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## The Everyday in a Time of Transformation: Exploring a Single South African Lifeworld after 20 Years of Democracy

**Abstract** Transformation has come to be a defining characteristic of contemporary societies, while it has rarely been studied in a way that gives acknowledgement to both its societal effects and the experience thereof by the individual. This article discusses a recent study that attempts to do just that. The everyday life of a South African is explored within the context of changes that can be linked, more or less directly, to those that have characterized South Africa as a state since the end of apartheid in 1994. The study strives to avoid the pitfalls associated with either an empirical or solely constructivist appreciation of this phenomenon, but rather represents an integral onto-epistemological framework for the practice of sociological research. The illustrated framework is argued to facilitate an analysis of social reality that encompasses all aspects thereof, from the objectively given to the intersubjectively constructed and subjectively constituted. While not requiring extensive development on the theoretical or methodological level, the possibility of carrying out such an integral study is highlighted as being comfortably within the capabilities of sociology as a discipline. While the article sheds light on the experience of transformation, it is also intended to contribute to the contemporary debate surrounding the current “ontological turn” within the social sciences.

**Keywords** Ontology; Epistemology; Phenomenology; Constructivism; South Africa; Integral Sociology; Transformation; Intersubjectively; Lifeworld

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The aim of this article is to integrally explore one South African lifeworld from within the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the country’s first non-racial democratic elections. The specific case explores the everyday life of Hennie van der Merwe,<sup>1</sup> an Afrikaner<sup>2</sup> schoolteacher who has personally experienced the transformation that has come to characterize South African society at every level. Hennie’s story is analyzed and interpreted in section *The Case of Hennie van der Merwe*. Before his story is told, however, the article introduces certain ontological and epistemological premises that were foundational to the study, and illustrates the sociological theories and methods that were implemented during the data collection and analysis phases of the research project. The study was conceptualized to serve as an example of the application of an integral framework for sociological practice to the study of everyday life. As such there is the need not only for a holistic balance between theory and practice, but for an overarching account that reflexively touches on all the relevant issues that came into play from the moment the researchers first engaged the object of study to the final keyboard strike that culminated in the writing of this article. This is the rationale for the following section opening with the presentation of models of reality and consciousness. These models are foundational to the rest of this article and should be illustrated before turning to the data and conclusions.

<sup>1</sup> All persons mentioned in the article are assigned pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this article, an Afrikaner is defined as a member of a specific contemporary White Afrikaans-speaking collectivity that actively seeks the cultural survival of the Afrikaner as existing up to the end of apartheid. Not all contemporary White Afrikaans speakers self-identify as Afrikaners. For a more comprehensive account of contemporary White Afrikaans-speaking identity and the contextual meaning of the moniker “Afrikaner,” see: Kotze et al. (2015).

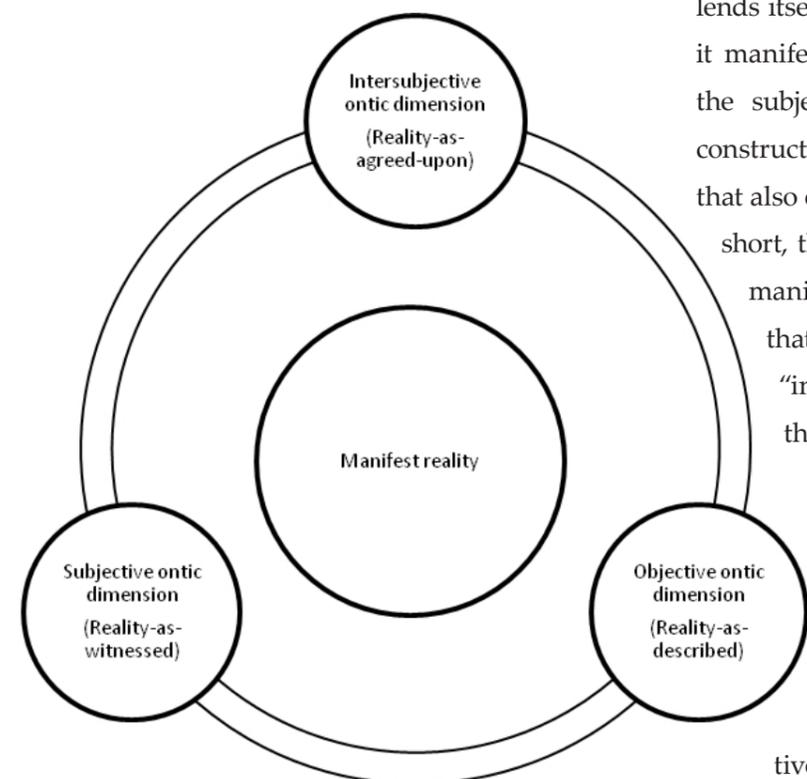
## Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

We acknowledge from the start that reality is trans-empirical. This means that any model or framework that purports to scientifically clarify the dual stream of manifestation and interpretation underlying our everyday experience is, and always will be, inherently arbitrary and provisional. It is in this reflexive spirit that the rest of this section should be understood to represent models of reality and consciousness. These models are arbitrary by nature and under no circumstance are they meant to be dogmatically superimposed over the fundamentally irreducible holon<sup>3</sup> of manifestation that is experienced reality. Any phenomenon, however, needs to be abstracted to a certain degree before meaningful analysis thereof can take place, and the models illustrated in this section are argued to represent one of the simplest yet most comprehensive ways of doing so. Having made this disclaimer, the study’s ontological and epistemological points of departure are grounded in an integral framework for sociological practice (cf. Kotze et al. 2015). According to this framework, reality manifests as an ever-present holon consisting of three irreducible ontic<sup>4</sup> dimensions:

<sup>3</sup> The term “holon” refers to a whole that simultaneously transcends and includes its parts.

<sup>4</sup> We consciously use the terms “ontic” and “epistemic” in place of the more commonly used “ontological” and “epistemological” with reference to the subtle yet essential difference in meaning between the two. The former signifies that which is given, free from interpretation, while the latter refers to that which is the product of classification according to any given ontology. The ontic dimensions of reality are thus not theoretical constructs, but the very quanta of manifestation and experience that give rise to the possibility of multiple ontologies.

Figure 1. The three ontic dimensions.



Source: Self-elaboration.

These dimensions, referred to as the subjective, intersubjective, and objective ontic dimensions respectively, represent undivorcably interconnected aspects of reality. This is the case because, when operating within the natural attitude of pre-scientific experience, any perceived object naturally confronts the perceiving subject with three clearly distinguishable but interrelated aspects of its being-in-the-world. Its objective ontic dimension renders an aspect of its existence that is ontologically rooted completely “outside” of the perceiving subject, at least where “everyday” states of consciousness are involved.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This qualification is made in line with an acknowledgement of the existence of various states of consciousness (or, more correct-

This objectively given dimension of a phenomenon lends itself most readily to empirical description, as it manifests itself relatively independently of both the subjectively constituted and intersubjectively constructed realms of meaningful interpretation that also exists in relation to any perceived object. In short, the objective ontic dimension of an object’s manifestation represents those aspects thereof that are characterized by a certain measure of “independence and externality in relation to the subject” (Habermas 1972:33).

