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# What's ours is yours: recall of history for lesser-known countries is guided by one's own national history

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## ABSTRACT

The present studies examine how people recall history. Sometimes, certain national histories are well known and sometimes they are not. We propose that, under certain circumstances, culturally distinctive representations of typical national histories can be used to guide recall, particularly in cases where the history is not well known. We focus on three national samples with varied levels of knowledge about each history: Great Britain, India, and the United States. In Study 1, we establish typical historical event templates for each nation consisting of events that a large proportion of participants from each sample identify as important in a typical nation's history. We examine points of divergence between the different groups' typical event templates and the valences of these events. In Study 2, we test and find that, in conditions of less knowledge, participants tend to refer to particular historical events that coincide with events unique to their own group's typical history. In Study 3, we demonstrate that this effect can be found even when a group possesses a reasonable amount of knowledge about the target country. We conclude by discussing the implications in relation to how such a retrieval strategy might inform interpretations of events in the present.

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How do people remember events from history? Is there a difference in remembering their own national history and the history of other countries? These are critical questions, in that what people remember about the history of their own and other nations can colour interpretations and inform decision-making of national and international import (Gilovich, 1981; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Olick, 2007; Schuman & Rieger, 1992). For instance, Americans might be more in favour of reparations to African Americans if they viewed US history through the lens of institutional racism. They also might object to saber rattling toward North Korea if reminded of the complex cascade of events that led to War World I. The concern here is not how historians tell history (Appleby, Hunt, & Jacob, 1994; Nora, 1989; White, 1987) or in the philosophy of history (Carr, 1961). Rather, our interest is in how lay individuals remember history—what some would refer to as the collective or collected memory of history (Hirst & Manier, 2008; Kansteiner, 2002; Klein, 2013; Olick, 1999; see Hirst, Yamashiro, & Coman, 2018, for a review).

Researchers have probed the way individuals remember the historical past of a nation using a variety of techniques. Some of the relevant research has examined the narratives that people construct when telling their nation's history (László, 2008). Others have elicited limited lists of

important historical events (Liu et al., 2009). The two are related, inasmuch as a nation's narrative is largely composed of selectively incorporated important historical events (Liu & Hilton, 2005). A central assertion of either approach is that remembering history is a subjective enterprise. As such, citizens from different nations might tell history differently.

We focus here on an event-centred methodology. Here, an experimenter asks participants, usually from the same nation, to identify important historical events from that nation's history. Researchers have used this task to demonstrate that generations differ in the way they tell history (Schuman & Scott, 1989), that historical events can be classified on a universal dimension from historical calamities to historical progress (Liu et al., 2012), and that there is a "Western bias" in the rendering of even non-Western histories (Liu et al., 2009).

We use the same event-centred method to explore differences between the recall of one's own national history and, more critically, other countries' histories. We focus on one retrieval strategy people might use to guide their retrieval: That people may use their understanding of what constitutes the typical history of a country to guide their retrieval of particular events from the histories of specific countries. What constitutes a

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\*Both authors developed the study concept. T. G. Cyr designed the studies and collected the data. Both authors performed analyses and interpreted the findings. T. G. Cyr drafted the manuscript and W. Hirst provided critical revisions. Both authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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“typical history” might be culturally distinctive. Britons might believe that the typical country goes from a monarchy to a democracy, based on their familiarity with this transition in their own country, whereas Americans might find the move from colonisation to independence more typical.

### *Retrieving events from history*

We begin with a straightforward observation: People tend to be adept at identifying important events in their own history, but not events from the history of some other countries. Most Americans would have little difficulty listing five events from US history and would likely mention many of the same events (Schuman & Corning, 2012). On the other hand, Americans may need to work harder to remember even a few events from, for example, Indian history.

Most theories of memory provide accounts for variation in difficulty with retrieval by either assuming that retrieval involves a search for a desired memory or the reconstruction of that memory (Bartlett, 1932; Brainerd, Wright, Reyna, & Payne, 2002; Gauld & Stephenson, 1967; Wagenaar, 1988). When the material is well learned, the search or reconstruction is often assumed to be quick and effortless. Those who employ the “search” metaphor often allude to “direct access” (e.g., Doshier, 1976; McElree & Doshier, 1989). The effortless and rapid recall of events from history that one sometimes observes in experts may represent this type of retrieval (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996, for a review). On the other hand, as noted, occasionally it is difficult to retrieve information, including historical information. Now, retrieval strategies can be important (Unsworth, 2017).

When, then, might people find retrieval of historical events for a particular country easy and effortless? When might they rely on retrieval strategies? A preliminary answer to these questions might separate countries into three different groups. First, there is one’s own country. Most should find it fairly easy to generate five important events from the history of their own country. The educational system – as well as a host of media outlets – usually ensures wide exposure to this history (see, for instance, Carretero, 2017, on the teaching of master narratives in school contexts). Information about important historical events is, if you like, overlearned and, hence, easy to remember (see Carretero, Berger, & Grever, 2017 for a number of instances of establishing and reaffirming national identities through history education). Second, there are countries with close connections to one’s own country. Although not always the case, the histories of these countries are also often discussed and have a chance of being overlearned. Americans, for instance, usually learn a great deal about British history in school, compared to, for instance, the history of France or Italy. Moreover, events from British history are often depicted

in films and books. Consider the number of films and books about Henry VIII. Third, there are countries whose histories are, at best, cursorily studied in school or represented in other media. Even the most important events from the history of these countries would be infrequently discussed and barely learned. How easily could the average American generate five events about Indian or Filipino history? The first two categories of nations might involve quick and effortless – non-strategic – retrieval. Recalling history of the last category of nations might be strategic.

As to the retrieval strategies people might use when recalling events from the history of the third category of “unfamiliar” countries, of course, there are many. People may use different strategies under different circumstances (e.g., Gilovich, 1981). We posit that one possible strategy is that people, for example, Americans, might reason as follows when recalling events from the history of an unfamiliar country, for instance, India:

Wars such as the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 figure in US history. Indeed, wars figure in the history of many countries. Consequently, India must have been at war at some point. What wars was India involved in?

That is, they might go from what they know about specific events in US history to possible classes of events from the history of a hypothetical or typical country and finally to a search for an exemplar of this class of event in the history of a particular country. Of course, general knowledge about classes of events can also be obtained from reading literature, learning myths, and through a host of other sources. But for it to be relevant to the history of a particular country, one must believe that countries, not just in literature, but also in the real world, often go to war. Other researchers have argued that typical events can guide the retrieval of particular events. For instance, Berntsen and Rubin (2004) based their theory of “cultural life-scripts” on the notion of “typical” events occur in an idealised person’s life. The typical events, then, are posited to guide the retrieval of particular autobiographical memories. One contribution of the present paper is that it explores whether a similar construct applies to the telling of history. If this strategy is not very common, it may be difficult to detect. But if it is a common strategy, we should be able to observe it.

To some extent, the events that people list as part of the history of a typical country might be similar, even across culturally diverse samples. Liu et al. (2005, 2009), for instance, have shown that when asked to list seven important events from world history, people from 12 different cultures centred their responses on politics and warfare. The same might hold when talking about a “typical country”. That is, politics and warfare might figure prominently in any list of typical events, no matter what country the respondent is from.

