The Narrative Study
of Lives in Central South Africa

by

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CONTENTS

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The Narrative Study of Lives: Editorial Notes

Each article in this Special Edition of *Qualitative Sociology Review* opens a window on everyday reality in central South Africa. The articles all originated from research in the program *The Narrative Study of Lives*, situated in the Department of Sociology at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. These windows on reality display the narrative as a methodological tool in qualitative research and reveal its potential to open up better understandings of everyday experience. We also reflect on the epistemological journey towards the

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unwrapping and breaking open of meaning. Narratives are not the only tools available to sociologists in our quest to understand and interpret meaning. But, when it comes to deep understanding, narratives are particularly effective in opening up more intricate levels associated with emotions, feelings, and subjective experiences.

All the contributions in this Special Edition reflect on the methodological and epistemological practice of using narratives to understand, sociologically. They also all reveal dimensions of the same concrete reality—the contemporary society of central South Africa. We invite readers to engage with each individual article, which provides a vignette—a brief episode—of a larger reality. We also invite you to engage with the entire collection, through which a more detailed and clearer picture of the larger reality will emerge.

Understanding through Qualitative Research

In their introduction to *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2011:3-4), Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln point out that the aim of qualitative research is to increase our understanding of social reality through the use of materials—such as accounts of personal experience, introspection, the life-story,

interviews, artefacts, and various texts—to describe/understand routine and exceptional moments and meanings in people's lives. It is particularly towards the understanding, description, and use of "exceptional moments and meanings" that this Special Edition of the journal turns. John Creswell (2013:44) shares the desire to unwrap exceptional moments and meanings when he talks about being "sensitive to the people and places under study," to generating "complex descriptions and interpretations of the problem," and to uncovering the "meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem." Most readers will agree that qualitative data should lead to rich descriptions, fruitful explanations, and new integrations. We trust that this Special Edition will achieve these aspirations.

Understanding through Narratives

Few methods of data collection capture context, meaning, experience, subjectivity, the lifeworld, reflexivity, and action as effectively as narratives. When people tell coherent and meaningful stories, embedded in a particular context, they reveal to us as researchers insights into our own, as well as other people's experiences. They provide accounts of how particular phenomena came to be what they are, of how those phenomena take on different meanings in different contexts, and of how individuals do/perform/constitute social life.

> A narrative captures the importance of context, the meaningfulness of human experience, thought, and speech within time and place; it provides opportunity to understand implicit as well as explicit rationales for action within a holistic framework…the

narrative approach is seeking comprehensiveness of understanding within the individual case. [Bazeley 2013:342]

In *The Narrative Study of Lives* program, we mostly analyze several narratives that focus on a particular issue in order to access the multiple meanings that people attach to it. Several research participants would share their life stories in keeping with the notion that "narrative understanding is a dynamic process, and narrative meaning accrues by degrees" (Popova 2015:n.p.). The linear unfolding of events is almost always constructed by narrators over multiple interviewing sessions. Multiple narrative sessions create a mosaic in which individual elements are pieced together to reconstruct singular events or to constitute a whole picture. Seldom is it possible to assemble a picture of the "full reality" in one session. Sometimes our hermeneutic journey towards understanding—our reconstructions of other people's constructions—involves fewer narrators. The first two articles in this Special Edition are examples of this: the first is an exploration of two life stories collected a decade apart and which focus on experiences of hardship; the second article explores the lifeworld of a single narrator. Both of these articles are situated in the sociology of everyday life. The rest of the articles involve several narrators reflecting on the specific issues in their lifeworlds.

The very essence of life-story research (especially in as far as narrative inquiry, life history, and oral history are concerned) provides an epistemological key to a wide scope of knowledge of everyday reality, indigenous knowledge, cultural transmission, and community engagement. Life-story data can,

however, never simply be accepted as "unmediated representations of social realities," as Atkinson and Delamont (2009:316) caution. For this reason, all the articles in this Special Edition attempt to execute a double reading: the reading of research participants' narratives against a reading from the background of the empirical reality within which participants are embedded. Researchers within the program of *The Narrative Study of Lives* always need to engage in a reflexive process to demonstrate how narrative realities that were unwrapped through life story research coincide with historical truths, and how they are logically consistent with other forms of understanding of social reality. Ken Plummer (2001) agrees with this view when he contextualizes the use of narratives as:

> getting close to living human beings, accurately yet imaginatively picking up the way they express their understandings of the world around them, perhaps providing an analysis of such expressions, presenting them in interesting ways, and being self-critically aware of the immense difficulties such tasks bring. [p. 2]

Although written a few decades ago, John Spradley's (1979) statement on why narrative research offers great potential resonates with our aim for the collection of articles in this Special Edition:

> I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. [p. 34]

Understanding the South African Context through the Narrative Study of Lives

It is now more than two decades since South Africa transformed itself from being an apartheid prison and arch-pariah to a widely acclaimed example of the potential for a new humanity. Few countries were more despised by the international community than the apartheid state formed by the National Party of South Africa when it came into power in 1948. Institutionalized and legally enshrined racism was to provide the basis for people living in separation and isolation. A person's race determined where she/he could live, and also what education, medical care, occupation, social services, legal protection, and property rights she/he would be entitled to. In the wider context of the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 and the approach of the end of the Cold War, South Africa negotiated a new dispensation under the leadership of Nelson Mandela and F. W. de Klerk. In April 1994, the first democratic elections took place and South Africa was finally free.

But, the legacy of the past continues into the present. Although South Africa is now a country with a constitution lauded as one of the most enlightened in the world, it is more than ever a country that harbors inequality and inequity. In her introduction to the comprehensive coverage on life-story research in the SAGE "Benchmarks in Social Research Methods," Barbara Harrison (2009:XXIII-XXIX) argues that a number of factors herald a growth in research that is based on narratives. Most of these factors are particularly relevant to the context of South Africa's

post-democracy phase, which started in 1994. The factors include an awareness of the role that oral history and narrative accounts can play in contributing towards a democratization of knowledge: How do we remember and experience the past? How are injustices of the past still part of our lives in the present? How do we deal with transition and trauma? How do we experience, and celebrate, cultural diversity and everyday aspects of our identities?

Traditional documents of life very often did not incorporate the voices of the majority of South Africa's people. Apartheid suppressed their voices by relegating entire racial groups to the economic and cultural margins of society. Through political

exclusion their experiences were hidden from most historical accounts and their views seldom played a role in representations and reconstructions of reality. In step with new horizons and freedoms, everyday discourses on issues that reflect everyday life as explored by researchers and postgraduate students in the program *The Narrative Study of Lives* contribute to greater inclusivity, and provide more opportunities for political and cultural participation and self-expression. The contributions in this Special Edition of QSR hope to provide broad brushstrokes of aspects of life in Central South Africa. The voices contained in the articles open up deeper levels of experience of "ordinary people." May it also lead to a better understanding of these experiences.

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Between Enslavement and Liberation. Narratives of Belonging from Two Farm Workers in Rural South Africa

Abstract   More than two decades after the genesis of South Africa's aspirational democracy in 1994, deep-seated forms of inequality still exist. These are explored in the narratives of two farm workers who tell of events and experiences in their everyday lives. In probing the everyday, we turn the spotlight on phenomena, events, and experiences that are simultaneously familiar yet perplexing, taken-for-granted yet questionable, tangible yet elusive. As a backdrop to the sociology of the everyday, key ideas from three social theorists—Randall Collins, Jeffrey Alexander, and Vanessa May— guide our interpretation of excerpts from the farm workers' narratives. The farm workers' stories are also juxtaposed with reflections on the socio-political, economic, and emotional contexts of slavery and serfdom.

Keywords   Interpretive Sociology of the Everyday; Narratives of Belonging; Farm Workers in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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The Everyday as a Window on Social Reality

In the surge of transformation following the iconic leadership of Nelson Mandela, South Africans reached eagerly for the freedoms of a long-awaited democracy. But, many were left behind, trapped in old, solidified structures of inequality. This phenomenon is uncovered in the narratives of two farm workers who have never moved from the farms where they were born and where they spent their lives in one rural district in the Eastern Cape Province. We turn our gaze towards the small-scale issues of the everyday and use as a point of departure: "the level of the everyday life of people amongst other people, together with them, side by side with them, in cooperation, competition, conflict, or struggle with them, in love or hatred, but never alone, in isolation" (Sztompka 2008:24).

The everyday is a sphere of natural, spontaneous experience. It is best interpreted in terms of continual creations where reality is constituted by individuals who actively contribute to the establishment of their social structures. We propose that the everyday is one of the best starting points for understanding the relationship between self and society—between individual experience and broader social reality. By focusing on the close, personal, familiar of the everyday, we aim to unwrap the structure and effect of society in its larger formations.

We also aim to access deeper nuances of the experience of *belonging* by focusing on personal reflections of individuals on their everyday experience. Following Yuval-Davis (2006), we draw a distinction between belonging as a discursive resource that is, on the one hand, closely related to identity, claims of social inclusion, and a political experience—and on the other hand, place-belongingness.

Three Theories for Engaging with the Everyday

Key ideas of three social theorists—Randall Collins, Jeffrey Alexander, and Vanessa May—guide our interpretive sociology of the everyday. Each of them offers distinct ways of thinking about and analyzing the everyday experience of ordinary people living ordinary lives.

Randall Collins and Microsociology

Randall Collins (2004) refers to his work as radical microsociology. A prominent aspect of radical microsociology is that it takes cognizance of and departs from the only directly observable reality in the constitution of social reality, namely, the individual. For Collins, any macro-phenomenon such as society only exists in as far as it emerges from a composite series of micro-experiences. The basic micro-unit of analysis is the encounter, which is a shared conversational reality revolving around negotiation and exchange of resources. Collins proposes the concept of *ritual interaction chains* to capture how empirical reality is shaped through and embodies an endless chain of personal experiences, forms of interaction, bargaining, agreement, or/and resistance. From this standpoint the individual experience of reality is a pivotal point for analyzing the social.

Jeffrey Alexander and the Construction of Cultural Trauma

In his book, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (2012), Jeffrey Alexander investigates social suffering by addressing exploitation, violence, war, massacres, and ethnic and racial strife. What makes his approach different is that, whilst remaining sensitive to the materiality and pragmatics of social suffering, he rejects materialist and pragmatic approaches for one that is situated in a cultural sociology. He connects personal-symbolic-emotional representations—such as belonging—to collective processes that center on meaning-making. Alexander acknowledges that individual suffering, rejection, othering, and marginalization are of great

Jan K. Coetzee & Asta Rau

Between Enslavement and Liberation. Narratives of Belonging from Two Farm Workers in Rural South Africa

human, moral, and intellectual importance and that the cultural construction of a collective trauma, such as the experience of apartheid, is fuelled by individual experiences. His focus is, however, on the threat of suffering on the collective identity rather than on the individual identity. Traumas become collective if and when they are conceived as wounds to the social identity. The important question is not *Who did this to me?*, but *What group did this to us?* The construction of shared cultural trauma does not happen automatically, it depends on collective processes of cultural interpretation. One of these processes (apart from rituals, commemorations, and meetings) is storytelling.

Vanessa May and the Sociology of Personal Life

Vanessa May, in her edited volume *Sociology of Personal Life* (2011a), emphasizes the relationship between the self (the fluid personal sphere of the present, including factors such as family life and home, going to work, taking part in financial transactions, engaging in friendships, and experiencing power) and society (the more fixed social structures of the past). Our sense of self is relational because we construct it in relationship with others and in relation to others. Thus, the self and society are mutually constitutive. May (2011b:368) sees belonging as crucial aspect of being a person and defines it as "a sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings." Belonging implies that one has created a sense of identification with one's social, relational, and material surroundings (Miller 2003).

On the epistemological level these three ways of looking at the everyday contribute three discernible

elements to our analysis. Randall Collins contributes the notion of ritual interaction chains, which are formed through personal experience and embedded in negotiation, exchange of resources, and shared conversational reality. Jeffrey Alexander links personal-symbolic-emotional representations, such as belonging, to collective processes of meaning-making. He focuses on how suffering and trauma impact on collective identity rather than individual identity. Like Collins and Alexander, Vanessa May also recognizes the mutually constitutive relationship between self and society. May's particular focus is on the fluid personal sphere of the present in relationship to the more fixed social structures of the past. She sees belonging as a sense of ease between a person and his or her world.

The South African Social Structure: The Context for the Two Life Stories

Our proposal that the meaning, nature, and impact of the everyday are revealed through individual experience of and reflection on belonging leads us to participants—Abraham Wessels and Henry Jooste.[1] To interpret their narratives, we need to contextualize them in a brief overview of South African social structure.

The two research participants come from the complex reality of post-democratic South Africa. It is two decades since South Africa transformed itself from an internationally labeled arch-pariah to a political "miracle" (Waldmeir 1997) of the late 20th century. This was, of course, the transformation from

the universally condemned apartheid state to the triumphant victory of democracy; from brutal oppression and grave injustices to worldwide optimism about the prospect of a "new humanity" (see: Cornell and Panfilio 2010).

But, the euphoria surrounding the transformative revolution and the elimination of inequality gradually gave way to the realization that the gap between rich and poor in South Africa is widening. A report published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (Leibbrandt et al. 2010) says that income inequality in South Africa gradually increased between 1993 (the year before the country's widely acclaimed dawn of democracy) and 2008.[2] Nowadays the income inequality levels in the country are among the highest in the world.[3] The correlation between race and poverty remains strong and wealth remains distributed along racial lines: Africans are poorer than Coloreds, who are poorer than Indians, who are poorer than Whites (Leibbrandt et al. 2010).

The ANC came to power with a radical agenda and an overwhelming mandate to redress historical inequities. But, shortly after coming into power, the new ANC government was accused of opting for policy of little initial change with the promise of cautious acceleration at some time in the future. This was partly due to a cautious, lawyerly belief in reconciliation and partly due to a significant cho-

rus from an influential White press propagating the need to retain business confidence. When workers claimed higher wages and threatened with strike action, the fear was expressed—even by the then newly elected President Nelson Mandela—that investors' confidence would be damaged. Due to this caution the pressing land issue was dealt with by a cumbersome system of tribunals. And the budget failed to allocate enough to do justice to the ANC's ambitious Reconstruction and Development Programme.

Following shortly after the brave, successful resistance to apartheid, there appeared to be a fear that any error could lead to a path of collapse so often found in the rest of Africa. Already in the first year of democracy this attitude towards governance and restitution, action and caution, revolution and order led to the use of the phrase "slave mentality" among critics of the ANC. In an article in *The Guardian*, Jonathan Steele (1994:18) calls this "an inordinate desire to be accepted and legitimized by showing the movement can conform to the old establishment's rules." In essence, this view concurs with Frantz Fanon's argument in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1968) that White racism damaged the Black person's pride to such an extent that the victim's only unquantifiable aspiration was to be accepted by the White society. The phrase "slave mentality" provides an important connection to the broad context within which the narratives of belonging of Abraham Wessels and Henry Jooste are situated.

Many analysts agree that in contemporary South Africa the political victory of the ending of apartheid corresponds to Black political empowerment. The

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[1] Pseudonyms.

[2] The report uses national survey data from 1993, 2000, and 2008.

[3] The RSA is regarded as currently having the highest pre-tax Gini coefficient in the world.

Jan K. Coetzee & Asta Rau

Between Enslavement and Liberation. Narratives of Belonging from Two Farm Workers in Rural South Africa

reality is, however, that although at the ballot box an African nationalist organization (the ANC) was elected, the mass of Black South Africans remain disenfranchised in the broader sense of the word. Nigel Gibson (2011:114) calls it "the inadequacies of political emancipation." He connects this situation with a quotation from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963):

Now it must be said that the masses show themselves totally incapable of appreciating the long way they have come. The peasant who goes on scratching out a living from the soil, and the unemployed man who never finds employment do not manage, in spite of public holidays and flags, new and brightly-coloured though they may be, to convince themselves that anything has really changed in their lives. [p. 136]

Not only did Black political empowerment not spread to the masses in the sense of an all-encompassing emancipation, it is also true that post-apartheid South Africa failed to address economic inequality. Much of the talk about structural change in the economy has been limited to espousing the merits of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). This was subsequently changed to Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BB-BEE) (Andreasson 2010:219) when government recognized that only a small Black capitalist class benefitted from BEE. Sadly this is also true for the newer BBBEE. The new economic trend among many leaders of the erstwhile liberation movement was to buy into national and multinational corporate capitalism. Because "the quality of life of the poorer 50 percent deteriorated consider-

ably in the post-apartheid period" (Terreblanche 2003:28) this "co-option" led to them being seen as working hand-in-glove with an exploitative capitalist force of domination.

Decades ago Frantz Fanon (1968:165) criticizes the nationalist project and national liberation when he proclaims that "the single party is the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie." Although he said this a quarter of a century before the ANC came into power, it is remarkably applicable to the ANC. The dominance of a neoliberal paradigm shortly before the ANC came into power and a gradual move away from the Freedom Charter were "ethical shift[s] away from ideas of the social and public good" (Gibson 2011:77).

Forms of Enslavement and Institutionalized Oppression

Slavery is the most explicit form of unfreedom: a slave is the property of another. In the 21st century, there is general condemnation of slavery and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has, since its inception in 1956, been fighting to uphold and maintain the universal abolition of slavery, the prevention of any new slave trade, as well as the recurrence of any practices or embedded institutions that smack of or seem similar to slavery (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights n.d.). Though it is widely assumed that in most Western countries there is very little left of the dark past of institutionalized slave trade and labor, the modern world gets occasionally reminded of its existence and practice.

Forced labor can also be regarded as enslavement. On December 16, 2013 the United Kingdom Home Secretary, Theresa May, promised to get tougher on the slave drivers responsible for forcing thousands into servitude in the UK. She estimated the number of slaves to be more than 10,000 and proclaimed: "most people think slavery finished years and years ago, but sadly so many people in our country are slaves" (May 2013). The African continent, next to Asia and the Pacific, is particularly tarnished by large numbers of slaves and forced laborers. The organization Anti-Slavery (n.d.) defines forced labor as "any work or services which people are forced to do against their will under the threat of some form of punishment" and estimates that 3.7 million people in Africa are subjected to slavery, forced labor, or debt bondage. The presence of forced labor in the global economy implicates a huge proportion of the world's population by their purchases or consumption.

Another widely occurring practice, bordering on slavery, is *debt bondage*. Debt bondage occurs when someone works for a lender to pay off a debt. The person pledges his/her personal services (or those of someone under his/her control, such as a child) as security for a debt, but these services are often not well-defined or delineated. Debt bondage is similar to slavery because the debt is often indefinite and permanent and sometimes even handed down as debt slavery to following generations (cf. *bonded labor* [Anti-Slavery n.d.]).

The line becomes finer in those cases where *individuals are given to others*, without the right to refuse. Where a woman is given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or livestock or in kind to

her parents (or other guardians), similar dimensions of exchange are found to cases of debt bondage. The effects of the indebtedness result sometimes even in the right to transfer a wife to another person or to exploit a child or a youth in as far as using this child or youth as a source of labor (Woolman and Bishop 2007:596-597).

One of the commonly occurring forms of bondage in existence at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries is the condition of *serfdom*. This specific (and often subtle) form of unfreedom is tightly woven into the life stories of Abraham Wessels and Henry Jooste and into their experience of belonging. Serfdom refers back to feudal times when agricultural workers were tied to working on a particular estate. Serfdom comes into being and becomes institutionalized over an extended period of time. The resultant condition, custom, or agreement emerges from processes of "intersubjective sedimentation" (Berger and Luckmann 1967:85-86), a concept that captures the gradual geographical processes of the layering of the earth's crust. These gradual processes occur via normative systems that are built up through communal experiences and consciousness around work, life, dependency, responsibility, and freedom. Through observations, words, and deeds—in other words, through routine and repetitive everyday processes—serfdom takes on an objective reality. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's (1967:85-86) phrase "objectivated and objectified sedimentations" are applicable to the process and to the embodiment of serfdom.

An elementary definition of a slave reads: "a person who is the legal property of another and is forced

Jan K. Coetzee & Asta Rau

Between Enslavement and Liberation. Narratives of Belonging from Two Farm Workers in Rural South Africa

to obey them" (OUP 2002). Although a serf is not the legal property of another, he/she finds him/herself bound by law, custom, agreement, or lack of viable alternatives to live and labor on land belonging to the other person. In the erstwhile apartheid dispensation, another factor contributed to this immobility: apartheid legislation (particularly the Group Areas Act) allocated the right to live in a particular geographical area to members of a particular racial group and designed measures to control influx and arrest the free movement of people. Even before this, in the early days of colonization, the situation of living and laboring on someone else's land has become a part of the life-world of large numbers of South Africans—both master and servant. The extended period during which social position, bargaining power, privileges, and duties were objectified and sedimented lead to clearly crystallized social patterns and sanctioned behaviors. The result is that both master and servant became structurally bound by the practices associated with serfdom. The serf may appear to be free to change her/his status, thus her/his labor seems to be performed voluntarily: it may even appear as if an acceptable exchange for the labor was negotiated. But, the structural reality of serfs renders them powerless because they occupy a social position that does not allow them to change their conditions. The serf's lived experiences are often severely constrained by the social conventions that result from deeply ingrained social patterns, practices, and accepted behaviors. But, the possibilities to break out of the bondage and often abject conditions are limited by social structures in South Africa, particularly those formed in the period after World War II.

Almost 60 years ago, in 1956, The United Nations' Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and the Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery proclaimed in Article 1: "The parties commit to abolish and abandon debt bondage, serfdom, servile marriage and child servitude" (see: http://treaties.un.org). South Africa has not formally ratified this convention, but in articles 232 and 233 of this country's constitution it is stated that South Africa's process of constitutional interpretation will be informed by the international community's accepted guidelines:

> Art. 232. Customary international law is law in the Republic unless it is inconsistent with the Constitution or an act of Parliament.

> Art. 233. When interpreting any legislation, every court must prefer any reasonable interpretation of the legislation that is consistent with international law over any alternative interpretation that is inconsistent with international law. [Department of Justice and Constitutional Development 2009: 139-140]

So emphatic is *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* about the principle of freedom, integrity, and security of the individual that no sooner than setting out the Founding Provisions of the state, its constitution, citizenship, relational symbols, and languages it moves to the *Bill of Rights*. This section spells out the equality of everyone before the law, human dignity, and that everyone has the right to live. Article 13 clearly and unequivocally reads:

> No one may be subjected to slavery, servitude or forced labour. [Department of Justice and Constitutional Development 2009:8].

By allocating this issue such a prominent position high up on the list of a total of 243 articles (some with multiple sub-sections) that make up *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, the legislators clearly expressed their intention to consolidate and affirm the democratic values of human freedom, equality, and dignity. There is no doubt about the condemnation of practices of slavery, servitude, or forced labor, but there is less clarity on what the law can do to root them out.

The Narrators

In a similar fashion as Charles van Onselen (1996) reflects on apartheid era in South Africa by looking at the life story of a single Black patriarch in his book *The Seed is Mine*, this article aims to illustrate the experiences of two individuals and show how they look back on a life of inclusion and exclusion, freedom and oppression, exploitation and equality, power and powerlessness. The spotlight is on Abraham Wessels and Henry Jooste, two participants who have much in common. They are formally classified as "Colored"[4] and their home language is Afrikaans. Both had very little formal schooling yet are well-respected in their community. Both are very active members of their church; Abraham often participates in sermons. Both men lost their wives a number of years prior to our conversations. Significantly, from their childhood

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[4] An official category for people of mixed race.

both men are still living on the same farms where they grew up and gradually became drawn into the world of work as farm laborers. At the time of the interviews Abraham Wessels was 68 years old, and Henry Jooste was 70. Compared to many other South Africans, Abraham is not very poor. With the assistance of his employer—whose father employed Abraham initially—he obtained a *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP) house in the nearby town. These houses are given to historically disadvantaged South Africans who qualify for them through a means-based test. Abraham rents the house out and earns an additional income from that. He also owns a small truck (in South Africa referred to as a *bakkie*). Henry, on the other hand, does not own any fixed property and appears to be less financially secure. Abraham and Henry live on neighboring farms in the Graaff Reinet district, a rural area in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

Our lengthy discussions with Abraham and Henry were conducted respectively during 2004/2005 (ten years after South Africa's democracy) and 2014 (twenty years thereafter). They were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Key issues of interest for the researchers are: What light does Abraham and Henry's stories shed on participation within their social lifeworld, on their perceptions regarding their right to live in a world that is meaningful to them as individuals? What do their narratives tell us about their aspirations, visions of transformation, and their capacity to move in a direction that they define as desirable? What do their stories tell us about belonging? Belonging is multidimensional (Antonsich 2010:664-669). Accordingly,

Jan K. Coetzee & Asta Rau

Between Enslavement and Liberation. Narratives of Belonging from Two Farm Workers in Rural South Africa

the discussions with Abraham and Henry touched on many elements associated with belonging. By telling us about their *everyday* experiences, they revealed perceptions on and experiences of their status in their community, their emotional attachments, and their affiliation with place, groups, and culture.

Dimensions of Belonging

Several themes or dimensions of belonging were distilled from the series of conversations with the two farm workers. To illustrate these, we selected and present quotes that emerge repeatedly in the narratives and are thus representative of—rather than an exception to—the lives that Abraham and Henry live and narrate.

Identity

During our interview sessions we asked Abraham and Henry to tell us what they would say if somebody asked them: *Who is Abraham Wessels?* or *Who is Henry Jooste?* We expected that they would quite easily elaborate on themselves as individuals—on their expectations, their existential positions, their personal trajectories, and on what they regard as their personal qualities. But, neither of them reveals much in terms of a personal, intimate assessment of themselves. They also do not express sentiments or views on their personalities, nor any deeply individual preferences and convictions. Although both are members of South African society, they reveal very little that indicates a deep-seated sense of belonging or identity at this wider relational level. In both cases, their responses reveal

a strong correlation between their views of themselves and their ability to live in peace with other people.

Abraham Wessels

It is essential, in Abraham's worldview, to be closely connected to others:

> I am…and my attitude towards every other human, Colored, and also Bantu, and also White man…is to live in peace. One cannot live on one's own, you have to have a family.

For Abraham, intersubjective emotional bonds are formed through talking, and this shared conversational reality (Collins 2004) builds and shapes the central values of his world—loving relationships and an embodiment of peace:

> Because I'll…even if we can't, we have to make a family. When you talk, you'll be building yourself a family. Even if somebody comes here and I don't know him, we have to talk to each other to make a family. When you talk, you are building for yourself a family. When you talk, there is life and there is love.

> As I say to you, Mister, I feel like living in peace with everyone. It is all that I feel to do. To remain like this. And there is no other way.

For Abraham, essentially a serf, his whole working life has been spent as a farm worker on one farm; there has clearly not been room for much choice in the more mundane sense of the word. Choices that are within his power have to do with his atti-

tude and the choices he makes in this regard create a space for the peace he so desires:

> It depends on how you organize your life. It is just, I always say so, you need to let your love shine. Your humility must shine. Your patience must shine like a light.

Love, humility, and patience—all injunctions of Christianity—are engaged by Abraham to situate himself in relationship to his world. His belief that these qualities will attract others to him and form a community around him illustrates what May (2011a) means when she says that a sense of self is relational—it is constructed in relationship with others and in relation to others. The bonds so formed create community and thus also shape social structures in Abraham's everyday life:

> I will tell you, Mister, it is just as I said: only humility and patience, and also love. Because if I am like this, I draw others to me. And they will create a community with me. Yes, I will draw him closer.

Abraham's narrative points to a complex and intricate interweaving of his choice of love, humility, and patience as right ways to be in the world—and his understanding that these qualities will guarantee almost endless reciprocity of goodwill from his employer, to the extent that it will be extended to Abraham's children even after his death. His very assumption that his children will *need* such reciprocity points to the repetitive, intergenerational aspects of serfdom. Or, to follow Berger and Luckmann (1967:85-86), to the "intersubjective sedimentation" of a social condition via normative systems

built up over long periods of time through shared experiences and consciousness around work, life, dependency, responsibility, and freedom:

> Now, when I'm no longer there, and my children would come [to his current employer] to, say, ask for a piece of bread, then the master will say: "Yes, your dad was patient, he was humble and he was somebody who always continued. Come, let me give you a piece of bread."

Many aspects of Abraham's sense of belonging have to do with conforming and the resultant "sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings" (May 2011b:368). His experience also reflects something of Alexander's (2012) idea that personal-symbolic-emotional representations, such as belonging, shape relationships at the collective level. We argue that fitting in is key to survival in communities of serfdom:

> I mean, you don't know where you fit and where you will be happy. Because each group has its own politics. Now you need to try to fit in, in order to be a happy man.

Particularly for Abraham, who wants to live in peace and be happy, interrupting the *status quo* is not an option. The act of fitting in appears to be even more important to him, perhaps, than the actualities of what he has to fit into. This resonates with the idea of being enslaved, of having no real choice but to accept, so that the greatest merit is to be had in accepting graciously. And the next link in this ritual interaction chain (Collins 1981:985; Coetzee 2001:129) is to be accepted in turn:

Jan K. Coetzee & Asta Rau

Between Enslavement and Liberation. Narratives of Belonging from Two Farm Workers in Rural South Africa

At each end, when I arrive, then I will feel completely happy. There's nothing wrong. Then it feels as if…shall I say to remain in the stream. I need to stay close to the stream. Now, to neglect or to turn off, will be to no avail. I need to stay inside.

Henry Jooste

In Henry's narratives, one can also see the workings of ritual interaction chains (Collins 2004), formed through personal experience and embedded in negotiation, exchange of resources, and a shared conversational reality. Like Abraham, Henry also speaks of the importance of extending love to others, but this love is more focused on, and manifests in, material help. His good reputation and position in his community pivots on helping as a material manifestation of love:

Yes, you have to love the other person, Mister.

My character, yes, Mister. I have to love them and they have to talk well about me because I have to help them and they have to help me also. Yes, you need to help the other one. Yes, and one day when I'm no longer there, they must say: "The uncle who helped us so much is now gone."

That is how I want to be remembered: that I helped others.

There is much in Henry's narratives to suggest that poverty overshadows his self-image. His identity is grounded, literally, in a consciousness and experience of immobility—the plight of the serf. He communicates a very poignant passivity, almost helplessness, in the face of poverty:

Suffer, Mister, suffer… Pure suffering… That is how my life is.

Yes, Mister, because I have nothing. Even now, I am only here, where I had always been.

Place and Space

A significant focus of our series of interviews was to establish Abraham and Henry's views on the respective places where they live. Do they experience a sense of belonging to the space where they have lived their whole life? Do these experiences play a role in how they define their identities?

Yuval-Davis (2006) draws a distinction between belonging as a discursive resource that is, on the one hand, closely related to identity, claims of social inclusion, and a political experience, and on the other hand—place-belongingness. In the previous section, we explored the more discursive aspects of Abraham and Henry's identity formation and showed how they regard their personal qualities and ways of being in the world as leading to their social inclusion—their belonging. The latter concept—place-belongingness—refers to a sentiment of attachment to a particular physical place and of feeling at home there. In a phenomenological sense, "home" is a symbolic space of familiarity, emotional attachment, and security (Hooks 2009:213). Abraham and Henry live in farm cottages which are small yet decent and functional. They seem to have little attachment to these places. And significantly, neither of them refers to the farm where he has spent a lifetime—where he grew up and labored his entire working life—as a place

where he feels at home. If anything, both participants experience and portray feelings of strangeness, of not really being part of the place and space that they have occupied for so many years (Rumford 2013).

Abraham Wessels

A constant influence of Calvinistic dogma runs through Abraham's narratives, which is understandable given that he is very involved in his church. In the series of interviews, he emphasizes *earth* as being his temporary home. In effect, by assiduously deflecting any probes on his thoughts and feelings of being at home in his cottage and on the farm, he creates an eloquent silence around place-connectedness:

Mister, I will say just as the Word says: you don't have a place on earth. Your place is in heaven or it is under the earth. That is how they've always made the saying. Your place is not on earth. Your place is under the earth or it is in heaven. Now, as long as we are still here, it is our place. On earth. But still, we need to be discharged from the earth. We need to depart. Yes, Mister, we will not stay here forever. Then I have to go to the last little house [the grave]. The last place where I have to go.

There is a sense of rootedness in Abraham's narratives, but it remains in the realm of relationships. People are his places and his sense of belonging resides in them:

Now, as long as I can continue, Mister, I will continue. I feel now that I can continue. Yes, I also feel

happy. Still happy with myself and with the master, and with the people around me. I simply continue.

Abraham has already spoken of the grave as a last home-on-earth. Even in this regard his connection to the land has to do with people. His forbearers are buried on the farm so his link to the land is ancestral:

Mister, I always feel still happy. Where I am now, I still feel happy, otherwise I will not be able to. Because as the life is, we need to be happy where we are. And have to go with the flow. Here we grew up. Here they also died. My father and mother. And buried. Now I simply stay here.

Even though Abraham owns an RDP house in the township, he never speaks of it as a home: it is merely a resource for extra income. The idea of place-connectedness being related to ownership of land or property does not arise in his narratives: it is as if a lifetime of serfdom precludes this.

Henry Jooste

A means-test would no doubt qualify Henry for an RDP house, but he has never acquired one. As discussed in the earlier section on *The South African Social Structure*, the government's provision of housing for previously disadvantaged population groups has failed to reach a substantial proportion of the people who need homes. Unlike Abraham, Henry's words suggest that if he did have an RDP house, he would think of it as his home; as we interpret it, lack of ownership is clearly an issue that shapes Henry's perceptions and experience of place-connectedness:

Jan K. Coetzee & Asta Rau

Between Enslavement and Liberation. Narratives of Belonging from Two Farm Workers in Rural South Africa

No, this is not my permanent home. See, your permanent home is in town. Then you have a claim to a house, your own house. But, this house I can't give to my children. Because that is how I meant it: I want to work for my children. If I pass on, I want my children to be under a roof. You do the same, don't you, Mister? You won't leave your child just like that, without anything. Your child needs a house—in town. Of this house I was merely told: "This is your place." But, it is not my place. It doesn't belong to me. My child can't stay here.

The fact that Henry's child cannot stay (meaning, live permanently) on the farm echoes old restrictions during apartheid when the movement and residence of people of color were restricted by law and enforced by policing. Ironically, such restrictions find renewal because of the land restitution policies of post-apartheid transformation—which has seen many farm workers claim rights to land because of living and laboring on it for decades. Nowadays some farmers move laborers off their farms rather than risk any claims being leveraged by farm workers because they are born on the farm or resided there for an extended period of time. The power still lies in the hands of those who own the land, which are predominantly the Whites. In this regard, Henry is as powerless and dependent as any serf:

Sometimes it works like that [living in the new South Africa], sometimes it doesn't. I'm still under the White man. If he says that I must go, then I must go. When he comes in here and says: "You need to pack up!," then I have to, I have no choice. I have to leave and go and board in Graaff-Reinet. Knock together a *blikhokkie* [literally: a small cage of corru-

gated iron in someone's backyard or in an informal settlement], and move in there.

Jeffrey Alexander (2012) reminds us that events in the history of South Africa, particularly the experience of apartheid, constitute an example of a collective trauma that supersedes individual experiences. It can be argued that the trauma of disenfranchisement and of second-class citizenship is reproduced and reinforced for a whole segment of South Africans who failed to share in the benefits that accompanied democracy, and following every election thereafter. Collective processes of cultural interpretation (Alexander 2012) among poor South Africans have resulted in a critical mass of people who doubt the point of voting and who are angry at being powerless to bring about positive change. Henry's narratives reflect these collective traumas. He remains sunk in poverty, perennially a serf without a place to call his own; worse, he anticipates that these conditions will continue relentlessly down through successive generations:

I cannot leave my child just like that, empty. Now he has to struggle and he will ask: "Gee, old man! Check out how my dad worked with me." I don't have a house, I don't have a roof over my head. That isn't fair. I want my own house. Look how we voted here. For what are we voting? For nothing.

The meetings with both research participants took place on the farms where they grew up and lived their entire lives. They pointed out to us where they were from, where they moved to when the occasional relocation had to take place, and where important events took place. In all their narratives, the so-

cio-spatial traits of exclusion are clearly described. It is also written in the landscape where the big homestead of the farmer owner contrasts clearly with the small cottages of the workers. One cannot but to realize that belonging is a phenomenological experience of attachment and rootedness. On the other hand, aspects of belonging can also be conferred. Belonging is established through processes of negotiation and can be rejected, even violated, in ongoing struggles between rival cultures, between "us" and "them."

Religion

Coinciding with his view that a person's true and ultimate place is not on earth, Abraham is of the opinion that religion constitutes a way in which the individual negotiates everyday reality and ameliorates suffering.

Abraham Wessels

With all respect Abraham's dedication to Christian teachings, and the spiritual enlightenment shining in his narratives, it would be remiss if as researchers we did not point out that the Calvinistic principles, ethics, sanctioned behaviors, and even the promises of reward that underlie Abraham's narratives may perpetuate servitude:

It is thus like this: if we become one, then there is an opportunity of grace for us. One family. Then there's again an opportunity of grace. And we see each other and we know each other and we move together. Only on Sunday, at church, did I say: "If we look at the bees, they work." They work. They work together. Then I told them [there at church]: "If we look at the

bees, they work. The Lord wants us to work together. So that our deeds can be known." Yes, Mister, no, Mister! But, it can. If only we talk.

Once again, Abraham's narratives illustrate the potential of a shared conversational reality (Collins 2004) to bring about change: for Abraham, words become deeds, and the end reward of words-as-deeds is a gently negotiated reconciliation:

Talking can heal everything. Talking heals everything. Talking is a success. Talking is something very good because it always leads to a solution. But, if one isn't talking, nothing will be solved. Now, if you spoke and you move a little to one side, then you see: no, it did change.

When asked *Should a Christian suffer?* Abraham offers a direct reply. His answer promotes the view that religion provides the most efficient medium to the individual to counter all forms of harm and injustice whether these are biological, personal, collective, or institutional in nature:

Mister, no. Except if someone walks away from the Lord. But, if he has the Lord, he cannot [suffer]. Because the Lord adds. He gives to us. He helps us if, perhaps, we're in trouble. He does all for us. If I ask him in my prayers, then he solves everything.

Henry Jooste

Henry also abides by the belief in an omnipotent God:

Religion is very important. If you believe the Lord, Mister, then the Lord will give you everything—and he gives you grace as well.

Jan K. Coetzee & Asta Rau

Between Enslavement and Liberation. Narratives of Belonging from Two Farm Workers in Rural South Africa

But, Henry is clearer than Abraham on the link between being a Christian and suffering:

> If you don't do the right thing, the Lord will make that you suffer. A person has to suffer.

This poses a dilemma: since Henry suffers, he must have done something wrong. But, Henry's suffering is an everyday reality in his life and it is very much connected to his state of poverty—it cannot be argued that he brings it on himself. On the one hand, Henry laments the structural inequalities he experiences, but on the other hand he accepts that "the Lord will make that you suffer" and that because of the institutional suppression there was no other way to go. This pernicious form of unfreedom brings us to the next theme in the narratives.

Experiencing Suppression

In keeping with their views on identity and place-belongingness, both participants experience a strong sense of a boundary between themselves and their employers. Deeply embedded discourses and practices separate them from the farm owners. Both Abraham and Henry refer to their employer as "master" and both have experienced a lifetime of being subordinates in the workplace, of belonging to a mixed (and sometimes referred to as an inferior) race ("Colored"), and of being members of a disenfranchised racial group. Not being part of "them" and not feeling a sense of ownership of place lead to the absence of a feeling of belonging, as well as to a sense of being inferior.

Abraham Wessels

When asked if he feels suppressed as a member of the Colored population group,[5] Abraham answers in the affirmative. He then quickly brings an age-old and religiously-based argument to justify his suppression. His argument is not unlike the one perpetuating the caste system in India, which sanctions—almost guarantees—the moral rightness of servitude:

> Yes, Mister, actually. But, as I look at my case, I see: we continue like this. If the Lord made us in such a way that we were all the same height, nobody would have wanted to work under someone else. And no one would have helped anyone else. Now the Lord has to change this matter in this way. So, if I can, I must now help. Now I have to help my master so that he can get ahead—like working with the sheep and those things. Now if we were all the same height, something like this wouldn't work. Now the Lord knew well, he had good knowledge.

We notice, also, the slippage of meaning between the phrases "work under someone else" and "helped anyone else." What is in fact work is reformulated by Abraham as giving help. It is an evocative revelation of his position as a serf that he accepts this role, and moreover accepts it as corresponding to a good moral order of life. It shows how the perpetuation of inequity and inequalities are constructed

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[5] Historically the "Colored" population has been discriminated against for being neither Black nor White and thus not fitting in anywhere. To some readers this may seem a disrespectful or politically incorrect question. South Africans are more likely to openly discuss racial tensions than to tread carefully around them. Perhaps this is a response to the often-enforced silence that apartheid brought about?

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through intersubjective sedimentation (Berger and Luckmann 1967:85-86) of meanings and practices that slowly but surely shape a shared social reality.

Abraham accepts that his labor should result in his employer flourishing while he literally and figuratively "stays in the same place," to borrow from an earlier quote. It is almost as if he volunteers himself for suppression:

> There has to be [a system of] let me do the work. And I also say so: I agree one hundred percent. There has to be let me do the work. Then it can…then it works. Each one feels…I feel: it is good that the Lord made it available.

It is an indictment of post-apartheid South Africa that our multiracial society is still a racial one. And that wealth remains distributed along racial lines. In his statement below, Abraham's remark reflects something of the sentiment of many so-called "Colored" people regarding the relative positioning in society of one population group in relation to another, a hierarchy which is seen by some as being heralded in by the ANC:

> The Colored, Mister, it is like I said…And if you look, the Colored is still a little below. Then the Bantu are still a little above. If you look carefully, you will see: he saw to it. He saw to it that he is now a little above. He took care that he can be above.

Around the period when a formal and legal status was conferred on apartheid, Frantz Fanon (1968:61-81) wrote in his book published in French in 1952 under the title *Peau Noire, Masques Blanc* (*Black Skin,*

White Masks) on the so-called dependency complex of colonized people. He launched an attack on a view of his time that feelings of inferiority among members of an oppressed part of society could be found even before colonization. For Fanon, a society is either racist or not racist. The racism coinciding with colonization is no different from any other form of racism. All forms of exploitation, irrespective if coinciding with colonization, are equally the same—and need to be rejected. Perhaps Fanon is correct when concluding that many people who find themselves in racist societies suffer from inferiority feelings. They suffer from these feelings because the societies in which they find themselves enhance these feelings of inferiority—not because they are inherently inferior (Fanon 1968:74).

Over the three long sessions during which we spoke to Abraham we see the workings of inferiority institutionalized in language. In the first session, he referred 40 times to his employer, the land owner, as "my master" (*My Baas* in the Afrikaans language) and no fewer than 172 further times did he address the first author of this article as "master" (*Baas*) even though no employment relationship existed between him and the first author. On a further 51 occasions he addressed the first author as "my great master" (*My Grootbaas*). At the end of this first session the first author put it to Abraham that his calling him "master / great master" caused embarrassment and he requested him kindly to refrain from doing so. Nine months later during our second session he consistently addressed the first author as "mister" (*Meneer*). Henry only addressed the first author as "mister" (*Meneer*), which reflects something of his more critical attitude towards old apartheid norms.

Jan K. Coetzee & Asta Rau

Between Enslavement and Liberation. Narratives of Belonging from Two Farm Workers in Rural South Africa

Henry Jooste

Like Abraham, Henry also conveys the impression that he accepts the inferior positioning and resultant subordination of one population group vis-à-vis another. And again his narrative shows how the power that accompanies race and wealth is strongly reinforced through language:

> I still call [the boss] master and *Seur* [the boss's father and original boss] and *Miesies* [the boss's wife]. Yes, we did say master [*Baas*] and great master [*Grootbaas*] and small master [*Kleinbaas*]. That we heard from our parents. I think [we speak to them in this manner] because of the suffering. You had to call the White owner *Seur* because he was the highest. Then you had a foreman, master [*Baas*], a White foreman. I also had to say to him *Baas, Baas Sarel*. But, for the owner of the farm it was *Seur*.

Henry's narrative tells of more direct forms of suppression that are historically institutionalized through unfair treatment and exploitation:

> Yes, we did get paid. But, that time, how can I say, I almost don't know what we were paid. And if you asked about the pay, the *Seur* got angry. Then he would say: "No, why do you want to know?" Today workers know. My children know. But, my father went to "pay" for me [received payment]. When he died, that is when I went to "pay" for myself. But no, it wasn't even worth the while.

One of the worst aspects of this for Henry is his sense of having colluded with this exploitation, although in reality there was little that he or his community could do. So again, the (misguided) idea emerges of being personally responsible for suffering and therefore deserving it. Drawing on Alexander (2012), we argue that practices and languages of oppression associated with serfdom became a threat to collective identity in as far as they damaged the psyche—the communal sense of self-worth—of whole communities of people who live and labor as serfs. According to Alexander (2012), collective trauma occurs when negative experiences inflicted by one group on another are conceived as wounds to social identity. From Henry's narrative it would seem that there is an alternative standpoint—one that links to Fanon's (1968:74, 61-81) insights—whereby the victims of collective trauma think: "We did this to ourselves":

> How can I say? We gave our life up, just like that. We went out and worked almost for nothing. Yes, you can say that we worked almost for nothing.

> We would complain, but not to the man [owner]. We complained amongst each other. We would not go to the man, we were afraid. The man can chase me away. Where will I find work? If the man chases you away, where are you to find work?

> Yes, we felt that we were going backwards and the man was going forward. But you worked just for free. It did bother people. But, people were afraid. Where would you find a new master?

There is a symbolic collective closing of the ranks against the owner, but in fact the community is powerless in the absence of any viable alternatives. Their fear of retribution and of losing what security they have are very real threats to unskilled laborers in a country with such high unemployment levels. But, apart from this, Henry is also trapped in the mindset of serfdom: he does not conceive of a solution other than finding "a new master":

> If I went to another farm, that farmer would phone my previous master and would ask him: "What kind of a boy was he?" Then the previous master would say: "No, he was such a boy or he was such a boy." Then the farmer would come back and say: "No, man, I did look for a man, but I found one." Then you had to go and try to get another master. And you would go along until one day when you would maybe find a master.

Again the language use tells us a lot about race and belonging. To call a man a "boy" harks back to an old and racial practice among some Whites during the apartheid days; it is very insulting as it insinuates that the employee is not an adult. In Henry's narrative—his meaning-making of an imaginary scenario—the employer does not repeat this insult to the farm worker's face. Instead, the employer replaces the insulting diminutive "boy" with the word "man." His rendition of the imaginary conversation between the two White bosses reveals how Henry perceives the existence of an underhand, almost secret, form of racism.

Unlike Abraham, who is far more complacent in the face of having to labor for all his life without reaping much in the way of material rewards, Henry is more vehement about this injustice of his situation.

> Gee whiz, we couldn't keep animals, nothing. We didn't have an income; it was only the pay, those few Rands and then it was finished. You were only, how can I put it, you were only alive. You needed to live for your stomach and for your children.

> Yes, the Brown man [Colored] helped the White man. How many times did I have to help him with everything—looking after his cattle, everything.

> Yes, that time it was not living together. The White man stayed on his own. He was on his own, and you were only a helper, you could say. Yes, I was only a helper. Because if he wanted to send me up that mountain, then I had to go! I can't say no. Because if I say no, then I had to go to the road.

Notwithstanding the lack of freedom and the difficulties of his situation, Henry does not seem to be able to imagine a world where he is not accountable to another. Perhaps his fatalism functions as a form of reassurance for him?

> But, what can you do? You need to work. You can't simply sit. There will always be someone that will look over you.

The media is saturated with examples of unrest, riots, resistance, and protests of large numbers of the South African society. Similar to other parts of Africa and several Western countries, it is the younger generation that has a greater sense of equity and is more inclined to resist domination and deprivation. Abraham and Henry's stories reflect the disposition of a small group of South Africans who accept, or at least endure, a life of suffering and suppression. Nonetheless, their stories should not be ignored or moved to the background.

Jan K. Coetzee & Asta Rau

Between Enslavement and Liberation. Narratives of Belonging from Two Farm Workers in Rural South Africa

Existential Suffering

As we see from the largest parts of his narratives, Abraham does not see himself as an outright suppressed and exploited human who experiences existential suffering. He lives in peace with himself, his employer, and his fellow people. He also lives in peace with his concrete reality. Henry is more explicit when describing his life as a life of suffering.

