(Not) Feeling the Past: Boredom as a Racialized Emotion

Forthcoming in the *American Journal of Sociology*

Chana Teeger, London School of Economics
c.teeger@lse.ac.uk

Key words: Racialized Emotions, Boredom, Collective Memory, Education, South Africa

Funding: This research was supported by a National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant (#1029273) and by the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University.

Acknowledgement: For helpful comments and conversations, I thank Adam Almeida, Aliya Hamid Rao, Dror Cohen, Gözde Güran, Graziella Moraes Silva, Jeffrey Olick, Kevin Lewis, Mike Savage, Tamara Pavasović Trošt, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and the AJS editors and anonymous reviewers. Earlier versions were presented at the LSE Department of Sociology Seminar, the Narrative Enquiry for Social Transformation (NEST) Colloquium at the University of the Witwatersrand, the 116th annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, and the Conflict and Identity Conference at the University of Oxford.

(Not) Feeling the Past: Boredom as a Racialized Emotion

ABSTRACT

This paper centers boredom as a racialized emotion by analyzing how it can come to characterize encounters with histories of racial oppression. Drawing on data collected in two racially diverse South African high schools, I document how and why students framed the history of apartheid as boring. To do so, I capitalize on the comparative interest shown in the Holocaust, which they studied the same year. Whereas the Holocaust was told as a psychosocial causal narrative, apartheid was presented primarily through lists of laws and events. A lack of causal narrative hindered students' ability to carry the story into the present and created a sense of disengagement. Boredom muted discussions of the ongoing legacies of the past and functioned as an emotional defense of the status quo. I discuss the implications for literatures on racialized emotions, collective memory, and history education.

What does it mean when people say they are bored? Seemingly an individual-level experience, boredom has seldom been interrogated for its social dimensions. Other emotions, such as shame (Rivera 2008), anger (Schieman 2006), love (Illouz 1997), excitement (Rivera 2015), grief (Charmaz and Milligan 2006), and regret (Olick 2007), have been studied as collective phenomena, which are both socially generated and generative. In other words, researchers have shown how such emotions are the outcomes of collective processes but also how they can reproduce broader social hierarchies.

One such line of research examines how emotions are racialized—that is, associated with different racial groups and used to reproduce inequality. Like more general scholarship in the sociology of emotions, this literature has focused predominantly on emotions with strong positive or negative valences (Bonilla-Silva 2019). Boredom—an affective state that might best be characterized by the *absence* of strong emotions (see Gardiner 2012; Tochilnikova 2020; Van Tilburg and Igou 2017)[1]—has remained undertheorized and empirically understudied.

In this paper, I center boredom as a racialized emotion. I do so by drawing on data collected over 18 months in two racially and socioeconomically diverse South African high schools. Data collection focused on the teaching of apartheid history to grade nine students (age 14 to 15). Interviews with teachers and students revealed that far from eliciting emotions such as anger, guilt, or pride, apartheid history was almost universally framed as boring. Students' lack of interest in apartheid was especially striking when contrasted with their fascination with the Holocaust, which they studied the same year. Students were not uniformly coding history as boring (see Loewen 2007). They were specifically describing the history of apartheid as boring and uninteresting.

Why was this so? My findings point to key differences in how the two histories were taught. Whereas the Holocaust was told as a psychosocial narrative with a beginning, middle, and end, apartheid was presented primarily in terms of lists of laws and events. Absent from the apartheid story were issues of causality and motivation. Student interest was piqued in the case of the Holocaust as they were primed to ask *why* questions. The teaching of apartheid dampened precisely these types of causal questions, which threatened to spill over into the present.

In addition to documenting how boredom was *socially produced*, I interrogate what this emotion *does* socially. Specifically, I point to boredom as an emotion related to processes of silencing and avoidance. Under a boring rendering of history, the past is not engaged. It is presented as irrelevant and distant; and its ongoing effects can be ignored.

Theoretically, these insights extend our understanding of racialized emotions. To date, scholarship has focused predominantly on how emotional expectations and performances vary across the population in racially patterned and unequal ways (Bonilla-Silva 2019; Wilkins 2012; Wingfield 2010). In contrast, my findings show how boredom becomes part of the definition of the situation—an emotion expressed by individuals regardless of their racial background. Nonetheless, boredom remains racialized in its *consequences* as it helps protect a racially unequal status quo from challenge. It defends those with power against more difficult emotions, like guilt and anger, and it regulates what can be discussed and emotionally expressed in conversations about racist pasts and their impact on the present.

Race scholars identify a variety of discourses that deny the effects of the past and thereby enable racism to continue unchecked in the era of civil liberties (Bobo, Kluegel, and

Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2014). As a racialized emotion, boredom supports such historical distancing, allowing the past—and its legacies— to be dismissed. This conceptualization of racialized emotions moves us beyond a model of emotional stratification. Instead, it points to the emotional underpinnings of racial ideologies that sustain inequality. In this framework, boredom act as a *mechanism* for reproducing racial inequality—even if the emotion itself appears to be race-neutral. At the same time, my findings suggest that, in contexts where histories of racial oppression are collectively framed as boring, racialized minorities are faced with additional emotional burdens, as their desire to engage the past as part of their lived realities is silenced and avoided.

RACIALIZED EMOTIONS

Sociologists have long pointed to the collective dimensions of affect (see Turner and Stets 2005). Feelings are not just the property of individual minds. They are structured by social interactions and rituals (Collins 2014; Rivera 2015) and intertwined with systems of power, hierarchy, and status (Kemper 1978, 1981; Ridgeway 2006). Emotional displays are also constrained by norms—or "feeling rules" (Hochschild 2012; Peterson 2006). These rules reflect and help sustain inequitable social arrangements (Fields, Copp, and Kleinman 2006).

Gender scholars have been at the forefront of sociological research on emotions and inequality. Much of this research has focused on "emotional labor." Beginning with Hochschild's (2012) seminal study on the commodification of "emotion work,"[2] researchers have documented how female-dominated professions make heightened emotional demands on employees. Moreover, even when men and women perform the same jobs, they are subjected to different feeling rules—where women are overwhelmingly expected to perform

care and congeniality (see also Martin 1999; Pierce 1999; Steinberg and Figart 1999; Wharton 2009).

While there has been less focus on the racialized dimensions of emotional labor (Mirchandani 2003), a smaller, but growing, body of literature shows that organizational feeling rules have different implications for workers of different races. For example, emotional norms of friendliness and congeniality create extra burdens for minorities who have to contend with everyday racism and microaggressions (Wingfield 2010). Those who challenge racism find themselves framed as "angry" or "over-sensitive" by whites, who draw on racist affective stereotypes to mute critique (Evans and Moore 2015). Minorities face a fraught double-bind: follow the norms and leave racism unchallenged or challenge racism and be positioned as "overly emotional or emotionally 'deviant'" (p. 445, see also Srivastava 2006). Highlighting an intersectional approach, scholars have shown how these racist affective stereotypes are at the same time gendered (Doharty 2020; Wingfield 2007).

Research further documents that minorities often have their emotions misrecognized. For instance, in a study with pre-service teachers, Halberstadt et al. (2018) presented participants with images of people of different races. Blacks were coded as "angry," "aggressive," and "hostile" much more frequently than whites, even though subjects in the images were not expressing such emotions. Black parents have responded to these realities by adopting a variety of socialization strategies aimed at managing their children's emotional responses in racist societies (see Hughes et al. 2006; Wilkins and Pace 2014).

While this literature has focused primarily on the emotions of racialized minorities, research shows how white children are socialized into color-blind ideologies that protect

them against feelings of guilt (Hagerman 2014; Teeger 2015a). Whites who adhere to such color-blind discourses may be reticent to express explicit racial prejudice, but their behaviors point to feelings of fear and distrust directed at minorities (John and Heald-Moore 1996; Lemanski 2004; Skogan 1995). Others express their racial anger and resentment more directly (see Hochschild 2018). Racialized emotions are not just experienced by minorities; they are deployed by whites to maintain their privilege in racist societies.

Overall, the literature has tended to focus primarily on emotions with a negative valence (Bonilla-Silva 2019). Still, researchers have shown how positively coded feelings, such as pride and solidarity, can be mobilized in processes of resistance (Evans and Moore 2015; Rhea 1997) and buffer against discrimination (Wilkins and Pace 2014).[3] But boredom—a ubiquitous emotion that has recently animated much psychological research on affect (Van Tilburg and Igou 2017)—has remained understudied, its role in racialized societies left unexamined.

BOREDOM

Boredom has enjoyed a "lively history" in art, literature, and philosophy (Toohey 2011). Yet, perhaps surprisingly, social scientists have been slower to pay it attention. In recent years, it has taken up a central place in affect research among psychologists (Van Tilburg and Igou 2017). Although difficult to define operationally (Raffaelli, Mills, and Christoff 2018), researchers have identified it as a distinct emotion (Goldberg et al. 2011; Van Tilburg and Igou 2017), developed a range of psychometric measures to capture its prevalence (Vodanovich 2003), and used fMRI technology to point to its neural correlates (Mathiak et al. 2013). They have further identified a variety of adverse psychological and behavioral outcomes associated with boredom, such as depression (LePera 2011), overeating

(Crockett, Myhre, and Rokke 2015), and aggression and anger (Dahlen et al. 2004). Others have shown that boredom may be psychologically helpful in motivating individuals towards change (Elpidorou 2018).

These studies have advanced our understanding of the individual-level measurement, determinants, and consequences of boredom. But what of its social dimensions? For the most part, this question has been addressed by social theorists. For example, drawing primarily on the work of Henri Lefebvre—but also Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel—Gardiner (2012) proposes a "sociology of boredom." In this analysis, boredom is a constitutive feature of modernity. It is theorized as a type of malaise, a flat and pervasive emotion resulting from mechanized, standardized, and urbanized social life—but one which nonetheless contains emancipatory potential in pushing individuals in search of meaning (see also Barbalet 1999; Brissett and Snow 1993; Johnsen 2016).

Such theoretical approaches point to the social underpinnings of boredom. However, they assume that it has "swept through all social strata, classes and professions indiscriminately." (Gardiner 2012: 41). Few empirical studies examine which people feel bored and under what conditions. Tochilnikova's (2020) comparative historical study goes some way at addressing this issue by looking at cultural, political, and artistic expressions of boredom in different countries. Extending a Durkheimian analysis of suicide, Tochilnikova argues that imbalances between social regulation and integration result in different types of boredom in different societies.

A handful of other studies take individuals, rather than nation-states, as the unit of analysis. For example, in developing a symbolic interactionist account of boredom, Darden (1999) draws on surveys, in-depth interviews, and written responses from participants who

were asked to recall situations when they felt bored. Darden finds that boredom arises when individuals' activities are constrained by the situation or where their role performance does not meet their expectations (see also Conrad 1997). The examples in the data are prosaic—a department store employee facing no customers, or an individual surrounded by strangers with nothing in common. Here, we are given an analysis of the types of social situations that generate boredom, but we do not learn about how these experiences might be implicated in processes of social stratification.

Others have touched on this issue by documenting the experiences of boredom among subsets of the population. For example, Roy's (1959) classic paper on "banana time" uses ethnographic observations to describe the boredom generated by the monotony of factory machine work. Roy highlights the importance of small, ritualized acts of camaraderie (such as the daily theft of a banana from one of the worker's lunchboxes). These acts help mark time, enliven the day, and dispel boredom. More recently, Islam (2020) has shown how young, unmarried, lower-middle-class women employed in the service economy in India associate boredom with "sitting at home." This framing allows them to position "employment as the alternative; that is as a way of resisting gender norms and crafting new subjectivities" (p.878).