On the other hand, there is no reason to expect that the list of typical events would be exactly the same

across cultures. Cultural differences can be found in Berntsen and Rubin's studies of cultural life-scripts. We might find a similar situation for events from a typical country, only here differences across cultures may be in the frequency with which an event is mentioned as typical rather than that a typical event associated with one culture is so distinctive that it does not map onto any particular event from another culture. After all, the typical events are posited to guide the retrieval of particular events from other unfamiliar countries. They could not do this if there is no particular event to remember. Because we are interested in differences in the frequency of mention rather than uniqueness, we will refer to the typical events that differ markedly in distinctiveness as *culturally distinctive events* rather than culturally specific events. To the extent, then, that what constitutes a typical event differs in frequency of mention across cultures, the recall of events from another country's history might be through the lens of one's memory of events in the history of one's own country, that is, at least when typical events guide the retrieval of particular events.

We are predicting, then, that people will employ something akin to "direct access" when generating events from their own or familiar countries. In the case of one's own country, this history might reflect the history of a "typical country", to the extent that people derive what is typical from what they know about their own country's history. As for the history of familiar countries other than one's own, the relative effortlessness involved in retrieving at least the most important events from that country's history could mean that the retrieval would be non-strategic. As a result, there would be no guarantee that these recalled events would reflect what the rememberer views as "typical historical events". They will be remembering what they learned, or overlearned, rather than remembering through the frame offered by a class of "typical historical events". Finally, there are non-familiar countries. It is for these countries we are positing strategic recall, specifically, recall based on what constitutes a "typical historical event". And it is for these countries, unlike the more familiar countries, that we would expect historical recollections to reflect the cultural lens of the rememberer rather than the distinctive history of the unfamiliar country.

### **The present studies**

We chose the United States, Great Britain, and India to represent the three categories of countries we have outlined. We expect our participants to evidence varying difficulty in recalling particular historical events, depending on their own citizenship and the countries involved. We reasoned as follows:

First, given the hegemonic position of the United States in the world today, participants from all three countries should have enough knowledge of the United States to

recall five events with relative ease. Despite the general focus on the use of history education as a means by which to establish national narratives (e.g., Carretero et al., 2017) there is reason to suspect that other nations are not immune to the hegemony of a select few histories. Liu et al. (2009), for instance, have shown that people across the world tend to list events figuring in European/US history as important to world history, even if the impact on their own countries is minimal (see also Cabecinhas et al., 2011).

Second, Great Britain and the United States have a closely intertwined history. The United States was originally a British colony and there is constant refrain that the two countries have a "special relationship" (Bromund, 2016). Great Britain and India are also closely intertwined. India was also a British colony and, to a large extent, institutions in present-day India reflect those colonial roots (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2006). In contrast, the connection between the United States and India is not as close. The only colonial connection, for instance, is that they were both colonies. It is fair to say that historically there is no "special relationship" in terms of government commitments, cultural heritage, or educational efforts (Kapur & Ganguly, 2007).

Given these considerations, then, Americans might find it relatively easy to generate events from British history, but not Indian history; Britons may find it relatively easy to generate events from both Indian and American history; Indians may find it relatively easy to generate events from both British and American history. Thus, we expect to find evidence of strategic retrieval when Americans recall Indian history.

### **Pilot studies**

We undertook a series of pilot studies to confirm our intuitions about the relative knowledge Americans, Britons, and Indians have of the history of the US, Great Britain, and India. Details are available in the Supplemental Materials. The first pilot study counted the number of pages of American, British, and Indian history that was covered in American, British, and Indian textbooks, with the assumption that the number of textbook pages that covered that country could be a crude measure of the textbook user's historical knowledge after reading the textbook. The second study asked American, British, and Indian participants to provide a self-assessment of their historical knowledge and to take a general-knowledge quiz on American, British, and Indian history. The final study asked separate samples of American, Indian, and British participants to generate, in three separate 40 second blocks of time, as many important events as they could, relevant to American, British, and Indian history. The results from each study allowed us to rank participants' exposure to, knowledge of, or ease of retrieving historical events from the three countries. Table 1 contains the rankings we obtained from the assessments.

**Table 1.** Knowledge assessments for Americans, Britons, and Indians from pilot testing.

Assessment	Sample		
	United States	Britain	India
Textual Analysis	(US, BR) > I	US > BR > I	I > (US, BR)
Self-Assessment	US > BR > I	BR > US > I	I > (US, BR)
Knowledge Quiz	US > BR > I	(BR, US) > I	(I, US) > BR
Generation Task	US > BR > I	BR > US > I	(I > BR) > US
Summary	US > BR > I	(BR, US) > I	(I, BR, US)

Note: Significant differences marked by > ; parentheses indicate approximately equal knowledge.

Our assessments did not produce completely consistent results, but a summary statement is possible, as captured in the last line of Table 1. The clearest pattern emerged for the US, in which the level of knowledge fell systematically from US to Britain to India, though knowledge of Great Britain and the US was closer to one another than knowledge of India. In other words, the US clearly evidenced a divide between their knowledge of the Britain and India. As for Indian participants, they appeared to have relatively equal knowledge for the history of all three countries, with a slight preference for their home country. Finally, those from Great Britain evidenced knowledge of their own and US history, less so for India. This pattern differs from the one we offered based on our own intuitions, that Britons should have a good knowledge of Indian history.

## Study 1

With these pilot studies in mind, we turned to our main predictions about ease of retrieval, the role of “typical historical events” in the recall of histories, and the cultural boundedness of remembering history. There is little doubt that people can generate what might be thought of as typical events from the history of a hypothetical country. People know, for instance, not just that the US fought in World War II, but also that wars generally occur in a typical nation’s history. We need, however, to determine what these typical events might be and whether some are culturally distinctive. Consequently, in Study 1, we asked American, British, and Indian participants to list typical events from a hypothetical national history in order to establish a basic retrieval template from which participants of each of those nations might draw. We refer to the frequently generated events as *typical events*. We expect that these typical events may differ depending on the participant pool’s country of origin – that is, they may be culturally distinctive.

Although not central to our concerns, we also assessed the valence of generated events. People tend to have a positivity bias when recalling autobiographical memories (Walker, Skowronski, & Thompson, 2003) and a negativity bias when imagining future national events (Shrikanth, Szpunar, & Szpunar, 2018; Topcu & Hirst, 2018). We do not know whether people are more likely to recall more positively or negatively valenced events when asked to

list “important” events from either a typical country or a particular country.

## Method

### Participants

Participants from the United States and India were recruited via the online crowd-sourcing platform Mechanical Turk. British participants were recruited using the online crowd-sourcing platform Prolific Academic. Based on related work (e.g., Berntsen & Rubin, 2004), we aimed for a sample size of 100–150 participants from each country. Mechanical Turk participants were required to have a 95% approval rating and to have participated in at least 50 tasks prior to the present study, whereas Prolific Academic participants were required to have a 90% approval rating (the platform did not allow a higher value at the time of collection). The samples collected from these online recruiting sites may not be representative of the populations of the three countries we examined, but they do provide insight into the country’s perspective. Participants reported being at least 18 years old and a citizen of the designated country at the time of the survey. Participants were compensated \$0.75 for their time. We eliminated participants who consistently supplied events relevant to a specific country, such as, “The attack on the World Trade Center 9/11” instead of “Terror attacks”. We suspect that they did not understand the task. We also eliminated participants whose responses indicated that they were not following the prompt, providing random strings of letters, copying the instructions in the text boxes, or failing to complete the survey. Other researchers have reported that samples from India often do not meet inclusion criteria (Litman, Robinson, & Rosenzweig, 2015). With this in mind, we oversampled Indians. Of those excluded from the Indian sample, 16% were excluded because IP addresses indicated that they were in countries other than India, 80% because they did not follow instructions, and 4% because they failed to complete the survey. Table 2 contains the relevant demographics for all studies.