Abraham Wessels

When looking back over his life, one period of existential suffering stands out for Abraham: the period of his substance (alcohol) addiction:

Mister, that was when I was still in-the-world. At that point I still grabbed the world. I had to be in the world and it needed to be only good. But, it wasn't good for me. I came across dark days. I suffered a lot. That was when I still took the drink.

The abuse of alcohol became for Abraham a personal enslavement and, as we interpret it, a double dose of slavery in his everyday life. The abuse of alcohol among farm workers in South Africa is commonplace. It has serious implications for other aspects of social life, such as violence in interpersonal relationships, and fetal alcohol syndrome (Gossage et al. 2014). Fortunately, Abraham gave up alcohol:

Mister, that was what was with me: the drinking. And that was a bad time in life. It destroys you. But, further life was not so dark. But, the drinking. It creates something terrible. Yes, I stayed in the world. But, I had to come [out of it].

Then me and my wife came to a decision. I then said: "Man, we can't continue. We can't. We'll have to decide to go off this road." Mister, I suffered a lot! I had dark days. I had difficult times. I was looking at the trap [mouth] of the bag.

By using the expression "I was looking at the trap [mouth] of the bag" Abraham refers to the abuse of cheap wine packaged in an aluminum foil bag inside a box. He perceives this incident that coincided mainly with his and his wife's act of volition as the lowest point of his life. The fact that he found himself for the largest part of his life as part of a social and political dispensation that ascribed to him and his family a range of fundamental restrictions seems to be of lesser importance.

Abraham's decision to quit drinking is uniquely personal one, but, as May (2011a; 2011b) reminds us, the self and society are mutually constitutive. Progress towards a better society can be created by the continuous affirmation of meaning and by the decisions made by individuals to create a meaningful life (see the work of François Perroux 1983).

Henry Jooste

I will describe my life as difficult. And it is even difficult until today.

Yes, look at my children, I can give them nothing. I can't even tell them that when I am dead, there will be a house. They have to suffer like a tortoise. When the small tortoise is hatched, he has to go his own way. When I look back at my life, it is a life of suffering.

Henry's metaphor holds another meaning pertinent to his lifeworld: a tortoise carries its home on its back. What he is born with is all that he has—his only inheritance.

Concluding Insights

At best Abraham and Henry's narratives reveal a small part of their deeper experiences and the selection presented here opens only a tiny window on their lives. As the narratives reveal, individual everyday experience often oscillates between solidarity and division, freedom and oppression, power and powerlessness, capital and poverty, exploitation and equality. They also show how belonging is constructed at the individual and societal levels.

Interpretation of the narratives connects to a basic assumption of critical theory: that a person can become more than what he/she is at a given moment. This issue of "increased humanness" (Coetzee 2001:122) is related to the emancipatory intention to aid the development of the communicative capacity in society (Habermas 1984; 1987). It is the duty of the social scientist to remind members of society continuously that they find themselves in a social reality that can become different/better than their present reality. Becoming a better society is described by Marc Olshan (1983:17) as: "the well-coordinated series of changes, sudden or gradual, whereby a given population **and all of its components** [our emphasis] move from a phase of life perceived as less human to one perceived as more human."

A free society creates conditions for the actualization of each individual's full potential (person-hood). In terms of this description, South Africa has not yet reached full freedom. Freedom implies a focus on the significance of individuals' capacities to achieve the kind of lives they have reason to value. It is not just a matter of subjective well-being and the means to a good life should not merely be available in theory. In this regard, Thomas Wells (n.d.) is correct when stating in his contribution to the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (on the issue of "Sen's Capabilities Approach"): "A person's capacity to live a good life is defined in terms of the set of valuable 'beings and doings' like being in good health or having loving relationships towards others to which they have real access." But, it goes further: the capacity to lead a good life also coincides with access to the most basic needs of social justice, humanity, and respect.

In the concluding remarks of his book on Frantz Fanon and how Fanon's work can influence the relationship between intellectuals and grassroots movements, Nigel Gibson (2011) draws a distinction between "pragmatic liberals" and "fundamentally anti-systemic dialecticians." He continues: "The former consider the poor as a sociological fact to be studied; the latter consider work with a poor people's movement as a process and a praxis" (Gibson 2011:215). In terms of the latter perspective, the intellectual activity can (and should) play a role towards stimulating the reflexive capacity for producing consciousness of action (cf. Guibernau 2013:16). The research on which this article is based is not participatory action research that aims to accompany the participants in the research process towards active critical involvement and resistance against their situation. On the other hand,

Jan K. Coetzee & Asta Rau

Between Enslavement and Liberation. Narratives of Belonging from Two Farm Workers in Rural South Africa

this research does not merely reflect an objective account of a phenomenon within the South African society. We trust that this research can assist in creating a deeper understanding with regards to inequality and inadequate participation in as far as some members of the South African society are concerned. Whatever the primary focus, research needs to continuously contribute to the decolonization of the mind—both of the researcher and of the researched.

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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 20th anniversary of the country's first non-racial democratic elections. The specific case explores the everyday life of Hennie van der Merwe,[1] an Afrikaner[2] 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.

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[3] 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[4] dimensions:

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[1] All persons mentioned in the article are assigned pseudonyms.

[2] 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).

[3] The term "holon" refers to a whole that simultaneously transcends and includes its parts.

[4] 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.
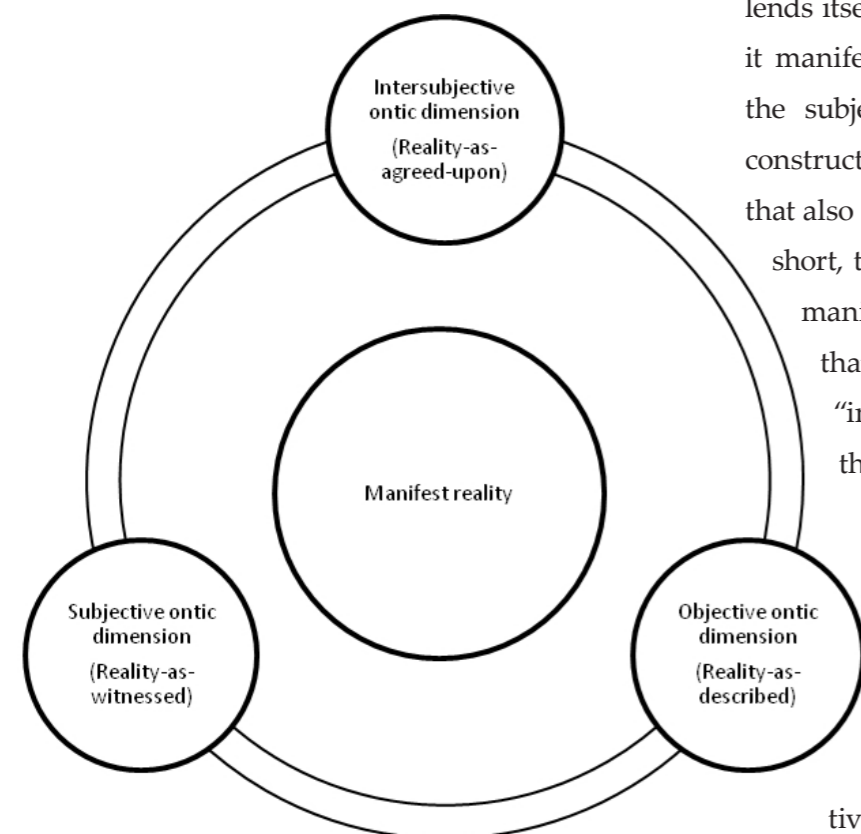
Source: Self-elaboration.

These dimensions, referred to as the subjective, intersubjective, and objective ontic dimensions respectively, represent undivorceably 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.[5]

[5] 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[6] and intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks oriented towards the object of perception. Through adding layers of socio-cultural meaning and exis-

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).

[6] 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[7] 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

[7] 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.
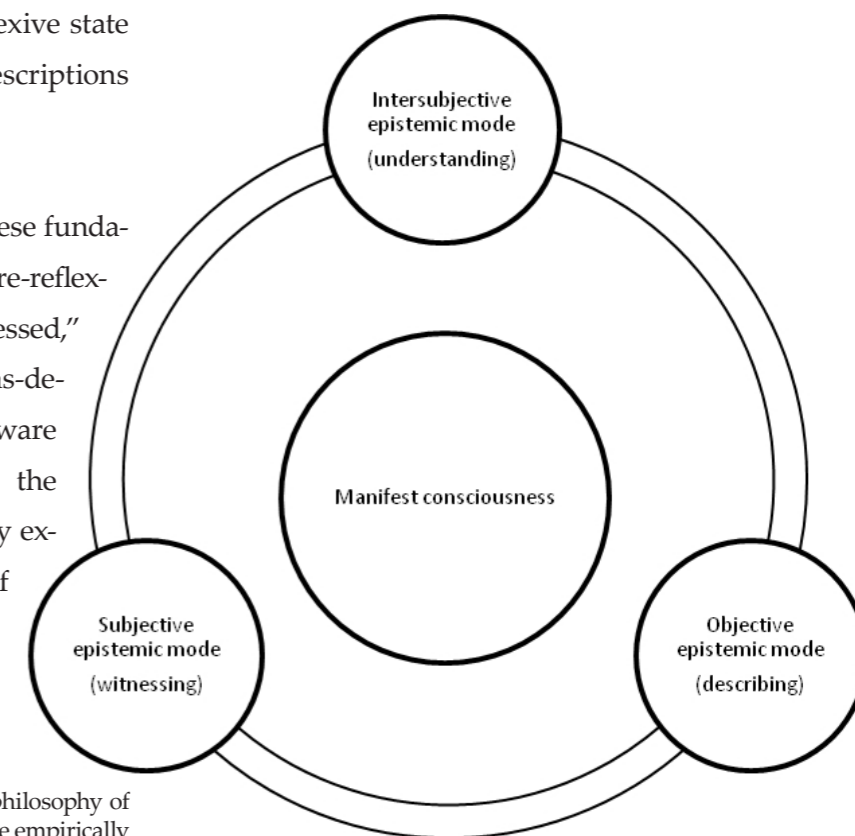
Source: Self-elaboration.

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.[8] 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

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[8] 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 varyingly 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 acknowledgement 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 integrally 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 *inter*subjective 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[9] 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

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-19th 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),[10] the town is marked by all the graces

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

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[9] 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).

[10] 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).

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[11] children, on the one hand, and the distant, paternalistic attitude of his stern parents and grandparents, on the other:

[11] 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[12] 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-

[12] 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-20th 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.[13] This allowed him to live

[13] 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:

> Thembani'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 Thembani'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, Thembani'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, Thembani 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 Thembani, 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 researchers, 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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Overcoming the Divide: An Interpretive Exploration of Young Black South Africans' Lived Experiences of Upward Mobility in Central South Africa

Abstract   The institutionalized racism that once subjugated the Black majority during South Africa's apartheid years gave way after 1994 to legislature that aims to bring the country into a new era of egalitarianism. A striking result of this has been the steady flow of young Black people achieving upward mobility and making the transition into the middle- and upper-classes. This article explores young Black South Africans' lived experiences of upward mobility, as well as their efforts to negotiate between separate and often contrasting identities by applying an interpretive sociological framework to their narrative accounts.

Keywords   Identity; Class; Race; Upward Mobility; Young Professionals; Phenomenology; Narrative Research

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This study's topic of interest is propelled by the striking history that continues to shape young Black South Africans' experiences of upward mobility. Contemporary South Africa, and the social reality of its people, has been marred by a tumultuous history of racial oppression which reached an apex during the apartheid era (1948-1994). As Jeremy Seekings (2008:2) states: "It would be astonishing if post-apartheid South African society was not shaped profoundly by the experience of apartheid, remaining distinctive in terms of the social, political or economic roles played by race." For the majority of South Africa's Black population, upward social mobility remains a dream, and many remain entrenched in appalling levels of inequality. Nonetheless, there is a glimmer of success mirrored in the accomplishments of a number of young Black South Africans who have been able to make use of the opportunities created by transformative policies and achieve upward mobility. It is the "Black Diamonds" and "Buppies" (Black upwardly mobile people belonging to South Africa's emerging middle- and upper-classes) whose narratives are explored in this article.

Philosophical and Theoretical Points of Departure

The philosophical and theoretical frameworks adopted in the study depart from an ontological standpoint informed by the tenets of constructivist reasoning. As such, the study is firmly rooted in Max Weber's interpretive sociology and its associative duty to achieve what Weber terms *Verstehen*—a truly empathetic understanding of how people subjectively perceive various phenomena

from their own unique perspectives. To achieve this, we were tasked with minimizing the "objective separateness" (Creswell 2007:18) between ourselves and research participants in order to give the readers a first-hand account of what it is like to be a young Black professional who is experiencing upward mobility in the central part of South Africa, namely, Bloemfontein. In epistemological terms, the findings presented in the study are thus considered the result of a collaborative effort between the researchers and the research participants (Guba and Lincoln 2013:40, 87).

In aid of garnering data that will lead to the *Verstehen* espoused in interpretive sociology, the study is informed by interpretive theoretical traditions, particularly Phenomenology, Existential Sociology, and Reflexive Sociology. Of these three schools of thought Phenomenology plays the most distinctive role in the overall conceptualization of the study. The onus of phenomenologically based research is to study the lifeworld, the mundane pre-scientific world of everyday life as it is perceived by individuals. This direct perception of the lifeworld is otherwise referred to as the lived experience (Crotty 1998:78). The study attempts to explore young Black South Africans' lived experiences of upward mobility by focusing predominantly on their subjective perceptions of instances where issues of race, class, and identity feature as part of their narrated experiences.

A second body of theoretical work, Existential Sociology, directs the researcher to pay attention to the importance of human free will and agency in the emergence of social reality (Kotarba 2009:140).

Michael Kok, Jan K. Coetzee & Florian Elliker

Overcoming the Divide: An Interpretive Exploration of Young Black South Africans' Lived Experiences
of Upward Mobility in Central South Africa

At the forefront of this endeavor is the understanding that at the very core of human agency is the powerful driving force known as "brute being" (Douglas 1977:23). Existential Sociology implores us to reconcile the profound power of human emotion with our experience of the lifeworld and the social reality that emerges from it (Kotarba 2009:146). The study thus acknowledges the idiosyncratic character of the participants' lived experiences as affected by the various emotions that they attribute to different situations in their narratives. The relative importance of accounting for emotions in the study is reflected in the researchers' attempts to obtain thick descriptions, and an approach to data presentation often referred to as "impressionist tales" to convey the emotional tone that characterizes the stories as told by the research participants.

Pierre Bourdieu's Reflexive Sociology also contributes to the body of theoretical work that influences how the study is constructed. Reflexive Sociology attempts to resolve what Bourdieu recognizes as "the debilitating reduction of sociology to either an objectivist physics of material structures or a constructivist phenomenology" (Wacquant 1992:5). Bourdieu describes social research as often being unjustifiably polarized into either structuralist inquiry, which applies quantitative measures of "social physics" to objective social structures, or constructivist inquiry, which probes micro-social phenomena by means of theoretical frameworks such as social phenomenology (Wacquant 1992:7). Bourdieu attempts to develop a "total science" of society that transcends the schism between these two seemingly irreconcilable approaches, and combines them to form a "social praxeology"—a singular approach that views social reality in two separate yet related "moments" (Wacquant 1992:7).

It was beyond the scope of this study to conduct both a quantitative and a qualitative approach to the lived experience of upward mobility and identity. Bourdieu's appeal to approach social research from two moments, however, remains an important feature in executing this research. Not to overlook the importance of society as existing in the objective order, the researchers compiled a literature review that made use of statistical information regarding significant aspects of South African society that affect upward mobility of young, Black professionals, such as levels of poverty and deprivation, socio-economic status, and the racial division of labor. This, mainly quantitative information included in the literature review, was consequently used as the foundation for identifying facets of the experience of upward mobility that could be explored as having an intersubjective presence in the participants' narratives.

Identity and Class

Identity as an Interpretive Process

The concept of identity plays a key role in exploring the participants' experiences of upward mobility. However, what soon became evident throughout the operationalization for the study is the confusion that reigns from the almost countless academic sources that attempt to touch upon the subject. It is therefore important that the conceptualization of identity that was adopted for the study be discussed. The researchers are concerned primarily with exploring how a meaningful social reality is constituted through mundane interpretive processes. In the case of this study, identity is considered part and parcel of these mundane social processes. From the interpretive process of identification, we are able to develop a cognitive map of sorts that provides us with the multidimensional knowledge of who we are in relation to other individuals and collectives; and who we are in relation to our positions in social space (Jenkins 2008:5). This interpretation emerges from the dialectic relation between internal subjective processes and external social interaction with others (Jenkins 2008:18).

We use the terms "identity" and "identification" interchangeably. Although these two terms may initially seem to convey two separate concepts, they are in fact rooted in the very same process. For Brubaker and Cooper (2000:14), the term identity implies something that is "real," an objective truth that is an unquestionable aspect of social reality. The use of "identity" as a noun (which risks reifying identities as essentialist objectivations) should thus be replaced with the term "identification," which presupposes active social processes (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:14). However, both "identity" and "identification" inevitably run the risk of reification. What matters is not "which" of the two terms we decide to use, but "how" we decide to use them (Jenkins 2008:14). With that being said, this article makes use of both "identity" and "identification" for semantic reasons. Although this maintains the use of identity as a noun, it should always be understood as accompanied and established through the active social process of identification.

Class as a Source of Identification

Exploring the lived experience of social mobility and identity requires adopting a theory of class which takes into account the importance of class as a significant form of identification in everyday life. The study therefore makes use of Pierre Bourdieu's culturist definition of social class and stratification. Bourdieu describes society as a "three dimensional social space" where individuals, with similarities in their embodied lifestyles and cultural dispositions, are grouped together to form distinctive social classes (Bottero 2005:148). Rather than viewing social classes as divided by externally imposed objective boundaries, each class is separated from the next by an imaginary line which is best described as "a flame whose edges are in constant movement, oscillating around a line or surface" (Bourdieu 1987:13). In this sense, there are no distinct borders that distinguish one social class from the next. Instead, on either side of the imaginary line that separates social classes we find social positions that differ in terms of the density of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1987:13).

For the structural functionalists, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore (2008), the hierarchical stratification of social classes creates stability in society by ordering occupational positions according to relative importance, and distributing economic and non-economic rewards, such as power and prestige, relative to the skill needed to fulfill the duties of each position. Bourdieu (1987:13) extends upon this structural functionalist position of social stratification and views one's occupational position as playing a prodigious role in serving as an identifiable

Michael Kok, Jan K. Coetzee & Florian Elliker

Overcoming the Divide: An Interpretive Exploration of Young Black South Africans' Lived Experiences
of Upward Mobility in Central South Africa

trait in the eyes of others. According to Bourdieu, one's occupational position indicates two fundamental attributes to the rest of society. On the one hand, it classifies an individual as having the type of primary qualities deemed necessary to occupy a certain position in the division of labor, such as one's position relative to the means of production; one's life chances relative to the labor market; and the status that is associated with the combination of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital specific to certain social positions (Brubaker 2005:52). On the other hand, one's occupation also indicates the possession of secondary qualities that are determined by the mechanisms that govern access to certain occupations on the basis of criteria such as level of education, age, gender, and race (Brubaker 2005:52).

It is for this reason that occupational status is regarded as the most proficient category for identifying one's social position in contemporary Western society (Crompton 2008:51). Relating this interception of class and identity to the study, the goal became to understand how the research participants identify themselves now that they have achieved a higher social class relative to the peers they grew up with, and how they experience being identified by those people on the basis of their newly achieved class positions. This was achieved by focusing on the participants' interpretations of situations where they may have interacted with others on the basis of their achieved class positions.

Towards a Class Schema for South Africa

The notion of occupation serving as a routine way of identifying one's social position is a crucial as-

pect in conceptualizing a class schema that is relevant to the South African context. In this respect, the study makes use of a class schema comprising of five South African class categories identified by Jeremy Seekings (2003:17). These categories are defined according to occupation and educational attainment:

- **upper-class** (UC): managers and professionals;
- **semi-professional class** (SPC): teachers and nurses;
- **intermediate class** (IC): routine white-collar, skilled and supervisory;
- **core working class** (CWC): semi-skilled and unskilled workers (except farm and domestic workers);
- **marginal working class** (MWC): farm and domestic workers.

According to Seekings (2003:17), what ultimately sets these classes apart is the level of qualification required for individuals to occupy them. Upper-class occupations, such as lawyers, physicians, and accountants, require at the least a university degree; occupations in the semi-professional class, such as teachers and nurses, usually require a diploma; and for the occupational classes below that, individuals tend to require a high school diploma or less (Seekings 2003:17). This article focuses exclusively on the experiences of young upper-class professionals who have acquired their positions through higher education, and whose parents' or primary caregivers' occupations are found to be lower in the occupational class schema. It is argued here that by acquiring occupations that are higher in the class schema than the occupations of their

parents those who participated in the study have in fact experienced upward social mobility.

Methodology and Operational Account

Methodology

Considering that the study's goal is an interpretive understanding of upward mobility and identity, a narrative approach to research is adopted as the primary methodology for data collection and analysis. Narratives customarily serve the purpose of preserving cultural values, and carrying these values forth in the plots of stories. Not only does this allow cultural values to endure, but individuals are able to relate their own values to culturally established ones. This provides the platform from which individuals can develop a meaningful sense of self relative to their connectedness with others and their positions in social space (Lawler 2008:249). When individuals tell stories, whether about themselves or about other people, they inevitably engage in identity practices that reveal aspects of who they are (Lawler 2008:249; Bamberg 2012:102).

The most prominent way in which identities emerge through narratives is when individuals order experienced events into episodes that constitute the plot of their life stories. In doing so, individuals are able to interpret later events in life as linked to earlier ones. Narratives thus indicate a temporal movement of one's life that links the past to the present and the present to the potential future. Every narrated event is thus given purpose as leading to a natural conclusion in one's present situation

(Lawler 2008:250). Narrative research attempts to understand how people define their identities by exploring this temporal space "in terms of what is viewed as changing and remaining the same" (Bamberg 2012:103). Achieving upward mobility through educational attainment is a lengthy process that sees individuals experiencing numerous changes to their lives over a period of time. The view of identity, as situated in narratives that occur over time, thus suits the study particularly well, as it forms the foundation upon which the researchers were able to explore how the participants' identities have emerged during the course of their transition through society's different class groupings.

Operational Account

Arguably the most crucial aspect to consider when undertaking social research is selecting a research sample that is relevant to meeting the needs of one's study. The study's target population is identified as young Black (African) South Africans between the ages of 18 and 30, who have achieved upward mobility (i.e., acquired professional occupations higher than that of their parents) through educational attainment, and who reside in Central South Africa. The researchers use non-probability sampling in order to draw research participants from the desired target population (Babbie and Mouton 2010:166). More specifically, two forms of non-probability sampling were employed, namely, purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

The data collection phase of the research project involved the use of two methods of interviewing, namely, one-on-one phenomenologically based

Michael Kok, Jan K. Coetzee & Florian Elliker

Overcoming the Divide: An Interpretive Exploration of Young Black South Africans' Lived Experiences
of Upward Mobility in Central South Africa

interviews and a focus group discussion. The purpose of using both methods is to generate in-depth data that are derived from the participants' own subjective experiences of upward mobility and identification. To achieve this aim, the researchers relied on an interview style aimed at generating an open dialogue that illuminates the interpretation, feelings, and understanding that participants attribute to their lived experiences. The aim was for each participant to determine the course of the dialogue while the researchers merely facilitated the topics of interest during the conversations with the aid of semi-structured interview schedules.

No deception was used at any stage of the research process. From the outset of the project, research participants were made aware of the aims of the study and the subject matter that was to be covered. Participants were also made aware that the interviews were to be audio recorded and that they were required to sign a letter of informed consent indicating their willing participation in the study. Participants were allowed to withdraw statements made during the interviews or remove their contribution from the study altogether. They were also free to exit the research at any time. The researchers took precautions to ensure that there is no identifiable information that could link the recordings, transcripts, and research findings to individual participants (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey 2011:71). All names presented in the research findings are pseudonyms.

As discussed above, the concept of identity adopted for the study views identity as an interpretive

process that makes it possible to understand who we are relative to our positions in social space, social groups, and other individual selves. According to Jenkins (2008:39), our identities emerge within three interrelated "orders" of experience within the lifeworld, namely, the "interaction order" (our daily interaction with other social actors on the basis of putative roles), the "institutional order" (our interaction with institutions and objectivations such as race, class, etc.), and the "individual" order (our idiosyncratic understanding of who we are). These orders, which typify the way we experience the world, are intersubjectively common to each individual. Therefore, although the participants' experiences within these orders may be unique, the intersubjective nature of these orders makes it possible to explore the participants' narratives by means of applying a common analytical framework.

Michael Bamberg's (2012:103) "narrative practice approach" proves invaluable directives with regard to exploring the participants' experiences of identification within Jenkins' (2008) three orders of experience. Rather than focusing solely on the content of participants' stories, the narrative practice approach turned the researcher's gaze to the interactive process of the interview setting (Bamberg 2012:102). What is of particular interest to researchers employing the narrative practice approach are the various discursive devices participants use to situate their sense of self while in the process of constructing their narratives. According to Bamberg (2012:103), discursive devices, specifically those which individuals use to make sense of their identities in narrative accounts, can be

grouped into three analytic "dimensions," namely, "agency" (words describing the participant as an embodied agent of various roles); "sameness versus difference" (words describing the participants' relation to social groups); and "constancy and change across time" (words used by participants to situate their sense of self in moments that link the past to the present and the present to the possible future). By applying an analytical framework that combines Bamberg's (2012) three dimensions of identity navigation with Jenkins' (2008) three orders of experiencing the lifeworld, it is possible to identify a number of themes from the participants' narratives—themes that paint a rich interpretive picture of their experiences of upward mobility and self- and external identification.

Presenting the Findings

In order to come as close as possible to producing an empathetic understanding as espoused by interpretive sociology, our presentation of the study's findings features the use of "thick descriptions" to provide a rich account of the research participants' experiences. As argued above, this necessitates including important contextual information such as the social setting, cultural values, and emotional tones that underlie the participants' descriptions of various situations (Ponterotto 2006:540-541). The findings presented here include verbatim quotes from the researchers' interactions with participants, which aim to provide the readers with a glimpse into the subjective sense-making processes that underlie the participants' experiences of upward mobility and identity.

Furthermore, as the epistemological position of the study views knowledge as emerging from a collaboration between researchers and participants, it is important to take into account the researchers' interpretation of narrated events. Making use of an ethnographic approach to research for "impressionist tales" (Van Maanen 1988), the findings also include reflexive notes from the researchers' perspective in an attempt to provide an understanding of how various spoken and unspoken cues inform their interpretation of the participants' narratives. The onus of this article rests on illuminating the often unspoken and lesser known challenges faced by the participants as shared in their conversations with the researchers.

Perceptions of Racial Isolation

Given South Africa's tumultuous history of racial oppression and continued racial inequality, one of the fundamental goals of the research project is to explore the attitudes and experiences of young and upwardly mobile Black South Africans with regard to racial categorization in everyday life. From the outset of posing the question of what it means to be labeled as a young Black professional, most of the participants expressed a certain degree of bitterness at being categorized as "Black." Ntombi's response, taken from the very early stages of data collection, reveals a sentiment shared by many of the participants in their response to the question of racial categorization:

Can't I just be someone that's working towards a goal? Do I have to be a Black student that's upwardly mobile? [Ntombi]

Michael Kok, Jan K. Coetzee & Florian Elliker

Overcoming the Divide: An Interpretive Exploration of Young Black South Africans' Lived Experiences of Upward Mobility in Central South Africa

The participants' antipathy towards having their race made salient may well be seen as an attempt to avoid the negative stereotypes that have historically been associated with being categorized as Black in South Africa (Mtose 2011:325-328). However, there is another aspect of racial categorization that emerged during the interviews that uncovers a form of stereotyping that runs much deeper than the superficial wounds caused by typical racist stereotypes. It is the idea that upwardly mobile Black people do not deserve to be regarded as holders of the social positions they worked so hard to achieve. As we shall see, this perception does not necessarily hinge on experiences of explicit racial prejudice, but rather stems from implicit cues in events that could otherwise go unnoticed.

During the interviews a number of the participants frequently made the point of reminding the researchers that they see the world through color-blind eyes, and that they prefer not to classify themselves in racial terms. Keketso is especially adamant to drive this point home a number of times throughout her interviews. However, she also makes it very clear that even though she prefers not to make race a salient aspect of how she interacts with people, the risk of being seen as the "other" in an occupational position that is dominated by Whites remains all too real. Almost every page of the transcribed conversation with Keketso is littered with emotive notes that indicate the humorous outlook she has on life. Yet, when she relates the following story (her mother's warning about thinking too highly of herself), the tone stands out as uncharacteristically serious:

This is what she said to me recently: "Don't forget you're a Black person. It doesn't matter how highly you think of yourself. It doesn't matter how good you are. Those people will still see you as a Black person. So keep that in mind." [Keketso]

Keketso's response is probed in order to understand whether she agrees with her mother's view. Her following response signals just how poignant a role her mother's words played in her perception of how she is viewed by White people in her achieved occupational position:

It's the truth at the end of the day. You can't fight it, it's the truth. It's the reality of where we live. The fact that you're a Black person in the workspace will still come up because that's how you are seen to the rest of the world, you know what I mean?...I could be a workaholic and go crazy here, and be the best attorney in the world, but to everybody else I'll be the best Black attorney, you understand? [Keketso]

However, it is not only the pragmatic knowledge shared by her mother that shapes Keketso interpretation of her racial identity among Whites, but also her first-hand experiences of what she termed "racist" events when she started working at a predominantly White Afrikaans-speaking law firm:

I've had to adapt to going to these…what we…well, what we as Black people know as racist restaurants and things like that. Or places where you are the only Black person [laughs]. Nowadays there's like a rule. They say you're going here and I say: "OK, how many other Black people are going? None? No, I'm not going." [Keketso]

Although Keketso did not mention anything explicitly racist happening at these "racist restaurants," the mere experience of being singled out on the basis of her race has led her to label and avoid all restaurants where there is the risk of a racist incident occurring as "racist restaurants." This narrative, of avoiding situations where one would be singled out in terms of race, is repeated during the conversation with Charles. The primary difference between Charles and Keketso's stories is that Charles did not experience racial isolation first-hand. Instead, his decision to not attend a similar "racist" function (as Keketso terms it) is based on the experiences of other Black people who have been in a similar situation:

We're having our year end function now on the fifth of December and…We also have a department upstairs, [with] a few African people. And this morning I had to go around with a list of people who's going to attend the function. And all of the non-Whites said they're not going. And I asked them: "Why?! This is my first time I'm going to be with you guys. I don't know what's happening here." They said to me: "No, don't go because you will feel very uncomfortable. The White people mingle with the White people and the Black people mingle with the Black people." So I think at my place of employment I'm…I'm gonna have an incident I just as yet haven't…I'm just waiting for it to happen. [Charles]

As Keketso and Charles' experiences show, the perception of being seen as an outsider does not necessarily have to stem from explicit forms of racial prejudice. Although it may be considered a lingering symptom of decades of racial oppression, the

mere discomfort expressed by Keketso and Charles' peers show how negatively something as mundane as the separation of racial groups at an event may be perceived. Importantly, a situation does not have to be perceived as isolating for the possible phenomenon of racial isolation to exist. Sizwe, for example, tells a story which, according to him, has become a private anecdote among him and his colleagues. The setting of Sizwe's story is a meeting in which their CEO introduced the measures their law firm will be taking to increase its BBBEE[1] exposure in the future:

So we're sitting in the boardroom. Then the CEO, our CEO, mister [X], mentions the fact that I'm the only Black associate…which I was totally oblivious of [laughs]...One of the key things that they're going to focus on in the new year is empowerment. After the meeting, Leon, one of the senior associates, says to me: "Sizwe, I didn't know you were Black" [laughs]. So I turn to him and I say: "Neither did I" [laughs]. [Sizwe]

The stories of racial categorization narrated under this theme differ somewhat in terms of the significance they have for the narrators. For some, being labeled as Black imposes negative stereotypes that are hard to shake off. For others, having their race made salient merely serves to drive home the idea that they will always be considered outsiders in a space that is still dominated by Whites. Even in an instance such as Sizwe's, where the experience

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[1] BBBEE is the acronym for Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment, an official part of the current South African government's policy to actively promote progress of Black business and industrial development.

Michael Kok, Jan K. Coetzee & Florian Elliker

Overcoming the Divide: An Interpretive Exploration of Young Black South Africans' Lived Experiences of Upward Mobility in Central South Africa

is viewed in a light-hearted way, the fact that he is singled out on the basis of his race during a meeting indicates an exaggerated prevalence of racialism in the participants' everyday lives.

Managing Differential Class Identities

Because the research participants have achieved upward mobility, they are identified by others on the basis that they own a certain set of qualities that are required to occupy their achieved social positions (Bourdieu 1987:13). The aim is thus to explore the participants' perspectives of how upwardly mobile Black South Africans are categorized by other less fortunate Black South Africans. According to Amohelang, the acquisition of items associated with wealth, such as a luxury German car and a big house (i.e., a lifestyle that sharply contrasts with that of less fortunate Black people still living in poverty), is the underlying cause of the negative connotations associated with successful Black South Africans:

> The way things are happening: Everyone…they're living this life of German cars, the mansion, the lifestyle, the everything. And it's quite sad because some people actually…some people lose so much touch with themselves that some don't even go back home or some aren't even proud of who they are…or aren't proud of the homes that they come from. You'll find somebody living in Sandton in a mansion, but then their parents are still living in a small four room house or a shack or whatever. [Amohelang]

However, Piwe's following response emphasizes that estrangement from less fortunate Black people cannot simply be explained by pointing to a difference in affluence. Instead, the schism between the two classes occurs because those individuals who have achieved upward mobility are seen to have changed in the eyes of those they have "left behind":

> I think there are people who portray that. But, they are not sell-outs per se, but people who forget. I think for me, with the connections that I have, with the community and consistently seeing and visiting people…people recognize and they appreciate… But, I think some people tend to have this change of mind. It's like they got a heart transplant and a brain transplant. They are a new person. But, it's not all about that. Even as much as you learn good things from tertiary institutions, you still need to anchor where you come from. So there is a tendency of educated young Blacks to deviate, and completely deviate. [Piwe]

Piwe's perspective is firmly grounded in his own experience of achieving upward mobility and returning to his community of origin. Because of his achievements, Piwe is able to afford the type of class indicators pointed out by Amohelang, such as a BMW and a house which is a tremendous departure from the home he grew up in. Yet, despite clearly having made the transition into a higher social class, Piwe maintains a strong connection with the people in the community where he grew up, and he still identifies strongly with the type of practices that characterize life in South Africa's townships. According to Piwe, the reason why he has not experienced the type of negativity that is present in Amohelang's story is because

by returning to his community on a regular basis, and engaging with the people there in a way that shows his connectedness to them, he is essentially portraying an image of himself that shows that he has not abandoned his origins for something he views as better than what life in the township has to offer. Much like Piwe, James has not encountered any negativity on the basis of being identified as someone who is upwardly mobile. He also speaks of preserving the practices of life in the township:

> No, these things happen. But, like I say, these guys who call people "coconuts,"[2] they look at…If I can say it like this. If I go to my friends and they think I have changed, they won't say I am a "coconut." They will just say: "Oh, this guy has changed for whatever reason." This thing of "coconuts" comes in because some Black people start acting like… they don't do the things they used to do when they were still living in the location, you understand? So it's these things of like only doing the White weddings. My friend, Pumla, I told you about earlier, he is only doing the White wedding [not also the traditional wedding]. So for him, people in the location will say he is acting like a "coconut" because why isn't he doing the cultural things, you understand? My grandparents are very cultural and traditional. They will be very heartbroken with me if I do things like that. That is why I did my initiation, you understand? Going to the mountain and that sort of thing. And it is important for me. I did it because I wanted to. I know it is something my people want and what I want in my life. [James]

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[2] The term "coconut" is defined in the next paragraph.

The above quote elicits a term that provides valuable insight to the understanding why the experience of estrangement is present in many of the participants' narratives. The term, "coconut," is a term that is commonly used to refer to Black people who act "White" or who adopt White South African values to the detriment of their native culture (Rudwick 2010:55). What is of importance is the idea that once young Black people become upwardly mobile, they are expected to maintain, or at least find a balance between the cultural practices of their social class of origin and the cultural practices of their achieved social class. Yet, it is not enough to merely say that one continues to enact those cultural practices. They are only able to negate the otherwise negative connotations associated with upwardly mobile Black South Africans if they maintain frequent interaction with lower class Black people. This essentially reifies their identity within the community as individuals who do not consider themselves as superior to the people they grew up with, and the culture they were raised in, just because they have achieved a higher class position.

Expectations of Total Financial Independence

Another theme related to the participants' identification with to their newly achieved class positions is a perceived expectation of affluence from the side of those who the participants grew up with. For James, this expectation is usually experienced as a humorous banter between himself and his old school friends. James suggests that less fortunate people think of wealth and affluence as an automatic result of completing one's degree and

Michael Kok, Jan K. Coetzee & Florian Elliker

Overcoming the Divide: An Interpretive Exploration of Young Black South Africans' Lived Experiences of Upward Mobility in Central South Africa

entering a professional occupation. However, as repeatedly shown throughout this theme, the research participants have just started their professional careers and have not had the opportunity to accumulate the type of wealth others have come to expect. For Sizwe, the expectation of wealth is primarily rooted in his parents' expectations of the level of affluence he should have been able to achieve by now. Yet, as Sizwe points out, his occupational title does not necessarily imply the type of economic prosperity his parents associate with his occupation:

> I think the biggest thing which I've discussed also with my father is when you come from…you know, it's not a racial thing, but when our parents come from…we're maybe the first generation professionals or the second, but my parents have the expectation that when you say you're training towards becoming an attorney, they're thinking in your first year you will be able to accomplish certain things financially, and that's been one of the biggest things. And it makes you seem like you're incapable of managing your finances, whereas you're really only getting so much. [Sizwe]

Piwe's experience of this expectation is also personified in the frequent requests he gets for "handouts" from both his peers and his parents.

> Almost ninety percent of the people that I grew up with have been left behind. There's very few, maybe five out of all the people I met and grew close to, that are successful. And I think it was just from procrastinating. And this thing of "there's still time," you know? So I left a lot of people behind. And some of

them, when you go home, the conversation really… The conversations are very short. Because it's all conversations about what can you give me? Seeing as you're so successful, what can you give me? And there's nothing to give them except to say: "Go to school, or try to do something." You know? They cannot get handouts. Because at this stage, where I am, I also have responsibilities. [Piwe]

The topic of the perception of affluence proves to be a contentious issue among the aforementioned participants. During their conversations with the researchers they often made a concerted effort to recount their experiences of this expectation without portraying themselves in an ungrateful or cold-hearted light. This is especially true of Piwe, who adopted an almost apologetic tone while mentioning having to refuse "handouts" to his parents and his friends. This only serves to cement the researchers' perception that, although the research participants may be labeled as "successful" because of achieving upward mobility, this in no way means that they have the economic resources commonly associated with their occupational positions. This perspective, which is rooted in their stories of "going back home," reflects a tragic juxtaposition in their identities. On the one hand, they are expected by their friends and family to have acquired a certain level of wealth that is simply unrealistic at this early stage of their careers. However, taking into consideration the very real threat of isolation through openly displaying increased wealth, eventually acquiring affluence may mean having to face the risk of alienation if their identities become too far removed from that of their communities.

Maintaining Tradition

All of the participants mention the presence of African traditionalism in their lives. Yet, for some of the participants, upholding traditionalism is perceived as an implicit expectation carried in the eyes of significant others. A common practice shared by young Black South Africans is to divide their weddings into distinct wedding ceremonies. For example, Piwe and Keketso both discuss having separate weddings that include both the traditional African wedding and the more Westernized "White wedding." At the time of the interview with Piwe, he was in Bloemfontein with his fiancé in search of a wedding dress for their White wedding. The topic of his marriage is thus frequently mentioned during the interview, especially when Piwe discusses his connection with African traditions:

> I'm doing a traditional wedding now, and that's why you sometimes hear me referring to my fiancé as my wife. We're married actually traditionally and we're completing it now on the twenty second of November. So we first started with that because we acknowledge our family, and we told them: "Listen, we're doing this because of you. We're showing you, guys, that we are no different. We're both doctors, but there's nothing…you raised us and made sacrifices, and we're acknowledging it." So we're doing that. And then next year for our friends and people we met at varsity, like professors, lecturers, people who are studying and working, we're inviting them to our celebration. Our White wedding. So we're still maintaining that. Our roots are still rooted. [Piwe]

In both Piwe and Keketso's stories, they highlight the importance of upholding the traditions their parents hold dear as a sign of respect. At no point do Keketso or Piwe mention that they were forced or coerced into conforming to these rituals. However, the manner in which they narrate their stories of balancing traditional and Western traditions indicates that it is a powerful expectation, even if implicitly reinforced. The topic of traditionalism prompts James to recount a story that emphasizes the continuing relevance of African traditions in contemporary South Africa, and how in certain contexts Black people are required to negotiate between Western and traditional ideals:

> I know this guy who bought a new house and he wanted to slaughter a sheep there. It's like a blessing, you see? When you slaughter a sheep at your house, it's like you are offering the ancestors…like something to look after the house and keep the people that live there safe. But, there was such a problem there because the neighbors didn't want him to do that there and they were very unhappy with it. He told them beforehand. He didn't just pitch with a sheep [laughs]. But, they said, no, they don't want him to do that there. So he still did the ceremony, but he didn't get to do it at his house like he wanted. I think most Black people still do these things. But, like what I see happening…there are more and more people my age that stop doing what their tradition tells them. And also because a lot of our people go to modern churches that tell them these things are wrong, you see? [James]

Based on the following extract, we were led to believe that the notion of respect for one's family plays a significant role in James' understanding of

Michael Kok, Jan K. Coetzee & Florian Elliker

Overcoming the Divide: An Interpretive Exploration of Young Black South Africans' Lived Experiences of Upward Mobility in Central South Africa

the continued practice of African traditions as an important expectation to adhere to:

> My grandparents are very cultural and traditional. They will be very heartbroken with me if I do things like that. That is why I did my initiation, you understand? Going to the mountain and that sort of thing. And it is important for me. I did it because I wanted to. I know it is something my people want and what I want in my life. [James]

A crucial perception raised by James is the idea that contemporary South African Christian churches often frown upon African traditionalism. Although the above statements may be James' personal opinion, they do reflect a degree of incompatibility between African and Western cultures that is especially present in Amohelang's narrative. When Amohelang studied at the University of the Free State, she was increasingly exposed to Christian worship, which did not necessarily feature as part of her upbringing in what she describes as a very traditional Zulu household. As Amohelang began to enact more and more Christian practices at home, she felt that a schism had developed between her and her father. According to Amohelang's following statement, it is the tension between herself and her family that reminds her of the importance of maintaining her traditional roots:

> We're very much strictly Zulu at home, and I'm Christian, as well. But, there is that clash between Christianity and culture, but that has been cleared up in my family. There's no more issues. My parents know where I stand in my relationship to God and my Christianity, and they've respected that. And I also

accept that there are certain cultural rules that we need to abide to and entertain. I'll take part in them, I respect them. I never look down on my background or my culture. I never look down on our Zulu culture or ancestors or anything, but I humbly did it for him [her father] to understand that, look, this is the path that I choose, but that does not necessarily mean that I don't respect you, or I won't…Like, for example, if there is a cultural ceremony, I'll go. It's not like I'll stay away or anything. I might just not take part in the finer details of it. [Amohelang]

Amohelang's story emphasizes just how important maintaining African traditionalism is to both her and her parents. For Amohelang, the respect she gives to her parents by participating in different aspects of their Zulu culture allows her to continue practicing aspects of Christianity in the knowledge that she can do so comfortably without having to fear their derision.

Withholding Behavioral Traits Perceived as "Black"

In the preceding section, the importance of maintaining African traditionalism was raised. However, a narrative theme emerged which emphasizes a level of precariousness experienced by the participants with regard to bringing aspects of African culture into their achieved class positions. During the interviews the research participants frequently made statements that differentiated between "them at work" and "them at home." Initially, the distinction between these two identities might not strike one as a necessarily important theme to explore. After all, there is a certain level of professionalism that is expected in the workplace that requires everyone

to conduct themselves in ways that they would not normally do at home. It was only during the analysis of the interviews that the researchers were struck by Veronica's following statement which, upon reflection, proves to be a turning point in exploring the expectations of others, which the participants view as associated with their achieved class positions:

> When I'm at the office, I understand it's very prim and proper and I speak a certain way, but when I get home, I'm very much an African. [Veronica]

The above quote emphasizes something crucial to Veronica's understanding of her social position. According to Veronica, displaying African traits (specifically speaking like an African) in the workplace could be considered as "improper." In essence, within her achieved class position, she perceives an ideology that positions Black South African traits as being inferior to White South African traits. During conversations with Keketso she shares the following story, which sheds light on the perceived contradiction between Black and White South African cultures, and the perceived superiority of White over Black cultural traits:

> As an example with the Sotho women, you know, they wear shoeshoe's. It's our cultural dress…It's a material. To us, the SeSothos, you wear that on special occasions. You don't just wear it every day. It's your traditional outfit. Whereas here they won't be so accepting. In fact, one of the partners made a comment…they think it's clothes that are just worn by maids. They're like [in an Afrikaans accent]: "Oh, what are you going to do? Clean?" And you're like: "Dude, no! Just because the people that have them in your life happen

to be your cleaners does not mean it's something that they specifically wear." You'll go to an African wedding, or a Black wedding, and I promise you, everybody will be in their traditional outfit. [Keketso]

In this story, the contradiction between White and Black cultural values is clear in the older White partner's misunderstanding of the cultural significance of shoeshoe fabric and style. Although he might not necessarily have intended to explicitly make this cultural dress the object of inferiority by referring to it as something "just worn by maids," he invariably did do so in Keketso's eyes. South Africa's middle- and upper-classes have historically been reserved for the White minority. It has only been 20 years since the first democratic elections opened the doors to upward mobility, and the culture perpetuated in the middle- and upper-class is still perceived by the participants as "White." This "White culture" is interpreted as contradicting and even condescending towards those traits characteristic of Black South Africans. This creates an environment of interaction where the participants, upon entering this social space, are expected to leave their Africanism at the door, so to speak.

Conclusion

The emergence of successful young Black South Africans is a theme that has been covered numerous times in newspaper articles and television shows. South Africans frequently read about or hear the term "Black Diamonds" without putting much thought to the effort it took many of these young Black people to achieve what they have. In the research participants' narratives is an intense sense

Michael Kok, Jan K. Coetzee & Florian Elliker

Overcoming the Divide: An Interpretive Exploration of Young Black South Africans' Lived Experiences
of Upward Mobility in Central South Africa

of pride at having achieved their positions. Not because they are a minority among the Black population, but because of the obstacles they perceive as unfairly stacked against them.

The section on categorization illuminates a shared perception that young Black people are faced with much more than remnants of racial inequality. The fact that they have achieved upward mobility means that they often find themselves in a no-man's-land between White and Black people. Acceptance in either of these groups hinges on their ability to find a balance between indicators of belonging to both worlds. Underlying this balancing act is a profound longing for the freedom to define themselves without having to navigate the negativity that comes with external categorization. Yet, despite seeing themselves as traversing a tightrope of negative categorization, there is a strong sense of group identification that is constructed on the need to help to uplift those young Black South Africans who have been less fortunate than themselves. And although they often discuss the misfortunes of other successful Black people who have been scorned by their communities of origin, the participants narrate a strong sense of solidarity with other Black people, a solidarity based on their understanding of the skewed nature of racial inequality in South Africa.

The participants' longing to identify themselves on their own terms also plays a significant role in their narratives as a powerful source of inspiration for their will to succeed. The vehement recall that *you're not defined by your circumstances* shines through as a desperate cry to remove the association with poverty that was imposed on Black South Africans

during the apartheid era. This narrative theme becomes more and more boisterous as the participants recount their interpretation of young Black people who fail to take hold of the opportunities given to them by the state.