Closest to the current study, Breidenstein (2007) documents how students communicate boredom to each other in classrooms. Breidenstein shows how teachers and students tacitly accept boredom as a feature of school life, while being normatively constrained in naming this feeling explicitly. Breidenstein notes that the classification of some school subjects as boring implies the opposite—that others can be interesting. But how and why do things get constructed as boring or interesting? What do individual affective displays of boredom *do* in social situations? And how might these processes

intersect with issues of race and inequality? I address these questions by analyzing why students felt bored by their country's racist past.

FEELING THE PAST

Collective memory is deeply intertwined with emotions. From memorials expressing national pride (Winter and Sivan 2000) to commemorative speeches wrought with regret (Olick 2007) or offering consolation (Simko 2015), representations of the past aim to be emotionally evocative. And they often are. Sometimes commemoration can open space for divergent emotions to be shared at a central location, as is the case with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Here, the representation of the past is deliberately ambiguous, open to interpretation, and able to accommodate feelings of anger, sadness, loss, and pride, among others (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991).

Other times, collective representations cannot contain the multivocality of emotions engendered by the past. In some cases, this leads to open conflict between groups, as the controversy around the Enola Gay exhibition demonstrates (Zolberg 1998). There, conflict arose between groups who felt pride in the US's role in ending World War II and those who felt shame at the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Such conflicts can lead groups to remember the same event in separate times and places, attaching different moral lessons and affective valences to the past. The commemoration of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination by right-wing and left-wing Israelis is a case in point. Each group has constructed its own memorial time and space where divergent narratives can be told and emotions put on display (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002)

But what about collective memories that don't resonate emotionally? Why do some historical representations pull strongly at our feelings, while others fail to move us? Insofar

as the literature has addressed these questions, it has done so by focusing on why some pasts are remembered, while others are not. Scholars point to the role of "agents of memory" (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002)—or, in Fine's (1996) terms, "reputational entrepreneurs"–who decide that the event is commemorable and draw on available resources to commemorate it (see Armstrong and Crage 2006). Conversely, research has pointed to various ways in which actors try to erase from memory aspects of the past that are politically charged and difficult (see Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010).

I build on this literature to advance our understanding of how a past can be remembered but not engaged. I do so by focusing on how apartheid was collectively recalled in South African high schools. Schools represent an important site for studying collective memory. These are institutional spaces, created and managed by the state, where individuals are *forced* to learn about the past (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010). Museums and monuments are built to be visited. Political speeches are made to be listened to. But, in democratic regimes, at least, no-one can make this happen. Schools represent one of the only spaces where individuals undergo mnemonic socialization, whether they like it or not.

One might wonder if this itself is the source of the boredom—an act of emotional resistance, similar to that documented by Milner Jr (2013) in his ethnography of US high schools. Milner observes that adolescents often complain about how boring their schools or hometowns are. He argues that this allows them to act "cool," resist authority figures, and enhance their prestige among peers—a process similarly described by Tochilnikova (2020) as "conspicuous boredom."

My findings suggest a different dynamic. Students in my study were not uniformly bored by history in particular or school in general. They were bored by apartheid history.

Further, I did not get the sense that students were trying to appear cool when they spoke with me in one-on-one interviews. They seemed quite earnest when telling me how interesting they found the Holocaust and how bored they were by apartheid.

Moreover, teachers did not interpret the boredom as a challenge to their authority. In fact, they agreed with this emotional framing. While students' boredom may not have reflected the type of generalized resistance to authority or status-enhancing posturing documented in the literature, my findings suggest that there was pressure to express this emotion in the particular context of apartheid history lessons. This pressure had to with a specific resistance to engaging with the past—including its ongoing effects on the present. Before comparing how the two history sections were taught and engaged, I outline my data collection and analysis procedures.

DATA AND METHODS

This paper comes out of a larger project examining how the history of apartheid is taught to, and understood by, young South Africans. The study focuses on how South Africa's so-called "born frees"— young people born into democracy—are dealing with their country's racist past in desegregated educational spaces. I did not set out to compare the teaching of the Holocaust to that of apartheid, nor did I intend to focus on boredom. The findings of this paper emerged inductively during data collection and analysis. Below, I discuss my case selection, data collection, and analysis procedures.

CASES

My study focuses on two South African high schools, which I call Glenville and Roxbridge High.[4] I embedded myself at Glenville during the 2010 South African school year and at Roxbridge the following year. I chose the schools for their similarities. Both are

formerly white schools that desegregated during the transition to democracy.[5] The schools attract students from the historically white—now desegregated—middle-class neighborhoods in which they are located. They also attract children from working-class families. These include children of domestic workers whose place of employment is in these neighborhoods[6] and—at Glenville—students from Soweto[7] who commute in. These enrollment dynamics make Glenville and Roxbridge among the most racially and socioeconomically diverse schools in the country. I chose them because I was interested in understanding how histories of racial oppression are taught in contexts of diversity. I focused my study on grade nine, as this is when students across the country learn about apartheid in a formal and systematic way for the first time in the educational system.[8]

This paper reports on a within-case comparison that emerged in the process of data collection and analysis. Students and teachers across schools and classrooms spoke comparatively about different sections of the grade nine history curriculum, describing the Holocaust as interesting and apartheid as boring. Below, I detail the various data sources I drew upon to understand where this difference in interest came from.

DOCUMENTS

I collected and analyzed official curricular documents as well as materials used in classes. The curricular documents are produced by the national government and guide teaching across all South African government schools. There is no government-mandated textbook in South Africa, and neither school used a textbook. Instead, and as I discuss in further detail below, the history departments in each school independently produced booklets that they distributed to students. These were guided by the national curriculum in that—with some exception, as discussed below in the case of Roxbridge—they followed its

structure and elaborated on its content. Whereas the national curriculum provides a point-form outline of what should be covered in each grade, the booklets expanded this to include narrative descriptions of the history as well as visuals (e.g., political cartoons) and instructions for class exercises. Ms. Viljoen (Roxbridge) explained the rationale: "A really good history teacher," she told me, "will not just use one textbook but will use other sources." Ms. Prescott (Glenville) similarly explained:

> The reason why we do notes . . . is because there's no textbook that I feel would meet the needs of all the sections. So basically what I do is, I get all the grade nine textbooks . . . I usually have about six [or] seven textbooks . . . And I look for the common things throughout. I read through them all, and then I basically just extract from here and there and then—it's like copying and pasting. Just extracting from here and there. Or if I have other books that I use, I'll take that as well, and I put it all in and get pictures and just make it into one set of notes.

Like teachers and students in my study, I refer to these written materials as the "booklets" or "notes." I collected and analyzed documents related to the apartheid section as well as other topics covered in grade nine history, including the Holocaust section.

OBSERVATIONS

I spent approximately 400 hours observing in 17 distinct history classrooms while students learned about apartheid. I usually sat at the back of the room and typed notes on my laptop. I tried to capture, verbatim, what was being said by teachers and students, as well as my own observations. Because the comparison with the Holocaust was not part of my initial research design, I do not have data from classroom observations of this section. By the time the comparative findings emerged inductively, such observations were no longer

logistically possible. As a result, I do not draw heavily on my classroom observations in this paper. Save one interchange, which I detail towards the end of the paper, the analysis is based on data from documents and interviews. Still, the time spent in classrooms allowed me to become familiar with the schools, teachers, and students; and the interview data should be read in the context of a longer-term embeddedness in both schools.

INTERVIEWS

I interviewed all grade nine history educators in both schools (*N*=10). Table 1 presents the characteristics of teachers. Interviews with teachers were open-ended and semi-structured and focused on their experiences teaching in post-apartheid classrooms in general and about apartheid in particular. The interview protocol varied slightly between schools. For example, at Roxbridge, I asked teachers for their opinion on classroom exercises that I had seen conducted at Glenville the previous year. Heads of the history department at each school were also asked specific questions about the structure of the curriculum. I asked all teachers at Roxbridge to speak to students' interest in grade nine history. At Glenville, I only asked the head of the history department about this as I had not yet realized the significance of the comparison between the apartheid and Holocaust units.

[Table 1 here]

I also interviewed 160 students. Eighty-two of these students were interviewed before they had been exposed to the apartheid section in school, and the rest were interviewed afterward. I chose students for interviews from class registers stratified by race. The overall response rate was 82.5%. I refer to the sample of students interviewed before learning the apartheid section as "pre" and the sample interviewed after taking this module as "post."[9] Table 2 presents the characteristics of the student sample.[10]

[Table 2 here]

Interviews with students were open-ended and semi-structured. Questions aimed to tap into experiences and understandings of race and racism inside and outside of school, knowledge and understanding of apartheid history, and—for the post-sample—experiences of history education at school. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Deterding and Waters (2018) have argued that a fruitful way of analyzing qualitative data is to look for surprises. The framing of apartheid history as boring was an unexpected and surprising finding that emerged during data collection and analysis. Commentators and policy-makers have honed in on history education as a significant avenue through which to effect transformational agendas following democratization (Freedman et al. 2008), and the content of history education is often a key site of struggle among a variety of interest groups (Binder 2009). I entered the field guided by the assumption that history education mattered and would likely engender strong emotional responses from students. I did not expect to hear, over and over again, that apartheid was "boring."

Although I found this curious during data collection, I did not begin to consider carefully how and why this boredom was constructed until after I left the field, when I began systematically analyzing my data using the qualitative data analysis software program Atlas.ti. Data analysis followed a version of the procedures outlined by Deterding and Waters (2018). In the first round of coding, I engaged in a type of "index coding" combined with a focus on descriptive codes (see Miles and Huberman 1994). In other words, I coded large chunks of data guided by the topics I had identified in my semi-structured interview protocol. At the

same time, I inductively developed descriptive codes that I applied to smaller chunks of data. I wrote extensive memos about emerging themes.

In the first round of coding, I noted that teachers and students talked comparatively about the apartheid and Holocaust sections in describing student interest. I created a code "APARTHEID_VS_HOLOCAUST" to capture this comparison. I wrote several analytic memos where I began thinking about why the Holocaust was being framed as interesting, while apartheid was viewed as boring. In the second round of coding, I approached the data with this specific question in mind. The findings about causality, silencing, and avoidance—which I describe in this paper—emerged inductively out of this process. Before turning to these findings, I first provide some contextual information that locates the grade nine apartheid section in the South African national curriculum, and I present data documenting the pervasive framing in both schools of apartheid as boring relative to the Holocaust.

APARTHEID IN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Before history education is delivered in schools and classrooms, it is constructed in official curricula. In South Africa, a national curriculum sets the guidelines for government schools across the country. At the time the research was conducted, this took the form of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS).[11] As a curriculum, the RNCS comprises hundreds of pages outlining the purposes of education in general and specific learning areas in particular. It details the types of learners and educators[12] that are envisioned and provides information about assessment standards, learning programs, and work schedules. Very few of these pages focus explicitly with content. A 110-page document dealing specifically with Social Studies (made up of Geography and History) devotes five

pages in total to content ("knowledge focus") that should be covered in History in grades R[13] to grade nine. Figure 1 reproduces the grade nine content as outlined in the RNCS.

[Figure 1 here]

Others have written about the logics that guided curriculum development in the post-apartheid era. One of these was "outcomes based education"—a focus on skills rather than content, which reflected a move away from the authoritarianism of apartheid pedagogy (Weldon 2009). Guided by this principle, under the RNCS, teachers were given a great deal of autonomy in filling in details under content headings provided by the state. Ms. Prescott, the head of history at Glenville, explained: "Basically, the government gives you the … sections you need to do … [But] how much detail you put into those sections … is up to you; you determine how much you want to do in terms of that."