Two further ontic dimensions, namely, the subjective and intersubjective, naturally accompany this empirically describable dimension of reality. These dimensions are represented respectively by subjectively constituted intentionalities<sup>6</sup> and intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks oriented towards the object of perception. Through adding layers of socio-cultural meaning and exist-

ly, phenomenal fields [Rock and Krippner 2007]) that are readily accessible to human beings. The main focus of sociology is, however, on that state of consciousness which forms the foundation of the natural attitude; the pre-scientific and often pre-reflexive mode of perceiving “the reality which seems self-evident,” or paramount reality (Schütz and Luckmann 1974:3).

<sup>6</sup> The word intentionality is used here in Husserl’s sense of denoting the character of consciousness as always being “of” something, and has nothing to do with “intention” as that word is commonly understood (McIntyre and Smith 1989). As Husserl, contrary to much popular speculation, strove to construct a rigorous science of phenomena that would pave the way to true objectivity, the alternative English rendering of his German term *Intentionalität* as “directedness” may provide us with a clearer understanding of its intended meaning. However, while the transcendental subject may perceive reality free from “everything that has overlaid the primordial surprise in the face of the world” (Evola 2003:143), certain judgments, opinions, and habits of thought and interaction are inherent in the intentionality of the embodied subject operating from within the natural attitude. These factors, by giving rise to a biographically-informed sense of obviousness and familiarity, constitute the unseen scaffolding of the individual habitus, which is explored in greater detail further in this article.

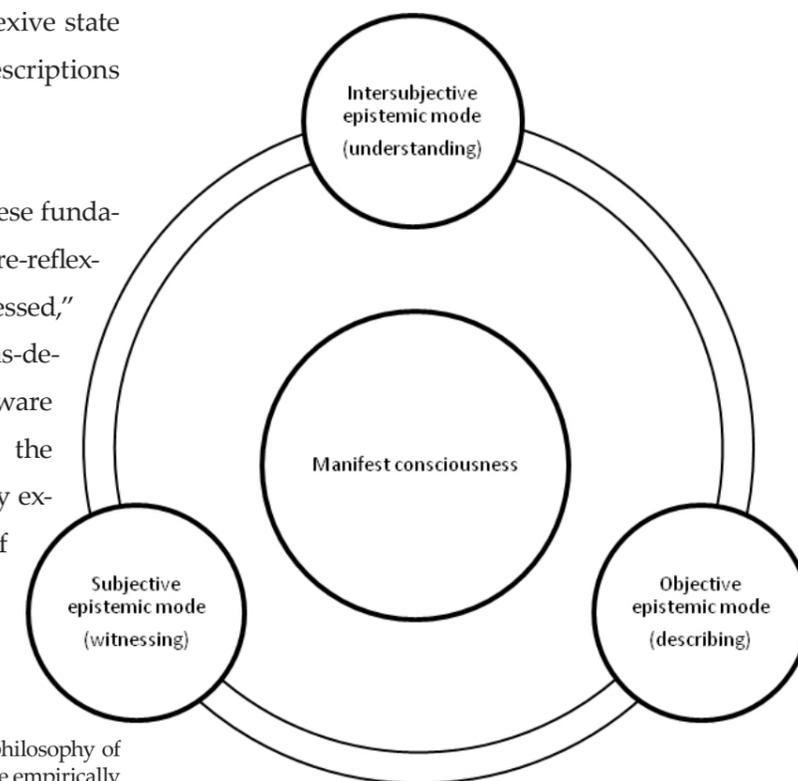
tential significance to our perception of phenomena, these dimensions play a fundamental role in the constitution of paramount reality. Paramount reality refers to the phenomenal reality that is unquestioningly accepted as “real” by the individual experiencing his or her daily existence from within the natural attitude. This “world-as-witnessed” comprises “the foundational structures of what is pre-scientific” (Schütz and Luckmann 1974:3). In contrast to the abstracted world described by the natural sciences, paramount reality represents an intersubjectively constructed and maintained realm populated by socially related subjects who all have pragmatic interests in its existence and interpretation (Schütz 1962). Indeed, subjective interpretation and intersubjective agreement exert greater influence on the constitution of the interpretation of the kosmos<sup>7</sup> that is unquestioningly accepted as real by socially related people going about their daily lives in a pre-reflexive state of consciousness, than do the detached descriptions of reality generated by empirical research.

All human beings varyingly experience these fundamental ontic dimensions on a daily basis, pre-reflexively alternating between “reality-as-witnessed,” “reality-as-agreed-upon,” and “reality-as-described” without necessarily becoming aware of the ontic discontinuities underlying the stream of consciousness, which is normally experienced as unified. An important effect of incorporating such an integral framework into sociological research is that it gives the

<sup>7</sup> The word “kosmos” is used here in line with the philosophy of Ken Wilber (2007). The kosmos represents not only the empirically observable cosmos existing “out there,” but also includes the “inner” realms of conscious experience and meaning (Visser 2003:197).

researcher access to aspects of reality that are beyond the reach, and often even the scope, of contemporary science. Alongside the generation of empirically verifiable “truth,” an accompanying focus on the subjectively constituted and intersubjectively constructed dimensions of reality facilitates sensitivity to issues of social justice and individual sincerity when analyzing social reality. In a very real sense, this framework thus harks back to a current of thought that has been latent in Western philosophy since at least the time of Aristotle, whose “transcendentals,” the good, the true, and the beautiful, come to the fore strongly when social reality is approached through the lens provided by this framework.

Figure 2. The three epistemic modes.



Source: Self-elaboration.

Correlating with the multidimensional nature of manifest reality is the multi-modal nature of human consciousness. Whenever consciousness is directed at a phenomenon (which may be a physical, mental, or supra-mental object), the interaction takes one (or more) of the following general forms: subjective witnessing, intersubjective agreement, or objective description.

The correlation of these modes of perception with the ontic dimensions of manifestation seems to be an inherent characteristic of reality. Understanding this unitary relationship between consciousness and its objects in greater detail may pave the way for a post-Cartesian scientific endeavor that overcomes the crippling dualism of modern science, while also transcending the constitutional limitations of reactionary relativist and constructivist schools of thought.<sup>8</sup> As long as the current subject/object split, based on deeply embedded cultural assumptions regarding the definition of “self” and “not-self,” is taken as characteristic of paramount reality, a detailed exposition of the entire experiential matrix encompassing both intersubjectively reified perceptual poles (that of subjectivity and objectivity) is necessary. The accompanying study

<sup>8</sup> Though a variety of “monistic” frameworks have seen the light in recent years (cf. Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012), their proclaimed non-dualism almost universally rests on an unconscious fracturing of the holon of reality, which means that certain ontic modes are given precedence over others. Though absolute reality is non-dual, its realization is an experiential affair that is generated only by a most arduous and conscious self-transformation that leads to the emergence of a worldview that is quite simply not typical of contemporary human experience. Thus, as long as the standard experience of reality is that of duality, our analytical frameworks should rest on a dual view of reality. Attempting otherwise will surely land us in a mire of existential conceit and pretence that may be even less relenting than the sinkhole of positivism.

was thus carried out with the intention of acknowledging all of the ontic dimensions and epistemic modes that comprise manifest reality and the conscious experience thereof that is currently prevalent among human beings. In this way, we attempt to avoid the various pitfalls associated with focusing on a single ontic dimension or making use of a single epistemic mode in isolation.