### Design and procedure

We asked participants to describe events from the course of history of a *typical* nation. Our query drew from Berntsen and Rubin’s (2004) instructions for soliciting cultural life-scripts. Our instructions asked participants to list typical events from a hypothetical, typical country. Participants read the following passage:

This study deals with our expectations about the ordinary course of events occurring at the national level. Your task is to decide which events are expected to take place for a typical nation. We ask that you take a moment and imagine a hypothetical nation with a hypothetical history. Remember, this nation is meant to represent a typical nation. You should not, therefore, think about your own nation or any particular nation when answering the questions; instead, it should be a



**Table 2.** Participant demographics.

Factors	Study 1			Study 2			Study 3	
	Americans	Britons	Indians	Americans	Britons	Indians	Americans	Indians
Final <i>n</i>	156	110	120	149	149	222	74	75
Excluded	16	20	85	2	12	46	1	80
Age ( <i>M</i> )	39.3	32.7	34.4	38.8	32.2	33.5	34.9	31.4
Age ( <i>SD</i> )	14.7	10.7	10.1	13.1	10.5	8.7	11.2	7.3
Female (%)	60	60	30	47.7	48.3	33.9	31.1	32
<i>Ethnicity (%)</i>								
White (non-hispanic)	80.1	89.1	0	80.5	89.3	0	77	0
Hispanic/Latino	5.8	0	0	6	0	0	8.1	0
Asian/Asian American	4.5	6.3	100	4.7	1.3	100	12.2	100
Black/African American	3.2	0	0	6	1.3	0	1.4	0
American Indian/ native American	1.3	0	0	0.7	0	0	0	0
Hawaiian/ Pacific islander	0.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	3.8	4.5	0	2	2.7	0	1.4	0
Did not disclose	0.6	0	0	0	5.4	0	0	0
<i>Education (%)</i>								
High school	7.1	16.4	1.7	6	10.1	1.4	4.1	2.7
Some college	32.7	19.1	3.3	23.5	19.5	5	28.4	2.7
Associate's degree	9	0.9	0	10.1	1.3	0	16.2	2.7
Bachelor's degree	34.6	34.5	37.5	42.3	39.6	35.1	39.2	46.7
Some graduate school	3.2	5.5	4.2	1.3	0.7	9.9	2.7	5.3
Graduate/professional degree	12.2	22.7	53.3	16.8	20.1	46.4	9.5	40
Other	1.3	0.9	0	0	3.4	2.3	0	0
Did not disclose	0	0	0	0	5.4	0	0	0

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not total to 100%; demographics for Study 2 are reported in the aggregate by national group.

nation in general. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your intuition about this nation. Your task is to list the seven most important events that you imagine are likely to take place over the entire course of your typical nation's history.

Participants were provided with an analogous example of how they might complete the task if they were thinking about the life of a person, using as an example, material collected by Berntsen and Rubin (2004). Upon listing the seven most important events, participants were asked to identify when, during the course of the nation's history, they expected those events would occur on a timeline. Participants were shown the seven events they previously identified, in the order they were generated. They were provided with a blank timeline and told that the timeline represented the nation's history, with the midpoint representing the present moment. Participants were instructed to imagine that the left-most position on the scale represented the farthest point in the nation's past and the right-most position on the scale represented the farthest point in the nation's future. Participants also rated the valence of each event on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating *very negative* and 7 indicating *very positive*. Participants were then asked to reflect on the hypothetical nation that they were using as the basis for the experiment and provide an estimate of the approximate age of the country.<sup>1</sup> Finally, participants provided basic demographic information, were debriefed, and compensated.

### Coding

Because there were no a priori predictions about the range of possible categories that the mentioned typical events could be grouped in, a first coder (the first author) began

by sorting individual responses across participants into categories, with two responses being put into the same category if they captured the same concept, idea, or event. The guiding principle was to group responses so that a single categorical label could describe their shared content.<sup>2</sup> Due to the nature of the prompt requesting discrete events, coding in this manner was possible for the vast majority of listed events. Indeed, in most instances, participants supplied the one or two word event descriptions. Examples of responses are: "Independence", "creating government", and "Terrorist attack". Occasionally participants listed multiple events as consisting of a single event. For instance, a participant might respond "achieving independence and replacing old leaders". In order to manage those cases and not allow for single participants to exert more influence over the frequency of events by listing multiple events, we ruled that in cases where multiple events were listed together, we would code the event according to the first discrete event that was listed in the grouping. Thus, in the above example, the event would be coded as *Independence*.

When making categorical distinctions, the first coder was careful not to cluster a wide range of events into a single large category, and instead sought a moderately fine-grained set of distinctive categories. For instance, he distinguished the more general category of *Forming Government* from establishing a *Democracy*, in that a trend emerged among some respondents where they specifically stated the latter, whereas others confined themselves to more general statements about government formation. Thus, in the coding scheme he defined *Forming Government* as "Formation of a government. If the form of government is specified as a Democracy, code as DEMOCRACY. If event specifies going from one form of government to

another, code as CHANGING GOVERNMENT [another typical event]". Following a similar line of reasoning, he drew a distinction between *Changing Government* and *Independence*. It is possible to change governments without gaining independence or establishing a democracy. A country might be occupied by one country and then another, with the form of government changing but the state of occupation remaining. This was the case for Southern Italy between the 15th and 19th Centuries, for instance.

Overall, 49 distinctive categories emerged from this process. We ranked each of the distinctive categories according to frequency of mention across the three samples. For each of the samples we selected the top-20 most mentioned events, which also constituted events that were mentioned by at least 10% of the samples. Across the three samples, when collapsing the coding to represent only those distinctive events that made up the various top-20 most mentioned events, we came to have 36 unique event categories (see Supplemental Materials). The remaining events were simply assigned to the category of "Other", taking an approach similar to that of Berntsen and Rubin (2004). Across the three samples, 31% of the events provided did not conform to the 36 unique event categories that made up the top-20 most mentioned events for each sample. As we shall see, not all categories were in the top-20 of all three samples, making some of them culturally distinctive.

Although drawing distinctions and arriving at a final coding scheme can be notoriously difficult, the distinctions the first coder arrived at were reliable. He developed a coding manual in which each of the 36 categories was briefly defined (see Supplemental Material). This coding scheme was sufficient for a second group of coders (one distinct coder for each national sample), who each dual coded 20% of the samples. They agreed with the primary coder for 85.2% of the events mentioned by our participants. This reliability is particularly telling inasmuch as the coders could also assign the label "Other" when they felt that none of the 36 categories fit a listed event. Discrepancies were resolved in discussion between the primary and secondary coders.

