Qual Sociol (2014) 37:69–92
DOI 10.1007/s11133-013-9267-3

Collective Memory and Collective Fear: How South Africans Use the Past to Explain Crime

Chana Teeger

Published online: 12 January 2014
© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2014

Abstract The past is a resource that individuals can draw upon as they try to make sense of the world around them, and scholars have long assumed that individuals internalize and utilize collective memories in their daily lives. Yet capturing and analyzing the deployment of collective memory has proven elusive. This paper offers a novel approach for tapping whether, and how, individuals selectively draw on their collective pasts to explain the present. Analyzing interviews with young South African managers and professionals, this paper demonstrates racial variation in how respondents organically introduce the country's apartheid past as an explanans for current crime, and suggests how these differences are related to divergent levels of commitment by blacks and whites to the South African nation-building project. In so doing, the paper offers a method for examining how individuals selectively use the past to construct, justify, and explain their present-day attitudes and behaviors. The study further highlights the importance of attending not only to *what* people remember, but also to *how* they think through and with collective representations of the past.

Keywords Collective memory · Perceptions of crime · Race · South Africa · Qualitative methods

Scholars argue that collective memory matters for processes of identity formation (DeGloma 2010; Gillis 1994; Vinitzky-Seroussi 1998), nation-building (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992), the consolidation of state policies and practices (Savelsberg and King 2005), international relations and state-level impression management (Olick 2007; Rivera 2008), social conflict (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002; Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010), social movement activism (Armstrong and Crage 2006), and destigmatization strategies (Fleming 2012). Indeed, believing in the efficacy of collective memory, a variety of national and other elite actors continue to pour great resources into the construction and elaboration of national and group pasts in the forms of museums, monuments, official texts, rituals, and proclamations. Scholars in turn examine these mnemonic devices to determine how elites attempt to use the past to serve present interests.[1]

[1] Several scholars also show how attempts to remake the past to serve present interests are curtailed by a variety of factors (see Coser 1992; Olick 1999b; Schudson 1989; Schwartz 1991).

C. Teeger (✉)
Department of Sociology, University of Johannesburg, C-ring 634, Kingsway Campus, PO Box 524, Auckland Park 2006, South Africa
e-mail: cteeger@uj.ac.za

Yet, we know little about whether and how the collective past matters for people in their daily lives. A growing body of literature demonstrates variation in *what* individuals recollect about the collective past when directly asked to do so in an interview context (see for example Rosenzweig and Thelen 1998; Schuman and Scott 1989). But how salient are these memories in other social contexts? Do people actively use collective representations of the past to construct their present-day beliefs about the world? If so, what patterned variations exist in how individuals deploy national and collective memories? In this article, I offer a strategy for tapping the processes through which individuals might organically *use* the collective past in their everyday lives to make sense of present circumstances. I suggest that researchers can learn a lot about whether and how the collective past matters for individuals by asking them about present social issues which researchers reasonably believe can be explained by recourse to present or past conditions (or both). Such issues may include crime, poverty, or the black-white gap in educational attainment. In analyzing the data, the researcher attends to whether, how, and by whom the past is mobilized as part of the explanation. The discursive choices made in the context of a face-to-face interview allow us insight into what individuals deem to be important about the collective past, as well as into how they might deploy collective memory to construct their contemporary attitudes and beliefs. This approach offers a novel way of capturing not only what individuals "think *about*" the past, but also how they "think *with*" the past (Gillis 1994, 5; see also Griffin and Bollen 2009). In so doing, it fills a gap that Griffin (2004, 556) identifies in the literature—namely, that we have yet to develop ways of studying what "people do with memory in time present."

I utilized this method by asking a racially diverse group of South African managers and professionals to work through a current social problem—crime. I then examined whether and how they drew on the country's apartheid past to formulate their accounts. My findings demonstrate that respondents varied by race in terms of how they deployed the country's past as an explanans for current crime. While both black and white interviewees highlighted present conditions as contributing to crime, black respondents also proposed several ways in which current crime has its roots in the country's apartheid past. In addition, black respondents suggested that narratives that posit a rupture between past and present limit our ability to see historical continuities that would help us account for present-day crime. In contrast, when white respondents deployed the apartheid past, they did so in order to promote these very ideologies of rupture between past and present and argued that those who illegitimately hold onto the past drove crime.

In constructing their explanations about why there is so much crime in their country, both black and white respondents in this study selectively referenced the past. However, they did so in very different ways. These differences point to the importance of attending not only to *who* recalls the past (see for example Griffin 2004; Schuman and Corning 2000; Schuman and Scott 1989; Schuman et al. 2003), but also to *how* individuals and groups *use* the past as a discursive resource in constructing narratives and explanations in the present. By asking respondents about a current social problem, and then listening to whether, how, and by whom the past is introduced into the conversation, this study describes a new strategy for tapping into the processes of meaning-making that connect collective memory with important attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in the present, such as policy support, racial attitudes, nationalism, identity, symbolic boundary formations, and more.

Presenting the Past

Maurice Halbwachs, often cited as the founding father of collective memory (Olick and Robbins 1998), famously argued that memory should not be thought of as a purely individual

affair, since all memory is socially structured (Halbwachs 1992). This insight is supported by psychological studies that highlight the importance of social cues in processes of mnemonic coding and retrieval (see Finkenauer et al. 1997; Gaskell and Wright 1997; Hirst et al. 2009). Among sociologists, the term collective memory is generally used to refer to the memory and representation of group pasts—whether these be ethnic, national, global, or other collective historical events.

The collective memory literature often focuses on the production side of historical representations. Scholars examine how elites and other "agents of memory" (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002), or "reputational entrepreneurs" (Fine 1996), represent the past for broader audiences. Through interviews with mnemonic stakeholders, as well as analyses of diaries, official texts, and proclamations, scholars examine what powerful individuals think or thought about the past, as well as how they use the past to advance their present interests. In addition, scholars focus much attention on semiotic readings of "sites of memory" (Nora 1989) in the form of museums, monuments, and other historical sites to ascertain how the past is selectively deployed in present material representations. In the process, they show how certain elements of the past are highlighted, while others are ignored or sidelined, in order to construct particular versions of the collective past, often most favorable to those in power and/or aimed at promoting group or national solidarity (see for example Poletta 1998; Spillman 1994; Trouillot 1995; Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010)

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992) articulate the most extreme version of this instrumentalist view of collective memory by showing how a variety of "traditions" have been completely "invented" for present purposes. Most of the scholarship, however, offers a more circumscribed version of this theory by documenting how aspects of the past are selectively deployed and represented (although not completely invented) to serve present interests. Several important contributions explicitly address how complete remakings of the past are curtailed by a variety of factors. These factors include "conflicts about the past among a multitude of mutually aware individuals and groups" (Schudson 1989, 107) as well as path-dependent processes in public memory (see Olick 1999b). "[T]he past," as Schwartz (1982, 396) explains, "cannot be literally constructed; it can only be selectively exploited."

Most of the collective memory literature highlights how, albeit under certain constraints, elites use the past as a resource for a variety of ends in the present. Nevertheless, a growing body of literature has demonstrated that non-elites also commemorate and represent their shared pasts. These "vernacular" (Bodnar 1992) memories often diverge from the "official" memory of states and other elite actors, although they can also be subsumed into (see Azaryahu 1996) or facilitated by (see Hass 1998; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991) official versions of the past.

Other studies explore the collective memories of non-elites by pursuing a methodologically individualistic research agenda. Those studies survey a cross-section of the population about their memories of national and global events. In their various manifestations, these surveys ask individuals to answer closed- or open-ended questions about the most important events or people in the past. Scholars then use these data to identify predictors of collective memory, such as cohort, race, and region (see for example Griffin 2004; Rosenzweig and Thelen 1998; Schuman and Corning 2000; Schuman and Scott 1989; Schuman et al. 2003; Schwartz and Schuman 2005). Sociologically oriented oral histories similarly show how personal reminiscence about the collective past is socially structured by attending to fine-grained distinctions between how subsets of a population talk about the past (see for example Auyero 1999; Passerini 1987). In short, these important studies make clear that non-elites might remember the past in ways that are

quite different from official elite representations, and that these memories might themselves vary across subsets of the population.[2]

A handful of studies employ quantitative methods to try to unpack not only the *determinants*, but also the *consequences*, of individuals' recall of the collective past. Griffin and Bollen (2009), for example, document that individuals who recalled the Civil Rights Movement in the US as an especially important historical event held more liberal views than those who nominated other events. Schuman and Rieger (1992) similarly show how Americans who viewed World War II as the best analogy through which to understand the situation in Iraq in 1991 were more likely to approve of the 1991 Gulf War than were Americans who drew analogies with the Vietnam War.