We are constantly reminded that there is much at stake for these participants. Although they do not explicitly state the importance of cultural capital, the participants' narratives shed light on an implicit understanding that upward mobility is greatly affected by access to the cultural capital legitimated by White South Africans. However, the delicate balance between living with a foothold in two different class conditions shines through as they describe the pitfalls of displaying the wrong kind of cultural competence in the wrong context. On the one hand, their achieved class positions require them to stifle any semblance of their class of origin, for example, through the perceived need to not act "ghetto" or "African." On the other hand, they feel that there is an expectation to adhere to the practices of their class or origin or else face the risk of alienation from their roots, their families, and communities.

The importance of finding a healthy balance between two worlds seems to flow over into the participants' very own sense of self. Despite achieving so much more than most young Black South Africans dream of, the participants perceptions of their class identities are narrated in such a way that the concept of change sometimes feels like a taboo. Even in instances where the participants convey a sense of self that illuminates the perception of belonging to a higher social class, they always do so in a manner that highlights their connection to their class of origin.

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Life as a Stranger: Experiences of Labor Migrants from Lesotho

Abstract Drawing on in-depth interviews with nine Basotho labor migrants in Bloemfontein, this article examines their experiences of being a stranger by exploring their accounts of everyday life. Literature on migration studies confirms that migrants face numerous challenges in destination areas, and South Africa is no exception in this regard. The major concerns expressed by the research participants are harassment by the police, hostility from the local citizens, poor living conditions, exploitation by employers, the language barrier, and difficulty in accessing public services. This article argues that these constraints make it difficult for migrants to establish a sense of belonging. Instead, they have a sense of being outsiders and strangers in Bloemfontein.

Keywords Labor Migrants; Migrant Experiences in South Africa; Sense of Belonging; Marginalization; Insecurity; Exclusion

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Migration to South Africa has increased significantly since 1990 (Crush and McDonald 2000:2). Approximately two million people staying in South Africa during the 2011 census were born outside of its borders (Statistics South Africa 2012:28). South Africa draws foreigners from other parts of Africa, especially from countries north of its borders, because it is well-endowed with infrastructure, resources, and services (Peberdy 2001:25). Lesotho is one of the top ten countries in the world whose citizens attained temporary and permanent residency in South Africa in 2013 (Statistics South Africa 2014:17, 37). Migration from Lesotho to South Africa is a long-standing occurrence (Murray 1981:12). It dates back as far as 1867 when diamonds were discovered in the Orange Free State (now called the Free State), and 1887 when gold mines were opened in Transvaal (now called Gauteng). The surge in mining led to a demand for cheap labor, which was then extracted from neighboring countries such as Lesotho, Botswana, Mozambique, and Swaziland. Basotho men (men from Lesotho) sought work in the mines, and their migration coincided with declining agricultural production in Lesotho at that time (Modo 2001:443). During the 1970s and 1980s, Lesotho, as a country, had most of its working population employed outside of its borders. More than 50 percent of the adult population of this Mountain Kingdom were temporarily employed in various sectors of the South African economy, especially in the gold mines (Cobbe 2012:1-3). Therefore, money earned in neighboring South Africa has always been a major source of income for individual Basotho households and for the Lesotho government as a whole (Mensah and Naidoo 2011:1018).

In the early 1990s, however, when gold production slowed and employers became more inclined to employ men from the local South African labor force (Cobbe 2012:2), many Basotho men were retrenched. This opened a new dimension to labor migration from Lesotho to South Africa. The loss of jobs on the mines coupled with lack of job opportunities and increasing poverty within Lesotho forced many women to take over from men as bread winners and to enter the labor market. A large proportion of them sought employment in the Free State. However, with little or no formal education, job opportunities were limited to domestic and farm work (Ulicki and Crush 2007:155, 161).

A vast amount of research has been conducted on migration from Lesotho to South Africa. Much of it revolves around work on mines, on farms, and domestic work. For instance, researchers have studied the effects of the migration of mine workers on family structure (Gordon 1981; Murray 1981; Modo 2001; Mensah and Naidoo 2011), female migration and farm work, the recruitment process, working conditions, employer demand (Ulicki and Crush 2000; 2007; Johnston 2007), and the employment experiences of domestic workers (Griffin 2010; 2011). While these studies are valuable, they are mostly quantitative in nature and thus more concerned with measurement and generalizations rather than with individual cases and life experiences. They focus almost exclusively on one aspect of migrant life—working conditions—and largely ignore the subjective life-world of the migrants. They also fail to take into consideration other sectors in which Basotho work. This article seeks to add to existing literature by taking a phenomenological approach to the study of migration in order to capture the essence of everyday life. It assumes a qualitative stance in order to reveal the existential experience of being a migrant laborer. Moreover, the article moves beyond the common categories of mine work, farm work, and domestic work to include a number of other occupations such as hairdressing, construction, and taxi driving.

Migrant Experiences in South Africa

Most of the narratives of migrant experiences of the research participants in this study tell of humiliation and hardship in their country of destination, as well as in South Africa. Migrants face many challenges on a daily basis, including exclusion from their own communities, xenophobic attitudes against them in the receiving country, economic hardship, and barriers to accessing public services. Migrants are

often discriminated against because the dominant population group perceive them as being different and threatening. By focusing for a moment on the concept of belonging, we can move towards an understanding of the experience of exclusion. Belonging is often part of the discourses and practices of socio-spatial in/exclusion. Belonging encompasses boundary maintenance, especially those boundaries which distinguish the world into "us" *vis-à-vis* "them." In other words, the politics of belonging is about belonging to a *group* (Yuval-Davis 2006:204; Antonsich 2010:650). Belonging to a group implies being integrated into the communities in which one lives. A sense of belonging therefore speaks to whether Basotho migrants feel part of the communities in which they live and whether they are able to express themselves in full. This also includes how welcome they feel in Bloemfontein.

Ruth Wodak (2008:60) defines exclusion as "deprivation of access through means of explicit or symbolic power…Inclusion would imply access to participation, citizenship, media, information, language learning, power positions, organizations, jobs, housing, education, and so on." Exclusion is the result of the perceived, as well as real, differences between groups. People become aware of differences through processes such as migration, which bring people from different parts of the world into contact with each other (Easthope 2004:131). Although migration to South Africa has been going on for a long time, Belinda Dodson (2010:6) notes that it increased drastically during the post-1994 era after South Africa's shift to democracy. She points out that African migrants coming to South Africa from various source countries and interacting directly with South Africans have led to the existential experience of cultural differences. Montserrat Guibernau (2013:14) confirms that perceived differences inevitably lead to an external categorization of others. This involves labeling and stereotyping, as well as creating assumptions about beliefs, views, and behaviors of those perceived as belonging to an*other* group. Assessments of "otherness" are due to the parallel assumption of similarity between members of one's own group and perceived differences from those belonging to the out-group.

Belonging revolves around the interplay of difference and sameness based on perceived boundaries that are created between those who do, and those who do not, belong (Ralph and Staeheli 2011:523). The dominant in-group tends to associate the idea of belonging with sameness (Antonsich 2010:650). This is a challenge for migrants as members of the out-group because a person will only be accepted into the group if its members believe that he or she is *similar* to them (Ralph and Staeheli 2011:523). So, in order to belong, people finding themselves outside the dominant group must attain a significant degree of similarity by adopting large parts of the culture, language, values, norms, and beliefs of the dominant group (Yuval-Davis 2006:209; Antonsich 2010:650). Saloshna and Thirusellvan Vandeyar (2011:4165-4166) note in this respect the importance of language by emphasizing that it "serves as a gatekeeper for acceptance in the host society." They believe that the inability to speak the basic language of the host society inevitably leads to exclusion. However, even if a person does assimilate into the dominant group, Marco Antonsich (2010:650) cautions that there will always be other markers of difference, such as place of birth, skin color, or even accent, which would prevent complete sameness and, as a result, can lead to the exclusion of the individual. Vandeyar and Vandeyar (2011:4166) emphasize the importance of accent by arguing that even if migrants can speak the language of the host society, their accent sets them apart from the local people, and that can distinguish them as "other."

Ruth Wodak (2008:64) adds that the exclusion of migrants is typically justified by arguments such as "they are a burden on our society," "they are dangerous, a threat," "they cost too much," "their culture is different." By so doing, she maintains, migrants easily become scapegoats as the host society blame them for unemployment, causing general dissatisfaction, abusing welfare systems, or posing a threat to established cultural practices and traditions. The same applies to South African society. Contrary to South Africans' expectations, since 1994, when the country achieved political democracy, development has been slow, while poverty and inequality have increased (McConnell 2009:34). Migrants became a convenient target to blame for high unemployment and crime rates, for an over-crowded informal trading sector, for the growth of the drug trade, and for bringing diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, and AIDS (Crush 2000:109; Peberdy 2001:24; Gotz and Abdoumaliq 2003:131; McConnell 2009:35; Dodson 2010:5-6; Landau and Freemantle 2010:378). According to Sally Peberdy (2001:28-29), as well as Ingrid Palmary, Janine Rauch, and Graeme Simpson (2003:111), an extreme form of exclusion resulting from the above stereotypes is xenophobia. Migrants often experience xenophobia in the form of harassment by the authorities and the police, and through negative societal attitudes and acts of discrimination and prejudice.

Loren Landau and Iriann Freemantle (2010:379) maintain that police often harass migrants irrespective of whether they are legal or not. They might even disregard work permits, or any other legal documents that migrants hold. It is alleged that police sometimes go to the extent of destroying such documents in order to arrest migrants. They make arrests solely based on migrants' physical appearance, their inability to speak the official languages, or merely for fitting the profile of undocumented migrants. Ingrid Palmary and her co-authors (2003:113) add that the police sometimes deny migrants access to services when they have been victimized, based on the argument that foreigners do not have rights to state resources. Michael Neocosmos (2008:588) also relates how the police frequently abuse their power and how they regularly raid and assault migrants in their own homes. Caroline Kihato's (2013:40-41) study on migrant women of Johannesburg shows that police raids are very common at migrants' places of work. When on their way from work to their places of residence, the migrant women narrate, they often encounter the police at roadblocks where they have to pay bribes in order to avoid arrest (Kihato 2013:40-41). In a study on Congolese migrants in Johannesburg, one Congolese migrant said it was necessary for them to have cash with them at all times, just in case they bump into police (Kakonde 2010:227).

Similarly, in the streets and communities where they live, migrants experience hostile attitudes from the

locals. A study conducted by Jonathan Crush (2000) on public attitudes of South Africans towards migrants and non-citizens shows that South Africans are intolerant of and hostile towards these people. In a study done in 2007-2008, African immigrants in Cape Town reported regular incidents of xenophobia in their everyday lives. They narrated experiencing negative attitudes from local South Africans, even from their neighbors. They described locals as being rude to them: they scorn and laugh about their complexion, mock their accent, and call them *makwerekwere* (Dodson 2010:15-16), in other words: "those who speak in an unintelligible language" (Hansen, Jeannerat, and Sadouni 2009:193). Peter Kakonde's (2010:227) study on Congolese migrants shows that they are often easy targets of crime. This is because migrants are forced to carry cash due to the difficulty of opening bank accounts because they lack proper documents. Moreover, Morten Madsen (2004:179) states that criminals will take advantage and attack migrants because they know that migrants will not report the crime.

Another consequence of lacking proper legal documents is that migrants can be exploited by their employers. Employers pay migrants virtually any wage they see fit because they know that migrants cannot complain to the authorities out of fear of deportation. In addition, hiring and firing practices are unfair because of this. As a result, the migrants lack economic security, and the low wages make it increasingly difficult for many to survive in South Africa. Labor migrants in various studies claim that their wages are barely enough to meet their basic needs and cannot allow them to generate savings. This makes it difficult to plan for the fu-

ture (Dinat and Peberdy 2007:194; Ulicki and Crush 2007:163; Griffin 2011:89-90; Pande 2014:384).

In addition to the difficulty of opening bank accounts, the absence of legal documents restricts migrants from accessing other basic services such as housing, healthcare, and education. Even migrants with legal documents often report some difficulty in accessing services, as is shown in Caroline Kihato's (2013:33-34) study on migrant women in inner-city Johannesburg. According to her, the women struggle to access services since employers and service providers, such as landlords, banks, clinics, and schools, disregard their documents.

Housing is a major problem for many migrants globally. Various studies note that it is equally a concern for migrants in South Africa. In the first instance, landlords and agencies frequently refuse migrants the possibility to rent. Those who do find housing pay excessive rent in spite of the poor quality of housing: most houses/rooms have no bathrooms, electricity, or running water. They are also situated in the less desirable areas, and those who live in urban centers often live in over-crowded neighborhoods (Calavita 2005:111-114; Pande 2014:383). Regis Chireshe's (2010:195) study on the narratives of Zimbabwean migrant women in the Eastern Cape found that most of the women live in poor and unhealthy conditions. These migrants endure poor housing conditions due to their inability to afford the excessive rent (Chireshe 2010:195). They often have irregular employment, which means an irregular income. Those working full-time earn low wages as most of them work in retail, factories, and as street traders (Peberdy and Majodina 2000:279-280). Tolerating

poor housing conditions is also related to difficulties convincing landlords to rent them rooms since they lack traceable references (Chireshe 2010:195). Comparing the housing situation in their countries of origin to housing in South Africa, a study on Somali migrants shows that the migrants classify accommodation in South Africa as uncomfortable, crowded, and as only a roof over their heads as they have no other options (Peberdy and Majodina 2000:283-284). Migrant women in Johannesburg (Kihato 2013:60) similarly agree that housing in their home countries is safer and better than what they encounter in South Africa.

Healthcare services, on the other hand, are often perceived as relatively accessible. In a study on HIV risk perception and healthcare access among Zimbabwean migrant women in Johannesburg, the women acknowledge that healthcare services are more accessible in South Africa than in Zimbabwe where anti-retroviral drugs are usually unavailable. However, they mention several barriers to accessing these services. These include financial constraints, fear of being asked for legal documents, and negative attitudes from medical personnel—particularly at hospitals (Munyewende et al. 2011:156-157).

All of these experiences demonstrate that migrants do not have full rights to the cities in which they live. It can be argued that processes of globalization and urbanization have led to the disenfranchisement of many urban residents. Migrants are stripped even further of these rights to the city because they are non-citizens. As much as they share in the routines of everyday life in the cities in which they live side-by-side with locals, they do not have full access to,

let alone control over, the cities (Purcell 2002:99-102). Because of all these problems, Kenneth Madsen and Ton van Naerssen (2003:62) argue that merely crossing an international border poses major challenges to belonging in the destination country—regardless of how close it may be to the home country. While South Africa in general, and Bloemfontein in particular, is a familiar place to Basotho in terms of geographical and cultural similarities, migrants from Lesotho are still humiliated and made to feel like strangers—they still experience xenophobia, restrictive immigration policies, and exclusion from many opportunities that are open to South African citizens. In addition to the many overt ways in which Basotho migrants are discriminated against, they also experience numerous covert social boundaries in their everyday lives in South Africa.

Theoretical and Methodological Reflections

This qualitative study explores Basotho labor migrants' experiences in an interpretive manner. An interpretivist paradigm focuses on how individuals interpret their lifeworlds (Gray 2014:23). Interpretivism is particularly interested in the uniqueness of individuals and their experiences. In this project, we draw on the theoretical guidelines provided particularly by reflexive sociology because of its focus on individuals' interpretations of events in their lifeworlds within the context of broader social structures (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:3).

The study follows a narrative design with an interest in the lived experiences of Basotho migrants as told by them. We followed a purposive sampling

method to reach the research participants. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants who are knowledgeable about the topic of interest. So we chose to collect narratives from migrants themselves. We also decided to choose migrants working in the informal sector, and without work permits, because we believe they struggle even more with a sense of belonging than other groups of migrants who hold work permits. Lawrence Neuman (2012:149) suggests that purposive sampling is ideal for specialized, hard-to-find populations, which applies to Basotho labor migrants without work permits and who are difficult to locate.

We had interviews with nine participants—four women and five men. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. The interviews were guided by an interview schedule which is formulated on the basis of the research questions, concepts from the theory, and the review of the literature. The schedule consisted of mostly open-ended questions to enable the participants to express themselves, but it also had a structured component to enable the researcher to gather specific information from participants (Merriam 2009:90). A pilot interview was conducted in order to check the relevance and effectiveness of the interview questions. As Kathryn Roulston (2010:99-100) urges, interviews must be scheduled at a time and place convenient for both the researcher and participant; interview sites were places of work and places of residence. According to John Creswell (2013:20), sites such as these constitute participants' world of lived experience and offer the greatest possibility of getting a deeper understanding of their experiences. Appropriate ethical measures—including informed consent, with

voluntary participation, and protection of confidentiality—were taken to safeguard the participants. These measures were all in line with the formal ethical requirements and directives of the University of the Free State's Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities (Ethical Clearance Number: UFS-HUM-2013-29). All the interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants. The raw data were transcribed verbatim, translated into English, and analyzed thematically.

Living as a Stranger

When analyzing the migrants' stories, their experiences of life in Bloemfontein can be categorized into experiences of marginalization, insecurity, and exclusion. In the findings below, pseudonyms are used.

Marginalization

The migrants lead marginalized lives as they are often harassed by the police and the general Bloemfontein public. Indeed, their everyday accounts point to the fact that they are sidelined and treated as outsiders by authorities and society alike. This finding coincides with information from the literature presented earlier: xenophobia—both in the form of harassment by the police and negative societal attitudes—is a common challenge for migrants in South Africa. The migrants report that police will even go as far as to raid their homes in the middle of the night, come to their places of work, and harass them by searching them in the streets. One man, who works as a laborer in building construction, attests to the police raids:

Like the police, they sometimes arrive here in the middle of the night demanding to see our passports and the like. If you happen to ask: "Who are you?" "We are the police!" When you tell them: "I cannot open for the police at this time of night, come during the day because I cannot open for you now!" They are going to kick the door. They kick it, they kick it. You will eventually open the door so that they can enter. [Tumelo]

The act of the police forcing entry into the migrants' homes at night endangers the migrants' lives as it becomes difficult for them to differentiate between authorities and criminals. Due to the high crime rate in many township areas in Bloemfontein, it is not far-fetched to imagine that people who knock at your door at night posing as police officials are actually criminals who mean you harm.

At the realization that the migrants' documents are not in order, instead of making arrests, the police often assault the migrants or demand bribes from them. One woman who works as a domestic worker narrates:

They always bother [emphatically stated] people from Lesotho by constantly saying: "Give us your passport, give us your passport!" And if it shows that you have overstayed your visitors' visa, THEY BEAT YOU UP [loud voice]. They don't arrest you. They assault you. Or they say: "Give us a bribe!"…Yes, they will beat them up, insult them. "You *makhonyo*,[1] bring the passport!" When you take it out and he finds that you have overstayed your visitors' visa, they will beat you

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[1] A word people in Bloemfontein use to curse someone.

up, they will beat you up [emphatically stated]. If they don't beat you, they say: "Give us R250 if you have it so that we leave you." If it's there and you give it to him, the following week they send others. [Itumeleng]

Similarly at their places of work, many participants explain that police arrive unexpectedly demanding to see their work permits. Work permits are not issued for migrants working in the informal sector. Knowing that they will not have work permits, the police chase after these migrants demanding this permit. One man who works as a taxi driver, after numerous encounters with the police at roadblocks, visited the offices of the South African High Commission seeking a work permit, just to discover that he does not qualify for one. This is his story:

Yes, there is…there is a role I once played in trying to find a work permit, you see. It happened that when the police stopped me on the road and told me that I have to get it, I gave myself time to ask them how I can find it. They said: "No, you will find it in Lesotho!" I will find it in Lesotho? Yes, okay, that's how he answered me, so when I got to Lesotho, I tried to find where I can find a work permit, where they are found. Then I found the office which grants work permits. Eh, I think it is where students go to find study permits. So there at the office, the people I found at the office explained that: "Eh, there is no way that people who drive taxis can qualify. We cannot issue them work permits here because South Africa has many people who drive taxis!" He explained it like that…there is no way we can issue work permits for people who are going to drive taxis in South Africa. [Tebello]

The police often humiliate Basotho migrants by randomly stopping them in the streets to search them. The participants mentioned that the police identify Basotho by the jobs that they do. For instance, they claim that the police are well-aware that the construction sector is dominated by Basotho workers and that is how they are caught. Alternatively, the migrants believe that the police identify them by their accent and the way they run. One man who installs ceilings and partitions clarifies this:

No, again the problem that I've realized…You should see how easily we get arrested. We are caught because of the way we walk, the way we speak. When they tell you to count from one to five, they are going to catch you, when you get to two. How does a person from Lesotho say two? Two [saying it in a different tone], they say one, two. A person from Lesotho when they say two, they say two [saying it in a different tone]. When they are told to count from one to five, they say one, two [saying it in a different tone]. They tell you: "Get into the van!" They say: "Run from here to that door!" Before you even get to the door, they say: "Come, get into the van!" Have you seen what they do? They [demonstrating]…This thing, isn't it they always get arrested in my presence? They say: "Run from here to there, run!" When a person runs, they say: "Come back!" Then I ask them how do you know that that person is from Lesotho? They say a person from Lesotho and one from Bloemfontein don't run in the same way. [Kutloano]

The harassment that migrants experience at the hands of the police makes them to live their everyday lives in fear. For most, a negative impact of this harassment is financial because the fear of not knowing when they will get arrested makes it difficult to budget. It also means having to get money, including loans, so that they can go home to renew their visitors' visas. For taxi drivers, the implication is that they sometimes lose their jobs during regular roadblocks when caught by the police and sent back to Lesotho as the taxi owners have to replace them with local taxi drivers.

Local citizens are not welcoming either. The migrants maintain that some members of the Bloemfontein community are hostile towards them; they call them names, mock their dressing style, and accuse them of a number of misdemeanors. This is in line with earlier reports that South Africans are often intolerant of non-citizens. The name that is often used to mock Basotho migrants is *moholoane*. In Lesotho, this term is actually used to show respect among men, but local people in Bloemfontein use it to degrade Basotho. As one man puts it:

South Africans, ma'am, most of them actually don't like us, Basotho. They really despise us. If you look closely, even in their conversations, when you listen. There is also that thing that you will hear them saying: *Baholoane,*[2] *Baholoane*. It's true that in Sesotho we know what it means to say *moholoane*. But, the way in which they use it, I mean, you find that it's like they belittle [emphatically stated] us...Sometimes, let's say, maybe I appear wearing my gumboots, you see? Yes, there are those who you will find, a person just standing there and mocking you and saying: "These ones wearing gumboots, these ones wearing gumboots!" Swearing and insulting us! [Tumelo]

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[2] Plural for *moholoane*.

As occurs with migrants elsewhere in the world, local citizens tend to use Basotho migrants as scapegoats and blame them for things such as job shortages. The migrants refute this by arguing that local people stay behind in the locations, while they go out and look for work. One woman who works as a hairdresser at a beauty salon makes this point:

Yes, there are those small talks which will sometimes annoy you…There was a girl who liked saying girls from Lesotho take their men [pause]; we're witches. What is it again? WE EVEN TAKE THEIR JOBS [loud voice], but you find that when you leave the location for work, those very people from here are the ones just sitting there not looking for jobs. They claim that we take their jobs…I don't think there is someone's space I have occupied because I have never seen them coming here seeking jobs. It's people from Lesotho who come here seeking jobs, while they are relaxing at the location. [Limpho]

From the narratives above, it appears the local citizens are not willing to accept the migrants as part of their communities. They view them as outsiders who do not belong in South Africa. Even the police, who are supposed to ensure everyone's protection, pose as a threat to migrants' security. In addition to this marginalization, the migrants' everyday lives are also marked by insecurity.

Insecurity

The migrants' insecurity is physical in the sense that they mostly live in poor conditions. All the participants in this study live in the townships, on the outskirts of Bloemfontein. We conducted most of the interviews at the participants' places of work or residence. When interviewing people at their places of residence, it was clear that the majority of them live in generally poor quality housing. This correlates with findings of studies discussed earlier, which found housing to be a major problem for most migrants in South Africa (cf. Peberdy and Majodina 2000:283-284; Chireshe 2010:195; Kihato 2013:60). One participant's room, for instance, had three double-sized beds taking almost the entire space, and the roofing was of poor quality with plastic sheets for a ceiling. At another participant's place of residence the room was in very bad shape: the roofing was old, the floor was cracked, and plastic bags had been used to cover the walls. Crates were used to store things, and a curtain was used to divide the room. At another participant's home the roofing was old, the paint on the walls was peeling off, and pieces of cloth had been used to fill up the holes, sheets of torn lace curtaining had also been used to cover some parts of the wall. The room was divided with a curtain into kitchen and bedroom. All the houses appeared to be old.

The participants' narratives highlight these poor housing conditions. They raise concerns about leaking roofs, dust during strong winds, overcrowding, and landlords who take no steps to maintain properties. They in fact emphasize that the houses people rent out to people from Lesotho are generally in bad condition. One woman says:

…the houses we normally live in are not good. In fact, the houses that people rent out in Bloemfontein are not good houses, especially if they rent them out to people from places like Lesotho. Even if you tell the

landlord: "You see how it is here!" He will not even take the initiative to maintain. [Rethabile]

Most of the participants state that housing back in Lesotho is much better in comparison to Bloemfontein, where housing is often just a matter of having a roof over one's head. This corroborates other studies mentioned earlier, which indicate that migrants perceive housing in their home countries as safer and as more comfortable than housing in South Africa. As one man says:

> This house that I stay in, ma'am. It is just a house because one is on the move, you understand. As long as you just have a roof over your head so that you can work. I mean, in comparison with where I stay in Lesotho: no, this one is not in good condition. It's just a shelter to protect one against rains and to ensure that you don't sleep outside. I mean, even you can see. [Tumelo]

The poor quality of housing in which the participants live even endangers their lives as they might get ill or suffer physical injuries. For instance, the dust that constantly gets in during winds and the damp from the leaking roofs can cause respiratory diseases. Even worse, if the roofs get blown off by strong winds, the participants can sustain serious injuries. Their health is therefore at risk.

The migrants' insecurity is also financial: according to their stories, they suffer exploitation at the hands of their employers in their everyday lives. Their employers usually pay them less than the amount they had initially agreed on and most migrants feel that they earn meager wages. Sometimes employers do not pay the migrants at all. Some participants also claim to have been unfairly dismissed. They are afraid to report any of these incidents out of fear that they will get themselves arrested due to not having work permits. The employers are well aware of this fact and it is why they continue to exploit migrants. Studies conducted in South Africa reinforce the finding that employers normally pay migrants low wages because they know they will not be reported to authorities. One man recalls:

> Oh, I nearly forgot one of the things I despise about working in construction. You find that you have worked; let's say we get paid per fortnight. You work. After a fortnight, when you have to get paid, sometimes you are paid only half of the money. You no longer get the amount that you expected, depending on how much you had agreed you would make per day with your employer. You find that the money is no longer…For example, let's say you agreed that the money you make per day: when you calculate, it's supposed to be R400 in a fortnight. You find that when it's pay day, your employer gives you only R350. When you try to find out what happened with the rest, the supervisor is going to explain that: "No, man, the money arrived just like that." Or: "Our employer didn't send the full amount, we didn't get the full amount of money." That is why I give you this much."…Just like now, there is someone that I worked with. I think I worked with him for about two weeks and three days…the total amount of money that I had to get from that person was R1 300, depending on the job description and the number of days we would take to finish the job. But, he only paid R500. Eh, the remaining R800 is with him. It is still with him. So when we went to confront him about the rest of the money, he kept on

beating about the bush. And now he doesn't even answer his phone when we call…We will never get it. As we continue working, you are going to find that, eh, you work for a fortnight. That fortnight, by the time that person has to pay you, he has disappeared. He is gone. There is no money. You have worked for nothing. You no longer get that money. [Tumelo]

He points to the challenges they face when thinking about reporting their employers to the police:

> Hey, now we have a problem because when we think of reporting him to the police, there is a problem at the police station. When we get there, they are going to ask. We are asked [emphatically stated] if we have work permits that allow us to work in this country. That is the challenge we are facing. When we go and report them to the police that: "Hey, we have a problem, we worked with this person, but now the problem is that he no longer pays us as per our agreement." Then comes up the issue that we don't have work permits, permission to work here. If we don't have such a document, then we are facing a challenge. [Tumelo]

There are also cases where employers pay the migrants in kind instead of in money. However, they do not tell the migrants beforehand. Migrants are perplexed after the completion of a job when they expect to get their wages and are instead offered goods. This points to a lack of consideration for other people's circumstances and feelings. It is also deliberate disrespect because they are aware that the migrants cannot report them to authorities. One woman who works on a part-time basis shares her experience:

> Yes, this one of blankets, washing clothes: some pay me well, others don't pay. She tells me that: "No, I will pay you with clothing." And, mind you, she tells me when she is supposed to give me money, she doesn't tell me at the time I start work…Any clothes that can fit me. She will be telling me: "I have these shoes, what size do you wear?" I say: "I wear size seven." Then she says: "I have size seven shoes, I'll give them to you. What size do your children wear?" Then I tell her: "No." "I will give you those clothes." I say: "No, I'm not going to be able to work for clothes."…Honestly: no. I didn't see it better to take them because I also have to send my children something so that they get food to eat. So I found it useless to take the clothes because they're not going to eat them [sad]. I didn't take the clothes. I didn't get money…Eh, I don't know what I can do because when I tell the story to someone, she/he will say: "Ooh! When you go to the police, they're going to ask you to produce a work permit." It's things like that. [Itumeleng]

Some participants have become aware that employers exploit migrants, and have as a result maneuvered ways around that. One man learnt first-hand that employees from Lesotho are generally paid less than local workers and so now he conceals his origins. He tells his story:

> Mm, they don't even know that I'm from Lesotho. They will take advantage of me, if they know I'm from Lesotho. Isn't it a fact that people from Lesotho are undermined? And you should know that if you work for an employer who knows that you're from Lesotho, you will find that your salary is not equal to other people's salaries…Yes, they are paid less. You are going to find that people are being paid R150

a day, while you are only paid R120 or R100. Eh, I realized because I saw, my first employer knew that I am from Lesotho. When I came to check my salary, I found that: nah, man, my salary is little. These other people have more. Then I thought that maybe it's because I found them already at the firm. Then I learnt… Those who found me already at the firm, these people are also getting more money than I am. Then someone said: "No, it's because that person knows that you are from Lesotho and there is nowhere you can complain." After I left that firm, moving from that firm to the next, I never again disclosed that I'm from Lesotho. [Kutloano]

Employers' exploitation of migrants deprives them of their livelihoods and of a full sense of belonging to the society. Financial security is an important component of belonging. By being paid less than the agreed amount, by not being paid at all, or being unfairly dismissed, migrants enter an unstable economic situation which leads to both hardship and heightened feelings of social exclusion. Additionally, migrants are excluded by being deprived access to services.

Exclusion

The migrants are excluded from access to public services. They are also excluded in terms of communication because of their inability to express themselves in some of the more prominent languages such as Afrikaans or Tswana during their dealings with service providers and the general Bloemfontein community. While Basotho migrants acknowledge that healthcare services are fairly easily accessible in South Africa, as do migrants from elsewhere, their experiences are that services such as banking, education, and the opening of accounts are difficult to access. They mention that they are usually hindered by their inability to provide specified documents required by service providers. One such document is an affidavit from the landlord stating that the migrant indeed stays on the landlord's premises. Migrants argue that it is difficult to obtain such an affidavit as the landlords work and often stay far away, and are therefore difficult to reach. Others report that they are denied services merely because they are from Lesotho. One man explains that his children were denied entry into school because they are from Lesotho:

No, services are being offered, but sometimes with that bias [emphatically stated]. For schooling of children, there is still discrimination. In some areas, they don't allow them. They say they don't take children from Lesotho. [Thabo]

Migrants also maintain that they are denied services by the police. This fact corroborates earlier findings that the police deny migrants services when they seek help. One woman tells the story of a fellow migrant whose grievances were not attended to by the police when she went to report assault:

Well, they [the police] haven't done anything to me, but they do to my fellow migrants. They won't be treating them well when they have complaints. They will be like: "She is a *moholoane*" [emphatically stated]. Yes, they will be like: "Oh! She is a *moholoane*!" My fellow migrant will be going to the police to report: "My husband assaulted me." When she arrives, they will be saying: "Oh! These *baholoane* are irritating!"…And they don't assist them. They will be saying: "You should come at a certain time." When you return, they say: "Come at a certain time!" [Itumeleng]

In general, lack of South African citizenship hinders migrants from accessing services. This is because they are asked to produce South African identification almost everywhere. One woman sums this up:

Everywhere you meet deadlines, everywhere. You can go to the bank to open an account—the problem is that you don't have an ID. Obviously, you cannot find your own, right? Because you're not…What do they say a person is? You are not a citizen. In many things, we're hindered by citizenship. You are not a South African citizen, so you don't have the right to these and that…For instance, JUST OPENING AN ACCOUNT [loud voice]. To open an account, you will find that if you use a Lesotho passport, they don't want to open an account for you. For clothing, for…Not for clothing because I have a clothing account…A furniture account. There is no furniture shop which can open an account for you. You will find them saying: "No, we don't open accounts for people from Lesotho!" So I don't know whether Basotho have disappeared with their things or what…It's not easy. In everything, they say: "No, not people from Lesotho. We want IDs." [Limpho]

In addition to difficulties accessing public services, the migrants encounter language problems in communicating with service providers. This is because in Bloemfontein there are many Afrikaans-speaking people. Sesotho is also a common spoken language. There are other languages such as Tswana, which is related to Sesotho although it is still a different language. According to the migrants' narratives, the many unfamiliar languages limit their interaction with local people in Bloemfontein. The difficulty in communication is a significant challenge; as the literature indicates—language is a very important prerequisite for migrants being accepted in the destination area since it is an important means for interaction (cf. Vandeyar and Vandeyar 2011:4165-4166). The participants acknowledge that their first language, Sesotho, is one of the spoken languages in Bloemfontein, and that they are able to communicate with some local people. However, in their experience, when it comes to public services, Sesotho does not help them much since they come across service providers who do not understand Sesotho. One woman says:

It's my language and it counts in my favor. Sometimes it doesn't. It helps me when I communicate with people like this. When I go to the shops, I will find people who don't speak Sesotho. Then I become confused as to what language I'm now supposed to speak in order for this person to understand…Let me say, I go to the hospital there, I will find a *lekoerekoere*.[3] She/he is not going to understand what I'm saying. If I go to the shops where they say there's a job available, when I arrive, I won't find a Mosotho[4] person. I will find that she/he speaks Xhosa, Zulu, English, so I will have to speak English. And I don't know it that well. I will then have to find someone who knows English to translate what I'm saying. [Itumeleng]

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[3] A name Basotho used to call people from other African countries.
[4] Singular for Basotho.

A similar degree of exclusion pertains to work. Participants maintain that they struggle to find jobs as some employers are not Sesotho-speaking. Because some migrants moved to Bloemfontein to explore job opportunities, the language barrier limits their prospects. In one man's words:

> Eh, Sesotho as my language here in Bloemfontein—it honestly gives me problems sometimes. Especially at work because you find that Afrikaans is the most generally spoken language. Since we work with White people, you are going to find that it is necessary to know Afrikaans. And if you don't know Afrikaans, you cannot work...We even prefer to work with Whites because they are trustworthy. Now, most of them don't know Sesotho. They speak Afrikaans. So if you don't know Afrikaans, you cannot be able to work with him because you will not understand each other. [Tumelo]

While Sesotho is spoken in Bloemfontein, the migrants maintain that the dialect differs from that which is spoken in Lesotho. They say that there are some instances when local people fail to understand them when they speak. The alternative is to speak English when they encounter people who do not understand Sesotho. But, resorting to English does not always help as the participants maintain that they sometimes come across local people who do not understand English. The fact that most research participants emphasize that a language barrier exists between them and local residents is in contrast with literature that suggests that migrants from Lesotho do not experience a language barrier in South Africa (cf. Hansen, Jeannerat, and Sadouni 2009:193).

Conclusion

Migration from Lesotho to South Africa has a long history and it will continue into the future. Researchers have documented dimensions of this migration, but mostly focus on increasing female migration, the recruitment of farm workers, and employer demand in shaping labor migration from Lesotho. Fewer studies investigate the everyday experiences of migrants and of those that do, most have a narrow focus on working conditions. This article explores a broader spectrum of events and situations in the everyday lifeworld and everyday experiences of Basotho labor migrants in Bloemfontein.

When analyzing the migrants' narratives, it becomes clear that they are treated as strangers in a place they are familiar with: geographically and culturally, the Free State is not particularly different from Lesotho and the distance between Maseru and Bloemfontein is relatively short. But, because the migrants have crossed an international border, they are considered as outsiders. Authorities and the general community alike are hostile towards them. The police abuse their power and subject the migrants to humiliation. They chase after them at work, demanding work permits which they know the migrants do not hold so that they can demand bribes. They harass them in the streets and humiliate them by making fun of them. But, it is not only the police; members of society at large call them names, mock their dressing style, and accuse them of stealing jobs. Landlords are unresponsive to their complaints about poor housing conditions which endanger their physical health. Their lack of proper documents restricts them from accessing public services and also makes them vulnerable to exploitation by employers. Their employability is judged on the basis of language proficiency rather than capability.

It cannot be denied that these migrants' everyday lives are characterized by marginalization, insecurity, and exclusion. The local people have set clear boundaries regarding who can and who cannot belong in South Africa. The lack of South African identity documents already implies that migrants cannot be provided with services. They are harassed and exploited by authorities and employers because they lack recourse to the law. Their dressing style and accent distinguish them as "other." For some time, a modern view of life in our times has been that everyone who inhabits the city—irrespective of nationality—has the right to urban residency. But, it is clear that the migrants' right to participate in and to have free access to Bloemfontein still very much depends on citizenship. Crossing an international border indeed poses a challenge to belonging irrespective of how close the distance may be between the country of origin and the destination.

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Experiencing Boundaries: Basotho Migrant Perspectives on the Lesotho-South Africa Border

Abstract   The Lesotho-South Africa border is regarded as highly porous with many Basotho migrants seizing work and educational opportunities in South Africa, while simultaneously maintaining strong ties to family members, businesses, and land in Lesotho. The fact that Sesotho is spoken on both sides of the border is one of the particular factors that has made it possible for people to move back and forth with relative ease. The border nevertheless remains an important political and socio-cultural barrier in the lives of those crossing it. While some have managed to acquire the permits that enable them to cross the border freely and take up formal work, others occupy a precarious legal status, which limits their housing and employment prospects. Moreover, the lives of all African migrants in South Africa have been affected by growing xenophobic violence in recent years. This has reinforced distinctions between insiders and outsiders, and limited the opportunities migrants have to experience belonging to South African society. Despite these emerging dynamics, the ways in which the border is perceived by migrants—as both a physical barrier between countries and as a social barrier distinguishing peoples—has yet to be explored. Drawing on narrative interviews conducted with Basotho migrants living in Bloemfontein, South Africa in a variety of legal and employment circumstances, this paper aims to highlight the meaning of the border in the migrants' day-to-day lives.

Keywords   Lesotho; Borders; Belonging; Work; Everyday Life

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It should be obvious that the construction of borders reflects existing ethnic, group and territorial difference (subsequent) just as it is often responsible for the creation of those differences in the first place (antecedent). [Newman 2006:155-156]

Borders are material in that they can be viewed as lines separating two sovereign territories. They are also much more than that, however, insofar as they influence culture, identity, and peoples' territorial belonging. As Morehouse (2004:20) puts it, borders, like all boundaries, "are material and metaphorical spatializations of difference." People actively reproduce boundaries and borders through their perceptions of difference and the various ways they perform identities and modes of belonging. However, they may also challenge material borders through transgressive practices carried out in their everyday lives.

Lesotho's position as a landlocked country inside South Africa makes it a unique case study by which to study borders and border crossings. Lesotho is the only UN member "entirely enclosed by another member" (SAMP 2002:9).

Geographically, socially, and economically South Africa and Lesotho have long been closely linked. Due to the relative strength of the South African economy, however, there has been a strong historical tendency towards movement from Lesotho to South Africa (Murray 1981). From the late 1800s

Figure 1. Positioning of Lesotho.

Source: Self-elaboration.

until the 1990s, many Basotho men came to work in the mines. The number of migrants grew exponentially over time, and during the 1970s and 1980s as much as 50% of the working age population of Lesotho was temporarily employed in South Africa (Cobbe 2012). Moreover, according to recent statistics, in 2013 Lesotho was represented among the top ten source countries for migrants receiving temporary and permanent residence permits for South Africa (Statistics South Africa 2014:17, 37). The economy of Lesotho has become very dependent on funds generated through migrant labor, which are usually sent back to Lesotho in the form of household remittances (Mensah and Naidoo 2011).

While migration from Lesotho to South Africa has remained steady over time, the characteristics of those moving have gradually changed. Since the 1990s, there have been fewer opportunities in the mining sector, which has reduced the number of men moving for work (Coplan 2001). Instead, more women have been moving to South Africa to seek work in the domestic and agricultural sectors (Ulicki and Crush 2007). That said, today both male and female migrants from Lesotho can be found working in a wide range of employment sectors, ranging from the informal to the formal, from the less skilled to highly skilled. There are Basotho migrants working in the healthcare, beauty, education, agricultural, retail, and domestic service sectors. It can therefore not be said that all migrants have a similar, homogeneous perspective or standpoint from which to experience the Lesotho-South Africa border. Any investigation of the border experience must therefore take into account the different circumstances encountered by these migrants, and the different opportunities they have to transcend the border between the two countries.

Most migrants from Lesotho to South Africa move to the neighboring Province of the Free State, where there are numerous linguistic and cultural similarities. That said, growing xenophobia in South Africa in recent years has raised the importance of South African citizenship as a prerequisite for belonging to the nation state, something which has heightened the socio-cultural meaning of the border between the two countries. Hence, while migrants from Lesotho may experience fewer cultural and linguistic barriers than most migrants to South Africa, they still experience xenophobia, restrictive immigration policies, and they are excluded from opportunities which are open to South African citizens.

Researchers have written about increasing female migration, the recruitment of farm workers, and employer demand in shaping labor migration from Lesotho (Ulicki and Crush 2000; 2007; Johnston 2007). However, little effort has been made to understand how Basotho labor migrants view the border—as a physical/political barrier and as a socio-cultural construct. In this article, a phenomenological approach is adopted to explore the experience of Basotho labor migrants who cross the South Africa-Lesotho border in order to obtain work. The article investigates how these migrants perceive, experience, and make sense of the border, and in doing so, aims to build an understanding of how the migrants under study attribute meaning to the border in their everyday lives.

Placing the South Africa-Lesotho Border

As Morehouse (2004) points out, context is key to understanding how boundaries are shaped and attention must therefore be given to their historical, geographical, and socio-economic formation. In Southern Africa, borders are a colonial construct. In many cases, these borders were drawn arbitrarily and were the outcome of power struggles between colonial powers. Interestingly, Lesotho was formed when the Basotho people resisted colonial rule during the wars in the Orange Free State of South Africa in the 1860s (SAMP 2002). Aided by a mountainous geography, the Basotho people were able to defend their territory. While some mobility restrictions between South Africa and Lesotho were put in place from that time, in practice, people moved freely across the border. It was only in 1963 when passports were first required to cross into South Africa (SAMP 2002). The apartheid government in power in South Africa at the time practiced isolationism and viewed people coming from Lesotho as a potential security threat. Anti-apartheid activities were indeed often planned and executed from Maseru, the capital of Lesotho. While security concerns are no longer an issue between the two countries, Lesotho is today treated just as all other foreign countries, and Lesotho citizens require visas to enter South Africa. Justifications typically given for this are "unauthorized immigration, employment, free use of South African social services, and criminal activity in general" (SAMP 2002:4). In reality, however, the South Africa-Lesotho border is a very porous boundary. While employment and study permits are more difficult to acquire, one can easily acquire a one month visitor's visa which can then be renewed by simply returning to Lesotho and then reentering South Africa. Moreover, according to a recent SAMP [South Africa Migration Project] report (2002), immigration and customs regulations can easily be overcome due to corruption at the border, and many people continue to cross the border illegally by way of swimming the river that divides the two countries or by crossing at other unpatrolled areas.

A tradition of moving across the Lesotho-South Africa border has been well-established for generations and even today, despite the imposition of visa requirements, some Basotho cross daily for school, work, or shopping, while others move for longer periods of time. Such migration patterns are well-established between South Africa and Lesotho, but also between South Africa and other countries in the region, such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Botswana. Ethnic and linguistic similarities between people on both sides of the border, as well as family and kinship ties have encouraged migration flows in the region. Recognition of the linkages between South Africa and the countries neighboring it was given at the end of apartheid in 1994, when the country became increasingly open to African migrants. Disparities between South Africa and its neighbors in terms of political stability, infrastructure, resources, and services, as well as the greater number of job opportunities in South Africa have also contributed to the significant influx of migrants from neighboring countries since that time (Peberdy 2001).

In recent years, however, there has been growing resistance to immigration in the South African

context. Following the establishment of democracy in South Africa in 1994, expectations were very high, with Black South Africans feeling that they would finally receive what had long been denied to them under apartheid: financial security and a better quality of life. Instead, competition for jobs, housing, and other state resources has led to a growing emphasis on legal belonging in the country at the expense of linguistic and cultural commonalities or kinship ties maintained across borders. There has therefore been growing violence and resentment directed at migrants, who are often blamed for the high unemployment and crime rate, over-crowded informal trading sector, the growth of the drug trade, and for bringing diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, and AIDS (Crush 2000; Peberdy 2001; Gotz and Abdoumaliq 2003; McConnell 2009; Dodson 2010; Landau and Freemantle 2010).

Migrants have been frequently subjected to harassment by the police, detention, and deportation, and have been the targets of day-to-day xenophobic attitudes which exclude them from full participation in and belonging to South African society (Crush 2000; Madsen 2004; Neocosmos 2008; Hansen, Jeannerat, and Sadouni 2009; Dodson 2010; Landau and Freemantle 2010). Migrants may be identified by their lack of official status in South Africa, but also on aspects of their physical appearance, their dress, their accents, or their language skills. A study conducted by Crush (2000) found that the majority of immigrants, refugees, and non-citizens in general living in South Africa had, according to their own perception, at some point experienced harassment by both South African citizens and the authorities.

Given the growing opposition to migration in the South African context, migrants from Africa in particular have faced growing risk of deportation and arrest. They have been increasingly subjected to police raids of their homes and workplaces, and to road blocks (Neocosmos 2008; Kihato 2013). It is not uncommon even for documented migrants to face such difficulties, with many relying on bribery as a way to overcome harassment (Madsen 2004; Sidzatane and Maharaj 2013).

So, despite the seemingly arbitrary meaning of the borders in the region, in the postcolonial context, there have been strong nationalist movements in many Southern African countries which have served to strengthen the importance of borders between states. In the post-apartheid context of South Africa in particular, this has resulted in an increased importance being placed on citizenship and a reluctance to honor multiple citizenship claims, and more generally—to welcome migrants, especially those seeking asylum or looking for work.

Borders and Everyday Life

Borders are physical, geopolitical entities, but they also greatly impact and are impacted by identities and constructions of difference (Newman and Paasi 1998; Gielis 2009). As Jenkins (2015:14) points out: "It is at the boundary during encounters with Others that identification occurs and identity is produced and reproduced, along with the group in question. Group boundaries, in this view, can be said to exist simultaneously in *individual knowledge* of them, in *practice and interaction*,

and as encoded and embodied in *institutions*." To date, there has not been a great effort to link the literature on group boundaries and political borders. While the former considers the social processes by which "ethnic" categories are maintained despite the mixing and movement of people between these categories, the latter is associated more with geopolitical concerns. Hence, the studies of political borders and socio-cultural boundaries are divided by discipline, terminology, and conceptualization (Newman 2006). But, material borders are one type of boundary among others, and in this study, the goal is to explore the relationship between the material border and less tangible boundaries separating and connecting Lesotho and South Africa.

