities, they feel that the school renders them minorities, and through the school, the authorities then conceive of them as minorities as well. For example, Chahid spoke out during the group discussions that the genocides in Africa are not addressed in school. This same sentiment was shared by other young people in the same group but, more broadly, when they talked about the role of the media. Several criticised the Belgian media as not covering some international conflicts in the same way that Arab

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<sup>22</sup> The event mentioned by young people must be contextualized. It is actually an action of the Vlaams Belang, Flemish far-right party, on 22 April 2010, which was organized in the Federal Parliament. It consists of gathering of the elected people of the party to sing the Vlaams Leeuw, Flemish patriotic song.

<sup>23</sup> In this regard, Annick Percheron insisted on the different sub-dimensions of the political context with the particular nature of the political context, influencing the overall system of the attitudes of young people. Percheron Annick, « La socialisation politique. Défense et illustration », in Grawitz Madeleine et Leca Jean, *Traité de science politique. Tome III. L'action politique*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1985, pp. 218-219.

<sup>24</sup> Klein Olivier *et al.*, « Le Collabo et l'Assisté : stéréotypes et mémoires collectives liés au conflit », in Luminet Olivier (dir.), *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

channels do, Chahid, again, does not hesitate to talk about censorship by Belgian TV channels.

Chahida: But I also wanted to say that what we watch on TV, it's not always true. So we shouldn't always believe what we watch because [...] when you're in Turkey, they really show the massacres, they really show the truth, whereas if you look at the Belgian channels, they will show you only a part.

Chahid: They are censored here; it's an understatement, it's nothing like with an Arab channel, or a Turkish channel, we do not see the same things. For example, if we watch an Arab channel we see stuff we've never seen before. And it shocks us. But when we watch RTL TVI<sup>25</sup>, when it comes to Israel and Hamas it's a lot of nonsense. Hamas, they have nothing. Although I am against them, they launch rockets and everything, but I mean still, sometimes the comparison with a country that has nuclear bombs and missiles thrown three or four tonnes [ while ] Hamas [...] throws [...] a missile I do not know how many grams or what.

Moderator: There are others who watch Arabic-language channels?

Chirine: But I mean [...] , they manipulate these images. They show a picture. We will take for example Al Jazeera and RTL TVI, they have the same image but with different commentary.

Cherazade: For example, on the regular channels we see when we take the soldiers of Palestine, it just shows when people, we just see the explosives [sic], that's all we see. On Arab channels you really see people, you see the real thing, children decapitated, armless.

Chirine: The thing that shocks, you know. Not stuff like big explosions and then that's it. There really go into the hospitals.

Cherazade: They show people suffering.

Chahid: There is not even the simplest thing. There is no medicine, they have nothing and RTL TVI, they show a small house in the north of Israel, which is a bit hit.

Cherazade: We see children without feet, without legs, this is serious, this is a big shock.

Discussions regarding the school's transmission of the Holocaust reflect the plurality of collective memories within the school setting, leading to a process of memory competition<sup>26</sup>, understood as a competition between groups of young people, young immigrants and those of immigrant origin defending and wishing to promote the memory of other historical or current events, constituting their very identities.

Is this memory competition, especially in absence of transmitting other collective memories at school, likely to influence the images that young people have of political authorities? Indeed, the school can be seen as an extension of these authorities, teaching as a public policy within the French Community of Belgium. More specifically, do immigrant and immigrant-origin youths present different images from their French-speaking Belgian peers in that the former share a sense of minority status related to their identities?

### **Images of the political system's authorities**

By invoking the memory of the Holocaust, the other past events and current examples, the youths did not hesitate to make political remarks in reference to the authorities of the political system.

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<sup>25</sup> It is the largest private TV channel in French-speaking Belgium.

<sup>26</sup> For more information, see Grandjean Geoffrey et Jamin Jérôme (dir.), *La concurrence mémorielle*, Paris, Armand Colin, coll. « Recherches », 2011, 250 p.



As a reminder, the image of the authorities is twofold: it is both cognitive and affective. We find these two components in the words of these young people. Thus, in the next section, a distinction is not always made between these two images of authority. Instead, developments show that the two are intrinsically linked: when these youths reveal their emotional images, their expressions always are founded on cognitive aspects.

### A distrust differently expressed

Above all, the young people constructed their images of authorities through the prism of political distrust. Thus, they do not feel that these authorities are honest, competent or that they act in the interest of citizens<sup>27</sup>.

