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Greedy Elites and Poor Lambs: How Young Europeans Remember the Great War

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Abstract

The present study examines current social representations associated with the origins of the Great War, a major event that has profoundly affected Europe. A survey conducted in 20 European countries (N = 1906 students in social sciences) shows a high consensus: The outbreak of the war is attributed to the warring nations' leaders while the responsibility of the populations is minimized. Building on the concept of social representation of history (Liu & Hilton, 2005), we suggest that the social representations of the Great War fulfill social psychological functions in contemporary Europe. We suggest that WWI may function as a charter for European integration. Their content also suggests a desire to distinguish a positively valued ingroup ("the people") from powerful elites, construed as an outgroup.

Keywords: charter, Europe, history, social identity, social representations, WWI

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On June 28th 1914, the assassination of the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary by a young Serbian nationalist triggered a war of a new kind: The First World War (WWI), also known as the "Great War". The conflict, that initially opposed the Entente (i.e., France, the British Empire and the Russian Empire) and the Central Powers (Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire), quickly became global. From 1914 to 1918, millions of men and women were involved in a fight that mobilised human, material and financial resources incommensurate with previous wars. For instance, 50% of the adult male population of the countries involved in the conflict served in the army during the conflict (Winter, 2004). After four years of fighting, the war ended with the defeat of the Central powers and the dismantling of the central and eastern empires. But for many "winners", victory had a bitter taste, most battles resulting in thousands of deaths and in the devastation of entire regions.

A hundred years later, WWI is still considered a major historical event. A survey by Liu et al. (2005) on the representations of World history showed that WWI was regarded as the second most important event in World history after World War II (see also Bobowik et al., 2014; Hilton & Liu, 2008). Parallel to this perceived importance, numerous commemorations took place on the occasion of the Centenary of the war. In Western Europe especially, the Centenary of WWI is marked by what commenters have called "a commemorative fever" (see e.g., Fillière, 2016; Verreycken, 2015). Since 2014, hundreds of official ceremonies with a strong political stance and countless local initiatives have attracted thousands of citizens. However, little is known about the way Europeans view this war. What is the nature of this war that we are commemorating widely and that we consider so important? Or more precisely, what are the representations of WWI shared by contemporary young Europeans? To our knowledge, the question has never been addressed in social psychology. Yet, we believe that representations of WWI may still bear on contemporary intergroup relations today. Indeed, as we shall see, the way individuals represent their past have potential major consequences on the definition of their social identity, justification of the social order and interpretation of the world. The main purpose of this paper is thus twofold. First, we will highlight WWI representations shared by European students in social sciences. Then, we will discuss the results obtained and their potential implications for intergroup relations.

To achieve this, we will introduce the reader to the social representational approach and then we will try to establish a dialogue between the work of historians and of social psychologists. Indeed, so far, history seems to be the only scientific discipline that addressed the social representations of WWI in a systematic way.

A Social Representational Approach

Social psychology as a scientific discipline is traversed by a series of approaches characterized by diverse ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations, one of these being the social representational approach. This "broad approach of social psychology" aims at integrating historical, cultural and macrosocial conditions in the understanding of social psychological phenomena (Wagner et al., 1999). As such, it is particularly appropriate to study the way individuals represent historical events. The authors who addressed the question of the representations of historical events the most systematically with a social representational approach are Liu and Hilton. These authors developed the notion of social representations of history.

Social representations of history (SRH) are organized knowledge of the past shared among group members. They take the form of symbols, models and events that are part of the group's culture (here, "group" is understood as "people", like the French or the Danes; Bar-Tal, 2014). According to Liu and Hilton, a central part of the representations of a group's history is constituted by what they call "charters" (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Such charters are narratives about the origins of a group and its historical mission. They are composed of hegemonic SR (i.e., consen-

sual representations widely shared among the members of a society; see [Moscovici, 1988](#)). As such, they are often taken for granted, and even treated as reality. As SR, charters are thought to have a descriptive dimension. They contain stereotypes but also names of people and events that are part of narratives of the origin of the group. To date, many studies have shown evidence of the hegemonic structure of the SR composing the charters. In a series of comparative studies, Liu and his colleagues have shown that SRH are characterized by significant consensus over the events and historical characters that are considered as the most important in the group's national history (see [Huang, Liu, & Chang, 2004](#)) but also in the history of the world (see e.g., [Cabecinhas et al., 2011](#); [Liu, 1999](#); [Páez et al., 2008](#)). These consensual representations focus on the recent past, on war and political events and are distinctly eurocentric. Charters are also characterized by a strong normative/prescriptive dimension. Indeed, they define roles for the group and confer legitimacy to its actions. They delineate what group members can and can't do – they establish rules and moral codes – often by referring to historical analogies. As such, they are more than a simple collection of representations or collective memories ([Liu & Hilton, 2005](#)). We can distinguish at least three functional aspects of SRH: construction/maintenance of social identity, framing/legitimization of inter/in-group relations, and interpretation of the world.

Social Identity

The existence of widely shared charters allows defining the essence of a group ([Liu & Hilton, 2005](#)). Charters explain the group's past in the form of foundational myths, but also shape its present and future. The narrative of a “shared experience” is thus central to the construction of a social identity as it helps maintaining the continuity of the group despite the evolving situations. As such, it is transmitted across generations and to new group members through institutions and cultural products such as commemorations, official narratives, vernaculars, museums, etc. (see [Anderson, 2006](#); [Liu & Laszlo, 2007](#); [Liu & Sibley, 2009](#); [Olick & Robbins, 1998](#); [Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, & Levy, 2011](#)).

Group Relations

By conditioning the social identity of peoples, SRH also legitimize specific forms of social order and of political culture ([Liu & Sibley, 2009](#)). They define what group members can and can't do in their society, what is acceptable and what is not. They also connect individuals to a larger collective and can imbue their own existence with historical meaning. At the societal level, charters provide national groups with a specific status in their international relations and can legitimate specific political agendas ([Liu & Hilton, 2005](#)).

Interpretation of the World

SRH provide peoples with specific frames of interpretation of the world. The use of historical analogies allows peoples to interpret current situations and conflicts through the lens of past events (see [Liu et al., 2005](#)). For instance, members of groups that possess a strong memory of victimization can see the world as especially threatening (e.g., [Bieber, 2002](#); [Schori-Eyal, Halperin, & Bar-Tal, 2014](#)).

The approach to SR developed by Liu and Hilton seems therefore particularly appropriate to investigate how young Europeans represent the Great War and especially the possible existence of a set of shared representations. Building on their approach, we shall adopt a cross-country comparative perspective in order to investigate the presence of similarities in the SR of WWI among European university students.

We have sketched a theoretical framework that seems particularly well suited to appraise SR of the Great War. Nevertheless, to our knowledge, this topic has never been addressed in the field of social psychology. In order

to know more about these representations, we must make a detour by a discipline that has addressed systematically the representations of WWI: Cultural History.

