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Assigning moral roles within the Second World War in Europe: National similarities, differences, and implications for group-level moral representations

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Abstract

The moral roles assigned to nations that took part in the Second World War cast a shadow over contemporary international politics. To understand contemporary moral beliefs about the war, we took 11 mostly student samples from 9 nations that took part in the European theater of war (total N = 1,427). We asked respondents, in free and scaled listings, to identify the war's heroes, villains, victims, and recipients of help. Nations and individuals seen as heroes, victims and villains could be readily identified by most samples and showed both continuity and difference across nations. Most nations preferentially assigned themselves hero and victim roles, and the two were correlated positively, showing ingroup favoritism linked to victimhood. These findings show the importance of morality to contemporary views of the war and suggest further directions for studying today's political climate in Europe and elsewhere.

Keywords: Morality, history, stereotypes, World War 2, nations

Assigning moral roles within the Second World War in Europe: National similarities, differences, and implications for group-level moral representations

When people across the world are asked to list the most important events in world history, the Second World War is still among the most frequently nominated (Liu et al., 2005; Liu et al. 2009). This is especially true for people in European countries (Choi, Liu, Mari, & Garber, 2020). Other international studies have confirmed the importance of this conflict in views of historical villains and heroes, with Hitler in particular a predominant villain (Hanke et al., 2015). And in studies of significant historical events, attitudes toward World War 2 have shown a special ability to predict willingness to fight future wars (Liu et al., 2011; Paez et al. 2008; Bobowik et al., 2014). That war, then, casts a long shadow over popular views of history worldwide.

However, we also believe that beyond the war's importance, the moral roles assigned to its combatant nations can reveal as many differences as similarities among countries. For example, in Hanke et al. (2015), it was not clear that Allied leaders such as Churchill and Roosevelt were universally idolized, scoring near the midpoint of a good-bad evaluation scale. Because views of history often follow nation-specific charters (Hilton & Liu, 2008; Liu & Hilton, 2005), it is possible that judgments of the actors in World War 2 show dissent, rather than consensus, among nations. To answer these questions, we carried out a study of respondents in nine countries that historically took part in the European theater of the war. We had reason to expect historically and ideologically driven differences as well as consensus among the respondent countries in the roles assigned to the combatant nations, including one's own. Also, by looking at the relationships among

the roles assigned to each country, we were able to test whether moral typecasting theory (Gray & Wegner, 2009) holds true when the targets are nations, not persons.

Moral roles on the individual and national level

Nations are a major form of group organization in history (Cote & Levine, 2002; Michaud, 1978). Lakoff (1992) proposes that a key metaphor in politics and war casts nations as individual persons, so that the traits and acts that characterize people also apply to countries. Graphic art, for example, often personifies countries in such iconic figures as Uncle Sam, Mother India, or France's Marianne. And research on "enemy images" originating in international relations has shown that political rhetoric and the popular imagination often frame other groups in terms of specific images corresponding to functional roles, which in turn relate to distinctive combinations of status, power and goal compatibility (Alexander, Brewer & Hermann, 1999; Alexander, Brewer & Livingston, 2005; Hermann, Voss, Schooler & Ciarocchi, 1997).

While the roles described in image theory depend on pragmatic concerns such as power, research confirms morality as a primary dimension of group social processes (for reviews, see Ellemers, Pagliaro & Barreto, 2013; Ellemers & van den Bos, 2012). Accordingly, roles with an explicitly moral character have been proposed as central elements of social representation. Principally, these are the hero (person who acts with good intentions), the villain (person who acts with evil intentions), and the victim (person who is harmed, often by a villain). For example, Propp (1968) identifies the conflict between a hero and villain as essential to the typical Russian folktale, wherein other roles such as helpers or victims may figure. Klapp (1954) also identifies the hero and the villain as archetypes commonly used in socially controlling narratives. While it might be possible to frame some of these roles in non-moral ways, the evaluative implications in common

language are clear: a hero is seen as morally good, a villain as bad, a victim as someone whose moral claim deserves a hearing (e.g., Eden et al., 2015).

Nations, too, can be framed as heroes or villains. For example, Wertsch's analysis (2002) of the narrative template pervading Russians' view of their own history involves a heroic response to a villainous invader, be it the Mongols, French, or Germans. However, this template also incorporates the victimization of the people at the hands of the villainous invader, which provokes and legitimizes the heroic rise of the Russian people. This three-party representation of collectives as hero-victim-villain commonly arises in lay perceptions of historical and current events, whether the H1N1 epidemic (Wagner-Egger et al, 2011), the September 11 attacks (Anker, 2005), or Australian responses to nuclear testing (Michel, 2003). A fourth role, the beneficiary or recipient of help, has also been identified in narratives, as a somewhat negatively viewed status (e.g., Todorov, 2009).

Moral roles seem particularly important in present-day narratives of the Second World War, which in turn often illustrate moral absolutes in contemporary issues. Hitler is readily nominated as the epitome of world-historical villainy (Hanke et al., 2015) so that comparing a rhetorical opponent to him has become a sarcastically commented cliché (Godwin, 2008). In recent controversies over European cohesion and policy, talk of the war is never far away, including the incongruous casting of the European Union as the Nazi regime and Angela Merkel as its Führer (for many more examples, see Karner & Mertens, 2013). Examples of war heroes, villainous Nazis, and victimized conquered peoples also abound in cinematic representations of the war (McLaughlin & Parry, 2006).

In this study, we sought to map and explain the assignment of roles to different countries among contemporary samples at several generations' remove from the events of the war. Previous studies, as mentioned, looked at heroes and villains, but not the

victim and recipient roles, nor did they systematically assess role assignment to and between countries. Also, we tested competing predictions about the relationships among morally relevant roles in general, derived from two theories: narrative theory, which draws on qualitative and interpretive research on source texts, and moral typecasting, which draws on experimental research in social cognition.

Descriptive findings: what can be expected

  Similarity among countries due to objective agreement. It could be argued that the victory of the Allied cause over the Axis, and its vindication through international institutions such as the United Nations and the Nuremberg tribunals, have left the moral terrain of the Second World War very clear. This view would predict a common international narrative charter of moral roles based on historical facts. Thus, Germany, Italy, and Japan would be villains because they started the war and because of their crimes against humanity. The Allied nations would be heroes in proportion to their contribution against the aggressors, with the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, and United States taking principal roles. Nations would be seen as victims to the extent that they suffered occupation or civilian deaths during the war, especially if early defeat meant that their part in the fight was carried out from exile or as partisans (e.g. France, Poland). Finally, these victim nations might also be classed as recipients of help if they received aid from other countries in liberating their territory, or in reconstructing after the war (e.g., the Marshall Plan).

  Differences due to historical and contemporary alignments. However, the theory that diverse nations have diverse national charters (e.g., Hilton & Liu, 2008) also implies that national narratives of the war differ in role assignment. Thus, one might also predict meaningful *differences* between countries in the roles they ascribe to other

countries, as well as differences between how countries see themselves and are seen externally. These predictions of difference draw on historical experiences, as well as contemporary international alignments.