Central to this endeavor is moving away from a top down view of borders that favors only the perspective of the nation state, to instead consider how citizens and migrants perceive, perform, reproduce, and challenge physical borders in their daily lives (Johnson et al. 2011). As van Houtum (2011:60) puts it: "We are not only victims of the border, but also the producers of it." Through othering, displays of nationalism, performances of national belonging, as well as through various claims-making processes related to mobility, human, and political rights people enact borders in their everyday lives (Gielis 2009; Johnson et al. 2011; Jenkins 2015). As Newman and Paasi (1998:187) put it, even if boundaries "are always more or less arbitrary lines between territorial entities, they may also have deep symbolic, cultural, historical and religious, often contested, meanings for social communities." Hence, it is not only borders, but also the process of bordering itself that impacts on people's everyday lives.

The space in which bordering occurs can extend well beyond the line of the physical border itself to encompass the lived spaces of those who cross the border. As Gielis (2009) has emphasized in relation to those moving between Germany and The Netherlands, borders can therefore be understood not only in their material form, but also as something that is lived and experienced. Several recent studies have emphasized the everyday lives of borderlanders who may live lives that transcend a physical border. The everyday lives of these migrants are frequently depicted as cosmopolitan and hybrid, with the border itself being conceptualized not only as a place of division but also as a meeting point between places (Morehouse 2004).

It is also important, however, to understand the order, categories, and limitations imposed by the physical border as something that can be resisted and challenged by those living in border spaces. As several scholars have pointed out, the political division imposed by the presence of a physical border is not something that necessarily coincides with the perceptions, agenda, and everyday practices of those living on either side of the demarcation. As Jones (2012) notes:

People accept that the state is there and a categorical order has been imposed, but they do not necessarily accept those categories. When required, they perform their role as subjects of the state, but at other times they continue to think and live in alternative configurations that maintain connections across, through, and around sovereign state-territoriality. [p. 697]

Hence, people may challenge the border by engaging in various transgressive activities such as illegal crossings, the smuggling of goods, and otherwise refusing to abide by state regulations (Jones 2012). While not necessarily overtly political in motive, such initiatives challenge the top down understanding of borders and instead highlight the way people live their everyday lives in border spaces.

Of particular interest to our study is the work of scholars like Struver (2005) who have drawn on the work of de Certeau to understand the everyday practices migrants use to overcome the challenges people face through the process of migration in their everyday lives. According to de Certeau (1984), the daily practices people adopt in order to "make do" are sometimes in opposition to the practices and strategies used by states to control citizens. In this sense, migrants should not be seen as simply responding to institutional and social structures they encounter, but also as active agents who find ways to circumvent these structures in order to achieve their goals. As Highmore (2002) notes, de Certeau offers an alternative way of looking at the political. Everyday life, according to de Certeau, is inventive and its politics is one that emerges from everyday practice, whether conscious or unconscious.

Several studies have considered the everyday experiences of migrants in South Africa, as well as how they "make do" and "get by" despite the challenges they face. For the many migrants who are not legally entitled to work, working life can be very difficult with low wages being the norm, and on account of their precarious legal status, exploitation and abuse are also common experiences. This creates an in-

ability to plan ahead financially (Dinat and Peberdy 2007; Ulicki and Crush 2007; Griffin 2011; Pande 2014) as they are never sure how long they will be working in a given place and with what wage. In order to deal with their lack of economic security, many migrants may work overtime or take on multiple jobs. For those with higher levels of skill, who may find it easier to secure work, not having citizenship or permanent residency may pose as a barrier to career progression.

The living conditions of the migrants are similarly shaped by their place in the labor market. A number of factors including the temporary nature of their stay in South Africa, their official legal status, their income, and the contacts they have (or lack) in the country may influence how and where they choose to live. A number of studies have addressed how housing is a major concern for migrants who are lacking in resources and security (Chireshe 2010; Munyewende et al. 2011). As they attempt to get by in the new country of residence, the migrants may experience poor living conditions, overcrowding, and threats to their security. This negatively impacts them psychologically and in terms of health.

The precarious living status and livelihoods of migrants in South Africa raise questions concerning how they perceive and experience the border and the spaces associated with the border. This article aims to build on the existing literature on the everyday lives of migrants in South Africa, but in doing so, goes beyond a specific focus on living and working conditions to instead consider how they make sense of their situations as border-crossing labor migrants.

Narrating the Border

The study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm which, according to Gray (2014), focuses on how individuals interpret their lifeworlds. Interpretivism is especially interested in the uniqueness of individuals, and as such it lends itself to a qualitative approach. The study follows a narrative design. The interest of this study is in the experiences of Basotho migrants as told by them. That is similarly the interest of narrative inquiry, according to Chase (2005). Butler-Kisber (2010) suggests that narrative inquiry is an appropriate design when we want to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals. The study is therefore following in the vein of thought adopted by border studies scholars such as Newman (2006) and Newman and Paasi (1998) who argue that narrative is a useful way for understanding how people make sense of the borders that affect their daily lives. As Newman (2006:152) puts it: "Through narrative, we perceive the borders which surround us, which we have to cross on a daily basis and/or are prevented from crossing because we do not 'belong' on the other side."

The purposive method of sampling is used to obtain the study participants. Purposive sampling involves selecting people who are knowledgeable about the topic of interest. The researcher relies on his/her judgment and prior knowledge to choose participants (Neuman 2012). By studying knowledgeable participants, Patton (2002) observes that the researcher will be able to answer the research questions. With our interest in understanding how Basotho labor migrants negotiate belonging

in their everyday lives, we choose Basotho labor migrants themselves as participants since they are the most knowledgeable about their experiences. We choose participants with a range of backgrounds, skill levels, and legal statuses. More than half are labor migrants in the informal sector without work permits, while others hold valid work or study permits, or even South African identification documents.

Fifteen participants relate their experiences to us: eight women and seven men. The semi-structured interviews used to gather data are based on open-ended questions. This gives participants the space to express themselves, but is structured enough to ensure that specific information is obtained from participants (Merriam 2009). The interviews are guided by an interview schedule formulated on the basis of the research questions, concepts from the theory, and the review of the literature. A pilot interview is first conducted in order to check the effectiveness of the interview questions. After finalizing the interview schedule, we meet with participants in their places of work, residence, or leisure, which, according to Creswell (2013), constitute their world of lived experience. It therefore offers the greatest possibility of getting a deeper understanding of their experiences. These meeting places are also convenient for the participants. As Roulston (2010) urges, interviews must be scheduled at a time and place convenient for both the researcher and participant. All the interviews are audio recorded with the permission of the participants. The interviews are conducted in either Sesotho or English. All Sesotho interviews are transcribed and subsequently translated.

Study Findings

As already emphasized, the border between two countries can be looked at in a variety of ways: as a material entity, as a lived political reality, and as a social construct or socio-cultural marker of difference. Naturally, these different types of boundaries overlap in a number of ways. For the purposes of analysis and presentation, however, in what follows, the findings of the study will be presented by considering how the participants perceive, experience, and imagine the "physical," "lived," and "socio-cultural" boundaries separating South Africa and Lesotho.

The Physical Boundary

For many of the participants, Lesotho is divided from South Africa as much by geographical features as it is by a political boundary. Many make reference to the Caledon River dividing the two places, as well as the mountainous geography which distinguishes Lesotho and gives it a slightly different climate. While Lesotho is associated with rural landscapes, the move to Bloemfontein denotes a shift to urban life; hence, from the perspective of the participants, migration from Lesotho to South Africa can be considered a case of internal rural to urban migration rather than a move across an international boundary.

As discussed, South Africa and Lesotho are highly integrated, and there is a longstanding history of migration between the countries. Hence, it is not surprising that the participants regard the political border between the two countries as highly porous

and easy to cross; movement across this boundary is regarded as expected, and in all ways unexceptional. A SAMP (2002:22) survey indicates that most Basotho see borders between South Africa and Lesotho "as an unnecessary and artificial construct." The same can be said for the participants in this study. The border is the physical manifestation of a political arrangement that is beyond their control and strategies are needed to overcome it.

The majority of the participants have Lesotho passports and enter South Africa on a monthly visitor's visa, which they find relatively easy to acquire. Some also mention, however, that South Africa can be entered without first acquiring a passport, for example, by knowing the right people and/or offering bribes to the border guards.

One woman, Rethabile,[1] who is currently working in the informal sector, tells the following story:

> At the time when I first came here, I didn't have a passport. It's the point that I don't have a passport, but I am going to Bloemfontein. Then she [the woman helping her] showed me where I should wait when I get to the border gate and what I should do to be able to leave. I waited there while she talked to some guys at the border gate. Then she told me: "These people who are standing there can be able to help you cross to South Africa." They were still being paid R50 then. So they showed me how I must go, and that lady went through the gate directly. When she got to the other side, she stopped the car and we got in. By the time I returned home, she told

[1] All participants' names have been changed to pseudonyms.

me what I should do when I get to the border gate. She called some guy she knew who helped us cross the last time, and told him that: "Hey, that girl is going to pass at a certain day. She will call and you will make a means of how she can cross." He called me, indeed, he called me. I got to him and he helped me cross, and I passed there. I first came here in 2007. In 2007, I didn't have a passport. Then it was 2008, and I still didn't have a passport. In 2009, I still didn't have a passport. In 2010, I applied for a passport. [Rethabile]

At present, most of the participants in the study opt to have a more secure status in South Africa, although this ranges from holding a work or study permit to having a monthly visitors permit which requires returning to Lesotho on a monthly basis for the purpose of renewal. The issue of permits affects how the participants perceive the physical distance between South Africa and Lesotho, and the porosity of the border. While not far in geographical distance from Bloemfontein, Lesotho still takes time and money to reach, especially when going by public transport. Most travel by shared taxis (minibuses) which cannot cross the border and hence travelers must make multiple transfers and physically walk across the border. Those who have to go back every month bemoan the time and cost it requires and the frequent trips back are something most would avoid, given the choice. Since Rethabile, cited above, received her passport, she is among those making the monthly trip:

> If it wasn't for the passport, I wouldn't go home every month, I would maybe skip a month. If I don't go this month, then I know next month I'm going. This month

I should at least just send them [the family] money so that when I give it to them this month, they should be able to see what they can do. The R200 that I use for transport to Lesotho, I should know that instead of using it for transport, I add it to what I give them so that they can see what to do. [Rethabile]

Her preference that the money used to travel to Lesotho be spent on other things such as additional remittances for her family members back in Lesotho is shared by a number of the participants in the study who live in Bloemfontein on visitors' permits.

For those who have been able to secure proper work permits, however, the perception of the border is very different. These participants tend to have higher incomes and, in some cases, even access to personal vehicles. Hence, for them, trips home are motivated by personal rather than economic reasons, and the travel distance and financial cost is much less of a barrier. These migrants are also more likely to be from middle class families, and as such they have grown up crossing the border regularly for the purposes of shopping, medical appointments, or entertainment—something that has given them the impression from an early age that the distance between Lesotho and South Africa is relatively insignificant. While some use their privileged status to make more trips across the border (for example, every weekend, in order to maintain their personal and family lives in Lesotho), others use their relative stability to stay in South Africa for months at a time without making trips back. These migrants therefore have much more choice in terms of how often they cross the border.

While some migrants have a more secure status in South Africa than others, this is not something they take for granted and almost all the participants are interested in improving their status in South Africa. While for lower skilled migrants acquiring a work permit in South Africa denotes increased freedom and security, those with work permits are interested in what kind of opportunities being a permanent resident might bring. Legal status is something few of the participants can take for granted, as even work and study permits eventually expire and another permit has to be sought.

Overall, the physical border demarcating South Africa and Lesotho is regarded by the participants as porous, but inconvenient and unnecessary. Interestingly, however, it is in the border spaces, beyond the line of the border itself, where the migrants experience and live out their daily lives, that the border has the greatest impact.

The Lived Boundary

Although the participants regard Lesotho and South Africa as very similar in many respects, their political status as outsiders, non-citizens, and, in some cases, undocumented workers greatly impacts their experience in South Africa, and they feel the power of the border between the two countries impacts many aspects of their lives.

The issues that many of the participants have with documentation and, in particular, the fact that they lack work permits, has made them vulnerable to exploitation. At work, many are paid very low wages, have encountered unfair hiring and firing practic-

es, and/or feel they cannot progress in their field of work due to discrimination or policies that overtly favor South African citizens. Kutloano, a man who works in the informal sector, says he tries to hide the fact that he is from Lesotho in order to avoid these setbacks:

> They will take advantage of me, if they know I'm from Lesotho. Isn't it a fact that people from Lesotho are undermined? And you should know that if you work for an employer who knows that you're from Lesotho, you will find that your salary is not equal to other people's salaries. Yes, you are paid less. You are going to find that people are being paid R150 a day, while you are only paid R120 or R100. Eh, I realized because I saw, my first employer knew that I am from Lesotho. When I came to check my salary, I found that: nah, man, my salary is little. These other people have more. Then I thought that maybe it's because I found them already at the firm. Then I learnt those who found me already at the firm, these people are also getting more money than I am. Then someone said, "No, it's because that person knows that you are from Lesotho and there is nowhere you can complain." After I left that firm, moving from that firm to the next, I never again disclosed that I'm from Lesotho. [Kutloano]

Their precarious position in both South Africa and the labor market means that employers can threaten to have the migrants arrested if they are knowingly undocumented. Alternatively employers may abuse their power by firing and hiring people at will, thereby forcing migrants to accept employment expectations that they know are beyond those normally expected of South African workers. The Basotho

migrants endure these conditions because the wages they receive are often still much higher than what they would receive in Lesotho.

Among those migrants with higher levels of skill job security is still not guaranteed and the general perception is that it is often difficult to compete with South African citizens and/or permanent residents. Sometimes official regulations prevent employers from hiring people without such permanent status, while in other cases, the participants simply feel that employers are not willing to do the extra paperwork needed to secure them a proper work permit. Mamello, a woman who holds a Master's degree and is working as a professional social scientist, encountered such difficulties:

> Again, when I applied for another position [at a local institution], I was told that I was not going to be given that particular position because I am from Lesotho. So that position, or most of the positions are only for permanent residents. There were so many issues so they did not want to go through that. [Mamello]

A secondary effect of the poor labor market position occupied by many of the participants is that they typically also have limited options in the housing market. Rethabile, a woman working in the informal sector, describes the situation as follows:

> The only problem is that the houses we normally live in are not good. In fact, the houses that people rent out in Bloemfontein are not good houses, especially if they rent them out to people from places like Lesotho. Even if you tell the landlord: "You see how it is here?"

She/he will not even take the initiative to maintain there. I think it's caused by the fact that we are not taken too seriously. [Rethabile]

While earning higher wages in South Africa, the migrants are often forced to live in crowded, substandard living conditions relative to what they are used to in Lesotho. For those with more financial means, this is naturally less of an issue, although even those with steady jobs and good incomes sometimes willingly choose to sacrifice their own comfort in favor of meeting the needs and desires of their families in Lesotho. One woman, who works as a nurse and has a relatively secure salary and a car, chooses to live far away from her place of work, in an area which she perceives as unpleasant and unsafe, in order to save money for investments she is making in Lesotho.

The participants emphasize that having a South African ID, or at least a proper work or study permit, is essential when trying to access medical services, banking, and education for one's child. As Limpho, an undocumented participant working in the informal sector, puts it:

> The most painful part is that whenever you go, if you don't have an ID, they won't…You won't receive services, have you seen? When you say: "No, I hold a Lesotho passport," they say: "No, we don't want passports, we want South African IDs." [Limpho]

The findings reveal that the everyday border space as experienced by the participants extends well beyond the border itself. To live in South Africa without proper documentation is challenging,

despite the proximity of Lesotho to South Africa and longstanding patterns of migration between the two countries. While the Basotho migrants acutely experience the political boundary between South Africa and Lesotho in many aspects of their lives, their perception of the socio-cultural boundary between the two countries is more complex and nuanced.

The Socio-Cultural Boundary

The participants feel that there are many similarities between South African and Basotho society which facilitate ease of movement between the two places. It can even be said that the participants view the socio-cultural boundary between South African and Basotho society as blurred, thereby challenging the political boundary between the two countries. This should be considered carefully, however, as the participant narratives point to complex constructions of similarity and difference across the Lesotho-South Africa divide.

It is typically assumed that there is no language barrier between the Free State in South Africa and Lesotho because of the large presence of Sesotho speakers in the Free State. The participants, however, have a number of different views on whether or not their knowledge of the Sesotho language makes it easy for them to find work and live in the city. While some participants feel that Sesotho facilitates their integration into South African society, others feel that differences in the way Sesotho is spoken in South Africa and Lesotho sometimes limit their communication with local residents. As one participant, Liteboho, perceives it:

Mm, it [Sesotho] is a spoken language, which is mostly spoken [is the dominant language in the area]. But then again, when you speak Sesotho, people from Bloem still don't understand. I don't know what kind of Sesotho they speak. There are instances where they don't understand when you speak… Mm, it's important that one knows English because this Sesotho can only take you as far as the Caledon River [border between Maseru and South Africa]. [Liteboho]

A common perception among the participants is that while Sesotho is enough to secure a livelihood in Lesotho, one must know more languages to perform well in South Africa's labor market. Proficient English was a requirement for many jobs, while Afrikaans, a language to which Basotho have little exposure, is widely spoken in Bloemfontein. Finally, while Sesotho may be the dominant African language in the region, it is also common to encounter people who instead speak Xhosa, Zulu, or Tswana, which pose difficulties to communication. Interestingly, while some make an effort to change their accent to match the local way of speaking, others take pride in maintaining what they consider to be a purer form of the Sesotho language. Hence, the issue of language is not clear-cut across the Lesotho-South Africa boundary, and is experienced differently by the participants.

Lifestyle differences between the two countries are also noted and debated. South Africa's economy is more based on the exchange of money and goods than Lesotho's where many people still live on farms and are therefore more self-sufficient. Moreover, those who move to Bloemfontein from

the villages of Lesotho experience a number of other differences on account of adapting to an urban environment. Cultural differences experienced on a national scale, however, are relatively small, and include things such as the types of food available and consumed, clothing styles, or ways of meeting and greeting and interacting with neighbors. These differences are generally asserted positively in favor of the Basotho way of life which is regarded as more simple, traditional, and "pure." Some participants refer to South Africa's diversity as problematic, insofar as it "contaminates" traditional Sotho norms and ways of life. A common assertion is that Sotho people in South Africa, on account of mixing with other ethnic groups and adopting a more capitalist way of living, have forgotten their traditions. Limpho explains her point of view as follows:

You know, Basotho are quiet people, who are reserved, or respectful. Here, I think because of many ethnicities…I don't know how I can say, it's like. Just like I was complaining about children. That you will find them loitering at night, dancing at the shops. I mean, we are not the same, we are not the same! So these ones, I don't know, maybe it's because they will imitate the ways of Xhosas, imitate the ways of, what are they called, Coloreds. I mean, it's like they don't exactly know where they stand. [Limpho]

One point that is repeatedly emphasized is the perception that children are raised in a more desirable way in Lesotho, where traditional values such as respect for elders are held in higher regard.

In Lesotho, we are not able to do as we please as children, and we still have respect for our parents. Chil-

dren here do as they please. They don't like school, and they don't respect their parents. This is what I see, that here it's different from home. [Kutloano]

Such perceptions of difference are shared by participants across the skill spectrum. Thato, who works as a university lecturer, states the following:

It's important that I still know who I am. You know? As much as I'm here in South Africa, I want it to be known that I'm Sotho, I'm not really South African. You know? At least with my language, my values. OK, not culture as such. Somewhere, somewhere… Because culture evolves, circumstances don't always agree with culture. One needs to change. I can't really say "my culture." No…But, values. There are certain values that we have that I regard as very important, which I am trying to instill in my child, as well. [Thato]

Hence, the socio-cultural boundary between the two countries is something to be reproduced and reinforced in order to preserve what are considered valuable modes of being in the world. The majority of the participants wish to raise their children in Lesotho in order to ensure that they are raised the "proper" way. And if this is not possible, they will try to raise them in accordance with "Basotho values" in Bloemfontein.

Compared to South Africa, Lesotho and the Basotho people are regarded as relatively innocent, naive, and untouched by some of the social difficulties faced in South Africa. South Africans in this regard are perceived as a less innocent Other who is, among other things, capable of violence and crime.

As Pule, a male skilled professional, puts it:

> And coming from Lesotho I was probably very igno-
> rant. In my town, I can walk at nine in the evening,
> or ten, and you don't really feel something could
> happen to you. But, later in that area, it's called Wil-
> lows, it's a high crime area because of the students
> that stay there. It was ten pm, some guys came at me
> with a gun, demanding cell phone and wallet. Com-
> ing from a country like Lesotho you become igno-
> rant. From where you come from it's probably way
> different. But, here it's a different environment. You
> have to remember, these people, they mean business
> [laughs]. They are not scared to exhibit raw violence.
> I've had to learn quickly, to choose where I stay. When
> you're driving, you always feel that you have to be
> extra careful. Crime is everywhere, particularly in
> your poorer countries, but because of our conserva-
> tive nature, if somebody steals something from you,
> they usually come in daylight and they sort of come
> behind you and pull it out without you feeling, and if
> they react, they simply run away. But, here it's sheer
> violence. [Pule]

On the other hand, however, one female participant, Liteboho, notes some positive things about South African culture and society, such as how she has more freedom to choose her way of life and how she is less often the subject of ridicule and gossip:

> So back home you know that even if you do this hair-
> style [bob cut] I have on, it's a problem. I have cut my
> hair like prostitutes, in such and such a way. I mean,
> back home they look at even the tiniest detail from
> your nails to your hair, including how you walk. It's
> a huge difference, it makes people to end up…You un-

> derstand, when you get here, you feel like you have
> arrived at a completely different world. You feel free
> about everything, it only depends on what you want.
> [Liteboho]

Moreover, while Lesotho is less diverse than South Africa, some participants feel that it is, somewhat ironically, more open to people from different back-grounds as it has not endured the same experience of racial apartheid and national isolation that South Africa has. One participant notes, for example, the ease with which he socializes and studies with White people while undertaking tertiary studies in South Africa, something that many Black South Africans still struggle to do.

It can be argued that many of the differences experienced by the participants can be considered social in nature rather than cultural. By far the issue of greatest importance in their narratives is not how they perceive South Africans, but rather how they feel perceived *by* South Africans, especially in a context of growing xenophobia and intolerance towards outsiders. Kutloano sums up a number of the various accusations that he feels Basotho people are subject to:

> When they [South Africans] talk about people from
> Lesotho, you can hear that they don't…They don't like
> us. Eh, firstly, they say we take their jobs. Secondly
> [pause], they say we are the criminals here in Bloem-
> fontein. Thirdly, they say we are the ones killing peo-
> ple here in Bloemfontein. [Kutloano]

It is a commonly held perception that South Africans perceive people from Lesotho as a threat, just as they do migrants from neighboring countries. While those working as undocumented migrants are most fearful of violent attacks in their homes and workplaces, those working in more professional environments appear to be somewhat less exposed and affected by such discourses. They nevertheless believe that Basotho migrants are viewed negatively in South Africa, and that their position in the society is therefore not secure. Given the attacks experienced by many migrants just months before some of the participants were interviewed, it is not surprising that they generally perceive the situation of foreigners in South Africa as getting worse rather than better.

Basotho people deal with the Othering they experience in the South Africa context by identifying and asserting what they see as the positive aspects of their Basotho identities, often expressed in socio-cultural terms. A common argument, for example, is that rather than stealing jobs from South Africans, Basotho people are simply more hardworking and entrepreneurial.

The socio-cultural boundary between South Africa and Lesotho is more difficult to define than the physical border or the lived border spaces experienced by labor migrants. There are clearly many similarities across the boundary that facilitate movement between the two places. At the same time, however, subtle cultural differences and a social context that encourages the view that Basotho people are Other because they cross an international boundary to enter South Africa lead Basotho people to be self-conscious and aware of what differentiates them from their South African counterparts.

Conclusion

The physical boundary between South Africa and Lesotho is highly porous, and movement across it cannot be considered new, or in any way exceptional. What has changed, however, is the way this border is treated, with Lesotho citizens becoming increasingly regarded as foreigners. This has created a number of difficulties for migrants from Lesotho in South Africa, insofar as they require visas to enter the country and are frequently the subjects of xenophobia, exploitation, and even violence once they have entered South African territory.

The departure point of this article is to consider how the migrants perceive the border in their day-to-day lives. For the participants in this study, who work in a range of employment sectors ranging from the informal to the formal, the unskilled to the highly skilled, the border is merely an inconvenient boundary demarcating two highly connected national spaces. While it can be claimed that there is a common language and culture that transcend the border, it is because of the political boundary and economic inequalities between South Africa and Lesotho that the migrants are easily exploited, and are limited in what they can achieve in South Africa. That said, many continue to disregard official regulations concerning who can and cannot work in the country, and use their networks to take up jobs without the proper documents. They do what is necessary in order to achieve their economic goals, often finding ways to save money through working multiple jobs and living in substandard conditions. Where necessary, they may use bribes in order to avoid arrest or deportation. Hence, they

employ what de Certeau would consider tactics that circumvent the intentions of the state to control who can and cannot cross the border.

The physical border has nevertheless created a number of powerful socio-cultural effects, many of which have impacted the way the participants view themselves and South Africans. Perhaps most significantly the physical border has reinforced a sense of "pure Basotho" identity among the participants, which is positively asserted, especially in the face of growing xenophobia and anti-migration sentiment in South Africa. In this sense, the boundary between Lesotho and South Africa is reproduced by the participants themselves who tend to idealize Basotho traditions, values, and ways of life. Most have a great deal of pride in being Basotho and do not wish to assimilate to South African norms. The ability to maintain a Basotho way of life is in turn reinforced by their (often) insecure legal status in South Africa, and hence an enduring feeling of temporariness; visa regulations require migrants to frequently return back to Lesotho to renew their visitors' visas, which has in part contributed to the fact that most migrants maintain strong ties to their villages of origin.

To be sure, the legal status of migrants, and the level of job security they are able to attain, has some impact on how they perceive the border. Legal migrants in professional positions find it easier to cross the South Africa-Lesotho physical boundary and therefore perceive the distance between the countries as less of a barrier. They are also less often the targets of xenophobia and anti-migration discourses. Even so, these migrants are acutely aware of what they believe distinguishes them as Basotho migrants and have a strong sense of Basotho identity. Like their less legally secure counterparts, they would also prefer to raise their children in Lesotho and maintain what they regard as traditional Basotho values, irrespective of their intentions to stay in South Africa for the long term.

In conclusion, one of the key findings of this study is that there is a great deal of overlap between the physical, lived, and socio-cultural boundaries separating national entities; the relationships between these different types of boundaries should be contextualized in the context of specific border space contexts. It is hoped that more studies will pursue this endeavor in the future, so that border studies can adequately engage with more sociological understandings of ethnic groups and boundaries.

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Group Identity and Groupness: Student Experiences at University

Abstract   One of the key transformations South African universities have undergone in the past two decades is the increase of racial and ethnic diversity of their student bodies and academic staff. In this study, we seek to contribute to a better understanding of these transformation processes by presenting students' narratives of how they experience the interracial integration of student residences. We first address the potential groupist and essential underpinnings of ethno-racial identifications by situating our categories of analysis in a social-constructivist framework, underlining the situational and processual character of identifying and establishing "groupness," while simultaneously considering the obdurate quality habitualized ways of identifying may generate. We then present an overview of our sensitizing themes as they are discussed in the literature on race and ethnicity with a focus on South Africa and student experiences. Thirdly, the article introduces the reader to the institutional context of the case study, namely, the campus of the University of the Free State and its student residences. Based on focus group discussions and thematic analyses, we present our findings in the form of the cultural themes that are central to the students' narrations of their experiences. These themes include the salience of racial and ethnic identifications, tolerant distance, confusion, fairness, neutrality, ethnolinguistic recognition, regional public arenas, rural-urban divides, as well as socio-economic divides.

Keywords   Race; Ethnicity; Transformation; Narrative Studies; Groups; Identity Focus Groups

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In this article, we present a focused interpretive sociological analysis of students' experience of transformation on a South African university campus revolving mainly around the closely intertwined phenomena of race, ethnicity, and groupism. The data have been collected since 2011 in the form of narratives generated by means of group interviews and participatory observation. The context of this article, being situated against the backdrop of South Africa's historical transition to a non-racial democracy and especially informed by institutional attempts at "integrating" groups of individuals who were historically segregated, may offer insights into future issues faced by European universities coming to terms with the increasing concrete results of multiculturalism. The analysis presented in this article is not aimed at furthering a given agenda or supporting any predominant opinion regarding matters of socio-cultural transformation, but simply aims to investigate the ways in which the people who find themselves subjected to these policies experience their ramifications on an everyday level. As such we primarily analyze the students' experience of group identity as constructed by themselves, as well as the interactions between these "groups." In the first section, we lay out the conceptual background underlying the analysis carried out during this study. The next section presents an informative overview of issues of transformation and diversity on university campuses as offered by existing research in this sphere, while the third section investigates the specific case of the University of the Free State. The fourth section presents the methodological framework put into practice during data collection and analysis, while some of the findings of the study are explored in the fifth section. The study was carried out under the auspices of the program *The Narrative Study of Lives*, of which Jan K. Coetzee is the director. Coetzee provided insight into narrative research on issues of transformation, risk, and uncertainty, as well as editorial input. Florian Elliker constructed the theoretical framework through which the analysis was approached, while Conrad Kotze developed the methodological framework, collected the data, and edited the final manuscript.

Groups and Group Identity

This article aims at reconstructing and analyzing how people who are affected by change *experience* transformation in their everyday life. In South Africa, the process of transformation is officially aimed at improving the lives of historically disadvantaged "groups" and at improving "intergroup" relations. However, when studying social phenomena pertaining to race, ethnicity, and nationality—which are in many ways closely related domains and fields of analysis (Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004:47; Brubaker 2009)—the concepts "group" and (group) "identity" appear to be problematic. In this article, we do not view racial (or ethnic) "groups" and "identities" as merely given, but as embedded in socially shared meaning-frameworks additionally informed by subjective experience and socially contextualized understanding. Thus, the experience of "intergroup" relations on a university campus and the students' narrative accounts thereof are likely to be structured, from a sociological perspective, by two contexts: local intersubjectively established ways of (non-)ethnicized or (non-)racialized interpreting and acting, and historically informed

cultural patterns of interpretation and action. These contexts have a bearing on how students experience transformation and on what they perceive to be relevant to and characteristic of the process of transformation. They are, firstly, actual contexts that the students have encountered before and during their life on the university campus. Secondly, they have contributed to the intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks that inform students' interpretations of current and past experiences.

Although "racism" is generally regarded as undesirable and even illegal, the mundane discursive space in South Africa is still dominated by highly objectified notions of race and ethnicity. This section therefore serves not only to outline our analytical apparatus, but also to reformulate our object of analysis—"intergroup" relations—from a social constructivist perspective. While the empirical analysis itself is based on the data collected in focus group sessions with students, we outline the relevant dimensions of their everyday life—the ethnographic context—in social constructivist terms. In the South African context, which is burdened with a history of racialized segregation and exclusion with dire consequences for the vast majority of the population, it is important to remember that a social constructivist perspective does not deny the reality of racism and its consequences. It merely aims to study this reality in a specific way by highlighting those aspects of reality that are intersubjectively constructed, maintained, and transformed, or what Conrad Kotze (2017) calls the intersubjective etiological dimension. A common misreading of the social constructivist perspective in the tradition of a sociology of knowledge approach is that it allegedly

denies the resilient and structured character of social reality. The current analysis explicitly counters this accusation, arguing that much of social reality's seemingly solid and obdurate character is a consequence of institutionalization processes. The reality of race and racism is therefore not the result of an "essential" nature of individuals or populations, but of institutionalized social practices that have the effect of reifying "groups" and "identities" that are experienced as objectively given by the individual operating from within the natural attitude.

The nature of present experience is shaped by past experiences that have coagulated into a subjective stock of knowledge, which is structured by types and typified relations, along with systems of thematic, interpretational, and motivational relevancies (Schütz and Luckmann 1989; Schütz 2004). Experience plays a crucial role in individual interpretation and informs both the content of intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks and their correlating patterns of social interaction. In its habitualized forms, this stock of knowledge provides a background of routine action and interpretation that does not warrant explicit attention by the subject operating from within the natural attitude. This enables members of a society to engage in "focused" action without having to renegotiate taken-for-granted issues through moment-to-moment reappraisals. A large part of the individual stock of knowledge is intersubjectively constructed and passed on to the individual, making it historical in origin and ensuring that, over time, pragmatically efficient patterns of interpretation and interaction are habitualized, externalized, institutionalized, and legitimized. In this way, by means of an ongo-

ing process of communication and mutual understanding, a seemingly objective reality that the individual is confronted with takes shape out of an essentially arbitrary sequence of meaning-ascription (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Thus, although fleeting and dependent on human reproduction, social reality is locally objectified and comes to inform (and often dominate) the experience of the socially embedded individual. In this sense, the structure of social reality emerges from routinized, habitualized, and institutionalized patterns of (inter)action and interpretation. On the one hand, actions create a context *reflexively* (Gumperz 1982). This means that the social situation is defined by the very act of engaging in certain practices and therewith stimulating the corresponding notions of propriety and ways of reaction among those engaged in these practices. Individuals' socially derived knowledge of these practices tends to reproduce social reality in typical ways—thus the structure of social reality also pertains to the distribution of knowledge needed to meaningfully engage in these practices. On the other hand, (inter)actions are enmeshed within a nexus of objectified meaning-frameworks that seem—from the perspective of the socialized individual operating from within the natural attitude—to be given in the empirical sense, as phenomena existing beyond individual agency. Hence, social reality is routinely experienced as consisting of different actors engaged in institutionalized routines that the individual subject is only able to bypass at the risk of having his/her own actions subjected to intersubjectively reified expectations. From the perspective of the individual, social structure thus also pertains to the unequal distribution

of access to certain social situations, groups, and institutions, or various "arenas" which become accessible to the individual only by means of the internalization of relevant aspects of the dominant stock of knowledge and repertoire of action patterns.

Each of these structural contexts is connected to a conglomerate of knowledge and typical actions. Throughout this article we use the term culture to distinguish such broad conglomerates of knowledge and practices from each other. Culture in this sense pertains not specifically to those higher orders of knowledge encompassing art, religion, science, and law, but to all knowledge and practices that are needed to cope with everyday life. Culture therefore generates a paramount reality according to which any given individual is oriented. It does not only refer to a symbolic realm, but to the "intimate link of knowledge and action, of 'cognitive system' and 'social organisation'" (Knoblauch 1995:73). Thus, culture denotes *conglomerates* of *empirically distinguishable* ways of action, interpretation, and knowledge that are bound to and typical not only of specific social situations, groups, organizations, entire institutional realms, and milieus, but also of social categories (this entails, for example, *organizational* cultures or *professional/vocational* cultures). Cultural practices may be institutionalized in varying degrees and encompass more or less objectified expectations of what the appropriate ways of (inter)action and interpretation are within the specific contexts. It is important to note that the term culture *neither* pertains exclusively to ethnicity or race *nor* entails essentialist notions, that is, the notion that the sharing of ideas and practices inherently leads to or forms an existential unity of the involved actors. Individu-

als are always *simultaneously* participating as actors in several cultures; in the cultures of their organizations and professions, peer groups, sport teams, and families, et cetera. In this way, a significant part of their experience is informed by "cultural interferences" (Reckwitz 2001) stemming from the diverse interactions between the "cultural grammars" of the various cultures that they are involved in. As these interferences may be mutually relativizing, individuals may develop a sense of agency by critically reflecting upon intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks in thought and in action. Our aim is neither to denigrate the existential agency of the individual subject nor to deny the existence of objectively given quanta and qualia, but to explore in greater detail specifically those aspects thereof that arise on the basis of intersubjective meaning sharing.

In the context of experiences pertaining to ethnicity and race, the concepts of "group" and "identity" often serve as categories of political practice *and* analysis. Both terms are used by both "lay" actors and by political actors to make sense of and frame their activities and their self-understandings and to organize and legitimize the pursuit of their interests. But, as both terms refer to collectivities encompassing a large number of people, they are likely to entail essentialist notions that cannot be unproblematically generalized. Pertaining to "groups," one cannot simply presuppose "single, bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, as main protagonists of social conflicts and as fundamental units of social analysis" (Brubaker 2002:164)—a notion that Rogers Brubaker has called "groupism." Conceived in such a way, "groups" are seen as monolithic and homog-

enous entities endowed with agency used for pursuing the common goals of its members. This corresponds to the use of identity as an assumed "fixed" or "strong" self of the individual that is seen as being the result of belonging to a specific group, the individual being endowed with particular group-specific "features" and interests. Such "strong" notions are potentially powerful political instruments, and are often used by politically motivated actors who deploy them to achieve certain goals, either against or in the name *of* and avowedly *for* certain "groups" with specific "identities." While many "groups," especially pertaining to race and ethnicity, are identifiable by their obduracy across time and space, solely focusing on the historical manifestation of such groups and their interrelationships may contribute to the generation of social realities wherein essentialist notions are objectified to such an extent that there is hardly any discursive space for alternative perspectives. Thus, research that employs categories of political practice uncritically as categories of analysis runs the danger of reifying social reality in problematic ways. To avoid contributing to this impasse, we employ categories from an alternative set of analytical concepts. For the analysis of the narrative accounts of the students, we make use of the distinction between relational and categorical modes of identification. The former pertains to identification "by position in a relational web (a web of kinship, for example, or of friendship, patron-client ties, or teacher-student relations)," while the latter is used to indicate "membership in a class of persons sharing some categorical attributes (such as race, ethnicity, language, nationality, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:15).

Identification is a situated and context-dependent process. While some categorical identifications may differ from situation to situation, others are more persistently engaged across contexts. Individuals identify themselves and others while constantly being identified by others in their turn, while self-identification and the ascription of identity by others are not necessarily congruent. Thus, categorical identifications that are applied to large portions of populations do not simply constitute "groups" in the sense of collectivities experienced as meaningful by those constituting them, but merely sort individuals into tentative "pre-group" collections (Bowker and Leigh Star 2000). Under certain circumstances, categorical identifications may take on group-like qualities that we analytically separate into commonality, connectedness, and groupness (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:19). In this context, "commonality" denotes the sharing of some common attribute, while "connectedness" denotes the relational ties that link people. Neither commonality nor connectedness alone engenders "groupness"—the existentially meaningful sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, but commonality and connectedness together may indeed do so (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:20). In the case of large collectivities, it is unlikely that connectedness is needed to create an intense feeling of belonging together; rather, groupness may be created by evoking powerful feelings of commonality. This crystallization of vague and diffuse identifications into a strong sense of belonging to a bounded group is a process that depends on the mapping of particular events onto discursively shared meaning-frameworks.

In contrast to the notion of "large groups," we use the term group to denote relatively small groups,

constituted by repeated, often highly patterned, interaction of reciprocally related actors. The prevailing patterns of their interaction are in turn shaped by a shared culture, founded on a common nexus of intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks rooted in a shared history. Groups establish and maintain boundaries, routinely distinguishing between members and non-members. Groups are situated in an arena, a physical or virtual space that they depend on for their enactment. They remain relatively stable through adjusting "lines of action" (Fine 2010:367) and routine "interaction ritual chains" (Collins 2004). Group culture thus refers to "those sets of meaning that are tied to a recognisable interaction scene and its routine participants" (Fine 2010:356). The culture of the group, reflecting a host of past shared experiences which are remembered in a shared "narrative repertoire" (Frank 2012), sets standards for propriety and action, forms a basis of collective representation, and codifies an "interactional grammar" (Fine 2010:366). Its structure results in practices building on previously sedimented routines, and is thus relatively stable. In the routine existence of a group, transformation is likely to consist of incremental change. More fundamental changes are likely due to external pressures or unpredicted events that facilitate a renegotiation of group culture and identity. New members being socialized into the group culture are a potential source of this kind of upheaval. Depending on how strong or weak their affiliations with the group become, they are existentially engaged in the group to various degrees, internalizing the life-worldly standards of the group culture to a greater or lesser extent and hence also contributing to its reproduction

and change in different ways, and informing their self-understanding accordingly.

Groups do not exist in isolation, but are connected to other groups both through sanctioned patterns of relatedness and through the multiple group memberships of any given individual. This gives rise to institutional realms in which specific groups are further connected by means of corresponding institution-wide communication, and embedded in an ecology of groups with differentially distributed authority and access to resources. The groups constituting such an ecology are also rooted in diverse matrices of socially shared meaning-frameworks. Organizational decisions are made within small groups and spread to other micro-publics through an established hierarchy of group relations. As "tiny publics" (Fine and Harrington 2004), they are not only the basis of organizations, but as "small communities of interest and experience, [they] provide the basis of civil society as they are where politics is discussed and enacted" (Fine 2010:361). Groups are internally segmented and may control access to membership more or less strictly, with boundaries being established by informal criteria and/or institutionalized categories. Thus, "through maintaining boundaries, local settings become the site for exclusion or segregation, suggesting why members of social categories have differential access to knowledge, resources, or relations" (Fine 2010:359). In the following section, we will take a preliminary look at the ways in which various groups relate to one another, based on a survey of studies dealing with the issues of importance to our analysis.

Race, Ethnicity, and Groupness in South Africa and the World

Studies on race and ethnicity,[1] long fragmented along national, disciplinary, and paradigmatic boundaries, are slowly emerging into a "new field that is comparative, global, cross-disciplinary, and multi-paradigmatic, and that construes ethnicity, race, and nationhood as a single integrated family of forms of cultural understanding, social organization, and political contestation" (Brubaker 2009:22). Ethnicity and race have been studied in connection to the active use of ethnic and racial notions in the pursuit of collective goals, thus examining the relationship between nation states and ethnic mobilization (Olzak 1983) and between ethnic entrepreneurship and the group's cultural characteristics and access to resources (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990). Ethnicity has further been analyzed in relation to social stratification and discrimination, in terms of culture, and how it links up with politics (Yinger 1985), and in the context of conflict (Williams 1994) and ethnic and nationalist violence (Brubaker and Laitin 1998). Much of this research has been international and comparative. Ethnicity has also been examined in terms of its links to state formation, nation building, and nationalism. Despite increased international mobility, "neither nationalism nor ethnicity is vanishing as part of an obsolete traditional order…Nationalism, in particular, remains the pre-eminent rhetoric for attempts to demarcate political communities, claim

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[1] The term race is popularly used to refer to distinctions between populations based on physical appearance, while ethnicity refers to distinctions between human populations based on various cultural variables (Frable 1997).

rights of self-determination and legitimate rule by reference to 'the people' of a country," while "ethnic solidarities and identities are claimed most often where groups do not seek 'national' autonomy but rather a recognition internal to or cross-cutting national or state boundaries" (Calhoun 1993:211). Racial and ethnic ways of imagining communities have involved processes of substantialization that are often reproduced by social scientists (Anderson 1983; Alonso 1994). Ethnicity and race have been part of the making of national cultures, that is, part of how "national culture [is] rendered as an implicit, taken-for-granted, shared national habitus" (Foster 1991:237). Research has been carried out on how ethnicity serves as a resource in creating social boundaries and groups (Sanders 2002), and there has also been a focus on the intersection of sexuality and ethnicity indicating that ethnic, racial, and national boundaries often overlap with sexual boundaries (Nagel 2000). Attention has been given to ethnicity and gender related attitudes and inequalities (Kane 2000), as well as to the persistence of racial prejudice and discrimination in general (Quillian 2006). There has also been differentiation between ethnicity and race and a focus on the enduring power of the latter (Harrison 1995), for example, in processes of residential segregation (Zubrinsky Charles 2003). A good deal of research has dealt with the macro level, analyzing race as racial formation (Omi and Winant 1994) or as race discrimination system (Reskin 2012). As much research on race, ethnicity, and nation involves rather large "collectives," such "macro"-level investigations implicitly often evoke groupist notions (cf. Brubaker 2002). "Group" is, however—as discussed in the first section—a problematic concept for such

large communities of people as its use may contribute to the substantialization of these very groups instead of analyzing the social processes that generate feelings of groupness associated with the corresponding population categories.

Sociological work on race and ethnicity in South Africa specifically has been diverse. Apartheid legislation incorporated a racialized perspective in many societal realms, and as the ensuing racialized social realities still indicate a cloven society (Prinsloo 1996), the concepts of race and ethnicity are at least implicitly present in much social scientific research. This is also true in work that is not mainly concerned with race and ethnicity, as in research on poverty and development (Wale and Foster 2007), elite attitudes (Kotzé 1993), work values (Steyn and Kotzé 2004), and the life satisfaction of students (Møller 1996), as well as in the sociology of work (Webster 1999). Empirical work has dealt with race and ethnicity in relation to most social realms, among others in connection with citizenship (Klugman 2008), racial relations at White universities (Gwele 2002), linguistic diversity and identity politics (Venter 1998; Kriel 2003), racialized and (de)segregated places (Piper et al. 2005; Peens 2012), and racial stereotypes (Vahed 2001). The occurrence of (small) groups built around racial and ethnic categories thus remains a characteristic of society in general and of South African society in particular. We argue that the reason for this is not explicitly political in as much as the continued existence of these groups is cultivated not only by organized social institutions, but primarily by the meaningful interpretation and consequent patterns of behavior of people going about their daily

lives. Factors linked to race and ethnicity are deeply internalized and correlate with readily observable facts of perception that seem empirically given, thus carrying over this objectified nature into tangible consequences on patterns of social interaction. With this in mind, we now turn our attention to the specific ways in which these realities seem to impact students worldwide and especially in such a culturally diverse society as South Africa.

Many of the students we interviewed experience their everyday life on campus as shaped by socializing in small groups along racial categories. To move outside of these boundaries is not without impact on their daily lives; for example, they may risk to lose contact with their in-group, as studies show for African American students who chose to adapt themselves to the dominant White American culture in one study (Arroyo and Zigler 1995). While rhetorically professing respectful attitudes to members of all racial categories, students simultaneously confess to forming racial and ethnic enclaves within the broader student body. In such circumstances, social intercourse across racial and ethnic categories may be limited to the extent that it is almost negligible, as has been confirmed by various studies on student self-segregation carried out in the United States (Taylor 2011). Although there are many parallels to be seen in South Africa as students tend to categorize themselves like their international counterparts do, they do so in slightly different ways and under the specific historical and demographical circumstances of the South African society, complicating not only the conventional Black-White dichotomy, but also the commonly used minority-majority distinction. In contrast to many other studies in the

domain of acculturation and so-called "intergroup" relations (e.g., Brown and Zagefka 2002; Sennett et al. 2003; Sang, Wang, and Zheng 2004; Brown and Greenland 2005; Chavous 2005; Cole and Yip 2008), the experiences of the participants of our study are not set in a predominantly White setting in which Black students constitute also demographically a minority. While in terms of material wealth and economic power the White population segment remains privileged, it demographically constitutes a minority of South Africa's population and thus lacks political power as a bloc, faced with the challenge of becoming a minority (Alsheh and Elliker 2015). Research on South African university students found, for instance, that White students expect their economic position relative to Blacks to suffer over the next decade, while the Black students expected to gain ground relative to Whites, but still come up short in ten years' time (Dumont and van Lill 2009). In a study measuring the adjustment of Black students at the University of Johannesburg, a historically White university comparable to the University of the Free State, it was found that levels of social, personal, and institutional adjustment related to race were closely linked to eventual academic performance (Sennett et al. 2003). Ethnic and racial categories are not only implied in the distribution of material wealth and political power, but intersect with an array of other issues, among others discrimination based on sexuality, gender, and religion (cf., e.g., Bishop et al. 2004; Ehrmann 2007), but also issues of psychological health (Arroyo and Zigler 1995), well-being, and academic performance (Liem and St. Louis 2005), as well as broader cultural changes such as postmodern stances impacting the experiences of the students (Dietz et al. 2005)—all

themes related to by the participants of our study. These changing intersections all have an impact on the transformation process on the university campus with regard to how students relate to each other in terms of ethnic and racial identifications, much of which is still shaped by student self-segregation (Crozier and Davies 2008).