History

Like most major historical events, WWI gave rise to a set of widely shared representations. And these representations have evolved over time and space. Thus, in Europe especially, in 1914, the myth of war enthusiasm and of patriotic fervour loomed large in many countries (Winter, 1992). In addition, WWI was first introduced by most of the belligerents as a defensive war (Mombauer, 2013). Over the years, other representations of the war have emerged. For instance, as early as 1925 and the Locarno Treaties, a new alternative discourse emerged, condemning the horrors of war itself, rather than a specific enemy (Standaert, 2013). Obviously, social representations (SR) of the war were much more diversified than focusing only on the glorification of the fighters or the condemnation of the massacres. They varied significantly and evolved in different ways across nations and social groups (see Mosse, 1991; Van Ypersele, 2010). For instance, in states such as France and Germany, WWI was associated to a common past of collective sufferings (Rosoux, 2001). Conversely, until recently in Serbia, the sufferings endured by the Serbs during WWI were emphasized and included in a chain of victimizing events, some dating back more than six centuries (Bieber, 2002)ⁱ. One of the key lessons from the historical literature is that throughout the 20th century, very different representations of the war have been mobilised in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. On the Eastern side, historians have highlighted a representation by the Soviets (and later, by extension, in other Soviet republics) of WWI as an imperialistic war where masses were sacrificed (see Eichenberg, 2015; Schramm, 2007). Current representations of the war in Western European countries are better documented. Starting in the late 1920s, the most widely shared representations centre on the "waste of lives", the incompetence of the elites and the absurdity of the war (e.g., Arnold-de-Simine, 2015; Todman, 2005). Soldiers are depicted as united in death, regardless of their nationalityⁱⁱ.

According to historians, these variations between Western and Eastern Europe are to some extent the result of different memory dynamics. In most Western European countries, the relative importance of WWI has varied across historical periods, but the war has remained present in the official memories and cultural productions from the interwar period until now (see e.g., Prost & Winter, 2004). Tens of thousands of British pupils visit the battlefields and cemeteries of the Commonwealth on the Continent each year, and millions of French and German citizens keep in mind the famous handshake of their respective presidents in Verdun in 1984 (see Rosoux, 2007).

In the Eastern part of Europe, even if the material and human toll of WWI is comparable to its Western counterpart (Eichenberg, 2015), the memories of the war have had a completely different destiny. In the case of Poland, this led specialists to call it the "Forgotten War" rather than the "Great War" (Traba, 2000, as cited in Eichenberg, 2015). This "forgetting" of WWI is mainly due to the 1917 Soviet revolution in Russia and the post-WWII hegemony of the USSR over Eastern Europe. Soviets considered WWI as an imperialistic war and subsequently tried to marginalise it. According to Dale (2013), "the marginalisation of World War I was an active process that involved the active participation of hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens in shaping and contesting memory." (p. 2024). The same author noted that, at some point, "historians of Soviet Russia have argued that the Great War disappeared from official, public and popular memories" (p. 2023). Thus, if WWI memories exist in the East, they were actively silenced until recently (Eichenberg, 2015; Petrone, 2011).

The differences in the way of representing WWI between Eastern and Western European countries also reflect different historical frames in which the war took place. If, for many Western countries, WWI can be considered a

well-delimited historical episode that took place between 1914 and 1918, this is not the case for many other countries, especially in the East. For some countries, WWI began as a continuation of previous conflicts such as the First and Second Balkan War in 1912-1913 involving, among others, the Ottoman Empire, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia. In Russia, WWI ended after the revolution of 1917 and was followed by five years of civil war. Finally, the dismantling of the Russian, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires was followed by periods of trouble and civil conflicts that lasted for years in Finland, Poland, Turkey, Hungary, Romania, the Baltic countries and most of the Balkan states. Thus, for instance, for Poles, WWI was much less the end of the "Belle Epoque" than the hope for a new independence (Schramm, 2007). Such examples led Eichenberg (2015) to conclude that representations of the war as the "founding disaster" of the 20th century are not present in the East (p. 57).

However, a strong focus on the contrasts between Western and Eastern countries' memories could lead to an underestimation of national specificities in representations of the war. As such, each national set of representations of the war cannot be fully assimilated to an "Eastern" or "Western" category. For instance, even if Hungary has been under Soviet influence for decades, its representations of WWI have been pervasive in the national memory throughout the whole century and are primarily articulated around the "drama" of the Treaty of Trianon (see Csertó & László, 2013; Gerner, 2007).

So, what have we learned from historians? In sum, the historical literature suggests that representations of the war are assumed to differ between Eastern and Western Europe as well as between particular nations. Yet, some characteristics of these representations seem to be shared across Europe. In both the East and West, the war tends to be viewed less as a confrontation between nations than as the sacrifice of the masses for the benefit of imperialism and political interests. Building on the lessons of historians (see Arnold-de-Simine, 2015; Eichenberg, 2015; Schramm, 2007; Todman, 2005), we expect to evidence a commonly shared narrative opposing the sacrifice of the masses to the imperialistic and political motives of their leaders. This constitutes our main hypothesis. Different country groupings will also be compared in order to investigate for potential differences according to historical and contemporary sociopolitical divides. More specifically, we will investigate whether SR vary according to status during WWI, belonging to Eastern or Western Europe, past colonial status, growth after the 2008 crisis and presence vs. absence of separatist/independentist tendencies. Despite the hypothesized presence of a shared narrative, we assume that SR of WWI vary between countries. The latter hypothesis complements the previous one, as specific SR can coexist with a shared narrative.

Method

A team composed of social psychologists and historians (as part of a large trans-European COST networkiii) jointly designed a survey in order to address our main Hypothesis. The survey (an online questionnaire) was conducted among university students in social sciences (mainly psychology). The characteristics of the sample are similar to the ones used in most studies on the topic (see e.g., Bobowik et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2009). Between March 2014 and July 2015, 1906 students (73.6% women, average age = 22.03 years, $SD = 6.96$) from universities of 20 countries completed the survey as part of their psychology courses or in exchange for credits: 53 from an Austrian university, 212 from Belgium, 121 from Bosnia, 122 from Croatia, 48 from Estonia, 36 from Finland, 98 from France, 149 from Germany, 100 from Greece, 80 from Hungary, 136 from Italy, 35 from Norway, 55 from Poland, 43 from Portugal, 125 from Romania, 111 from Russia, 208 from Serbia, 67 from Spain, 72 from Turkey and 35 from the UK. In each country, with the exception of France and Germany, data were collected in a single

university (see [Appendix 1](#) for a general overview of the subsamples' characteristics). In this article, we use a cross-country comparison approach. Participants will thus be labelled as members of countries. Nevertheless, the reader must keep in mind that, beyond the country label, there is in most cases a single university. Most European countries were represented, including Russia and Turkey, two major actors in the Great War. In addition to the country/university level, individual countries were grouped in categories corresponding to historical and contemporary socio-political divides: Status during WWI, belonging to Eastern or Western Europe, past colonial status, growth after the 2008 crisis and presence vs. absence of separatist/independentist tendencies. These categorizations were based respectively on the following sources: Great War Encyclopedia ([Audoin-Rouzeau & Becker, 2004](#)), [Wikimedia Commons European History Atlas \(n.d.\)](#), Wikipedia article on [European colonialism \(n.d.\)](#), [OECD Quarterly Growth Rates \(2018\)](#) and Wikipedia List of [active separatist movements in Europe \(n.d.\)](#).

Participants were presented the questionnaire in their language of education. Items were translated from English by the researcher(s) in charge of data collection in each specific country. The translated versions were then checked by the first author and native speakers. Completing the questionnaire took on average 30 minutes. Only those parts of the survey that are relevant to the current analysis are presented here (the full questionnaire is available here: <https://osf.io/sruk8/>). Besides questions about demographics, it was composed of the following set of items. Unless specified, all variables were measured on 7-point scales, ranging from 1 = Not at all to 7 = Extremely.