These studies suggest that individuals may use the past in constructing their present-day attitudes. However, in their reliance on quantitative data, they offer us limited insight into the meaning-making processes through which individuals make these connections. In what follows, I present an interviewing strategy that allows researchers to capture the *processes* through which individuals selectively draw on the past in constructing and articulating their present-day attitudes and beliefs. This involves asking respondents to talk through a contemporary social issue and then attending to whether and how they reference the past in their accounts.

In asking respondents to talk about contemporary crime, I found that both black and white respondents selectively deployed the country's collective past. However, they did so to make different kinds of arguments. When black respondents in this study used apartheid to explain current crime, they did so in order to highlight a variety of structural legacies that contribute to contemporary social problems. On the other hand, when white respondents mobilized apartheid, they did so in order to argue that current crime is fuelled by those who illegitimately refuse to let the past go. The study demonstrates that both groups deployed the past to make sense of the present, but they did so in very different ways. The interviewing technique presented in this article offers a method for examining how individuals selectively use the past to construct, justify, and explain their present-day attitudes and behaviors.

Rupturing from the Past in the South African Transition to Democracy

Numerous scholars highlight the importance of founding moments in memory work, as these enable, constrain, and set limits on future mnemonic practices (see Olick 2005, 1999b; Schudson 1989; Schwartz 1982, 1991; Spillman 2003; Vinitzky-Seroussi 2001, 2002). Elsewhere (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007), we have argued that the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) represents a founding moment in public memory in post-apartheid South Africa. In what follows, I draw on the literature to briefly discuss how the TRC promoted what I call a *narrative logic of rupture* in South African collective memory. While I cannot make claims about the causal role that the TRC's narratives played in constituting individual South Africans' ideas about the links between past and present, several of my respondents explicitly referenced the TRC in their interviews and offered appraisals of the narrative logic of rupture which it constructed (although they of course did not use that

[2] For an overview on the collectivist and individualist traditions in the literature, see Olick (1999a) who proposes that the field of "Social Memory Studies" be divided into two main traditions: studies of "collective memory" (publicly available representational symbols) and studies of "collected memories" (aggregated individual memories). In keeping with the bulk of the literature (including Olick et al. (2011)), I use the term "collective memory" rather than "social memory" to refer inclusively to both traditions.

term), and most referenced the same logic implicitly. Because a basic understanding of the role of the TRC as a mechanism of transition, and as a mnemonic institution, is essential for understanding this paper's findings, I offer a brief summary below.

The South African system of apartheid had its roots in the history of European colonialism and its accompanying economic exploitation. In the 1950s and 1960s, as the rest of Africa was decolonizing, the South African apartheid government was intensifying and codifying its racist policies. By the late 1980s, however, heightened internal resistance to apartheid, combined with international sanctions, brought many in power to believe that apartheid was both economically irrational and practically unsustainable. A context had been created in which anti-apartheid activists could negotiate with the apartheid regime for a peaceful resolution (see Fagan 2000; Marais 2001).

One of the significant aspects of the negotiated transition was the decision about how to deal with the past. Eschewing a Nuremberg-style justice, representatives of both sides agreed to the principle of what would emerge as the TRC. In many ways the TRC reflected the broader ideology of reconciliation that was advanced by the Mandela presidency and its Government of National Unity which was, in essence, a type of power sharing agreement between the incoming regime, led by the African National Congress, and the outgoing regime, led by the Nationalist Party.

As the institution directly and explicitly tasked with dealing with the past, the TRC has received an enormous amount of scholarly attention for its role in crystalizing and articulating the post-apartheid mnemonic agenda. A large body of literature examines the judicial, psychological, and social dimensions of the TRC. Much of the existing literature is positive and highlights the ways in which the TRC functioned to promote both "reconciliation" by its focus on restorative rather than retributive justice (see for example Llewellyn and Howse 1999), as well as "truth" by its focus on victims' hearings and its mandate to grant individual, rather than blanket, amnesty to perpetrators, conditional upon their full disclosure of past wrongdoings (see for example Minow 1998, 59; Olick 2007, 148-9). Although most scholars and policy makers alike praise the TRC for facilitating one of the most celebrated transitions to democracy, several scholars have been quite critical. They argue, among other things, that the TRC created an artificial sense of rupture between past and present and failed to adequately examine and address aspects of the past that have left their remnants in the present (see for example Posel 2002; Simpson 2002; Wilson 2001).

The TRC's *mnemonic logic of rupture* was constructed in three ways. First, by focusing only on gross violations of human rights, the TRC created a context wherein the past of apartheid was addressed in a way that did not really confront its systemic nature. The focus on gross human rights violations obscured the illegitimacy of the regime as a whole by condemning those actions that would, for the most part, have been deemed beyond the law even under apartheid jurisprudence (van der Walt et al. 2003; Wilson 2001). The stories of those who suffered—and continue to suffer—the effects of the systematic political, economic, and educational discrimination of apartheid, were not given voice (Mamdani 1998).

Second, one of the major compromises of the negotiations process was that amnesty would be granted on an *individual* basis. Amnesty would be given to individuals who came forward to fully disclose their past wrongdoings and showed that these actions had been politically motivated. The decision around individual amnesty has been praised in that it promoted knowledge about the past (see Minow 1998; Olick 2007), while avoiding the stigmatization of entire groups thus aiding in the reconciliation process (Goldstone 2000). However, by focusing on individuals, rather than on institutions or groups, the TRC took accountability outside of the social context in which individuals are embedded. The complicity of business and faith-based organizations, for example,

was sidelined (see Nattrass 1999).[3] In addition, by focusing on the victim/perpetrator binary, the TRC left out the notion of beneficiaries, thus allowing the majority of white South Africans to join in with indignation at, and condemnation of, the acts of the few who arguably had been acting in their collective interest (Lodge 2003; Mamdani 1998; Posel 2002). In so doing, the majority of white South Africa could enter the new dispensation without having to reflect about, or account for, how they benefited, and continue to benefit, from the apartheid system.

Third, in addition to the amnesty application hearings, the TRC held victims' hearings where survivors of apartheid were given a forum in which they could tell their stories in public. However while the TRC had the quasi-judicial power to grant or withhold amnesty from perpetrators, as far as victims were concerned, it could only make *recommendations* regarding material reparations (see Lodge 2003). In dealing with the past in this way, the TRC can be said to have been given a mandate that prioritized the political and sidelined the economic. Not surprisingly, in post-apartheid society, it is the political that has changed most, while the economic has in many ways remained much the same for the majority of the population (Marais 2001).

In these ways, the TRC can be seen to have examined the past, but also to have done so in ways that allowed for the construction of a sense of rupture between past and present. While I am not here proposing that there was a better way of handling the South African transition to democracy (although there might well have been), what I am suggesting is that the TRC (even if it was a "best case scenario") helped to create an institutionalized mnemonic reality whereby continuities between past and present were elided.

In this study, I investigate whether this logic of rupture is articulated on the micro level by examining whether a sample of South African managers and professionals construct the past as relevant to present social concerns. Specifically, I asked respondents to tell me about a contemporary social problem—crime—and I attended to whether and how they used the past to explain the present. By focusing the interview on the present rather than on the past per se, I offer a way of getting at the micro-level processes through which individuals deploy collective memory. Equally importantly, this study adds to our knowledge of the long-term and micro-level consequences of the "South African Option" as a mechanism of transition. In conflict resolution circles, this celebrated transition from authoritarian rule to democracy has often been hailed as a model of successful societal transformation. This, despite the fact that the great bulk of literature around the transition has focused on analysis of the TRC hearings and Final Report, while very little has been written about how South Africans have viewed this institution on-the-ground and how they have coped with their country's past more generally.[4] This article offers one approach to tackling these issues.

Crime in Post-Apartheid South Africa

The present study examines individuals' perceptions and understandings of crime, rather than the reality of crime per se. Nevertheless, a few words about crime statistics in South Africa are in order. There are two main issues to consider when evaluating crime statistics in South Africa (and, to a certain degree, elsewhere). First, it is difficult to compare crime statistics from before

[3] Special hearings were held into the role of business and faith communities in the past. Participation in these hearings was completely voluntary and there were no potential consequences to non-participation. This was not the case with individual perpetrators who risked criminal prosecutions should amnesty not be granted.

[4] Gibson's (2004; 2006) survey is an exception in this regard.

and after the transition to democracy, since apartheid-era statistics grossly under-reported crimes committed against blacks and defined as criminal many activities that are perfectly legal in the new democratic dispensation. Second, as in other countries, South African crime statistics suffer from the so-called *dark figure of crime*—a term used to describe those crimes that are not reported to or by the police. Notwithstanding these caveats, statistics released by the South African Police Services indicate a 30 % increase in recorded crime over the first decade of democracy (du Plessis and Louw 2006), although studies suggest that crime was already on the increase in South Africa from the mid-1980s, thus predating the transition by about a decade (Roberts 2010).