Differences in historical experience before and especially after the war might lead to different identification of other countries as heroes and villains. For example, countries occupied by the Soviet Union after the war might be more likely to give that state an important role, given the massive contribution of the USSR to the war effort in terms of troops deployed and casualties suffered. By contrast, in the West, the role of the USSR is often downplayed (Jordan, 2015; Tharoor, 2015), perhaps because casting the USSR as the "hero" or even "victim" during the war would have undermined the fight against it as the "villain" in the Cold War.

Alignments and experiences in the later 20th Century may also play a part in retrospective moral narratives about World War 2. Countries in the Warsaw Pact which offered resistance to Soviet control during the Cold War, such as Hungary (1956), the Czech Republic (as Czechoslovakia, 1968), or Poland (1980-1989), might be more inclined to take a negative view of the USSR as villain, despite its role in ending German occupation. Indeed, it should be remembered that in 1939, Poland was also invaded and ultimately partitioned by the Soviet Union in cooperation with Nazi Germany.

A recurrent theme in historical memory studies, for instance in the foundational writings of Halbwachs (1941/1992), is that history often serves the needs of the present society. In this vein, attitudes toward Russia, the European Union (EU), and the NATO bloc led by the United States can also influence views of the war. Countries such as Belarus and Serbia (Konitzer, 2010) have diplomatically aligned with Russia as a counterweight to NATO, whose bombing of Belgrade in the late 1990's further

encouraged this alignment. By contrast, East and Central European countries such as the Baltic States, Ukraine, and Poland have opposed Russian interests (Braghiroli & Carta, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2014). Mälksoo (2009) has specifically analyzed the dynamics of post-Communist historical memory of World War 2 in Russia and Eastern Europe. In this analysis, a Western European narrative that focuses on Germany and brushes past the USSR is challenged both by new EU nations such as Poland, who wish to equalize Soviet villainy with Nazi villainy in order to cement their moral status in the bloc, and by Putin's Russia and its allies, who raise Soviet heroism to preeminence (cf. Khapaeva, 2017). Evidently, the discrepant contemporary political projects of nations in Western and Eastern Europe also contribute to official historical role-building.

Differences due to group-based biases. Established biases lead us to predict that citizens might overestimate their own country's role as hero and as victim, and underestimate its role as villain and recipient. First, heroic narratives of history are common in many nations (Smith, 1999), while moralized glorification forms a part of nationalistic ideology (e.g. Roccas et al., 2006). Citizens tend to take positive but not negative events as reflective of their own national disposition, e.g. helping but not harming ethnic minorities during the Holocaust (Bilewicz et al., 2017; Hirschberger et al., 2016) These biases could explain why citizens would assign their country a greater role as hero than other countries would.

A parallel bias is to resist categorizing one's own country as a villain. In general, when confronted with ingroup harmdoing, people tend to disengage cognitively from ingroup misconduct cognitively and to rationalize such behavior (Bandura, 1999; Leidner & Castano, 2012). Thus, individuals may evaluate the ingroup's wrongdoings more indulgently than those of other groups (e.g., Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2008), favoring the ingroup. One exception, however, is Germany, where official policy and education have

combined to resist the adoption of heroic views of the Second World War, and to promote the acknowledgement of the evil of the Nazi regime (Barkan, 2001).

Previous research also indicates how national groups develop different collective narratives of victimhood in the same violent historical event. For instance, although victimhood has connotations of weakness, it is often claimed as desirable in a rhetorical way, as part of a collective self-concept after or during a conflict, regardless of real experience in the conflict (Noor, Vollhardt, Mari & Nadler, 2017). As recently reviewed by Bilali and Vollhardt (2019), victimhood status may weaken ingroup agency (e.g., Shnabel & Nadler, 2015). But on the other hand, it may lead to positive outcomes such as material reparation, third-party support and sympathy, and a sense of moral superiority (e.g., Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009). Even nations responsible for historic injustices can strategically downplay the level of harm inflicted and shift blame onto others by endorsing beliefs of perpetual victimhood (that they are victims throughout history; Vollhardt, 2015) or competitive victimhood (that their victimization should be taken as seriously or more seriously than other groups'; Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012; Young & Sullivan, 2016). For example, Hirschberger et al. (2016) show how narratives of victimization in Hungary can undermine acknowledgement of the country's role as an Axis collaborator.

All considered, the victim role might be embraced for a variety of reasons. Modern citizens might be particularly aware of their own country's suffering because of relevant family histories, education, and media portrayals. Victimhood also plays a central part in the collective narrative of countries that see themselves as unfairly treated by history, such as Hungary (Fulop et al, 2013; Laszlo, 2014). In this context such views have been shown to drive other defensive nationalistic attitudes, such as opposition to helping refugees (Szabo et al., 2020). Nations that uphold the Soviet legacy, such as Russia or

Belarus, also officially include in the narrative of struggle reminders of sacrifice and victimhood (Savchenko, 2009; Tumarkin, 1995). Finally, Germany again might prove an exception and embrace victimhood with less enthusiasm. Mentioning the victimization of Germans during the war, e.g. by the Red Army or Allied bombing, was seen as problematic in the postwar era due to de-Nazification aims, leading to a cautious re-engagement with the victim role in the 21st century (e.g., Moeller, 2005).

Narrative vs. typecasting views

In narrative analyses such as Wertsch's (2002), the hero and villain are opposed, such that nations cannot easily fill both roles. This prediction would also seem to agree with the theory of *moral typecasting* in person perception (Gray & Wegner, 2009), in which assigning individuals to one moral role makes it difficult to imagine them in another. However, in moral typecasting, individuals' roles are defined not just as helpful or harmful ("benevolence"), but also by whether one is doing the act ("agency"), or has it done to them ("patiency"). In addition to the roles "victim" (patient of evil) and "hero" (agent of good), this theory includes the "villain" (agent of evil) and "beneficiary" or "recipient" (patient of good). Experiments in support of this theory have found that agency overrides benevolence when forming ideas of a person's blameworthiness. For example, if a person is a past victim of wrong, it is harder to blame them for bad deeds they later perform, than to blame a past hero who has previously done good deeds, because of the common element of agency between good and bad deeds (Gray & Wegner, 2009; 2011).

Moral typecasting, to our knowledge, has not yet been applied to collective moral roles such as nations. Our research thus tests the suitability of using moral typecasting on a national level. Both the evidence and the rationale for moral typecasting theory have been criticized (Arico, 2012), but narrative theory analyses also call into doubt its

application to the national level. In a narrative where a country is invaded, then responds through warfare, the same country plays the part of both hero and victim. Thus, narrative theory organizes moral roles on evaluative grounds, rather than by agency and patiency, in line with the primacy of evaluation as a semantic category more generally (Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957). Sympathetic roles (hero, victim) are related to each other, and oppose negatively viewed roles (villain; Todorov & Golsan, 1998; Todorov, 2009). Thus, while narrative theory would predict that the hero and victim role would be positively correlated across a variety of target nations, moral typecasting would predict that victim (as patient of wrong) should be negatively correlated with both hero (as agent of good) and villain (as agent of wrong), because patient and agent are incompatible roles.