Social Representations of the War

The representations of the war were measured using two indicators. The first one consists in a list of 14 reasons for the war. The list was composed of the specific representations of WWI highlighted by historians, to which we added reasons classically associated with the representations of the beginning of a war (i.e., politics, greed, power; see [Van der Linden & Licata, 2012](#); see [Appendix 2](#) for the complete list of reasons for the war). In order to appraise the perceived importance of these representations, participants were asked to answer, for each item, "To what extent did the following reason lead to the War?"

The second indicator is a measure of the involvement of four social groups in the beginning of the conflict. It was specifically designed to compare the perceived involvement of peoples and leaders in the war. Participants were invited to answer the following question: "To what extent were the majority of the following groups involved in the war against their will?" Two social groups were civilians: "The people living in the involved countries" and "Political leaders". The two other groups were military: "Front troops" and "Staff officers (generals, colonels)". The focus on the key moment of the outbreak of the war seemed especially relevant, since it allowed to highlight the representations of the main dynamics triggering and structuring the conflict.

Results

Cross-Country Comparison

In line with work by [Liu et al. \(2005\)](#), we voluntarily departed from complex multivariate analyses, as the main objective of this paper is descriptive-comparative: to highlight the relative importance of certain representations of war and their distribution across countries. As such, the use of ranking analyses seems especially appropriate. The relative importance and distribution of the perceived reasons for war were measured using hierarchical

ranking based on the mean level of the items by country (see Doise et al., 1992). Ranking is a simple and clear descriptive method used in most comparative studies about SRH (see Bobowik et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2009). For each sample, items were ranked in descending order according to their mean level. Results are presented in Figure 1.

Homogeneity and "Vertical Type" Structure

The first observation is the remarkable cross-national consensus about the relative importance of the reasons for war. The willingness of the leaders to reinforce their power is the reason for war that ranks highest in terms of importance. It is ranked first in 12 out of 22 samples. It is also ranked in the top 3 of the most important reasons for war in all samples but the Turkish one. The second reason perceived as the most important is the selfishness of the nation's leaders. These first two reasons are both present in the top 3 in 12 out of 22 samples. The third reason perceived as the most important is nationalism (12 times in top 3). Interestingly, this pattern appears to be relatively independent of the status of the countries in WWI (see Figure 2). Whether the participants are from former members of the Triple Alliance (namely 594 students from Austria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Germany, Hungary and Turkey), of from the Entente (namely 1149 students from Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia and United Kingdom) or neutrals (102 students from Norway and Spain), this does not appear to significantly affect the perceived importance of the main reasons that led to the conflict. The main difference between these three groups is that the economic context is ranked third in the Entente countries while nationalism is ranked fourth. Regarding East-West patterns, results are quite similar. Participants from Western European countries (namely 964 students from Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom)^V and Eastern European countries (namely 870 students from Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Estonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Serbia) similarly perceive a high responsibility of the leaders in the outbreak of the war (see Figure 2). The main difference between East and West is the perceived importance of the economic context, which is ranked third in order of importance in the Eastern countries (nationalism is ranked in the fifth place). In sum, the results highlight an attribution of the main responsibility for the outbreak of war to national leaders, and a stigmatisation of nationalism.

Parallel to this consensus about the reasons perceived as most important, another set of representations is even more widely shared. It concerns the reasons for war that are rated as the least important. "Chance" is ranked last in 19 out of 22 samples (and 3 times in the bottom 3). Other unpopular reasons are peoples' willingness to fight (19 times in the bottom 3) and misunderstanding between the peoples. These two reasons are found 16 times together in the bottom 3. This pattern appears to be independent of the status of the countries during WWI and of the East-West distinction (see Figure 2). The second step aims at backing the descriptive results with a clearer statistical criterion. We appraised the degree of agreement in the ranking of the 14 reasons for war among the different samples, using Kendall's Coefficient of concordance. Results reveal that for each categorization the degree of agreement in the ranking of the 14 reasons for war is very reasonable (Kendall's $W_{\text{Status during WWI}} = .97, p < .001$; Kendall's $W_{\text{East-West distinction}} = .94, p = .026$).

City, Country Code	Salzburg, AT	Brussels, BE	Banja Luka, BA	Zagreb, HR	Tallinn, EE	Helsinki, FI	Rennes, Paris & Toulouse, FR	Hamburg, DE	Landau, DE	Bremen, DE	Athens, GR	Budapest, HU	Milan, IT	Oslo, NO	Warsaw, PL	Braga, PT	Iasi, RO	Moscow, RU	Belgrade, RS	Leioa, ES	Ankara, TR	Undisclosed City, UK
Reasons (n)	53	212	121	122	48	36	98	85	33	31	100	80	136	35	55	43	125	111	208	67	72	35
WWJ Status	C	E	C	C	E	E	E	C	C	C	E	C	E	N	C&E	E	E	E	E	N	C	E
Willingness of leaders to reinforce their power	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	1	1	1	2	3	3	1	1	2	2	2	1
Egoism of national leaders	1	4	4	2	2	4	3	2	1	4	3	5	5	4	1	2	3	3	5	1	4	2
Nationalism	6	2	3	3	10	2	4	4	3	1	4	4	2	1	5	1	8	11	3	6	3	3
Defence of the country	2	3	5	11	8	6	1	7	5	7	10	11	8	7	9	4	2	5	10	7	9	4
Economic context	4	5	7	6	3	5	5	6	7	5	2	6	3	5	2	5	4	2	4	4	7	9
Misunderstanding between elites	9	7	11	10	9	11	6	5	8	12	11	10	11	6	6	9	5	8	11	11	11	10
Imperialism/Colonialism	8	8	8	5	4	3	7	1	4	3	5	3	4	3	4	7	12	6	1	5	1	6
Ideological conflicts	7	6	6	4	5	8	8	9	6	10	7	8	6	8	7	6	6	4	6	3	5	5
Nation's desire to export their model of society	11	9	2	8	7	10	9	12	9	11	8	7	10	10	10	8	9	9	9	8	8	8
Social conditions of that time	5	10	9	7	11	7	10	8	11	6	6	12	9	9	11	10	11	10	7	10	10	7
Need for raw materials	10	11	10	9	6	9	11	11	10	8	9	2	7	11	8	12	10	7	8	9	2	13
Misunderstanding between the peoples	12	12	12	12	12	13	12	13	14	13	12	9	12	12	12	11	7	12	12	12	12	12
Willingness of the peoples to fight	13	13	13	14	13	12	13	10	12	9	13	13	13	13	13	13	14	13	13	13	13	11
By chance	14	14	14	13	14	14	14	14	13	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	13	14	14	14	14	14

Figure 1. Ranked perceived reasons for war by country.

Note. C = Central Powers (“losers”); E = Entente (“winners”); N = Neutral. For each country, the three highest ranks are highlighted in bold and the three lowest ranks are marked in italics. These six values are highlighted in a grey whose intensity decreases as a function of the rank. The three German sub-samples are presented in three columns. Because of technical reasons, the three French subsamples couldn't be distinguished. They are presented in a single column. A more complete figure with mean levels and confidence intervals for the 14 indicators is available as Appendix 3.