In a study of how curriculum developers built and revised the history curriculum from 1995 (one year after the first democratic elections) to 2019, Bertram (2020) shows how they increasingly focused on universal themes (like "nationalism," "leadership," and "quest for freedom"). Instead of being guided by a chronology of the nation-state, curriculum developers made choices that brought together exemplars from different parts of the world that would fit under each theme. The overarching theme in grade nine is human rights. As shown in Figure 1, apartheid is but one of the topics listed under this theme.

FRAMING APARTHEID AS BORING

Although the national curriculum lists various topics under the grade nine knowledge foci, both Glenville and Roxbridge focused predominantly on the Holocaust and apartheid. At Glenville, teachers followed the structure outlined in the RNCS, although they spent significantly more time on apartheid and the Holocaust than on other topics. At Roxbridge,

teachers deviated from the national curriculum. They covered apartheid in the first term, even though the RNCS guidelines indicated this should be taught later in the year. The rest of the year was spent studying the Holocaust and World War II.

Ms. Viljoen (white)—the head of the history department at Roxbridge—explained this deviation from the national curriculum while I was negotiating access to the school. They did this, she told me, because they wanted to make grade nine history as interesting as possible for students. At the end of grade nine, students across the country choose their matriculation subjects, which they take until they graduate high school. Ms. Viljoen explained that they had decided to restructure the history curriculum at Roxbridge to cover the Holocaust during the crucial "subject choice" period, as students enjoyed learning this section. Apartheid, which was perceived as not very interesting, was taught first to get it out the way—even though this did not make chronological sense.

Later in the year, Ms. Green (white)—a new teacher at Roxbridge—told me that she did not understand why they taught apartheid first. "They've got it mixed up," she said. "We should be doing apartheid afterwards." When I asked her why she thought this was, she pointed to students' lack of interest in apartheid:

> I don't know. I don't understand it at all. Unless it's got to do with—it could be because they know it's not as popular, and that the grade nines have got to choose [their matriculation] subjects… and to end on it [apartheid] might lower the numbers.

The restructuring of the curriculum may have been extreme, but the sentiment it reflected was not unique. The previous year, as I conducted my fieldwork at Glenville, I had begun to notice that apartheid was being framed as boring relative to the Holocaust. There,

Ms. Prescott (white), the head of the history department, had told me that in terms of student interest, the Holocaust "trumps them all." Students agreed. Towards the end of my interviews with the post-sample, I asked students to tell me what they thought was the most interesting section they had covered that year.[14] The vast majority named the Holocaust. Many described the apartheid section as boring. They explained that this was because it was repetitive as they had covered it already at earlier points in their school career. For example, Lindiwe (African) told me that she did not find the apartheid section interesting. She responded as follows when I asked her why:

> I think because I knew about it. We've been taught [about it] since primary [school] so then you're always learning about it constantly . . . Everyone knows apartheid, fight for freedom.

Lizzie (biracial[15]) concurred: "We've learnt it like since grade four *ja*, we learn it over and over again. It's been drummed into us basically." Tammy (Coloured) similarly explained: "We wanted to learn new stuff about it, but they don't really give that. They just tell [us] stuff that we know. They just go more into it."

Ms. Prescott (white), the head history teacher at Glenville, agreed. "I think apartheid sometimes is hashed for them," she explained, "so they don't find it so interesting." Her counterpart at Roxbridge, Ms. Viljoen (white), similarly told me:

> I think they start off—when they hear we're going to do apartheid—with an absolute mental block against it. They always will say things like 'But we've done it so many times' and 'why do we have to do this again?'

I was surprised by the description of the apartheid section as repetitive. According to the national curriculum, grade nine was the first time this topic was covered across the country. Looking more closely at topics covered in earlier years, I realized that this was not entirely accurate. Although not a topic in its own right, apartheid had been touched upon under other themes covered in the history curriculum. For example, in grade three, under the theme of "Commemoration," students learn "stories about past events from the history of South Africa and the wider world." The RNCS suggests Poppy Day, the Olympics, Freedom Day, and June 16th as exemplars. The latter two are South African public holidays commemorating the first democratic elections in 1994 (Freedom Day) and the 1976 Soweto student uprising ("June 16," now called "Youth Day"). Students in primary schools that had chosen those examples would have had some explanation—however rudimentary—about apartheid.

In other grades, students learn about aspects of colonialism and dispossession in southern Africa that directly link to the apartheid story. Under the theme of "Industrialisation" in grade eight, for example, they learn about "diamonds and gold, and the changing work and lives in South Africa on the mines, the land and in the cities (including the 1913 Land Act)."[16] The previous year—in grade seven—students would have learned about "contact, conflict and dispossession in the Cape eastern or northern frontiers [of South Africa] … [and] in America in the nineteenth century." This is covered under the theme of "Moving Frontiers."

Under the thematic focus of the RNCS, these aspects of South African history become exemplars of broader topics, rather than parts of a longer narrative of colonialism and dispossession that culminates in apartheid. Still, the issues of racial segregation and

conflict which they raise could create the impression for students that apartheid is covered in just about every year of the school curriculum.

The descriptions of students being saturated with apartheid memory echo Stein's (2014: 166) discussion of an increasing sense among some Jews that "Holocaust memory is everywhere" and there is simply "too much memory." But these feelings are not the result of mere repetition. Instead, Stein shows how they reflect other dynamics, such as a desire for a Jewish identity that is not primarily defined by pain, suffering, and victimhood.

In other words, while repetition is often understood as a key driver of boredom (Mercer-Lynn, Bar, and Eastwood 2014), it is not, in itself, sufficient (Tochilnikova 2020).[17] Grade nine history could have been an opportunity to consolidate the information students had been exposed to in earlier years and show how it links together. Research has shown that when history lessons have at-hand real-life relevance, they generate audience interest (Van Straaten, Wilschut, and Oostdam 2016). But students in my study framed the recent national past as boring despite its significance for the world around them, believing they had learned nothing new even when confronted with novel material. Why was this the case? And why, in contrast, was the more distant past of the Holocaust conceptualized as interesting? In the next section, I compare the teaching of apartheid to that of the Holocaust. I show how the latter was taught as a causal narrative that animated students' interest, while the former was organized around lists of events and laws. In addition to reinforcing a sense of repetition, this latter approach curtailed students' interest by hindering their ability to ask the *why* questions that they found so interesting in the Holocaust section.[18]

CONSTRUCTING BOREDOM

How are boring narratives constructed? In what follows, I distinguish between a narrative approach that focuses on causality and motivation and one that eschews such issues by telling a truncated story organized around lists of laws and events. I do so by contrasting how the Holocaust and apartheid were taught in schools. By avoiding causal questions, teachers limited their students' ability to carry the story forward into their own lived realities. Although my data do not indicate that teachers *intended* to create boredom, boredom certainly resonated with teachers' desire to avoid more difficult feelings, such as guilt and anger, in their classrooms.

THE HOLOCAUST: CAUSALITY AND MOTIVATION

Notes distributed to students in both schools presented a straightforward—if simplistic—causal narrative about the Holocaust. They began by referencing the German defeat in World War I, which students had covered in history classes the previous year. Students did not need to have too much historical background to understand the narrative presented. In both schools, the Holocaust was explained as follows: There had been a war. Germany was defeated. The terms of that defeat—signed in a treaty at Versailles—crushed the German economy and angered and humiliated the German people. This context, explained the notes in both schools, created the conditions for Germans to support a man called Hitler who promised to restore Germany to her former glory, and identified a scapegoat—Jews—as responsible for German humiliation.

At Roxbridge, the Holocaust section was contextualized in a term-long module on the "Circumstances Leading up to World War II." This module was not part of the official curriculum and took the place of other topics identified under the grade nine human rights theme outlined in the national curriculum. At the end of this section, students were

presented with a subheading, "Why did people support Hitler?" The notes provided the following answer:

> The Weimar Republic appeared to have no idea how to solve the problems of the Depression. The Nazis on the other hand promised to solve the problems. Hitler promised most groups in Germany what they wanted. Hitler used the Jews and other sections of society as scapegoats, blaming all the problems on them … People in Germany were tired of their poor quality of life. Hitler promised to make Germany proud again—it was exactly what people wanted to hear.

The notes compiled for the Holocaust section repeated this explanation but drew on anti-Semitic tropes to elaborate on why Jews became the primary scapegoat. The notes explained that "[m]any Germans were poor and unemployed and wanted someone to blame. They turned on the Jews, many of whom were rich and successful in business." In addition, students were told that "for hundreds of years Christian Europe had regarded the Jews as the Christ-killers."

At Glenville, the notes distributed to students constructed a similar narrative, adding a psychological dimension that explained the development of Hitler's anti-Semitism:

> Hitler began to give the people of Germany what they wanted—someone to blame for their difficult living conditions. Hitler blamed the communists, the November Criminals (the people who signed the Treaty of Versailles) and most of all the Jewish people. Hitler's resentment of the Jewish people started when he was a young student trying to find a place at the Vienna Academy of Art. He was refused entry by the examination board principal [who] was Jewish. In the years which followed his resentment of the Jewish people began to grow. Hitler promised that he would

> overthrow the Treaty, restore pride to the Germans and restore Germany to her former glory and more.

The narrative presented in both schools focused on a charismatic leader and psychological processes around scapegoating and brainwashing through propaganda. Students found this neatly packaged narrative very compelling. They were especially fascinated by Hitler and were very curious about what motivated him. In both schools, teachers and students informally referred to the Holocaust section as "the Hitler section" and spoke about "the Hitler booklets." This historical narrative, with a clearly defined villain, piqued student interest. Students wanted to understand the psychosocial motivations that propelled Hitler. For example, when I asked Nomvula (African) and Charlene (Coloured) from the post-sample at Glenville which section in grade nine history was most interesting to them, they both identified "Hitler":

> I really enjoyed Hitler because, I don't know, it was just like—it's so interesting. You just look at him and say, 'What was he thinking doing all these things?' And you're just trying to figure out why he did them (Nomvula).

> The most interesting [section] I think [was] the Hitler [one], the whole Holocaust and everything, because it's just so interesting to see how one person can do so much damage to a whole country, and how unfair certain people [can be] or how weird and silly some people's ideologies can be (Charlene).

To be sure, I am in no way suggesting that this is a good way to teach the history of the Holocaust. For the purposes of this paper, however, it is important to note how causal questions—What made Hitler this way? What pushed Germans to support him? —propel the narrative and generate student interest.

APARTHEID: A TRUNCATED HISTORY

In contrast to the Holocaust—which was told as a self-contained causal narrative—the apartheid section seemed to start in the middle. Following national curriculum guidelines, both schools began the apartheid section with "the impact of World War II." At Glenville, the notes contextualized apartheid as follows:

> The 1948 elections occurred soon after the end of World War II. The general attitude after World War II was moving towards equality and ending racism. Many white people in South Africa feared that they were facing a future where the black majority rule was inevitable and that they would lose the lifestyle to which they had become accustomed. The National Party was aware of this fear and decided to use it in their 1948 election campaign.

Here, students were provided with a reason why whites voted for the National Party and its policy of apartheid. But why did whites have this privilege in the first place? And how was apartheid different from, or similar to, what came before? Answering these questions would mean extending the range of the apartheid narrative backward and embedding it in a history of racism, colonialism, and dispossession in southern Africa. Instead, the national curriculum placed apartheid within a global human rights module and, following RNCS guidelines, schools contextualized it in relation to World War II.