Generalized forms that these epistemological traps often take are relativism (overemphasis on the intersubjectively constructed aspects of reality), reductionism (seeking objective “facts” to the extent that the resulting description of reality is completely removed from lived experience, common sense, and intuition), and the various degrees of unconfirmability and solipsism associated with the unavoidable foray into metaphysics that accompanies a one-sided focus on the individually unique contents of isolated subjectivity. Corresponding to the fact that a given phenomenon may be experienced varying in terms of its objective suchness, social fairness, and personal desirability, an integral deployment of all three epistemic modes makes possible the carrying out of research that emphasizes not only the enlargement of the empirical knowledge base, but also a socially accountable assessment of the justness and utility of generated knowledge, as well as a strong contemplative engagement with aesthetic, moral, and transformative dimensions pertaining to the phenomenon under study and the application of generated knowledge. Thus, this framework generates a more human way of going about social scientific research by bringing the praxis of sociology in line with the full human experience of reality.

The following section deals with the theoretical considerations used to apply this framework practically. It is not necessary to construct novel theories in order to undertake integral sociological research. The various ontic dimensions have already been explored in great detail by existing schools of thought, albeit mostly in isolation from the other dimensions (as in the case of existentialism focusing on the subjective ontic dimension, ethnography on the intersubjective, etc.) and without explicit acknowledgment of the holon of manifest reality. All existing sociological theories more or less explicitly focus on a given ontic dimension and make use of certain epistemic modes. These underlying orientations are, however, mostly constituted unconsciously, embedded in powerful worldviews and paradigmatic assumptions, and as such are rarely reflected upon. This state of affairs has led to the seemingly irresolvable opposition of various contemporary sociological paradigms, an obstacle that persists even though all of these competing theoretical frameworks are internally coherent and each one provides us with useful partial truths about the nature of social reality. Thus, the following section explores some sociological theories which competently explore one or more of the ontological dimensions and seeks their practical unification into a theoretical framework for the integral study of social reality, as described up to this point.

### Theoretical Foundation

Theoretically speaking, a conceptual framework acknowledging all the ontic dimensions and epistemic modes introduced in the previous section was needed in order for this study to attain its goal of inte-

grally exploring social reality in the context of a single individual’s meaningful life experience. Such a framework is possible when incorporating aspects of Alfred Schütz’s phenomenology of the social world, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s ideas regarding the social construction of reality, and the reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. The resultant theoretical framework, coupled with the researchers’ own “utterly firsthand and direct presentation of the phenomena and the description and analyses proper to them” (Natanson 1978:189), represents the conceptual lens applied to the interpretation of Hennie’s life story that is shared further in this article. As is to be expected, the theoretical framework constructed for the purposes of this study is compatible with the integral onto-epistemological framework outlined earlier. This specific amalgamation of theoretical streams acknowledges all the ontic dimensions of reality, facilitating the development of a methodological approach that makes use of all three epistemic modes, as is discussed in the next section.

The first theoretical stream included in the study is the phenomenologically informed school of thought that started with the work of Alfred Schütz and was developed further by various thinkers over the course of the second half of the previous century and the first years of our own. Of these successors, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann represent the most important thinkers in the context of this study. Though Schütz can be said to have developed a true phenomenology of the social world, most of the work that strove to build upon his ideas can be more aptly referred to as *phenomenologically informed sociology*. This designation is due to the

fact that whereas Schütz contemplated the universal structures of consciousness that underlie the subjective, pre-communicative constitution of reality in a thoroughly Husserlian manner, the later “phenomenologists,” as is most clearly evident in the case of the ethnomethodologists, focused rather on the *intersubjective* construction of social reality through communication, ritual, agreement, et cetera (cf. Dreher 2012). The very condensation of these streams of thought into codified, more or less uniformly applied theoretical and methodological systems sets them epistemologically apart from the “all-embracing self-investigation,” the “first of all monadic” enterprise that is phenomenology proper (Husserl 1960:156). Thus, the various theories that today constitute “phenomenological sociology” are rather incorporated into this study because of their exceptional suitability to an analysis of the socially constructed aspects of reality. This suitability stems from the fact that these theories represent epistemological frameworks aimed at exploring the intersubjective ontic dimension, or the dimension of reality that is founded on mutual agreement and the resulting construction of socially shared meaning-frameworks.

This phenomenologically informed nexus of theories provides us with several relevant concepts. First and most foundational of these is the lifeworld. As we attempt to gain understanding of a given individual’s experience of social reality, it is of the essence that the target of our analysis should be reality as experienced by the participant. Thus, the target of analysis is the world as experienced by Hennie van der Merwe, or his “naïve...immersion in the already-given world” (Husserl 1960:152). The

emphasis of this analysis is on three closely related foundational structures of Hennie’s experience, namely, his biographically determined situation, his stock of knowledge, and his narrative repertoire. An individual’s biographically determined situation, his or her uniquely experienced position in and orientation towards the world, is constituted through a temporally directed dialectical relationship between internalized learning from past experience, expectations oriented towards the future, and present psychological, social, and physical conditions. This continuously evolving existential nexus solidifies into a given individual’s momentary orientation to reality. It delineates individual subjects’ perceptions of “not only [their] position in space, time, and society but also [their] experience that some of the elements of the world taken for granted are imposed upon [them], while others are either within [their] control or capable of being brought within [their] control” (Schütz 1962:76). Thus, the content of a given individual’s biographically determined situation offers a glimpse into that person’s momentary orientation towards the three ontic dimensions of reality, as well as the spatio-temporally, socio-culturally, and existentially contextualized contents of that individual’s consciousness as mediated by the three epistemic modes.