The Case of Life on the Main Campus of the University of the Free State

When students access any university campus, they enter a large and diverse arena of action, constituted by a multiplicity of more or less strongly bounded groups of various sizes. Their experiences, actions, and interpretations within this arena are in many ways implicitly or explicitly related to these groups. The university is enacted through small and medium sized groups—work teams, departments, administrative units, student associations, sport teams, et cetera—all of which are linked to each other through bureaucratically institutionalized connectors typical of large organizations, as well as through more informal processes. An important spatial arena of the University of the Free State is the main campus in Bloemfontein, which is cordoned off from the surrounding city by fences and strictly controlled access gates. All but one of the participants' residences are located on this campus, interspersed between teaching venues, sports facilities, office buildings, parking areas, streets, and park-like lawns. Students living at residences become members of a group in the above outlined sense. The groups are clearly bounded (residents are regarded as members, all other persons as non-members) and have their own exclu-

sive spatial arena (in addition to the public arenas of the campus) within the residence building. The residents participate in a web of relations within the residence, establishing in various ways ties to the group and engaging in various activities *as* members of the residence (e.g., participating in residence meetings, sporting competitions, etc.). The groups feature a more or less specific idioculture that is also shaped in activities that represent it externally. For instance, first year students engage in a parade contest, where members of different residences visit each other as a group and perform short plays. Most of the residences have a reputation pertaining to (excellence in) academics or sports, but also to the composition of its members pertaining to commonly perceived socio-cultural categories. At the time of our study, all residences were gender segregated, that is, inhabited exclusively by either male or female students.

Students are connected to other groups, an important one being their family. In some families, it is customary for the parents to visit the residence in the first year to see how their offspring is doing. They may also play a role in deciding whether the student will live on campus or not and in the process of choosing a residence. In some families, members of different generations have lived at the same residence. Among other relevant networks or social relations, students are likely to stay in contact with former school friends, some of them studying at the same university and often part of different residences and peer groups. Student life is not only experienced in groups, though; it may be experienced in relatively anonymous places such as cafeterias, libraries, offices of the university

administration. In these contexts, the individual student and the staff adopt their context-dependent, institutionalized roles. During lectures the student role is usually experienced in a collective, but the collective does not necessarily form a bounded group with a specific group culture. Apart from being a spatial arena of and for diverse social situations and groups, the university campus and its institutions are also experienced *as* "university," as a unity that is presented symbolically. This is done by means of university wide communication, such as weekly newsletters from the vice-chancellor, a campus radio station, the university website, and through events and processes that are interpreted *as* pertaining to parts of or the entire university, the university logo being present in the spatial arena and in the aforementioned communication channels, but also in advertisements and promotional material of the university that appear in regional and national newspapers.

Within the residence, all students share certain duties and obligations (such as adhering to the house rules), participate in residence related cultural practices, and identify each other relationally as members of the residence. At the same time, students are categorically identified according to "seniority," for example, as a "first year" or "third year" student. In the residences' idioculture, these categorical identifications have practical implications. Freshman students generally do not share the same "rights and privileges" as second and third year students, have to endure forms of "orientation" during the first year, are sometimes seated separately in residence meetings, and do, mainly in residences for male students, often have to pass an "initiation" at some

stage, a *rite de passage* whereby they become "full" members of the residences. Freshman students who do not reside in a residence are not confronted with these relational expectations and obligations. Through their enactment categorical identifications such as "first year student" may form the base for creating groups—in relation to the residence—or subgroups of students, their categorical commonality through shared activities being complemented by relatedness and potentially by feelings of more or less intense groupness (e.g., in the case of shared initiation rituals that are experienced as humiliating). While members of a residence may internally identify each other relationally as members (and interact accordingly), they may simultaneously be identified categorically by non-members of their residence, that is, as members of a certain residence, and be treated accordingly. For the individual, residence membership may be used in a categorical or relational mode of identification by another; life on campus does allow not only for categorical identifications being enacted in environments where students are also relationally identified, but relational identifications may also become categorical ones. Thus, there is a wide range of opportunities for non-ethnic or non-racial modes of categorical and relational identifications. The students' relations to each other and their self-understanding may be formed by adhering to the idiocultures of groups of which they are members, developing strong or weak ties to that group, relationally identifying others as members of the same group or identifying them or others with categories pertaining to university life.

It does also, however, create an environment where university related categorical or relational identi-

fications are enacted in conjunction with racial or ethnic categories. In addition to stereotypical category-bound actions and interpretations, racial or ethnic categories can become entangled in group-related activities and may—as in the example of the "first year" student category—be complemented by direct relatedness. Thus, they potentially serve as the basis for a more or less strong feeling of groupness, concerning not only subgroups within residences or sport teams, but also intergroup friendships or networks. This is of particular relevance, since for some of the students, the campus and especially the residences are the first action arenas in their life-courses where interaction with people ascribed to other ethnic or racial categories has the potential of going beyond stereotypical category-bound patterns of action and interpretation. For the first time in many cases, these interactions take place over an extended period of time, in relatively intimate, non-anonymous settings (residences), encompassing working and playing relationships, sharing the same mundane activities, and involving relational and categorical identifications pertaining to other realms than race or ethnicity. In other words, the university campus *may* be the first action arena in their lives where certain latent culturally bound meaning-frameworks oriented towards racial or ethnic identifications could be enacted in such a way that actual feelings of groupness are created—enacting *effective* "intergroup" or "group" relations that are otherwise an unsuitable label for such broad population categories as the ones pertaining to race or ethnicity. Indeed, the amplification of the still often segregated and alienating nature of South African society in general in the arena of a historically Afrikaans

university tends to result in highly polarized campus politics that rapidly serve to reify issues of race and ethnicity to a level that is seldom concretely experienced off campus. The degree to which such possible feelings of groupness constitute a novelty for a particular student likely depends on his or her biography prior to the university, which is shaped through the belonging to various small groups such as the family, peer groups, et cetera. These experiences may differ with respect to how categorically segregated the group environments were in the students' biographies. The vast majority grew up in groups and graduated from primary and secondary educational institutions that were composed of members of mostly the same racial or ethnic category. Interaction with persons of other categories mainly took place in relatively anonymous settings, or "non-places" (Augé 1995), in spaces within which one does not become part of a distinct group—if such locations were mixed at all in that regard. Indeed, the students' narratives suggest that large parts of these realms are not "categorically mixed" either, but segregated.

The potential creation or amplification of feelings of groupness along ethnic or racial categories at the university campus may thus either be experienced as something new or as a continuation of one's segregated upbringing exclusively among groups consisting only of persons of one category, the latter, however, with the important novelty that the students at the university are formerly unknown "members" of the same category. Such a creation of groupness might even be more strongly related to the categorical identification, since in the prior lived experience, such identifications have

most probably always been intertwined with other identifications. "Others" have also been, and most likely, have *predominantly* been family members, neighbors, peers, et cetera. This gives rise to the categorical identification serving as the only, or one of few, resource(s) available during the generation of such a feeling of groupness, which in turn makes the categorical attribute potentially more salient in its perceived "effectivity" of being a reason/base for bonding, for inclusion and exclusion. Whether ethnic or racial categories serve as a basis for feelings of groupness among members of the same category, it is an empirical question whether category membership alone is sufficient to generate such feelings. Most likely this is not the case, as it is not experienced as an abstractum, but amidst concrete settings with other relational or categorical expectations and obligations. The relevant difference pertains to what set of interpretations and practices are dominant in interaction; either those that are bound to the local residence culture and its relational network or those bound to the racialized categories. Residences might thus provide a potential arena for developing ties that go beyond racial categorical identifications, but might also be a place where racial identity and its social implications are enforced. Institutionally "mixing" residences is thus not a guarantee for the promotion of the former possibility, not least because the residence integration policy (which has failed in the past)[2] and the resulting creation of unbalanced presences of different ethnic or racial categories in

a residence tend to make the categorical identification more salient than before.

Data Collection and Analysis

The findings presented in the fifth section concern only one of a whole range of realms that were subject to interventions by the university administration, such as activities of political parties on campus, substance use, gender relations, and religion. As students' perceptions and experiences concerning these issues did not crystallize into readily available "naturally occurring" data—that is, artefacts suitable for data analysis covering all these aspects—data were collected in focus group sessions. They involved "engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion…'focused' around [the above outlined] set of issues" (Wilkinson 2011:168). They differed from "group interviews" in that there was no regular back-and-forth exchange between the researcher and the participants, but the researcher allowed for and encouraged interaction between the group participants (Morgan 1988:12). Used as a self-contained method, the main aim was to facilitate detailed representations about the issues of interest (Bohnsack 2004:220), the points of views mainly stemming from the discussion among the students. The students' interaction generated enriched and nuanced accounts of typical experiences and brought to the fore in more explicit terms differing views in relation to contested issues (Warr 2005). The students' narratives were analyzed primarily with regard to their perspectives concerning the abovementioned issues.

Interested in what way the students used to make sense of their experiences, we pursued a thematic approach to the focus group data (Silverman 2011), analyzing which domains, categories, and themes structured the views of the students. This first reading suggested an additional reading, as the accounts of experiences often referred to local cultural contexts with relatively autonomous systems of relevancies and action problems that can selectively become a stage for the enactment of population categories. Thus, the data were also read as an ethnographic account to tentatively describe the relevant dimensions of the everyday residence and university context as represented in the students' narratives. For both analytical readings, ethnographic semantics (Spradley 1979) was employed, as it extends the reconstruction of mundane domains of action and interpretation into an analysis of cultural themes.

Being interested primarily in domains, categories, and themes, the interaction of the focus groups was rather instrumental towards facilitating detailed and rich accounts. This was done mainly among students, evoking their systems of relevancies concerning the issues discussed. We did not explicitly analyze the group discussions in terms of their structural properties, however, as the students explicate their experiences and views they account in varying degrees for the presence and anticipated reaction of the other students. The focus group thus constitutes a temporary "tiny public" (Fine and Harrington 2004) that is, indeed, an ethnographic context of its own (cf. Wilkinson 2011:173). An interaction is generated that is not part of the everyday contexts of the students and which is characterized

by the presence of a researcher who "injects" issues into the discussion, who is instrumental in framing, establishing, maintaining, and dissolving the interaction situation, and whose presence—as a relative non-member of the students' lifeworld and as someone with specific gender, age, "ethnic," academic, et cetera attributes—may suggest specific forms of communication and interaction. But, as far as the focus group as temporal and situated accomplishment is based on habitualized practices—and as far as these practices are *not exclusively* competencies for focus group participation—it does allow for inferences as to what kind of cultural practices and standards, for example, the use of population categories, are externalized by the students in their everyday lives and to what extent these are enacted. The next section offers insights into this question by presenting some of the narratives of students living in residences on the main campus.

Findings

According to the data, race and ethnicity remain important identity markers to students currently enrolled at the institution. Almost every response concerning racial or ethnic identification was introduced with a phrase indicating the given individual's pride in his or her racial identification. In the words of Tezovic, a Black male participant:

I'm Xhosa and I'm proud to be Xhosa. It's my identity.

Racial and ethnic identifications remain a fundamental concern for many students, and the history of the country ensures that it does not vanish

into the background of social life. This identification with racially defined feelings of groupness is strong among both Black and White students. Responding to the charge of being descended from immigrants and thus not sufficiently African, Chomp, a White male participant, makes the following remark:

…what should we do? I was born here, but [I] feel like an alien.

It seems that a certain historical weight, a legacy of mutual violence, has affected the self-understanding of students to a great degree before they even arrive at university. It also seems that, when students arrive at university to start tertiary studies, racial and ethnic identifications are internalized to the extent that many expect to be staying with others from their own racial and ethnic background in the residence that is to be their home for the next few years. The loss of this homogeneity, which correlates with a weakening of the dominant culture of their biographical background, is lamented by various students, including Mr. S, who experiences the effects of mandatory integration as a process of sweeping change that makes just one more politically correct public arena out of a previously closed cultural safe-space:

…the hostel used to be part of your identity, now it's just a place to stay.

Although racial and ethnic enclaves remain, there is little outright hostility along these lines. Rather, a sense of understanding, empathy, and solidarity generally flourishes. In the absence of what university policy would define as integration, many students report positive tolerance. The now thoroughly multiracial and multi-ethnic character of the campus and especially the residences does, however, mean that minor clashes sometimes occur. Various occasions are reported, ranging from dissonance in sexual, sanitary, and social behavior to occasional reports of verbal and physical altercations. It does seem as though the most turbulent years of the institution's transformation into a multicultural institute of higher learning is behind it, as mainstream acceptance of multiculturalism is the norm among many students and any behavior infringing on that understanding is seen as radical and deviant from both White and Black students' perspectives. Be that as it may, boundaries along ethnic and racial identifications remain salient in everyday life and "us and them" issues strongly inform student discourse, especially when it comes to issues regarding racially mixed residences and the ways in which students perceive top management's policies in this regard. Black and White students are united in the stance that university administration is implementing far-reaching policies without—or only marginally—involving the students in the process, and with little positive management of the consequences of these policies. A White male participant, Mr. Gericke, laments the enduring self-segregation of students in his residence, even though the intake of new students is strictly managed to ensure diversity:

It's actually become like the old days now, you know. The Black guys live almost exclusively in one part of the building and the White guys in another.

A Black female participant, Sira, echoes this sentiment:

I know me as a Black person, I have my own culture, and I'm Xhosa. I'm going to do things this way and obviously won't click all the time with Sotho people because they have their own ways, and also when it comes to English and then Afrikaans people; you just get the feeling that it will never work. In the hostel, I tolerate them. It's not like we like each other, we just tolerate each other. You keep your distance, I keep my distance.

Such feelings of tolerant distance reflected in these comments are not directed at members of other racial or ethnic categories as such; rather, this skeptic stance is shaped by the perception of the way in which university management has implemented integration. Though there are accusations of resistance to change and unwillingness to cooperate directed towards outgroups, such as Ntombi's opinion that

…some races are resistant to changes,

or that of Mr. Gericke when he says

…the Black guys don't want to adjust. They disobey the rules and we have to change,

students readily agree that

…you get the feeling that it's all about numbers. This forced integration only hinders any real progress,

as Mr. S puts it. Sira agrees, further revealing the students' confusion and frustration with a policy that many see as causing unnecessary friction:

I don't know whether they want us to stay together or accept each other in any way because they just come and put Black people in White hostels and White people in Black hostels, and then they leave it like that. They don't research to see what happens in three months. It's just that thing they do, and they leave it like that.

Indeed, outside of the institutionally managed context of the residence, conflict between members of different racial and ethnic categories does not present itself as a serious issue. Certain cultural practices do conflict with each other, but where this is the case, the issue is usually resolved without the need for violence or institutional involvement. Rather, the main point of contention present is the question of Afrikaans as an official language of the University. This issue sharply divides the students that participated in this study. There are those who feel that English should be the sole language and that the University should be a linguistically neutral zone. They argue that as they leave their mother tongue at home, Afrikaans-speaking students should do the same. This view can get quite impassioned, as is expressed by Gabby, a Black female participant, when she says:

Let them learn in Afrikaans so they can get stuck here in the Free State.

A vast majority of participants see the bilingual facet of the University as unfair, and call for one medium of instruction, based not on certain ethnically or racially underpinned cultural outlooks, but on neutral and mutually beneficial concerns. Meeting each other midway in such a fashion seems like an easy

solution, but a minority feels just as strong about their right to keep learning in Afrikaans, arguing that their rights would be infringed upon if the language was to be taken away. The third opinionated group feels that Afrikaans can stay, but that equal recognition should then be given to other indigenous languages, or at least Sotho, which, along with English and Afrikaans, is one of the most widely spoken languages in the region.[3]

There is also little social intercourse between Black and White students off campus, with it being common knowledge that there are different bars and nightclubs frequented by the individuals belonging to the various racial groups. To some this state of affairs comes naturally, while the high degree of social segregation at the University engenders a shocking and traumatic experience for others. Many students that hail from other parts of the country, especially those from the larger, more liberal metropolitan areas, find this state of affairs quite strange, with many theorizing that it might be a regional phenomenon. Tezovic goes on to describe the situation thus:

> I stopped going to certain places. I went once or twice and got funny stares and I realized I'm not meant to be here. I stopped going out to certain places.

The measure of this social segregation tends to vary among demographic subsets. A study carried out in the U.S. discovered various differences in racial identity between individuals with different social backgrounds, noting, for example, that individuals from more cosmopolitan backgrounds tend to diffuse racially tense scenarios more successfully (Tatum 2004). This hypothesis was supported by our findings, with various participants who came here from other metropolitan areas regarding many of the most controversial race-based matters to be a regional issue. Chomp, for instance, said the following:

> In Cape Town, you don't see this. I went to school with Black guys and when I came here, it was like, wow. I think it's a Bloemfontein thing.

This example can be compared to Tezovic's story about coming here from the Eastern Cape and has a lot in common with Sir's story of a White school friend becoming absorbed in what he calls "Bloemfontein's racist subculture":

> This guy was English, like proper English, but when we came here, after a few months, he was talking Afrikaans and we almost never see each other anymore.

Almost identical tales were told by female participants. Following this course of investigation may shed light on differences between the attitudes of students from rural backgrounds and those whose roots are in the city, an important distinction within the Zulu, Sotho, and Afrikaans communities in particular. Various cases of lifelong interracial friendships crumbling after the first few months in Bloemfontein were recorded.

These regional, as well as rural-urban differences intersect with divides in the ethnic realm, compli-

cating the issue of integration and segregation even further. According to Sir, another Black participant:

> Two Sotho guys are tight, but a Sotho and a Xhosa guy are not as tight.

A similar situation was seen in the social behavior of Afrikaans- and English-speaking White students. Thus, an individual's racial and ethnic identification currently plays a major role in the patterns of social contact that person is likely to follow during his or her tenure as a student at the University of the Free State. Many students also believe that management's closure of the residence taverns has worsened the situation as Black and White students who previously socialized together in the same residence now frequent different spots in town where segregationist patterns remain well-established. With the few racially diverse arenas of social contact eradicated by management policies designed to curb substance abuse, ethnic and racial identification, and the associated indirect self-segregation of students through choices in the leisure domain further contribute to the enactment of boundaries along ethnic and racial categories, a phenomenon which is very much alive at the University. As Mr. Gericke, a White male participant, points out:

> …so we don't really mix. The thing is, we don't have that much in common. Take our languages, for instance, you associate with those you share something with. It's not a racist thing.

While focusing on all this, it is important to keep in mind that race, though an important factor, should not be considered as necessarily always being the

most salient phenomenon. Various other factors, like social and financial status, may carry as much weight in the social integration process of especially senior undergraduate students. The data yielded by our research supported this view in the sense that where racial integration is implemented in residences, there is often a vast gap in socio-economic status that largely correlates with race. In this regard, Chomp, a White male participant, had the following to say:

> The thing is, these kids come from homes where they don't have a lot of money for socializing. They can't go to the places or do the things the White guys do because they don't have the money. This makes it even harder to integrate.

All of South Africa's universities are racially integrated today, but one needs only take a walk across campus to see that the reality at the micro-level does not reflect the expectations of the macro-level. As Crozier and Davies (2008) said, "the trouble is they don't mix." In a society like South Africa, where racial separation and enmity have long been the dish of the day, it is important to explore the contemporary self-segregation of students, as well as the behavior of those who form the exception to this rule. This should, however, not be done with any political outcomes in mind, but in the spirit of uncovering the meaningful experiences of the people affected by these processes on a daily basis. All the participants were familiar with the multiracial and multi-ethnic reality of contemporary South African campuses and had been exposed to situations involving culturally diverse actors on various occasions since enrolment at the institution. One area where progress

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[3] The University of the Free State recently adopted a new language policy. English will now be the sole formal medium of education, while support will be offered in Afrikaans, Tswana, and Sotho, the three most widely spoken indigenous languages in the University (Marais 2016).

has been made is in perceptions and the emphatic understanding of members of other population categories. Even if voluntary social contact remains rare, incidences of racism and other forms of prejudice based on race or ethnicity have declined significantly. Since the residence integration policy has been put in place, students have been forced to move beyond their comfort zones and experience unprecedented levels of physical and social proximity to a vast array of individuals differing from themselves in factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, and religion.

Conclusion

Apart from the dynamics of relations between members of different ethnic and racial categories at the University of the Free State, the findings of this study shed light on the status of education as an institution in South Africa. Until 1994, student racial segregation from pre-school to post-graduate level was official government policy, and this arrangement continues to impact on lived realities today. To summarize, the findings of this study include that institutional desegregation is not integration and that the mixing of students belonging to different ethnic and racial categories without sufficient structural and administrative support, *along with* an experienced investment in the process by the students themselves, tends to encourage self-segregating practices instead of mutually shared experiences. Without the inner structures and meaning-making processes of both the institution and members of all backgrounds undergoing fundamental modifications, the arbitrary mixing of different racial categories in classrooms and residences will continue

to be risk-factors with regard to the intended outcome of such mixing. This leads us to consider the importance of successful multicultural educational practices as paramount to the successful integration of South African graduate students into the multicultural world of business and post-educational social life. When combined with a sensitive understanding of the ethnicized and racialized histories and relationships in any given society, multicultural education is one of the most powerful assets any student can have (as opposed to experiences of haphazard methods of simple desegregation).

The situation seems to be most tense in those male residences that have seen a significant Black *minority* moving in since 2008. The reasons for this appear to be myriad. According to the narratives, White minorities in Black residences tend to move out after short periods of time, while Black students moving into traditionally White residences stay there. This may be due to a range of factors, and, apart from "White flight," one of the most important is socio-economic status. Many of the Black students simply cannot afford private accommodation and thus choose to stay where management places them, even if a certain degree of discomfort is involved. This situation results in the illusion that Black students are "taking over" White residences, while traditionally Black residences are not transforming at all. This sentiment, along with certain actions taken by management, has resulted in a sense of alienation, especially in White male students in historically White residences.

The UFS's integration policy is made significantly harder to implement through the stubborn existence

of somewhat antiquated residence-specific traditions and value systems, which are slowly but surely starting to evolve as the residences that spawned these systems see their population change. Both Black and White participants report fundamental changes in residence traditions and patterns of behavior and interaction since the advent of mixed-raced residences, and various erstwhile practices, many of which would be seen as highly exclusive and alienating to outside observers, have been replaced by more inclusive, culturally neutral forms of behavior. Once again these changes have been most dramatic in the traditionally White male residences involved in the study. Many of these residences had long histories of physical initiation rituals and traditions reminiscent of military practice which in some cases do stretch back to the time of military conscription under the National Party government and its embeddedness in the Afrikaner nationalist project.

The weakening of these practices has, indeed, brought about change in how a residence at the Uni-

versity of the Free State is defined. Changing demographics and an increasingly top-down attitude from management, albeit one that seeks to further the academic and social mission of the institution, have led to campus residences becoming less and less bastions of "identity and culture," where one's self-understanding is shaped and cultural capital is acquired, and more and more places of residence and study primarily. This move from an emphasis on the collective to a focus on the individual is one that garners strong opinions from students, both for and against the process. There is, however, an emerging trend that accepts the changes, grudgingly in the most extreme cases, but willingly nonetheless. Slowly but surely a paradigm shift is taking place among students. The hardcore hangers-on of the fraternity and sorority type residence dynamic is slowly giving way to a more modern attitude of live and let live, which accepts the importance of individual academic success as a factor that takes precedence of the social identity provided by membership of a given residence.

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Narrating Experiences of Breast Cancer: Reflections of Women Attending a Private Hospital in Bloemfontein, South Africa

Abstract   It is commonly thought that breast cancer, like many other cancers, is an illness equivalent to a death sentence. Though this may be true in some cases, the majority of women diagnosed with breast cancer do survive this illness. Breast cancer is a growing illness and is continuing to affect women worldwide, including developing countries like South Africa. Furthermore, this country's medical system operates in terms of a duality. Here, hospitals and healthcare are mainly situated in either state operated institutions or in privately run practices. This duality emphasizes the inequality within the socio-economic classes, treatment regimens, and ethic-of-care. This article deals with how women from the higher socio-economic stratum of the deeply polarized South Africa deal with breast cancer. The aim is to understand how each participant renegotiates and transforms her self-perception, her *identity*, and issues around femininity. In addition, the authors also seek to understand if this medical encounter influences the participants' sense of embodiment, as well as how the medical encounter impacts on their everyday lifeworld.

Keywords   Breast Cancer; South Africa; Private Hospitals; Identity; Femininity

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testing services since Angelina Jolie went public" (Harp 2013:1). This phenomenon has been dubbed the "Angelina effect" and it underscores cancer's indiscriminate character. In the words of Annabel Crabb (2013:1), "one of the world's most genetically blessed women turns out also to be genetically cursed." Public awareness and concomitant health-seeking behavior in as far as breast cancer is concerned is prevalent throughout the Western world and even beyond.

Increased awareness has led to a change in attitude regarding breast cancer and increased media coverage undoubtedly leads to women having a renegotiated understanding of such a diagnosis. Previous notions of this illness have reflected stances of victimization and death, but due to celebrities' public openness about their personal battles with breast cancer and increased successful treatment outcomes, the common perceptions have been transformed to reflect hope, faith, courage, and strength. An organization such as CANSA (Cancer Association of South Africa) focuses a lot of attention on promoting awareness of breast cancer and uses many avenues to disseminate this knowledge: Internet sites, magazine articles, and awareness activities such as cancer month and the cancer *Shavathon*.[1]

Cancer is a life-altering illness and does not discriminate in terms of demographics or socio-economic status. However, the manner in which people perceive, experience, and obtain diagnosis and treatment for cancer (and breast cancer in particular) varies greatly (Fregene and Newman 2005; Maree and Wright, 2010; Stilwell 2013). Due to increased urbanization and exposure to pollutants, women from all walks of life are susceptible to breast cancer. Global public attention flared up when the celebrity, Angelina Jolie, announced her preventative double mastectomy in February 2013 (Payne 2013). This revelation by the actress sparked an increase not only in awareness, but also in

health-seeking behavior, and an oncologist from London (in Harp 2013:1) noted that in England, "the amount of women having breast cancer screenings has doubled since Jolie's announcement." This increase in breast cancer awareness and health-seeking was confirmed by Dr. Jacobs, who found that "there has been an increase in referrals to genetic

Although South Africa has undergone more than 20 years of democracy, the country still has a very unequal *dual* healthcare system whereby one either

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[1] *Shavathon* is an annual event where people can either get their hair shaved, cut, or colored in solidarity with those who have lost their hair in the process of cancer treatment (CANSA 2013).

has the inancial means to obtain private medical care (characterized by high-tech services and products) or one has to make use of the public healthcare system (characterized by generalized shortages of staff, medication, and diagnostic procedures) (Erasmus 2012; Van Rensburg 2012:77). Most of the middle-to-upper class population groups have the economic means that allows for private health and most of these groups have the additional safety net in the form of medical aid schemes. According to Health24, "17% of South Africans belong to medical schemes," thus emphasizing that 83% of the South African population are medically uninsured (Erasmus 2012) and have to rely on public healthcare facilities.

Concerning breast cancer, anecdotal evidence collected during this research and limited documented research (Maree and Wright 2010) suggest that women from a higher socio-economic background view the diagnosis of breast cancer in a more positive light (i.e., as a curable illness). They tend to get diagnosed earlier given their access to private healthcare services which are often diagnostically oriented and thus preventative. As for women from lower socio-economic groups, they tend to perceive this illness as a death sentence given the late diagnosis thereof and a generalized lack of knowledge on issues related to cancer (Maree and Wright 2010). These differing perceptions can be attributed to the individual's socio-economic status, the concomitant exposure that a person has knowledge about breast cancer, and the fact that women with greater access to financial means can afford the best treatment and are therefore better supported medically to overcome this illness.

In this particular study, our research participants represent the privileged section of the South African population as each of these participants is able to afford and to access private medical healthcare. The focus of the study is on eight women diagnosed with and undergoing treatment for breast cancer in Bloemfontein, which is situated in the Free State Province in South Africa. This article investigates how these women diagnosed with breast cancer perceive and experience their diagnosis within the South African healthcare system. We are of the opinion that these women are influenced by a certain "healthcare ideology" which is socially and culturally constructed (Cheng 2010). Accessing care in a private medical institution within South Africa is worlds apart from using the services of the public healthcare system. Not only the care itself, but also factors influencing standardized behavior and the manner in which diagnosis and treatment are viewed form part of this broad "healthcare ideology." The relevance of this study is not only related to the experiences of the privileged part of South African society. There is currently a growth in the diagnosis of breast cancer and increased awareness thereof in other developing countries. The main sociological driver behind this research is our curiosity about the experience of breast cancer given the dearth of social research on this medical condition. Little is recorded of the experiences of breast cancer survivors (Maree and Wright 2010), and this article sets out to contribute to this understanding.

What the Literature Tells Us

Knowledge surrounding breast cancer can, in most cases, be seen as a significant element leading to improved coping. Knowledge is an important component of self-care and provides a good starting point in the event of diagnosis with any form of illness. How the individual implements knowledge of cancer can influence how she sees herself, her prognosis, and her overall medical encounter once diagnosed with this illness (Bury 1982). This, in turn, is strongly shaped by the particular "healthcare ideology" that the person is subject to. Within the middle-to-upper class segment of society, women mostly perceive a breast cancer diagnosis as a treatable illness due to their easier access to healthcare that normally guarantees a speedy, if not immediate, treatment trajectory (Klawiter 2008:4).

Breast cancer is likely to have a permanent physical and psychological impact on the individual's lifeworld, which results in a "biographical disruption" (Bury 1982). A biographical disruption is seen when an illness, such as breast cancer, causes significant disruption to an individual's everyday lifeworld and prompts her "to rethink her biography and self-concept" (Bury 1982:169). Currently, there is a high probability that treatment can cure an individual of breast cancer, but only after an extensive and expensive treatment regimen and in the case of early detection. Common treatments are surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation (sometimes pejoratively referred to as the "slash/burn/poison trilogy") (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001:145). The treatment trajectory encompasses many side-effects: the loss of one or both breasts, hair loss, the burning of veins, blackening of nails, radiation burns on sections of the chest and neck, and a five-year-long suppression of the hormone estrogen.

Breast cancer is therefore not merely a temporary disruption, but an illness that will most likely mark an individual for the rest of her life. There are indications (Greenberg 2002; Brennan and Moynihan 2005:153; Sulik 2011:323) that women from the middle and upper socio-economic classes often view a breast cancer diagnosis as a periodic interruption that can result in a temporary to a permanent renegotiation of personal priorities and lifestyle choices. Thus, in the overall understanding of this illness, privileged women often view breast cancer as a *temporary* episode in their lives. However, due to the physical scarring and the overall experience of the treatment regimen, there is little doubt that certain aspects of the individual will be affected, be it her self-understanding, identity, or the manner in which she views her lifeworld.

Even amidst technologically well-equipped medical facilities and among well-qualified medical practitioners, some breast cancer patients can be subjected to and viewed as just being subjects in the institutionalized "regime of medicalization" (Klawiter 2008:75). In this regard, Terry Tien Cheng (2010:63) argues that during intense medical treatment an individual's self-identity is inevitably shaped by "socially and culturally constructed healthcare ideologies." Therefore, although more affluent and socially well-adjusted women may regard breast cancer as an illness that can be overcome (a perception that is popularized in the mass media), there is little doubt that this illness will leave deep scars on the body and the identity of breast cancer survivors, and these occurrences are intimately linked to their experiences of the overall medical encounter.

Organizations such as CANSA are dedicated to promote public awareness of breast cancer, but the South African healthcare system is still very much divided between the well-resourced, private medical healthcare system of predominantly individually insured medicine, and the poorly administered public component provided by the state. Almost a decade ago, a well-known South African oncologist, Carl Albrecht (2006:4), who is the Head of Research at CANSA, emphasized that South Africa must anticipate a strong rise in breast cancer incident rates "due to migration to cities and [an] increased life expectancy." Other factors, such as the later onset of pregnancy, fewer (if any) pregnancies, shorter periods of breastfeeding (or no breastfeeding whatsoever), and exposure to harmful environmental agents are all responsible for the increase in breast cancer. Accordingly, cancer (especially cervical, breast, and testicular cancer), on top of other burdens of morbidity and mortality in South Africa, is seemingly going to take on "staggering proportions" in the near future (Farmer et al. 2010).

The possibility of contracting breast cancer necessitates constant monitoring. It is often said that "early detection" is key to a better chance of healing and survival (Stilwell 2013). However, this appeal for *self-care* can at times be a double-edged sword, where women can be exposed to over-diagnosis and even be treated unnecessarily. Frequent mammography sessions might even increase the risk of developing breast cancer (Stilwell 2013). Although early detection is related to increased chances of survival, breast cancer survival brings with it other negative influences on women's lifeworlds:

Women with breast cancer report difficulties with multiple areas of self-concept, including physical, personal, and social aspects…Body image was one of the most frequently mentioned themes by participants in all groups. Almost all patients reported that some aspect of their body image had been challenged by breast cancer, such as feeling unattractive, missing their breasts, feeling "lopsided," and coping with weight change and hair loss. [Beatty et al. 2008:336]

Once diagnosed with breast cancer and accepting treatment, patients are faced with a host of medical and social interventions over a long period of time. Taken together these can be referred to as the "medical encounter." Stewart and Kleihues (2003:271) state that most patients who have access to a well-functioning medical healthcare system will have a "uniquely structured treatment scheme" that caters specifically for her type and grade of breast cancer. In advanced medical care environments, medical practitioners are often encouraged to incorporate "behavioral medical care" into their outlook and interaction with patients. By incorporating "behavioral medical care" into daily practices, the medical practitioner "recognises the importance of a person's subjective experience of illness and healing, including personal meaning and emotional responses, cultural and interpersonal context, and the individual's decision-making and behavioural responses" (Schrodt and Sephton n.d. as cited in Donegan and Spratt 2002:959). "Attitudes and beliefs, social support systems, and health related behaviors are critical issues in all phases of breast cancer management, ranging from compliance with primary preven-

tative measures such as mammography to tertiary treatment decision-making and adherence to treatment" (Schrodt and Sephton n.d. as cited in Donegan and Spratt 2002:959).

When being treated for cancer, the oncologist is the face and voice of the entire surgical team and the oncologist's sole purpose is to cure the patient of this illness that is damaging the health and functioning of the human body (Fawcett and McQueen 2011:109). In the research project on which this article is based, Dr. Aaron Jackson (pseudonym) was the leading oncological physician who acted as contact person with the research participants. The preliminary findings within the literature review reflect his acknowledgement of "behavioral medical care":

Ninety nine percent of the patients you see are women in their fifties to seventies, and occasionally younger. So you deal with female patients...and emotional female patients with cancer. So sometimes you treat the emotions more than you treat the cancer.

Given the nature of a cancer diagnosis, the long journey of treatment, and uncertainty of the eventual outcome, paying attention to the emotional experience of the breast cancer patients is important as this will encourage a holistic approach when treating her. The oncologist's primary focus is the breast cancer diagnosis, but how he/she sees and understands the patient will influence how the patient accepts her diagnosis and expresses or commits her willingness to undergo the recommended treatment trajectory. Breast cancer patients need to understand that the treatment regime will result

in varying side-effects: the loss of a breast or even both breasts, the loss of hair, nausea, discomfort, pain, the blackening of veins, are just some of the physiological changes. These changes will inevitably trigger emotional turmoil, making it essential to negotiate the patient's willingness to undergo and fulfill her full treatment trajectory.

If you take away a breast or both, a woman will feel less feminine and, unfortunately, when you block a female's estrogen, you take away her femininity. What gives you your secondary female characteristics? It is estrogen, and now we [oncologists] take it away for five years [as this is part of the hormonal treatment that follows the radiation]. You get hot flushes, dry hair, dry skin, you get painful joints, you get osteoporosis, you get vaginal dryness, you get bladder irritation and reduced bladder activity, and the list goes on. They [breast cancer patients] get fat and, yes, they are fat because they pick up ten percent of their body weight. So, yes, these things all have a very bad effect on a woman feeling feminine...they are one breast less and no hair. [Dr. Jackson, interview on 23/10/2012]

Breast cancer inevitably alters a woman's self-image. How a woman views herself influences and affects her self-concept and ultimately how she perceives her femininity. According to Dr. Jackson:

Breast cancer is one of the easiest cancers to treat oncologically, but one of the most difficult cancers to treat emotionally. [interview on 23/10/2012]

It is accepted that women who are able to afford private medical care often reveal a higher level of

a positive "healthcare ideology." A healthcare ideology influences to a large extent how patients will approach their healthcare in terms of health-seeking behavior, compliance, and adherence to treatment, understanding and knowledge of their affliction, and the perception of the prospects of healing and improvement. These, in turn, inevitably influence the manner in which healthcare workers will interact with patients and will impact on the ultimate experiences of the medical encounter. In this context, it is therefore important that healthcare providers encourage patients to be better informed, and that healthcare providers are "responsive to the patient-consumer empowerment" (Cheng 2010:63).

The Narrative as a Tool to Unwrap Meaning: The Methodological Account

Researching narratives implies a focus on the biographical descriptions that people give of their everyday lived experiences. The term biographical description overlaps with those such as autobiography, autoethnography, life history, life story, and documents of life (diaries or memoranda). To uncover meaning, we relied in this project on in-depth interviews which took the form of conversational, dialogical, semi-structured, open-ended, reflexive, collaborative, and guided encounters. The aim is that the participant collaborates during the in-depth interviews in producing accounts or versions of her past, present, or future actions, experiences, aspirations, thoughts, and feelings.

When interpreting and analysing narratives, the social reality underlying the narratives is seen as in-trinsically dynamic and complex. The breast cancer patient is an active agent within the context of her lifeworld within which social action takes place and within which meaning is constructed. As narrative analysts, our understanding is an interpretation, and through the language we use, our interpretation becomes part of a process of meaning-making. This process entails, among others, that we draw on all available information concerning the structure within which the narratives are situated.

The narrative findings that we express below reflect the experiences of eight participants who had access to private medical care for their breast cancer. Their experiences therefore are not generally applicable to the overall South African population given the country's pernicious and persistent inequalities, especially in the healthcare sector.

How one perceives events, actions, and experiences affects in how one recalls information and facts from one's "stock of knowledge" (Audi 2003:1-2). Each individual research participant gathers her knowledge and experience from within her lifeworld and adapts to the demands of her life within the context of her experiencing breast cancer (Mouton 1996 as cited in Coetzee and Graaff 1996:16). Society and its norms, values, and beliefs play a role in how the individual understands and accepts a situation such as dealing with breast cancer. No one individual's social existence is entirely freely created, nor is it strictly scripted. Each event allows the actor to write, produce, and act within her own social setting (Ritzer 2011:205). In this way, participants create their stories and the truth of these stories "is not only what *was* experienced, but equally

what *becomes* experience in the telling and reception" (Frank 1995:22).

The research focuses on eight women from Bloemfontein, South Africa, varying between the ages of 37 and 62 years. Their socio-economic background can be regarded as fairly similar and, as mentioned, they all had access to private medical healthcare. Seven of the eight participants obtained tertiary education qualifications. Each one of them had a sound bio-medical understanding of breast cancer. Each one was contacted with the assistance of the first *gatekeeper* who is their primary oncologist, Dr. Aaron Jackson. He informed his patients about the research and negotiated consent with willing patients. All eight participants declared their willingness to be involved in the study and remained willing to participate throughout the study.

The information was collected over two years (2012-2013). Each participant's breast cancer diagnosis was her first diagnosis; and at the time of the research no participant suffered metastasis or a recurrent breast cancer diagnosis. Ethical clearance was obtained for this study from the Ethics Committee of The Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa (ECUFS 150/2012). Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, each phase of the research was approached by obtaining a renewed assurance from participants that they were truly prepared to continue sharing their narratives.

Who Told Their Stories?

The narratives need to be situated within the broad context of the national health system of South Af-

rica, as well as the South African society. As mentioned before, the South African healthcare system is grossly unequal. The public sector healthcare as provided by the state is highly inequitable when compared to the free-market medical system where providers are mainly private entrepreneurs operating from privately owned facilities (Van Rensburg 2012).

The eight women who shared their narratives reveal the experiences of a small group of women belonging to the semi-professional upper-middle class. We read the stories of these women not only as stories of their struggle with breast cancer, but also as stories reflecting their lifeworlds. Three of the participants work in the field of education: two as teachers and one as an administrator in education. Another three work in the healthcare system: one as an emergency care practitioner and the other two as nurses. One woman owns and runs her own business, and the final woman is married to an entrepreneur and now runs her household.

Encountering the Medical World

One often hears that state-run institutions such as hospitals and clinics not only lack physical equipment, but also lack empathy and sufficient communication when treating patients (Oosthuizen 2012; Taylor 2012; Prince and Marsland 2014). One of the research participants, Anna, who was 37 at the time of meeting her, is a paramedic working for the state. She draws from her personal experience of working in the state hospital and compares it to her breast cancer treatment in the private healthcare set-up.

They are giving us soup and sandwiches and stuff, I did not expect this. They try and make it "homely" for you. You know, they are giving out blankets and we have these comfortable chairs. I thought [my treatment] would be like [that in the] state hospitals. Where you sit on a straight chair, get irritated the whole time, and the personnel is stiff [and unfriendly]. I did not expect this [private hospital experience]. You must understand that state hospitals and private hospitals [are] two different things. The experiences that I have [being] a worker [and employed] in the state hospital is completely different than in the private hospital [setting], especially with the personnel [because] in state hospitals they don't care. They don't even talk to you. They [just] put the drip up and that's that. In [the local state hospital], where we take cancer patients to, there is no compassion, nothing. So I had this perception that this [private hospital would be] like [that].

Anna's personal interaction and involvement as a paramedic with the public and private healthcare sector might reflect a biased experience because she has always been on the supply side of public healthcare as an objective actor. Her personal experience with being diagnosed with breast cancer puts her in the shoes of the subjects having to deal with the medical gaze. Her personal involvement as a patient exposes her for the first time to a treatment trajectory. She is able to distinguish her treatment from those of the many patients she has encountered before.

When viewing the medical encounter from the research participants' perspectives, it is clear that each participant felt like she was a priority to the

healthcare team within this private medical facility and the medical personnel in this private medical facility did not feel restricted by standard working hours. This sentiment was shared numerous times by Donna:

I have a cough on me and stuff like that because we are in the middle of winter and I am trying to go through chemo…and say, that night at nine o'clock or something like that; he [Dr. Jackson] will phone me and he is still in his office and is trying to help people…he is supposed to go home and not supposed to sit there.

Although Donna was probably the most negative participant among the eight women; represented in phrases such as, "I don't know how to get up and go on with life again," "I'll rather shoot myself," and "I don't know if I am going to cope," she expressed only positive remarks about the actual medical encounter. Not only was she satisfied with the medical personnel and her primary physician, but also appreciated the extra effort and care they displayed in the chemotherapy lounge.

They really do go out of their way. Like I said, the little sandwiches. And they put this little bug [heated bean bag], which they warm, and they put it on your hand before they put the wire with the needle in…they treat you so nicely.

By undergoing cancer treatment, participants express belief that they will overcome this illness despite the seriousness thereof. This belief is further strengthened by the quality of care in the medical

facilities that the private medical institute employs. Fiona reflects on her understanding of the treatment alternatives and their consequences.

[Breast cancer] is a serious disease, but the medical technology is so good that you don't have to fear because there is treatment for it. So, I went for the treatment…[also] the medical view has also changed in the last few years. They tried to…they called it, um…breast reservation [or breast conservation therapy[2]]…Dr. [in the private hospital] explained it to me. They don't want to do a mastectomy,[3] if it is not necessary because they know a woman's hair and breasts are sort of her main, um…features of femininity [and that is why] they would rather do breast reservation than doing a mastectomy.

A good relationship between medical personnel and patient influences how a diagnosis is perceived. Gina is, for example, positive about her breast cancer journey and the overall medical encounter.

There were these three beautiful people: the nurses working there, and Dr. Jackson himself is a very special oncologist. You know, he explains [everything] one hundred percent.

During the interviews with the research participants frequent mention is made of the role played by the three chemotherapy nurses who are an intricate part of all the participants' medical encoun-

ters. Each of the participants comments on the extraordinary service and compassion they receive from these women, as expressed by Hala:

The nurses remember me and they are friendly and chatty and they make you feel like family.

Anna, in turn, indicates that they treated her as a "human being, and not as a sickness." While Gina has the following to say:

The three nurses are like these three angles working for God on earth. Such nice people, and I said to myself: "Thank goodness that it is these three that are there for us, they are kind and compassionate."

Hala's rendition of the medical encounter captures most of the sentiments expressed in the other research participants' accounts:

Dr. Jackson was absolutely so sweet and the sisters at the chemotherapy, you know, you could not have asked for better. I couldn't have asked for better medical personnel to treat me and to give me that chemo. They were so gorgeous, so friendly, and you felt so at home there. They went through so much trouble and they always wanted to find out if you were OK. And they brought us coffee or tea or whatever we wanted. The one day when I came there, there were the most delicious sandwiches, and they started with the chemotherapy. There is nothing that I could think of suggesting to them that they have to change. We had lovely Lazy Boys [a type of relaxing chair] to sit in so it was so comfortable and all the people were going through the same trauma. So everybody was so, so kind.

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[2] Breast conservation therapy is seen when the surgical intervention is minimal in an "attempt to preserve the breast without compromising survival" (Rahman 2011:1).
[3] Mastectomy "is the removal of the whole breast" (Breast cancer 101 2013:1).

Medical Interaction between Patients and Practitioners

How the medical team views patients and interacts with them can influence how an illness is perceived and treated. Some of the research participants indicate that they wanted a more in-depth understanding of their illness after being diagnosed. Ella, who is self-employed and 49 years of age, is one of the participants who wanted to know more.

If I could change something for people that will be diagnosed in the future, is to give them more information the moment they tell you something is wrong. They have to tell you: "Listen... You know, after two weeks, I came to Dr. Jackson and he told me this is the type of cancer you had." When I went to hospital, they did the lumpectomy and the next thing they put me on the machine and they take a uhm, uhm a sonar of the skeleton. You don't...They don't tell you they will do that and why they will do that. I was...myself, I would like more information before I go through this. They must say: "Listen, we will take out the lump and then we will do this and this and this to see what is happening and then we will send you to the oncologist and these are the types of breast cancers you can have. We don't know yet, but this and this and this is the most uhm...most people... eighty percent has this one and twenty percent has this one." So you can just understand more before you go through everything. Uhm, it is just like...they diagnose you and then they send you to the surgeon and the surgeon doesn't tell you anything because he is just there to remove the lump. And then...you understand what I am saying? There must be some sort of support for people...And it is not the doctors'

fault. There must be somebody like a psychologist or somebody who tells the patient what is going to happen to you. More than one person said exactly the same when I talked to them. They would have liked to know before anything happens so you can take a...decide what to do and know what is going to happen. Because you just lie there in the hospital and, OK, now you are going for a...X-ray and now you go for a sonar, and you don't know why or nothing.

A patient's right to be informed about her diagnosis and the treatment trajectories are important aspects to fortify rapport in the doctor-patient relationship. This relationship must emphasize trust, "open dialogue," and advice on the advantages and disadvantage of treatment options (Wagener 2009:243). This is reflected in various personal testimonies which emphasize that the most common first response to a breast cancer diagnosis is shock and disbelief. This initial response is counteracted by collecting of information and becoming familiar with the diagnosis. In a study conducted by Barbara Delinsky (2001:4), findings revealed that her participants emphasized similar thoughts of their breast cancer diagnosis. One of her participant's states: "I wanted information immediately. I wanted to know which treatment plan was right for me...I sought the advice of trusted family, friends, doctors, and breast cancer survivors, so that I could be my own best advocate" (Delinsky 2001:4).

The research participants reveal that after the initial shock wore off, the majority of them sought information through books, the Internet, family, friends, and medical staff to broaden their knowledge and to regain some form of control over their lives.

Some of the participants are of the opinion that the diagnosing physician relayed the information and treatment trajectory in a manner that was comforting and informative. This also helps to build a trusting relationship where patients feel comfortable to ask questions and inquire about medical terminology. Hala states that she did not hesitate to further her understanding of her diagnosis.

I am not ashamed to ask [the doctors] if they are talking their [medical] language. [I would say]: "Please help me understand better and explain what that means."

Bella's experience reflects a holistic encounter in which her doctors explained and even elaborated by drawing pictures to fully depict what they would be doing and how they planned to do her surgery. This is how she relates the interim period between her diagnosis and undergoing a double mastectomy:

The doctor at X-ray explained [that] now the cancer is operable. "I will refer you to somebody who can operate on you and is very good." Then I met that doctor and she was a very funny lady and she explained [everything]. She even put up some pictures to explain and show me how she is going to work and what [she is going to do].

Carla also accounts an interactive and guided treatment experience with the medical personnel:

[The doctor] explained everything. What type of cancer. She even drew a sketch for me on what is happening and what she is going to do. So I understood [everything].