Status WWI/East-West Distinction	Central Powers	Entente	Neutral	East	West
Number of samples	(8)	(11)	(2)	(8)	(13)
Willingness of leaders to reinforce their power	2.50	1.32	2	1.38	1.88
Egoism of national leaders	2.88	3.36	2.5	3.13	2.85
Nationalism	3.38	4.45	3.5	5.88	2.92
Defence of the country	7.25	5.59	7	7.63	5.58
Economic context	5.75	4.27	4.5	4.25	4.85
Misunderstanding between elites	9.50	8.91	8.5	8.75	8.92
Imperialism/Colonialism	4.13	5.82	4	5.38	5
Ideological conflicts	6.88	6	5.5	5.75	6.77
Nation's desire to export their model of society	8.50	8.73	9	7.63	9.46
Social conditions of that time	8.50	8.91	9.5	9.75	8.31
Need for raw materials	7.75	9.36	10.5	7.50	10.15
Misunderstanding between the peoples	<i>12.13</i>	<i>11.64</i>	<i>11.5</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12.31</i>
Willingness of the peoples to fight	<i>12.13</i>	<i>12.91</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>13.25</i>	<i>12.23</i>
By chance	<i>13.75</i>	<i>13.73</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>13.75</i>	<i>13.77</i>

Figure 2. Mean ranks of perceived reasons for war as a function of status during the war and of East-West distinction.

Note. Central Powers = "losers"; Entente = "winners"; Eastern countries = Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Estonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia; Western countries = Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom. Participants from Turkey have been excluded as they are not classically associated with the East-West prism of interpretation. Values in the figure correspond to calculated mean values across country ranks. The three highest mean ranks are highlighted in bold and the three lowest mean ranks are marked in italics. These six mean ranks are highlighted in a grey whose intensity decreases as a function of the rank.

The existence of a wide cross-national consensus around a shared pattern of representations, regardless of the status of the countries during the war, is consistent with the main hypothesis. However, we decided to further test the scope of the consensus by appraising whether it transcends divides loaded with more contemporary significance than WWI alliances. Three groupings reflecting contemporary cleavages were selected: presence vs. absence of colonial past after the 1940's, consequences of the 2008 crisis on GDP growth and presence vs. absence of separatist tendencies (Figure 3). Results show that the consensus holds beyond these three cleavages, both for the reasons perceived as least important and for the ones perceived as the most important in the outbreak of the war (see Figure 3). The only diverging pattern is the perceived importance of imperialism/colonialism that is ranked third among the countries whose GDP has been the least affected by the 2008 crisis. In this pattern, nationalism is ranked fourth (see Figure 3). In these cases, also, Kendall's Coefficients of concordance reveal that for each categorization the degree of agreement in the ranking of the 14 reasons for war is very reasonable: Kendall's $W_{\text{Colonial Past}} = .96, p = .024$; Kendall's $W_{\text{GDP}} = .96, p < .001$; Kendall's $W_{\text{Separatism/Independentism}} = .97, p = .021$. These additional analyses bring stronger empirical substantiation to our main hypothesis. There seems to be a significant international consensus around a shared pattern of representations of the outbreak of WWI. This set of representations is characterised by an emphasis on nationalism as accounting for the outbreak of the war. However, what characterizes this set of representations most is its vertical structure, in which the responsibility of nations' leaders is put at the forefront while that of peoples is absolutely minimised.

Colonial Status/ GDP Growth after 2008/ Presence of significant Separatist/ Independentist Tendencies	Colonial Past	No colonial Past	Good Growth	Growth Stopped	Growth Decreased	Separatist/ Independentist Tendencies	No Separatist/ Independentist Tendencies
Number of samples	(7)	(15)	(6)	(6)	(4)	(7)	(15)
Willingness leaders reinforce their power	1.50	3	2.83	1.75	1.75	1.86	1.90
Egoism nation leaders	3	2.07	2.50	3.17	2.75	3.43	2.80
Nationalism	4	4	4.50	2.83	3.25	4.14	3.93
Defence of the country	4.64	7.33	7	4.08	7.25	5.86	6.77
Economic context	4.71	4.73	4.83	5.17	3.50	5.29	4.47
Misunderstanding between elites	8.86	9	8.33	8.17	10.50	9.86	9
Imperialism/Colonialism	6.29	4.33	3.17	6	5.25	5.43	8.53
Ideological conflicts	5.29	6.80	6.83	6.83	5.50	5	6.93
Nation's desire to export their model of society	8.71	8.73	9.83	9.50	8.50	7.71	9.2
Social conditions of that time	9.43	8.67	9.33	8	8.75	9.29	8.73
Need for raw materials	10	8.27	7.67	11	9.25	8.43	9
Misunderstanding between the peoples	11.86	11.80	12.67	12.17	11.75	12	11.73
Willingness of the peoples to fight	12.71	12.06	11.67	12.67	13	12.71	12.60
By chance	14	13.67	13.83	13.67	14	14	13.67

Figure 3. Mean ranks of perceived reasons for war as a function of colonial past, of consequences of the 2008 Crisis on GDP growth and of separatist and independentist tendencies.

Note. Countries with colonial past (countries with colonies/protectorates after WW2) = Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, Russia, Spain, United Kingdom; Countries without colonial past (after WW2) = Austria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Turkey; Countries with GDP momentarily affected but good growth index from 2009 to 2015 = Germany, Poland, Russia, Turkey; Countries with GDP affected and growth stopped from 2009 to 2015 = Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Norway, United Kingdom; Countries with GDP significantly affected and decreased growth = Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain^{VI}. Six countries were excluded from analyses given the absence of reliable indicators. Countries facing major separatist/independentist tendencies = Belgium, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Italy, Russia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom; Countries without major separatist/independentist tendencies = Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia. Values in the figure correspond to calculated mean values across country ranks. The three highest mean ranks are highlighted in bold and the three lowest mean ranks are marked in italics. These six mean ranks are highlighted in a grey whose intensity decreases as a function of the rank.

The presence of a vertical structure in the set of representations is also evidenced in the perception of the involvement of social groups at the beginning of the war. Figure 4 shows the mean level of the forced involvement in the war of two groups from the civil society by sample: political leaders and peoples. In every sample, the mean level of forced involvement of peoples was rated higher than 4.5 on a 7-point scale, whereas (with the exception of Romania: $M = 5.01$, $SD = 2.03$) the forced involvement of political leaders has mean scores lower than 3.5. Again with the exception of Romania, $t(124) = 1.72$, $p = .089$, the peoples are considered to have been involved in the war against their will far more than the leaders.