Operating in an intricate dialectic with the biographically determined situation is a person’s stock of knowledge and his or her narrative repertoire. Along with the biographically determined situation, both of these interpretational matrices provide the underlying impetus for certain acts and the justification for certain beliefs and interpretations of reality. Both are socially informed

and underlie the construction of collective identities through their operation on the porous boundary between the subjective, intersubjective, and objective ontic dimensions of reality. Thus, the convergence of the subjectively constituted world-as-witnessed, the intersubjectively constructed world-as-agreed-upon, and the objectively given world-as-described into an unproblematically experienced paramount reality is facilitated by the interpretational nexus formed by these three foundational structures of consciousness (the biographically determined situation, stock of knowledge, and narrative repertoire). Whereas the biographically determined situation is predominantly affective in nature, the stock of knowledge comprises the pragmatic “skills, useful knowledge [and] knowledge of recipes” (Schütz and Luckmann 1974:105) acquired by an individual during the course of his or her life. The narrative repertoire represents the socially shared and historically contextualized storehouse of narratives, characters, and plots drawn on by individuals during the interpretation of their own lives as a contextually meaningful story featuring themselves as the protagonist, a mode of self-analysis that seems to be geographically and temporally universal among human beings (McAdams 1993; 2012; Frank 2012). Considering the interplay between an individual’s biographically determined situation, stock of knowledge, and narrative repertoire, all of which are socially and historically contextualized, thus allows for insight into the nexus of self-perception that orients a person’s momentary interpretation of his or her place in society and history, along with the corresponding actions people execute during their participation in the ongoing construction and

maintenance of their socially shared lifeworlds. Through investigating the contents and structure of, as well as the relationship between these three socially embedded matrices of self-experience, a deeper understanding of the socially constructed aspects of a given individual’s experience of reality is made possible.

In close combination with this phenomenologically informed theoretical stream is the work of Pierre Bourdieu. To the extent that Bourdieu’s sociology incorporates subjective experience, it can be seen as an offshoot of the phenomenological stream in sociology. What makes Bourdieu’s “structural constructivism” unique, however, is its emphasis on what he refers to as “methodological relationalism” (cf. Bourdieu 1989; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Bourdieu’s clarification of the “double life” of life-worldly phenomena makes possible the acknowledgement of both the intersubjective and objective ontic dimensions and epistemological modes during the social scientific research process. This is the case because Bourdieu realizes that the structures of the universe exist simultaneously as objects of the first order, independent of interpretation, and as objects of the second order, as meaningfully interpreted and symbolized by conscious beings (Wacquant 1992). This double life necessitates a “double reading,” or the complementary application of two divergent modes of analyzing social reality. The first, social physics, is characterized by the quantitative analysis of social structures, while the second, social phenomenology, entails a qualitative exploration of the meaning-frameworks underlying the experience of the individuals constituting these social structures (Bourdieu 1990).

In this way, Bourdieu's sociology makes possible the acknowledgement of both the objective and intersubjective ontic dimensions during the analysis of social reality. By including an empirical collection of social facts in the analysis of an individual's lifeworld, access can be gained to the objectivated phenomena experienced as unproblematically given by the participant and which play a central role in the constitution of subjective experience and the construction of mutual understanding during everyday life. Incorporating this insight into sociological research allows for social reality to be understood neither as fundamentally driven by the actions of individuals nor as primarily predetermined by impersonal societal structures and processes, but as arising dialectically out of a continuous interaction between these two streams of agency. Taken into the realm of methodology, the praxis of the double reading facilitates a reflexive focus on the readily observable relationships existing between individual action and social structure. While understanding Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" as analogous to the nexus of self-experience comprising an individual's biographically determined situation, stock of knowledge, and narrative repertoire, meaningful social action can thus be seen as being the result of an ongoing "adjustment of habitus to the necessities and to the probabilities inscribed in the field" (Wacquant 1989:43). In this context, the field refers simply to the given situation in which the subject finds him- or herself at any particular moment, which is populated by encountered objects ranging in ontic status from personally experienced thoughts, through socially constructed meaning-frameworks, to concrete physical objects and other conscious beings. The inclusion of Bourdieu's sociological theory

within an integral theoretical framework thus facilitates an acknowledgement of the role played by the interaction between the intersubjective and objective ontic dimensions during the constitution of subjectively experienced meaning and the carrying out of meaningful action in everyday life.

While the theoretical framework described up to this point has much to offer in terms of reflexively analyzing social reality as constructed by communicating subjects confronted with empirically given objects and embedded in socially shared meaning-frameworks, it does not touch upon the subjective ontic dimension, which is monadic in the strictest sense. Thus, though the intersubjectively constructed and objectively given aspects of social reality are accounted for quite thoroughly, there is still a need to turn to that dimension of reality that is constituted by unmediated subjective experience, and as such is unique to each and every experiencing subject. In Husserlian terms, the previously constructed theoretical framework comprising phenomenologically informed sociology and the insights gained from Bourdieu's double reading still represents a scientific endeavor "lost in the world." What remains then is for the researcher to "lose the world by epoché, in order to regain it by a universal self-examination" (Husserl 1960:157). Practically speaking, this means that the researcher's unique first-person perspective on the mystery under investigation needs to be given more than a passing acknowledgement. This is the case because, no matter how reflexively defined the research process, when it comes to the final sifting and analysis of data, powerful assumptions on the part of the analyst come into play. Thus, when all

is said and done, the role played by the unique constitution of the monadic perceiving subject needs to be made explicit.

Apart from the contents of the researchers' own individually specific nexus of subjectively constituted and intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks, an important factor to be explored is the ontological discontinuity that is generated by one subject entering the lifeworld of another, which is even more pronounced when the observing subject is engaged in reflexive analysis. This ontological discontinuity comes to the fore most powerfully in the realization that what is reality to the pre-reflexive subject going about his daily life is clearly seen to be appearance by the discerning sociologist, most dramatically so when it comes to socially shared interpretations of historical events. As socially reified interpretations of history are objectivated to the degree that they are internalized as representing objective "facts," these objectivated events can be treated as constituting, along with geographical, demographic, and other empirically measurable variables, the objective ontic dimension of social reality. While it is rather obvious that objectivated interpretations of social reality never solidify to the extent that they become objective in the classical sense, rather exhibiting an asymptotical relationship to objectivity as empirically defined, this fact is not generally apparent to the individual operating pre-reflexively from within a given socio-cultural milieu. These objectivated interpretations, often taking on the form of a normative imperative within a given social context, constitute a foundational part of the field of everyday experience and, as such, their excavation

allows for greater insight into the larger socio-cultural context underlying individual patterns of thought and behavior.

Thus, by integrally focusing on the objectivated deposits of reified history and culture, along with the socially shared meaning-frameworks constructed by contemporary collectivities and the subjectively constituted experience of everyday life, a theoretical framework is generated that meets the requirements of an integral framework introduced in previous section. The next section demonstrates how these theoretical streams can be put into practice at the methodological level.

### Methodological Approach

At this stage it should be restated that the focus of this study is on the participant's experience of his lifeworld. This means that the reality under investigation is the world as experienced daily by Hennie van der Merwe and, as such, the "reality interpreted by...and subjectively meaningful to" this particular human being (Berger and Luckmann 1967:33). This does not mean that we researched some ontologically isolated sphere of subjective fantasy, but that we are explicit in pointing out the windows through which we are to peer into the ever-present flux of subjectively constituted experience, intersubjectively constructed meaning, and objectively given data that constitute manifest reality. Thus, the world was not reduced to the stream of consciousness "in Hennie's head," but life in all its manifold complexity was rendered as seen "through Hennie's eyes." Such an endeavor, if it is to be integral in the sense defined throughout

previous sections, necessitates a three-way engagement with the participant's life story. During this process an interpretive spiral between Hennie's presented narrative, the larger socio-historical context within which his story plays out, and the investigators' own interpretation of the encountered "mystery" comes into being.