## Results

### Frequency of mention

Operationally, we defined a *typical event* as one appearing in the top-20 of the most frequently mentioned events. See Table 3. A line indicates instances in which a typical event was not in the top-20 for that particular sample. Given the manner by which we derived our 36 categories, all figured in at least one of the samples. In addition to being in the top-20, we also required that they be endorsed by a reasonably large number of people in order to be classified as "typical". In order to specify operationally what we meant by "reasonably large number", we examined the probability of mention when Schuman and Scott (1989)

asked Americans to list "one or two" important historical events in the last 50 years. The average probability for the top-ten mentioned events was .11. When we examined the average probability of top-10 events reported by Liu et al. (2005; top-20 were not reported), from both their US and British samples, we find an average probability of .30. India, which was included in Liu et al. (2009; again top-10), had an average probability of .29. As for the present samples, as evidenced in Table 3, the American, British, and Indian top-10 had an average frequency of mention of .28, .32, and .25, respectively. For the top-20, it was .20, .23, and .19, respectively. That is, whether in the top-10 or the top-20, the typical events seemed to be mentioned frequently enough to be treated as commonly held.

The list found in Table 3 is consistent with Liu et al.'s (2005, 2009) claim that world history is represented as a story about politics and warfare. War was the most frequent "typical" event for all three samples. Other possibly war-related events also featured on the top-20 lists: *independence, terrorism, civil unrest, civil war, settlement/colonization, military, and peace*. On the political side, there was: *change leaders, forming government, changing government, changing law, elections, political conflict, and form alliances*. Indeed, depending on how one classifies an event, more than 75% of the events listed in Table 3 might be viewed as being related to politics or warfare.

Was there cultural variation in the frequency with which events were mentioned in each of our samples' top-20? Here we define an event as *culturally distinctive* to a sample (which we will shorten to *distinctive* in much that follows) if it made the top-20 in that sample but did not make the top-20 in one or more of the other samples. Distinctive typical events are those with a line in at least one of the columns in Table 3. Many typical events did not qualify as culturally distinctive, in that they were in the top-20 of all three lists. Examples are *war, forming alliances, economic events, and scientific/technological advances*. Interestingly, the majority of events in the top-10 were shared across the three samples (60%, 50%, and 60% for the American, British, and Indian samples, respectively). That is, the most frequently mentioned events for a particular sample tended to be mentioned frequently by the other samples as well.

As to the culturally distinctive events, when comparing the American and British top-20, eight event-types per sample qualify (e.g., *constitution/founding document*). When comparing the US and Indian lists, nine of the top-20 events per sample qualify, with differences such as *civil war* in the US list and *social stratification* in the Indian list. Between the British and Indian lists, we find that 12 of the 20 events from each sample are distinctive, with Britain featuring events such as *equal rights* and *civil war* and the Indian list featuring events such as *independence* and *terrorism*.

Some of the distinctive events intuitively seem reasonable for the countries they are associated with. For instance, one of distinctive Indian events was *social*

**Table 3.** Average and nation-level percentage mention of events composing typical histories (Top 20 events) offered by Americans, Britons, and Indians.

Event	Frequency Mentioned (%)			
	Average	Americans	Britons	Indians
War	56.7	55	71	35
Economic event	38.7	44	39	33
Elections	29.5	31	–	28
Independence	28.5	17	–	40
Natural disaster	26.7	21	36	23
Scientific/technological advances	26	19	30	29
Change leaders	24	–	24	–
Founding	22.5	24	21	–
Forming government	21	26	26	11
Democracy	20	–	20	–
Terrorism	20	–	–	20
Establishing laws for first time	19	24	14	–
Industrialisation	18	–	22	14
Form alliances	17	12	26	13
Cultural identity	16.3	14	22	13
Civil unrest	16	16	16	–
Civil war	16	16	16	–
Changing government	16	–	16	–
Settlement/colonisation	15	15	–	–
Change laws	15	–	15	–
Political conflict	14	14	–	–
Constitution/founding document	14	12	–	16
Geographic expansion	14	–	14	–
Education	14	–	–	14
Establishing military	13.5	13	–	14
Trade	13	13	–	–
Ecological issues	13	–	–	13
Employment	13	–	–	13
Social stratification	13	–	–	13
Infrastructure	12	–	12	–
Religion	12	–	–	12
Peace	11	11	–	–
Equal rights	11	10	12	–
Natural resources	11	–	–	11
Corruption	11	–	–	11
Social welfare programmes	10	–	10	–

Note: Instances where there is a line in one column and a percentage in another column in the same row indicate when there is a culturally distinctive pairing between groups.

*stratification*. For Britain, we find *social welfare programmes* listed. Clearly, both *social stratification* and *social welfare programmes* figure in the history of all three samples, but it is fair to say that they figure more prominently in the history of India and Britain, respectively. On the other hand, other culturally distinctive events did not seem so closely aligned with a particular country. For instance, the event *peace* appeared only in the US list. But surely *peace* is part of every country's history. We suspect that it does not figure in our Indian and British top-20 lists not because participants from those countries think that peace is an atypical event, but rather other typical events besides *peace* are more readily accessible when thinking of a typical country. The claim would be that, as a result, *peace* is not likely to be a typical event that guides the recall of particular events for our Indians and Britons.

### Valence

Typical events are neither strongly positive nor negative by definition. For instance, some wars can be viewed as positive, others negative. However, we do observe a positivity

effect based on participants' valence ratings. For each participant, we calculated the mean valence rating of those events in the top-20 that a given participant mentioned. For all three samples, the average was significantly higher than the neutral mid-point of the measure (4.00), indicating a positivity bias (note that *dfs* do not align precisely with the original sample sizes because, in some cases, certain participants did not mention any top-20 events): American:  $M = 4.68$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ,  $t(155) = 5.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.44$ , 95% CI[0.43, 0.92]; British,  $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ;  $t(109) = 4.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.44$ , 95% CI[0.31, 0.77]; Indian,  $M = 5.15$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ;  $t(119) = 8.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.82$ , 95% CI[0.89, 1.40].

Was this positivity effect due solely to the distinctive events, the non-distinctive events, or both? A mixed model 2 (distinctiveness) by 3 (national sample) ANOVA with distinctiveness as a within-subject variable and national sample as a between-subject variable revealed a significant main effect of distinctiveness,  $F(1, 201) = 10.14$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .048$ , that was qualified by a significant distinctiveness by national sample interaction,  $F(2, 201) = 16.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .141$ . Bonferroni corrected pairwise comparisons revealed that the significant interaction was driven primarily by the British sample, where distinctive events ( $M = 5.65$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) were significantly more positive than non-distinctive events ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ),  $p < .001$ . The American and Indian sample valences did not differ as a function of distinctiveness ( $p = .166$  and  $p = .062$ , respectively). We should note, however, that these tests are limited by the fact that the number of wholly distinctive events is relatively small and, as a result, the average valences are subject to wide variance according to the content to the distinctive events. Culturally distinctive event are probably not, in general, more positively valenced than non-distinctive events.

### Summary

The results demonstrate that some events are thought to be more typical of a hypothetical country than others, constituting what we have called our list of typical events. Some events on these lists figure in all of our three samples, whereas others were culturally distinctive. Thus, at least to some degree, people from different communities can think differently about what events they believe might occur in a "typical" country, perhaps a reflection of the fact that they derive the "typical" from the particularities of their own history. Perhaps unexpected, given, for instance, the prevalence of war-related events, the typical events were, overall, positive in nature. With these classes of typical events in hand, we asked a new group of participants to identify important events in actual national histories.