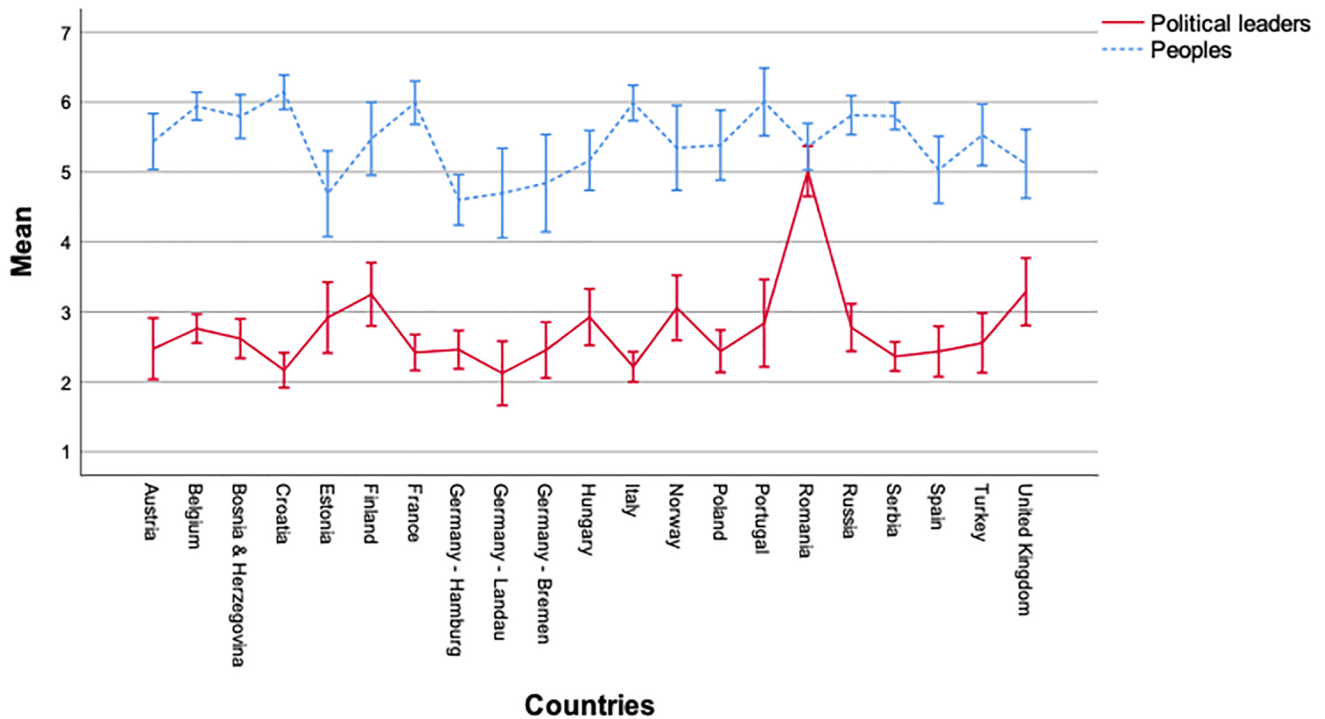


Figure 4. Mean levels of perceived constrained involvement in the war of two groups of civilians. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

The same pattern is found for the military, albeit with less marked differences than for civilians. In each sample, results from paired *t*-tests show that frontline soldiers are considered to have been involved more against their will than staff officers (see Figure 5). The latter result illustrates once again the existence of a vertical structure of the conflict's outbreak, in which "leaders" and "peoples" are distinct. In addition to this confirmation, these findings also demonstrate the existence of a vertical structure within the military. As such, the present results support our main hypothesis.

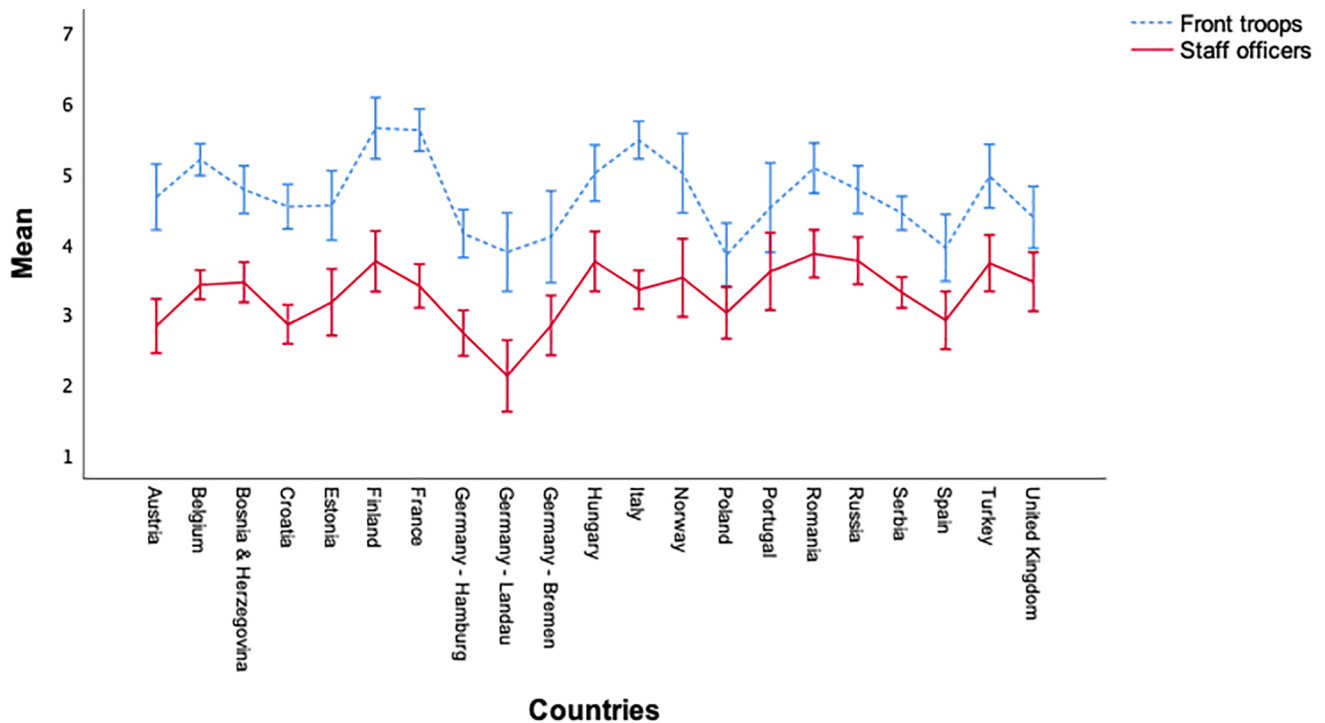


Figure 5. Mean levels of perceived constrained involvement in the war of two groups of army members. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

East-West and Between Countries Differences

As we noted, the ranking of the reasons for war perceived as the most and the least important is generally equivalent across European countries. However, this shared set of representations is accompanied by variations among countries (see Figures 2 and 3). For instance, the "economic context" is perceived as one of the most important reasons for war in Austria, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Poland and Russia but is perceived as relatively less important in the other countries. In the subsamples "Eastern countries" and "Entente", the "economic context" also comes third in the perceived responsibilities, before "nationalism". Nevertheless, the mean rank of these two indicators (i.e., nationalism and economic context) are very similar and "economic context" appears fourth in Western European countries and fifth in the former members of the Entente, not far from "nationalism". "Imperialism" is a reason for war perceived as relatively important in Finland, Norway, Serbia, two of the three German samples, Hungary and Turkey and is ranked third in the countries less affected by the 2008 crisis; "Defence of the country" is considered relatively important (Top 3) in four countries: Austria, Belgium, France and Romania. Finally, Turkey seems to be diverging from the other countries, as it is the only one that does not perceive a high responsibility of its leaders for the war's outbreak, and Romania is the only country where political leaders are seen as being involved against their will almost as much as the other civilians (see Figure 4). These differences between countries show that, while representations of war seem characterized by a shared structure, they are far from being uniform across countries. Interestingly, the cross-country comparison reveals more differences in terms of representations than the comparison of the five broader categories.