Some of the teachers at Glenville tried to address what was distinctive about apartheid by explaining how it differed from "segregation." Their explanations were so unclear that I found myself writing in my fieldnotes, "kids are struggling with this (me too actually)." At Roxbridge, students were given a more systematic explanation in their notes:

> At the time of the outbreak of World War Two, segregation was deeply entrenched in South Africa. There were many laws that prevented black South Africans from participating in the ownership of land and in government. Although the term 'Apartheid' had not yet been used politically, there was extreme segregation of the races

Like those at Glenville, the notes distributed at Roxbridge failed to explain how and why this status quo of segregation and dispossession came about. Passive voice constructions dominated the narrative: "Segregation was entrenched," "there were many laws," "there was extreme segregation." These constructions discursively eschew causality. They tell us about the outcomes of causes but not about the causes themselves.

In the absence of a causal narrative to move the story forward, teachers focused on what was distinctive about apartheid. First, they taught about apartheid's laws. In both schools, students had to learn by heart not only what the various acts said, but also their precise names and the exact dates of their implementation. Second, teachers presented students with lists of key events and resistance organizations.[19] Teachers tried to build a causal narrative into the story by highlighting the intensification of resistance over time, but the primary organizing structure of the lessons was around lists of events and organizations. Ms. Green (white), a teacher who had just started at Roxbridge, identified the disjuncture between lists and narratives as a critical factor contributing to students' lack of interest in the apartheid section. She contrasted this with the Holocaust section:

> You know, [with the apartheid section,] they literally get a list of acts that were passed and then a list of how it affected the country, and then a list of how it went about to get changed. There's no—you can't explore anything in any kind of detail

> because they're so overloaded with these things [and they're] like, '*Ja* Ma'am, we know about that. We know about the segregation. We know about the Mixed Marriages Act. We know about the Group Areas Act. Like, give us another one.'
>
> I really do think that they deal with Hitler in a much more intelligent way, and we should really start modeling the way in which you look at apartheid on the way in which you're looking at Hitler and Nazi Germany. . . [There] you're getting a theoretical—you're getting a timeline. So you're getting a chronological thing but you're also getting a theoretical build-up. You can't understand Hitler if you don't understand what Germany was like at the end of the First World War. I think that's part of the problem, is that apartheid is treated as completely separate to anything else and it's treated as more important than anything else. But you can't understand it unless you're seeing it in the context of the country as a whole and our history before that section.

Here, Ms. Green points to how the teaching of apartheid generates a sense of repetition that leads to boredom. Students may be learning new facts, but these just seem like examples of things they already know. At the same time, the lessons fail to provide them with a narrative structure that connects these facts and stimulates curiosity in the way the Holocaust section does.

Alternative Accounts

Above, I have suggested that student interest in the Holocaust was driven by its causal narrative structure. Students found apartheid boring precisely because such causal links were muted. In what follows, I consider two alternative accounts: 1) that the Holocaust is innately more interesting than apartheid; and 2) that the differences in how the two

histories were recounted have to do with variation in the structure of the curriculum and the level of teacher autonomy.

The Nature of Events

Is it possible that nature the Holocaust—a genocide—is simply more compelling than the structural story of racist discrimination in South Africa? Teachers at both schools suggested that this could be the case:

> I think just the scale and the atrocities and the things that they hear from it, I think they find it more entertaining to listen to things that happen in concentration camps … So I think just the things that happened and the scale that it was on appeals to them more than what apartheid does (Ms. Prescott, Glenville, white).

> They like the blood and gore. They like—people like—if you drive past an accident everyone will stop and look at it. So they want to see 'Oh my word, the mass graves.' They've got like this sick fascination (Ms. Lesley, Roxbridge, white).

On the one hand, if this is true, it opens, rather than closes, questions about curricular choices that juxtapose apartheid with the Holocaust and arguably serve to minimize the impact and horror of the former in relation to the latter. On the other hand, students were not nearly as fascinated with the Rwandan genocide as they were with the Holocaust. This topic was not even covered at Roxbridge because it was not deemed interesting enough to convince students to stick with history as they selected their matriculation subjects. At Glenville, the section on the Rwandan genocide was covered very quickly and without much detail, in stark contrast to how the Holocaust was presented. The driving force in making history boring seems to be how it is presented, rather than how "gory" it is.

The importance of narrative construction in driving student interest was underscored by my interview with Ms. Green, who also suggested that the Holocaust was inherently more interesting than apartheid. Students were naturally fascinated by the Holocaust, she explained, because its magnitude is unfathomable and, somewhat paradoxically, they could relate to the processes of propaganda and indoctrination that made it possible—especially as these pertained to young people their own age:

> I think they also just they get blown away by the magnitude of it [the Holocaust]. It's the kind of numbers that you can't even actually make any sense of because they are just so big. I mean . . . the numbers that you've got there that you're dealing with, your brain can't even fathom properly. And it's something that you can relate to, you can get them to relate to. Like you can talk about how the education system was designed according to Hitler's beliefs, and everything was almost channeled in a way to get people to stick by the Nazi party. And that's something that they can understand because it's kids their own age and younger who were having this done to them, without them even realizing it.

As Ms. Green finished her explanation, she seemed to realize that apartheid too could be taught through the lens of young people's experiences. She continued:

> I mean, a lot of the [anti-apartheid] resistances [sic] is not that far off their own age group anyway as well. I don't think—you know, I think that's the [pause] Hector Peterson[20] and those kinds of things, we do talk about it, but it's not something that they [pause] relate to as well.

In transitioning from thinking about young people during the Holocaust to young people during apartheid, Ms. Green jumped from talking about ideologies that explained

support for a regime to young people as resistors. In making this shift, she also veered away from thinking about ideologies as part of a causal framework explaining the emergence of racism—ideologies that were explored in lessons about the Holocaust but not apartheid. While Ms. Green noted that they do "talk about" Hector Peterson "and those kinds of things," such lessons are curiously not relatable to students—likely because they are presented as part of a *list* of resistance events, rather than within a broader *causal* story. It seems counter-intuitive that students would relate more to geographically distant historical events, like the Holocaust, than the recent and local history of apartheid that their parents and grandparents lived through. And yet, this is precisely what my data show. One imagines many ways in which apartheid could be made more relevant to students, but this would entail moving beyond a "list and laws" approach and interrogating questions of causality and motivation.

Teacher Autonomy and the Curriculum

The above discussion also begs the question of *why* the two histories were taught so differently. While my data cannot fully address this question, the answer is unlikely to be related to differences in the structure of control in educational policy. Apartheid and the Holocaust were both required topics in the centralized national history curriculum for grade nine—the last year where history as a school subject (and indeed formal schooling more generally) is required for young people across the country. The difference in how these two topics were taught cannot, therefore, be explained by variation in the level of control of educational policy, as it might be when comparing elective versus required school subjects; or subjects taught in different educational systems—for instance, a system that is centralized versus one that is open to local variation.

At the same time, the South African curriculum allowed teachers much autonomy in elaborating content under the topic headings it provided. Might this have been a source of the boredom? This too seems unlikely. As discussed in the methods section, heads of history in both schools explained that they approached the apartheid section the same way they approached other sections in the history curriculum, drawing on different sources to compile a set of notes that went beyond what any one textbook could provide. The content they produced, therefore, was heavily influenced by historical resources outside of their control.

The reason the histories were told so differently, therefore, likely has to do with a) national curricular developers' decision to chop up history thematically rather than chronologically and b) the narratives available to educators in broader historiography. Although historians locate the Holocaust in long-standing histories of European anti-Semitism (Brustein 2003) and the advent of modernity (Bauman 2000), the narrative structure recounted in schools is fairly well-known and easily packaged and transmitted. In many ways, this narrative fits into the classic melodrama genre where there is a clear villain, clear victims, and a clear delineation of good and evil. Such genres are highly "effective in encouraging audience emotional engagement" (Loseke 2009: 519). There does not seem to be an equivalent neatly contained causal narrative readily available in the case of apartheid. Instead, the historiography has focused on the development of racial capitalism over time (see, for example, Johnstone 1976; Marx 1998; Wolpe 1972). Starting the story in 1948 inevitably means truncating its beginning.

That said, at Roxbridge, teachers went beyond the autonomy given to them by the national curriculum by expanding on the Holocaust section and extending it into a three-term module. Ms. Viljoen acknowledged that this was beyond the bounds of what they should be doing. "I'll have a problem," she responded when I asked her what would happen

if a school inspector saw they weren't teaching exactly according to the syllabus. But she was not too concerned, elaborating that she would probably get "a slap on the wrist" and would promise to "do better next time." In any event, she thought such a scenario was unlikely as inspections tended to focus on assessment and occur near the middle of the year. As such, she explained, she could always say that the relevant topics were yet to be covered. Still, it was a risk she was willing to take. There is no apparent reason why a similar risk could not have been made in the case of apartheid. Instead, at Roxbridge—like at Glenville—teachers followed the official curriculum and seemed to take at face value that apartheid was inherently less interesting to students than the Holocaust.

I have no data to suggest that teachers *intended* to make the apartheid section boring. However, as I document elsewhere (Teeger 2015b), teachers were very committed to presenting their schools as icons of racial transformation, where students interact across racial divides, unburdened by the past. These ideas map onto nation-building myths that construct a rupture between the apartheid past and a reconciled "Rainbow Nation" present—an image of unity in diversity promoted during the South African transition to democracy (see Kiguwa 2006; Teeger 2015).[21] Maines (1993: 21) has argued that "stories have a point; they convey a central theme through the use of emplotment." The truncated narrative structure of the apartheid story helped convey the theme of distance between past and present, sustaining a depiction of social change. In many ways, this nation-building narrative reflects what scholars of autobiographical accounts call a "conversion narrative." Such narratives involve a story of self-transformation or awakening that works to reconstitute an actor's identity (DeGloma 2014; Flores 2016; Schrock, McCabe, and Vaccaro 2018). The truncated version of apartheid history allowed teachers to sustain such a narrative.

Narratives are not just stories, they provide us with "emotional codes" that "encourage particular ways of *feeling*" (Loseke 2009: 498, emphasis in the original). Teachers at both schools worried that learning about apartheid might make white students feel guilty and black students feel angry and that this would undermine the image of racial harmony they tried to promote (Teeger 2015a). By telling this social story of rupture between past and present, teachers limited students' ability to connect their own racialized experiences and identities to apartheid.[22] Even if teachers did not explicitly intend to create boredom in their history classrooms, it is not difficult to see how this emotion would help avoid these other affective responses.

BOREDOM, AVOIDANCE, AND SILENCING

"Emotions *do things"* (Ahmed 2004: 119, emphasis in the original). What does boredom do in social situations? In what follows, I highlight the types of discussions that boredom *prevents*. I begin with an analysis of an unusual classroom conversation where students started a conversation about the causes of apartheid. The exchange highlights the ease with which such discussions can move from the past to the present. I then focus on a conversation I had with Zodwa, a black African student in the post-sample at Glenville, who told me about her desire to ask causal questions in class and her observation that many of her classmates prefer not to address such questions—indeed, they avoid them through their displays of boredom.

THE DANGERS OF CAUSAL NARRATIVES

Students occasionally introduced issues usually silenced in the curriculum into classroom discussions. One such instance occurred in Ms. Devin's (white, Roxbridge) classroom. Students spontaneously got into a conversation about the origins of apartheid.

The discussion took place towards the very end of the apartheid section. Students were busy learning about the 1980s. There were less than two pages left in their apartheid booklets.