Official statistics for 2007–2008 (when data for this study were collected) paint a gloomy picture, with murder rates of 38.6 per 100,000 of the population;[5] carjacking rates of 29.7 per 100,000; and robbery rates of 135.8 per 100,000. In the province of Gauteng, where Johannesburg is located (and where the interviews for this study were conducted), statistics were well above the national average with a murder rate of 51.1 per 100,000 of the population; a carjacking rate of 77.3 per 100,000; and a robbery rate of 233.9 per 100,000.

Data on South Africans' perceptions of crime and risk are similarly disheartening. Findings from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (see Roberts et al. 2010) indicate that a third of all South Africans reported feeling "very unsafe" or "a bit unsafe" when asked about their global feelings of safety. More specific measures show that most South Africans feel unsafe walking in their neighborhoods at night. This is true for black Africans (70 %) as well as whites (65 %). Afrobarometer (2008) indicators similarly show that that over 50 % of South Africans fear crime in their homes.[6] Overall, South Africans' fear of crime is significantly higher than that of their counterparts in other developed and developing countries, including those in transition (Roberts 2010; see also Louw 2007). According to commentators (see for example Shaw 2002), continued high levels of crime pose a significant barrier to the full consolidation of democracy in South Africa.

That crime is a major issue in South Africa is clear. In this paper, I do not aim to uncover the causes of crime. Rather, I discuss the explanations given by respondents in this study and I analyze whether and how the past figured into their interpretations.

Capturing the Deployment of Collective Memory: Data and Methods

Data were collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews with a racially diverse set of South Africans in 2007. I restricted my sample in several ways. First, I interviewed only managers and professionals, defined as individuals working for mainstream sectors such as banking, medicine, or law or in management or executive positions in other industries. All my interviewees had at least one tertiary degree. I did not ask directly about income because it is a culturally sensitive topic. However, given their educational background, combined with their occupation, it is safe to say that all of the respondents were middle or upper-middle class. Interviews were all conducted in Johannesburg—the economic powerhouse not only of South Africa but, arguably, of the entire sub-Saharan African region. Although interviewees occupied similar class positions and tended to live in the northern suburbs of the city, they worked in a range of industries as indicated in Table 1, which describes the sample. I chose to sample in

[5] For comparative purposes, the murder rate per 100,000 of the population in the United States was 5.6 (FBI Uniform Crime Reports 2007).

[6] Black Africans are slightly more fearful than whites, with 48.4 % indicating that they have never feared crime in their homes as opposed to 59.3 % of whites.

this way because I wanted to hold class constant and to explore the relationship between discussions of crime and emigration, since crime is often cited as a key factor driving high levels of emigration by South African professionals (see Demombynes and Özler 2005; Shaw 2002). The respondents' class positions constituted them as potential highly skilled migrants.

Second, I restricted my sample by age, interviewing respondents between 23 and 40 years of age only. Schuman and Scott (1989; see also Mannheim 1952) find that events that occur in early to mid adolescence are most salient in individual recollections of collective history, and I wanted to sample individuals who would have been in the relevant age bracket during the nation's transition to democracy. Thus, I wished to examine whether and how understandings of the roots of social problems in post-apartheid South Africa might vary even among an economically and educationally homogenous group for whom a particular historical moment should be of utmost prominence in their minds.

Table 1 Respondents by sex, race, age, occupation, and education

Name[a]	Sex	Race	Age	Occupation	Years of education
Jane	Female	Black	28	Pediatric Nurse	16
Janet	Female	Black	40	Nurse	16
Lerato	Female	Black	26	Financial Accountant	16
Nquobile	Female	Black	28	Market Planner	16
Sibongile	Female	Black	25	Banking Administrator	16
Thandiswa	Female	Black	27	Attorney	17
John	Male	Black	38	Executive	19
Kaya	Male	Black	28	Risk Analyst	15
Mandla	Male	Black	27	IT Manager	15
Mpho	Male	Black	30	Print Designer	15
Sipho	Male	Black	30	IT Manager	17
Tebogo	Male	Black	27	Product Development Manager	15
Thato	Male	Black	38	Advocate Attorney	19
Themba	Male	Black	29	Property Developer	16
Timothy	Male	Black	23	Banking Administrator	16
Amanda	Female	White	38	Teacher	16
Anna	Female	White	28	Brand Builder	19
Estelle	Female	White	23	Banking Administrator	15
Helen	Female	White	25	Litigation Attorney	16
Karen	Female	White	26	Psychologist	18
Lisa	Female	White	25	Industrial Psychologist	18
Nicole	Female	White	28	Psychologist	21
Rebekka	Female	White	26	Managing Director	16
Damian	Male	White	23	Psychologist	18
Daniel	Male	White	30	Financial Director	19
Kevin	Male	White	39	Entrepreneur	17
Matthew	Male	White	40	Attorney	19
Sean	Male	White	35	Chartered Accountant	20
Steven	Male	White	39	Managing Director	17

[a] Names changed

Respondents were identified via personal contacts in South Africa. I did not interview anyone whom I knew personally in any capacity. Rather, I asked personal contacts to introduce me to friends or colleagues in their social networks who fit the criteria for my sample. Most introduced me to colleagues. Likewise, I asked these interviewees to introduce me to others in their social networks, generating a snowball sample with multiple starting points. The study reports on data collected in one-on-one in-depth interviews with 15 black Africans[7] and 14 whites.[8] It is important to note that referrals were made across racial divides, with whites referring me to black respondents and vice versa. As such, differences in responses by race of respondents should not be an artifact of social networks. Indeed, the fact that racial differences emerged in spite of the sampling technique may indicate that differences in the population are underestimated in this study. All interviews were conducted in English and all interviewees spoke English fluently.[9]

I contacted respondents by phone or email and set up a time to meet. I met most in their offices during working hours. The rest were interviewed in coffee shops or at their homes during the evening or on the weekend. I told respondents that I was conducting a study on young professionals' understandings and perceptions of crime in South Africa. Interviewees were not primed to talk about apartheid.

At the beginning of each interview, I explained to the interviewees that, although there were certain questions that I liked to cover in each interview, we would begin in a very open-ended fashion so as to let them direct the conversation. To start the discussion, I asked them to tell me how they saw the crime situation in South Africa at present. For the most part, respondents brought up many of the issues that I had wanted to cover in the interview, such as why there is so much crime in South Africa, what the main types of crime are, which areas and neighborhoods they consider to be dangerous, how crime figures into discussions around emigration and so on. On occasions when these issues did not arise organically in the conversation, I asked about them directly.[10]

Mostly, I probed respondents on issues they brought up themselves. If respondents said that crime was "because of apartheid," I asked them to elaborate on how and why. If they said that poverty alone could not explain the high levels of violent crime, I asked them if they could think of what could. If they said that crime was "out of control," I asked them what they meant by this term and whether and how crime could be controlled. As such, while my interviewing strategy was extremely open-ended, the interviews themselves were rather similar in the types of issues, if not the content, that arose in the discussion.

[7] South African social science tends to divide the population using the apartheid categories and these remain salient in how individuals self-identify. These are: African, coloured, Indian, and white. Echoing anti-apartheid resistance movements, many South African social scientists use the term "black" to refer collectively to Africans, coloureds and Indians. This study reports only on interviews with black Africans, from now on referred to as blacks.

[8] I also conducted interviews with two respondents who moved to South Africa as adults, and with three Indian and two coloured respondents. The responses of coloured respondents resembled those of African respondents and those of Indian respondents were similar to those of white respondents. For the sake of parsimony, this paper reports only on interviews with South African born black African and white respondents.

[9] Even if English was not the respondents' first language, all respondents worked in workplaces where English was the medium of communication (as most workplaces in Johannesburg are) and spoke it with first-language fluency (as most professionals in Johannesburg do).

[10] I left a question about whether the past could be viewed as responsible for current social issues for the very end of the interview, after respondents had finished offering their appraisals of the crime situation in South Africa. Aside from one respondent (Damian), none of my interviewees responded to this prompt by offering opinions about the connection between apartheid and crime that had not already emerged in the interview. I have excluded Damian's response from the analysis.

In what follows, I present my respondents' views on the causes of contemporary crime. My findings demonstrate that although both black and white respondents were deeply concerned about crime, they differed in terms of the explanations they gave for South Africa's high crime rates. Black respondents tended to argue that crime is caused by a combination of present and historical conditions. White respondents, on the other hand, tended to focus on present conditions. When white respondents mobilized the past as part of their explanations, they did so in order to argue that much crime is committed by individuals who *illegitimately* hold onto the past.