Discussion

The present paper started from an observation: While WWI is perceived as one of the most important events in the history of the world and its Centenary is widely commemorated, little is known about its perception by young Europeans. Noting the absence of studies on the topic in social psychology, we investigated what history could teach us about the shared representations of the first global conflict. We discovered that there exist similarities in the way Europeans interpret WWI. Indeed, both in Western and Eastern Europe, WWI tends to be viewed as an opposition between victimized peoples that were sacrificed and leaders blinded by their political and imperialistic ambitions. Using a social representational perspective, we showed that young Europeans represent the outbreak of the war in a similar way. The greed and egoism of the nations' leaders is perceived as the most important reason that led to the war. By contrast, peoples are considered as having a low level of responsibility in the outbreak of the conflict. Historians' observations are thus empirically confirmed on specific samples. These samples are composed of European students in the social sciences – most of them born after the fall of the "Iron Curtain" and exposed to an overrepresentation of Western cultural media. Our findings were hence obtained on limited samples within each society, but across a large range of national contexts to which our participants are exposed. The strongest and most consistent empirical pattern highlighted by these findings displays a shared representation of WWI as imposed by leaders to ordinary peoples.

There was only little variation in the content the representations considered as the most and least important reasons for the outbreak of the war of these representations, both across the whole sample but also between five groupings reflecting historical and contemporary societal cleavages. There was strong agreement on the ranking of 14 proposed reasons for war, across national subsamples as well as across transnational groupings of subsamples. How can we explain such homogeneity? Two interpretations are especially relevant in the case of the studied samples.

The first concerns the distant character of the event. WWI broke out more than a hundred years from now. And while it exerted major consequences for the destiny of Europe, it was followed by another global war that is perceived as even more important (see [Liu et al., 2005](#)) and by many major geopolitical changes. In sum, in 100 years, the world has changed radically and as a relatively ancient event, WWI might be characterized by few polemical representations: Its consequences are no longer hot societal issues in the current societal situation in Europe^{vii}. The homogeneity of the representations of the war might result from this lack of relevance. Another effect of the temporal distance can be limited knowledge of the events for lay individual. Lacking nuanced knowledge, young European students would then interpret the conflict in very broad and abstract terms. This phenomenon is well illustrated by the British historian Dan Todman. Stressing that the war was not a matter of "lived experience" anymore, he observes that war stories have lost details and nuances ([Todman, 2005](#)).

A second interpretation – that complements the first – resides in the globalization of memory. This globalization is massive. In the past fifteen years, people's relationship with the past has changed. Memory currents pass through most contemporary societies and structure themselves globally ([Garcia, 2010](#)). What can be qualified as a "globalization of memory" does not seem to be restricted to specific events but encompasses a set of regional and global events ([Rousso, 2007](#)). This globalization can be explained by the conjunction of several factors, the main one being the digital revolution, allowing a globalization of culture and information. In many cases this evolution of people's relationship with the past leads to a homogenisation of their representations of history (see [Liu](#)

et al., 2005). This effect is especially relevant in the case of the specific samples studied here (see [Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010](#)). Indeed, university students are potentially more frequently in contact with other Europeans than young people in the same age group (given Erasmus-style exchange programs and students' greater mastery of other languages). Moreover, university students have access to different sources of information about WWI than less educated populations and are presumably rather mobile and cosmopolitan. As such, they are more prone to be exposed to globalized information. We therefore assume that both interpretations contribute to explain the presence of a homogenised set of SR of the war, structured around a shared core narrative.

Nevertheless, the presence of this shared core narrative should not lead to underestimate variations between countries on specific aspects of the representations of WWI. For instance, countries that were under threat by empires during the war (Finland, Norway and Serbia) and defeated countries with imperialistic ambitions (Germany, Hungary and Turkey) perceive imperialism as an important reason for war. The perceived importance of the "defence of the country" by the Belgians and French fits with the historical experience of Belgium and France as being partially occupied by Germany at the beginning of the war ([Becker, 2013](#); [De Schaepdrijver, 2004](#)). It fits much less with the historical experience of Austria and Romania that were in positions of "invaders" during the war. However, it can be better understood knowing that the "defence of the country" was an argument classically used by most countries to justify their involvement in the war ([Audoin-Rouzeau & Becker, 2000](#); [Demartial, 1931](#)).

Interestingly, and contrary to what had been suggested by historians, differences between countries no longer appear to organise along an East/West cleavage. A tiny exception is the perceived role of the "economic context", which is ranked third in Eastern Europe and fourth in the West. One might speculate whether the perceived importance of the economic context could be linked to a remaining influence of Marxism, but caution is warranted when interpreting this result given that the mean levels of the two indicators (i.e., nationalism and economic context) are very close (see [Appendix 3](#)). Overall, the similarity between eastern and western countries is remarkable. It suggests that the East-West cleavage is currently much less relevant than at the time of the cold war, which most participants did not experience. Given this potentially limited relevance of the East-West cleavage, as well as of the WWI system of alliances, we decided to dig deeper to identify possible lines of divergence. As we noted in the introduction, social representations of history are oriented by present needs and functions. We have therefore applied three additional groupings reflecting current societal cleavages to our sample: presence vs. absence of colonial past, intensity of the effects of the 2008 crisis of GDP growth and presence vs. absence of separatist/autonomist tendencies. But again, we found a high level of consensus spanning these different categories. Finally, we statistically tested the degree of agreement on the ranking of the different reasons for war in each sample and subsample.

The key finding of the present study concerns a specific pattern of a shared representation: perceived reasons for the outbreak of WWI are largely structured around an opposition between peoples and leaders. In line with [Liu and Hilton \(2005\)](#), this observation might suggest that the representations of WWI currently constitute a charter at the level of Europe, but a specific one. Charters are widely shared by group members and are closely linked to how they interpret the world. Further, they help define social identity. We assume therefore that SR of WWI play the role of a *negative charter*, which serves as of a foil for contrast and a cautionary tale with the current state of Europe. This state is characterized by an unprecedented period of peace but also by the rise of major societal challenges. Indeed, most European societies have been at peace for more than 70 years. However, the current level of defiance toward the political and economic elites has been rarely equalled (see e.g., [OECD, 2017](#)). The level of economic inequalities is similar to the one of the end of the 19th Century (see [Piketty, 2014](#)) and the

defiance toward the political establishment is materialized in the success of populist candidates in many countries. In our view, the representations of WWI highlighted here could correspond to the counter-model against which European institutions have been built. The negative charter constituted by WWI therefore refers to the contemporary context: A peaceful and democratic Europe is born from the ashes of a war provoked by nationalism and the ego of leaders. In this sense, WWI can't be considered as an "accident".