A white student raised her hand and asked, "Why were the blacks seen as inferior?" Another white student immediately followed up. "Yes, why was there apartheid?" The classroom became animated as students started jumping in with their suggestions without raising their hands. "Maybe they were seen as a threat?" proposed an African student. "Maybe it was an excuse for white people when they came and took the land, so it was an excuse for them to feel they were right," added an Indian student. Another white student offered: "When the Dutch came and became Afrikaners maybe they felt superior cause they were colonialists."

Ms. Devin interjected. "Remember in District 9?" she asked the students, referencing a science fiction movie where an alien ship lands in Johannesburg, South Africa. "[P]eople were scared of the prawns," she explained. "I think it is fear of the unknown. The British came here; they hadn't seen blacks before, so they created these laws." But students immediately challenged Ms. Devin. "But that is different," said a Coloured student, "cause the blacks were here first and there the prawns came." A white student concurred and added, "I think that movie is more about the Zimbabweans coming to South Africa." Ms. Devin stood her ground. "I think it's more about apartheid," she said. With that, she reasserted her authority and turned students' attention back to their handouts as she began reading about international sanctions.

This was one of the liveliest discussions I witnessed in all of my classroom observations. Students' interest was piqued by the causal questions of where racism and apartheid came from. In this discussion, students did not identify themselves with the

historical actors whom they referenced. They used third-person pronouns, referring to "them" and not "us." And yet, it is easy to imagine how this type of conversation could move from past tense to present tense and from the third person to the first.

Ms. Devin's intervention pushed the conversation far from the realms of the present by creating an analogy with science fiction. But students brought the conversation back to reality. They reminded her that "blacks were here first" and referenced current xenophobia against Zimbabweans. These types of topics threaten to spill into the present and amplify divisions between students. By minimizing *why* questions, teachers could limit these kinds of conversations and the uncomfortable feelings they might engender (including possibly for the white teacher herself). Instead, the apartheid section could be framed as "boring," and students' could minimize their emotional engagement with this history.

BOREDOM AS A PLACEHOLDER

Towards the end of my interviews, I asked students in the post-sample whether there was ever a time in class when they wanted to say something but held back because they were nervous about others' reactions. Zodwa, an African student at Glenville, responded affirmatively and explained how she was silenced by the bored posturing of other students:

> ZODWA: … I think I have had that time where I've been like, "Why did they do that?"… I don't know why they did it. Why did they hurt people like that? Why did they destroy so many families?" And it really had a bad effect on people. **I've had those moments where I wanted to ask … "Why did they do that?"** …
>
> INTERVIEWER: And how do you think other learners would've reacted if you said that?

ZODWA: I don't know because I think—so I think most of them want to know why as well. Because we do interact with the white people, we still talk to each other—but maybe some of them would've felt like, "Why are you bringing back the past again? Why do you want to talk about what happened? Let's leave the past in the past." **I think there are people in our class who feel that, let's just leave it in the past, let's just move forward and just forget about it.** But we can't really forget about what has happened; we do still learn from it as well.

INTERVIEWER: So do you think those people get annoyed that you're learning about apartheid in school?

ZODWA: *Ja*, there are people in my class who feel that "Why do I have to go through this again? and let's just leave it in the past."

INTERVIEWER: Do they say those kinds of things in class?

ZODWA: Well they don't really say it but **I can just see in their attitude, like they feel bored** and all of that. I can sense that and stuff (emphasis added)

Zodwa linked students' boredom with their desires to leave the past in the past. The idea of the past being in the past is a key storyline that sustains color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2014). By constructing narratives that do not address causal questions around the role of capitalism, racism, and settler colonialism, teachers hindered students' ability to carry the causal story into the present. Instead, they focused on laws that no longer exist and events that are long gone. The "lists and laws" approach to history allowed the past to be kept firmly in the past. The result was a boring and disconnected rendering of history.

At the same time, as Zodwa suggested, boredom itself can function as a placeholder for teachers' and students' refusal to engage with the ongoing effects of apartheid on their

schools and communities. The Holocaust—which is indeed distant from South Africans' lived realities—can be taught in a more engaging manner, where questions of causality and motivation are less threatening to the social order.

I do not have many examples in my data of black students telling me things like Zodwa did. Indeed, many said they were bored by apartheid and preferred learning about the Holocaust. Whether this is how they truly felt is difficult to know. It is possible that the ways the histories were narrated in schools led students, regardless of their racial background, to find the Holocaust more interesting than apartheid. It is also possible, however, that interviewer effects played a role in eliciting these descriptions from students. I am a white woman, roughly the same age as many of their teachers—most of whom were also white. In such a context, black students may have been reticent to offer critical appraisals and discuss the ongoing effects of racism. Recognizing that their white peers found apartheid boring, they may have assumed that this is what I wanted to hear from them too.

In her answer, Zodwa implied that she has had conversations with other black students about these issues. When I asked her how she thinks other students would have reacted had she asked the causal questions she had wanted to ask, she answered that she thinks that "most of them want to know why as well." Her next sentence clarified who the "them" are. "Because we do interact with the white people," she explained, indicating that the pronoun in the previous sentence refers to black students like herself. At this point, Zodwa seemed to shift her attention to white students' reactions, explaining their desire to "leave it in the past." She recognized this desire, she told me, not because white students necessarily say these things out loud, but rather because of their performance of boredom.

Boredom, in Zodwa's description, is an emotion that regulates what can be discussed. Zodwa did not act on her desire to ask *why* questions because she was aware that others in the classroom wanted to keep the past in the past. The questions she wanted to ask—about causality and motivation—threaten to move the conversation into the present. These questions were silenced—and their implications avoided—through boredom. In such a context, it is possible that many black students enacted boredom as a strategy to protect themselves. Similar dynamics have been documented among other marginalized communities, such as queer intellectuals and artists in the 1950s, who often adopted a conflict-averse "politics of indifference," maintaining a stance of "no opinion" on political issues (see Tochilnikova 2020: 90). In other words, boredom may have been part of the definition of the situation in both schools, but this does not mean that it meant the same thing for all who were expressing it.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

There are many reasons why individuals might feel bored. But when groups of people in different contexts define a subject as boring, there is something decidedly social going on. Focusing on the case of history education in South Africa, I showed how and why students across schools and classrooms came to define apartheid as boring. To do so, I capitalized on the comparative interest they showed in the Holocaust section, taught to them the same year.

At the curricular level, the chopping up of South African history under broader global themes created a sense of repetition and hindered the telling of a causal narrative. The beginning of the history was truncated. Issues of racism, economic exploitation, and settler colonialism that help put the consolidation of apartheid into context—and that remain

relevant for understanding contemporary racial inequality—were silenced. Instead, teachers focused primarily on lists of laws (that have been repealed) and events (that have now passed). Because apartheid was not told as a causal story, students were not encouraged to ask *why* questions. It was precisely these types of causal questions that animated student interest in the Holocaust. At the most basic level, the findings point to the relationship between causal narratives and audience engagement. More significantly, they highlight how a history of racial oppression can be taught in ways that limit its emotional impact in the present.

Implications for Racialized Emotions

This paper identifies boredom as a socially produced affective response that is far from benign and can instead work to dampen the other, potentially more divisive, types of emotions that have received attention in the literature on racialized emotions (Bonilla-Silva 2019). This process is not neutral. When dealing with racist histories, boredom can become a mechanism of keeping the past in the past and thereby sustaining racial inequality.

Race scholars have shown how distancing the past in this way helps entrench white supremacy by providing ideological support for an unequal status quo (see Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2014). The assertion of the past being in the past implies that histories of racism have no effect on the present. Historical narratives that eschew causality help support these assertions. They also construct these histories as boring. When such histories are collectively defined as not worthy of interest, boredom becomes a racialized emotion—silencing black people's pain and anger and legitimizing inequality.

Much of the literature on racialized emotions has focused on racial variation in how individuals feel, what is expected of them emotionally, and how their affect is perceived by

others (Bonilla-Silva 2019; Wilkins 2012; Wingfield 2010). This paper has not documented such differences. Instead, it has shown how an emotion can become part of a collective definition of the situation. When the situation involves discussions of racism, an emotion like boredom is racialized—even if it is expressed across racial groups. This is because it functions as an emotional defense of a racist status quo by preventing the interrogation of historical legacies.[23]

At the same time, the fact that my study did not capture racial variation, of course, does not mean that it did not exist. Qualitative researchers have long acknowledged the relational nature of data collection and worked to think through their impact on the field of study (Fujii 2017). My positionality as a white woman may have affected what black students were willing to tell me. If this is true, then it highlights the relationship between boredom and silencing. Zodwa, a black African student intrigued by causal questions, made these links explicitly in her interview with me. Others may have censored themselves from doing so.

Implications for Collective Memory

The findings of this paper point to the role of causality and motivation in the construction of narratives about the past. While the collective memory literature has highlighted the range of social processes that result in the memorialization of some histories over others (see Armstrong and Crage 2006; Erll 2020), less attention has been paid to the narrative structures that affect how audiences *feel* about the past.

This paper points to how the past can be remembered but not engaged. Researchers have increasingly focused on the commemoration of difficult pasts—shameful and traumatic histories with the potential to cause conflict, tension, and contestation in the present (Rivera 2008; Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991). The memory of these

pasts is often characterized by silences and omissions (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010, 2019). This paper adds to our knowledge by identifying the role of *causal silences* in these processes. It advances our understanding not only of *what* is remembered and commemorated, but of the *feelings* that collective memory engenders. In focusing on how these emotions play out in discussions of racially oppressive pasts, this study adds to a growing body of literature that documents the role of collective memory in constituting color-blind racism (see Fleming 2017; Teeger 2015; Weiner 2014).

Scholars have shown that racism is sustained by whites' commitment to an epistemology of ignorance—"a way of knowing oriented towards evading, mystifying, and obscuring the reality of racism" (Mueller 2020: 147; see also Mills 2007; Steyn 2012). This epistemology of ignorance is as much about contemporary instantiations of racism as it is about the ongoing effects of racist pasts. Future research could examine the relationship between assertions of *not feeling* the past and those of *not knowing* it. Scholars might also wish to investigate how boredom can be weaponized against minorities who insist on the continued relevance of the past. Such studies would help further our understanding of the relationship between collective memory, racialized emotions, and racial ideologies.

Implications for History Education

History education in schools is often a site of contestation. Stakeholders debate whether history should be a compulsory school subject (Little 1990) and what content it should include (Binder 2009; Pavasovic Trošt 2018). In so doing, they argue that history education is a powerful tool in shaping beliefs and identities in the present (see Freedman et al. 2008; VanSledright 2008).

Supporting the assertion that history in schools matters, researchers in a variety of contexts have documented how learning about their nation's history affects students' identities (Barton and McCully 2005; Epstein 2010). They have also shown the emotional effects that history teaching can have on students and teachers in divided societies (Zembylas and Kambani 2012). This paper moves the conversation beyond the boundaries of the nation-state to examine the interplay between local and global histories. While histories constructed around narratives of national exceptionalism have received legitimate critique (Tyrrell 1991), this paper's findings question curricular choices that construct national pasts merely as exemplars of broader historical trends. In so doing, findings point to the limits of historical analogies as a pedagogical technique.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this paper emerged inductively. I was not looking for boredom during data collection. In examining the implications of this paper's findings, scholars may want to attend more closely to how interest or boredom are expressed in classroom discussions. Although students and teachers described the apartheid section as boring, I did not get a strong sense of students enacting this boredom in classrooms. Boredom, however, was not something I was orienting my fieldnotes around, and so I may have missed its more subtle manifestations. Closer ethnographic attention to when, how, and by whom boredom is deployed in dynamic classroom interactions will surely advance our sociological knowledge of this emotion.