Moral typecasting would also predict a negative correlation between being seen as an agentic hero or villain, and being seen as a recipient of good deeds, another patient role. Recipient, in turn, would correlate positively with victim status, a relationship that resonates with many international situations in which aid is given in response to, or in anticipation of, harm by a third party. The role of the recipient, however, does not seem clear in the mainly evaluative alignments of narrative theory. It is inoffensive, but also implies weakness or an obligation, so might be ill-regarded (Todorov & Golsan, 1998). In social research, too, receiving aid can lead either to positive reactions, or negative ones, depending on factors such as the stability of status relations and the way in which help is given (e.g., Gergen, 1974; Halabi & Nadler, 2009). Thus, in predicting the correlates of the novel role of recipient, typecasting theory may provide the clearer expectation.

Table 1, upper panel, gives a listing of the four main moral roles and their definitions in the study.[1]

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Scope and structure of the project

The present research focused on the war in Europe, due to the genesis of this project in a European research network. In a questionnaire, 11 samples from nine participant nations first answered open-ended questions asking what nations or other entities in the war best fit the descriptions of each of the main moral schemas. Afterward, they answered directed, scaled questions asking how much each of eight target nations fit each of the schemas in World War 2.

The eight target nations (Table 1, bottom panel) were chosen to represent the three Axis powers in the Second World War (Germany, Japan and Italy), and the five principal Allied nations that fought in the European theater, by population and military capacity: France, Great Britain, Poland, the USA and the USSR. For some participant nations, additional target countries were included to answer questions of local interest, which are not part of this more general analysis. As part of this, each sampled nation that was not itself a target nation (i.e. Hungary and Serbia) was included as a target in its own questionnaires only, with the exception of Belarus.

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[1] The study also included two exploratory roles involving incompetence, but their definitions apparently were not fully understood by participants, so for the sake of clarity we focus reporting on the central, theoretically supported roles.

The 11 participant nation samples were mainly university students (Table 1, bottom panel); Poland and the USA were represented both by a student sample and a somewhat older Internet sample. The nations were chosen to match the target nations, excluding Japan; the USSR was represented by a sample from the former Soviet republic of Belarus, which officially maintains an ideological continuity with the Soviet side in the war. We were also able to obtain samples from two nations that fought in the war, but are less widely recognized as combatants: Hungary (which supported the Axis and sent troops to fight the USSR) and Serbia (which as part of Yugoslavia was invaded by the Axis, and sustained a partisan resistance struggle afterwards, which helped to give birth to the post-war Yugoslav state).

Hypotheses

Similarity and difference between countries. The hypotheses that there would be a general reality-based consensus about roles, but modified in places by differences between countries according to historic and current alignments, was mainly tested by inferential statistical tests carried out on the scaled endorsements, with a particular focus on which nations and roles showed difference.

Own-country differences. Each of our samples also rated its own country's roles in World War 2, allowing us to compare national self-views to other countries' views of the same nation. Based on historical facts (membership in the Axis or the Allied nations; whether or not the country was occupied by the Axis or the USSR), one might expect absolute differences between countries in the primary role ascribed to itself. But in comparison to other nations' views, a nation might see itself more positively than others see it, in line with similar egocentric effects in group perception (e.g., Brewer, 2007) and collective memory (e.g., Sahdra & Ross, 2007). Thus, compared to how others see them,

we expected that nationals would see their country as greater heroes, greater victims, lesser villains, and lesser recipients of help, because obligation and dependency are generally undesirable states.

How are moral roles generally structured? Finally, the data structure we gathered allows multilevel analysis of the relationships between scaled role ratings for different target countries among different participant populations. When looking at the correlations among assignment of roles, typecasting theory would predict:

- correlations between assignment of low-agency Victim and Recipient roles to the same country (low agency) should be positive,
- correlations between high and low agency roles (Hero-Recipient, Villain-Victim, Hero-Victim, Villain-Recipient) should be negative.
- correlations between assignment of Hero and Villain roles to the same country should be weak or null, as the roles' opposed benevolence conflicts with their shared high agency.

However, under the narrative-evaluative hypothesis that valence will overshadow agency in the structuring of roles because of the importance of conflict in understanding World War 2, then:

- Correlations between Hero and Villain roles should be strongly negative.
- Hero and Victim roles should be positively correlated, because these are both seen sympathetically.
- As a potentially ambiguous role, inoffensive but also subservient, the Recipient should show low or null correlations with the others.

Method

Participants

In each country we aimed to achieve a sample of at least 60 participants, which we deemed reasonable given the largely within-participants design. For example, ANOVA comparing the nine nationalities on any one measure would have statistical power of 99.7% to find a medium sized effect of f = .25; the Country x Role within-participants interaction for any one sample would have power of 99.9% to find f = .25. Power analysis guidelines for multilevel analysis also spoke to the high power of the design, with well over 80% power to detect even a small effect (coefficient gamma ~= .10) when the overall N of data points is 20,120, or 660 (participants) x 32 (questions, 4 roles asked about 8 countries; Arend & Schäfer, 2019). In fact, most samples were larger than this target, leading to a very high statistical power.

Participants were mostly university students, although two adult online samples were collected as well for Poland and the USA, the Polish online sample being collected as a snowball sample through e-mail and social media, and the US sample through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Student participants were recruited by various means including filling out the questionnaire in class, being approached on campus, or through distribution of links to an online questionnaire. All samples gave informed consent and were debriefed about the purpose of the study. Basic statistics for each sample are given below (Table 2). Participants had to be nationals of the country in which they were sampled.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Materials and Procedure

Questionnaire content was developed in English and translated into the language of the sample by a native speaker, then back-translated by a different bilingual speaker, and checked with the first author, adjusting gaps in meaning as needed.

All versions of the questionnaire included questions on gender, age, nationality, student status and degree studied. Some samples, at the discretion of the researcher, included other questions on topics unrelated to the present hypotheses, such as self-rated knowledge of World War 2, high school history education, and political orientation; these will not be reported. We otherwise report all measures and exclusions.

Open questions. First, participants read the following instructions:

People usually have some idea of certain events which have occurred throughout history, even if they haven't lived through the period themselves, or remember little from history lessons at school.

In this study, you will read a number of descriptions and will then be required to write down a list of countries or individuals from a specific period in history that you believe fit those descriptions. If you think a country or individual fits multiple descriptions, you may repeat them.

Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers, and if you have no idea who could fit a description then simply write "don't know".

The general prompt for each description was "Which countries or individuals in World War 2 could be described as [ROLE]? Write down up to 5." The roles were described, in order, using the exact textual descriptions presented in Table 1, top panel.

Scaled questions. This section presented again the list of role descriptions and explained: "This task requires you to circle a number on a scale stating to what extent you believe specific countries fitted the descriptions above during World War 2," followed by a list of the role labels.

A five point scale was used with labels: "1: Nothing to do with the profile, 2: Not a great example, 3: An OK example, 4: Good example, 5: Perfect example." One question was asked about each of the roles in relation to each of the eight target countries: Britain, the USA, Germany, the Soviet Union (including Russia), France, Poland, Italy, and Japan. The Hungarian sample asked the same questions of Hungary, and the Serbian sample asked the same questions of Serbia, Croatia, and Yugoslavia.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

Open responses

The top five (by count) open responses for each role, in each sample, were analyzed by count. Each national site researcher made decisions about which terms should be considered synonymous (e.g., Britain = UK = United Kingdom; in some places popular understanding equates the Soviet Union with Russia). Although the open responses were not systematically analyzed, these findings generally corresponded to the scaled measures. For example, the USSR was little mentioned in Western countries, was the predominant hero in Serbia and Belarus, but mentioned more as a villain in Poland and, to a lesser extent, Hungary.