In summary, 100 years after the event, SR of WWI seems to still function as a symbolic reservoir to warn against war. That this major bloodbath may have a potentially virtuous function a hundred years later needs to be emphasized. This representation would suggest that lessons can be drawn from the Great War. Or as Hölderlin once wrote: "*Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch*" ["But where there is danger, what rescues grows as well"] (Hölderlin, 1846/2012). These two aspects are linked to classical functions associated to charters: providing peoples with specific frames of interpretation of the world and promoting specific forms of political culture (Liu & Sibley, 2009). What is quite original in this case is that, compared to most charters that highlight a glorious episode or foundational event, this one serves as a warning, a permanent reminder of the past disaster. A highly similar function has been highlighted in a study by Bouchat et al. (2017) based on part of the samples used for the present study. We showed that the citizens of countries that were highly victimized during WWI develop a higher level of pacifist attitudes than citizens of less victimized European countries. Our interpretation of this phenomenon is that countries that were particularly victimized have developed SR favouring a peaceful coexistence. This interpretation in terms of charter and hegemonic representations seems particularly relevant in the current context.

Besides the "warning" function, SRs of the Great War may fulfil another function; protecting the group's positive social identity. Classically, individuals seek to maintain or increase their positive social identity by comparing themselves with other groups (see e.g., Tajfel, 2010). In the present case, this protection of a positive social identity would be achieved by shifting the responsibility for a negative historical event on the members of an outgroup. This function has been particularly highlighted in an article by László, Ferenczhalmy, and Szalai (2010). These authors show that the level of agency of the Hungarians is relatively lower than that of other nations in their representations of the Treaty of Trianon (a consequence of WWI particularly traumatic for Hungarians). In the current results, the level of perceived agency of peoples in the outbreak of the war is relatively low, while that of leaders is relatively high. In this case, we suppose that most students identify with the masses/peoples and that leaders are considered as the main outgroup – rather than other nations. Again, this interpretation seems especially relevant in the current period of growing anti-system movements and defiance toward elites across Europe. A perception of low agency could thus contribute to maintaining a positive social identity of students assimilated to the peoples. What is interesting in this case is that this pattern corresponds to at least two central values of Europe: Peace and a Europe of the peoples. This interpretation therefore raises several questions: Does it indicate the beginning of a movement towards a Europe of the peoples or even a post-national Europe? Although our results cannot provide adequate answers to this question, they raise interesting prospects for the future of Europe as these students are the new voters and some of them might become the new leaders. Nevertheless, a reduced sense of agency could also produce a set of relatively harmful side effects: It can reduce the responsibility of groups to take control of their destiny and hamper a realistic appraisal of their current situation (see László et al., 2010).

We have presented two interpretations of the results of this study. They are not mutually exclusive and might even reflect a common dynamic. Indeed, individuals and groups are likely to seek interpretations of the past that provide

a meaning to their social identity and to the world they live in while, simultaneously, achieving a sense of distinctiveness from relevant comparison groups (for an example in a very different context, see [Licata & Klein, 2005](#)).

Limitations

A first limitation relates to the small size of some samples and to the overrepresentation of women among most of them. This issue is the result of the pragmatic nature of cross-countries studies where a large amount of data must be collected in a short period of time (see e.g., [Liu et al., 2009](#)). Our goal was to collect data from as many major actors from the conflict as possible in order to provide a panorama of the representations in most European countries. Our desire to report data from many countries prevailed over the diversity and size of some samples. It is thus important for the reader to be aware of this limitation when interpreting the results.

A second limitation is based on the type of measurement used to appraise the SR of the war. The presentation of a limited number of items to be assessed regarding perceived importance as reasons for war does not allow the emergence of representations of the conflict to which the authors had not paid attention. Moreover, by asking participants to answer the same items in all the countries, we could blur national specificities. This issue has been particularly investigated by [Rose et al. \(1995\)](#) who pointed out that the use of surveys reifies the concept of consensus while ignoring divergent opinions. Further, given the use of single items, one limitation of the study is that measurement invariance cannot be established.

Third, although it was the main focus of the paper, the national angle we adopted may have hidden the influence of other variables on the organization of the representations of WWI (e.g., social classes, country of origin, generations, gender, social compositions of study samples across different sites). In the absence of information on most of these variables, further studies would be needed to refine our initial observations and test alternative interpretations.

Fourth, the discussion of the differences observed between countries is rather limited. The analysis of the historical and political factors that led to these differences is an extremely speculative and arduous task that we have not pretended to undertake. We consider that the interpretation of specific national patterns will be the prerogative of specialists better armed than we are to do this (e.g., historians and political scientists). This could constitute an interesting future interdisciplinary research topic.

Conclusion

The present paper constitutes an advance in the comparative study of social representations of history. Building on [Hilton and Liu \(2008\)](#)'s findings, this study is – to our knowledge – the first that highlights, on a large cross-national scale, the relative consensus on social representations of a specific historical event. Our findings suggest that social representations of WWI might play the role of an important shared symbolic reservoir in today's Europe. More generally, this paper constitutes a plea in favour of an interdisciplinary approach of social representations of history and it highlights the added value of historical studies in the analyses of social representations, both for the formulation of hypotheses and the interpretation of findings.

Notes

- i) The evolution of WWI representations is in most cases the result of promotion of specific representations by state authorities (e.g., through official statements, commemorative policies or history textbooks). However, this “top-down” mechanism is in many cases accompanied by the independent evolution of shared representations within a range of actors in each state.
- ii) This representation will quickly evolve in Germany after the end of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazi regime.
- iii) COST Network "Social Representations of History in the enlarged European Union".
http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/isch/IS1205
- iv) From here, the word people(s) is used generically to describe the popular / civilian masses.
- v) The ranking of two countries in the category "West" (i.e., Finland and Germany) must be made explicit. In the case of Germany, the mobilized universities are all from West Germany. And Finland is a Western European country according to many criteria (e.g., sharing of many Western living standards and belonging to Europe).
- vi) See <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryName=350&QueryType=View&Lang=fr#>
- vii) Except for Hungary and Turkey where the memories of the Trianon Treaty and of the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire are still present.

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Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Supplementary Materials

The full questionnaire (including parts of the survey that are not relevant to the current analysis) is available from the [OSF project page](#).

Index of Supplementary Materials

Bouchat, P., Licata, L., Rosoux, V., Allesch, C., Ammerer, H., Babinska, M., . . . Klein, O. (2019). *Greedy Elites and Poor Lambs: How Young Europeans Remember the Great War* [Supplementary Materials]. Open Science Framework.
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Appendices

Appendix 1

Table A1

Samples Main Characteristics

Country	N	% Women	Age		Main Sites of Data Collection
			M	SD	
Austria	53	77.4	23.43	8.23	University of Salzburg
Belgium	212	73.1	20.12	3.14	Université libre de Bruxelles
Bosnia & Herzegovina	121	95.0	21.36	1.59	University of Banja Luka
Croatia	122	85.2	21.50	3.18	Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar
Estonia	48	66.7	23.06	10.92	Tallinn University
Finland	36	77.8	28.08	6.42	University of Helsinki
France	98	78.6	23.46	8.52	Université Rennes 2, Université Paris Descartes & Université de Toulouse II
Germany	149	32.9	24.45	4.30	Universität Koblenz-Landau & Jacobs University & Helmut-Schmidt-Universität
Greece	100	87.0	19.50	1.46	Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences
Hungary	80	68.8	24.85	6.40	Hungarian Academy of Sciences
Italy	136	81.6	23.12	3.40	Università degli Studi di Milano – Bicocca
Norway	35	57.1	27.29	10.17	University of Oslo
Poland	55	74.5	/		University of Warsaw
Portugal	43	60.5	20.67	4.38	Universidade do Minho
Romania	125	80.8	23.52	6.57	Universitatea Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iași
Russia	111	79.3	23.07	6.75	Moscow State University of Psychology and Education
Serbia	208	72.6	21.67	3.70	University of Belgrade
Spain	67	73.1	21.78	4.03	Universidad del País Vasco
Turkey	72	76.4	23.24	4.36	Middle East Technical University
United Kingdom	35	34.3	33.57	11.23	Undisclosed

Appendix 2

Table A2

14 Reasons for War

Items
By chance
Imperialism/Colonialism
Nationalism
Nations' desire to export their model of society
The defence of the country
The economic context
The egoism of the nations' leaders
Ideological conflicts
Misunderstanding between the elites
Misunderstanding between the peoples
Need for raw materials
Social conditions of that time
The desire of the nations' leaders to reinforce their power
Willingness of the peoples to fight

Note. The items were rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). Participants were asked to answer, for each item, "To what extent did the following reason lead to the War?"