Fiona recalls the hospital personnel as portraying an optimistic view:

They were very friendly people [who exuded] high spirits. [They] never [make you] feel like [you are] a sick person when you entered the hospital.

None of the research participants felt side-lined or rejected by any member of the medical personnel. Each participant indicates that she experienced a rather open relationship with them, including face-to-face and telephonic interactions and participation in the negotiation of the treatment trajectory.

Experiencing Additional Interventions

Loue and Sajatovic (2004:9) indicate that "women have been expected to meet a certain body image, to conform to a contemporary standard of appearance and beauty." But, to meet these idealized norms of beauty while battling with a breast cancer diagnosis can be a challenging prospect. In addition to the medical intervention that often entails a mastectomy, breast cancer almost always coincides with hair loss. The research participants placed a strong emphasis on the trauma of losing their hair. Apart from the shock of the actual breast cancer diagnosis and surgery or chemotherapy, hair loss was expressed as being the most traumatic aspect of the illness experience. To combat this trauma the hospital made a concerted effort to help the patient to deal with this. Bella recalls one of her medical encounters:

The hospital brings in beauticians especially for breast cancer [patients]. They tell you even if you

don't attend [this] session you [must] come for another session. [They come and help] the people to clean their face[s] and have a cup of tea with us and talk.

She further praises the staff at the private hospital for not only accepting her, but also for making sure that everything was taken care of from the administrative side to the understanding of her surgery, as well as the different outreach programs. Participants spoke of experiences that are in line with an ethic-of-care approach. An ethic-of-care approach "stresses that the caring response is determined in a concrete way for each unique patient within that patient's particular network of relationships and given that patient's unique needs and desires" (Cates and Lauritzen 2001:58).

The staff accepted me and said I looked pretty. Even with my admission, they organized everything for me. [When] I was discharged, they organized that I go to [a local organization] with [these specialized] bra[ziers]. [They said that the lady with the bra(ziers)] will measure [me] and do all these things for the bra[ziers] so that [I] look the way [I] looked before [I was] operated on. [The hospital has] so many channels they can send you to after your operation. There were [even] some sessions where you were visited by these beauticians and they pamper[ed] you. There were about ten or twelve of us for the sessions that they [gave and it] is free of charge. They give you the cleansing material, the moisturizers, the lipsticks, and the blushes. They give [you] all [this] stuff that makes you look beautiful.

The treatment that participants received was to a large extent client-centered. Research participants experienced being treated as important and not as just a body with an illness. They felt that their emotional well-being seemed to matter. It is clear that by focusing on the patient's well-being, the medical facility not only helps the individual to a better recovery, but also improves her outlook on her illness experience. Gina recalls her experience with the chemotherapy nurses:

I went for my first chemo[therapy and] they said to me: "Just cut your hair a bit shorter, so that the day you lose your hair, it is like shorter...shorter...gone."

Her curiosity about her illness led to the oncologist providing her with reading material:

I felt to myself that I am studying medical science now with [Dr. Jackson]. He even took my email address and he said to me: "I will send you articles on this." He said the HER2 positive [cancer] is a very aggressive cancer and [then] he sent me two articles that I read.

The Quest for Normalcy and Control

During the breast cancer journey each of the participants sought to balance her everyday roles (as mother and wife) with her treatment trajectory and its varying side-effects. Some of the participants indicate that they rely strongly on family support whereas others feel that the breast cancer battle is largely a solo journey. The decision to fight the cancer herself led Ella to ask family and friends to reduce contact with her:

I asked them not to contact me and phone me every day to ask me what is going on. I told them if I need them,

then I would phone them and ask them for help, otherwise they must just leave me. I will survive. I asked them to please phone my husband and ask him how I am feeling. Ask him and don't phone me, just leave me.

Other participants became accustomed to their new appearance and the side-effects of the treatment regimen. They are also comfortable with having their family and close friends see their altered appearance. According to Hala, she tried for a time to maintain her pre-diagnosis appearance and to continue her daily activities, but when she experienced the negative effect of the chemotherapy and radiation on her everyday lifeworld, she renegotiated her self-understanding.

At first I told myself I will never ever walk without this wig. I will not walk like that. That not even my children would see me without hair. But, because it was so hot during summer time, I just thought to myself: They must just see me the way I am because I am not going through this. They must just accept me the way I am. In the winter time, it is so cold without hair. So I used a beanie [a woolen hat] during the nights. But, it is OK. I realized that this is just a phase that I had to go through and, fortunately, nothing lasts forever and things will change and things have changed.

Carla notes that her breast cancer diagnosis is more traumatic to her family and friends.

I am coping and accepting, but the breast cancer diagnosis affects others.

Furthermore, she believes that once she comes to terms with her diagnosis, her life will carry on with a few adjustments such as her diet.

I am eating normal with lots of vegetables and fruits. I decided to change my lifestyle on my own...nothing is going to stop me from what I want. I am not sick.

Each of the participants finds her own ways to come to terms with her diagnosis. Having accepted her breast cancer diagnosis, each participant makes a concerted effort to find a renewed balance in her life. This includes beauty regimens, daily chores, and meal preparations in which partners and children are an integral aspect of maintaining normalcy. This way of balancing the illness with leading a normal life allows for a sharing of control, especially when a daily chore such as cooking is done by a family member or friend. Donna states:

The friend of mine helps when he cooks.

The effect can also be seen in Gina's family circle, which sees her grown daughter coming home to her parents to help them with their daily chores:

My one daughter phones me and says: "Ma, must I bring you food?," "I will come and make you food." Because I can't face food. This helps me and my family to continue with life as normal.

Weathering the Storms

Kathy Charmaz (1997) views a breast cancer diagnosis as a disruption to an individual's self-concept and immediate lifeworld. Cheng (2010:ii) adds that the diagnosis of breast cancer does not only disrupt a "woman's everyday life, but also, and more importantly, her self-identity: who she was before

the cancer diagnosis and who she becomes after the diagnosis." The shock of a breast cancer diagnosis can turn an individual's lifeworld up-side-down. The acceptance of this reality varies depending on the individual's self-understanding in combination with her immediate support structure. In each of the research participants' cases, the initial diagnosis came as a shock, but through their inner strength and support structures (family, friends, and religion), they were able to renegotiate their disrupted lifeworlds.

Shortly after her diagnosis, Carla struggled with various unanswered questions linked to this affliction. Despite this tragic diagnosis, she realizes that she has the power to renegotiate her circumstance by taking control in her treatment trajectory.

> It was a shock...Sometimes when I am sitting alone, I get those questions which you don't have answers to...I am a person who fights and I don't just sit there and cry because no one is going to help you, if you don't help yourself.

Ella recalls that she felt very uneasy with her breast cancer diagnosis. She felt that not enough information was provided during her consultation with the diagnosing physician. This prompted her to seek guidance from a friend who had overcome her own breast cancer diagnosis.

> I was so shocked, you don't know what to do. So I would have liked this to happen: the moment you are diagnosed, there must be somebody they send directly to you and who says: "Listen, this is what is going to happen to you." Because you don't

know...I was talking to one of my friends who also got breast cancer and she said: "The moment that you get diagnosed with breast cancer, you need somebody to tell you exactly what is going on." Because what they do is they say: "OK, it is cancer and it must be operated on, so which surgeon would you like?"

Bella is the only research participant who accepted her diagnosis immediately. However, she reveals that after her initial diagnosis, she was scared:

> When I was diagnosed, I was a little bit scared, but I thought: Let me just accept this condition. Because if I don't accept it, it is going to be a little bit tough for me to go through everything concerning cancer. And I just prepared myself and accepted the condition as it is.

Bella explains that her strong and accepting self-understanding was influenced by an article that she received from her daughter in the period between her check-up and diagnosis.

> My daughter came and said: "No, mama, it is not you alone"...She gave me an article with this person who has breast cancer as well. The story was written and the information was given...When I read this story, it was as if this story was mine. But, when I went down a bit, it was from somebody from the Eastern Cape. They were talking about the breast cancer...but that woman was afraid and couldn't accept herself.

Donna still juggles with her emotions when trying to come to terms with her diagnosis and the end of chemotherapy and radiation. She realizes that this

is not an illness that you can ignore because of the uncertainty of it returning one day. Initial acceptance is therefore not the issue any more; it is rather the prospect of the cancer recurring after the intense treatment. Her focus is now on coping with the looming possibility of metastasis.

> I actually went into shock...all they could say is that it is third grade and very progressive and the lump must come out. And then in the operation itself they can say how far it is...Now, having finished chemotherapy, I feel I should see somebody about this experience. To get myself coping with the fact that the chemo is now finished. Because you get through this process of building yourself up and then it breaks you down again...I can't accept the fact that it is really over. OK, now I am going for the radiation and I must be careful with that so that my skin doesn't get broken. But, I feel now, what about if they test me now, and I have to go through all of this again? I don't think I am going to do that. I'll rather shoot myself. This is the stuff that goes through my brain. I don't think that you have to think positively. You are always fighting with yourself.

Support

In analyzing the treatment trajectory, it became evident that support from family members and close friends is vital in accepting a breast cancer diagnosis and finding strength in continuing the long treatment. Donna is the only participant who does not have immediate family and friends to aid her in her illness journey. She reveals that she has been divorced for many years and both her daughters live with her ex-husband and do not visit her often.

Due to her isolated everyday lifeworld, she finds comfort in Christian television and her church fellowship.

> There wasn't any emotional support...I am still feeling very negative. I am reading a lot and watching TBN [Christian television] and I am looking to hold onto something in life...because you get into such a small world of just coping with the cancer. I am looking for something through TBN and through the Word of God.

Each of the other research participants reflects a positive outlook of her breast cancer experience, and this appears to be strongly linked to the support each of them received from family and friends. For some of the participants, a feeling of shame was accompanied to their physical appearance following their surgery (lumpectomy,[4] partial mastectomy,[5] or double mastectomy[6]). The husbands of these women also had to renegotiate their roles as partners and lovers. Those participants who are married reveal that it is difficult to accept their altered bodies and that their husbands' gaze is unsettling. According to Carla, it took her a while before she felt comfortable letting her husband see her naked after having a mastectomy of the left breast.

> When you look at yourself, it is hard to accept yourself being like that, so I took time. I didn't even want

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[4] Lumpectomy—"where the tumor along with a rim of at least 1 cm of normal breast tissue is removed" (Roy 2011:443).

[5] Partial mastectomy—"removes less than the whole breast, taking only the part of the breast in which the cancer occurs" (Rossi and Sokolowski 2011:154).

[6] Double mastectomy—"the removal of both breasts" (Breast cancer 101 2013:1).

my husband to see because he is not used to seeing me like that...it took like two months before he can really actually look at me because I didn't want him to...Even when I was in the bath, he saw that I didn't want it. And he saw I didn't want him there and he accepted it.

Anna also voices her concern about how her husband will see her after her mastectomy and whether he will be able to accept her as she is now. She decided to discuss her insecurities and find out how her husband feels about the situation.

> Is he going to accept me? You know, I think there it [femininity] may play a role. But, after we had a discussion and after the mastectomy we had intercourse again and after that everything went fine. It is like before. So it was just that anxiety and not knowing. Am I going to be accepted and am I going to accept myself…But, since then my husband and I had the talk and he assured me that nothing has changed.

Ella's breast cancer surgery consisted of a lumpectomy. She states that she was aware of her scar, but indicates that her hair loss was more traumatic. She takes care that her family does not see her without her wig. Ella's husband is accepting of her need to present herself as before her diagnosis and he even occasionally tries to lighten the mood.

> I don't even show my family, not my children and not my husband. They must understand that this is personal for me and I don't want them to see me without my make-up and a wig on. They are very positive people and especially my husband is a very

positive person. But, for me, I don't want them to see me like that and I always put something on my head so they don't see me without hair.

Throughout the research the concept of hair and the loss thereof is a prominent theme. Some participants attempt to deal with their hair loss privately while others include supportive others in their experience of losing their hair. Gina is happily married and a mother of four, and her family shares her trauma when she shaved her hair. By removing her hair, she experiences that she is losing part of her identity and needs the support of her family to help her to come to terms with her new appearance. This traumatic event even encouraged her husband to propose that he, too, shaves his head in solidarity with his wife.

> It is important. When my daughter was cutting my hair, my son was there and my husband was there supporting me. I was sitting there crying and if I look at my son, I could see his eyes as well [tears]. And I didn't look at my daughter, but she was like: "No, Ma, let me cut just a little bit off with the scissors and then I will take, you know, [the shaver]." My daughter is a qualified hairdresser. I also said to my husband that: "If I need a hand, yours must be there first." And shame, he said he would also shave his hair. And I said: "No, you are going to look like a bandit." Don't shave your head, I thank you very much, but don't"…[After I shaved my head] I was scared to lose my identity. Like if I take my wig off, then I think: who am I? It is still my eyes, but who is this woman looking at me? But, it's just temporary and I know that my hair will grow again.

Reflecting on the Future

Having a view on the future is an important dimension of how an individual perceives her diagnosis and the fight she puts on to overcome her illness. The biographical disruption accompanying the trauma can be seen to encompass almost the entirety of the research participants present and future lives. Most of the participants view their illness as a chapter in their lives and they display a determination to survive. This proactive mentality prompts a re-evaluation of family relations, daily living, and values attached to the concrete reality of everyday life. According to Carla, she is furthering her studies and uses the idea of losing out on seeing her granddaughter grow as inspiration to overcome her ordeal. Carla is also adamant that her life will carry on and that she will be able to reach old age:

> I want to do my Master's thesis. And my little granddaughter, I will miss out on. I love her. She is so lovely and she is two years old now. I thought about many things: "Am I going to live?" "Am I going to die?" You ask yourself many questions, but at the end I said: "No, other people are still alive, so why not me." So I told myself I am going to fight and I am going to change my lifestyle…My goal is seeing myself passing this sickness and getting my certificate and continuing my life and my work.

Ella has re-evaluated her everyday lifeworld and has come to realize that material things hold little value to her and cannot replace the importance of her family. Her future is the one thing that is important to her now:

I have a different outlook on life and on the little things, you know. But, I am still me and I am just moving on. Not myself, but things in life is different for me. Things I see in the future and in everyday life is different. This is something I can tell you...I ordered myself a car...three months before I was diagnosed, alright...And it was very important for me to have that car. Now, I don't worry about the car because I wanted a BMW X3. I didn't want anything else because I wanted a BMW. But, now I don't worry if it's a Volkswagen or if it's whatever. It doesn't matter anymore. So that changed.

Donna believes that she will accomplish this self-renewal through what she calls The Word of God. Her strong need to find a balance between who she is and what she experienced through her illness may in part be ascribed to the fact that she initially experienced a lack in support structure. She relates that she needed to find the courage within herself to fight this battle on her own.

> I am still feeling very negative. I am trying to find myself again. I am trying to restore myself to normal again. I know I must just find the love of God for me and I am struggling to get that because, you know, when you have no one, really [it is very difficult].

Fiona brings to light what she considers a very important feature in the breast cancer journey. She points out that one must take responsibility for oneself and states that she achieved this by implementing three principles to help her accept her diagnosis, undergo treatment, and see her future plans materialize.

> I think about my life, it certainly has changed. The way I see my life and my future. But I still have

a purpose here. I think the one thing I learnt about this illness is that everybody has a responsibility towards oneself. You must have your regular check-ups every year. You must look after yourself, get exercise, eat healthy and keep your mind healthy, and think positively. A friend of mine said: "There are three things that you must do: live a healthy lifestyle, keep your mind healthy, and have faith." And I think those three things are the most important things that I try in my life. Now I really appreciate every day more than what I did in the past, really. Because the cancer can kill you and therefore I think I appreciate life more.

Throughout Gina's narrative it becomes clear that her family is the most important aspect to her lifeworld. Her family-orientated outlook is strongly reflected in her future aspirations. She hopes to retire with her husband in a home they specially bought for this and furthermore, she hopes to continue being part of the lives of her grandchildren.

I always say to myself: "You know, I have three grandsons, but I must still see one granddaughter somewhere." Because I always said to myself that I am always more of a girl mother than a boy mother. I love my son and to me he is something special, but I love my girls. My girls and I are very close and I am glad I got them. Now I have the three *boeties* [grandsons] and it is always: "Ouma touch, crouch, and engage" [a reference to the way rugby is played] and there is nothing Barbie. Always very physical. But, my children and grandsons…they make life worth living. Also, last year I bought a house in Smithfield and my husband is renovating it. But, it is six years before he retires. So we must hang on.

Each research participant makes a clear and conscious statement that once the treatment trajectory is completed and the cancer is in remission, she will continue her life and have future aspirations as planned before her diagnosis. There is a strong commitment to returning their lives to normal and to view this illness as an episode, not as a permanent and continuing condition. The illness experience did influence the individual's previous self-concept, but all eight research participants are unwavering in their resolution not to allow the illness to change who they are. They all aim to continue their futures in terms of their renegotiated selves and not only as breast cancer survivors. While this renegotiated self-perception might be influenced by certain aspects of the illness experience, research participants agree that they will not allow the illness experience to alter who they essentially are.

Conclusion

When trying to unwrap the meaning contained in the narratives of these eight women, we realize that it tells us only about a small part of the reality of women's experience of breast cancer in contemporary South Africa. The eight women who told us their stories do interpret and construct social reality, they experience the social lifeworld, and make sense of and constitute meaning. But, these constructions, experiences, and constitutions of meaning should also be situated polemically in relation to the broader social context and in relation to the possibility of alternative accounts, as Roy Bhaskar (2008:187) observes, "social structure and human agency are distinct, but at the same time highly inter-dependent entities."

It is the aim of this research to analyze the subjective views of each of the participants and to relate key aspects of their narratives. Perhaps due to the similarities between participants' socio-economic positions (background and educational levels) they share rather similar thoughts about their illness. Most of these women are interested in broadening their knowledge of their diagnosis and treatment trajectory. They all experience their ordeal as an important chapter in their lives. These commonalities inevitably influence their subjective experiences and understanding greatly.

From current understandings, it is clear that breast cancer is a multi-faceted illness affecting the individual psychologically, emotionally, and physically and also impacting on the immediate family members. From the narratives it appears that middle class women rely heavily on trusted relationships with medical personnel, the family, close friendship circles, and even religious networks to air their fears and to find strength. The narrative of one participant reveals that the medical healthcare system in South Africa exhibits a vast contrast between the state-run institutions and private medical care. Hospitals run by the state struggle on a daily basis with shortages in equipment, lack of medication, and understaffing (Cullinan 2006:21). Even though issues related to the public-run hospitals are of great concern, this article focuses predominantly on the privileged part of the South African population and thus on encounters with private healthcare providers. Therefore, the abovementioned narratives are not applicable to all South African women who are struggling with breast cancer. The narratives rather reflect the personal journeys that these eight participants experience.

Although the research participants view their illness as a chapter in their lives, most are adamant that breast cancer will not define *who they are* or *who they will be*, that is, merely a survivor. Not only have these women survived a breast cancer diagnosis, but they also see their illness as something that can be overcome. Once they have completed the treatment trajectory (surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and five years of hormone therapy) and have obtained a clean bill of health, they want to continue with their lives as before their diagnosis (as a wife, a mother, a grandmother, an academic scholar, or whatever else). Donna is the only participant who mentioned the fear of a breast cancer recurrence. She finds this prospect threatening, but realizes that she must actively try to stay positive through her faith.

Based on the narratives, we can state that a breast cancer diagnosis does not appear to have permanently disrupted the participants' perception and concept of themselves, even though such an illness is lived as a profound existential experience. Each of the women still feels feminine although this sense of femininity often has to be re-enforced with the aid of a wig, make-up, or specifically designed clothing. Even though their physical body has been altered and this has resulted in scarring or the loss of breasts, none of the women feel that they need reconstructive surgery to be perceived and accepted as a woman. Rather, the illness is accepted as an experience and a memory that can even encourage her to pursue her future plans and prospects. In conclusion, this article does not overlook the seriousness of a breast cancer diagnosis. However, mostly due to the participants' financial ability to obtain excellent private medical care and to them having the extended support structure of family, friends, and religion, they understand and live their breast cancer ordeal as a chapter in their lives.

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Everyday Hair Discourses of African Black Women

Abstract   Hair for African Black people has always had meaning. In the past, elaborate hairstyles communicated their status, identity, and place within the larger society. In present day society, hair continues to be a significant part of being an African Black person. Especially for women, who attach a number of different meanings to hair. This study casts more light on young African Black women's everyday perceptions of hair and uncovers the meanings they attach to hair and beauty. This is done by looking at how the intersections of race, gender, and class impact on their everyday perceptions and experiences of hair. The literature indicates that the hair preferences and choices of Black African women tend to emulate Western notions of beauty. This is due to a great extent to the historical link between Black hair and "bad" hair associated with old slave days. But, the narratives of participants contradict this normative discourse in many ways and provide new insights on hair—insights that reflect and motivate antiracist aesthetics.

Keywords   African Black Women; Black Beauty; Eurocentric Beauty; Hair; Race; Racialization of Beauty

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Introductory Remarks

Hair, as organic matter and part of the human body, has been subjected to manipulation and styling throughout history (Mercer 1989:34). It has always carried social meanings—for instance, as a symbol of status or as a fashion statement. As in the rest of the world, hair plays a vital role in the lives of African people, and South Africans are no exception when it comes to a preoccupation with hair (Erasmus 1997:12). The importance of hair in African communities is first seen in the curiosity surrounding the hair of a newborn baby (Mercer 1987:35; Erasmus 1997:12). This interest in hair continues throughout life and is associated with individual and social issues of identity and beauty (White 2010:19). This attentiveness to, almost fixation with, hair can be observed through the every-

day efforts of African Black women to groom and style their hair (Mercer 1987:34). We analyze everyday discourses on hair as these intersect with race, gender, and class (Erasmus 1997:12).

The awareness that hair can be racialized is essential in opening up dialogues about, and meanings of, "good" and "bad" hair among African Black people. In the light of this, everyday hair discourses by African Black women can only be understood when historically and racially embedded (White 2010:19). The idea that discourses on hair are linked to the politics of skin color reaches as far back as the old times of slavery, when greater monetary value was attached to light-skinned Black women with straight hair (Russel, Wilson, and Hall 1992; Hooks 1994; White 2010:19). This generalized and stereotypical valuation of hair and skin color still exists to some extent—irrespective of the fact that hairstyles can be relatively easily styled to match personal preferences (Gibson 1995; Collins 2000; Hooks 2001; White 2010:19). When it comes to hair and hairstyling over the centuries, African women have been very creative in manipulating African hair. Even as early as the fifteenth century we find evidence of the various meanings and symbols attached to hair—as can be seen in depictions of the Wolf, the Mende, the Mandingo, and the Yoruba people from Africa (Patton 2006:27). In African communities, hairstyling practices were about more than an individual wanting to look good or make a statement—they also served as bonding sessions and united the community, particularly the women. Hair was perceived as being more than just aesthetic, it formed part of people's sense of identity (Patton 2006:28). However, after slav-

ery brought these communities in touch with the Western world, African people started to adopt new styles and ways to carry and maintain their African tresses.

One of the reasons for this change in hair practices was that African hair developed negative meanings. African women started to seek straighter, silky hair in order to fit into Western society and to acquire social mobility (White and White 1995:56). These attempts at using hair to signal class issues such as improved social standing were also influenced by the perception that a combination of African and white European genetic composition led to mixed race offspring whose physical features were regarded as more desirable than the kinky, coarse hair and dark skin of their African forebears (Badillo 2001; Montalvo 2004; Robinson 2011:361). These physical differences among African slaves created a social hierarchy based on skin color and hair texture (Lara 2010). Slaves with features closer to the European norm (lighter skin and straighter hair) also became more valuable in monetary terms. This even extended to special privileges being awarded to slaves of mixed race. This social construction of a caste system based on color tends to put African Black women at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts. This is because African Black women, more than men, find themselves at the intersection of gender, race, and beauty (Wolf 1999; Arogundade 2000; Badillo 2001; Robinson 2011:363).

Against the background of these factors, we gathered discourses of hair among young African Black women in Bloemfontein, South Africa. We are interested in the meanings that African Black women

attach to their hair, the significance of hair in their everyday lives, including its everyday care and maintenance. We also discuss hair as a marker for identity and as a symbol of beauty.

Hair as Beauty

Beauty has to do with personal likes and desires. It is difficult to be detached, clinical, or objective when talking about beauty. When reflecting on beauty, we inevitably enter the intersection of race and culture and gender. Various standards and meanings of beauty are also time- and gender-bound.

The advent of colonialism and the accompanying increase in contact between different racial groups greatly impacted on everyday perceptions of beauty in Africa, particularly among women (Erasmus 1997:12). People started to make comparisons with regards to beauty, comparisons that were largely linked to the physical features of the different races. Apart from the obvious difference in skin color, hair has always been one of the main areas of comparison. The literature indicates that, historically, negative meanings were attached to Black hair (Mercer 1989:36) and this shaped perceptions of "good" and "bad" hair in African Black communities (cf. Thompson 2009:834). On the one hand, everyday dialogues about "good" hair were understood as referring to straight hair. On the other hand, dialogues about "bad" hair usually referred to kinky or "woolly" hair (Mercer 1987:35; White and White 1995:56). This distinction would bring about an obsession among generation upon generation of African women, who would spend countless hours and large amounts of money to straight-

en their hair in pursuit of "good" hair. The legacy of slavery and colonialism is therefore not only restricted to oppression and exploitation in political and economic sense. It also lead to beauty standards that reject and exclude distinguishing features of African Black women (Robinson 2011:358). It put an enormous burden on them in terms of the cost of attaining what was then seen to be the ideal.

There is a need to revisit the historical link between Black hair and "bad" hair. We need to find new discourses on hair that reflect and motivate antiracist aesthetics. To this end we investigate the connection between Black female beauty and Eurocentric standards of beauty, including hair and skin color. Racist beauty aesthetics always promote features of the dominant groups at the expense of minority groups (Craig 2006:159). It is why Black women often regard themselves at being the bottom of the beauty pile, and how some come to accept racist beauty aesthetics as normal (Gaskins 1997; Taylor 1999; Arogundade 2000; Robison 2011:359-360). There is little doubt that the racialization of beauty and hair has an impact on African Black women's identity and that many go to a great deal of trouble to comply with Eurocentric standards (Robinson 2011:360). But, despite their efforts, Black women sometimes *still* do not fit into the Eurocentric standard of beauty—and, ironically, this can reinforce their internalization of, and desire to meet, Eurocentric standards.

African Hair

Finding themselves within a predominantly Western-centric popular culture, the traditional connec-

tion between African people and their hair was, for a long time, largely severed. As noted earlier, this began in the slave trade era in the nineteenth century. The end of the slave era meant new beginnings for most Africans—including opportunities for new ways to think afresh about their physical features (Rooks 1996 as cited in Thompson 2009:834). For women such as Madam C. J. Walker (1867-1919)—an African-American entrepreneur, philanthropist, and social activist who became one of the wealthiest African-American women in the U.S. from a line of African-American hair care products she invented in 1905—this new trend in beauty care was also an opportunity to enter the financial bracket of the middle classes. She opened up the market for products such as hair softener and hair-straightening combs that would enable African-American women to obtain the straight, silky hair favored since the early 20th century.

The *politics* of African hair evolved from interrogating this obsession with straight hair (Thompson 2009:837). These arguments range from issues of self-hate and self-love, to the freedom to express personal choice (Thompson 2009:837-838). Hair politics within the African community usually leads to debates about natural hair versus fake/manipulated hair (Nyamnjoh and Fuh 2014:57). In turn, these lead to the notion of "good" versus "bad" hair. And, repeating the old stereotypes, "bad" hair gets related to natural and unprocessed hair, and "good" hair to chemically straightened hair.

In South Africa, these discourses on hair are explicitly promoted in the corporate and mass media worlds where there is a great deal of money to be

made on weave extensions and hair manipulation. But, there has also been a number of television programs that debate the norms that the market has created in relation to African hair (Nyamnjoh and Fuh 2014:58). Also in the U.S. debates on hair among African-American women have been covered in shows hosted by celebrities such as Tyra Banks. Chris Rock's 2009 documentary *Good Hair*, directed by Jeff Stilson, explores the perception among many people of African descent that curly hair was not "good." The documentary delves into the hugely lucrative Black hair industry and explores popular approaches to styling, chemical straighteners, and people's experiences of their own hair.

One example of the coverage of discourses on hair in South Africa was in the TV program—now discontinued—*3rd Degree* by Debora Patta, which was aired on South African television channels *e.tv* and *eNCA* in June 2012. Called *It's Just Hair Isn't It?* Debora Patta's attempt to provoke debates on the "otherness" of African hair was widely criticized and even condemned as badly researched and sensationalist. Patta's show attempts to highlight the importance that hair has on the everyday lives of South African Black women. She also tackled the notion that identity becomes attached to hair (Nyamnjoh and Fuh 2014:58):

Hair is such an important part of our identity. We spend an inordinate amount of time and money on it. And it is not just about looking good. It says something about us. Whether we colour it or straighten it, or make it curly. It is intimately connected to our self-image. For Black women, it is an even more complex issue. Natural hair versus weave may sound

frivolous, but that frivolity belies an even deeper issue. It is about race, about Western versus African ideals. And what exactly defines beauty. It can potentially make you stand out in a crowd. One of our most notable features. Billions spent on it every year. But it is just hair, isn't it?

The Chris Rock documentary and the television shows hosted by Tyra Banks in the U.S. and Patta in South Africa all mention the high incidence of chemically straightened hair, point out that the fashion thrives despite a widespread awareness of the dangerous toxins contained in chemical relaxers. Erasmus (1997:11-16) argues that such an obsession, which flies in the face of the dangers and consequences of many hair treatments, points to South Africa's long history of racial division, which altered African Black women's relationship with their hair.

From the above it is clear that everyday discourses on hair are more than simply about hair. Hair can serve to define a person, and the juxtaposition of African hair and African beauty against Western hair and Western beauty indicates not only beauty standards: it also points to an internalization of racism via those beauty standards (Nyamnjoh and Fuh 2014:59). It can be argued that fake hair such as weaves are an emulation of Western beauty standards and therefore, to a certain extent, a denial of one's African identity. It is also possible to argue that it is entirely a matter of individual choice. Eusebius McKaiser (2012:24), however, warns that in present-day South Africa, individual choices also need to be analyzed as they are often the result of an internalization of the country's long and troubled history.

Theoretical and Methodological Notes

This study relies on a number of theoretical frameworks to contextualize our understanding of African Black women's everyday hair experiences. The most relevant frameworks are phenomenology, social constructivism, and feminist theories (particularly those dealing with intersectionality). Phenomenology is concerned with people's everyday perceptions and experiences of the social world (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009:98). In other words, it is concerned with how people experience, feel about, and perceive their social world (Inglis 2012:86). By working in a phenomenological way, we thus seek to understand the influence of discourses on hair, and the different hair practices of African Black women, through the lenses of their personal perceptions and everyday experiences. Social constructivism also aims at opening out understandings of how people co-create their social world, and attach meanings to it (Creswell 2013:24). These meanings are assimilated during early childhood and communicated through social encounters (Harris 2008:232). In both phenomenological and social constructivist thought, the existence of an unchangeable objective reality is discarded in favor of understanding how actors actively (re)construct aspects of their everyday lives and how they come to view it as real (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Harris 2008:233). A dimension of feminist intersectionality also forms part of our theoretical bases, in step with the idea that African Black women's everyday lives are shaped by issues of race, gender, and class (Collins 2000:6), and that their everyday relationship with hair can be understood through analyzing an intersection of these factors.

Qualitative research attempts to make sense of how people experience aspects of their social reality by situating the individual's accounts within the broader social context (Brinkmann 2012:19; Creswell 2013:43). In this study, the narratives are collected in their natural setting and subsequently analyzed as life stories (cf. Webster and Mertova 2007:13) This is done with the assumption that narration is the practice of constructing meaningful selves, identities, and realities (Chase 2011:422).

Eight young females between the ages 19 and 29 and from diverse ethnic groups were selected to participate. Although they are from diverse economic backgrounds, they are all university students and therefore, in the context of South Africa, can be considered as upwardly mobile. They were selected based on physical appearance—all clearly took great care of appearance and hairstyling. Selection was also based on recruiting participants from a wide spectrum of hairstyle choices: weave extensions, braid extensions, chemically straightened hair, afros, or short hair.

We used in-depth, face-to-face interviews (Braun and Clarke 2013:79), which are ideal for building a dialogical relationship between the researcher and the research participants (Riessman 2008:23). This dialogical relationship leads to the co-construction of meaning between the researcher and the research participant. Open-ended questions allowed participants to engage in-depth with the research topic. We also used a focus group interview to augment the individual interviews (Flick 2009:195) and gain further understanding. The focus group interview also served as a way to validate the opinions and attitudes expressed by the participants in the individual interviews.

All individual and focus group interviews were audio recorded. They were then transcribed verbatim. Verbatim transcription ensures that the full content and meaning expressed by participants are made available for analysis. Data were analyzed thematically (Riessman 2008:53). Special attention was paid to thick and rich descriptions given by the research participants.

The research received formal clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State (Ethical Clearance No: UFS – HUM – 2013 – 27) and complies with best practices regarding informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to dignity. All names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Narrating Hair

First Experiences

Participants were asked to recall their first-time experiences of having their hair done.

I don't think I remember my very first time doing my hair. I do remember that I have had long hair for most of my life, but I do remember my very first time cutting my hair. That's my most profound memory. I think I was ten or eleven years old and I went to the salon, and I said to my mom that I wanted to cut my hair. And then I remember I wanted to cut Rebecca Malope's hairstyle [South African female gos-

pel artist]. I don't know, but, for me, it was like the best hairstyle ever. It was very short on the sides and very big in the middle [German haircut]. So I loved that hairstyle and I was with my mom and brother. And I remember that it was a guy doing my hair. He cut my hair and he did it beautifully. I mean, you know [emphasizing]! But, at that time it wasn't accepted. I got to school and people were like: "Why did you cut your hair? You had such good hair!" And the guys were laughing at me. But, I never really cared. And it's my most profound memory of doing my hair. I cut it when I was ten. [Nthabiseng]

I can't remember that one, hey! [the first hairdo]. Because I have been going to the salon...from a very young age. So I was used to people doing whatever they liked with my hair. But, I remember when I first cut my hair. I looked into the mirror and I was like: "Wow!" Because it was very long. Then I noticed that I actually looked prettier with short hair than with long hair, although people tried to convince me otherwise—that all hairstyles suit you. They were even persuading me to do dreadlocks. But, I am content with short hair. So when I first cut my hair, I noticed that I look more beautiful with short hair than with any other hairstyle. [Palesa]

Even though the two participants do not remember the first time they ever did their hair, they do remember their first experiences of *cutting* their hair. And these experiences were mainly positive. For Palesa, it was a point at which she realized that she looks beautiful with short hair. For Nthabiseng, her first haircut was the best hairstyle that she ever had. For both, the choice to cut hair coincides with a point of independence in their lives: a decision to

wear and to cut their hair as they desired and an experience of freedom from the shackles of other people's opinions.

However, for Nonzuzo, her first experiences of doing her hair is associated with negative emotions as she recalls how painful the whole process was. She decides that the pain associated with doing hair is not worth it, even if it means she might look beautiful afterwards.

My cousin did my hair at the time. There was something called popcorn [plaits]. Do you know it? It's like braiding [braid extension], but with your own hair. Small braiding and then you just roll round it, roll it around. It was so painful! Some people do it with pantyhose, but my cousin never used pantyhose because I had long hair. So she would just wrap it around and it would stick hantle [nicely]. Yoh! When you sleep, the following day I woke up and I just undid it, like yoh! I unplaited it. Everything *nje* [just]. That's how I felt: *gore* [that]. I cannot! I cannot do this! It's just torture! So that's when I noticed that some things you don't need to do...to feel some pain in order to be beautiful. If you feel good, it's fine. [Nonzuzo]

Her last statements show that her negative experience has a positive spin—it makes her independent from a fashion norm.

"Good" and "Bad" Hair

Participants agree that there is "good" and "bad" hair. But, they show different understandings of what makes hair "good" or "bad."

Mm, *ya*, there is "bad" hair, there is "bad" hair! Depending on how you carry your hair, how you treat it. It can be "bad" *wabona* [you see]. But, also sometimes you need to understand your hair texture as well. Then you know you can just enhance it...many people they don't understand their hair texture. And then something just goes deliberately like wrong. Because they don't know what to use and what not to use. They dye and then *moriri watswa* [they dye and then the hair starts breaking off], you know! Because their hair is softer, you know. You need to understand your hair. Hence, it becomes "bad" at some point. [Nonzuzo]

Even though Nonzuzo admits that there is "good" and "bad" hair, she says it all depends on how familiar one is with one's natural hair type and texture and how to work with that. She observes that people end up having "bad" hair because they do not have the knowledge of how to properly care for it. Notably, when she talks about "good" and "bad" hair, she does not attach any notions of beauty to it or associate "good" hair with a specific hair type. She also does not associate "bad" hair with a certain hair texture. Nthabiseng, for her part, believes that one inherits "good" hair and to keep it good just takes the right maintenance.

First of all, I sincerely believe that it's inherited: that's the first thing. "Good" hair is actually inherited. But, the second thing is maintenance, of course. When people started noticing that not all hair is "good" hair...then people started coming with products to maintain the "bad" hair. That's why there are products to maintain the "bad" hairs [hair] [everyone laughing]. I do sincerely think that "good" hair is in-

herited. But, you can also work towards "good" hair by certain products: boJabu Stone [Jabu Stone is a local hair product for natural hair such as dreadlocks and afros in South Africa]. [Nthabiseng]

In general, there seems to be consensus on the notion of "good" and "bad" hair by the participants. And contrary to literature discussed earlier, dialogues of "good" and "bad" hair among research participants do not directly associate Black African hair with "bad" hair.

Hair and Identity

It is clear that hair plays an important part in the everyday lives of the female participants. They consider it an essential aspect of a woman's being and explain why they think so.

Yes, as much as the India Arie's song says: "I'm not my hair"...I don't think it's true. Women feel confident and more alive when they feel good about their hair. You might look good in what you wear, like with what you dress like. But then when your hair is not good, I think it impacts. It impacts on your confidence as well. You know that: Okay, my hair does not look that good, you know. I mean, when people look at you, they look at your face, and then the minute the head...it's your hair. So when people communicate with you, they look at you in your face. So your hair plays a very, not a very important role, it plays a vital role in feeling confident and being free. It can be anything—it can be dreadlocks, it can be an afro, it can be braids, it can be whatever. But, if you're confident with your hairstyle, you feel good. [Karabo]

Well, there is a saying that: "*Botle ba mme botloho*" [a woman's beauty is in her hair]. Right? I think a weave defines who you are as an individual. What do you stand for? Because you with your dreadlocks: it means you are original, African woman and all of that. But, for someone who would stand between me and you. They will see you as more African than me because I...I am…I don't know. And then there are people who are bold and they are still African with their boldness. Okay as long as someone's head is neat. That's all that's important. [Lerato]

Not only does hair carry meaning, to Lerato, hair also signifies something about identity and serves as an indication of Africanism. However, this linking of hair with an African identity is rejected by some participants during the focus group interview. They were asked if they agree with the legendary South African jazz musician Hugh Masekela's opinion that weaves and hair extensions are betrayals of the African identity. Hugh Masekela caused a stir a few months prior to the data collection for this project when he refused to have his picture taken at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, with female students donning weaves or hair extensions. Masekela was awarded an honorary doctorate from Rhodes University in April 2015, and he delivered the graduation address at the ceremony. He was given a standing ovation when expressing his disdain for the dwindling sense of heritage among young South Africans. After the graduation ceremony he confirmed his aversion to weaves and hair extensions at press conferences. For the participants in the focus group interview, Africanism and an African identity are more about a sense of humanity than having natural hair.

It's about you. I'm very traditional. You heard me, right! But, if I decide to put on a weave [extension], I have my own reasons. It doesn't mean that I am betraying the ethnic blah, blah, blah, you know. For instance, I've got natural hair [now], but at some point I braid it, I do weaves [extensions], but not for a long time. Because why? He [Masekela] does not understand the reasons. I don't want to comb. I'm trying to save time. I'm attending classes, you know. He does not understand the concepts of putting a weave [extension] at some point. So, he will never relate. [Nonzuzo]

Ya, Africanism is about how friendly we are, about *Ubuntu* [a spirit of giving]. [Nthabiseng]

It is clear that the choice to wear weaves or extensions is a personal choice for the participants rather than a matter of betraying their African identity.

Okay, I am a natural girl as you can see. Mm, I love my hair natural. When I was growing up, my mom would put all these artificial hairs on my head. But now, now that I am a woman, I've had this short hair about eight years now. I've never grown my hair up to more than five centimeters [long]. So I just love being natural. [Palesa]

For the participants, hair is perceived as being important for communicating messages about themselves to others. Hair is also considered significant in building people's confidence regardless of the style. They attach various meanings to hair and conceive of hair as forming an essential part of a woman's everyday experiences in her lifeworld.

Hair and Grooming

An important aspect of hair is that it serves as an indicator of how well people look after themselves in their everyday life.

As much as maybe I may not like certain hairstyles on certain people, I do feel, like your hair is an expression of a part of you. It's also a look, it also forms part of a look you have. It also says how much you take care of yourself. So it's also hygienic, it's also fashionable. But, it's also natural. You know, you should take care of your hair. You should make it part of who you are…It is important to do your hair every day. It should form part of your everyday life. [Nthabiseng]

Hair and Gender

Hair also appears to be a form of symbolic capital, stratifying people according to different genders. Short hair often tends to be associated with boys. So hair length distinguishes girls from boys and strengthens the preference for longer hair among girls. It also seems that social conventions require girls to put extra effort into caring and maintaining their hair.

In my culture [Pedi culture], short hair is preferred, but there is no law. But, I have heard my uncles. My uncles are very old-fashioned. My mom's uncles [Sotho culture], as well, are very old-fashioned men. When children relax their hair [chemically straighten their hair] *ya*, *ya* [yes, yes], they say: "You look like a girl now." And when you don't have your hair combed: "No! Girls are not supposed to look like that!"

Exactly, *le nna* [even with me]. They say that all the time about my hair. They always say: "Aah, you! I think you're trying to look like a boy. Why you want to look like a boy?" And I don't wear earrings as well. I just, I don't think I need to wear earrings. Then: "Girls wear earrings!" No, I…I don't have to wear earrings. [Nthabiseng]

The association of short hair with males is also evident in Karabo's story:

Yes [giggles], yes! I cut my hair…my mom tricked me into cutting my hair. It was the shortest hair…it was like almost brush cut, you know. And then my head was very small. And they said I looked like a boy. And, you know, they teased me the whole time until my hair grew [giggles again]…It made me feel less of a girl because they said I looked like a boy [giggles]. It did hurt, but then, as I said, as time goes on, you just get used to it at the end of the day. [Karabo]

The decision to go for short hair for Nthabiseng is primarily based on her intention to show people that short hair can also be beautiful. She regards it as important for people to know that female beauty does not necessarily coincide with long hair.

Well, I have a cut [female hair cut] on my head now [laughs]. But, aah, I choose this hairstyle because I was tired of having long hair. I grew up with long hair and for some other reason it seemed like when you are a girl, you were supposed to have long hair. So I never understood that. I never understood why, you know. But, I never did anything about it. My parents were also like: why not? You just have long hair. So I was like: okay, fine, I will keep the long hair.

Then I got to varsity and I saw everybody, you know, doing what they want. But, what was very consistent was extensions and bondings [weaves], and this and that. So I was like: no, I don't want this. I don't want people to say I am beautiful because of my hair. So I decided to cut my hair. I change the hairstyles now even if my hair is short: I will have lines here and dye it like this, and I will have curls *ning ning* [now and then]. But, I do feel strongly about having short hair. Uhm, but I don't think it's because of some sort of statement that I am trying to make. It's just that I prefer it. And I think I am trying to maybe say that there is a different way of being beautiful. And it's not just long hair or extensions or this. There's a different way, and people compliment me all the time. So I think it is working. People like it—whatever their reason may be. I love my hair! [Nthabiseng]

Hair and Beauty

Many of the participants clearly connected hair, beauty, and confidence. But, as Nonzuzo observes, there should also be acknowledgement that beauty does not just lie in outward appearances.

I think it's an important thing…Like: it's like you're important…'Cause if your hair is clean, first of all you feel good. And you see yourself hore [like that]: I am beautiful also. But, beauty is not about the hair. It's about you, the inner beauty. How do you see yourself? Have you accepted yourself? So the hair is just there to enhance who you are. But, if your hair is clean and you keep changing styles, you feel good as well. And you're going…according to your mood. If I feel like it's hot now, and my mood tells me that I should just cut all of it—I should just shave it. Then it's fine. [Nonzuzo]

Clearly, participants think that their hair contributes to how they feel about themselves, how they experience female beauty, and indicates something of their self-appreciation. These meanings are socially created, historically embedded, and shared and communicated through social encounters with others. In turn, these social encounters are subjectively reinterpreted by the participants as individuals, and in their everyday lives. It is via these overlapping cycles of influence that they co-construct their reality.

For Palesa and Thembeka, the decision to have short hair is mainly the result of how beautiful they think they look with short hair compared to other hairstyles. Their narratives reflect an appreciation for their natural physical attributes, which they seek to enhance rather than reject. Again, we find evidence against the idea that Black African hair and features are considered less desirable than Western ones; perhaps the idea itself has become out of step with the freedom young women feel and with the eclectic notions of beauty in current times?

I looked at my face. I saw that I have a round face. And I noticed that when I have a weave on or braidings, or whatever artificial hair, I looked more round. So I noticed that short hair makes me look normal. Yes, I have a round face, but I looked better with short hair than long weaves or braids, or with long hair in general. [Palesa]

It's like…it goes so well with my skin color and my complexion…it's my hair with my natural color. [Thembeka]

But, as a further comment from Thembeka shows, hair and beauty is not just about appreciating your natural looks. It is also about keeping up with the latest trends, and clearly these are plentiful and move fast:

[Indicating her hair] Black, soft, dread. Back in December, you know, everyone is like: "Okay, you're coming to Cape Town! Here's money to do your hair!" This is actually my cousin's hair piece. She went for a German cut [the fade] and then she's like: "You can have my hair piece." Because she won't be having [long] hair anytime soon. So that's how I got it. But, *eish*, my hairstylist wants me to do this brown, blonde, box braid...that's what I want to do soon, *eish*.

Hair and Convenience

Many of the narratives have already demonstrated that convenience and practicality are important when choosing hairstyles. Arguments about convenience, particularly the time that must be spent on maintaining a hairstyle, are mainly raised by participants with short hair.

Aah, what I love about my hair [thinking]? Aah, it's convenient, it's very convenient. I don't know why people don't think that natural hair [ethnic hair] is convenient. But, short hair is convenient. It's cheap and it looks good on me. I mean, I haven't seen anything that suits me like this in a very long time. If I had an opportunity to change my hair, would I? I wouldn't change my hairstyle, but I would change the texture of my hair. I just wish it was more hard and natural, you know. So that I can cut it in all different ways, but with a natural look to it. So I would

change the texture just to make it a little more natural. I just have fluffy hair, fluffy hair. [Nthabiseng]

What is interesting in Nthabiseng's narrative is that she wishes her hair was *more* "natural," meaning *more* African; again, the narratives contradict the idea that young African women seek to emulate Western looks.

Relaxing [hair takes] less than an hour. So I like the fact that you don't sit for hours doing your hair. And it's much cheaper…I think it's plus or minus two hundred rand [R200] in a month. Because afterwards you will be just, [be] washing it and putting in some treatment. That's it. [Nonzuzo]

So finances are also important factors in the types of hairstyle chosen by the participants and costs influence how often they do their hair or renew their hairstyles.