At the same time, it is important to underscore that, as sociologists, we cannot observe people's true feelings. What we have access to is how they *describe* and *perform* their emotions. It would be a mistake to assume that emotional displays are a more reliable

indicator of feelings than emotional accounts. Indeed, much of the literature on emotional labor indicates that individuals can engage in affective performances that run counter to their true feelings (e.g., Hochschild 2012; Lamont et al. 2016; Wingfield 2010). Future research would do well to disentangle the enactment of boredom from its discursive articulation as well as consider the social causes and consequences of both.

Future research should also pay closer attention to variation across teachers, schools, and classrooms. At Roxbridge, all the grade nine history teachers were white. At Glenville, two were black African. One of this paper's limitations is that I did not ask all teachers at Glenville to contextualize the apartheid section within the broader curriculum. Because my study was focused on apartheid history education, I initially focused my interview protocol on this history. At Glenville, I only asked Ms. Prescott—the department head—to speak to these more general curricular issues. By the time I got to Roxbridge the following year, I was already aware of the comparison in student interest between apartheid and the Holocaust and I asked all teachers about this. The result is that I only have data from white teachers about this issue. Elsewhere (Teeger 2015a), I have shown that black and white teachers taught about apartheid in surprisingly similar ways. Still, it is possible that black teachers would have had different interpretations of student boredom.

Comparable Cases

The findings of this paper are grounded in a study of history teaching in desegregated South African schools. But their theoretical implications extend beyond the boundaries of the case. In what other contexts might we expect to find the type of boredom documented in this paper? The case at hand suggests three salient dimensions of variation

that should inform future research aimed at developing a comparative framework: *audience*, *time,* and *curriculum type*.

Audience: Roxbridge and Glenville are both racially and socioeconomically diverse schools. Students occupied a variety of subject positions in relation to the past and its ongoing effects on the present. In contrast, consider Holocaust education in Germany. There—where descendants of victims are notably absent—secondary school history education has increasingly "sought to provoke an emotional upheaval, *Betroffenheit*" in children—pushing them towards identifying empathically with victims (Oeser 2019: 42).[24] We do not have access to the counterfactual, namely what would history education look like in Germany if the children of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders all sat in the same classrooms? However, it seems undoubtable that a strategy of generating strong emotional responses would raise different dynamics in such an audience, especially if students connected the history to their own lived realities.[25] Audiences made up of individuals with diverse relationships towards the past seem most likely to elicit the types of non-causal narratives (and their accompanying boredom) documented in this paper.[26]

Time: This study focused on South Africa's first generation born into democracy. The parents and grandparents of students in this study lived under apartheid. As time passes, the direct familial relationship with this history will grow more distant. The past—and the guilt and anger it could bring with it—is likely to be less potent. And boredom—as an emotion that defends against these more difficult feelings—might, in turn, make way for a more engaged relationship with history.[27] In other words, the type of boredom documented in this paper is likely characteristic of historical encounters with traumatic pasts that are temporally recent. That said, mnemonic time is not always linear. As Ben Yehuda (1996) and Zerubavel (1995) have shown, histories long-buried and forgotten can be rediscovered and publicly

reinvigorated thousands of years after the last living witnesses have passed on. Such cases highlight that it is not necessarily the passage of time that matters, but rather the relevance of the past for present debates (see Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002). Recent pasts are usually those most relevant, but this is not always the case. As such, we can expect to find boredom in history lessons about slavery, segregation, and colonialism in other societies grappling with ongoing racism, regardless of how long has passed since the end of *de jure* discrimination. A study by Clark (2008) in Australia suggests that, indeed, similar dynamics of boredom around colonial history might be in play there.

Curriculum Type: Although teachers in this study had a lot of autonomy, they were constrained by a national curriculum that mandated the teaching of the recent past to their diverse audience of students. Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger (2010) have shown how schools cope with being mandated to commemorate and teach about difficult, traumatic, and shameful pasts by engaging in "covert silences"—that is, silences that are hidden within mnemonic speech and thus more difficult to identify and critique. In a similar vein, boredom, as an emotional defense of the status quo, seems more likely to emerge in contexts where students and teachers are *forced* to engage with histories that they might otherwise wish to avoid—in other words, when the curriculum is centralized and/or the relevant history is a required topic.[28]

In developing a comparative framework for studying boredom as a racialized emotion, scholars may wish to look beyond schools to other contexts where racism is discussed, such as workplace diversity training or implicit bias workshops. They may also wish to consider the relationship between boredom and emotions such as exhaustion or fatigue. Researchers have shown how continual exposure to racism can lead to "racial battle fatigue"—a set of psychological and physiological stress responses, such as elevated heart

rate, anxiety, and exhaustion (Quaye et al. 2020; Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007). Such fatigue can be especially pronounced for racial justice activists of color, who engage in recurrent struggles (Gorski 2019), as well as for teachers and students of color, who are tasked with "educating" white peers and colleagues, often in contexts where racism is denied (Olsen 2019; Pizarro and Kohli 2020).

In assuming a bored posturing, black students in my study may have tried to protect themselves from the exhaustion of fighting against the dominant framing. Although my data cannot speak to this directly, it is also plausible that continually encountering boredom might heighten exhaustion among those advancing the cause of racial justice, as their struggles for equality are stonewalled by indifference. In taking up such research agendas, researchers should ask: Whose interests does boredom serve? And what does it help avoid? Addressing these questions in schools, workplaces, and social movements—to name but a few examples—will surely advance our knowledge of the role of emotions in racially unequal social systems.

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Sara. 2004. "Affective Economies." *Social Text* 22(2):117–39.

Armstrong, Elizabeth A., and Suzanna M. Crage. 2006. "Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth." *American Sociological Review* 71(5):724–51.

Barbalet, Jack M. 1999. "Boredom and Social Meaning." *The British Journal of Sociology* 50(4):631–46.

Barton, Keith C., and Alan W. McCully. 2005. "History, Identity, and the School Curriculum in Northern Ireland: An Empirical Study of Secondary Students' Ideas and Perspectives." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 37(1):85–116.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2000. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Cornell University Press.

Bell, Joyce M., and Douglas Hartmann. 2007. "Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of 'Happy Talk.'" *American Sociological Review* 72(6):895–914.

Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. 1996. *Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Univ of Wisconsin Press.

Bertram, Carol. 2020. "Remaking History: The Pedagogic Device and Shifting Discourses in the South African School History Curriculum." (23):29.

Binder, Amy J. 2009. *Contentious Curricula: Afrocentrism and Creationism in American Public Schools*. Princeton University Press.

Bobo, Lawrence, James R. Kluegel, and Ryan A. Smith. 1997. "Laissez-Faire Racism: The Crystallization of a Kinder, Gentler, Antiblack Ideology." *Racial Attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and Change* 15:23–25.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2014. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. 4th ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2019. "Feeling Race: Theorizing the Racial Economy of Emotions." *American Sociological Review* 84(1):1–25.

Breidenstein, Georg. 2007. "The Meaning of Boredom in School Lessons. Participant Observation in the Seventh and Eighth Form." *Ethnography and Education* 2(1):93–108. doi: 10.1080/17457820601159133.

Brissett, Dennis, and Robert P. Snow. 1993. "Boredom: Where the Future Isn't." *Symbolic Interaction* 16(3):237–56.

Brustein, William I. 2003. *Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust*. Cambridge University Press.

Carrim, Nazir, and Crain Soudien. 1999. "Critical Antiracism in South Africa." *Critical Multiculturalism: Rethinking Multicultural and Antiracist Education* 153–71.

Charmaz, Kathy, and Melinda J. Milligan. 2006. "Grief." Pp. 516–43 in *Handbook of the sociology of emotions*. Springer.

Chiricos, Ted, Michael Hogan, and Marc Gertz. 1997. "Racial Composition of Neighborhood and Fear of Crime." *Criminology* 35(1):107–32.

Clark, Anna. 2008. *History's Children: History Wars in the Classroom*. UNSW Press.

Collins, Randall. 2014. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton university press.

Conrad, Peter. 1997. "It's Boring: Notes on the Meanings of Boredom in Everyday Life." *Qualitative Sociology* 20(4):465–75.

Crockett, Amanda C., Samantha K. Myhre, and Paul D. Rokke. 2015. "Boredom Proneness and Emotion Regulation Predict Emotional Eating." *Journal of Health Psychology* 20(5):670–80.

Dahlen, Eric R., Ryan C. Martin, Katie Ragan, and Myndi M. Kuhlman. 2004. "Boredom Proneness in Anger and Aggression: Effects of Impulsiveness and Sensation Seeking." *Personality and Individual Differences* 37(8):1615–27.

Darden, Donna K. 1999. "Boredom: A Socially Disvalued Emotion." *Sociological Spectrum* 19(1):13–37.

DeGloma, Thomas. 2014. "Seeing the Light." in *Seeing the Light*. University of Chicago Press.

Deterding, Nicole M., and Mary C. Waters. 2018. "Flexible Coding of In-Depth Interviews: A Twenty-First-Century Approach." *Sociological Methods & Research* 0049124118799377. doi: 10.1177/0049124118799377.

Doharty, Nadena. 2020. "The 'Angry Black Woman'as Intellectual Bondage: Being Strategically Emotional on the Academic Plantation." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 23(4):548–62.

Elpidorou, Andreas. 2018. "The Bored Mind Is a Guiding Mind: Toward a Regulatory Theory of Boredom." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 17(3):455–84.

Epstein, Terrie. 2010. *Interpreting National History: Race, Identity, and Pedagogy in Classrooms and Communities*. New York: Routledge.

Erasmus, Zimitri. 2001. *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identites in Cape Town*. Kwela books.

Erll, Astrid. 2020. "Afterword: Memory Worlds in Times of Corona." *Memory Studies* 13(5):861–74. doi: 10.1177/1750698020943014.

Evans, Louwanda, and Wendy Leo Moore. 2015. "Impossible Burdens: White Institutions, Emotional Labor, and Micro-Resistance." *Social Problems* 62(3):439–54.

Fields, Jessica, Martha Copp, and Sherryl Kleinman. 2006. "Symbolic Interactionism, Inequality, and Emotions." Pp. 155–78 in *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*. Springer.

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(5):1159–93.

Fleming, Crystal Marie. 2017. *Resurrecting Slavery: Racial Legacies and White Supremacy in France*. Temple University Press.

Flores, David. 2016. "From Prowar Soldier to Antiwar Activist: Change and Continuity in the Narratives of Political Conversion among Iraq War Veterans." *Symbolic Interaction* 39(2):196–212.

Freedman, Sarah Warshauer, Harvey M. Weinstein, Karen Murphy, and Timothy Longman. 2008. "Teaching History after Identity-Based Conflicts: The Rwanda Experience." *Comparative Education Review* 52(4):663–90.

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2017. *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach*. Routledge.

Gardiner, Michael E. 2012. "Henri Lefebvre and the 'Sociology of Boredom.'" *Theory, Culture & Society* 29(2):37–62.

Goldberg, Yael K., John D. Eastwood, Jennifer LaGuardia, and James Danckert. 2011. "Boredom: An Emotional Experience Distinct from Apathy, Anhedonia, or Depression." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 30(6):647–66.

Gorski, Paul C. 2019. "Racial Battle Fatigue and Activist Burnout in Racial Justice Activists of Color at Predominately White Colleges and Universities." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 22(1):1–20.