However, the open responses also showed recurrent appearances of groups and individuals not included in the scales. It is not surprising that, for example, well-known leaders like Churchill should appear alongside Britain, or Hitler alongside Germany. Beyond obvious examples, individuals named in moral roles tended to be of the same nationality as the respondent (e.g., Petain, Mihailović, Zhukov), reflecting greater familiarity with own-nation history. Some diversity also appeared in Victim role responses, with frequent mentions of Jews and other groups the Nazis targeted for extermination, as

well as a variety of smaller occupied countries. Jews were also sometimes mentioned as recipients of help, though never by a majority (e.g., in France, USA and Poland).

Scaled responses

Subsample analyses. The Polish and USA contribution each included both a student sample (early 20's) and an online sample (around 30 years of age), with different rates of responding. Nonetheless, these diverse samples from the same nation revealed generally similar patterns of responding in terms of the broad ranking of means. To simplify analysis, the two samples from Poland and the USA were combined, yielding nine different national samples. In samples which had students taking different subjects (Serbia, Belarus), there were also only minor differences between history and other students that did not affect the overall patterns remarked on below, which were reproduced in both subsamples.

Main analyses. Because samples varied in their rate of omitted responses (Table 2), we used multilevel analysis to include remaining responses even when participants left out some combinations of nation and role. Scaled responses were subjected to a mixed model analysis using the SPSS v23 MIXED procedure, with participant ID (unique across samples) as a random variable, with three factors distinguishing responses: 9 (sample, between) x 8 (target nation, within) x 4 (role, within). The significance of effects was not of primary importance. Indeed, all main and interaction effects were significant, Fs > 17.47, p < .001, and the critical three-way interaction, $F(168, 34466) = 34.99$, showed that different national samples had different patterns of assigning roles to countries.

Of greater interest were the patterns of means, presented separately in Figures 1-8 by target country, sample country and role. "Eastern" countries here are defined as ex-Communist states (Belarus, Hungary, Poland, Serbia) as opposed to "Western" ones.

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Insert Figures 1-8 about here

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Overall, the role of Recipient was not as strongly assigned to countries as the other three. For example, Hero, Victim and Villain were often assigned to countries with means at or near 4 on the five-point scale, indicating some degree of consensus within a sample on that country's role. Recipient never reached a mean of 4 in any sample and seldom reached a mean of 3. This finding supports the applicability of narrative theory's central trio, showing the strong emergence of these roles in views of the wartime nations.

To summarize these results, target nation by target nation:

- The UK was primarily seen as a Hero of World War 2 in all sampled countries, with strong secondary roles as Victim and Recipient.

- The USA was generally seen as a Hero in Western countries and Poland, but had a more equivocal role in other Eastern countries, and in Belarus the USA was rated as the principal villain of the Second World War -- more even than Germany.

- Germany was principally seen as a Villain in all countries except Belarus, where assignment of Germany to any role was low.

- The USSR, importantly, showed the most discrepancy in evaluation. It was not strongly assigned any single role in Western countries, whereas Eastern countries were split, some seeing it strongly as Hero and Victim (Serbia, Belarus) and others principally as Villain (Hungary, Poland).

- France was seen nearly universally, if not strongly, to be a Victim and Recipient to a similar degree.

- Poland was strongly identified as a Victim in all samples.

- Italy was not strongly rated overall, but emerged primarily as a Villain.

- Japan was seen principally as a Villain, if not as strongly as Germany, and Victim was a strong secondary role, probably due to the use of the atomic bomb.

This profile of results shows consensus on many role assignments, but dissent between nations on others, in particular the roles of the USSR and of the USA.

Own-country analysis

A multilevel analysis similar to the previous one was also conducted, examining differences between samples in how they saw their own nation's role in the war, the design being 9 (sample, between) x 4 (role of own nation). Two countries presented special issues in that they had become independent from larger polities that took part in the war: Serbia from Yugoslavia, and Belarus from the USSR. In the Serbian case, the post-Communist Yugoslav break-up found Serbia in a state of war with other former republics, recapitulating civil strife between nationalities and ideologies during World War 2. Belarus, however, has generally shown a strong sense of continuity with the USSR and good relations with post-Soviet Russia. For this reason the "own country" of Serbia was defined as Serbia, but the "own country" of Belarus was defined as the USSR.

In the analysis, both main effects and the interaction were highly significant, each $F > 10.98$, $p < .001$, indicating differences in national self-concept profile between countries. We describe here each nation's top roles, as well as any roles assigned to the nation at a scale-midpoint mean of 3 or higher.

- Britain saw itself as a Hero with lesser endorsement of Recipient and Victim status.

- France saw itself as Victim, then Hero, with Recipient in between and not different from either;

- Germany saw itself as Villain;

- Italy showed mid-range endorsements of every role except Hero;

- Serbia was primarily Victim, then Hero;

- Hungary was primarily Victim;

- Polish samples saw their country as primarily a Victim, and secondarily as Hero;

- The USA saw itself exclusively as a Hero;

- Belarus saw the USSR as a Hero, then a Victim, and then a Recipient.

Comparisons between national self-images and other samples' rating of the nation in that same role showed a number of biases (Table 3). Each nation except for the former Axis nations of Germany and Italy saw itself as more of a Hero than others saw them. Also, each nation (even Germany) rated itself more highly on Victim status than others saw it, except for Poland, which was equally highly recognized by others as a Victim. The USA and Belarus (as member of the former USSR) complemented their high Hero roles with a low acceptance of Villain status relative to others, while France gave itself a higher but still low Villain rating, possibly due to the recognition of Vichy collaboration. Recipient status showed few differences.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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General relations among roles

      Finally, to investigate the relationships between roles, we ran multilevel analysis on a restructured data set where each case was the set of role ratings for a given country and a given participant, and participant was entered as a random level 2 variable, collapsing across sample origin, using again the mixed model procedure in SPSS version 23. This allowed us to extract a coefficient for each relationship between a pair of roles, considering all samples' evaluations of all countries. The grid of these coefficients is shown in Table 4.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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      The relationship between the four roles supported different elements of both the narrative and typecasting hypotheses. Supporting typecasting against narrative, the two patient roles, Victim and Recipient, were related strongly, even though the narrative view holds that they carry different evaluative implications. However, there was a strong negative relationship between the two agentic roles, Hero and Villain, which supports the narrative account. Moreover, a heroic view of a country was also associated positively with seeing it as a victim, which supports the narrative account as well.

Discussion

National similarities and differences

      This study showed clear and meaningful moral roles assigned to the major European participants in World War 2 among samples largely consisting of university

students, underscoring the importance of the conflict even among those generationally far removed from it. Some of the role assignments, in both the free-response and scaled measures, showed general agreement across countries. Poland and France were seen as victims; Germany as a villain, even by Germans themselves; the UK was seen as a hero. These findings suggest a common historical schema of World War 2, guided by objective facts about the aggressors, defenders, and occupied countries.