Salience of Crime in Everyday Life: Experiences and Explanations

Crime was a major concern for every respondent in this study, regardless of race or gender. Almost all respondents identified the same areas in Johannesburg as "no-go" zones. Without prompting, each mentioned behavioral and/or cognitive measures adopted in response to living in a high crime society. Beneath these apparent similarities, however, lay dramatic differences in the ways in which black and white respondents spoke about crime. In other words, while their cognitive-behavioral mechanisms of responding to crime were similar, their narrative understandings of why the phenomenon existed and what it meant for them as national citizens diverged quite dramatically.

Most respondents began by talking about poverty and unemployment as contributors to crime—themes that emerge in each and every interview. The majority of respondents, however, explicitly rejected these as the only, or even the dominant, contributors to crime. Two main reasons were given. First, respondents cited the violence associated with much of the crime in South Africa. Second, they argued that there is a materialism associated with South African crime that goes beyond individuals' attempts to satisfy their basic needs for food and shelter.

So, if poverty cannot provide enough of an explanation for the materialism and violence associated with crime in South Africa, what can? From the responses given by interviewees, I identified four primary explanations: 1) *Anti-white violence*; 2) *Persistent class inequalities*; 3) *Old violence in a new form*; 4) *No deterrence*. In analyzing the data, I counted the frequency of explanations by race of respondents. Table 2 describes which explanations were given by which respondents. As the table indicates, the explanations were not necessarily mutually exclusive. In what follows, I explore each of these explanations, focusing on how they varied by race of the respondents and how each did or did not draw on the past as a legitimate explanans for present crime.

Anti-White Violence

Half of the white respondents felt that they were specifically targeted for violent crime because of their race. I began my interview with Sean, a 35-year-old white chartered accountant, in the same way as I began all of my interviews, by asking him to tell me, generally speaking, how he saw the crime situation in South Africa. Sean responded as follows:

> Generally crime in South Africa is pretty bad, but the main problem is the violence associated with it…and that's the worst thing for me about the crime. You know, you understand [that] there are people who are desperate and you always wonder "If you were in that situation, would you resort to crime?" But what I can't really understand, and what is unacceptable, is the level of violence that comes with it. You know, you're

Table 2 Types of explanations by respondents

		Anti-white violence	Persistent class inequalities	Old violence in a new form	No deterrence[a]
Black respondents	Jane				
	Janet				
	John		X		
	Kaya				
	Lerato				
	Mandla				
	Mpho		X	X	X
	Nquobile			X	
	Sibongile		X	X	X
	Sipho		X		
	Tebogo				
	Thandiswa		X	X	
	Thato		X	X	X
	Themba	X	X		
	Timothy	X			
White respondents	Amanda	X			
	Anna		X		
	Damian				
	Daniel	X			
	Estelle	X			
	Helen	X			
	Karen		X		
	Kevin			X	
	Lisa				
	Matthew				
	Nicole	X			
	Rebekka	X			
	Sean	X			
	Steven				

[a] Refers to the subsample that mentioned the historical reasons for lack of police and judicial legitimacy

> gonna rob someone, fine rob them. But why shoot them or stab them? So I think there's a degree of hatred or revenge for the past and for apartheid which comes into it…There does seem to be that element of revenge and violence that's not really necessary. So that's the worst part of crime for me…So I don't think they will *not* steal from another person because they're black, so I don't think it's race-motivated, but I think the violence might be [pause], the violent part of it might be (emphasis by respondent).[11]

For Sean, some degree of property crime might be understandable, given the high levels of poverty in South Africa. The associated violence, however, is not. This violence, as Sean

[11] Note the implicit assumption—made by white and black respondents in this study—that criminals in South Africa are black. On the processes through which individuals deploy—or remain mute about—race in interaction by drawing on "common knowledge," see Whitehead (2009; see also Pollock 2004).

understands it, expresses black South Africans' anger about past injustices during apartheid and is directed specifically at whites.

Estelle, a 23-year-old white banking administrator, made a similar point in her interview. Like Sean, she responded to my first question by talking about crime as an expression of anger and revenge directed by blacks against whites:

> **Estelle:** I see it as a racist thing. I know it's not nice. I don't want it to be that way, but I think it's racist driven, most of it at least…
> **Interviewer:** Can you explain what you mean when you say it's racist driven?
> **Estelle:** They want to get us back—the white people…
> **Interviewer:** So you think whites are targeted more?
> **Estelle:** … I have this perception that they wouldn't do it to their own people…they don't hate their own kind like they hate us.

For Estelle, crime is a way for black South Africans to "get back" at white South Africans. Crime then is driven not merely by poverty or unemployment. Instead it is driven by "hate" directed by blacks against whites. Estelle notes that blacks "wouldn't do it to their own people" and the assumption here is that it is race, not class, that determines victimization.

The idea that whites are specifically targeted for crime is not unique to white respondents in my sample. In 2009, Brandon Huntley, a white South African, sought—and was awarded—political asylum in Canada based on his claim that he was being persecuted because of his race. Huntley claimed that he had been attacked by black South Africans on seven different occasions[12] and that these attacks were racially motivated. He further argued that the South African government was doing nothing to protect the country's white minority—a sentiment that was echoed by a third of the white respondents in my study. The immigration board in Ottawa, Canada, found Huntley's argument convincing and ruled that he "was a victim because of his race rather than a victim of criminality."[13] South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC) responded by stating that

> The ANC views the granting by Canada of a refugee status to South African citizen Brandon Huntley on the grounds that Africans would "persecute" him, as racist…We find the claim by Huntley to have been attacked seven times by Africans due to his skin colour without any police intervention sensational and alarming. Canada's reasoning for granting Huntley refugee status can only serve to perpetuate racism. (Reported in Smith 2009)

One hundred and forty two South African academics similarly challenged the decision in an open letter to the *Charge d'Affaires* of Canada in South Africa, stating:

> The outrageously distorted representation of contemporary South Africa does not square with the realities in our country, by any factual measure. While the crime rates in South Africa are high as a consequence of numerous interrelated factors—many of which are the working through of the past brutalization of our society by the system of white supremacy, and none of which relate to inherent criminal tendencies in black people—it is simply untrue that white people are being targeted disproportionately. Black South Africans are much more likely to be victims of crime, largely because they are less able to afford the protections and security measures which most white South Africans, as still privileged citizens, are able to acquire… The sad truth is that this case demonstrates not

[12] None of these incidents was ever reported to the South African police (Mail and Guardian 2009)

[13] The decision was overturned in 2010 (see Mail and Guardian 2010)

> the perilous condition of white South Africans, but the kinds of things some people are still willing to believe about Africa and Africans, based on assumptions that continue to circulate in the white worlds they share. (Steyn et al. 2009)

Both the ANC and the academics challenged the veracity of Huntley's claims of white victimization and pointed to the underlying racism that allows such claims to resonate globally. The academics further pointed to other explanations for high crime rates—explanations that are rooted in the country's racially violent apartheid past and that echo the "old violence in a new form" narrative presented by some of the black respondents in this study, as discussed below. When white respondents in my study referenced the past, however, they did so in a way that closely resembled the narrative presented by Huntley. They argued that white South Africans are indeed disproportionately the victims of violent crime and that this is because some black South Africans simply cannot let go of the past. Returning to the issue of "hate" that Estelle brought up, I asked her whether she thought that black South Africans might in any way be justified for feeling angry. She responded as follows:

> *Ja* [Yes] they are but so are we. We're justified for being angry about them hating us for something that was not our fault. It was our parents' fault. And not even directly our parents' fault. It was some white guy who did it. And now we all get blamed.

From Estelle's perspective, white South Africans are being made to pay for the sins of the fathers. In a sense, she suggests that much crime in South Africa is the result of people illegitimately refusing to let go of the past. The echoes of the TRC are difficult to miss in how Estelle deploys the past: White South Africa was absolved of the crime of apartheid and the individuals ("some white guy") who perpetuated gross violations of human rights are those who are really accountable. Introducing some notion of collective accountability becomes beyond the boundaries of acceptability, creating anger at the anger.

Six out of fifteen of the black respondents challenged this position, stating explicitly that crime in South Africa is not about race. Only two black respondents suggested that some crime might be about race. Themba, a 29-year-old black property developer, who grew up in Alexandra township[14] but now lives in an upper-middle-class suburb, explained that "[criminals] think white people have taken from us so we will take from white people." Timothy, a 23-year-old black banking administrator—who lives near Johannesburg's inner city in a neighborhood that the majority of other respondents describe as a "no-go area"—explained what he sees to be the mentality of many criminals in South Africa: "They say the only reason these guys got rich is because they [white people] broke our grandfathers' backs . . . it's only fair that we get our shit." While Themba and Timothy seem to offer a somewhat similar explanation to their white counterparts, their explanation focuses on the material—rather than the violent—nature of crime directed at whites. Crime, they suggest, might be driven by impulses at material redistribution. The broader commentary about revenge, hate, and anger is missing from their description. In addition, both continued to suggest that the racialized nature of current crime was changing as more and more blacks were becoming upwardly mobile and moving into the suburbs. Themba also suggested that those who have been marginalized in the capitalist economy of post-apartheid South Africa have resorted to crime in order to get what they believe to be justly owed to them. Here, he foreshadows a second explanation for current crime that focuses on class, rather than race, and that suggests that crime is driven by structural continuities that have resisted narratives of change.