It is first necessary to examine the discourse of the young French-speaking Belgians. As a reminder, during the group discussions, they placed the memory of the Holocaust in perspective with the Belgian inter-community conflict. By operating in this way, these young people expressed a relative distrust of one type of actors in Belgian politics, namely the Flemish political leaders. In discussing the Holocaust, these young people question the development of the Belgian communitarian crisis. For them, it is possible for leaders to engage Flanders, according to them, on the politics of exclusion, even massacres, of the Walloons. Thus, during the discussions, the young people do not hesitate to confirm that in Belgium, “we have two parties that tear each other apart”, a “Flemish-Walloon civil war could happen” or that “the Flemish could kill the Walloons”. It was observed that the tensions in the political context have raised significant concerns among young French-speaking Belgians, expressing a sense of distrust of the Flemish political leaders. This feeling, however, is relatively limited, occupying only a small place in the discussions.

In the other group discussions, young people also expressed their representations and perceptions of the authorities of a political system when placing the Holocaust in perspective with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The judicial system was first criticised as incompetent at solving certain political matters. During the group discussions, Chahid explained to his classmates that “there is no real justice here in life”. He wondered what was currently happening in the Gaza Strip, where, he said, “we do not judge the rulers,” clarifying that he had “nothing against the Jews”. From this, he concluded that there are two weights, two measures with one side, there is much talk of the atrocities suffered by the Jews during the Second World War; while the other, “we do not speak enough about the two million Palestinians who are outside of Palestine and who were plundered”. According to Chahid, the Israeli government is responsible for such misinformation. For him, we must not forget this sort of current event, as we do not forget the Holocaust.

Afterwards, the youth of this particular group spoke of distrust for educational institutions. How did they express such distrust? During the discussions, the young people initially were interested in curriculum, acknowledging that they had the opportunity to learn about the historical events surrounding the Holocaust. Very quickly, the discussion gravitated towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The youths

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<sup>27</sup> We rely on the definition of political confidence given by Bennett Button Christine, « Political Education for Minority Groups », in Niemi Richard et al., *The Politics of Future Citizens. New Dimensions in the Political Socialization of Children*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1974, p. 173.

stressed that were unable to discuss this subject at school. Chahida did not hesitate to attribute responsibility to the school itself and, through it, to the State<sup>28</sup>. The influence of the Israeli government was again mentioned in this exchange; Cheima stating that the lack of coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in school in Belgium ought to be attributed to pressure from the Israeli government.

Shirin: Between us, we talk about things. An example where, not long ago, we debated, it was about Palestine and Israel. I mean it's been a great debate. But not in class, we talk more about it outside [of school].

Chahida: I feel like here, they do not want to hear about it, they know that we're all for Palestine, and the school is the State for me, as they know [...] we're for Palestine, they will not ask us any questions [about it].

Cherazade: Everyone is for Palestine. Everyone knows that the Palestinians they have done nothing.

Chahida: There are some who think it isn't interesting so they will not discuss it.

Moderator: Okay, so you've never talked about it at school then.

Cherazade: Maybe [that] they are afraid of our reaction.

Inco: We discussed it but outside of school.

Chahida: We talked about it in religion class.

Presenter: in religion.

Cheima: No. I think there is also an influence of the Israeli government here because a friend [...] a Belgian, well, not really a friend, my teacher or anything, he does not want to talk about it [...], he said, "yeah forget it" and all. And I do not know, they are afraid, they are afraid to say it.

Cherazade: We came to school with the Palestinian flag, they made us remove it, because they do not want us to put it on.

Moderator: Okay. Someone said that, you've already talked about it in religion class, who is it who said that? Is that you?

Chahida: Yes.

Moderator: What exactly did you say [in the class]?

Chahida: What we talked about? [...]

Cheima: This is the news.

Chirine: Yeah it's a hot topic today.

Moderator: So you saw the conflict from an historical point of view.

Chirine: Yeah.

Cheima: Even if it is at the end of the world, but it's like in the world, so you have to be interested.

If the youths now criticise the absence of the transmission of past or current events associated with their identities, i.e., this case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they clearly blame the authorities of the political system, considered vaguely, in cognitive terms, as "the State" and "the government".

The reasoning of these immigrant or immigrant-origin youths does not stop there. To the extent that the authorities of the Belgian political system, including the educational institutions, show no interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, young people in no way expect an intervention on the part of these authorities, but also more generally, none from the European Union. They view these authorities as incapable and incompetent in efforts to resolve the conflict in the Middle East. Belgium's apparent lack of interest — and more specifically the French Community of Belgium — in this conflict directly feeds the feeling of distrust, in terms of its inability to act, even that of the European Union.

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<sup>28</sup> In the Belgian federal context, it would be more appropriate to speak of the French Community of Belgium rather than the "State".

Chafika: In the end, even if there are protests, Belgium can't do anything either.