But perhaps more interesting were national disagreements on roles, principally the Soviet Union, which can be summed up in terms of East-West differences and further divisions within Eastern countries. The USSR took on no single predominant role in the eyes of Western European countries (e.g., UK, USA, France). This may reflect the ambiguous part that Stalin played during the war, siding first with Hitler and then the Western Allies before going back to enemy status in the Cold War. It also connects to a general Western downplaying of the Soviet role in the war. By contrast, the USSR was important in the East, but controversial: some countries saw the USSR as more Villain than Hero (Poland, Hungary) and some saw it as more Hero than Villain (Serbia, Belarus). The divisions in the East may reflect historical and contemporary attitudes toward Russia, based in turn on postwar and Cold War experiences, as discussed in the Introduction.

Symmetrically, the USA was seen as a hero of the war in the Western countries, but played an ambiguous role in Serbia and was rated as a principal villain in Belarus. As explained previously, the alignment of Serbia with Russian interests and its relatively recent punishment by NATO would make the role of the USA more problematic there than elsewhere. The negative view of the USA in Belarus also should not surprise those familiar with popular and official views of history there, promoting a continuity narrative with the former USSR. Often, the USA, as leader of the Western world, has been presented as an ideological enemy of Belarus, one that wants to "steal" credit for the

sacred victory in the Great Patriotic War, i.e. World War 2 (Narotchitskaja, 2008). This view is promoted above all in school textbooks (Kovalenia, 2004; Loukachenko, 2003). When Belarusians were asked to explicitly rate the role of the USA in the war, then, they may have focused on betrayal by a former ally as a sign of villainy.

Own-country versus outside views

There were also clear differences in the roles national respondents endorsed for their own countries. Some saw themselves as heroes much more than victims - namely, the USA and Britain, two Allied countries that had not been occupied. Germans, in line with their country's official diplomatic and educational policy (Barkan, 2001), admitted responsibility as the principal villain. French, Poles, and Serbians took on victimhood with elements of heroism, while Belarusians saw their role in the war as heroic with elements of victimhood. These views accord with these countries' history of invasion, resistance, and liberation in the war. Indeed, the relative self-views of these countries largely corresponded in rank to other countries' view of them, with Belarus as an exception both for its negative view of the USA and its positive view of the USSR.

However, general biases in self-views were also found. In particular, national respondents relative to outside observers were more likely to cast themselves as collective Heroes and Victims, two roles that for different reasons are each desirable. This was true even when other roles predominated for that nation's respondents. The extension of this pattern to Germany's victim role speaks to the effective lifting of a 20th century "taboo" against commemorating German civilian victimhood.

Italy and Hungary, as partners in the Axis for whom a heroic self-narrative might be difficult, present unique cases that warrant further study. Italians showed no predominant role, and roughly equally saw themselves as Villains, Victims, and Recipients. Further analyses on

this sample showed that these divergences depended on ideological views, measured with political orientation, where 1 = *left*, and 7 = *right*; left-wing Italians more strongly endorsed the villain status of Italy (r = -.40, *p* <. 001), whereas right-wing Italians more strongly endorsed victim status (r = .23, *p* = .008). No significant correlations were found between political orientation and the hero or recipient role. This analysis speaks to the larger literature on defensive reactions to collective harm, and to the ideological implications of such national biases.

In Hungary, the predominance of the Victim identity in our study resonates with larger themes of collective victimhood in Hungarian historical self-views and charters that stretch back over the centuries (László, 2014). In Hungarian collective memory (László, Ehmann & Imre, 2002), the last positively evaluated events come from before the medieval period. Later heroic events, e.g. victories against the Ottoman Empire, Habsburg Empire and Soviet Union (1703, 1848, 1956), were always followed by defeats and repression. The national failures of the 20th century (losing the two world wars, and suffering under the Holocaust and Soviet domination) also helped a sense of collective victimhood to become an integral part of the Hungarian national identity. As we have seen (e.g., Szabó, 2020) the victim identity in its exclusive form (Noor et al., 2017) promotes in this case a withholding of charity to other victimized peoples, and can inhibit acknowledging the collaborator status of the Hungarian government with the Nazis (Hirschberger et al., 2016).

Relationships among moral roles

Supporting narrative theory over typecasting, countries endorsed as heroes were overall *more* likely to be endorsed as victims, and *less* likely to be endorsed as villains. The hero-villain dichotomy this result supported seems basic to a collective, moralized, oppositional situation of war. The hero-victim correspondence is also understandable

within a view of nations that subsumes both civilians and fighters. Even though it may be difficult for an individual to be seen as both hero and victim, it is normal for a *nation* to contain both individual heroes and victims. Many countries, in and beyond World War 2, tell a story in which they are the victims of an unprovoked attack who then heroically fought back (e.g., Banjeglav, 2012; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998), a sequence also central to Wertsch's (2002) analysis of the Russian national story across history. Therefore, adjustments to moral typecasting theory are necessary at a collective level.

However, our results also suggest that Todorov's characterization of the recipient (beneficiary) of good deeds as an undesirable role may not apply to collective views of World War 2, an instance where typecasting theory was confirmed. The recipient role was strongly and directly correlated with the victim role across samples, which in Todorov's scheme is positively viewed. Recipient was less strongly correlated with the other well-intentioned role, the hero. It was also negatively correlated with the villain role. This suggests that the recipient is partly seen as a passive patient of moral acts, in line with moral typecasting theory, but also sympathetic, correlated with other desirable roles in line with the evaluatively based predictions of narrative theory.

Limitations of method

Samples. Our decision to focus on university student samples was partly out of convenience, and partly a conscious decision to look at a relatively more educated subset of a generation whose parents likely had no direct experience of the war -- increasing the likelihood of basic knowledge about the war, while ensuring a personal remoteness from its events. There were some demographic differences between samples. Students had different topics of study, and two non-student internet samples were collected. Our analyses showed only minor differences between comparable samples within the same

nation, overshadowed by the idiosyncratic, national shape of their moral views of the war. We thus think it likely that these national differences would persist, with minor variation, in any reasonably knowledgeable sample. Other differences among our samples, however, such as gender composition and completion rate, argue for further replication of these findings with these variables better controlled for. In particular the differences in completion rate may be attributed to different motivation levels of participants at different sites, differences in knowledge of the issues, or procedural differences such as whether questionnaire completion was invigilated or not.

Although it was not feasible to collect samples from all nations involved in the European war, we believe that the principal participants in terms of population and military might are well represented. Still, contemporary views from the war's neutral nations (e.g. Switzerland, Sweden, Turkey, Spain) might be interesting to collect. The war in Asia would also be an interesting topic to study among contemporary generations in China, Korea, Japan, Philippines, and other countries that took part. Japan's role in the war and the complex process of acknowledging its brutal legacy still has the potential to stir conflict in the region (Togo, 2013).