[14] Townships refer to urban areas designated for blacks during apartheid.

Persistent Class Inequalities

While half of the white respondents spoke about race and the unwillingness of some blacks to move past the racial animosity of apartheid, black respondents were more likely to privilege class inequalities in their explanatory frameworks. Thus, approximately half of black respondents argued that persistent class inequalities, in the face of the professed equality of opportunity of the new dispensation, play a role in South African crime.[15] Thandiswa, a 27-year-old black attorney, answered a question about whom she thinks is most affected by crime as follows:

> **Thandiswa:** I think post-94 we had this reconciled thing, rainbow nation, and all of that … forget, well not forget, but like let's bury the past, that was the attitude. And I think the tensions that are unspoken—you know the gap between rich and poor is so unspoken but it's actually so pervasive that it's manifesting itself in various ways. So it's not just isolated incidents. It's not just about people that want to carry cellphones. It's not about that. I think it's about a deeper issue and I think, I mean I could be wrong, but I think it's the fact that people were hopeful coming to the new dispensation that their lives would change drastically and it hasn't really happened. I think a select few university-educated elite have really benefited from the new dispensation. So, yes, I think those issues, those kinds of tensions, are manifesting themselves in crime…And, you know, I hate making arguments about the moral fiber and all that but there is something there, there is something there that is happening in our society and I don't think we're actually noticing the underlying causes of it, and I think it's actually going to explode because our stance that we've always taken is "let's bury the past and move on"—but we actually can't do that. We've actually got to deal with those issues. And because we're not dealing with them, they're actually manifesting themselves in violence.
> **Interviewer:** When you say that you bury the past, can you expand on what you mean?
> **Thandiswa:** Well like the TRC and what they were trying to achieve, to say "Look if you come out and say this is what you did and you ask for forgiveness, you'll be forgiven, you will not be prosecuted." I'm not going to judge that as good or bad. But what I can say is that it does not work because apartheid came with a very, very big price and we still have hundreds of thousands of families that are destitute that have just been left in the lurch… So when we say bury the past, those kinds of issues were never addressed and I think…people were prepared to forgive because their lives were going to change…So people are sitting and thinking "gee wiz [sic] we were prepared to forgive and forget and we're worse off"… So I think that, possibly, those are the reasons why there's this attack on the middle class currently.

For Thandiswa and others, the explanation for current crime is rooted in the unfulfilled promises of the transition. So, while there was a promise of the New South Africa, only a select few benefited economically from this transition. Crime, in this explanation, is not the result of those who illegitimately refuse to let go of the past. Instead, it is perpetrated by those who have been prevented from embracing the promises of rupture inherent in the process of transition.

Echoing these sentiments, and focusing specifically on the material dimensions of property crime, other respondents highlighted a sense of materialism that developed in the wake of democracy. These newfound material aspirations, however, were met with persistent structural

[15] Two white respondents—neither of whom advanced the "anti-white violence" explanation—mentioned the "persistent class inequalities" explanation.

conditions that impeded accumulation. When I asked Sipho, a 30-year-old black IT manager, why he thinks there is so much crime in South Africa, he explained:

> In the past, you were not allowed certain things and with the new government coming in the whole world opened up and people wanted to be involved in the main economic activities, but they were finding it difficult because it's only a few people who are actually involved in those.

Like many of my other interviewees, John, a 38-year-old black executive, began his interview by stating that crime is a major problem in South Africa. He identified the surge in crime as being a "post-democracy" phenomenon. When I asked him to expand, he gave the following appraisal:

> There is definitely a growing gap of the haves and the have-nots. So there was a certain expectation—I don't know if it was generational—which came about during the last years of apartheid where mostly young black people have this expectation…that the end of apartheid would bring about untold wealth… But definitely that has created a certain sort of animosity, I don't know if that's the right word. And maybe that's where the problem lies, not the poor but those who feel that they should also be partaking in this whole economic growth—the whole country is growing and maybe [these] guys feel that they should be part of it…that's why I lean to the idea that the wealth gap has reared its head.

Here, respondents argued that in some senses there was a change in South Africa. For most South Africans, however, the change was more ideological than material. Thus, while the capitalist ideology and culture of materialism began to pervade the new democracy, many found that they were structurally barred from partaking in the promises of wealth. Responding to persistent class inequalities and armed with the new capitalist logic of accumulation, many have resorted to illegal means to acquire that which they could not achieve through legitimate avenues.

These class-based explanations acknowledge, but at the same time reject, the mnemonic logic of rupture. Change, argue these respondents, has come, but it has come for a minority of those discriminated against by the apartheid regime. For the majority, the promises of change have been undermined by continued and stark class inequalities.[16] In accordance with the logic of rupture, these respondents argue that there has been a change on the ideological realm where South Africans have become increasingly materialistic as the country re-enters the global capitalist marketplace. However, this ideological shift has occurred in the absence of material change and the mismatch between material expectations and realities—a mismatch between the ideology and structure of opportunity—has resulted in an exponential increase in crime in South Africa. Respondents who offered these class-based explanations, like respondents who offered the race-based explanations, deployed the country's apartheid past. However, they did so in very different ways. The former referenced apartheid to argue that a lack of change between past and present fuels crime. The latter referenced apartheid to argue that change has indeed come and that crime is committed by those who refuse to recognize that fact.

[16] South Africa's gini coefficient was estimated at 0.67 in 2008 (Office of the Presidency of South Africa 2009). For a detailed discussion of patterns of inequality in South Africa, see Seekings and Nattrass (2005).

Old Violence in a New Form

Proponents of the third explanation highlighted the violent, and not merely the material, dimensions of crime. Deploying collective memories of the violence of the apartheid regime, these respondents argued that focusing on the new-ness of the phenomenon obscures the ways in which violent crime is firmly rooted in the past and wrongly places blame at the seats of power in the present. A third of black respondents used this explanation.[17] For example, Nquobile, a 28-year-old black market planner, began by explaining how inequality contributes to crime. However, she continued by suggesting that inequality alone cannot explain the violent dimension of crime. When I asked her what could, she took an extremely broad perspective, highlighting continuities between past and present violence:

> **Nquobile:** You can't have such a huge disparity in wealth and not expect there to be crime…Where there's a disparity of wealth, you'll always have the poorer people coming in to seek money and if they can't get a job then they'll revert to crime. And I think for me the big difference is that the crime here is violent and that's the one thing I do agree with the media… I agree that our crime is violent in comparison to crime stats around the world.
> **Interviewer:** And why do you think we have such violent crime?
> **Nquobile:** I think when you look at the history of South Africa, we are a violent nation and not just looking at apartheid, looking further than that. You look at the history of when South Africa was colonized… And I feel somehow that if you look at the history of our country and how we've evolved, everything has been resolved through violence…So partly I think it is because we have such a violent history and I think it's naïve for us to think that we can just forget what's happened in the past and people will turn around 360° and just live life happily.

This explanation directly and explicitly challenges the notion of rupture between past and present. It locates the antecedents of present violence in past violence, deploying the past to advance a discourse of continuity. Several respondents who presented this explanation spoke of criminal violence as analogous with state sanctioned violence of the past, blurring the boundaries between the socially constructed categories of criminal and political violence. In this vein, Thandiswa, a 27-year-old black attorney, explained that crime had increased following the transition to democracy but then added:

> For me crime and fear are intertwined. So fear before the transition was fear of what the government would do to you, the apartheid government what it would do to your son, to your young children and so on, detain them without trial. So that was a different kind of fear and that was a different kind of crime that was leveled actually by the state to the citizens, or at least the black citizens. And now, it's pretty much the man on the street.

When I asked her how she thinks crime could be reduced, Sibongile, a 25-year-old black banking administrator, answered: "I think it depends on what causes it…some people say its unemployment. Perhaps [it is]…but I think we just have a violent society as well." When I followed-up by asking her why the society was violent she said: "I don't know, I think perhaps from our past. People are so used to defending themselves and fighting and that sort of thing; it doesn't stop just because we have a democracy."