The object of study in this case is referred to as a mystery because of the fact that it does not simply represent an objectively solvable problem, but a trans-empirical phenomenon that is not merely to be empirically described, but hermeneutically understood and phenomenologically interpreted, as well (Alvesson and Kärreman 2011). As the navigation of mystery reveals, "relationships...that had not been previously expected [and that] change actions and perspectives" (Weick 1989:524), such an approach generates more than impersonal objective data. The researchers' own entanglement in the mystery, brought about by lieu of their existential engagement with the phenomenon, ensures that understanding of the given mystery is always correlated with "growth in inner awareness," as "everything understanding mediates is mediated along with ourselves" (Gadamer 1990:110). Through engaging with Hennie's story in the way a philologist would a fragment of text, such an approach allows for the unraveling of mystery by constructing socially and temporally contextualized understanding out of the meaningful interaction between ontologically discrete subjects, along with the historical and social context within which this interaction takes place. In short, Hennie's story may be more readily understood by a person who is familiar with the society, culture, and history

within which Hennie himself is existentially embedded. At the very least, such a familiarity facilitates the uncovering of certain quanta and qualia that simply do not exist in the perception of an "outsider."

A larger view that includes social, historical, political, and other contexts is thus fundamental to understanding encountered interpretations that, from the standpoint of the researcher, may seem incongruous or absurd as isolated things-in-themselves. Only by making explicit the historical and social contexts of the participant's interpretations of reality, as well as the temporal and relational conditions in which the understanding thereof by the researcher takes place (which are further informed by the contextualized interpretations of the researcher him/herself), can the socio-historically situated interpretation of the contents of one subjectivity by another be meaningfully expressed in a way that makes it accessible to any third party (Gadamer 2013). A practical method of generating such a larger view of the socio-historical background in relation to which a given individual's life story plays out is to excavate a reflexively informed meta-narrative to serve as a contextualizing backdrop to the stories shared by an individual participant. The term excavation is used here instead of construction for the simple reason that, as discussed in previous section, the events of Hennie's past, as well as those more general archetypes shared by the collectivities to which he belongs, confront him as reified objects during everyday life. Mapping out the objectivated social and historical terrain navigated by Hennie during his day to day life grants us access to the "objective" world

as witnessed by him. The first methodological step in this study was thus the excavation of the most solidified aspects of Hennie's lifeworld, namely, those objectivated meaning-frameworks inherited from the natural and historical past. This meta-narrative was generated by means of a review of the history of the small rural town in which he lives and works, as well as the larger history informing his own biography and that of the collectivities to which he claims membership and with which he comes into contact on a daily basis.

With this meta-narrative on the table, the focus could be shifted to Hennie's contemporary experience of everyday life. The first step in this process was a certain degree of ethnographic participation in Hennie's lifeworld which lasted from 2011 to 2014. We separately spent time in the village, naturally interacting not only with Hennie himself and his immediate family, but with locals of all backgrounds, from schoolchildren to the elderly, farm laborers to the well-off individuals who own the many extensive farms surrounding the settlement. This was done as we were aware of the fact that sociologists can successfully "enter into dialogue with people's stories only if [they have] sufficient proximate experience of the everyday circumstances in which people learn and tell their stories" (Frank 2012:39). This phase marked the starting point of our investigation of the intersubjective ontic dimension of Hennie's lifeworld, whereas the almost positivistic collection of historical and social facts engaged in during the reconstruction of the preceding meta-narrative represented an exploration of its objective ontic dimension. Placing ourselves squarely within Hennie's world-as-witnessed

made possible a degree of understanding which is simply not possible otherwise, as we came to know his world "with our bodies," temporarily becoming co-constructors of this lifeworld by means of our communicative presence (Wacquant 2004:VIII). This participation in Hennie's lifeworld, alongside the previously excavated map of the objective ontic dimension of this lifeworld, allows for a more integral view of the human being under consideration by completing the "double reading" advocated by Bourdieu. The broader view generated by this approach allows us to reflexively deal with two significant problems often encountered in qualitative research focusing solely on interviews. These problems are referred to by some as the "transparent self problem" and the "transparent account problem" respectively (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). The former refers to the taken-for-granted notion that the participant knows him- or herself fully and the latter to the common assumption that the participant is willing to share this knowledge with a stranger. Collecting other perspectives on the participant in the ways mentioned up to now allows us to align the data collection process more closely with our commonsense knowledge of everyday human interaction, in which an expectation of confused and sometimes contradictory relationships between people and their stories about themselves is fundamental to people's understanding of each other.

Apart from this "passive" participation, encompassing informal communication both with Hennie and others within the community, we included Hennie in six involved conversations, which ranged from completely open-ended in the

beginning to semi-structured as the research went on and analytic themes emerged. These conversations, not referred to as interviews due to various negative associations having attached themselves to that term over the last few decades, lasted anything from an hour to two hours and allowed us a deep insight into Hennie's subjective experience of reality, as well as the intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks according to which his pre-reflexive perception of reality is oriented. These conversations are characterized by their open-endedness and the fact that they play out in terms of symbols that are put on the table by the participant himself, thus diminishing the risk of entrapping the participant in the researcher's own meaning-frameworks (Roulston 2012). In this way, rich descriptive accounts of Hennie's past and everyday experiences were generated, instead of a generalized account aimed merely at explaining superficial patterns of behavior, as is too often the case with interviews. The final step in implementing an integral methodological approach is a phenomenological analysis of all the data on the table. Navigating the border between the natural and reflexive attitudes, a first-person interpretation of Hennie's lifeworld and existential situation (from the researchers' point of view) was generated. The resulting account, taking into consideration all the ontic dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation and all the epistemic modes utilized in its exploration, is presented in the next section. In the spirit of interpretive research, these data are not presented as the final word, but rather represent a plausible and transparently perspectival interpretation of the mystery at hand that is always open to debate and further analysis.

### The Case of Hennie van der Merwe

This section is presented in the form of a collective first-person account of the researchers' interactions with Hennie, and is divided into three subsections outlining the intricately linked development of three themes that have played an existential role in Hennie's life, as gleaned from our conversations with him. These themes are Hennie's bodily and familial history, his religious faith, and his tendency towards existential involvement with people from other social, racial, and cultural backgrounds. These themes are interwoven with a contextually situated<sup>9</sup> first-hand account of the researchers' time with Hennie and the community in which he lives.