Whatever hairstyle a girl wants to do, she has to either buy a hairpiece and then pay someone to do her hair, or rather go to a salon where everything will be provided. But, you'll just settle the amount they want you to pay. So, basically it [money] does play an important role which style you want. Because the amount of hairstyles vary. It's not the same for each and every hairstyle; they are different. [Nonzuzo]

The last hairstyle I had was short hair; cut hair and I dyed it and there was a bit of S-curl, I think. I have changed from that because I wanted to grow my hair. And the reason I put on an extension braid is because…okay, it's been trending. I have been seeing it a lot and I'm like: "That is nice. It is very nice!" And

the fact that I am trying to grow my hair makes it easier to maintain as well. Because hair that doesn't have extensions is very hard to maintain and stuff. [Karabo]

Concluding Remarks

Using an interpretivist approach, we aim to reveal young African women's everyday experiences in relation to hair, including their everyday practices in caring and maintaining it. We are also interested in the meanings that they attach to hair in their dialogues and their practices. It is clear from the narratives that for young African Black women, hair is more than just hair: it impacts on their everyday evaluations of themselves—how they perceive and feel about themselves. It is also about how they are perceived by others: they believe that hair says a lot about a person and, as a result, most go out of their way to maintain their hair and take pride in it.

Black women attach various social meanings to hair, including a sense of identity. Historically, hair symbolized for Africans who they were and where they came from. But, with the advent of slavery and colonization, the natural relationship of Africans to their hair became challenged. Especially for African Black women, the relationship since then has been like a roller coaster ride—lunging between positive and negative emotions as they move between trying, on the one hand, to obtain straight hair in order to fit into Western societies' assessment of beauty, and, on the other hand, trying to appreciate their natural hair. Whereas historical, as well as current discourses link hair to race and promote the idea that the desired norm for Africans is the straight

silky hair associated with Western looks, the narratives of young Black African women participants in this study show that there is also a return to, and appreciation of, natural African Black hair. Their ideas about "good" and "bad" hair are not, as the literature suggests, arranged along racial or cultural divides; it is, more simply and *a*-culturally, about the genetics of having healthy hair versus weak hair. So there is less evidence in our narratives indicating that the normative notion of Western beauty is as strong as suggested in the literature reviewed for this article. Rather, notions of beauty are quite eclectic and both African and Western forms of beauty are appreciated.

Hair is undoubtedly intertwined with conceptions of beauty—we think this is likely to be true for all women, not just African women. African Black women spend large amounts of money caring for and maintaining hair, and so do White women. Some of this time and money is spent by young women participants on weave extensions, braid extensions, and the use of chemical hair relaxers—all of which indicate that straight hair remains an important choice for some young women. But, our research indicates that this is more a matter of personal choice, and that young women move between more traditional African styles and Western styles as they wish. They are free, they follow a wide variety of fashions, and they opt for styles that make them look more beautiful. This does not fit with the idea that, via the hair-related discourses and practices, African Black women emulate whiteness and express symbolic self-hate. For participants in this research, hairstyle choices and practices do *not* signal a betrayal of their African roots.

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Between Society and Self: The Socio-Cultural Construction of the Black Female Body and Beauty in South Africa

Abstract   Interested in the socio-cultural construction of the body and beauty, this study investigates the embodied experience of Black African women in South Africa. The Black female body has been problematically positioned in the discourses of beauty. In the dominant, Westernized imagery, the physical markers of blackness such as dark skin and kinky hair have been aesthetically devalued. In the African traditionalist discourses, these body features have been celebrated as beautiful and invoked as the signifiers of cultural pride. This, however, has also been considered as a form of cultural imperative that holds women accountable for how they embody their relationship with their race and ethnicity. Most recently, cultural critics notice the aesthetic revaluation of Black female beauty and ascribe it to the global popularity of the African-American hip-hop culture. In this study, we explore how the socio-cultural complexity of Black female beauty affects the ways in which individuals make sense of their bodies.

Keywords   Body; Discourse; Gender, Intersectionality; Positioning; Race/Ethnicity; Subjectivity

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Researching the Black Female Body and Beauty

Beauty practices are the universal social preoccupation with the body. Although they predominantly consist in practical undertakings, in this article, we focus on the less manifest, symbolical (discursive) site on which beauty is constructed. Specifically, we seek to understand how young Black African women in South Africa establish their embodied subjectivities amidst contending discourses of beauty. Following Craig (2006:168), Black women have always been placed "outside of the beauty category." The most common figures of Black femininity—the corpulent "mammy" and the bosom Jezebel (Simien 2006; Durham 2007)—embody, respectively, the asexual and hypersexual femininity, and neither of them befits the dominant conceptions of beauty. Dark-skinned and full-figured in the culture valuing fair complexion and slimness (Hooks 1995; Byrd and Tharps 2002; Patton 2006), Black women developed ways of refining their bodies (Craig 2002; Bellinger 2007; Spellers and Moffitt 2010). Yet, because the beauty techniques (e.g., skin bleaching and hair relaxation) have *de facto* been aimed at approximating the normative, Aryan physique, they have been defined by African traditionalists as symptomatic of internalized oppression (Taylor 1999). In the African culturalist discourse, the beauty of kinky hair and dark skin has been reinstated and they have been invoked as the signifiers of racial, ethnic, and cultural pride. Most recently, following the increased popularity of the African-American hip-hop culture, the global beauty industry has shifted from favoring the skinny body to the body with curves. Whilst this media imagery has been criticized for the undue sexualization of Black femininity (e.g., Collins 2004), its role in the aesthetic transformation shows that the Black female body has been revalorized as a desirable beauty canon (Durham 2012).

The symbolical complexity has its lived implications for women across the African diaspora (Erasmus 1997; Pinho 2006; Candelario 2007; Gordon 2013; Lara 2010). In our study, we address this issue with South African women in mind by exploring the ways in which the contending discourses of beauty are reflected in their intersubjective practices of making sense of the body. In the article, analyzing meanings that individuals attach to their bodies on the basis of their subjective experience and socio-culturally available discourses, we demonstrate how through these interpretative engagements with the body the individuals negotiate their embodied subjectivities.

We present findings from a qualitative study in which a group of eight young Black African women of different ethnicities talked about their perceptions and experience of the body and beauty. The research participants were selected through judgmental sampling among students of the local university. Before they signed consent forms, they were informed about the goal and proceedings of the study, and assured that the study had been approved by the university research ethics committee. The women were fluent English speakers, so all interviews were conducted in English. But, for one, all participants were interviewed twice individually. Moreover, three of them took part in a focus group interview, which was expected to give a better picture of the intersubjective dynamics of Black female beauty. The women were selected for the focus group interview due to the richness of the data they had provided. In all of the interviews, the participants were presented with and encouraged to comment on media prompts which featured diverse visual representations of Black beauty. The interviews lasted from one to two hours and took place in participants' residences and on campus.

In her study of Black femininity and beauty, Tate (2005:6) considers Black identities as "texts of social practice," which she defines as "critical ontologies of the self" produced during everyday interactions. While we believe that this holds relevance to all identities, not solely the Black self, in the article, we find this conception particularly apt for the object of the current study. Due to its intricate history, the definition of Black female beauty is complex and dynamic, for instance, continuously interrogated in intersubjective relationships. Moreover, like Tate (2005:21), we argue that self is "produced through and reflexively embedded in language use" and, consequently, explore the minutiae of the discursive production of meanings that are attached to the body. Vitally, although the discussion is framed around the two identity categories of gender and ethnicity, in the study, we did not presume the salience of either of these, or any other.

The Constructions of the Black Female Body

Yellow Bones

As mentioned, skin bleaching has been one of the beauty practices that the African culturalists pegged as seeking to "look White." Most of the participants constructed it as a trend which is popular with young people who want to be "yellow bone" (light-toned); some constructed bleaching as an indication of lack of self-acceptance. Yet, with the exception of one participant, in neither of the two cases did they overtly construct bleaching as symptomatic of internalized devaluation

of blackness. The ideologically-laden repertoire[1] was also absent from the participants' reactions to three pictures of Khanyi Mbau, a South African celebrity, which indicated that she bleached her skin. In their on-the-spot reactions, the women commented on Mbau's increasing reliance on beauty accessories such as weaves[2] and outfits; some participants casually linked Mbau's transformation with her upgraded financial status. Also, all participants with one exception, even those who criticized skin bleaching on any of the grounds mentioned above, expressed a positive disposition to the change in Mbau's appearance. This is not to argue that the participants are not aware of the ideological implications of bleaching, but to notice that they dismissed them in their own interpretations of the Black female body.

"The African Ass"

Among the body features which we found central for the participants' notion of beauty are body size and shape. Most of them point to a specific size and shape that are positively valorized in their culture:

Extract 1

Palesa: Mm, I think that one…uhm, people who say it is important to have a specific body size or shape is people who are obsessed with looks, like people who feel like if you don't have a big bum as an African woman, then you don't look good.

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[1] Potter and Wetherell (1987:203) define interpretative repertoires as "recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena."
[2] Weaves are human or synthetic hair woven into one's natural hair—for length and softer texture.

Like all other participants, in Extract 1, Palesa constructs the fetishization of big buttocks as typical of the African culture. In Extract 2, she constructs the fetish as motivating her to work on her body:

Extract 2

Palesa: Uhm, I don't count, but every time when I go pee, after peeing I do squats. Apparently, they give you like a bigger bum. I don't have what you can call an "African ass," but my mom has always been on my case because I am the only one without a big bum in the family.

Through her constructions of the African body, Palesa articulates a non-essentialist understanding of the (African) body. Instead of talking about the body one is born with as an African woman, she refers to the body features which African women are praised for in their culture. By the same token, describing her work on attaining the culturally desirable look, she talks about "the African ass" as something that she has not been naturally given, but she nonetheless decided to attain through a consistent work on the body. The idea that the African body can be intentionally shaped was implicit in the constructions of the other participants who pointed to squats as their main or the only workout routine which all of them constructed as motivated by the power of squats to make buttocks more round and protruding.

The positive appraisal of a full-shaped body was also expressed in the focus group interview, for example, in the acknowledgment of a plus-size model in one of the visual prompts ("properly sized," "thick is the

new sexy"), and in the negative reaction to a picture of a skinny model:

Extract 3

Nthabiseng: My thought bonier ((everyone laughing)). Are bony. Actually my first was no and then I said too thin. I wrote no, no, no, no. ((Everyone laughing))
Lerato: I said anorexia ((everyone laughing again)) ((Nonzuzo clapping hands)).
Nthabiseng: But, she's too bony.
Thembeka: She does look sick though.
Lerato: Very sick ((laughs)).

Later in the interview, asked about reactions which the same pictures might arouse in their families, the participants said the full-figured model would be seen as "wealthy" and successful, whilst the other as somebody whose life is in danger:

Extract 4

Interviewer: […] In your different ethnic groups, what would be your first thoughts about her?
Thembeka: She's sick.
Interviewer: Sick?
Lerato: Dying.
Nthabiseng: Ya, she's really sick. Something is happening with her and she and she needs to be helped soon.
Thembeka: *Bam loyile.* ((They have bewitched her.))
Interviewer: So those would be the perceptions within your various ethnic groups?
Nonzuzo: [Yes.]
Thembeka: [Yes.]

Nthabiseng: [Yes.] My, my…the first thing that my mom would say she's, you know, something is wrong and, you know, you must ask after her if she's okay.

Thembeka: I can see my grandmother saying the ancestors are calling her ((everyone laughing)).

Lerato: My mom would be like offer her a breakfast, a proper English breakfast ((chuckles)).

The participants' reactions to the visual prompts show the hybrid nature of their discourse of beauty. In both extracts, the women react to the skinny body mockingly—in neither is life threat constructed literally; it is used to denounce the aesthetic value of the skinny body. The suspicion of anorexia and "a proper English breakfast" on the one hand, and the idea of bewitchment and ancestors calling on the other, show that the women are capable of interpreting the body consistently, but in two culturally distant languages. In their original reactions to the two pictures, the participants revealed what they themselves constructed as the traditionally African perception of the body, yet they articulated it by means of the language typical of the Western culture.

Although the participants clearly shared the idea that Black African culture celebrates voluptuousness, but for two women who were slim, the rest qualified their body satisfaction because of their weight gain. At the same time, they overtly stated that they have not maintained any consistent workout routine, but for on-and-off attempts to sculpt their buttocks. Therefore, they constructed workout as related with the body's aesthetic quality, not its health. Lack of workout routine was in some of the interviews overtly racialized:

Extract 5

Interviewer: […] do you think it's about being healthy, […] or latest fashion trends?

Karabo: […] For White people I would say it's a lifestyle. Us, Black people, I swear to God, we only start… okay not everybody, but some. I would say ninety percent of Black people start…start going to the gym for somebody, for the trend, summer body. For the trend summer, and then after that it's all gone back to soup, *magwina* ((fat cakes)), you know, *vetkoek* ((fat cakes—a traditional Afrikaans food)) and everything.

Extract 6

Interviewer: Many people say White girls are more concerned with size and weight? Would you agree?

Palesa: Ya, uhm, as you can see around campus or as you have noticed you get very few fat White ladies. They work out a lot, like how often do you see a Black girl jogging ((both laugh)).

The interviewees' accounts for their disinclination to fitness are consistent with their reactions to several of the visual prompts. Two of the pictures presented an African-American celebrity Jennifer Hudson—before and after her significant weight loss. The interviewees were unenthusiastic about the weight drop. Asked about possible reasons behind Hudson's change, except for one, the interviewees did not consider that she might have wanted a more healthy and fit body for herself; instead, they explained it as related with stress caused by family loss or ascribed it to Hudson's ambition to keep up with other celebrities. Relatedly, when exposed to the photos of the tennis star, Serena Williams, rather than construct her body

as fit, the participants criticized its overly masculine look which they ascribed to her musculature. Like in the case of Hudson's pictures, the participants' reactions to the pictures imply that the women construct the body mainly in terms of its aesthetic value, which is assessed from the perspective of a heterosexual man. Their indisposition to the athletic female body, whose gender transgressive shape is, at least conventionally, less sexually appealing, corresponds with the interviewees' high valorization of big buttocks and hips, hence the body parts which have traditionally been the objects of the heterosexual male gaze. Interweaving the discourses of gender and race, such interpretations of the body reflect the intersectional complexity of Black female subjectivity.[3] In comparison to race, whose salience in the socio-cultural constitution of the body was overtly enunciated by the interviewees, gender was more intricately entangled in it—it was made explicit only through a closer analysis of the data.

Weaves, Dreadlocks, and Short Hair

The most intensely invested aspect of embodied subjectivity was hair. In Extract 7, it is constructed as an ethnic signifier:

Extract 7

Lerato: She is an African woman by the look of the hair, but she, I think she compliments both African and Western, which is my ideal type of beauty, ya.

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[3] Intersectionality is a concept describing the ways in which identities categories (race, sexuality, gender, class, age, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be analyzed separately from one another. The concept was first used in this sense by a legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989).

Interviewer: Okay, can you tell me what is Western in this picture about her?

Lerato: The make-up and lashes.

Similarly to Palesa's non-essentialist construction of the body in Extract 2, talking about the hair of a model in a visual prompt, Lerato draws on the idea that the body can be more or less African—depending on the extent to which it is "stylized" (Butler 1990). Lerato constructs physical appearance in terms of moving along a continuum whose polar ends are the African and the Western bodies. She locates her "ideal type of beauty" at the middle of it. The non-essentialist logic of body stylization also underlies Thembeka's account:

Extract 8

Thembeka: […] your African girls are for natural hair, you know. Your short hair, your dreadlocks, your afro, you know, your plaits, your cornrows using your own hair. And then your Western girls they are for your weaves, your extensions, all these things going on, you know.

Talking about hairstyle preferences, Thembeka constructs the African body as culturally fabricated through the social cultivation of physique, in which one can make it "African" or "Western." Likewise, although Nthabiseng herself did not wear dreadlocks, she attached to the hairstyle the value of ethnic credibility:

Extract 9

Nthabiseng: […] They're so different for me, that's what I love about dreadlocks. So it's a different, it's an

ethnic and, you know, African believable look, that's what I love about dreadlocks.

As mentioned, in the African traditionalist discourse, the non-cultivated hair has been the signifier of racial, ethnic, and cultural pride, which signification implies for Black women the imperative of keeping hair natural. The sense of accountability related with hairstyle choices underlies Lerato's self-account:

Extract 10

Lerato: Well, there is a saying that *botle bam mme botloho* (("a woman's beauty is in her hair")), right, but I don't think to me weaves are that important. But, I think a weave defines who you are as an individual. What do you stand for. Because you, with your dreadlocks, it means you are original, African woman, and all of that. But, for someone who would stand between me and you, they will see you as more African than me because I…I am…I don't know. And then there are people who are bold and they are still African with their boldness. Okay as long as someone's head is neat that's all that's important.

Lerato positions herself in relation to the interviewer whose dreadlocks she constructs as superior to weaves for the way they communicate one's relationship with her African identity.

Noting a strong entanglement of hair in the social semiotics of the Black body, Kobena Mercer (1987:36) ascribes it to the malleability of hair: "In the complexity of this social code, hair functions as a key 'ethnic signifier' because, compared with bodily

shape or facial features, it can be changed more easily by cultural practices such as straightening." The malleability, we found, is not only physical, but also discursive. The performance of race, ethnicity, and culture was not the only signification practice that the interviewees pointed to in their constructions of the symbolic role of hair. For example, talking about relaxing hair as a child, Karabo harnessed its subjectivity-forming capacity to position herself as a woman:

Extract 11

Karabo: My mom, that's why I say as much as my father was there. My mom was there to also be the feminine touch in the relationship because my father didn't think that his…she's young, she can do whatever. […] I hated pink, I so hated pink because I felt that it was too bright for the blue clothes my brothers wear. So, uhm, when I…the time I realized that it was wrong was when my cousins came into place in my father's side. […] …the cousin…we were like same age. She was more feminine than me, so now I started realizing that, hey, I'm behind. And actually do not know half of the things. I never wore nail polish, I never ((giggles)) wanted my hair to be straightened, do anything.

Narrating the epiphanic moment when she discovered that her body is gendered, Karabo constructs femininity as embodied through beauty practices, the knowledge of which she acquired intersubjectively. Pink clothes, nail varnish, and hair straightening are the practices she did not embrace, but felt obliged to follow upon observing young women around her ("I realized that it was wrong," "I started realizing that, hey, I'm behind").

In contrast to Karabo's half-hearted commitment to embodying femininity, Nthabiseng and Palesa used hair practices as the expedient means of positioning themselves as women who have claimed their rights to constitute their bodies on their own terms. Nthabiseng overtly claimed the importance which hair holds for her ("But I do feel strongly about having short hair"). The recurrence of short hair in her narratives shows its role in how Nthabiseng embodies her gender subjectivity. For example, at some point she constructed short hair as an expression of a woman's "rebelliousness":

Extract 12

Nthabiseng: […] Long hair makes other people feel more like ladies, uhm, long hair makes people feel more like, uhm, beautiful people. With certain girls, short hair makes them feel different and they feel like rebels. So, ya, short hair speaks to certain people about, you know, their look and where they are in their life, and, you know, an expression of who they are. Yes, it does.

Relatedly, during the focus group interview, Nthabiseng talked about the expectations which men in her ethnic culture hold of women's look:

Extract 13

Nthabiseng: In my culture ((Pedi)), short hair is preferred, but there is no law, but I have heard my uncles, my uncles are very old-fashioned. My mom's uncles ((Sotho)) are, well, very old-fashioned men, you know, when children relax their hair, ya, ya, they say, "You look like a girl now." Uhm, you know, when you don't

have your hair combed, "No, girls are not supposed to look like that" […].

Explaining how gender becomes embodied in her culture through hair, Nthabiseng constructs a hierarchical relationship wherein adult men hold young women accountable for their body practices. Thus, similarly to Karabo (Extract 11), Nthabiseng does not construct relaxing hair, hence the practice of diminishing its African (i.e., kinky) look, as a performance of race, but that of gender. Although at the beginning of Extract 13 Nthabiseng constructs short hair as the culturally preferred hairstyle in her ethnic community, Extract 14 shows that she subsequently conferred on it gender significance:

Extract 14

Nthabiseng: With my aunts, I would have to say, it's, you know, staying natural, being natural. Like my aunts are very confident. They think they are the most gorgeous women in the history of the world. So short hair for them has always been an expression of how beautiful they are. So for me they…they've just taught me that you can be naturally beautiful with short hair.

Given what Nthabiseng said about the role of the male gaze in her family in Extract 13, cutting hair short signifies independence from the aesthetic control of her uncles—this empowering positioning is reinforced when Nthabiseng constructs her choice of this hairstyle as something she has learnt from women in her family, who do not depend on others' opinions to feel beautiful.

Although throughout the interview Palesa constructed short hair along different interpretative repertoires, the main signifying role she ascribed to it was embodying her personal independence from others' opinions:

Extract 15

Palesa: [...] So I was used to people doing whatever they liked with my hair, so I don't have...but I remember when I first cut my hair. I looked into the mirror and I was like, wow, because it was very long. Then I noticed that I actually look prettier with short hair than with long hair, although people tried to convince me otherwise that all hairstyles suits you. They were even persuading me to do dreadlocks, but I am content with short hair. So when I first cut my hair, I noticed that I look more beautiful with short hair than with any other hairstyle.

Interviewer: What would you say made you to decide to want to go natural?

Palesa: I was... ((chuckles)) it's a funny story, uhm, I was mad because my cousin refused to wash my hair. It was very long, it was dirty, and I was going to see...I mean, I was visiting my aunt's place and there was this guy that I like ((giggles)). And I didn't want to go with ugly hair, so, uhm, my cousin refused to do my hair and I wasn't gonna leave like that. So I just...let me cut it off, and it has turned out to be the best thing I ever did.

Palesa's narrative includes two intersubjective relationships. One of them reveals a discrepancy between Palesa's perception of her body ("I noticed that I actually look prettier") and people's opinions on it. By using the epistemic adverb "actually,"

which expresses a high degree of commitment to the truth of the statement, Palesa positions herself as a person speaking with an appropriate degree of conviction, while the persuasion by others is constructed as ineffective ("tried to convince" and the imperfect mood "were even persuading" communicate the incompleteness of the actions). The other relationship shows Palesa's distress ("mad") about lack of control over her body ("It was very long, it was dirty"), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, lack of help from her cousin ("refused to do my hair"). The distress is constructed as reinforced by the presence of the male gaze in the relationship ("there was this guy that I like"), which apparently made the situation a tipping point in which Palesa took control over her body by cutting her hair ("I wasn't gonna leave like that. So I just...let me cut it off").

Clearly, in the three autobiographic accounts, hair was gendered (in different ways). Another identity category which the participants drew into their constructions of hair was class. For instance, some of the participants constructed their positive disposition to short hair as motivated by its affordability. By the same token, weaves were constructed as an excessive investment in looks. To illustrate, in the extract below, Mpho constructs weaves along that line contingently while explaining her notion of the race-based differences in the conceptions of beauty:

Extract 16

Mpho: I think culture also plays a role in beauty, because other racial groups do not believe in this waste thing of putting weaves and what not.

The interviewees often enumerated weaves concurrently or conversely with make-up, to which they were not positively disposed on the grounds of the costs it entails. For example, asked if women share the same beauty practices, Mpho said:

Extract 17

Mpho: I don't think so, because others use make-up and put weaves on, and other stay in their natural beauty without any make-up and weaves and stuff. So we don't do the same way.

A similar line of construction featured Nonzuzo and Palesa's positioning in which they distanced themselves from others' beauty practices:

Extract 18

Nonzuzo: It's, it's, yho ((exclamation)), *mina* ((I)), I dress like a tomboy in most cases. I prefer wearing my pump and sometimes tekkies to campus. I really don't mind, but when I would be on campus, I would see people with heels and some long expensive weave and make-up.

Extract 19

Palesa: [...] So I only noticed, aah, that we have different preferences when I got to varsity, and you would get girls who would have...like, who are so obsessed with weaves because, remember, in high school, man, you just, all you needed was a lip gloss and nothing more. So when I got here, uhm, I notice, okay, you need to have nice long hair, and you need to have this...I don't know, for some odd reason, red lipstick just made it big. And I noticed that mostly more girls

were interested in having nice hair more than anything. Then, when I got here, it really sensed that, okay, people are more interested in hair, more than anything, especially weaves.

In the three extracts above, the participants mark weaves with connotations of excessive consumption. In Mpho's "natural beauty without any make-up and weaves and stuff," the two parallel conjunctions "and" together with the indiscriminate "stuff" work rhetorically to imply an accumulation of beautifying resources. A similar sweeping construction can be found in Nonzuzo's "people with heels and some long expensive weave and make-up." Redundant in the conversation with the interviewer who knows what weaves are like, the pre-modifiers "some long expensive" are also deployed rhetorically. Palesa constructs weaves, together with make-up, as indications of excessive beauty care, to which she related through a negative appraisement "obsessed with weaves." Weaves are also rejected by Nthabiseng, in her positioning as a strong-minded woman:

Extract 20

Nthabiseng: [...] Then I got to varsity and I saw everybody, you know, doing what they want, but what was very consistent was extensions and bondings ((weaves)), and this and that. So I was like, no I don't want this. I don't want people to say I am beautiful because of my hair [...], so I decided to cut my hair.

By evoking the connotations of excess through the hyperbolic, generalizing "this and that" and appending it to the coordinated "extensions and

bondings," Nthabiseng constructs a relation of contrast between others' intense investment in looks and her minimalist style.

"Betraying the Ethnic Blah, Blah, Blah"

As discussed, two of the participants expressed their awareness of the political accountability of hair by valorizing dreadlocks over other types of hair (Extracts 9 and 10). Yet, none of the women constructed weaves as a form of betraying one's African identity, which is the chief argument raised against weaves by African culturalists. Likewise, short hair, which traditionalists value as ethnically authentic, was constructed as the site of articulating gender, not ethnic, identity. Moreover, the political accountability of hair was rejected by the focus group participants when the interviewer elicited the topic to investigate the women's intersubjective engagement with the culturalist discourse (as one of the hegemonic discourses of beauty).

In the two extracts below, Thembeka, Lerato, and Nthabiseng talk about one of the media prompts they were presented with, namely, an article in a South African daily *Sowetan* (Sept/15/2015), "Hair Today, Fake It All Tomorrow? Celebrities Have Their Say" by Karabo Disetlhe. The article discusses controversies stirred by Hugh Masekela, a South African musician, who asked that bodyguards prevent him from being approached by women with weaves:

Extract 21

Thembeka: I, I, personally, for me, I will always respect, I respect *utat'* ((Mr)) Huge Masekela and…

but I feel like he, uhm, I don't understand this whole…I feel like he's trying to dictate the lives of young girls […]

Nthabiseng: I think that he doesn't fully try to understand why some girls have, you know, fake hair. She just explained her reasons. I don't know whether they will be acceptable for him, you know, that you can't maintain it, but, you know, you reserve the right to have that excuse from having natural hair. So he doesn't try to fully understand…for a grown man…

Thembeka: His age.

Nthabiseng: That has travelled, he's well-travelled, I mean, you would think that he would be open-minded to certain things, but he does also maintain the right not want to take pictures for whatever reason, but I don't think he has the right to discriminate like that and say…what if people didn't want to take pictures with him because he's old, because he is old. What if, you know, people started… what if Beyoncé says to him, no I can't, you too old ((laughs)) you know…

Lerato: You know, you're gonna ruin my picture. How would he feel?

In the extract, the participants reframe the discursive field within which they have been positioned. Although herself with short hair, it is Nthabiseng who takes on the role of Masekela's opponent. She talks about "some girls" finding themselves overwhelmed by the trouble of maintaining natural hair, refers back to Thembeka's explanation why she wears weaves, and next explicitly confirms its validity. Therefore, even though Nthabiseng does not talk about her own experience, by asserting her knowledge of the tedious nitty-gritty of hair mainte-

nance, in her polemic with Masekela, she positions herself as a person speaking from the reality of lived experience rather than from an abstract, ideological discourse from which Masekela articulates his critique of weaves.

Based on the above, we propose to see Nthabiseng's positioning as *representin* (Richardson 2007a; 2007b). Following Richardson (2007a), representin is

> a part of the larger black discourse practice…Consonant with the fictive kinship ideology, black people performed in a manner that protected the humanity of the collective enslaved community. As Signithia Fordham (1996: 75) explains, "in contexts controlled by (an) Other, it was necessary to behave as a collective Black Self while suppressing the desire to promote the individual Self." [p. 797]

In the specific context, because of the intersectional complexity of the positioning of Black women in the discourse of beauty, the participants position themselves to Masekela (himself a member of their ethnic community) as to the "controlling Other," in relation to whom they perform a collective subjectivity of Black young women. Originally, the aspect of age is drawn in by Thembeka to claim respect for Masekela, but then it is played around in a humorous way when Nthabiseng and Thembeka cooperatively proceed to deride Masekela. In the cumulative point of the derision, they draw into the discursive field Beyoncé, who—as an iconic representation of the Westernized look disparaged by Masekela and an internationally renowned singer—might have been referred to by the participants strategically.

In the extract below, Masekela's traditionalist approach is explicitly addressed by the interviewer:

Extract 22

Interviewer: One of his reasons for refusing to take pictures with girls with weaves, he asserts, is because it is a "betrayal of the African identity."

Thembeka: Betrayal?

Nonzuzo: I disagree *mna* ((I)).

Thembeka: He ((exclamation)) I disagree.

Nonzuzo: Strongly disagree ((everyone laughing)).

Interviewer: Can you give me your reasons for disagreeing with Hugh Masekela?

Nonzuzo: Uhm, it's about you. I'm very traditional, you heard me, right, but if I decide to put on a weave, I have my own reasons. It doesn't mean that I am betraying the ethnic blah, blah, blah, you know. For instance, I've got a natural hair, but at some point I braid it, I do weaves, but not for a long time because why? He does not understand the reasons. I don't want to comb, uhm, I'm trying to save time; I'm attending classes, you know. He does not understand the concept of putting a weave at some point. So he will never relate.

Thembeka: And he's never been faced with having to grow any hair because he is a man.

Nonzuzo: Man, he will never relate to, to this thing.

Nthabiseng: I, first of all, what is his definition of Africanism? What did he say, "African is a betrayal of what"?

Interviewer: According to him, weaves are a "betrayal of the African identity."

Nthabiseng: So he defines African identity as having natural hair, yes, that's his full description of African identity. I, I, no, first of all, you cannot say that being

an African has anything to do with the way you look. I don't think so, that I don't think so. And he, oh my gosh, he has no right to say something like that…

Thembeka: It's so disappointing.

This time it is Nonzuzo, like Nthabiseng with short hair, who defends weaves. Also like Nthabiseng, she does so by means of the repertoires of hair maintenance and of one's right to independently decide on her body. This devaluation of an egoistic presentation of self, to which both Nonzuzo and Nthabiseng could have turned because of their natural hairstyles, implies the ethos of representin. The communal character of the women's diatribe against Masekela is enacted not only on the level of (a shared disposition to) body practice, but also in discourse structures. The repetition of the key word "disagree" when all three of them voice their opinions each in her own way, as well as the repetition and elaboration of the words from the previous speaker's turn ("never," "man") indicate high mutuality of the speakers' disposition.

The interviewees' talk in the focus group reveals a significant amount of affect. For instance, Extract 22 features exclamations, unanimous laughter, as well as vocalization of irritation ("the ethnic blah, blah, blah") through which Nonzuzo expressed distance from the traditionalist discourse. These discursive cues, we argue, demonstrate the *affective economy* of Black femininity. Following Ahmed (2004:117), emotions are not a private property that resides in individuals, but affectively consequential practices of meaning-making. Circulating between bodies and signs, emotions become part and parcel of the flowing signifiers and as such enter intersubjective

relations (Ahmed 2004:119). While Ahmed focuses on the relationship between the non-Aryan body and the Aryan society, in this article, we observe the affective economy within ethnic and racial communities. Ahmed (2004:120) considers that "movement between signs converts into affect," that is, the more signs circulate between subjects, the more affective power they garner. As the "key ethnic signifier" (Mercer 1987:36), specific Black hairstyles are a case in point. In this study, the affective load of weaves came to the surface of discourse in the focus group. The affective cues enumerated above reveal affect attached to hair when the participants, interpellated as politically accountable for how they embody race, reject the accountability. This reinforces Ahmed's argument that emotions emerge from the circulation of signs within the social space and shows its applicability to how Black women experience their bodies.

Discussion

In the study, we consider that the interviewees do not solely describe the lived reality of Black female body. Following Brah (2001),

> experience does not transparently reflect a pre-given reality, but rather is itself a cultural construction. Indeed, experience is a process of signification…Contrary to the idea of an already fully constituted "experiencing subject" to whom "experiences happen," experience is the site of subject formation…Attention to this reveals experience as a site of contestation: a discursive space where different and differential subject positions and subjectivities are inscribed, reiterated, or repudiated. [p. 466]

Subject formation, we argue, does not happen in its own right—it takes place when individuals make sense of the experience drawing on the socio-culturally available meaning-making resources. In the discussion, we consistently talked about the Black female body as constructed to emphasize the focus of the study—not the subjective experience of the body itself, but what individuals do with it to constitute themselves as subjects (to construct their identities).

The data presented in the article make evident that the body is a semi-raw material people are born with, it is malleable and contingent on the culturally-specific practices and meaning-making resources, as well as on individuals' idiosyncratic deployment thereof. By semi-raw, we mean that the bodies are always lodged with meanings. The bodies are made meaningful in the intersubjective encounters even when individuals are not aware of it, and in ways they may not necessarily know of. As Ali (2003:13) notes in her accounts of embodying a mixed-race identity, it is possible "that others may pass me without my knowledge." Yet, the data presented in the article show that although bodies are always already meaningful in one way or another, individuals' scope of meaning-making is significant and hence bodies can be used as sites of articulating one's subjectivity. As Black women, the participants in our study have been interpellated by numerous discourses, which construct the Black female body in a number of ways. In the data presented in the article, the women demonstrate their reflexivity of the discourses (though not all and not all of the time), and draw on them in their constructions of the body and beauty. Crucially,

the participants' deployment of the discourses is selective and in addition to the socio-culturally available interpretations of the Black female body, the women vest their bodies with meanings fabricated by means of their autobiographic experience.

Stripped of essentialist properties, race in the participants' constructions is a meaning-making and subject-forming resource which they mobilize on their own terms in the interpretations of the Black female body. For example, body shape and hair are constructed as ethnic markers, but no symbolic links are forged between racial or ethnic identity and skin bleaching. Talking about hair, the participants deploy meanings that have been ascribed to hair by hegemonic discourses, but also readily defy the discourses when they find the discourses to infringe their sovereign subjectivity. Moreover, speaking about hair practices that have been commonly constructed as the denial or affirmation of blackness (hence race signification), the participants construct them as signifiers of gender and class. In this way, we argue, the data show the dynamic nature of Black femininity and reflexivity with which it is interpreted and embodied.

In her research on Black female beauty, Tate (2005:5-6) finds Black women reflexively positioned in discursive space which she calls the "third space" (Bhabha 1990). She regards Black femininity as a continuous process of *translation* (Tate 2007:18) in which identifications emergent from the renegotiation of meanings and positionings, "although different, still bear the traces of identification discourses in order to be meaningful (Tate 2007:8)." Following this logic of interpretation, we consider that in our

study, the participants establish their embodied subjectivities by translating the cultural meanings of their bodies (e.g., skin, hair, and body shape). In doing so, the women reassess the images of the Black body, as well as subvert simplistic equations between race and body. Hence, they organize the discursive space set up in the research context in ways that allow them to enunciate their own interpretations of Black female beauty.

Apart from translation, another empowering discourse practice found in the data is collective positioning. Comparing women's beauty practices to negotiations in "unstable fields of power shaped by inequalities," Craig (2006:166) notes that any negotiator in such a relationship "is stronger if she is part of collectivity." In the data from the focus group interview, the interviewees draw power from the collective subjectivity of young Black women by enunciating each of its constituent identity categories (race, gender, and age) as shared and hence anchoring their arguments in the reality of lived experience that is accessible only to the members of this collective identity. Constructing this as the prerequisite to claim the right to decide on their bodies, the participants vindicate their prerogative to do so. Consequently, they take it away from the subjects such as Masekela, who have claimed this right solely on the grounds of race.

As could also be seen in the discussion, bestowed with meanings and values, as the object of reflection and talk, the body generates affect. Data presented in the article illustrate the affective value attached to hair as a subject-forming sign and show how emotions flowed in the interactive exchange between the interviewees. Vitally, the data imply the subject-empowering potential of affect. In the focus group, rather than be carried away by the heightened affective valence of the interactive moment, the interviewees effectively resist the hegemonic discourse of the Black body and beauty. The women's collective resistance consists in emptying the Black female body of political accountability, and hence, disavowing the logic of Black stylization espoused by Black culturalists. Mercer (1987) finds this logic of stylization

> only a tactical inversion of the chain of equivalences that structured the Eurocentric system of white bias. We saw how the biological determinism of classical racist ideology first "politicized" our hair: its logic of devalorization of blackness radically devalued our hair, debarring it from access to dominant regimes of the "truth of beauty." The aesthetic de-negation "logically" depended on prior relations of equivalence which posited the categories of "Africa" and "nature" as equally other to Europe's deluded self-image which sought to monopolize claims to beauty. [p. 40]

In the study, we found participants to reject the understanding of living the African self by simply celebrating nature—no matter how creatively it can be played around. Explaining the symbolical investment made by the Black pride discourse in the natural hair stylizations, Mercer (1987:41) considers it based on the appropriation of "a particularly romanticist version of 'nature' as a means of empowering the black subject." The data show that the women choose different ways of empowering themselves through depoliticizing Black hair. The self-empowered subject is free to choose artifice over nature, and to lodge her body with other (e.g., class, gender) significances.

Briefly, in the discussion, we demonstrated a richness and complexity of meanings that Black female body has accrued. We proposed that because Black women are positioned in multiple discourses, and because their bodies are inexorably entangled with the discourses, they engage themselves in the symbolical struggle over the meanings. That is, they negotiate their embodied subjectivities in interactions with other subjects with whom they can, for example, (re)assign, (re)construct, and (in)validate certain meanings that are attached to the Black female body by fiat. In the data discussed, moving within the "third space," the interviewees draw from the pool of meanings, freely attach them to their bodies hence positioning as embodied subjects. The women use intersectionality of their embodied subjectivities as their symbolical resource by juggling its constituent identity categories. On the whole, in the ongoing negotiation over the ownership and meanings of their bodies between the individual and society, the women were found to aptly draw on the existing discourses of beauty.

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Appendix: Transcription notes.

,	short pause in the flow of talk
.	full stop, stopping fall in tone, not necessarily end of sentence
…	longer silence
!	animated and emphatic tone
?	rising intonation, not necessarily a question
[…]	material omitted by the author
(( ))	transcriber's comments, not transcription
[talk]	overlapping utterances

Adapted from Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998).

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Narrating Everyday Precarity: Women's Voices from Resource Poor Areas

Abstract African family life in South Africa's post-apartheid context is shaped by the socio-political history of the country. Despite various attempts to address the remnants of poverty, unequal distribution of resources and the lack of livelihood services still exist. African families from resource poor areas of townships in South Africa are still faced with poverty and deprivation. Black African women, often with minimum schooling, suffer the most from these scourges. This article aims to explore the everyday life narratives of precarity at various levels and the manner in which women from Mangaung Township in Bloemfontein cope with this. They talk about the fragile relationships within the family, about the gendered dynamics of the household, and about the importance of support networks.

Keywords African Family Life; Precarity; Support Networks; Narrative Approach; Mangaung Township

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Black African[1] families in South Africa, especially those residing in the poorly-resourced areas of townships, are still bearing the brunt of a potent mix of historical and contemporary socio-political factors that disrupt and systematically undermine their overall well-being. Family bonds are threatened, weakened, and pressurized by institutions such as the still-prevalent migrant labor system (Appolis 1996:1; Russell 2003:30) and other structural inequities that result in a skewed distribution of economic opportunities, poverty, unemployment, and service delivery (Benjamin 2007:175; Sekham-

pu 2012:9504). Black African families, statistics[2] tell us, are most frequently at the underserved and under-resourced end of the equation. According to an editorial in Business Tech (2014:1), a 6.2 million increase has been seen in the number of people that can be classified as poor. Poverty in this sense refers to issues such as standards of living, education, and provision of health (Chitiga-Mabugu et al. 2014:57-60). It is estimated that there is a 103% increase in unemployment rates since 1994. This implies an additional 5.067 million, mainly Black African South Africans, relying on government grants and financial aid schemes (Business Tech 2014:1).

These social ills are still an omnipresent reality in the lives of many Black African people and their families, despite a non-racial democratic administration that has been in power for over twenty years. Marginalized population groups, especially Black African women with minimum schooling, bear the brunt of inequities as they often have few financial and other resources to sustain and operate their households. These women are often mostly responsible for the upbringing of their children. Many of them cannot meet the demands of running their households because they are, at most, in low waged part-time employment (or "piece jobs" as they are referred to colloquially). Burdened with fulfilling both roles of a "mother" and a "father," further put pressure on the household to survive with insufficient resources. This brings about that the majority of households are in a position of precarity (Kimani and Kombo 2010:12).

This article attempts to contribute to the body of knowledge that addresses the lack of Black African women's emancipation in South Africa's post-apartheid, democratic dispensation. The study differs from other research by focusing on exposing the unheard voices, coming from poorly-resourced households within the Mangaung Township in Bloemfontein, South Africa. These narratives are mostly told in despair as these women widely believe that insufficient efforts are directed to release them from the prison of poverty and inequality. The article draws on narratives of survival—demonstrating resilience and access to specific social networks that equip and enable the participants to manage to take care of their families, and in particular their children, under insecure and fragile living conditions.

Precarity in Black African Families

Precarity in this study is conceptualized as a condition of existence describing human beings' lifeworlds[3] characterized by "instability, vulnerability, insecurity, uncertainty and unpredictability" (Ettlinger 2007:320; Waite 2009:426). In this study, the concept precarity is explored in relation to unstable and fluctuating employment opportunities, as well as overall life conditions experienced by poorly-resourced families of the Mangaung Township. Townships were originally designed as sleepover places for Black African laborers in White areas. Increased urban migration resulted in overcrowding with inadequate livelihood services. Life conditions in these

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[1] Throughout the text, we refer to the socially constructed racial categories of "Black" and "White" that is entrenched in the South African society after years of apartheid and racial oppression. "Black" roughly refers to those categories of people who were disadvantaged by the apartheid regime, and includes so-called "Coloreds" and "Indians," although this research was conducted solely among "Black" African women.

[2] Among others is the 25,5% official unemployment rate (Statistics South Africa 2015:2).

[3] Lifeworld is the "world of daily life along with the corresponding knowledge needed to exist in it; a world and knowledge shared by members of a society or social group" (Cavalcanti 1995:1338).

areas clearly reflect social issues coinciding with unemployment, underemployment, and poverty.

On the one hand, the notion of precarity is used to refer to the economically and socially fragile nature of part-time employment, especially low-skilled part-time employment. Such work has no safety measures such as pension schemes, medical aid, subsistence allowances, or safeguards in the form of rights reserved for tenured or better-skilled positions. The meager income hardly covers the maintenance and needs of households and families (Dodson and Dickert 2004:318; Waite 2009:416). In the context of this article, precarity also depicts life conditions experienced by individuals who occupy seemingly powerless and disadvantaged social positions in the wider historical and socio-political context. Precarity tends to "inhabit the micro spaces of everyday life" where fragile and unstable situations hinder those who experience this precarity, from predicting and planning for their time (Ettlinger 2007:320). Precarity is located in everyday life—within the spaces where individuals "think, feel, act and interact" (Ettlinger 2007:234). This precarity is transferred to the spaces in which they endure the contingencies and uncertainties of their daily lives and everyday living conditions (Ettlinger 2007:320; Waite 2009:415). Therefore, "to be precariatised is to be subject to pressures and experiences that lead to a precariat existence, of living in the present, without a secure identity or sense of development achieved through work and lifestyle" (Standing 2011:16).

The concept of precarity is "concerned not just with factors that constitute a threat of social exclusion

in the short-term but with factors that are likely to erode people's resources and capacities in a way that raises their risk of marginalisation in the longer-term" (Herrmann and van der Maesen 2008:12). Thus, precarity can be explained as a phenomenon that further erodes society because of perceived and real lack of opportunities related to participation strategies (Herrmann and van der Maesen 2008:13) affecting aspects of "intersubjective life, including housing, debt and ability to build affective social relations" (Neilson and Rossiter 2006:10). Precarious individuals tend to lack the ability to fully participate in the social-economic life within their communities because of their limited resources. The notion of "precarity" is thus more than physical wants and needs—it extends into socio-psychological realms. Moreover, problems and disadvantages often get repeated inter-generationally (Dass-Brailsford 2005:575; Van Wormer, Sudduth, and Jackson 2011:413).

Despite the overwhelming pessimism that is normally associated with the notion of precarity, the narratives of these research participants also indicate elements of resilience striving to counter harsh realities. In addition, the post-apartheid government has put in place several mechanisms to help address social, and particularly economic, problems. One mechanism is the introduction of the social grant system, which changed the Black African household dynamics. Financial burdens are alleviated to some extent as young and older members started contributing to the household income in the form of child grant and old age grants. Child support grants (R330.00 per month), foster care grants (R860.00 per month), and pension

grants (R1410 per month) serve as a safety net for many of the poor households, regardless of whether breadwinners are employed—as they contribute to the day-to-day survival. The child support and foster grants are awarded to the primary care-giver (most often women), who has to be in possession of citizenship documents—mainly a South African identity document and valid birth certificates of the beneficiaries (Kaseke 2010:160; Møller 2010:148).

There is an important traditional cultural norm that also contributes (or at least has the potential to contribute) to resilience and solidarity. The philosophy of Ubuntu/Botho is engrained in the African society. Knowledge and practice of communal support and networks still exist as a "norm" in everyday life, and is thus often taken-for-granted. There is a Sepedi proverb which states *mothoga ae phete, o phetwa ke batho*. This translates into "human beings need other people to travel the journey of life" and it means as one can only get through the challenges and hardships by relying on those who have experienced similar problems. Human survival is not only dependant on material resources, but also social capital which amounts to non-material resources and social support vested in trust (Kovalainen 2004:160).

Methodological Notes

This article draws on a qualitative sociological inquiry vested in a constructivist/interpretive paradigm which is concerned with "understanding the world as it is and the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experienc-

es" (Burrell and Morgan 1979:28). An interpretive paradigm explores the manner in which human beings construct and understand their social reality—it pays attention to how people think, behave, interrelate with others, construct subjective perceptions, and form their ideas about the world (Wills 2007:6; Thomas 2009:75).

This study adopts a narrative approach to inquiry as this has the potential to enable participants to provide detailed descriptions of their lived experiences, feelings, and perceptions in the form of a story. Personal narratives give lived experiences structure where narrators are provided an opportunity to explain what happened in their lives. Also, expressing experiences in words allows participants to move closer to making sense of these experiences (Gilbert 2002:224). These narratives thus do not follow the sequence of events as expected of "stories." Rather, they emerge as unsystematic and disjointed or "fragmented." This is evident in spoken narratives at times being riddled with inconsistencies, contradictions, and incoherencies, which emphasizes how dependent real-life events are on memory, interpretation, and intent (Barak and Leichtentritt 2014:1-2).

A narrative methodology holds the potential to shed light on and to bring forth the complexities and subtleties that human beings experience in their activities of everyday life. Human beings by nature are orientated to storytelling (Gilbert 2002:225) as they "individually and socially lead storied lives" (Connelly and Clandinin 1990:2). People's stories are part of their real life because they form connections that give meaning to that

life (Webster and Mertova 2007:2-3). Narratives are therefore integral "to make sense of, evaluate, and integrate the tensions inherent in experience: the past with the present, the fictional with the 'real,' the official with the unofficial, the personal with the professional, the canonical with the different and unexpected" (Dyson and Genishi 1994 as cited in Webster and Mertova 2007:2).

The participants in this research adapt and learn to survive in their precarious world partly through narratives, as they learn how to live and navigate their lifeworlds through other people's renditions of the past, as well as through their own experiences (Gilbert 2002:225-226). The article is based on narratives that were collected from eight women aged between 29 and 59. The participants were recruited with assistance from a local social worker who identified and requested permission from several women to speak to the research team working on an umbrella project titled "Crises in Contemporary African Families." Snowball sampling was also used through specific research participants who initially joined the research. Several rounds of interviews were held with the participants where in-depth discussions, as well as immediate observation informed us about the contexts of the participant. These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated—and later thematically analyzed. The discussions often drifted to unrelated topics, as to be expected when conducting narrative research, and these discussions were considered to be part of the overall narrative of participants.