In these explanations, respondents make note of the levels of state-sanctioned violence against blacks during apartheid. They also note the moments of violent resistance to this

[17] The explanation was mentioned by one white respondent.

authoritarian regime and suggest that the apparent novelty of post-apartheid criminal violence may in fact be rooted in the more politically-based historical violence of the society. The argument is reminiscent of Simpson's (2002) critique of the TRC's creation of an artificial rupture between the era of political violence and that of criminal violence. In fact, the proponents of this view tended to explicitly challenge the notion of rupture advanced by the TRC. Nquobile, quoted above, elaborated on the point she made that violent crime should not be thought of as a purely post-apartheid phenomenon. She explained that apartheid was sustained by two things, ideology and violence, and she argued that current violence has its roots in past violence. In advancing this explanation, she introduced the TRC and suggested that it failed to address the everyday forms of violence that now manifest themselves in violent crime:

> I think our violence, in terms of the violence now, it stemmed there [in apartheid]. I think it started there… If you look at just smaller things—I remember I hated coming to Joburg [Johannesburg], cause we had gone shopping with my aunt—and because she had taken a trolley that some [white] Afrikaner in Kempton Park wanted to take, he slapped her. And nothing was done. And I say to myself "that's violent." And yes it happened in the 1980s, early 1980s, but it's something I remember and yet nothing was done about it cause he was an Afrikaner guy. And so for me, I just think that we're decontextualizing the violence, we're looking at it within this day and age and we're forgetting how far it's rooted. The fact that it was the norm to hit your domestic worker if they weren't doing things correctly, and then you say that "No, violence is only a case of post-apartheid." No it's not. And I think it's all these hidden truths that we're refusing to face up to and to acknowledge that they actually happened, and just take responsibility in terms of how the past is linked to our present…The Truth and Reconciliation [Commission], as an idea it was great, but the shortcomings of it is [sic.] that it only helped a few people. It only touched the top of what happened. It only touched the kind of big stories of what happened. It didn't help the people who lived the day to day violence of apartheid and of the latter years. It didn't resolve that.

In advancing this explanation, respondents drew on their memories of the violence of apartheid to directly challenge the premises of the transition. They explicitly privileged continuity over change. They rejected clear-cut distinctions between criminal and political violence, and they proposed that the mechanisms of transition did not adequately deal with the everyday physical, economic, and psychological dimensions of apartheid.

No Deterrence

The final explanation for crime seems to be firmly rooted in the present and does not immediately use the past as part of the explanation. It involves a critique of the criminal justice system in general and the police in particular. All but one respondent, regardless of race, made reference to this explanation in one way or another. Respondents' discussions of the police concurred with findings from large-scale surveys in South Africa that indicate that the police are one of the least trusted institutions in the country (see Rule and Langa 2010). Respondents in this study indicated that they have little faith in the police and many noted that they would call their private security companies before the police. Incompetence and corruption were highlighted over and over again.

Respondents talked about their lack of faith in the police when explaining why others commit crime. They did so to explain how inefficiency and incompetency lead to a lack of respect of the law and to the absence of legal deterrents to committing crime. In their

descriptions of police and judicial incompetence, respondents noted that there are no consequences for committing crime. They argued that people commit crimes, quite simply, because they can get away with it. And, as more and more people commit crimes without repercussion, the incentives for joining in begin to outweigh the potential costs, making crime seem like a viable option for many (see also Altbeker 2007, 114). In their stories of the police and other elements of the criminal justice system, respondents indicated a lack of what Tyler (2004) has called "procedural justice"—an element of fairness and transparency necessary for creating police and judicial legitimacy. In this argument, people commit crimes because they don't fear, trust, or respect the law.

While this explanation is firmly rooted in the present administration of justice, a minority of black respondents deployed the past to highlight *historical* reasons for limited legitimacy. In so doing, they suggested that institutional legitimacy is not merely a product of present procedures, but is also constructed through historical images of those institutions. Mpho and Sibongile explained:

> You have somebody who doesn't even know how to open a charge at a police station. We grew up knowing that you can't trust the police, we are against the police, that kind of stuff. And now we have never been taught: be friendly with the police. People still have that kind of old thinking, that you don't trust the police. [Mpho, 30 years old, black male, print designer]

> People might be angry at the police and what they did in the past, and perhaps they see them as the same person. Cause some people really still can't trust policemen because in the old regime policemen were not people you could trust. [Sibongile, 25 years old, black female, banking administrator]

No white respondent advanced this notion of continuity in images of institutions. So, while all respondents believed that the police should be tougher on crime and that the criminal justice system needs to become more efficient and less corrupt, only black respondents introduced the notion that the historical images of these institutions may play a part in limiting the legitimacy of the criminal justice system. In this way, they avoided attributing blame *solely* to present conditions.

Explaining the Explanations: Race and National Identity

For many white respondents, crime was constructed as one more manifestation of the incompetence of the current administration. Over and over again, white respondents would respond to questions about crime by talking about the state of healthcare, education, and the provision of basic services. Several black respondents seemed to be aware of this phenomenon and noted the tendency of white South Africans to complain a lot. Black respondents' reluctance to complain does not seem to reflect different experiences with crime. Almost half of the interviewees, regardless of race, recounted incidents where they had been victims of crime, even though I never asked them about their personal experiences with crime. Almost all expressed fear and anxiety, told me about crime-avoidance behavioral routines, or admitted to having private security. The reluctance to complain, however, may reflect an aversion to offering a completely presentist narrative on current social problems, since doing so might be seen to be a critique of the government, of democracy, and of the post-apartheid era. Thandiswa, a black attorney in her mid-twenties, answered my open-ended prompt about the crime situation in South Africa by stating that she is very concerned about crime, and detailed how this anxiety has increased since she had her baby. Almost catching herself, she

halted the account of safety strategies that she has adopted and shifted the focus to explain the dilemma faced by many of the black elite, who are worried about the crime situation but who also realize that such discussions are politicized. She explained:

> Also there are different schools of thought around this issue of crime. I think it's also been an issue of race to say that white South Africa feels that the crime problem is uniquely their problem … I think that because [in] South Africa, we've got such unique…issues…that something like a crime issue can actually get racialized. When I say there are different schools of thought, especially amongst the sort of elite black society, there's the perception that crime is just used as a cop out…by white South Africans who are not as patriotic, who want to prove that South Africa is not working out post-1994, so it's just used as a tool to say "look the black government actually doesn't know what they're doing." And another school of thought says "You know what, this is a problem and leave the politics out of it. It's a serious problem. Proper attention needs to be given to it and proper solutions need to be put in place." So it's a bit of a murky issue at the moment.

Here Thandiswa points to the ways in which individuals "do race" through discussions of crime (see Whitehead 2011). By deploying the past to reject the narrative logic of rupture, black respondents acknowledge the persistent structural factors that contribute to current crime. This, in turn, means that crime is not attributed solely to shortcomings in "the black government," nor is it understood to be the result of irrational prejudice and resentment by blacks against whites. For white respondents, on the other hand, present problems may be a site through which new types of racism get constructed in the post-apartheid era.[18]

When asked whether they had considered permanent emigration because of crime or for any other reason, all but one of the black respondents said that, while they may consider leaving South Africa for two to three years to gain work and other experience, they would eventually return. They offered patriotism as a reason for not considering permanent emigration and noted that they wanted to be part of the solution:

> I've never considered leaving... I believe that black and white, we owe it to this country, we owe it to the people who enabled us to live under the freedom that we live now... to stick around and make a difference and fight... I don't believe that we should run away from problems. I don't think it's a way of sorting it out. [Themba, 29 years old, black male, property developer]

In contrast, the vast majority of white respondents said that they were presently considering, or had previously seriously considered, permanent emigration as an option. Crime was cited as the main factor, or as one of the main factors, in such considerations. But other issues were brought up as well. Those who had decided that they would be staying in South Africa said they were doing so because of familial or work-related commitments in contrast to black respondents who for the most part used patriotic discourses in their explanations for staying.

For black respondents, refusing to fully accept the narrative of rupture offered them a way to *understand* the present without laying *accountability* entirely in the present and without offering unpatriotic critiques of the new democratic dispensation. The past in a sense constituted an explanatory resource that allowed individuals to make sense of the present in ways that do not compromise their national identity and commitment to the present political order.

[18] For discussions of how racism is reconfigured following the elimination of *de jure* discrimination, see Bobo et al. (1997); Bonilla-Silva (2010); and Sears (1988).

Discussion and Conclusions

Vinitzky-Seroussi (2002) has noted that the relevance of the past for present debates is a crucial variable in explaining not only how difficult pasts are memorialized, but also the potential of such pasts to ignite social conflict in the present. Through the case of South Africa, I have shown that while at the institutional level the past may be constructed as irrelevant to present debates (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007), individuals might continue to deploy the past in ways that keep it alive and relevant.