#### The Burden of Circumstance

After driving a long way through the Karoo, possibly one of the world's most mesmerizing landscapes, one finally sees a sign welcoming one to the small farming village in South Africa's rural Eastern Cape Province—the home of Hennie van der Merwe. The welcome is written in three languages: English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa, an indicator of the wonderfully complex heritage that characterizes this part of the South African countryside. Here Boer, Brit, and Bantu have been living side by side, sometimes amicably, sometimes violently, for almost two centuries. Just after the welcome signpost one is met by two

<sup>9</sup> This context is presented in the form of a meta-narrative, excavated empirically out of the larger, objectified historical and social situation against which Hennie's life plays out. This meta-narrative represents the objective ontic dimension of Hennie's everyday reality (as discussed previously), in so far as socially shared perspectives on history and social reality come to congeal into reified phenomena according to which subjective intentionalities and intersubjective meaning-frameworks are oriented (Kotze 2013; Kotze et al. 2015).

of the most easily recognizable flags in the world today, proudly waving from the entrance gate to an old farmyard. The flag of post-apartheid South Africa and the rainbow flag of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ) community signify that this quaint hamlet has not been left behind by the tide of transformation that has swept over the country since the first free democratic elections in 1994. Naive enthusiasm is soon tempered by reality, though, as one enters the town and sees the disenchanting signs of debilitating poverty everywhere around. Along with political freedom, the people of South Africa unfortunately also inherited one of the most unequal economic systems in the world, and especially rural areas have seen great suffering over the last two decades due to a general lack of economic opportunities, depopulation caused by urbanization, a lack of consistency in basic service delivery, and skyrocketing rates of HIV-AIDS infection (Habib 2013).

Like most visitors to this quaint hamlet, one is seduced into driving slowly through the few streets before checking into one's guesthouse. Although small, this place has a rich history dating back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Founded by Andries Stockenström, a man both praised and criticized for his liberal approach to race relations during a protracted period of conflict known as the Cape Frontier Wars (1779-1879),<sup>10</sup> the town is marked by all the graces

<sup>10</sup> The nine wars that erupted between European settlers and Xhosa tribes between 1779 and 1879 represent the longest running military action in African colonial history (Peires 1982). Fought along the volatile Northeastern border of the then Cape Colony, these wars were sparked by underlying tensions between various Xhosa tribes, independent groups of Boer frontiersmen, and the British Empire. They were largely the result of disputes about territory, European meddling in local politics, and back-and-forth cattle raids (Giliomee 2009).

of a British colonial settlement. As we approach the beautiful buildings of the school, where Hennie is a senior staff member, we cannot help but notice the demography of the learners. The institution was founded in the British boarding school tradition almost a century and a half ago and has long been associated with some of the most well-known British settler families, yet we do not see a single White kid. Upon raising the topic, various staff tell us that there are "two or three" White children in the school, while most of the pupils are not aware of the existence of these elusive specimens. The case, as we would later find out, is that the school has seen an exodus of White learners, whose parents have been systematically moving them to other schools since the racial integration and declining standards of South Africa's education system. Indeed, a private school has since opened its doors in town, and most of the wealthy farmers' children now receive their primary education there. Sitting in Hennie's office later that morning, talking about this and other happenings in the region's recent past, we get a feel for the immense task of being a teacher in South Africa today:

I'm one of those people who never see something as being black or white. Maybe it's a part of my profession and what it means to be a teacher nowadays. A teacher is expected to be a judge, a president, a doctor, and an advocate. Nothing can ever be said to be black or white.

Public education is a contentious issue in South Africa, with corruption, lack of funding, data manipulation, and delays in service delivery fuelling heated debates about the current state of affairs in public

schools (Nkosi 2013; Pretorius 2013; Van Zyl 2014; Washkansky 2014). In the Eastern Cape Province, 67 936 teachers are tasked with educating almost two million learners (Department of Basic Education 2014), which means that, theoretically, there are roughly 29 learners per teacher. In practice, the ration is substantially worse. This, along with a general increase in youth criminality and incidents of violence at public schools (Mncube and Harber 2013; Davids 2014), has made teaching one of the most unenviable occupations in the country today. Far from being mere lip-service to political correctness, however, Hennie's inspired attitude comes to the fore throughout his personal and social history, which is as riveting an account of transformation as one would be able to find anywhere in South Africa today. Born in a small Free State farming town in the early nineteen fifties, his life was marked by fate at an early age:

When I was about nine months old, something bad happened to me. I rolled off the bed while my mother was in the kitchen. I fell and hit my head against the cot, causing the right side of my body to become paralyzed. Though the paralysis wasn't permanent, the right side of my body always lagged behind the left developmentally.

This accident, which Hennie was later told about by his parents, was to shape the rest of his life. Doctors initially said that he had a fifty percent chance of walking, and the fact that he eventually recovered was, for him, one of the first signs of a divine presence in his life, something that he views as the foundation of his earthly existence. His health was, however, permanently affected by this event. When he was four years old a similar thing happened, and he

has since been subject to sporadic epileptic seizures and organ difficulties because of the discrepancy in growth between the two sides of his body. This, his affliction, has been an existential pivot to his experience of life:

The problems I have today, various symptoms of sickness, can all be traced back to that. And yes, it has had a lot to do with my development as a person. It naturally had an impact on my whole being, my entire existence. You're always aware, it's always in the back of your head that you're not as fast, as good, as flexible as the rest.

Because of this injury Hennie has had to undergo several operations and was not allowed to participate in sports, which is one of his passions, from a very young age. During these early years of isolation he found solace in Christianity. His faith was to prove a pillar upon which he would lean for the rest of his life, and he personally feels his life story to be guided by a divine power which has allowed him to overcome all the challenges that life has thrown at him. Apart from this physical condition, Hennie also inherited a peculiar social circumstance; that of being born a White Afrikaans-speaker during the height of apartheid. This condition, which was every bit as involuntary as his injury, caused the young Hennie quite some confusion. As a child he was always acutely aware of the dissonance between his own deep friendships with the local Black African<sup>11</sup> children, on the one hand, and the distant, paternalistic attitude of his stern parents and grandparents, on the other:

<sup>11</sup> Hennie grew up in a part of South Africa where mostly Sotho-speaking Black Africans reside.

I remember how my best friend and I used to eat out of the same plate with our hands on Sundays. We were so fond of each other that we used to share everything. Naturally, it wasn't always something that the older generation understood, but, for me, it was an absolutely natural unfolding of the person that I am. I've always had a very good relationship with people from different cultural backgrounds than my own.

In my grandfather's time, in my father's time, they were only workers. When driving around the farm, the Black man would sit on the back of the truck, while the dog would sit in front with the farmer. I wanted to socialize with them, I wanted to learn from them.

Despite all his yearning for reconciliation Hennie remained a staunch nationalist politically, and his Afrikaner heritage has always been something that he has held in the highest regard:

Equality means that we all have access to the same rights and privileges, but not that I should give up my identity. I remain what I am. I believe that the Xhosa<sup>12</sup> child should be just as proud of his traditions, his history, his language, and his customs as I am of mine, but that we should create a space in which we can converse, so that he can learn from me and me from him.