### Study 2

When do people refer to typical events from the history of a hypothetical country to guide the recall of important



events from the history of a particular country? In Study 2, participants from the three previously sampled nations recalled important events from their own country's history and the histories of the other nations. These responses were then compared with the typical events found in Study 1.

## Method

### Participants

Recruitment procedures were identical to those employed in Study 1. Unlike Study 1, where we initially oversampled to get a pre-determined sample size, in this case, if participants were excluded, we resampled until we had the desired sample size of 75 plus or minus two. A power analysis indicates that we achieved approximately 98% power to detect a medium effect size with an alpha of .05, in within-subjects comparisons (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). We tested a total of seven groups of participants. There were three groups from India, with one group listing American events ( $n = 73$ ), another British events ( $n = 74$ ), and a third, Indian events ( $n = 75$ ). For American and British sampling, we divided each sample into two groups. One group from each nation exclusively recalled events from Indian history (American  $n = 73$ ; British  $n = 75$ ), whereas the other two groups recalled, in counter-balanced blocks, events from American or British history (American  $n = 76$ ; British  $n = 74$ ). Because of a design feature in Mechanical Turk, where a participant can complete the study and not submit their work for compensation, one extra American participant completed the task and is included in the sample. We report the sample groups' demographic information in the aggregate by country affiliation in Table 2 for the purpose of succinctness.

### Tasks

Participants were asked to identify the five most important events that occurred in the history of the US, Britain, or India. In order to avoid receiving an overwhelming number of responses related to World War I and II, we instructed participants not to include those two events. In order to avoid a recency effect, participants were also instructed not to include events that had happened within the past 20 years. Participants were then shown each event they had specified and asked to provide the year that they believed each event occurred.<sup>3</sup> Participants rated the valence of each event on the same scale employed in Study 1. Participants then provided basic demographic information, were debriefed, and compensated \$0.75.

### Coding

In the analyses presented here, we compare the typical events in the top-20 lists collected in Study 1 with particular events reported in this study, thereby coding each particular event as representative of a typical

event in Study 1. Coders were again provided with the 36-event coding scheme developed for Study 1 (see Supplemental Materials). When in question about the nature of particular events, coders were instructed to conduct Internet searches to clarify the nature of the events and the context surrounding those events. As with the coding procedure from Study 1, we coded in a manner reflective of the language used by participants. For instance, if a participant identified "IRA terrorism", the event was coded as "Terrorism", whereas if a participant identified "The Troubles", it was coded as "Political Conflict". When a match with a typical event could not be found, the particular event was coded as "not top-20" and was excluded from further analysis; this accounted for an average of 28.36% of events across the seven samples. Forty percent of the responses provided by the combined US/Britain condition were dual coded by the first author and a second coder. This resulted in 90.3% agreement for the 600 coded events. Given the acceptable level of agreement, we reduced the amount of dual coding to 20% for each of the remaining samples (again coded by the first author and a second coder distinct from the coder of the US/Britain conditions), finding 86.4% agreement on these events (Range = 81.3% to 92%). Disagreements were resolved between the coders.

## Results

We first asked how strong the mapping was between the particular events recalled by participants from a specific country and what people from this country view as typical events. We compared this mapping to a similar comparison involving the same participants recalling particular events for another country. Inasmuch as we are arguing that typical events should be grounded in the history of one's own nation, we expect to find that the overlap should be greater when one tells one's own history than when one tells the history of another nation.

Here we initially focus on all typical events; that is, those in the top-20 for their country, regardless of their cultural distinctiveness. For each sample, we calculated the proportion of particular events generated for each of the three countries (that is, about the US, Britain, and India) that coincided with events from the top-20 list of typical events for that sample's country. For instance, for the Indian sample, we calculated the proportion of particular events the Indian participants generated as important to US, British, and Indian history that also figured in the India top-20 list of typical events. As noted, this *top-20 proportion* should be larger when participants are from the same country as the country about which they were generating particular events. For example, with the Indian sample, the proportion of events that overlap with the India top-20 list when telling Indian history should be significantly higher than the proportion of overlap when they are telling British or US history. As Table 4 shows, this

**Table 4.** Proportion of typical historical events generated by Americans, Britons, and Indians in their telling of American, British and Indian history.

Country whose history is being told	Participant Group		
	US	BR	India
US	.56 (.23)	.54 (.19)	.55 (.24)
BR	.36 (.27)	.62 (.23)	.38 (.22)
India	.45 (.26)	.20 (.18)	.70 (.22)

Note: SDs are in parentheses. Cells where the participant group and the country about which the history is being told are the same have only one proportion. In cells split diagonally, the upper diagonal is the proportion of events consistent with typical events belonging to the nation of participant group who is telling the history. The lower diagonal is the proportion of events consistent with typical events belonging to the nation whose history is being told.

prediction was verified. The mean top-20 proportion of the American sample when Americans told US history ( $M = .56$ ,  $SD = .23$ ) was significantly higher than when Americans told British history ( $M = .36$ ,  $SD = .27$ ,  $t(75) = 5.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .60$ , 95% CI[0.12, 0.27] or Indian history ( $M = .45$ ,  $SD = .26$ ,  $t(148) = 2.77$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $d = .45$ , 95% CI[0.03, 0.19]. Indians also had a significantly higher mean top-20 proportion when telling their own history ( $M = .70$ ,  $SD = .22$ ) than when telling American history ( $M = .55$ ,  $SD = .24$ ,  $t(146) = 4.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .65$ , 95% CI[0.08, 0.23] or British history ( $M = .38$ ,  $SD = .22$ ,  $t(147) = 9.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.46$ , 95% CI[0.26, 0.40]. Finally, Britons' mean top-20 proportion was significantly higher when they told British history ( $M = .62$ ,  $SD = .23$ ) than when they told American history ( $M = .54$ ,  $SD = .19$ ),  $t(73) = 2.83$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $d = 0.33$ , 95% CI[0.03, 0.14] or Indian history ( $M = .20$ ,  $SD = .18$ ),  $t(136.59) = 12.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.02$ , 95% CI[0.35, 0.48]. Thus, there is support for the contention that how one represents a

typical nation's history does indeed overlap with how one tells one's own history, more so than the overlap with how one tells another nation's history.

These results focus on all typical events, not the culturally distinctive typical events alone. What pattern emerges when a particular event generated in Study 2 maps onto a culturally distinctive typical event collected in Study 1? Two possible mappings are: (1) a particular event maps onto a culturally distinctive event from one's own national template, as established in Study 1, or (2) a particular event maps onto a culturally distinctive event from the national template (as established in Study 1) of the country whose history is being told. For example, for an American, the mapping might be a particular event from Indian history mapping onto either culturally distinctive American typical events, for case (1), or culturally distinctive Indian typical events, for case (2). For case (1), the mapping would suggest that participants are recalling a country's history from their own perspective; for case (2), from the perspective of a citizen from the country whose history is being recounted.