The findings show that respondents varied systematically by race in terms of their willingness to introduce the past as a legitimate explanans for present crime. Both black and white respondents argued that present conditions—specifically the present administration of justice—contribute to South Africa's crime rate. Where they differed was in how they introduced apartheid into their accounts. Black respondents in this study suggested that the country's apartheid past constitutes a legitimate and important part of the explanation for contemporary crime. They argued that an impetus towards muting discourses continuity between past and present makes us ignore a lot of what is going on (and that this impetus itself might be partially fueling crime). When white respondents deployed the past, they tended to do so in order to argue that the past is indeed past, and to propose that crime is the result of those who illegitimately and irrationally refuse to let it go. In other words, both groups of respondents were aware of, and dialogued with, the mnemonic logic of rupture, but they did so in very different ways, with whites promoting this logic and blacks challenging it.

That white respondents would embrace, and black respondents would challenge, the narrative logic of rupture, is far from self-evident, especially given the socioeconomic statuses of respondents in this study. It would not be a stretch to imagine that black professionals, who have experienced dramatic upward mobility in their own lifetimes, would be invested in articulating narratives about rupture. Such narratives would resonate well with the changes experienced in their own lives and would allow them to construct individualistic stories about their own success, based on tropes of hard work and motivation. This was not the strategy they chose. Instead, they chose to draw on the past to understand present social problems while still remaining patriotically committed to the new democracy.

As far as South Africa is concerned, the case study points to the importance of examining the long-term effects of the nature of the transition to democracy. Almost two decades in, the very elements of the transition that were aimed at aiding reconciliation may in fact serve to enhance racially based social conflicts in the present. The ideology of rupture advanced by the transitional institution of the TRC was intended to allow all South Africans to move into the new dispensation unbridled by the burdens of the past. Following a similar logic, the white South Africans in my sample disavowed the past as a *legitimate* explanation for current crime. Black respondents challenged this ideology of rupture by arguing that the country's apartheid past causally impacts upon the crime phenomenon in the present. One interpretation of these findings is that the long-term effects of the logic of rupture, promoted as it was by the imperatives of reconciliation, may be to heighten and intensify race-based social animosities and conflict.

While this article has been grounded in the South African case, I view it as an opportunity to open up doors for broader cross-national studies of the deployment of collective memory. While numerous studies have identified variation in how different sectors of the population recollect the past when they are asked to do so (see for example Auyero 1999; Griffin 2004; Schuman and Scott 1989), this study suggests that we attend more closely to whether and how individuals choose to *use* the past in their attempts to make sense of the present. To this end, I proposed a novel interviewing strategy for capturing the micro-level deployment of collective

memory. This involves asking respondents to work through a current social issue, such as crime. Because respondents are not primed to talk about the past, the discursive strategies that they choose in the context of a face-to-face interview give us some insight into how they might use the past in their everyday attempts to understand the world around them.

Studies that examine the content of lay understandings of a variety of issues from the causes of mental illness (Schnittker et al. 2000), to the reasons for poverty (Hunt 1996), inequality (Hunt 2007), and welfare (Somers and Block 2005; Steensland 2006) indicate that folk explanations might affect individuals' attitudes and behaviors in the present, such as support for related public policies. In this article, I have suggested that we attend to the role that collective memory might play in such processes. I have argued that we would do well to attend to the nuanced and varied ways in which individuals think with and through collective memory in their attempts to make sense of the present. Doing so will surely advance our knowledge of how collective memory functions in processes of identity construction, symbolic boundary formations, political action, collective mobilization, and the possible emergence of conflict in the present.

Acknowledgments An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2009 annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society in Baltimore, MD. I thank Bart Bonikowski, Nicholas Christakis, Simone Ispa-Landa, Kevin Lewis, Jeffrey Olick, Brenna Powell, Lauren Rivera, Graziella Silva, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, Mary Waters, David Smilde, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful and insightful comments. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Jocelyn Viterna for her incisive feedback on this paper.

References

Afrobarometer. 2008. South Africa round 4 data. http://www.afrobarometer.org. Accessed 17 November 2010.
Altbeker, Anton. 2007. *A country at war with itself: South Africa's crisis of crime*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.
Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*. New York: Verso.
Armstrong, Elizabeth A., and Suzanna M. Crage. 2006. Movements and memory: The making of the stonewall myth. *American Sociological Review* 71: 724–751.
Auyero, Javier. 1999. Re-membering peronism: An ethnographic account of the relational character of political memory. *Qualitative Sociology* 22(4): 331–351.
Azaryahu, Maoz. 1996. The spontaneous formation of memorial space: The case of Kikar Rabin, Tel Aviv. *Area* 28: 510–513.
Bobo, Lawrence, James R. Kluegel, and Ryan A. Smith. 1997. Laissez faire racism: The crystalization of a kinder, gentler, antiblack ideology. In *Racial attitudes in the 1990s*, ed. Steven Tuch and Jack Martin, 15–44. Westport: Praeger.
Bodnar, John. 1992. *Remaking America: Public memory, commemoration, and patriotism in twentieth century America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2010. *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism & racial inequality in contemporary America*, 3rd ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
Coser, Lewis A. 1992. The revival of the sociology of culture: The case of collective memory. *Sociological Forum* 7(2): 365–373.
DeGloma, Thomas. 2010. Awakenings: Autobiography, memory, and the social logic of personal discovery. *Sociological Forum* 25(3): 519–540.
Demombynes, Gabriel, and Berk Özler. 2005. Crime and local inequality in South Africa. *Journal of Development Economics* 76(2): 265–292.
Du Plessis, Anton, and Antoinette Louw. 2006. Crime and crime prevention in South Africa: 10 years after. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* 47(2): 427–446.
Fagan, Eduard. 2000. The constitutional entrenchment of memory. In *Negotiating the past: The making of memory in South Africa*, ed. Sarah Nuttal and Carli Coetzee, 249–262. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

FBI Uniform Crime Reports. 2007. Crime in the United States, by volume and rate per 100,000 inhabitants, 1988–2007. www.fbi.gov. Accessed 27 September 2010.
Fine, Gary Alan. 1996. Reputational entrepreneurs and the memory of incompetence: Melting supporters, partisan warriors, and images of President Harding. *American Journal of Sociology* 101: 1159–1193.
Finkenauer, Catrin, et al. 1997. When individual memories are socially shaped: Flashbulb memories of sociopolitical events. In *Collective memory of political events: Social psychological perspectives*, ed. James W. Pennebaker, Dario Paez, and Bernard Rimé, 191–208. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Fleming, Crystal M. 2012. White cruelty or republican sins: Competing frames of stigma reversal in French commemorations of slavery. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35(3): 488–505.
Gaskell, George D., and Daniel B. Wright. 1997. Group differences in memory for a political event. In *Collective memory of political events: Social psychological perspectives*, ed. James W. Pennebaker, Dario Paez, and Bernard Rimé, 175–190. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Gibson, James L. 2004. Does truth lead to reconciliation? testing the causal assumptions of the South African truth and reconciliation process. *American Journal of Political Science* 48(2): 201–217.
Gibson, James L. 2006. The contributions of truth to reconciliation: Lessons from South Africa. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50(3): 409–423.
Gillis, John (ed.). 1994. *Commemorations: The politics of national identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Griffin, Larry J. 2004. “Generation and collective memory” Revisited: Race, region, and memory of civil rights. *American Sociological Review* 64: 544–557.
Griffin, Larry J., and Kenneth A. Bollen. 2009. Civil rights remembrance and racial attitudes. *American Sociological Review* 74(4): 594–614.
Goldstone, Richard. 2000. “Forward.” In *Looking back reaching forward: Reflections on the truth and reconciliation commission of South Africa,* ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio and Wilhelm Verwoerd, viii-xiii. Cape Town: Cape Town University Press.
Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On collective memory*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Hass, Kristin A. 1998. *Carried to the wall: American memory and the Vietnam veterans memorial*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Hirst, William, et al. 2009. Long-term memory for the terrorist attack of September 11: Flashbulb memories, event memories, and the factors that influence their retention. *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 138(2): 161–176.
Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger. 1992. *The invention of tradition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Hunt, Matthew O. 1996. The individual, society, or both? A comparison of black, Latino, and white beliefs about the causes of poverty. *Social Forces* 75(1): 293–322.
Hunt, Matthew O. 2007. African American, Hispanic, and white beliefs about black/white inequality, 1977–2004. *American Sociological Review* 72(3): 390–415.
Llewellyn, Jennifer J., and Robert Howse. 1999. Institutions for restorative justice: The South African truth and reconciliation commission. *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 49(3): 355–388.
Lodge, Tom. 2003. *Politics in South Africa: From Mandela to Mbeki*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Louw, Antoinette. 2007. Crime and perceptions after a decade of democracy. *Social Indicators Research* 81: 235–255.
Mail & Guardian. 2009. SA crime refugee never laid charges with cops. http://mg.co.za/article/2009-09-02-sa-crime-refugee-never-laid-charges-with-cops. Accessed 28 September 2013.
Mail & Guardian. 2010. Brandon Huntley’s refugee bid overturned. http://mg.co.za/article/2010-11-27-brandon-huntleys-refugee-bid-overturned. Accessed 28 September 2013.
Mamdani, Mahmood. 1998. A diminished truth. *Siyaya!* 3: 38–41.
Mannheim, Karl. 1952. The problem of generations. In *Essays on the sociology of knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti, 276–322. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Marais, Hein. 2001. *South Africa limits to change: The political economy of transition*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
Minow, Martha. 1998. Between vengeance and forgiveness: South Africa’s truth and reconciliation commission. *Negotiation Journal* 14(4): 319–355.
Nattrass, Nicoli. 1999. The truth and reconciliation commission on business and apartheid: A critical evaluation. *African Affairs* 98: 373–391.
Nora, Pierre. 1989. Between memory and history: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *Representations* 26: 7–25.
Office of the Presidency of South Africa. 2009. *Development indicators*. http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/learning/me/indicators/2009/indicators.pdf. Accessed 27 September 2013.
Olick, Jeffrey K. 1999a. Collective memory: The two cultures. *Sociological Theory* 17: 333–348.
Olick, Jeffrey K. 1999b. Genre memories and memory genres: A dialogical analysis of May 8, 1945 commemorations in the Federal Republic of Germany. *American Sociological Review* 64: 381–402.