Appendix 3

City, Country Code	Salzburg, AT	Brussels, BE	Banja Luka, BA	Zagreb, HR	Tallinn, EE	Helsinki, FI	Rennes, Paris & Toulouse, FR	Hamburg, DE	Landau, DE	Bremen, DE	Athens, GR	Budapest, HU	Milan, IT	Oslo, NO	Warsaw, PL	Braga, PT	Issi, RO	Moscow, RU	Belgrade, RS	Leioa, ES	Ankara, TR	Un disclosed City, UK	
Reasons (n)	53	212	121	122	48	36	98	85	33	31	100	80	136	35	55	43	125	111	208	67	72	35	
WWI Status	C	E	C	C	E	E	E	C	C	C	E	C	E	N	C&E	E	E	E	E	N	C	E	
Willingness leaders reinforce their power	5.26 4.89- 5.64	5.42 5.24- 5.60	5.87 5.65- 6.10	5.82 5.57- 6.07	5.31 4.86- 5.77	5.69 5.36- 6.03	5.49 5.21- 5.77	5.04 4.85- 5.23	5.45 5.19- 5.71	5.84 5.64- 6.04	5.84 5.64- 6.04	5.52 5.20- 5.84	5.71 5.43- 6.00	5.65 5.41- 5.90	5.63 5.19- 6.06	5.36 5.04- 5.68	5.40 5.10- 5.78	5.82 4.91- 6.06	5.20 4.91- 5.49	5.13 4.92- 5.33	4.96 4.52- 5.39	5.57 5.18- 5.96	5.29 4.83- 5.74
Egoism nation leaders	5.64	4.93	5.29	5.35	4.98	5.14	5.21	5.13	5.45	5.35	5.02	5.11	5.08	5.29	5.60	5.51	5.21	4.41	4.57	5.00	5.88	5.06	
Nationalism	4.74	5.28	5.65	5.16	4.10	5.50	5.01	4.94	5.27	6.23	4.94	5.19	5.46	5.74	5.15	5.67	4.62	3.32	5.00	4.54	6.28	5.06	
Defence of the country	5.26	5.16	5.22	4.16	4.31	4.69	5.56	4.19	4.76	4.29	3.77	4.03	4.26	4.74	4.69	5.23	5.28	4.14	4.21	4.30	5.24	4.97	
Economic context	4.88- 5.65	4.65- 5.07	4.42- 5.00	4.66- 5.15	4.38- 5.25	4.63- 5.48	4.60-5.20	4.04-4.36	4.83	4.52- 5.02	4.78- 5.36	4.77	5.08 4.73-5.42	5.35 5.14- 5.56	5.00 4.49- 5.11- 5.69	5.40 4.72- 4.87- 5.42	4.50 4.17- 4.82	4.42 4.17- 4.82	4.96 4.50- 4.96	5.10 4.37- 5.10	5.93 5.15- 5.15	4.14 3.75-4.53	
Misunderstanding between elites	4.64	4.71	4.12	4.26	4.15	4.31	4.70	4.22	4.45	3.74	3.54	4.31	3.79	4.77	4.91	4.05	5.12	3.91	3.53	3.51	3.87	4.09	
Imperialism/Colonialism	4.68	4.66	4.62	4.94	4.58	5.25	4.61	5.13	5.12	5.61	4.74	5.25	5.16	5.24	5.07	4.10	4.14	3.81	4.97	4.70	6.65	4.54	
Ideological conflicts	4.72	4.88	4.93	5.24	5.09	5.57	4.30-4.93	5.30	5.38	5.84	5.08	5.58	5.43	5.73	5.55	5.65	4.38	4.46	5.41	5.12	6.83	4.01-5.07	
Nation's desire to export their model of society	4.28	4.57	5.81	4.79	4.33	4.44	4.05	3.64	3.97	3.77	4.30	5.06	4.01	4.00	4.60	4.51	4.39	3.88	4.22	3.99	5.24	4.37	
Social conditions of that time	4.49- 5.32	3.97- 4.36	4.28- 4.83	4.62- 5.17	3.57- 4.43	4.20- 5.08	3.67-4.27	3.64-4.00	4.01	4.80	4.85	4.64	3.56 3.21-3.91	4.24 4.50	4.29 4.78	4.36 4.74	4.00 4.46	4.22 3.94	3.66 3.86	4.43 4.21	3.94 3.59	4.49 4.45	4.07-4.91
Need for raw materials	4.28	3.75	4.20	4.47	4.37	4.50	3.64	3.68	3.79	4.13	4.03	5.41	4.30	3.91	4.80	3.40	4.29	4.06	4.37	3.97	6.39	3.51	
Misunderstanding between the peoples	3.07-3.97	3.51- 3.96	3.69- 4.36	3.62- 4.31	3.03- 3.93	2.12- 2.99	2.98-3.64	2.89-3.19	2.94	2.73	2.97	2.57	4.19-4.95	3.34 3.07- 3.61	3.97 3.45- 4.49	3.78 3.36- 4.21	3.44 2.86- 4.03	4.64 2.94- 3.53	3.23 2.99- 3.73-	3.21 2.99- 4.61	3.45 3.03- 3.87	2.54 2.15- 2.93	3.80 3.32-4.28
Willingness of the peoples to fight	3.26	2.55	2.28	2.48	3.44	2.69	2.44	3.69	3.48	4.06	2.32	2.89	2.32	3.31	2.87	2.65	2.61	1.86	2.22	2.58	2.03	3.83	
By chance	1.96-2.91	2.43	2.03	1.68	1.68	2.31	2.57	2.82	3.00	2.77	1.74	2.23	1.46	3.09	2.38	1.70	3.58	1.83	1.66	1.52	1.76	2.91	
	2.22	1.94	1.68	2.31	2.57	3.00	1.64-2.20	2.62-3.02	2.67	2.63	1.47	1.88-2.57	1.90	2.46	2.01	1.38	3.22	1.89	1.51-1.82	1.24	1.48	2.41-3.42	
			1.87	2.92	3.64	4.71		3.33	3.35	3.11	2.02		1.63	3.71	2.76	2.02	3.93	2.07		1.81	2.04		

Figure A1. Mean Levels of Perceived Reasons for War by Country.

Note. C = Central Powers ("losers"); E = Entente ("winners"); N = Neutral. For each country, the three highest means are highlighted in bold and the three lowest means are marked in italics. These six means and corresponding 95% confidence intervals are highlighted in a grey whose intensity decreases as a function of the rank.