Chahid: Yeah but Belgium, it's the European Union.

Cherazade: But I do not count on the countries, I do not count on Belgium, I do not count on France. It's us who [must] do something, if all the Muslims of the world [...] move to Palestine, we'll crush them. This is because we do not move. If we all moved to Palestine, they'd once and for all understand that never again will they try to pick on people like that.

According to these young people, the only way to stop such a conflict is the belief in each citizen's own individual capacity for action<sup>29</sup>. Only they can truly make things move in what's happening in the Middle East. Better yet, is "becoming someone in life", according to Cheima, "that things can change".

Finally, a major difference can be seen in the comments made by the young French-speaking Belgians compared with the immigrant youth and those of immigrant origin. The first group speak of a limited distrust of Flemish leaders in the context of an inter-community crisis in Belgium. The latter group expresses a more intense distrust towards the school itself, and through it, the "State", while criticising the failure and incompetence of Belgian and European political authorities in their efforts to resolve particular international conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

#### A limited confidence

Echoing the distrust shared in the discussion groups, some young people expressed an occasional sense of political trust that is appropriate to present here to better understand the richness of their messages.

Thus, the sense of distrust of the Flemish political leaders were offset, as articulated by the young French-speaking Belgians, by the expressions of feelings of confidence toward two types of actors also holding a position of authority within the political system. On the one hand, the young people highlighted the role of the monarchy in Belgium, which ensures mediation between the two Belgian linguistic communities. On the other hand, even if they fear that the Belgian political crisis has been escalating, they remain convinced that the European institutions will be able to prevent any downward slide that may harm the Francophone population. For example, Henri said, in a peremptory tone, as if we were to face a political takeover of some Flemish extremists, "the European institutions will ensure that it [that is to say any killings] does not happen." For him, "If someone stands out [...] the European authorities] will try to minimise, to 'cut the priority', to prevent there being an extremist who rises to power in any country the European Union".

Among immigrant youths and those of foreign origin, traces of confidence were also detected during the facilitated group discussions. However, they do not refer to the authorities of a political system but to its regime<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, these young people

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<sup>29</sup> This belief refers to the sense of political efficacy, defined as the feeling that individual political action can have an impact on the political process. Easton David et Dennis Jack, « The Child's Acquisition of Regime Norms: Political Efficacy », *The American Political Science Review*, march 1967, vol. 61, n° 1, p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> In systemic perspective, the regime is defined as the structure and norms that govern the political system. Easton David et Hess Robert D., *op. cit.*, p. 233 et Easton David et Dennis Jack, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

are confident about the impossibility of a resurgence of a genocidal process in Europe. For them, a series of “law and human rights” ensures the protection of European citizens, including their equal treatment. So if these young people do not seem to have but a limited trust in various people in positions of authority in a political system, they are more confident in the rules governing that system.

## **Conclusion**

This contribution was intended to determine if the transmission of the memory of the Holocaust conveyed in schools can affect the students’ images of authorities. The hypothesis presented here assumed that young immigrants and those of immigrant origin would favour their collective memories, criticise the choice of Francophone Belgian political authorities and have a negative image of them.

First, discussions in the focus groups show that memory of the Holocaust was put into perspective by these young people with other past and current events. Where the young French-speaking Belgians focused particularly on the Belgian Community conflict, their immigrant and immigrant-origin peers placed greater emphasis on a series of conflicts and wars associated with their identities, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Beyond placing this in perspective, the immigrant youth and those of foreign origin complain that the school system does not pay sufficient attention to other past or current events. Thus, there is a process of memory competition between these groups of young people; where the immigrant and immigrant-origin youth defending and seeking to promote the memory of historical and contemporary events associated with their identities.

The images that the young people have of the authorities of the political system can then be identified. Putting into perspective the memory of the Holocaust, the youths reported their perceptions and representations of the authorities of a political system. Whereas the young Francophone Belgians expressed a relative distrust of Flemish political leaders, the young immigrants and those of immigrant background expressed their distrust of the educational institution itself and through it, the State, all the while also criticising the inability and incompetence of the Belgian political authorities, but also of Europeans in general to be able to solve international conflicts.

Also, these feelings of distrust were offset by some expressions of trust. While the young Belgians believe in the effectiveness of the royalty and the European institutions to prevent the Belgian Community conflict from getting out of control, the immigrant and immigrant-origin youth prefer to express their confidence in some of the basic rules of a political system.

In conclusion, the transmission of the memory of past events occurring in schools is a potential source of memory competition, and stimulates political discussions involving cognitive and affective images of authorities. In this sense, despite its intentions, the school can be a link of political socialisation and tension.