Olick, Jeffrey K. 2005. *In the house of the hangman: The agonies of german defeat, 1943–1949*. Chicago: The University of Chicago.
Olick, Jeffrey K. 2007. *The politics of regret: On collective memory and historical responsibility*. New York: Routledge.
Olick, Jeffrey A., and Joyce Robbins. 1998. Social memory studies: From "Collective Memory" to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices. *Annual Review of Sociology* 98(24): 105–140.
Olick, Jeffrey, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy (eds.). 2011. *The collective memory reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Passerini, Luisa. 1987. *Fascism in popular memory: The cultural experiences of the Turin working class*. Translated by Lumley, R and J. Bloomfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Poletta, Francesca. 1998. Legacies and liabilities of an insurgent past: Remembering Martin Luther King Jr. on the house and Senate floors. *Social Science History* 22(4): 479–512.
Pollock, Mica. 2004. *Colormute: Race talk dilemmas in an American School*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Posel, Deborah. 2002. The TRC report: What kind of history? What kind of truth? In *Commissioning the past: Understanding South Africa's truth and reconciliation commission*, ed. Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson, 147–172. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
Rivera, Lauren A. 2008. Managing 'Spoiled' national identity: War, tourism, and memory in Croatia. *American Sociological Review* 73(4): 613–634.
Roberts, Benjamin. 2010. Fear factor: Perceptions of safety in South Africa. In *South African social attitudes second report: Reflections on the age of hope*, ed. Benjamin Roberts et al., 250–275. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
Roberts, Benjamin, Mbithi wa Kivilu, and Derek Davids (eds.). 2010. *South African social attitudes second report: Reflections on the age of hope*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
Rosenzweig, Roy, and David Thelen. 1998. *The presence of the past: Popular uses of history in American life*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Rule, Stephen, and Zakes Langa. 2010. South African's views about national priorities and the trustworthiness of institutions. In *South African social attitudes 2nd report: Reflections on the age of hope*, ed. Benjamin Roberts et al., 19–42. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
Savelsberg, Joachim J., and Ryan D. King. 2005. Institutionalizing collective memories of hate: Law and law enforcement in Germany and the United States. *American Journal of Sociology* 111(2): 579–616.
Schnittker, Jason, et al. 2000. Nature, nurture, neither, nor: Black-white differences in beliefs about the causes and appropriate treatment of mental illness. *Social Forces* 78(3): 1101–1130.
Schudson, Michael. 1989. The present in the past versus the past in the present. *Communication* 11: 105–113.
Schuman, Howard, and Amy D. Corning. 2000. Collective knowledge of public events: The Soviet Era from the great purge to glasnost. *American Journal of Sociology* 105(4): 913–956.
Schuman, Howard, and Cheryl Rieger. 1992. Historical analogies, generational effects, and attitudes toward war. *American Sociological Review* 57: 315–326.
Schuman, Howard, and Jacqueline Scott. 1989. Generations and collective memories. *American Sociological Review* 54(3): 359–381.
Schuman, Howard, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Amiram D. Vinokur. 2003. Keeping the past alive: memories of Israeli Jews at the turn of the millennium. *Sociological Forum* 18(1): 103–136.
Schwartz, Barry. 1982. The social context of commemoration: A study in collective memory. *Social Forces* 61: 374–402.
Schwartz, Barry. 1991. Social change and collective memory: The democratization of George Washington. *American Sociological Review* 56: 221–236.
Schwartz, Barry, and Howard Schuman. 2005. History, commemoration and belief: Abraham Lincoln in American memory 1945–2001. *American Sociological Review* 70(2): 183–203.
Sears, David O. 1988. Symbolic racism. In *Eliminating racism: Profiles in controversy*, ed. Phyllis A. Katz and Dalmas A. Taylor, 53–84. New York: Plenum Press.
Seekings, Jeremy, and Nicoli Nattrass. 2005. *Class, race, and inequality in South Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Shaw, Mark. 2002. *Crime and policing in post-apartheid South Africa: Transforming under fire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Simpson, Graeme. 2002. "Tell no lies, claim no easy victories": A brief evaluation of South Africa's truth and reconciliation commission. In *Commissioning the past: Understanding South Africa's truth and reconciliation commission*, ed. Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson, 220–251. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
Smith, David. 2009. Row as Canada gives asylum to white South African. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/01/canada-south-africa-asylum-seeker. Accessed 27 September 2013.

Somers, Margaret R., and Fred Block. 2005. From poverty to perversity: Ideas, markets, and institutions over 200 years of welfare debate. *American Sociological Review* 70(2): 260–287.
Spillman, Lyn. 1994. Imagining community and hoping for recognition: Bicentennial celebrations in 1976 and 1988. *Qualitative Sociology* 17(1): 3–28.
Spillman, Lyn. 2003. When do collective memories last?: Founding moments in the United States and Australia. In *States of memory: Continuities, conflicts, and transformations in national retrospection*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, 161–193. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
Steensland, Brian. 2006. Cultural categories and the American Welfare State: The case of guaranteed income policy. *American Journal of Sociology* 111(5): 1273–1326.
Steyn, Melissa et al. 2009. Brandon Huntley: An open letter to Canada. http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71619?oid=143169&sn=Detail. Accessed 27 September 2013.
Teeger, Chana, and Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi. 2007. Controlling for consensus: Commemorating apartheid in South Africa. *Symbolic Interaction* 30(1): 57–78.
Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history.* Boston: Beacon.
Tyler, Tom. 2004. Enhancing police legitimacy. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 593(1): 84–99.
Van der Walt, Clint, Vijé Fanchi, and Garth Stevens. 2003. The South African truth and reconciliation commission: “Race,” historical compromise and transitional democracy. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 27: 251–267.
Vinitzky-Seroussi, Vered. 1998. *After pomp and circumstance: High School Reunions as autobiographical occasions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Vinitzky-Seroussi, Vered. 2001. Commemorating narratives of violence: The Yitzhak Rabin memorial day in Israeli Schools. *Qualitative Sociology* 24(2): 245–268.
Vinitzky-Seroussi, Vered. 2002. Commemorating a difficult past: Yitzhak Rabin’s memorials. *American Sociological Review* 7: 30–51.
Vinitzky-Seroussi, Vered, and Chana Teeger. 2010. Unpacking the unspoken: Silence in collective memory and forgetting. *Social Forces* 88(3): 1103–1122.
Wagner-Pacifici, Robin, and Barry Schwartz. 1991. The Vietnam veterans memorial: Commemorating a difficult past. *American Journal of Sociology* 97: 376–420.
Whitehead, Kevin. 2009. “Categorizing the Categorizer”: The management of racial common sense in interaction. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 72(4): 325–342.
Whitehead, Kevin. 2011. An ethnomethodological conversation analytic approach to investigating race in South Africa. *South African Review of Sociology* 42(3): 1–22.
Wilson, Richard A. 2001. *The politics of truth and reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the post-apartheid state*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chana Teeger is a National Research Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow in the Sociology Department at the University of Johannesburg. Her research examines how representations of histories of racial and ethnic conflict impact upon contemporary race and ethnic relations.