Items. Our set of target countries, representing the larger forces in the European theater (and Japan), showed a few omissions when compared to the answers generated in free responses. Many people spontaneously listed the Jewish people as a victim of the war. Other subgroups victimized by Nazis, and sometimes groups such as the Serbian Chetniks (monarchist guerrillas) or the category of "civilians", were listed less frequently. Moreover, the nomination of individuals leads to further questions about how countries represent the moral roles of national leaders (e.g. Hitler), collaborators (e.g., Petain), resistants (e.g. Schindler), and martyrs (e.g. the French Resistance fighter Jean Moulin). One interesting and wholly understandable observation about leaders versus peoples:

Stalin, when mentioned, was always in the role of a villain, whereas both hero and victim roles were given to the USSR as a whole rather than its leader. Turning to the selection of moral roles, although our list was based on theory, the clearest results were found among the trio of Hero, Villain and Victim. The Recipient role was less distinct from Victim, as the two generally rose or fell together on a national level.

Further applications

Our findings can support further demonstrations of how World War 2's rhetorical shadow is still cast over contemporary issues. Following the example of Gilovich (1981), archival or experimental research could study the effects of metaphors involving the war on political attitudes. For example, some see the failure to appease Hitler as an eternally justifying case for military intervention in any situation. Both US Bush administrations frequently compared Saddam Hussein to Hitler, with explicit analogies to his expansionism, prior to waging war on his regime. These arguments depended on the typecasting of Saddam as a Hitlerian villain and by extension, those who would wage war against him as heroes like the Allies (Noon, 2004). Evidence supporting this wider point comes from a multinational survey that implicated nation-level heroic and moralizing representations of the two World Wars in legitimizing support for further wars (Bobowik et al., 2014).

There are many other political issues to which the moral lessons of World War 2 have been applied. The "spirit of the Blitz" in World War 2 has been used to bolster national unity in Britain (e.g., after the 2011 riots; Kelsey, 2015). However, in France the moral lesson of the war may be more divisive, reinforcing the need to distinguish between the "deux France" of resistants and collaborators (Geisser, 2019). Indeed, recent studies show quite different consequences for social attitudes of reminding French people of their country's heroic, versus villainous, role in World War 2; for example, narratives of

historical continuity with the Resistance, versus with collaborators, bolster support for civil

disobedience (Maoulida, Tavani, & Urdapilleta, in press). In the context of Brexit, the war

figures both in support of European unity (by painting all nations in some way as victims,

underlining the need to prevent future strife) and in support of Euroscepticism (by drawing

on heroic wartime images of Britain alone and on distrust of Germany; Spiering, 2014;

Wellings, 2010). Such examples illustrate the point that widely shared representations of

the Second World War can be mobilized to support different group perspectives both

across and within countries (Hilton & Liu, 2017).

The assignment of moral roles should also be examined in other conflicts. One

key question is whether World War 2 is today particularly moralized compared to, for

example, World War 1, the main lesson of which seems to be tragic rather than heroic

(i.e., national losses in World War 1 compared to World War 2 are more influential upon

present-day sense of collective victimhood; Bouchat et al., 2017). Colonial and post-

colonial conflicts—the Boer War for the British, Vietnam for the French and U.S.—also

carry moral lessons today that are characterized by disagreement about whether the

nation acted heroically or as a villain. The evolution of views over time is also of interest;

World War 1 was strongly moralized by contemporary British and US propaganda, but

today the struggle against the Kaiser has lost moral bite in the shadow of Hitler's far more

vicious example.

In conclusion, we believe the framework of moral roles to be useful in studying both

consensus and variability in popular ideas about history and conflict. Conducted in the approach

to 75th anniversaries of the war's events, our research has shown young people at a far

generational remove from the war still maintaining clear ideas about the heroes, villains and

victims of the war. Media, education, and commemoration all deserve to be examined as routes

of transmission. Research in cognitive and social psychology suggests how, for individuals and

societies, multiple retransmissions of a narrative can simplify a complex situation into a story that follows familiar rules (Schacter, 1995) of which a moral arc is surely one. Countries also differ in their own self-image about their role in the war, which could provide the grounds for further investigation into history's input into national charters and national identification. Finally, the differences between these findings and individual-level findings in moral typecasting indicate the importance of considering how narratives about collective identities might be constructed from different actors, such as civilians, leaders, and soldiers.

Data availability statement. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Roger Giner-Sorolla (rsg@kent.ac.uk), upon request.

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Tables

Table 1: Summary of the four main moral roles.

Moral role	Description given to participants
Hero	*Someone with good intentions who acts on them effectively.*
Villain	*Someone with evil intentions who acts on them effectively.*
Victim	*Someone who is harmed.*
Recipient	*Someone who is helped.*

Table 2. Overview of samples and their characteristics.

Country	Sample type	Median age	N	M/F	Year	% scale items blank	Degree (major), if student
United Kingdom	student	19	57	29/28	2013	12.3	All subjects
France	student	21	79	19/60	2014	11.1	Mostly psychology
Germany	student	23	65	17/46	2014	5.8	All subjects
Italy	student	22	125	28/97	2014	0.2	Mostly psychology
Serbia	student	22	119	86/33	2014	0	All subjects, including 60 history students
Hungary	student	22	134	61/73	2014	0	All subjects
Poland 1	student	21	72	11/61	2014	0	All psychology
Poland 2	online	29	252	109/ 143	2014	55.4	
Belarus	student	19	95	41/54	2015	0	47 psychology, 48 history
United States 1	student	20	159	60/97	2015	43.0	All subjects
United States 2	online	32	270	154/ 116	2015	25.9	

Table 3. Comparison of own nation vs. average other nation ratings of the nation's own role, for all feasible nations (i.e., excluding Hungary and Serbia). Means with non-overlapping confidence intervals for comparable own- and other-country ratings are marked with an asterisk (*) by the higher mean.

	Hero	Villain	Victim	Recipient
UK own	3.91*	1.82	3.02*	3.22
UK other	3.35	1.72	2.57	2.97
FR own	3.22*	2.18*	3.80*	3.51
FR other	2.49	1.70	3.25	3.34
GE own	1.62	4.08	2.59*	2.08
GE other	1.52	4.31	2.19	1.90
IT own	1.75	3.13	2.96*	2.79*
IT other	1.68	3.36	2.12	2.35
PL own	3.45*	1.26	4.46	2.98
PL other	2.39	1.54*	4.36	3.21
USA own	4.25*	1.71	2.49*	2.14
USA other	3.12	2.41*	1.77	1.96
Belarus/USSR own	4.77*	1.21	4.23*	3.70*
Belarus/USSR other	2.62	3.08*	2.63	2.38

Table 4. Bivariate relationships between roles collapsing across all samples (multilevel analysis). Columns are predictors, rows are outcomes. Unstandardized coefficients are shown, with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$.

|	Hero	Villain	Victim	Recipient
Hero	---	-.379 *** (.009)	.305 *** (.010)	.281 *** (.010)
Villain	-.454 *** (.011)	---	-.244 *** (.011)	-.148 *** (.012)
Victim	.313 *** (.010)	-.235 *** (.009)	---	.505 *** (.009)
Recipient	.251 *** (.010)	-.172 *** (.009)	.466 *** (.009)	---