With these two possibilities in mind, for each participant, we calculated two proportions to reflect, respectively, the two mappings: (1) the proportion of particular events generated about a country that are representative of culturally distinctive typical events for the group telling the history and (2) the proportion of particular events generated about a country that are representative of the culturally distinctive typical events of the history that was being told. For example, when Americans generated important events from Indian history, we calculated (1) the proportion of culturally distinctive US typical events in Americans' telling of Indian history and (2) the proportion of culturally distinctive Indian typical events in Americans' telling of Indian history. A high value for the first proportion would suggest that the American telling of Indian history made use of a culturally distinctive, American template. That is, Americans are viewing Indian history through an

**Table 5.** Proportion of culturally distinctive typical historical events generated by Americans, Britons, and Indians in their telling of American, British, and Indian history.

	Participant group		
	Americans	Britons	Indians
Telling US history			
US Events	<b>.26 (.19)</b>		.14 (.16)
India Events	<b>.04 (.09)</b>		.17 (.19)
US Events	.16 (.17)	.14 (.13)	
BR Events	.14 (.16)	.12 (.13)	
Telling British history			
BR Events	.21 (.21)	<b>.23 (.18)</b>	
US Events	.15 (.17)	<b>.06 (.10)</b>	
BR Events		<b>.32 (.23)</b>	<b>.30 (.23)</b>
India Events		<b>.15 (.16)</b>	<b>.12 (.17)</b>
Telling Indian history			
India Events		<b>.27 (.20)</b>	<b>.33 (.17)</b>
BR Events		<b>.05 (.10)</b>	<b>.02 (.07)</b>
India Events	<b>.08 (.12)</b>		.05 (.09)
US Events	<b>.15 (.17)</b>		.04 (.08)

Note: Significant differences are in bold type. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

American lens. A high value for the second proportion would indicate a telling of history consistent with how that nation represents its own history. As indicated in the Introduction, we would expect a high value for the first proportion when considering the telling of history of one's own country or an unfamiliar country. We would expect a high value for the second proportion when telling the history of a familiar country other than one's own. The results, including means and standard deviations, are summarised in Table 5.

### *Americans telling history*

When Americans tell American history, we predicted and found that the proportion of culturally distinctive American typical events in the generated list of particular events was greater than the proportion from an unfamiliar country, in this case India,  $t(75) = 8.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.02$ , 95% CI[0.17, 0.27]. When Americans generated events from Indian history, they produced a greater proportion of particular events that overlap with distinctive American typical events than overlapped with distinctive Indian typical events,  $t(72) = 2.77$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $d = 0.32$ , 95% CI[0.02, 0.12]. When Americans tell British history, a familiar history, we did not find a significant difference between the proportion of distinctive American typical events and the proportion of distinctive British typical events in this list,  $t(75) = 1.74$ ,  $p = .086$ ,  $d = 0.20$ , 95% CI[−0.01, 0.13]. The historical entanglement of the US and British histories was also evident when examining the contributions of distinct American and British typical events when US participants tell their own history,  $t(75) = 0.66$ ,  $p = .510$ ,  $d = 0.08$ , 95% CI[−0.04, 0.07]. Even when it comes to telling their own history, Americans incorporate elements from both American and British classes of culturally distinctive typical events. Taken together, the results suggest that Americans might have “direct access” to what they know about both American and British history, at least when asked to generate five important events. The results are, however, consistent with the proposed retrieval strategy guiding recall of events from Indian history.

### *Britons telling history*

When British participants generate particular events from their own history, their renderings are more consistent with culturally distinctive British typical events than either US,  $t(73) = 6.69$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.78$ , 95% CI[0.12, 0.22], or Indian typical events,  $t(73) = 4.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.54$ , 95% CI[0.10, 0.25]. When recalling events from Indian history, British participants appear to be guided by distinctive Indian typical events, mentioning a significantly larger proportion of those events than distinctive British typical events,  $t(74) = 9.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.07$ , 95% CI[0.17, 0.27]. When recalling American history, a similar difference between British typical events and distinctive US typical events did not emerge,  $t(73) = 0.68$ ,  $p = .496$ ,  $d = 0.08$ , 95% CI[−0.05, 0.03]. The intertwined history of Britain and India may have led Britain to treat India as a “familiar

country”, similar to how US participants treated Britain in not imposing its own culturally distinctive typical events in remembering US history.

### *Indians telling history*

When Indians generate events from Indian history, they make use of significantly more culturally distinctive Indian typical events than culturally distinctive British typical events,  $t(74) = 14.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.63$ , 95% CI[0.27, 0.35], but not more culturally distinctive US typical events,  $t(74) = 0.93$ ,  $p = .357$ ,  $d = 0.11$ , 95% CI[−0.02, 0.04]. The floor effect in the latter comparison may be partially attributable, we suspect, to the substantial overlap of Indian and American typical events, making the number of culturally distinctive typical events for this comparison too limited.

As we predicted, given US hegemony, when generating particular events from US history, Indians did not rely more on culturally distinctive Indian typical events than on culturally distinctive American typical events,  $t(72) = 1.01$ ,  $p = .314$ ,  $d = 0.12$ , 95% CI[−0.03, 0.10]. When recalling British history, Indians were significantly more likely to cite culturally distinctive British typical events than typical events of their own,  $t(73) = 5.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.60$ , 95% CI[0.11, 0.26]. These results reflect not only the hegemony of the US and the West more generally (Liu et al., 2009), but also the entangled histories of India and Great Britain. It is also consistent with the mixed story we found when assessing Indian historical knowledge in our pilot testing.

### *Valence*

In Study 1, we found that, on average, the events emerging as typical to hypothetical national histories tended to be positively valenced. For the present study, as with Study 1 before, we calculated the mean valence of events that were coded as aligning with the top-20 typical events represented in Table 3 for each participant. We derived a mean valence score of particular events for each participant, so long as they mentioned at least one event that coincided with a typical event. With these scores, we conducted a series of one-sample t-tests, testing the mean valence against the neutral mid-point of the scale (4.00). Results of these tests are reported in Table 6. In line with what we found in Study 1, we see that when telling the history of one's own country, there is a significant positivity bias (all  $t$ s  $> 4.08$  and all  $p$ s  $< .001$ ). Generally there is also a positivity bias for the telling of other histories, though there are exceptions. Americans did not rate events in British history as positive, likely attributable to the lack of positive founding events (e.g., forming government and founding) coupled with various wars (e.g., War of 1812, War of the Roses) and natural disasters (e.g., the plague). Britons trended toward the positive when rating events in Indian history ( $p = .063$ ).

In order to explore whether the tendency toward recalling positive events was not merely an artifact of focusing only on typical events, we also conducted the same set of

**Table 6.** One sample *T*-tests for the mean valence of typical events generalised from particular histories tested against the neutral mid-point (4.00) of the valence measure.