This simultaneous pride in his heritage and openness to the experience of other ways of life, along with the physical implications of his childhood in-

<sup>12</sup> Hennie currently serves as a senior teacher among Xhosa-speaking learners.

jury, gave rise to a marked amplification of a tension that is universal to the human condition. This tension is between continuity, on the one hand, and transformation, on the other. Physically he would experience the ramifications of his injury up until the present day and most likely for the rest of his life, while the psychosocial struggle would run a course through diverse experiences, and finally to a cathartic denouement that would have been unforeseeable to all but Hennie's omniscient God.

### The Hope of Redemption

From about the age of six, Hennie started acting on this discrepancy between the separatist reality of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century South Africa and his own acutely felt need for communion with those whom he had grown up with, but had been taught to keep at a distance. The outlet that came most naturally to the religious-minded boy, and that was least likely to raise the ire of his elders, was to take the gospel into the nearby Black township:

As a young lad, I remember the mandatory naps on a Sunday afternoon. After church, after the Sunday lunch, everyone had to take a nap. This was the most unendurable punishment my young mind could think of. So, I would always manage to sneak out of the house without my parents noticing. I would take my bicycle and ride into the nearby Black township. There I just conversed with the people, I testified to them in my simplicity, so to speak. Even many years later, when I meet some of those people, we would still have a wonderful dialogue.

This spontaneous communion with the Sotho people of his home town grew into a desire to carry the Christian message into the mountainous land of Lesotho, something that he eventually decided to do when, at eighteen years of age, his physical condition once again impacted his life in a remarkable way:

In my matric year, when the draft was still in place, the doctor strongly advised that there was no way that I could be exposed to that kind of activity and, interestingly, the government accepted his recommendation and I never joined the army. This was another major setback for me as a person because I couldn't fight for my country like all of my friends were doing. Looking back, it was then that I really started focusing on things that truly matter to me. While I was studying, I joined the missionary association on campus and we did a lot of outreach and construction work in Lesotho. I felt that I could live out my beliefs and make a contribution; that my deficiencies wouldn't matter there.

Thus, Hennie's circumstances allowed him to escape the draft that was in place between 1966 and 1989, when the apartheid state was engaged in a bloody and controversial war over the territory of present-day Namibia.<sup>13</sup> This allowed him to live

<sup>13</sup> The South African Border War, also referred to as the Angolan Bush War, was closely intertwined with the Namibian War of Independence and the Angolan Civil War. Playing out against the larger background of the Cold War, South Africa disputed the rights towards Namibian independence claimed by the South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). The territory of Namibia (then known as South-West Africa) had been governed as a *de facto* fifth province of South Africa since the close of the II World War, when South Africa invaded German South-West Africa as a member of the Allied Forces (Shillington 2012).

out both his hopes of fostering understanding between Black and White and his lifelong dream to share the message of hope that Christianity had impressed on him personally, two endeavors that he combined during missionary work in Lesotho. Though this landlocked country is encircled by South African territory, its mountainous terrain makes it a challenge to traverse, and many of its inhabitants have little exposure to the ways of modern Western culture. It was on one of these "outreaches" that Hennie met his wife, a person who would become the second pillar around which his life would revolve:

When I was in university, I became Vice Chair of the Missionary Fellowship, and we built churches in Lesotho. For the first four years of my tertiary studies we would drive two Land Rovers into Lesotho, the inhospitable Lesotho. It was like the ox wagon journeys of old; sometimes the students had to secure the vehicle with rope just to be able to navigate the angled mountain tracks. That is where I met my wife. One specific June month in 1973 she was also a crewmember in one of these outreach programs. There we met each other, and the Lord gave us to each other.

This sincere effort to reach out to his fellow South Africans as a young man, along with his deep-rooted faith and the unwavering love and support of his wife, gave Hennie the strength of conviction to face two very testing events that fate would mete out later in his life:

I think the fact that I actively interacted with people from other cultures, with other habits and traditions from a young age gave me the capacity to positive-

ly encounter whatever life could throw at me. At this stage the really big challenges of my life were actually still far in the future. Here my wife and I were molded and prepared for the choices we would have to make later in our lives.

These challenges arose as a result of the unique existential nexus manifested by the person of Hennie in the time and place in which he lived his life. Looking back, one can almost see a direct line of causation running through these themes. Nonetheless, the shock of the events, as they happened, was such that it tested Hennie's resiliency and his familial relationships to the maximum. Though Hennie sincerely and actively sought to enrich the lives of poor rural Black people, he was eventually faced with two dilemmas that tested his moral fiber to the extreme and pushed the boundaries of his solidarity with both other Afrikaners and Black South Africans. The first of these was the adoption of a Xhosa boy who was born with severe fetal alcohol syndrome:

Themban's story is an exceptional one. My wife, Hanna, was the matron of the hostel and one of her duties was that, if one of the children was in hospital, she had to report back to his or her parents. So it happened that she had to go and visit a child one day. Hanna has an amazing love for children, indescribable. When she goes to the hospital, she never passes the ward where the very small children are cared for. On that day she visited the young ones as usual and saw a little boy standing in his cot with a swollen tummy, and he was extremely cross-eyed. She immediately felt a connection to the boy and, believe it or not, as she approached him, he opened his arms to let

her pick him up. The nurse told her Themban's story: A few days earlier a man had brought in a twin brother and sister, saying that he couldn't feed or house them. The girl later died because of malnutrition. She put him down and turned around to leave, but the encounter wouldn't stop haunting her.

A while later the boy was released from hospital and Hennie's wife bumped into his father outside. He said that he still could not feed the child. Hanna took him to the local supermarket and bought two weeks' worth of milk powder, saying that she would talk to a social worker about the possibility of providing food for the family. Their concern was, however, not abated as their householder, who knew the local Xhosa community well, told them that things were not going well in the household of Thukile, Themban's father. One day a pupil came running into Hennie's office and told him that Thukile was passed out drunk in the street. What was worse, Themban was running around in the traffic. Hennie immediately got in his car, picked up the boy, and took him home:

When Thukile eventually came to and started looking for his son, he naturally came to us and asked us to help him search for the boy. I told him that he didn't have to look any further because he's right here. And here he is up to this day.

After a long legal struggle, Hennie and Hanna eventually adopted Themban, who is currently thriving. Despite having severe fetal alcohol syndrome, he has surpassed all the doctors' expectations and is currently enrolled in Grade 8, which is the freshman stage of high school in the South

African education system. His biological father is also employed as a gardener by the van der Merwe's, which has had a positive effect on both his financial situation and peace of mind, as he gets to see his son thrive on a daily basis. Hennie's story would, however, not end here. Despite certain more conservative family members initially shunning Thembani's adoption, everyone eventually accepted his presence in the family. However, Hennie's personal commitment to reconciliation was to be tested again. His younger daughter, Elsa, had befriended a Black African man, with whom she came to be romantically involved. After hiding the budding relationship from her father for a while, the truth eventually came out. Elsa was planning to attend her partner's father's funeral in another part of the country, and when asked about her travels, she divulged everything:

Then she told me with tears in her eyes that she had a Black partner and their relationship was growing, and that this was the man that she was going to marry. She told me that he was everything that I ever taught her a good man should be; he just wasn't White.