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Figures

Fig. 1: Mean scaled evaluations of the United Kingdom in WW2, by sample nationality (X axis groupings) and role (different bars). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.
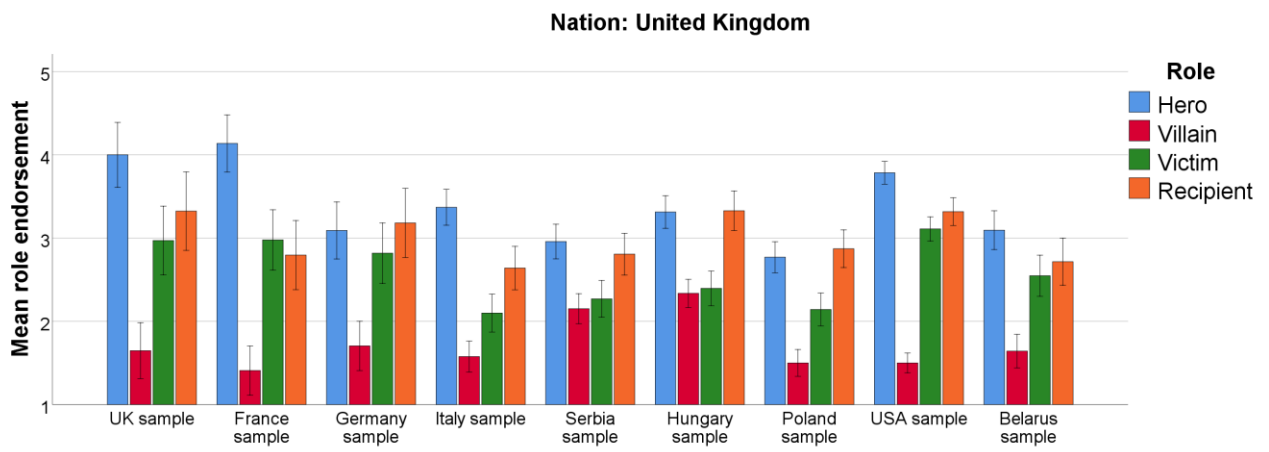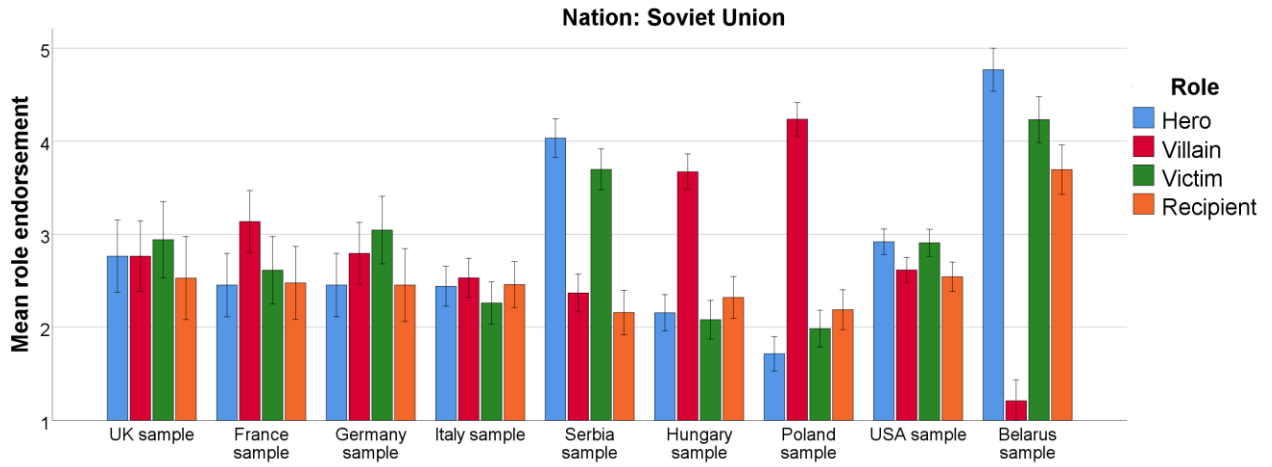
Fig. 2: Mean scaled evaluations of the United States in WW2, by sample nationality (X axis groupings) and role (different bars). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.
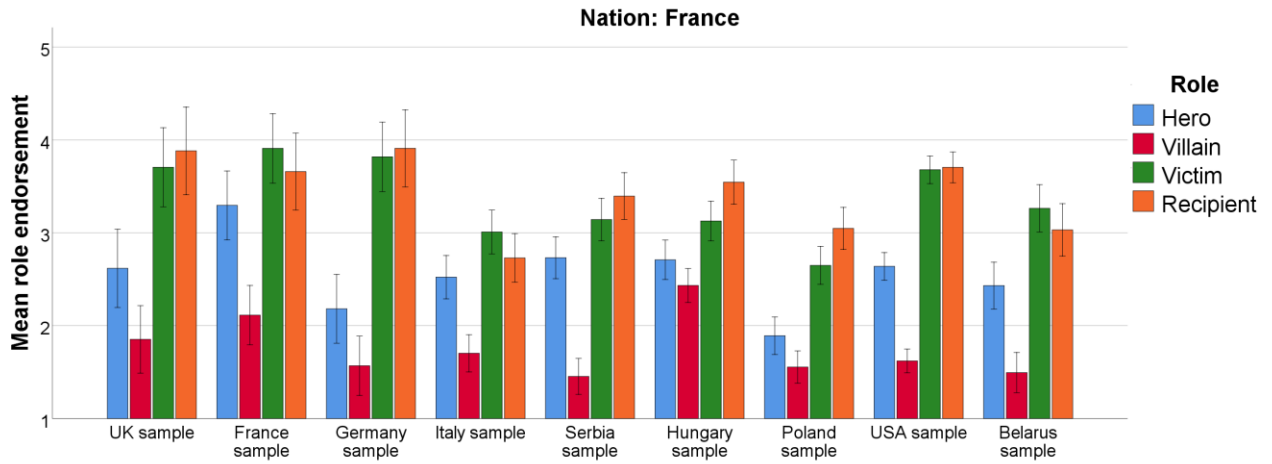