Hagerman, Margaret Ann. 2014. "White Families and Race: Colour-Blind and Colour-Conscious Approaches to White Racial Socialization." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37(14):2598–2614.

Halberstadt, Amy G., Vanessa L. Castro, Qiao Chu, Fantasy T. Lozada, and Calvin M. Sims. 2018. "Preservice Teachers' Racialized Emotion Recognition, Anger Bias, and Hostility Attributions." *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 54:125–38. doi: 10.1016/j.cedpsych.2018.06.004.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2012. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. University of California Press.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2018. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. The New Press.

Hughes, Diane, James Rodriguez, Emilie P. Smith, Deborah J. Johnson, Howard C. Stevenson, and Paul Spicer. 2006. "Parents' Ethnic-Racial Socialization Practices: A Review of Research and Directions for Future Study." *Developmental Psychology* 42(5):747.

Illouz, Eva. 1997. *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Univ of California Press.

Islam, Asiya. 2020. "'It Gets Really Boring If You Stay at Home': Women, Work and Temporalities in Urban India." *Sociology* 0038038520934995.

John, Craig St, and Tamara Heald-Moore. 1996. "Racial Prejudice and Fear of Criminal Victimization by Strangers in Public Settings." *Sociological Inquiry* 66(3):267–84.

Johnsen, Rasmus. 2016. "Boredom and Organization Studies." *Organization Studies* 37(10):1403–15.

Johnstone, Frederick A. 1976. *Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa*. Routledge.

Kemper, Theodore D. 1978. "Toward a Sociology of Emotions: Some Problems and Some Solutions." *The American Sociologist* 30–41.

Kemper, Theodore D. 1981. "Social Constructionist and Positivist Approaches to the Sociology of Emotions." *American Journal of Sociology* 87(2):336–62.

Kiguwa, Peace. 2006. "The Rainbow Nation: Constructs of National Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *A Race against Time: Psychology and Challenges to Deracialisation in South Africa* 317–34.

Lamont, Michèle, Graziella Moraes Silva, Jessica Welburn, Joshua Guetzkow, Nissim Mizrachi, Hanna Herzog, and Elisa Reis. 2016. "Getting Respect." in *Getting Respect*. Princeton University Press.

Lemanski, Charlotte. 2004. "A New Apartheid? The Spatial Implications of Fear of Crime in Cape Town, South Africa." *Environment and Urbanization* 16(2):101–12.

LePera, Nicole. 2011. "Relationships between Boredom Proneness, Mindfulness, Anxiety, Depression, and Substance Use." *The New School Psychology Bulletin* 8(2):15–25.

Little, Vivienne. 1990. "A National Curriculum in History: A Very Contentious Issue." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 38(4):319–34.

Loseke, Donileen R. 2007. "The Study of Identity as Cultural, Institutional, Organizational, and Personal Narratives: Theoretical and Empirical Integrations." *The Sociological Quarterly* 48(4):661–88.

Loseke, Donileen R. 2009. "Examining Emotion as Discourse: Emotion Codes and Presidential Speeches Justifying War." *The Sociological Quarterly* 50(3):497–524.

Maines, David R. 1993. "Narrative's Moment and Sociology's Phenomena: Toward a Narrative Sociology." *The Sociological Quarterly* 34(1):17–38.

Martin, Susan Ehrlich. 1999. "Police Force or Police Service? Gender and Emotional Labor." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 561(1):111–26.

Marx, Anthony W. 1998. *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil*. Cambridge University Press.

Mathiak, Krystyna A., Martin Klasen, Mikhail Zvyagintsev, René Weber, and Klaus Mathiak. 2013. "Neural Networks Underlying Affective States in a Multimodal Virtual Environment: Contributions to Boredom." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7.

Mercer-Lynn, Kimberley B., Rachel J. Bar, and John D. Eastwood. 2014. "Causes of Boredom: The Person, the Situation, or Both?" *Personality and Individual Differences* 56:122–26.

Miles, Matthew B., and A. Michael Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. sage.

Mills, Charles. 2007. "White Ignorance." *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* 247:26–31.

Milner Jr, Murray. 2013. *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids: American Teenagers, Schools, and the Culture of Consumption*. Routledge.

Mirchandani, Kiran. 2003. "Challenging Racial Silences in Studies of Emotion Work: Contributions from Anti-Racist Feminist Theory." *Organization Studies* 24(5):721–42.

Mueller, Jennifer C. 2020. "Racial Ideology or Racial Ignorance? An Alternative Theory of Racial Cognition." *Sociological Theory* 38(2):142–69.

Oeser, Alexandra. 2019. *When Will We Talk About Hitler?: German Students and the Nazi Past*. Vol. 1. Berghahn Books.

Olick, Jeffrey K. 2007. *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. New York: Routledge.

Olsen, Lauren D. 2019. "The Conscripted Curriculum and the Reproduction of Racial Inequalities in Contemporary US Medical Education." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 60(1):55–68.

Pavasovic Trošt, Tamara. 2018. "Ruptures and Continuities in Nationhood Narratives: Reconstructing the Nation through History Textbooks in Serbia and Croatia." *Nations and Nationalism* 24(3):716–40. doi: 10.1111/nana.12433.

Peterson, Gretchen. 2006. "Cultural Theory and Emotions." Pp. 114–34 in *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*. Springer.

Pierce, Jennifer L. 1999. "Emotional Labor among Paralegals." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 561(1):127–42.

Pirtle, Whitney N. Laster. 2022. "'White People Still Come Out on Top': The Persistence of White Supremacy in Shaping Coloured South Africans' Perceptions of Racial Hierarchy and Experiences of Racism in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Social Sciences* 11(2):70.

Pizarro, Marcos, and Rita Kohli. 2020. "'I Stopped Sleeping': Teachers of Color and the Impact of Racial Battle Fatigue." *Urban Education* 55(7):967–91.

Posel, Deborah. 2001. "Race as Common Sense: Racial Classification in Twentieth-Century South Africa." *African Studies Review* 87–113.

Quaye, Stephen John, Shamika N. Karikari, Kiaya Demere Carter, Wilson Kwamogi Okello, and Courtney Allen. 2020. "' Why Can't i Just Chill?': The Visceral Nature of Racial Battle Fatigue." *Journal of College Student Development* 61(5):609–23.

Raffaelli, Quentin, Caitlin Mills, and Kalina Christoff. 2018. "The Knowns and Unknowns of Boredom: A Review of the Literature." *Experimental Brain Research* 236(9):2451–62.

Rao, Aliya Hamid. 2017. "Stand by Your Man: Wives' Emotion Work during Men's Unemployment." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 79(3):636–56.

Rhea, Joseph Tilden. 1997. *Race Pride and the American Identity*. Harvard University Press.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2006. "Expectation States Theory and Emotion." Pp. 347–67 in *Handbook of the sociology of emotions*. Springer.

Rivera, Lauren A. 2008. "Managing 'Spoiled' National Identity: War, Tourism, and Memory in Croatia." *American Sociological Review* 73(4):613–34.

Rivera, Lauren A. 2015. "Go with Your Gut: Emotion and Evaluation in Job Interviews." *American Journal of Sociology* 120(5):1339–89.

Roy, Donald. 1959. "' Banana Time': Job Satisfaction and Informal Interaction." *Human Organization* 18(4):158–68.

Schieman, Scott. 2006. "Anger." Pp. 493–515 in *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*. Springer.

Schrock, Douglas, Janice McCabe, and Christian Vaccaro. 2018. "Narrative Manhood Acts: Batterer Intervention Program Graduates' Tragic Relationships." *Symbolic Interaction* 41(3):384–410.

Simko, Christina. 2015. *The Politics of Consolation: Memory and the Meaning of September 11*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Skogan, Wesley G. 1995. "Crime and the Racial Fears of White Americans." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 539(1):59–71.

Smith, William A., Walter R. Allen, and Lynette L. Danley. 2007. "'Assume the Position... You Fit the Description' Psychosocial Experiences and Racial Battle Fatigue among African American Male College Students." *American Behavioral Scientist* 51(4):551–78.

Soudien, Crain. 2012. *Realising the Dream: Unlearning the Logic of Race in the South African School*. HSRC Press.

Srivastava, Sarita. 2006. "Tears, Fears and Careers: Anti-Racism and Emotion in Social Movement Organizations." *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie* 55–90.

Stein, Arlene. 2014. *Reluctant Witnesses: Survivors, Their Children, and the Rise of Holocaust Consciousness*. Oxford University Press.

Steinberg, Ronnie J., and Deborah M. Figart. 1999. "Emotional Labor since: The Managed Heart." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 561(1):8–26.

Steyn, Melissa. 2012. "The Ignorance Contract: Recollections of Apartheid Childhoods and the Construction of Epistemologies of Ignorance." *Identities* 19(1):8–25.

Teeger, Chana. 2015a. "'Both Sides of the Story' History Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *American Sociological Review* 80(6):1175–1200.

Teeger, Chana. 2015b. "Ruptures in the Rainbow Nation: How Desegregated South African Schools Deal with Interpersonal and Structural Racism." *Sociology of Education* 88(3):226–43.

Tochilnikova, Elina. 2020. *Towards a General Theory of Boredom: A Case Study of Anglo and Russian Society*. Routledge.

Toohey, Peter. 2011. *Boredom: A Lively History*. Yale University Press.

Trošt, Tamara, and Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc. 2020. "Identity Politics in History Textbooks in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia." Pp. 197–230 in *The Visegrad Four and the Western Balkans*. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG.

Turner, Jonathan H., and Jan E. Stets. 2005. *The Sociology of Emotions*. Cambridge University Press.

Tveit, A. D., D. L. Cameron, and V. B. Kovač. 2014. "'Two Schools under One Roof' in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Exploring the Challenges of Group Identity and Deliberative Values among Bosniak and Croat Students." *International Journal of Educational Research* 66:103–12.

Tyrrell, Ian. 1991. "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History." *The American Historical Review* 1031–55.

Van Straaten, Dick, Arie Wilschut, and Ron Oostdam. 2016. "Making History Relevant to Students by Connecting Past, Present and Future: A Framework for Research." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 48(4):479–502.

Van Tilburg, Wijnand AP, and Eric R. Igou. 2017. "Boredom Begs to Differ: Differentiation from Other Negative Emotions." *Emotion* 17(2):309.

VanSledright, Bruce. 2008. "Narratives of Nation-State, Historical Knowledge, and School History Education." *Review of Research in Education* 32(1):109–46.

Vinitzky-Seroussi, Vered. 2001. "Commemorating Narratives of Violence: The Yitzhak Rabin Memorial Day in Israeli Schools." *Qualitative Sociology* 24(2):245–68.

Vinitzky-Seroussi, Vered. 2002. "Commemorating a Difficult Past: Yitzhak Rabin's Memorials." *American Sociological Review* 30–51.

Vinitzky-Seroussi, Vered. 2009. *Yitzhak Rabin's Assassination and the Dilemmas of Commemoration*. Albany NY: SUNY Press.

Vinitzky-Seroussi, Vered, and Chana Teeger. 2010. "Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting." *Social Forces* 88(3):1103–22.

Vinitzky-Seroussi, Vered, and Chana Teeger. 2019. "Silence and Collective Memory." Pp. 663–74 in *Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Sociology.*, edited by W. H. Brekhaus and G. Ignatow. New York: Oxford University Press.

Vodanovich, Stephen J. 2003. "Psychometric Measures of Boredom: A Review of the Literature." *The Journal of Psychology* 137(6):569–95. doi: 10.1080/00223980309600636.