This revelation tested the steel of a man who had devoted his life to equality and transformation, but his own acceptance of the situation was only the first obstacle he would face.

### The Grace of Acceptance

Hennie explains that, even in Thembani's case, the line between "us" and "them" was always clearly demarcated. Though he would often cross the line and share a few hours of his life with those on the

other side, having this trusted and taken-for-granted threshold pulled out from under his feet triggered a trying period of introspection:

It's easy to knock on a door, to enter, and be able to leave again after a while. The experience I had with Thembani was completely different than the situation with Wandile. Interestingly, my initial reaction to the situation was that it was completely unacceptable. There was a period of about six months during which I was the cause of a schism between myself and Elsa, and we used to have such a special bond. I struggled with this thing because I'm the one who's been reaching out all my life, but when it grabbed at me from the inside, I have to confess it wasn't easy. Hanna and I would drive to Elsa, various times, and ask her if she couldn't consider ending the relationship. Her answer to me was: "Daddy, this is the man I love, this is the man you taught me to look for because he has all the characteristics that you said a good man must have. You must get to know him because I'm not leaving him." Those were six months of tremendous introspection for me.

Apart from his own struggle with acceptance, Hennie, his wife, and his daughter faced the judgment of close family. Despite Hennie and Hanna's acceptance of, and eventual rejoicing in, the marriage of Elsa to Wandile, many of those nearest to Hennie refused to accept the situation. His son-in-law, André, refused to allow both Thembani and Wandile in his home, causing Hennie to lose regular contact with his elder daughter and his grandson. Other relationships also suffered. For example, while his father accepted the situation reluctantly, his mother, after whom Elsa was named, never made peace with it:

My mother always held me responsible for this marriage. That was her way of coping. On various occasions she told me that if I hadn't raised my daughter in a certain way, to make room for all people in life and to treat everyone equally, this never would have happened. Many times she asked, "When are you going to place Thembani in foster care?" It was hard for her to accept that he was here to stay, like my daughters, and that I loved him just as much.

Hennie's mother removed all photographs of them from her house, and their relationship remains strained, though things are slowly but surely improving. André is also starting to change his hard-line attitude, conscious of the pain his wife feels at being estranged from her parents and sister. Whatever the situation may be, Hennie is optimistic that all of these struggles are obstacles necessary to the development of a more sincere level of humanity and understanding for all involved, and that he has been fortunate to see one of the more hopeful possibilities of South Africa's future play out on a micro scale within his own lifeworld. He is adamant that he has been guided up to this point by a higher hand, and that, whatever the consequences may be, he will continue trusting in the path he feels that he has been set upon by destiny:

I see the workings of the Higher Hand in all of this. Why did He make me the way I am? So that I, an Afrikaner from the Free State, have always felt differently and acted differently towards my Black friends? Why did He send me to the missionary field? I've come to the conclusion that He has been preparing me from birth for that which lay

ahead. Because the Bible says that God will never test you beyond your limits, in other words, He believed that it was within my abilities to struggle through this challenge and arrive on the other side with His support. And I am on the other side now. My daughter is happily married and Wandile is my son, just like Thembani is my son. And where we initially stood alone, just me, Hanna, and Elsa, I can now happily see how far we've come on the road to reconciliation as a family.

Hennie's story offers a remarkable account of humanity in a rapidly transforming society, which is often a chaotic and frightening place. The fact that Hennie and his family drew on love, faith, and hope to overcome a situation that would have been deemed apocalyptic a generation earlier indicates the extent to which certain South Africans have embraced their newfound humanity and expanded identity. The fact that these deep-seated values are universal is what has made possible the understanding between and indeed union of superficially different cultural groups that makes this story stand out as a message of hope towards a future of acceptance and cooperation. Although situations differ and people have varied ideas regarding the way forward in a multicultural country like South Africa, the fact remains that we are all bound by the law of Ubuntu. This predominantly African idea states that a person is a person through other people and that our daily interactions with each other mold the eventual character of humanity. Hennie's story serves as inspiration towards living out this ideal through accepting the choices and lifestyles of others and reminding us that we are not that different after all.

## Conclusion

This article argued for the development of an integral approach to sociological practice that takes into consideration the various subjectively constituted, intersubjectively constructed, and objectively given dimensions that characterize our experience of everyday life in general and social reality in particular. Section *Ontological and Epistemological Considerations* introduces an integral ontological and epistemological framework suited to this task, while sections *Theoretical Foundation* and *Methodological Approach* respectively outline theoretical and methodological matrices that are compatible with this framework as implemented during a recent study of a single individual's experience of transformation in his private and professional life. The strength of the integral framework is argued to lie in the fact that no major new developments on the theoretical and methodological levels are needed to put it into practice. As a science, sociology already possesses a corpus that is diverse enough to be implemented integrally, with only slight modifications needed to synthesize a context-specific theoretical and methodological matrix that fulfills the meta-theoretical requirements set out in section *Ontological and Epistemological Considerations*. Section *The Case of Hennie van der Merwe* illustrates a recent application of the integral framework during a study of the everyday life of an Afrikaner schoolteacher in post-apartheid South Africa. By crafting an integral theoretical framework out of the social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz and the work of Pierre Bourdieu, coupled with a contextualizing historicist approach and the first-hand experience of the re-

searchers, a multi-dimensional account is generated of this man's everyday experience of life within a transforming social milieu. Apart from the data, which is of interest within the context of any multicultural contemporary society, the article mainly represents an attempt at moving towards a solution to the various paradigmatic conflicts within contemporary sociology. It does so by providing a possible alternative to the standoff between constructivism and positivism, or subjectivity and objectivity, which faces social scientists today. Finally, going about the activity of sociological research in the way advocated by this article allows for the interconnected nature of all facets of social reality to come to the fore. By not limiting the investigatory focus to either individual agency, collective tendencies, or social structure, it becomes possible to see more clearly how individual experience both underlies and draws on socially constructed understandings, while simultaneously reciprocally interacting with the material environment, which simultaneously serves as the ground of embodied reality, as well as the repository of its consequences. We hope that further developing such an integral framework for sociological practice may empower both sociologists and the people they study. This can come about through ensuring that research is not carried out blindly in the hopes of strengthening the researcher's favored theoretical dogma, while people's lives are treated with the respect they deserve, as well as the ongoing consciousness that what is being investigated is not some empirical fact isolated from experience and consequence, but the very essence of what it means to be human and what it may come to mean in the future.

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