Nation: United States
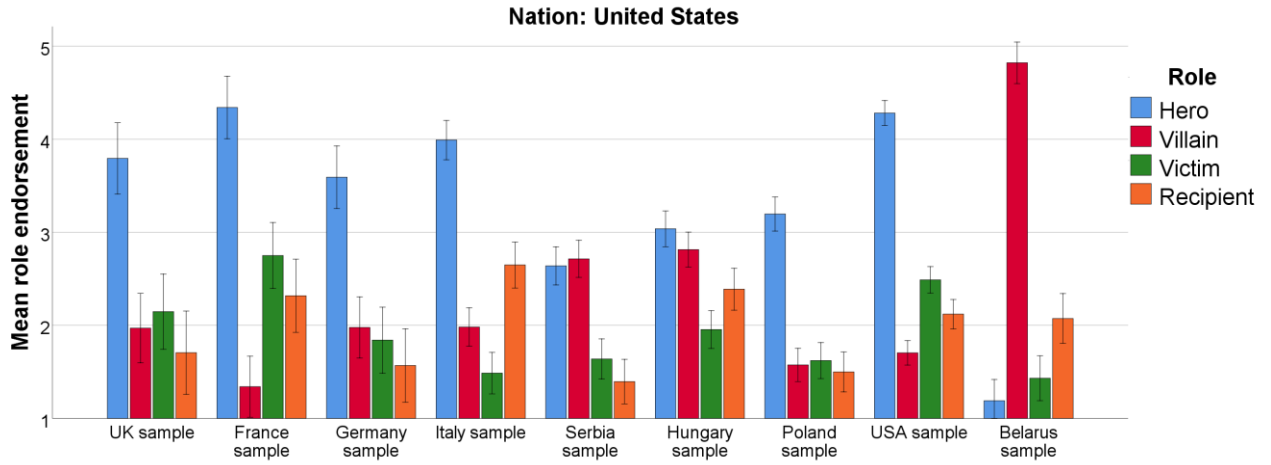
Fig. 3: Mean scaled evaluations of Germany in WW2, by sample nationality (X axis groupings) and role (different bars). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.
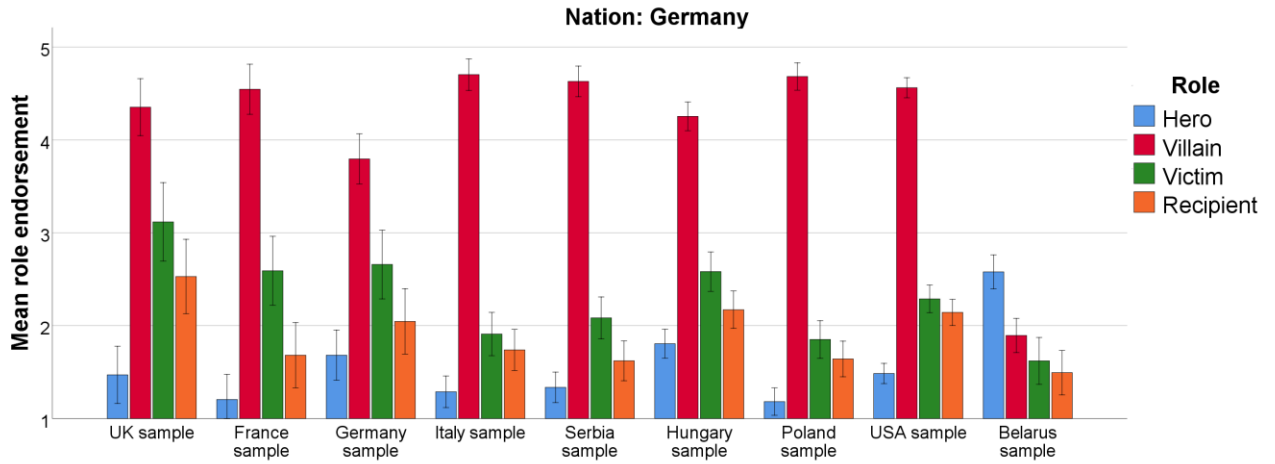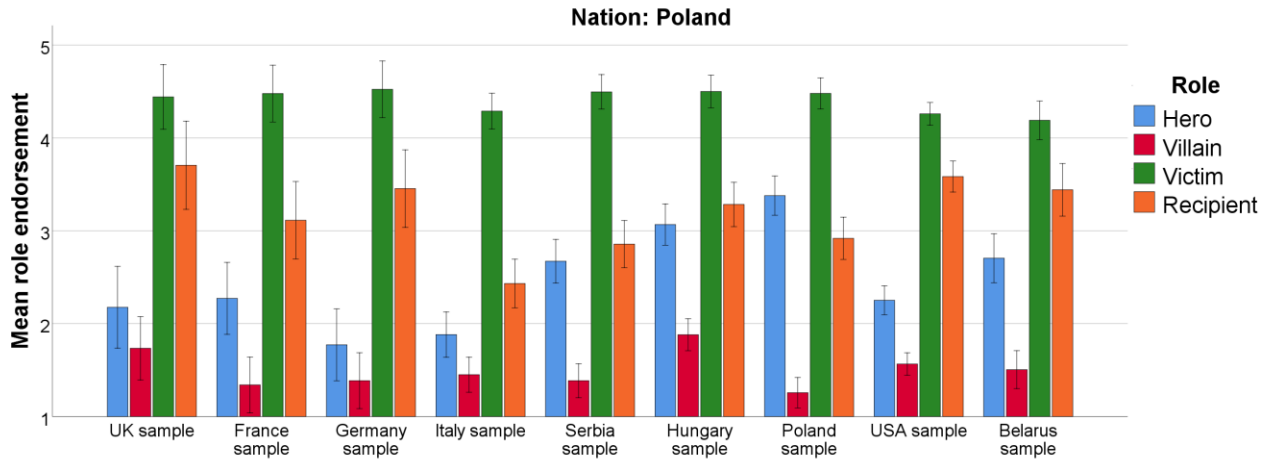
Fig. 4: Mean scaled evaluations of the Soviet Union in WW2, by sample nationality (X axis groupings) and role (different bars). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Fig. 5: Mean scaled evaluations of France in WW2, by sample nationality (X axis groupings) and role (different bars). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.
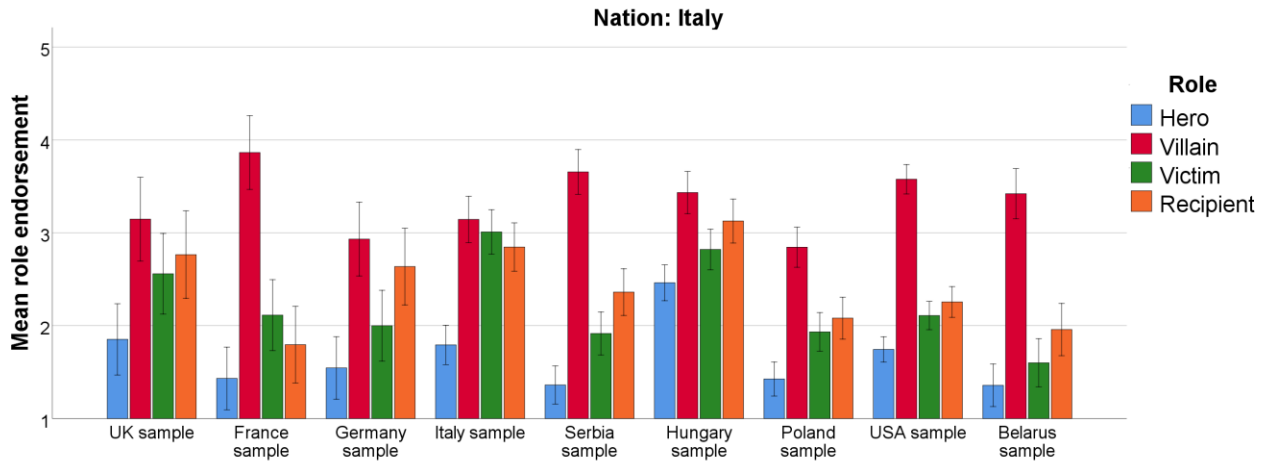
Fig. 6: Mean scaled evaluations of Poland in WW2, by sample nationality (X axis groupings) and role (different bars). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Fig. 7: Mean scaled evaluations of Italy in WW2, by sample nationality (X axis groupings) and role (different bars). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Fig. 8: Mean scaled evaluations of Japan in WW2, by sample nationality (X axis groupings) and

role (different bars). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.