Wagner-Pacifici, Robin, and Barry Schwartz. 1991. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past." *American Journal of Sociology* 97(2):376–420.

Watt, Diana. 2017. "Dealing with Difficult Conversations: Anti-Racism in Youth & Community Work Training." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 20(3):401–13.

Weiner, Melissa F. 2014. "(E) Racing Slavery." *Du Bois Review* 11(2):329.

Weldon, Gail. 2009. "Memory, Identity and the Politics of Curriculum Construction in Transition Societies: Rwanda and South Africa." *Perspectives in Education* 27(2):177–89.

Wharton, Amy S. 2009. "The Sociology of Emotional Labor." *Annual Review of Sociology* 35(1):147–65. doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-070308-115944.

Wilkins, Amy. 2012. "'Not Out to Start a Revolution' Race, Gender, and Emotional Restraint among Black University Men." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 41(1):34–65.

Wilkins, Amy C., and Jennifer A. Pace. 2014. "Class, Race, and Emotions." Pp. 385–409 in *Handbook of the sociology of emotions: Volume II*. Springer.

Wingfield, Adia Harvey. 2007. "The Modern Mammy and the Angry Black Man: African American Professionals' Experiences with Gendered Racism in the Workplace." *Race, Gender & Class* 196–212.

Wingfield, Adia Harvey. 2010. "Are Some Emotions Marked" Whites Only"? Racialized Feeling Rules in Professional Workplaces." *Social Problems* 57(2):251–68.

Winter, Jay, and Emmanuel Sivan. 2000. *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*. Vol. 5. Cambridge University Press.

Wolpe, Harold. 1972. "Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid." *Economy and Society* 1(4):425–56.

Zembylas, Michalinos, and Froso Kambani. 2012. "The Teaching of Controversial Issues during Elementary-Level History Instruction: Greek-Cypriot Teachers' Perceptions and Emotions." *Theory & Research in Social Education* 40(2):107–33.

Zerubavel, Yael. 1995. "The Multivocality of a National Myth: Memory and Counter-Memories of Masada." *Israel Affairs* 1(3):110–28.

Zolberg, Vera L. 1998. "Contested Remembrance: The Hiroshima Exhibit Controversy." *Theory and Society* 27(4):565–90.

Figure 1: Knowledge Focus for Grade 9: RNCS, Grades R-9, Social Sciences, pp. 61-62

Knowledge focus for Grade 9
The knowledge focus for achieving the Learning Outcomes in Grade 9 is reflected in:

■ Human rights issues during and after World War II:
- •Nazi Germany: How did the Nazis construct an Aryan identity? How did the Nazis use this 'identity' to define and exclude others? How and why did the Holocaust happen? What choices did people have in Nazi Germany?

■ The end of World War II and the struggle for human rights:
- • United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (including crimes against humanity);
- • United States civil rights movement;
- • human rights and anti-colonial struggles in Africa.

■ Apartheid in South Africa:
- • impact of World War II;
- • What was apartheid?;
- • How did it affect people's lives?;
- • repression and resistance to apartheid in the 1950s (e.g. the Defiance Campaign, the Freedom Charter and popular culture);
- • repression and the armed struggle in the 1960s;
- • divide and rule: the role of the homelands;
- • repression and the growth of mass democratic movements in the 1970s and 1980s: external and internal pressure;
- • building a new identity in South Africa in the 1990s: pre-1994 negotiations, the first democratic elections and South Africa's Constitution.

■ The Nuclear Age and the Cold War:
- • Hiroshima and Nagasaki: the changing nature of war;
- • ideologies: capitalism and communism;
- • United States vs. the Soviet Union as superpowers: the arms race, conflict over territory, the space race;
- • the collapse of communism;
- • the collapse of apartheid.

■ Issues of our time:
- • dealing with crimes against humanity: apartheid and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission compared with the Holocaust and the Nuremberg Trials;
- • xenophobia and genocide (e.g. Rwanda, the Balkans);
- • the effects of globalisation on Africa.

■ A new vision for Africa: Africa's economic recovery.

Table 1: Characteristics of Teachers

	School	Race	Age
Mr. Lane	Glenville	White	53
Mr. Pretorius	Glenville	White	26
Ms. Prescott	Glenville	White	25
Ms. Mokoena	Glenville	African	41
Ms. Ndlovu	Glenville	African	39
Ms. Viljoen	Roxbridge	White	42
Ms. Green	Roxbridge	White	26
Ms. Roux	Roxbridge	White	27
Ms. Devin	Roxbridge	White	25
Ms. Lesley	Roxbridge	White	34

Table 2: Characteristics of Students

		Glenville	Roxbridge	Total
Pre-sample	African	14	8	22
	Biracial/Mixed	3	0	3
	Coloured	11	8	19
	Indian	13	8	21
	White	10	7	17
	Total	51	31	82
Post-Sample	African	14	10	24
	Biracial/Mixed	2	0	2
	Coloured	8	10	18
	Indian	7	9	16
	White	6	12	18
	Total	37	41	78
Total		**88**	**72**	**160**

ENDNOTES

[1] Gardiner (2012: 41) describes boredom as an "emotional flatness and resigned indifference." Similarly, Tochilnikova (2000: 27) notes that it is "an emotion of apathy and low arousal with a lack of either notable positive or negative feelings." Van Tilburg and Igou (2017) argue that boredom has a negative valence, but that valence is much weaker than other emotions.

[2] Hochschild (2012) distinguishes between emotional labor, which is done for pay, and emotion work, which is not for pay and usually in the realm of the domestic. But see Rao (2017) who argues that this distinction is, in practice, often artificial.

[3] It is important to note that labeling emotions as having a "positive" or "negative" valence does not imply a normative judgment about "good" or "bad" emotions, nor does it suggest that some emotions sustain an unequal racial order, while others are mobilized to dismantle it. Indeed, the same emotion can mean different things when it is enacted by members of different groups. As Ahmed (2004) notes, white supremacy has been built on discourses of racial love and solidarity.

[4] Names of schools and participants are pseudonyms.

[5] For more information on school desegregation in South Africa, see Carrim and Soudien (1999), Soudien (2012), Teeger (2015b)

[6] According to the 1996 South African Schools Act, children are considered to be in a school's catchment area if their parents live *or work* there.

[7] Soweto is an urban area (township), now part of the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, historically reserved for black Africans.

[8] Although, as I discuss in the findings sections, many had indeed touched on specific aspects of this history in earlier years.

[9] Different students were interviewed in the two samples. Because the interview protocol was essentially the same for the two samples (aside from a battery of questions about the experience of learning the apartheid section, administered only to the post-sample), and because of the short time-lag between the two samples, I worried that data in the post-sample could be contaminated by interviewees' recall of the first interview had the same students been interviewed in both.

[10] At Roxbridge, I was provided with lists stratified based on parents'/guardians' categorization of their children. At Glenville, the head of the history department racially categorized class lists. The table presents interviewees' own racial identification in interviews. The vast majority of students identified as they had been categorized and used one of apartheid's four official racial categories: African (or black African), Coloured, Indian (or Asian), and white. These categories remain broadly salient in post-apartheid South Africa (on racial categorization in South Africa, see Posel 2001). Drawing on the language of anti-apartheid resistance movements, in this paper, I use the term black to refer inclusively to Africans, Coloureds, and Indians, and in contrast to whites.

[11] Shortly after concluding my fieldwork, the government revised the curriculum. The new national curriculum, called CAPS, left much intact. One significant change was the scaling down of content in grade nine history to apartheid and the Holocaust.

[12] South Africans refer to students as learners and teachers as educators. I use these terms interchangeably in this paper.

[13] Grade R refers to Reception, which is similar to Kindergarten in the U.S. Schooling in South Africa is compulsory from grade one to nine.

[14] I did not ask this question of the post-sample at Roxbridge because I interviewed them right after they had covered the apartheid section—at the beginning of the year—so they did not have this comparative perspective. My interviews with students in the post-sample at Glenville were at the end of the academic year, when they had covered almost all topics.

[15] As described in note 10, most students identified racially using one of apartheid's official racial categories. However, Lizzie, along with four other students, identified as biracial (or mixed), possibly reflecting the emergence of new racial categories in post-apartheid South Africa. While the term Coloured is often understood to refer to people of mixed-racial backgrounds, the five students who identified as biracial/mixed explained that to be Coloured, one's parents would also have to be Coloured. In contrast, they explained that they identified as biracial because they came from an interracial family. On the meaning of Coloured identity and the historical construction of this distinct racial category in South Africa, see Erasmus (2001) and Pirtle (2022).

[16] The Land Act dispossessed black Africans of their land, reserving ninety percent of the land in South Africa for whites.

[17] Indeed, as Tochilnikova (2020) notes, in some contexts, people enjoy repetition, such as when they return to familiar music over and over again without getting bored.

[18] It is worth noting that students were not *tabula rasa* when it came to the Holocaust either. Students in the pre-sample told me they were excited to learn about Hitler and wanted to

learn more about why he did the things he did, indicating that they had some prior knowledge. Nevertheless, the causal story that they were told was experienced as engaging rather than repetitive.

[19] These were the same in both schools. The events covered were: the Defiance Campaign, the Freedom Charter, the Sharpeville Massacre, the Soweto Uprising, and the Women's March. The organizations discussed were the African National Congress, the Pan African Congress, and the Black Consciousness Movement.

[20] Hector Peterson was a school-aged child who was shot dead by the police during the 1976 student uprisings in Soweto. Sam Nzima's photograph of Peterson, being carried by a friend, with his sister running alongside, has become iconic.

[21] In many ways, the ideology of "Rainbow Nationalism" mirrors the "happy talk" of diversity discourse in the United States in that it allows individuals "to engage race on the surface but disavow and disguise its deeper structural roots and consequences" (Bell and Hartmann 2007: 910).

[22] On the relationship between social and individual narratives and their connection to social and individual identity, see Loseke (2007)

[23] Similarly, see Beeman (2015) for a discussion of how social movement activists—across race—engage is "racism evasiveness," strategically silencing discussions of racism in the organization and thereby reproducing inequalities.

[24] The Nazi past only began to be actively engaged in the educational system (and in broader public discourse) following the 1968 movement. By the 1980s, the pedagogy of emotional upheaval, *Betroffenheitspädagogik* became popular in West Germany. In East Germany, a

similar approach was pursued, although the victims were presented as communists rather than Jews (Oeser 2019).

[25] Likewise, consider the case of Northern Ireland where the school system is, for the most part, segregated along religious lines, with Protestants attending schools managed by regional education boards and Catholics attending schools governed by boards established under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church (Barton and McCully 2005). Similarly, in the Balkans, Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats learn history in ethnically homogenous education systems (Trošt and Trbovc 2020). This is true even in ethnically mixed areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a policy of "two schools under one roof" means that children study in ethnically segregated classrooms and follow different curricula within the same school (Tveit, Cameron, and Kovač 2014).

[26] In South Africa, future research could investigate this by looking at historically black schools that have remained racially homogenous in the post-apartheid era.

[27] On boredom as an emotion that defends against uncomfortable, unpleasant, and painful emotions, such as rage and shame, see Tochilnikova (2021: 31-32)

[28] Watt's (2017) study of anti-racism training for future youth and community workers in the UK underscores this point. As an elective subject, the module was popular among Black and Asian students and provided a safe space for engaged conversations about their experiences of racism. As the module moved from an elective to a required one, facilitators noticed a resistance among white students to engage in conversations about race as well as "repeated expressions of boredom" (p. 441).