Sample group	Telling history of ...	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Americans	United States	4.77 (1.62)	4.08	73	0.47	<.001	[0.39, 1.14]
	Britain	4.26 (1.57)	1.29	58	0.17	.204	[−0.15, 0.67]
	India	4.55 (1.58)	2.84	67	0.34	.006	[0.17, 0.93]
Britons	United States	4.50 (1.65)	2.56	73	0.30	.013	[0.11, 0.87]
	Britain	4.83 (1.39)	5.08	72	0.60	<.001	[0.50, 1.15]
	India	4.52 (1.94)	1.90	49	0.27	.063	[−0.03, 1.08]
Indians	United States	4.53 (1.75)	2.57	70	0.31	.012	[0.12, 0.95]
	Britain	5.28 (1.57)	6.73	67	0.82	<.001	[0.90, 1.66]
	India	5.20 (1.35)	7.71	74	0.89	<.001	[0.89, 1.51]

analyses using mean valences calculated based on all events that a participant mentioned, irrespective of whether it was a top-20 typical event or not. We found significant positivity effects for one's own nation and, as before, there were exceptions: Indians about the US ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ,  $p = .133$ ), Britons about the US ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ,  $p = .566$ ), and Americans about India ( $M = 4.23$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ,  $p = .072$ ) did not differ from the neutral mid-point. Despite the non-significant differences from the neutral mid-point, there were no instances in which the mean was significantly less than the neutral mid-point of the measure, and thus negative.

### Summary

Based on the historical relations between the three countries in question, we find different patterns of overlap in both typical events and particular histories based on the sample telling a given history. We found evidence that, at times, this overlap reflected differences in the cultural distinctiveness of some typical events. When Americans told their own history, they tended to reference particular events consistent with culturally distinctive British and American typical events equally, a finding that underscores the longstanding entanglements of the two nations. When Americans tell British history, there is a non-significant trend toward using more culturally distinct typical British events, again reflecting the close relationship between the US and Britain. On the other hand, reflecting the relative impoverishment of their knowledge, there were significantly more culturally distinctive typical American events than culturally distinctive typical Indian events when Americans tell Indian history. To an extent, Americans told the history of India through their own cultural lens.

Amongst the British sample we find that they refer to their own typical events significantly more than US or Indian typical events when telling their own history. Unlike with the American sample, we see British participants refer to more culturally distinctive typical events from the US and India when telling those histories, perhaps reflecting their familiarity and close relationship to both countries. In other words, Britons were able to tell history through the lens of the "locals". Indians

evidenced a pattern of recall similar to that of their British counterparts. When telling US or British history, Indians tended to see it through the lens, again, of the "locals". This localism may reflect the hegemonic position of the US and the West more generally and the intertwined histories of Britain and India.

### Study 3

Thus far, we have only one instance in which participants would be expected to employ a strategic retrieval process and draw from their own understanding of a typical history when telling the history of another nation: Americans about India. In order to demonstrate that this retrieval strategy is not exclusive to this pairing alone, in Study 3, we manipulated the number of events that participants were asked to provide, now asking them to recall ten events as opposed to the five required in Study 2. We employed this method on two groups: Americans telling British history and Indians telling American history. Neither group appeared to use a typicality-based retrieval strategy in the telling, respectively, of British and American history in Study 2. We reasoned that the more participants are required to remember, the more likely they would be to depend on retrieval strategies to complete the task, even if they are familiar with the other country's history. With this reasoning in mind, we hypothesised that we would replicate the findings from Study 2 when examining the first five reported events. That is, we predicted we would find no difference in the proportion of culturally distinctive typical American events and typical British events when the American sample recalled British history and no difference in the proportion of culturally distinctive typical Indian events and typical American events when the Indian sample recalled US history. For the second set of five events, we hypothesised that the need to employ a retrieval strategy would increase as the difficulty in accessing important historical events increased. Thus, for the second set of five events we predicted that American participants would recall a significantly higher proportion of particular events associated with culturally distinctive typical American events than the proportion of particular events associated with

distinctive typical British events. The Indian sample poses a more rigorous test of our retrieval strategy hypothesis, in that past work clearly indicates a Eurocentric hegemony of world history (e.g., Cabecinhas et al., 2011). Therefore, even when pressed to name ten events, the ubiquity of American “Western” history on the world-stage may still result in participants not relying on culturally distinctive event types to guide retrieval.

## Method

### Participants

As with Study 2, we set a desired sample size of 75 participants from each national group and recruitment was the same as described in the previous studies. One American was excluded due to not completing the task. Eighty Indians, over the course of three waves of collection, were excluded and subsequently recollected for indicating that they referred to the Internet in completing the task (which was explicitly warned against in the instructions) or indicating that they had not used the Internet despite their responses being traced to externally generated lists with Internet searches. See Table 2 for demographics.

### Task

The task proceeded as in Study 2, with two exceptions. Participants were first asked to identify the five most important events in the target nation’s history. After listing five events, participants were presented the following prompt:

A number of studies have shown that people are able to remember much more than they believe they can with a little added effort. Because of this, we ask that you try this task again, this time identifying five different historically significant events from British (or American, depending on sample) history. Please do not list events that you previously listed.

Following this task, participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire, were debriefed, thanked for their time, and compensated \$1.00.

### Coding

Coding proceeded as in Study 2. A second coder dual coded 20% of each of the two samples and achieved 93.3% agreement on the American sample and 85.3% on the Indian sample. Disagreements were resolved.

## Results

### American sample

We calculated two separate proportions of recalled events that corresponded to the American top-20 list of typical events (Table 3) for the first five identified events ( $M = .40$ ,  $SD = .24$ ) and the latter five identified events ( $M = .37$ ,  $SD = .23$ ). That is, the proportion represents the amount of overlap between the events identified here

with the top-20 typical American events from Study 1. Using a one-sample t-test, we compared each proportion with the mean top-20 proportion derived from Study 2 when Americans tell American history as a test value (.56). The test value was significantly larger than the first five events proportion when telling British history,  $t(73) = 6.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.70$ , 95% CI[0.11, 0.22]. For the latter five events, the test value (again, .56) was significantly larger than the top-20 proportion,  $t(73) = 7.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.84$ , 95% CI[0.14, 0.24]. The proportion of typical events for the first five reported particular events and latter five reported particular events did not differ,  $t(73) = 0.68$ ,  $p = .498$ ,  $d = .08$ , 95% CI[−0.05, 0.10].

Now turning to the contribution of culturally distinctive typical events, as predicted, we replicated the findings from Study 2 for the first five generated events: the proportion of distinctive American typical events ( $M = .18$ ,  $SD = .18$ ) did not significantly differ from the proportion of distinctive British typical events ( $M = .15$ ,  $SD = .18$ ),  $t(73) = 0.95$ ,  $p = .347$ ,  $d = 0.11$ , 95% CI[−0.03, 0.09]. For the latter five generated events, there was a significant difference, with a greater proportion of events representing distinctive American typical events ( $M = .15$ ,  $SD = .16$ ) than culturally British typical events ( $M = .10$ ,  $SD = .13$ ):  $t(73) = 2.48$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $d = .29$ , 95% CI[.01, .11].

### Indian sample

We again calculated the mean top-20 proportion of typical events recalled when Indians told the history of the United States. Again using the mean proportion of when Indians tell Indian history (Study 2), as a test value (.70), we find that the test value is significantly higher than when Indians recall the first five events of American history ( $M = .57$ ,  $SD = .25$ ),  $t(74) = 4.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.51$ , 95% CI[0.07, 0.19]. This finding holds for the latter five events, as well ( $M = .56$ ,  $SD = .21$ ),  $t(74) = 6.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.70$ , 95% CI[0.10, 0.19]. Like with the American sample, the proportion from the first five listed events does not significantly differ from the latter five events,  $t(74) = 0.42$ ,  $p = .674$ ,  $d = 0.05$ , 95% CI[−0.06, 0.09].

We again replicated the findings from Study 2 with the first set of five events, with the proportion of distinctive Indian typical events ( $M = .13$ ,  $SD = .17$ ) not differing significantly from the proportion of distinctive American typical events ( $M = .14$ ,  $SD = .16$ ),  $t(74) = 0.38$ ,  $p = .706$ ,  $d = .04$ , 95% CI[−0.07, 0.05]. For the latter five events, consistent with our prediction that increasing the number of events would require more effortful, and thus strategic, event retrieval, we find a significant difference in the proportion of distinctive Indian events ( $M = .17$ ,  $SD = .16$ ) and distinctive American typical events ( $M = .12$ ,  $SD = .14$ ),  $t(74) = 2.24$ ,  $p = .028$ ,  $d = .26$ , 95% CI[0.01, 0.10]. Notably, this effect is somewhat weaker than when the American sample recalls British history, in line with the theory that hegemonic effects of Western history pose a more considerable hurdle when attempting to induce conditions where strategic retrieval will occur.



## General discussion

At the outset we posited two potential retrieval modes when generating historical events: A direct non-strategic mode typical of overlearned material and a more strategic mode in which recall is guided by typical events for a history of a hypothetical nation. In Study 1 we first sought to verify our intuitions that people could arrive at a consensus around what constitutes an important event from the history of a hypothetical typical country. Our findings are consistent with the work of Liu and colleagues on world history: Recalled events largely touched on war and politics. The ubiquity of war and politics does not mean that all typical events were the same, regardless of the country of origin of the participants, however. Some typical events were distinctive across samples. These distinctive events likely reflect the learning experiences of the citizens from the three nations. Americans, for instance, thought that the event *Constitution/founding document* was typical for a hypothetical country, whereas Britons did not. For Americans, documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution have an almost sacred character. This is not the case for comparable British documents, such as the Magna Carta, as half of its clauses were repealed by 1863 and only three full clauses are still part of English law (Vincent, 2012). Thus, although founding documents may figure in the history of both countries, the way the history is told can emphasise the role of such documents.

In Studies 2 and 3, we sought evidence that there were indeed two kinds of retrieval modes: direct access, or something akin, associated with one's own and familiar countries and a more strategic mode associated with unfamiliar countries. When people listed important events from their own country's history, they focused mainly on events that reflected their list of typical events. The test case was Americans' recall of events from Indian history. In particular, Americans mentioned particular events associated with their culturally distinctive typical events, as opposed to the culturally distinctive typical events generated by people from other countries. The reliance on culturally distinctive typical events took precedence when trying to recall particular events from an unfamiliar country. In such instances, retrieval is likely effortful. As a result, typical events could strategically guide this retrieval. As predicted, events generated by Americans about Indian history tended to mirror their own notion of what constituted events from a typical history (which overlaps considerably with how they tell their own history) rather than what Indians thought of as events from a typical history. That is, Americans tended to recall Indian history through their own American lens.

Such culturally distinctive perspectives did not hold when participants were likely to have a greater knowledge of a country's history. Americans recalling British history, for instance, did not show a preference for culturally distinctive American typical historical events, possibly

because of the close connection and familiarity Americans have with Britain and British history. Likely reflecting American hegemony and an intertwined history, both Indians and Britons did not show a preference for their own culturally distinctive historical events when recalling American history. That is, despite the relative focus on history education as a means by which to nation build (e.g., Carretero et al., 2017), there is an apparent persistence of historical knowledge about the Western hegemonic world powers. Moreover, likely capturing the historical entanglements between Great Britain and India, Britons tended to generate events from Indian history in a manner that favoured Indian typical events, whereas the Indian sample tended to recall British history through a British lens.

A further test of the hypothesis that people would only see another country's history through their own lens when retrieval becomes effortful was undertaken in Study 3. We asked Americans and Indians to generate 10 important events from British and American history, respectively. For Americans, replicating the results from Study 2, the first five generated events reflected both American and British typical events (the proportions did not differ), whereas the latter five events reflected culturally distinctive typical American events. For Indians, again replicating the results from Study 2, the first five generated events reflected both Indian and American typical events. The latter five generated events reflected culturally distinctive typical Indian events. The lens through which one espies the history of a nation depends on the level of familiarity; however, even when there is some familiarity, as the task of generating events becomes more difficult, the lens through which the history is told may shift, resulting in the use of a strategic retrieval process. As a general note, it is important to keep in mind that our participants may have had different interpretations of the events than our coders. But we note that our focus here is on three English-speaking countries with generally shared political attitudes. Moreover, our coding was guided by what people stated directly, which often included language that made classifications rather straightforward, as indicated by the high rates of inter-coder agreement. Follow-up studies might involve more thorough in-person interviews of representative samples, something the use of online sampling did not allow. While this is a potential limitation, the consistency in the coding provides support for our general claims.

In terms of event valence, both typical and particular histories manifest a significant bias toward positive events. This effect holds whether looking at events that coincide with typical historical events or, as we find in Study 2, across all listed events. Importantly, whereas we did not always find a significant positivity effect, we encountered no negativity bias. This effect is striking, given that negative events like wars loom large in world history.

In sum, whereas people often recall a nation's history in a narrative form, this narrative telling requires them to

remember specific events. The present research suggests that in many instances, people can readily and effortlessly access these events, but in other instances, the retrieval requires effort. In these latter instances, our results indicate that people may use their knowledge of what constitutes a typical country's history to guide their retrieval of a particular country's history. Inasmuch as these typical representations can, in part, be culturally distinctive, in such instances, the telling of history can reflect the cultural biases reflective of the lay historian's country of origin. Of course, based on the present findings, we can only make this claim with respect to the role of culturally distinctive typical historical events. No doubt, there are other ways to impose one's national history on others' histories, as Wertsch (2008) suggested in his discussions of narrative schematic templates. Nevertheless, whether it is through the hypothetical, typical national histories we have explored here, or through schematic templates, scripts (Schank & Abelson, 1977), or analogical reasoning (Gilovich, 1981), it appears that, in some instances, history can be told through a culturally distinctive lens.

This nation-centricism may have been evident when the US, but not other countries, saw the Arab Spring as a "freeing of the Arabs" (Cohen, 2011) and a means of "turning shame into liberty" (Ajami, 2011). It can also help explain the blinders Americans wear when trying to understand the history of countries like Syria. The current study, of course, not only specifies one way these at least partially culturally distinctive renderings might emerge, but also places limits on when history is told from a cultural perspective. It underscores that, in cases where there is increased familiarity, one can step out from behind these cultural constraints. Expertise matters (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996). Knowing the ways people tell the history of their own country, familiar other countries, and less familiar countries, is critical to appreciating how people understand the world of nations. The present work provides at least one swipe through this complex problem.

## Notes

1. Timeline data and country age estimates are not reported here, as the results are not germane to the present work.
2. In the process of coding we confined ourselves to the content of the words expressed by the participants and did not attempt to draw parallels or make inferences about what a participant may have meant. For example, conceptually, "achieving independence" and "changing leaders" could indeed be related. However, if a participant wrote "independence", we did not attempt to intuit whether a participant might have also meant "changing leaders".
3. Analyses associated with year of occurrence are not reported here, as the results are not germane to the present study.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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