Ethical clearance to conduct this research study was obtained from the Faculty of Humanities' Eth-

ics Committee (UFS – HUM – 2013 – 002; University of the Free State). Due respect and consideration was given to participants and this helped to establish good rapport that allowed for free and unencumbered discussions to take place. All standard ethical procedures were adhered to, including the dissemination of translated informed consent forms that stipulated the purpose of the research and emphasized the voluntary participation of the women, also stating the precautions taken to uphold confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms are used throughout the project and also in this article. Despite explicit informed consent granted, the research team was also aware of and responsive to non-verbal indications of some participants and subsequently refrained from laboring some points that seemed traumatic to broach.

All the research participants are mothers and have extensive experience of motherhood. Moreover, most of them are not only responsible for their biological children, but also guardians to younger siblings, grandchildren, and foster children. The majority of the participants are involved in intimate relationships, some being married and others having partners who are not necessarily the fathers of their children. Mostly these husbands and partners also make a living through "piece jobs" (irregular employment in the informal sector) and are unable to contribute much to the finances of the household. Three women reached Grade 12 (which is the highest school-leaving qualification) while the other women all dropped out of secondary school at some point in time. One participant never attended school because of the apartheid demarcations which prohibited the

"Colored"[4] population to attend schools designated for Black learners. With the lack of educational and other qualifications due to various life circumstances (family commitments and financial constraints, to mention two), these women had to take up jobs as domestic workers or cleaners in and around Bloemfontein, with meager remuneration to sustain their households.

Findings

The everyday precarity of Black African family life is illustrated by the selection of narratives of four of the participants in this project. The narratives of these women, Pinky, Nobantu, Zoleka, and Khanyisile, are chosen because of the poignancy and the clarity with which they illustrate their everyday struggles and their survival under difficult everyday living conditions.

The Family and Fragile Relationships

The institution of the family normally plays a significant role in people's lives in as far as meaning and purpose of their lifeworlds are concerned. A normal family fulfils the primary functions of socialization and providing companionship and various forms of support. The family usually symbolizes a safety net for its members during hardships and provides them with a sense of belonging. People are usually able to overcome and face problems and challenges with the assistance of their family members, who

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[4] Pinky (not her real name) was born to a Xhosa (Black) father and a "Colored" (mixed race) mother, thus she was classified "Colored"—a classification that she still carries, even in post-apartheid South Africa.

help them to cope with their responsibilities and obligations. Therefore, under normal circumstances, family holds an important task in ensuring everyday survival of its members both in difficult and happy times. However, some of the participants in this study express family not only as a place of refuge and stability but also as a prominent site of conflict. In fact, "family" seems to be a rather fluid concept in the lifeworlds of some of the participants. They frequently mention that they only consider those people who provide them with various forms of support as being family members. In other words, those members who benefit materially and emotionally from each other and who maintain relationships based on reciprocity and sharing are considered to be family. "Family" is not only bound by blood or genealogical links, and the participants often consider friends, landlords, prayer group members, and even tenants as family. In an African context, it is common for those with whom close ties are maintained to be thought of, and treated, as extended family. Family ties are often based on relationships that contain love, respect, commitment, sacrifice, and obligation.

Pinky is a 54-years-old mother and she lost two of her daughters to AIDS, each leaving behind a child which adds to her responsibilities. Her partner left her and she has to fend for herself and their two children. Pinky depends on her siblings, uncles, and child support grants for financial assistance as her fragile health (she was also diagnosed with HIV) prohibits her from keeping a job. She is always weak as she cannot afford the balanced, nutritious diet required for the intake of antiretroviral therapy, the life-saving medication that has turned

HIV/AIDS for many South Africans from a death sentence to a chronic, manageable disease. Pinky's survival is largely dependent on her extended family, a fact that greatly pains her as she dislikes being a burden to others, particularly given that her family members have their own struggles and challenges. It is not always possible for the family to provide for Pinky and there have often been instances where she and her dependents had to go to bed with an empty stomach:

My family is very important to me, but sometimes, you know, I feel pain, you understand. They love me and they do show me that they love me. I don't know how to say this to you because my sisters feel my pain when I do not have things in my house. They are able to do things for me, but sometimes when I ask things from them, they will promise to bring them and they never do. And then I sleep without eating with my children in this house.

Khanyisile is a 46-years-old married mother of three children. Financial constraints and early motherhood forced her to abandon her dream of a proper career and she had to settle for various "piece jobs"—currently she makes her living by selling vegetables, fruits, sweets, and snacks from her home. Khanyisile's husband is a construction worker, but is currently unemployed, so she is dependent on her extended family and child support grants for household income. Khanyisile says that the notion of "family" has lost its essence and meaning as kin support and ties have weakened over time. She is of the opinion that in the current South African society, qualities like respect and equal treatment have disappeared. Modern society

favors those with money, with the poor being excluded and isolated. Khanyisile explains that families of today have lost the values, morals, and respect instilled by past generations and now make their own rules, choices, and decisions. She says that people can choose who they regard as part of their family. Those who have money do not want to be associated with people like her:

Family is very important, but it has lost its value in these times because people control themselves and they isolate themselves. When you are poor, most family members do not want to be associated with you, but when you are rich, they all want to be close to you. Most family members do not care about you if you are poor, but if you are doing well, then they will regard you as their family.

Khanyisile's story shows how the institution of the family is also a site of potential conflicts, with families experiencing issues in different ways, leading to disagreements and fights. These conflicts have the potential of tearing families apart, resulting in family members having fragile or conflicting (or even non-existent) relationships with each other. In these circumstances, members tend to have ill feelings towards one another, especially when others fail to fulfill expected family-orientated obligations and responsibilities.

Nobantu, who is 33-years-old, was born in the neighboring country, Lesotho, and later moved to Bloemfontein in search of better employment—which she did not find. She has three children with her deceased husband, but she does not stay with her children as she does not have a house. She is

currently in a relationship and she is staying with her partner in his home where she rents one of the shacks[5] for R400 per month as a place to run her hair salon. Nobantu has two brothers who have turned their backs on her and they do not assist her and her children in any way. Both these brothers are employed, but they only provide for their own partners and children, even though Nobantu had provided them with help in the past. Nobantu is frustrated with her brothers, especially her younger brother, who she took to school and looked after when her deceased husband's estate's money was released. Nobantu feels like she does not have siblings as they are neglecting and ignoring her:

You know, I have two brothers and I am the only girl at home, but they don't do anything for me. They don't help me out in any way yet they are both working. The one who comes after me, I supported him when he was looking for a job. I gave him money and I made sure that he was well-fed during the period when he was looking for a job. But, once he found the job, then he forgot that his sister has problems. He and his wife just look at me and ignore the fact that I was supportive when he was still unemployed. I took him to school after my husband passed away. He attended at Cemtech [College in Lesotho] and after he completed, then he turned his back on me. He has literally disregarded everything that I have done for him. My other brother doesn't help me out either; actually, to him I am just a "thing." Sometimes I even forget about them, I seriously forget about them and that is why I say that my family is made up of my grandmother and aunt, and the rest are just there by name.

[5] A type of small house made from corrugated metal and scraps—it is also known as a tin house.

In contexts of familial, inter-generational precarity, expectations, especially of financial assistance, are hard to meet, and responsibilities towards fellow family members are potentially conflictual, given the limited means among the various members, even those who are employed.

Women as the Backbone of the Family

Women often occupy strong positions within African families and are often the main agents responsible for the survival of the family—to which end they harness unique abilities that enable them to organize and fulfill the demands attached to everyday family activities and responsibilities. Women are often considered as the backbone of their families as they tend to be in charge of educating their children about moral, ethical, and social values (Taiwo 2010:230). The participants acknowledge the importance of other family members in their upbringing and socialization, and their own mothers occupy special positions in relation to their experiences of being cared for. Those who still have their mothers present in their lives, still depend on their assistance in some way—be it financial, providing moral support, or helping to look after children. Thus, their mothers help them to cope with everyday struggles and challenges.

Death has robbed some of the participants of the warmth and support of their mothers. In some cases, the lineage of care is taken up through the mothers-of-mothers. Some grandmothers step into the gap. Nobantu narrates that her life would have been different if her own mother was still alive as she would have cared for and sheltered her

children, as opposed to now where her children are living with various family members and her in-laws:

> Family is very important, but nothing beats having a mother. A mother is very important, and if mine was still alive, I think my life would be easier because she would be staying with my children as opposed to them being spread out. My mother would have made sure that she looks after my children and they live under the same roof and then I would have given her the little that I make from my job. I think things would have been much easier that way because right now I find it difficult to see how they are living and how satisfied they are with the people they live with. I always ask myself whether they have eaten and if they get enough sleep, especially the one who lives with my in-laws. Every time I speak to him on the phone [her son], after that I know that he is not going to sleep. He was diagnosed with a heart problem by a doctor and that just shows that this child is always told about how bad and irresponsible his mother is. Telling a child those things causes the child to have stress. That is why I wish that he could stay with me. My wish is that he could come and live with me because if he continues this way, then he will end up being naughty and will find himself involved in criminal activities in search of money. He might end up living on the streets as a street kid. That is why I want a house and if only the government could help get my ID because Home Affairs is really giving me problems. Then I could be able to buy myself a house and I can stay with my child. I do not worry about the other two because you can see that they are happy. When I visit them, they are happy and free children. My family really looks after them well and they sup-

port me by doing that. I am very grateful to them because they have accepted my children in their homes and they understand when I don't have money. Their support and love is important to me, but they won't do as much as a mother would have done.

Most of the research participants were raised in female-headed households where fathers were absent for various reasons: migrant employment, death, separation, divorce, or abandonment. Thus, they were provided for by their mothers with the help of the maternal families. Even though they knew their paternal families and fathers, their fathers were not financially, materially, and physically involved in their upbringing.

Zoleka is a 53-years-old divorcee and her former husband moved to Johannesburg after their divorce. They have four children and one grandchild. Their oldest daughter relocated to Cape Town, leaving her own child behind for Zoleka to raise alone. Zoleka's former husband stopped paying R1 200.00 monthly maintenance in 2012, leaving Zoleka to survive on a R1 480.00 per month wage earned from cleaning at a local university. In response, Zoleka's children refuse to visit their father and his family as they feel neglected:

> The father of my children sometimes puts in money for them. Sometimes he doesn't. Like now he has not put in money for them for over a year now. He stopped last year and I wanted to take him to a court in Jo'burg [Johannesburg], but I could not go as my mother passed away right about the same time. I am planning to go now to the court in Jo'burg to hear what is going on. He is quiet and when I asked him,

he told me that he is sick and he doesn't go to work anymore. These phones are troubles as they can lie. I am quiet for now and I know the type of person he is. I've had enough with his excuses, so I am planning to go to the court in Jo'burg to see what is really happening.

The research participants are constantly faced with the challenges of balancing both work and home responsibilities. Most women's narratives show that they are able to cope fulfilling multiple roles by depending on others, especially close family members, for assistance. Nobantu finds it difficult to balance her work and home roles, especially since she works from home—"home" being the shack she rents from her current partner in order to run a hair salon. Nobantu's job as a hairdresser is strenuous in that it requires her to be on her feet almost the whole day:

> It's very difficult for me, but what makes me bear it all is because of my struggles. On the one hand, I am someone's girlfriend, and on the other, I work and I am very tired. When I close the salon and when I go into the house, I will find that nobody cooked. I will then start cooking and after that I just want to go to bed, and then when I get there, my boyfriend will want to have sex. Things are very difficult for me and sometimes I tell him that I will go to Lesotho for the whole month [giggles], but that will not happen because what brought me here in the first place was money. So I tell myself to hang in there because of my children.

Despite them trying hard to vouch for their children's well-being, they still experience powerless-

ness as to the real state of affairs in their children's lives. Nobantu and Zoleka, like many Black South African women, also grew up without ever knowing their fathers. Their own experiences relate to minimal fatherly involvement and these experiences are now repeated in the lives of their children. Emotional detachment from a father and leaning on a mother for support is a leitmotiv for many of these families.

Gendered Dynamics of the Household

Domestic responsibilities tend to dominate the research participants' activities. These women are faced with the reality of having to conduct routine household chores on behalf of their dependents—duties that are considered to be "feminized." However, the women mention their sense of satisfaction at fulfilling these duties and providing their dependants with what little they have available. They also strive towards providing for their children in order to give them a "better" life and to prevent them from experiencing poverty. They thereby wish to break the inter-generational cycle of hardship and its concomitant troubles. Unemployed Pinky's lifeworld revolves around taking care of her children and their needs. She narrates the following:

> After that [walking children to school] I make tea for myself and then start cleaning the house. When I am done, then I go back into my bed and sleep. I take naps and then later I will wake up and prepare food for the children when they come back from school. They will find me having cooked them pap. That is my job: that is what I do every day.

Participants are of the opinion that women can do household chores (gardening, cleaning the yard, cutting trees, and fixing appliances) that are usually associated with men, and vice versa. According to the women, gender does play a major role in their performances of mundane, largely unrewarded, tasks in the household. As Khanyisile says:

We need to help each other out, there is no such thing as women's or men's job.

Nobantu shares these sentiments of domestic responsibilities ideally not being bound by gender. She feels that families should help each other and should share household responsibilities. She blames preceding generations for this narrow thinking and behavior, whereby younger generations are groomed to perpetuate gender roles and stereotypes. This results in the imbalance and overburdening of women who are expected not only to run the entire household, but also to bring in income:

I think household chores must be done by everyone, but it depends on one's upbringing. If he was raised and told that a woman is not a slave, then he would know that he is supposed to help me with the cooking, washing of the dishes, and making the bed, and sweeping the room when he can see that I am busy. He would offer to wash the clothes, but you can see that in his upbringing, he was taught that these chores are only supposed to be done by women. But, he is not the only one with this problem as the male tenants wake up in the morning and smoke. The yard will be dirty at that time, but none of them will think of cleaning. Instead, we have to

clean it. I am the one who usually does it because I hate a dirty place. You can tell that he is relieved by me doing these chores and he can see that I am used to doing them, as I was also doing them back home in Lesotho. At home in Lesotho, the yard is cleaned by children and my brother is not lazy to help me with the cooking. He is not lazy to clean the house and he can do his own washing, but here [referring to her partner and the male tenants] you can see that there is a huge problem.

The notion of gender roles gets instilled in children from a young age. Female children are socialized to perform chores like cleaning, cooking, doing the laundry, bathing their younger siblings, and running the household. It is traditionally expected of men to be breadwinners and to provide for their families, a gendered expectation that still finds a firm footing in patriarchal societies. But, these gendered norms do not seem to hold in the case of participants in this study, who say that they are more or less solely responsible for the revenue needed to keep the household going. The income earned by these women is often not enough to sustain households and family members are often required to send remittances and groceries to assist. Some of these women talk about them having to build extra rooms (shacks) at the back of their dwellings to rent out for addition income. This income is mainly used to procure basic necessities such as food, toiletries, and electricity—primary items of daily survival.

The Importance of Support Networks

The philosophy of Ubuntu/Botho, defined as "an African worldview that is based on values of intense

humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values," in essence promotes social cohesion and peaceful living within the family and community (Broodryk 2002:19). Ubuntu/Botho is the foundation of support structures within African communities, which goes beyond family ties to acknowledge people as social beings living within a society—where everybody needs other people in order to be able to adapt and survive. Ubuntu/Botho is supposed to play a fundamental part in people's lives in a direct manner. This way of life is vested in reciprocity—an expectation that good deeds will be rewarded by a higher entity or by other people. Pinky echoes this philosophy:

I can't live without other people because help comes from other people. When I need help, I consult other people and ask for help.

Nobantu explains her understanding of Ubuntu/Botho as the "inner being" of a person, or as part of "humanity." Individuals are supposed to care about each other's well-being as a means to strengthen the community's spirit. Nobantu narrates that Ubuntu/Botho is found in people's hearts and in the ability of people to feel and show compassion and sympathy towards each other:

I think Botho is in your heart: if your heart can be able to feel pain on behalf of someone and be able to think for others. Botho can also be your spirit; when you do well towards others, then you know that the Almighty God is watching you. And you are scared to do bad things towards others because God can see you and He will deal with you. I think Botho is in people as in their spirit.

Some participants feel that the ethos of Ubuntu/ Botho has weakened over generations, as it does not speak to some individuals, especially those who fail to reciprocate assistance and thereby neglect their responsibility. As noted earlier, Khanyisile sees respect and recognition as being extended only to those who have money. And Zoleka notes that she assisted other people and showed Ubuntu/Botho, but her good deeds were not returned. This inability or reluctance to reciprocate has forced Zoleka to rethink her willingness to help in future:

I have helped too many people, but I have bad luck when it comes to them returning my help. I really have bad luck, so I just keep quiet and tell myself that someday they will find themselves in trouble and they will want my help, but it won't be there. I won't have their help because they didn't help me when I needed them. They don't want to help me, but they expect me to help them all the time.

Participants clearly depend on selected individuals for social support. This equips them with the strength to cope with the burdens, demands, and stresses of everyday life. The negotiated spaces with their ties, bonds, and relationships are where participants find comfort, relief, and strength to continue with their everyday activities and overcome their difficult circumstances. This social network, in most cases, provides care to the participants when they are sick, and this support also ensures that their households continue to function during periods of hardship.

Some participants also call on religion (God) and religious fellowships for strength. Khanyisile

relies on two friends from church to a point that she sees them as part of her family. She describes these friends as:

> Individuals who are supposed to know everything about you. Even when there is shortage of food in the house, they are supposed to say: "My friend, I can see that the children are hungry. So here is something. Please go buy food and hide the embarrassment."

Another form of support network in Black African neighborhoods is the *stokvel*. Members of *stokvels* contribute money throughout the year. Often the proceeds of this collective saving is divided between members during times when additional money is required, such as when a funeral needs to be arranged for tor during festive periods. A *stokvel* is therefore a "type of credit union in which a group of people enter into an agreement to contribute a fixed amount of money to a common pool weekly, fortnightly or monthly" (Lukhele 1990:1). Participants often join different *stokvels* as means of financial security (investing and saving their money) and social well-being (as relationships based on trust, reciprocity, and a sense of belonging). The participants contribute money throughout the year and in December they often buy and share groceries. In addition to *stokvels*, some women pool money monthly to buy food stamps from large retail supermarkets. These savings mechanisms ensure that they have some money and groceries over the festive season. The *stokvel* members sometimes also increase their money by loaning it out and charging interest.

Nobantu is a business woman (hairdresser) whose income depends on the number of customers. She invests some of her money in a bank and, in addition, joined different *stokvels* to increase her savings and make sure that she has enough groceries and money when she returns to Lesotho for the festive season. Nobantu trusts the women that she is operating the *stokvels* with.

> I am part of different *stokvels*: the first one we contribute R500 a month each, another one we contribute R300 a month each, and another one where we contribute R400 for groceries, and the last one we contribute R200 that we buy meat with. From there on I just invest the rest of my money in a bank. The women are really trustworthy and I do trust them. When they have serious problems like a child being admitted to hospital and they can't pay, they make sure that they tell us.

Stokvels are thus constructive means of saving money and, in addition, a way of socializing for the majority of these women. But, there are those who are unable to be part of these informal networks. Women who are unemployed or dependent on erratic sources of income, and those whose major source of income comes from social grants and hand-outs, find it difficult, if not impossible, to be part of *stokvels*. Thus, they forfeit the services provided by these networks: an informal means of saving, but also a sense of belonging and trust in a hostile context characterized by hardship and isolation.

Pinky agrees that *stokvels* require one to have income as she used to be part of a *stokvel* when she

still received her monthly disability grant. She was forced to withdraw from the *stokvel* when the grant was stopped:

> I used to be part of a stokvel with my sister when I still had my sick pay [disability grant], but now I can't anymore because I don't have money to contribute.

This holds very negative consequences for Pinky. Notwithstanding her troubles, she is of the opinion that one should not let other people see one's challenges and struggles and that it is better to suffer in private:

> You know, I always think to myself that people who do not have problems, do not know what problems are. There are some days where we sleep without eating for like two to three days. But, we do not worry. We just stand there and drink water and clean the house like everybody else. People do not need to see your problems in the house and yet life still goes on. Today my children have grown and they are used to go to bed without eating. I sit them down every day and tell them that they have experienced problems and they now know what problems are and they will show their children what problems are. There are some people who find me irritating when I go to their homes and tell them about my problems and there are some people who actually are willing to help out. Sometimes I feel like not telling anyone that I don't have things in my house because they get irritated with me. I don't want to go to people all the time with my problems.

Her story demonstrates that there are limits to reciprocity and generosity in contexts of prevalent pre-

carity. The idealistic and romanticized notion of Ubuntu/Botho has often failed participants during their most pressing times.

The World of Work in the Context of Precarity

Well-remunerated employment is a dream for most of the women who participate in this research. They feel that their lives would have turned out differently if they had the opportunity to complete high school and to obtain further qualifications. The inability to get better employment prevents them from escaping the cycle of poverty. Pinky is saddened by her situation and she is reminded of her struggle every month-end when, unlike herself, other parents are able to buy their children things they need:

> Not having permanent employment makes me feel bad. Seriously, that thing pains me so much. Like at the end of every month, people buy things. They buy things for their children and I can't afford to. I also want to buy things for my children, but I can't because I do not have money.

Khanyisile echoes Pinky's frustrations and pain of not being able to get a stable and well-remunerated job—although she is studying towards a Matric in the hope that it will afford her better prospects. Khanyisile's husband is struggling to find a steady source of income. Her situation leaves her wondering and questioning if there is something wrong with them compared to other people who have stable and well-paying jobs. Khanyisile fears that one day their children will ask them what they were

doing while other parents were making sure that their children are well-provided for:

> Not having a good job makes me feel bad. It's like something is wrong with me because I can't find a job like everybody else. You ask yourself questions when you are alone and someday I also asked the Lord: "My husband and I are not sick, we are healthy people and we are both hard workers because when my husband finds a job, then he does his work very well and same with me. So, why can't we get jobs?" We need to work for our children because tomorrow they are going to ask us what we were doing while other parents were working for their children. "Were we just sitting in this two-roomed house," they are going to ask us?

Emotions of fear and anxiety in the lives of these women leave them in a state of being constantly uncertain and having to face the unknown. The majority of the participants state that death is one of their greatest fears because they do not know how their loved ones, in particular their children, will cope in their absence. Nobantu, for instance, feels that she is the only one who protects and guides them without the presence of a father, and she experiences gnawing uncertainty as to the continued support of her extended family. She is concerned with the types of lifestyles that the younger generations are exposed to and mentions worrying trends among the young. She narrates her fears:

> My greatest fear is the thought of God calling me—death. You know, I ask myself how life will be on our children. Today, teenagers are experiencing the harshness of life, so how will life be for them when we are not here. How will things be, since we won't be around to protect, guide, and show them their wrongdoings and how are they going to live. I always ask myself that question about the kinds of life these children will live. Things keep getting worse. Right now there is Nyaope [a drug] among many things. I wonder what will happen when my son is between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Would he smoke the Nyaope drug and what will I say or do if he smokes it? That's my fear and I wish they didn't have to grow old. But, it's God's will for children to grow old. When it comes to my daughters, their challenges are better because the worst she can do is to bring a child home and I can raise the child. But, how will I handle it if she brings more children home. Those are my fears. I really wish my children didn't have to grow old.

Khanyisile shares Nobantu's fears as to the type of lifestyle her children will lead. Khanyisile is more worried about the well-being of her two daughters compared to her son. Her son is an adult now and, according to her, a respectful young man who was able to get through his teenage stage without smoking (drugs), drinking, and having children. Khanyisile is scared of the challenges her daughters will face in society where young children, especially girls, are raped on a daily basis. She is worried about influences they are going to come across and the types of friends they will surround themselves with. These fears are made more real by the fact that she has limited control over her daughters' whereabouts seeing as she is not always at home because she has to accept whatever job comes her way to make ends meet for the family. Khanyisile says that her only hope is prayer and she relies on God to protect and guide her children:

> As a parent, you tend to worry about your daughters and fear for them. I always wonder what will happen when my daughters turn fifteen years old. What is going to happen to them? What is going to frustrate them and the types of people they are going to meet? At that age their bodies will be developing and I can't help but worry about the people that they are going to come across. I ask God to protect them when they walk on the streets, especially when they are walking alone because you will never know what can happen. What if they are kidnapped? These things are very scary when you have daughters, but when you have sons, one tends to be more relaxed. I did not have the same concerns with my son because he was a very respectful child. He used to get scared when I was praying. He doesn't even know how he managed to escape and not use drugs in his teenage years.

Conclusion

Far-reaching, entrenched, and pervasive socio-political and economic factors left visible scars on the Black African family in post-apartheid South Africa. The African family was strained and weakened by the race-based disruptions and concomitant inequalities that saw a gradual and far-reaching undermining of African family life. The systematic weakening of the African family made them vulnerable and exposed them to a variety of problems and a manifestation of social ills such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of proper education. Although the African family has become unstable and struggles to fulfill its critical roles and functions related to nurturing, care, and protection towards its members, all is not gloom and doom. Community members tend to strive for self-preservation in these precarious contexts and are lending a helping hand often extending beyond those that they have close relationships with and that they consider to be part of their immediate families.

Family is still one of the most important social institutions (especially for the poor and vulnerable sectors of the population). It is known to provide support and care to its members. For this reason, participants regard individuals who provide them with material, emotional, and spiritual support as part of their families. Family members form a support structure that is available during good and bad times. Thus, family is important to the research participants because it also creates a space that allows them to have a sense of belonging and a place where they can turn to when faced with challenges and difficulties during their everyday struggles. Family serves as a site of some stability for the participants as it provides a major means of survival. But, simultaneously, family is a potential site of conflict and tension, especially when members are unable to contribute to the household operations or are unable to reciprocate previous acts of generosity.

Amidst all the hardship and suffering that the research participants experience, it is touching that they can still talk about happiness. It testifies to resilience—an ability to withstand the trauma and destruction of poverty. Their abilities to deal with difficult conditions are admirable.

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The *Sangoma* or the Healthcare Center? Health-Seeking Practices of Women Living in the Mangaung Township (Bloemfontein, South Africa)

Abstract   Traditional and Western medicine are both commonplace in South Africa, and are often consulted in conjunction with each other. The article aims to fill critical knowledge gaps in understanding how women as caregivers decide on medication when experiencing illness in the home. In order to achieve valid and rich in-depth understanding about the types of medicine that individuals opt for, a narrative study was conducted. The research participants are women from Bloemfontein's townships. Analysis of the participants' narratives suggests that there are social-economic, traditional, and cultural trajectories associated with negotiating medical treatment. The findings indicate that the context in which individuals give meaning to, diagnose, and treat illness influences their remedial choices. Accordingly, many individuals constantly shift between different types of remedies, as they believe that they yield different, but unique possibilities and solutions.

Keywords   Health-Seeking Practices; Illness, South Africa; Caregiver; Western Medicine; Traditional Medicine

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People in post-apartheid South Africa still experience enduring disparities, one of which is Black African people's health. Of the country's total population of almost 55 million, just over 44 million (or 80.5%) identify as Black Africans (Statistics South Africa 2015). The rest of the population is made up of 4.8 million Coloreds (8.8%), 1.3 million Indians/Asians (2.5%), and 4.5 million Whites (8.3%). The life expectancy of South Africans at birth is estimated at 59.2 years for males and 63.1 years for females (Statistics South Africa 2015:2). The health status of Black African South Africans is generally much lower than other population groups and therefore one can assume that the life expectancy of Black African South Africans will be lower than their Colored, Indian, or White counterparts. There are many reasons for lower life expectancy for Black Africans, including unemployment and poverty, but one that has raised attention in the health sector is the HIV prevalence rate. In particular, HIV/AIDS is prevalent among the Black African population. The estimated HIV prevalence of the total South African population is 10.2% (Statistics South Africa 2015), but the HIV prevalence among Black African adults of 15-49 years old is 22.7% as against the 0.6% of their White counterparts (Shisana et al. 2014).

Attending swiftly and competently to the onset of an illness and deciding on a treatment modality is vital and impacts on the health outcome. However, medical help can be delayed when the nature of an illness is associated with stigma such as in the case of HIV/AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases (Besana, Cole, and LaRoque 2011). The home is a space where health decisions are mostly made (Williams

2002:149) and initial health-seeking practices very often take place within the family. The household then becomes a curative space of care where meanings of illness and medications are shaped (Kamutingondo et al. 2011) and where decisions on treatment are negotiated. Several treatment options are available in present-day South Africa in response to different illnesses. These treatment options include seeking help by means of Western medicine, consulting traditional healers, employing complementary medicine, using home remedies, and even reverting to prayers. There is also the option of not treating and/or allowing the illness run its course. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 80% of people in Africa use traditional medicine as their primary treatment modality (Chinsamy 2012), and we can therefore assume that a large proportion of South Africans are doing likewise. Biomedical and indigenous medicines offer different healing properties and individuals are therefore compelled to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each method (Hardy 2008).

In Black African families in South Africa, women are often the primary and informal caregivers. Thus, they play vital roles in selecting a treatment modality when a family member is unwell. In this article, which is based on research undertaken in the Mangaung Township, Bloemfontein,[1] South Africa, we discuss everyday health-seeking practices of African women who are their family's primary caregivers and who have to decide on a preferred

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[1] Bloemfontein is the capital city of the Free State Province (South Africa); is one of South Africa's three national capitals and is known as the judicial capital of the country. The city is also known as Mangaung, the Sesotho name meaning "Place of Cheetahs."

Naomi Yvonne Mbelekani, Amanda M. Young-Hauser & Jan K. Coetzee

The *Sangoma* or the Healthcare Center? Health-Seeking Practices of Women Living in the Mangaung Township (Bloemfontein, South Africa)

treatment. These decisions rest upon cultural understandings, the conceptualization of health and illness, the availability of treatment modalities, and the family's financial situation. Social and cultural backgrounds influence how people negotiate medical treatment (Barnard and Turner 2011). To understand health, illness, and treatment, cultural aspects such as what constitutes illness, health, and well-being, as well as associated healing practices, must be considered (Freund and McGuire 1995). Culture is nothing natural or innate, but rather a social construct into which individuals are being socialized (Hagemeier 2011).

What constitutes health is contested and there is no single definition of it (Senior and Viveash 1998:5). The World Health Organization (1998:9) suggested that health should be seen as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being; and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." This is a useful starting point because it suggests a holistic approach and considers physical and mental aspects of well-being. The social aspect, including economic, historic, and political facets, is pertinent because poor economic and harmful social conditions affect people's well-being (Eyles and Woods 1983); also, the cost of comprehensive healthcare often puts quality medical attention beyond the reach of the average poor person.

While South Africa's primary healthcare system aims to provide healthcare for everyone (Lugte, Friedman, and Mbatha 2008), Black African people in the Free State Province, where this research was conducted, experience some of the lowest levels of life expectancy in South Africa (Statistics South Af-

rica 2015). The Mangaung Municipality in particular experiences a shortage of clinics and faces other challenges such as low levels of security, the need to upgrade existing clinics, and the lack of infrastructure maintenance (Tamasane 2013). Thus, the safety and well-being of the Municipality's citizens depending on healthcare at these clinics are often compromised.

The Different Healing Modalities Found in South Africa

The Health Professionals Council of South Africa (HPCSA) assists in developing medical policies and is regarded as the key medical regulatory body in South Africa (de Vries et al. 2009). The HPCSA aims to ensure "quality healthcare standards for all, by enhancing the quality and developing strategic policy frameworks for the effective co-ordination and guidance" (de Vries et al. 2009:121). Medical pluralism is "the co-existence and availability of different ways of perceiving, explaining and treating illness" (Hagemeier 2011:159), with the home often being the place for deciding on and making available medication. The household then becomes a therapeutic space of care where meanings of illness and medications are shaped (Kamutingondo et al. 2011).

The South African healthcare system is a dual medical system comprising of private and public providers. Most Black African citizens of the Free State Province cannot afford private medical care and are therefore obliged to use public health facilities. The Free State provincial biomedical health and well-being infrastructure is distributed

through four health complexes: the Southern Free State Health Complex (SFSHC); the Northern Free State Health Complex (NFSHC); the Eastern Free State Health Complex (EFSHC); and the Academic Health Complex (AHC) (Mohai 2013). These facilities cater for the largest part of the estimated 2.8 million of the Free State's inhabitants, which constitutes a 5.2 percentage share of the country's population (Statistics South Africa 2015). Within these health complexes there are 32 regional and district hospitals, with 155 mobile clinics and 352 clinics (Mohai 2013). Although statistics are unreliable, there are estimated to be around 200 000 traditional healers in South Africa, with a possibility of a traditional healer being in or near the neighborhood of every Black South African (Hassim, Heywood, and Berger 2007; Dickinson 2008; King 2012). The Traditional Health Practitioners Council provides oversight on traditional healers as explained and recognized in the Traditional Health Practitioner's Act (No. 22 of 2007) (King 2012). The national government and the healthcare system therefore acknowledge and support the use of traditional medication. It is not recognized as alternative/non-conventional, but rather as a form of medicine in the healthcare system (King 2012; World Health Organization 2012). It is true to say that traditional health practitioners and users are placed within an "African cosmology" that renders different lifeworld views on medicine to those associated with "scientific inquiry" (Dickinson 2008).

Biomedicine

Biomedicine (often also referred to as Western medicine) refers to "the predominant medical theory

and practice of Euro-American societies, a medicine widely disseminated throughout the world" (Hahn and Kleinman 1983:305). A biomedical approach focuses on the individual and on individual well-being. The starting point for the practitioner and patient is that "something is wrong with the body," and for the professional to treat this wrong thing within the body there has to be a diagnosis—"a cause identified and the body thus fixed" (Hagemeier 2011:145). In this "mind-body dualism," the individual's body and mind are seen as separate from each other and sickness is attributed to the individual rather than to the social or environmental context (Hagemeier 2011). In the biomedical model of health, sickness is treated with medication (Hahn and Kleinman 1983), practitioners are often unfamiliar with patients' backgrounds, and they may lack empathy and humanity while operating state-of-the-art technology (Charon 2001). Patients are treated homogeneously despite diverse cultural backgrounds and different understandings of the illness and healing modalities (Engel 1977). Biomedicine has a culturally specific illness perspective (Engel 1977) rooted in Western and scientific ways of understanding illness (Mokaila 2001). Taking a patient's medical history is thought of as "medicalized tasks directed not at the patient's life world, but at diagnostic evidence" (Hahn and Kleinman 1983:316).

Traditional Healing Methods

African people often draw on indigenous healing modalities. There are many reasons why traditional remedies are favored over Western medication. An indigenous healer often explains the physical or mental illness in cultural terms, which is more

Naomi Yvonne Mbelekani, Amanda M. Young-Hauser & Jan K. Coetzee

The *Sangoma* or the Healthcare Center? Health-Seeking Practices of Women Living in the Mangaung Township (Bloemfontein, South Africa)

readily accepted or understood than a biomedical explanation (Atindanbila and Thompson 2011). Traditional healing practices are often rooted in wider folk belief systems and they continue to be an important part of many African people's lives (World Health Organization 2002). A further reason for favoring traditional healing is the affordability of traditional medicine.

Indigenous healers provide medical treatment that is not only affordable, but also accessible and available to everyone for any type of illness or problem (Pretorius 1999). A traditional belief system often identifies the causes of an illness as the power of evil spirits, being enchanted by an enemy, or as the result of the anger of certain beings (Hirst 2005).

Complementary/Alternative/Non-Conventional Methods of Healing

The terms "alternative," "non-conventional," "complementary," and "parallel" methods "refer to a broad set of health care practices that are not part of a country's own tradition, or not integrated into its dominant health care system" (World Health Organization 2002:7). Self-medication, a common practice in developing countries (Shankar, Partha, and Shenoy 2002), can be defined as "obtaining and consuming drugs without the advice of a physician either for diagnosis, prescription or surveillance of treatment" (Shankar, Partha, and Shenoy 2002:4). Complementary alternative medicine includes the following healing practices: Ayurveda; naturopathy; osteopathy; therapeutic aromatherapy; homeopathy; phytotherapy or herbalism; chiropractic; therapeutic reflexology; therapeutic massage thera-

py; and Chinese medicine and acupuncture (Hassim, Heywood, and Berger 2007). Influenced by traditional beliefs and low socio-economic status, the use of alternative self-medication is often prevalent in developing countries (World Health Organization 2002).

Some Factors That Influence Medical Decision-Making Processes

It is important to examine and understand health-seeking practices in South Africa and to study factors that influence treatment choices because these impact on the health outcome. Golooba-Mutebi and Tollman (2007) suggest different approaches among poor indigenous people with regard to ill health depending on worldviews and circumstances: a wait and see approach, visiting a traditional healer, a visit to a clinic or hospital, self-medication, or any combination of these. There are many factors that influence decision-making processes, including advice from social networks, cultural norms, socio-economic status, or available treatment modalities (Weiss and Lonnquist 1997). A further important aspect includes the relationship between the caregiver and the sick person.

Individuals seek healthcare in order to maintain or restore health and well-being (Jetten, Haslam, and Haslam 2012), and medical treatment is sought if the illness is perceived as being serious. When assessing an illness, individuals normally categorize the possible medical treatment options available to them by considering three conditional treatment features. The first feature of consideration is whether the medical treatment has any potential consequences

which include harmful side effects. The second feature is whether the diagnosis of the illness indicates a perceived severity (whether the condition has serious consequences). The third feature is whether there is a reasonable prognosis for recovery (Caspi, Koithan, and Criddle 2004). The consideration of treatment options might not always take place in a conscious and premeditated manner.

Prior experience with a medical condition and its treatment often helps a caregiver to choose between different modalities. In most cases, individuals "consider intervention based on convincing repetitive suggestions and personal testimonials" from social network groups (Caspi, Koithan, and Criddle 2004:71). This means that the social network group influences the decision-making process. Most of the time there are assumed power roles in health decision-making and these power roles are occupied by specific people (Besana, Cole, and LaRoque 2011), such as the mother in a household, the giver of care, and the care recipient, often a child.

Factors promoting health-seeking practices have collective, dynamic, and interactive elements that are also influenced by historic and socio-economic elements. In this article, we discuss factors that influence Black African women to select one health approach over another. The study draws in particular on the families' experience of health and well-being over the last five years.

Methodological Notes

Ethical approval for the research was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of the Free

State's Humanities Faculty. The study was conducted in a resource poor area of Batho in the Mangaung Municipality and data were collected from the communities in the sections known as Lusaka and Maphikela. To qualify for inclusion in this study, a research participant had to be a Black African woman and the primary caregiver of at least one child (being a biological, foster, or adopted child) and to make health-related decisions. Twelve women were recruited with the assistance of a non-governmental organization (NGO) working with women in these particular areas. Semi-structured in-depth interviews, specifically on health-seeking practices, were conducted with six of these women in Sesotho, the participants' native language. The other six women, who participated in an extended project on family life in resource poor areas in Bloemfontein, also offered narratives on aspects of health-seeking. Aspects of these narratives are included in this article. The interviews were transcribed in Sesotho and then translated into English in consultation with other Sesotho speakers in order to obtain the most appropriate English translation.

The study is situated within a qualitative paradigm and applies an interpretive theoretical framework in order to make sense of participants' experiences of reality and their everyday lifeworld (Kelly 2006; Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge 2007; Creswell 2013). Guided by an interpretive sociological framework, we aim to understand rather than to explain individual experiences and realities. We also aim to understand the complexity, points of commonality and differences between the accounts of the research participants. We employ concepts from

Naomi Yvonne Mbelekani, Amanda M. Young-Hauser & Jan K. Coetzee

The *Sangoma* or the Healthcare Center? Health-Seeking Practices of Women Living in the Mangaung Township (Bloemfontein, South Africa)

phenomenological thinking, existential phenomenology, and feminist theories to broaden and deepen our understanding of the everyday lifeworld by looking at questions that explore the research participants' experiences and views within real-life contexts (Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge 2007:4). We emphasize the narrative interpretation of experiences and reality, in which there is a "sequential unfolding of someone's story" (Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge 2007:14).

The interpretive sociological framework in terms of which this research has been conducted is strongly embedded in social constructionism. In this respect, the article aims at illustrating that the meaning and experience of illness are to a large extent shaped by the social and cultural contexts within which the research participants find themselves. For this rea-son, the article focuses on the illness experience, the cultural meaning of illness, the way in which the illness experience is socially constructed, as well as the way in which medical knowledge, decisions, and practices are socially constructed. Reality is created by individuals who act within their particular environment and who also act upon environment and circumstances. The research participants in this research therefore enact their practices and decisions regarding illness and they fill these practices and decisions with meaning.

A brief description of the 12 women from the resource poor area of Batho's Lusaka and Maphikela communities in Bloemfontein, who participated in this research, is shown in Table 1. They are the women who decide on and negotiate a cure for an ailment in their households.

Table 1. Participant information.

PSEUDONYM	YEAR BORN	NO. OF PEOPLE IN THE HOUSEHOLD	NUMBER OF CHILDREN (LIVING AND DECEASED) UNDER HER CARE
Dineo	1953	13	11 (including 3 grandchildren and 5 foster children)
Lerato	1942	5	3 (grandchildren), (5 children deceased)
Dimpho	1964	3	2 (including 1 grandchild)
Mampho	1949	3	4 (grandchildren), (1 child deceased)
Karabo	1951	6	7 (including grandchildren), (1 child deceased)
Teboho	1933	4	6 (grandchildren), (7 children deceased)
Nomasonto	1972	8	6 (including 2 grandchildren)
Phaphama	1999	8	6 (including 4 brothers and 1 nephew)
Khomotso	1963	10 and 2 tenants	8 (including 4 foster children, 1 adopted niece, and 1 grandchild)
Khetiwe	1969	13	9 (including 5 foster children)
Lebohang	1998	13	1
Ledisi	n/a	n/a	5 (including 1 grandchild)

Source: Self-elaboration.

The Illness Experience

In order to discuss remedies, we first examine what research participants consider as illness. The illness narratives are embedded in the context of the family because being a member of a family is often considered essential for survival. In all cases, family members contribute to the research participants' sense of physical and emotional well-being. The research participants define family in terms of love, trustworthiness, respect, helpfulness, and honor, and families form a support structure in their lives. All research participants experience financial hardship and often illnesses. Other dire conditions within which all the research participants find themselves are unemployment, being the primary carer of the family, the geographical location within which they live, and social and economic factors related to their lifeworlds.

We now discuss the research participants' experiences and the meanings they attach to illness, health, and well-being in order to understand how their perspectives on illness are related to their upbringing, culture, history, and the world of indigenous beliefs *vis-à-vis* the world of Western beliefs. These "two worlds" of indigenous and Western beliefs are not necessarily separate, but rather represent unique worldviews that fuse but also clash at times, and in the analysis of the narratives we indicate how the research participants draw on either world for different, temporally, and contextually influenced reasons. To understand the illness experience, we need to understand the meaning of what constitutes an illness, and to define illness in terms of what we understand it to be. Based on their realities and experiences, the participants construct their subjective definitions of illness and afford meaning to an illness and its symptoms. Most participants express feelings of fear, panic, and anxiety at the onset of an illness. They dread the illness because of its uncertainty and possible consequences. For our research participants, an illness in the family usually means disruptions to daily routines, further financial hardship, suffering, and even the possibility of death. Because funerals are important traditional cultural events, the participants will, in the event of death, be obliged to provide an appropriate funeral that will add further financial burdens to the family.

From the participants' narratives, it is clear that their meaning of illness deviates from conventional understandings. Most of them believe that illness is when a person cannot move freely. Participants also define illness as something alien or foreign to them. If the illness is perceived to be minor, then the participants call it *mokgotlani*. These minor illnesses (*mokgotlani*) allow for bodily movements to take place and for the appetite to be only partially and temporarily affected (e.g., when one suffers from a headache or stomachache).

> You would hear them say: "No, they have only a mild illness [*mokgotlani*]…They are small things, like my foot pains me here." But, you can still work, like the body is in pain, but you can still do things. This is only called a mild illness. When you are ill, it's when you can't move. That is illness. [Teboho][2]

Naomi Yvonne Mbelekani, Amanda M. Young-Hauser & Jan K. Coetzee

The *Sangoma* or the Healthcare Center? Health-Seeking Practices of Women Living in the Mangaung Township (Bloemfontein, South Africa)

From the stories shared by the research participants, it is clear that they have their own subjective definition of illness, health, and well-being, which is influenced by their social reality. The research participants identify lack of appetite, tiredness, weakness, vomiting, and sweating as the main symptoms of feeling unwell.

> You can see sometimes when someone has no appetite for anything. Sometimes they would say: "It hurts here." Sometimes: "I'm running out of energy, I feel this way." Another might say: "When I eat something, I vomit. Maybe it doesn't go well with my system." So you need to clean your intestines. Things like those would help me tell that this person is ill. I have to take them to the doctor, or try to figure out what could heal them. [Lerato]

While the illness experiences might be unique, the participants define illness in similar terms, namely, as a loss of bodily functioning with the person being unable to perform ordinary tasks or partake in daily life activities. According to the research participants, a person is considered ill mostly when her/his ability to take care of her/himself is compromised:

> Like being ill? I don't know what I would say it is… When we say this person is ill, it's when they can't stand up and they can't feed themselves. That's when you should know that person is ill. They have an illness…they don't know how to feed themselves. They can't do anything. The person is ill. [Teboho]

To diagnose an illness, participants observe and listen, compare and evaluate a person's physical appearance and alertness. For most of the participants, illness should not be immediately associated with death, but should be regarded as a mere experience that will probably pass with time. Many participants do, however, refer to it as the correlation between illness and death. This can be ascribed to the high prevalence in their community of serious illnesses related to HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS has a high prevalence in South Africa. It is therefore not surprising that all participants allude to or discuss HIV/AIDS in the context of their families and all participants mention at least one family member who passed away due to complications of AIDS. AIDS remains very stigmatized and is often circumscribed rather than named. Not naming the disease by its name indicates the level of stigma still associated with HIV/AIDS. In some households, it might be acceptable to talk about a family member who is HIV positive, but most families are too embarrassed to discuss it. In the narratives, HIV/AIDS is often simply referred to as being "sick." Lerato says:

> It's her, but I don't say much about this thing she has [HIV/AIDS].

And Khetiwe suggests:

> I didn't want help from other people, you know, because the children were…because they were positive [HIV positive]. People dislike people who are like that.

Cancer is another serious and prevalent illness, which, together with HIV/AIDS, evokes many emotional responses and reactions. The participants' stories of the various serious illnesses are always accompanied with sadness—either expressed in their voices or through crying. It is clear that serious illness takes an emotional toll on the research participants' lives.

> It was cancer, she passed away at National Hospital, where these doctors were checking her. She was admitted there, they even transferred her from National. When I went there, they said her cancer is very huge, there is nothing they can do, they can't even burn it [administer chemotherapy]. When I came back, that was her passing. [Karabo]

> It's my mother, she was old and then she had cancer, yes [lowering her voice and facing down to the floor]. She was staying back home, but I went to get her to stay here with me. It was on and off like that, but she was going to the doctor until she was admitted and slept in the hospital. She passed away in the hospital. [Mampho]

In the case of Mampho, both her mother and grandmother died from stomach cancer. Karabo's older sister was also a victim of cancer. In both cases, Western doctors diagnosed and treated the cancer.

The research participants believe that illness can be caused by the environment, lack of sanitation, poor living conditions, unemployment, and an unbalanced diet. Illness might also be a consequence of emotions, spiritual intervention, and witchcraft.

> Another reason is because of things that are caused intentionally by people. It is things that are made intentionally, and these people are envious/jealous. Sometimes these people want to see what you are going to do and it is things like that. But, I still think, maybe it is God's purpose. [Lerato]

How to Deal with Illness?

All the research participants claim to be familiar with the different types of remedies, namely, Western medication, traditional healing, as well as complementary and self-healing practices. Most research participants relate taking similar initial steps to decide on an action. They explain that their medical decision-making processes depend on prior knowledge of a specific illness experience and that they normally replicate what worked for them in the past or what worked for others. The cost of treatment, availability of treatment, type of illness, social networks, testimonials from others, and prior experience with the treatment help the research participants to negotiate medical treatment. "If they are sick," Ledisi relates, "we call an ambulance to take them to hospital." This action is usually taken when the illness is perceived as serious or when seeking medical treatment has been delayed to the point where the patient has fallen gravely ill. Transport is often not readily available, thus calling an ambulance remains an option for poor people who will not be required to pay for this service. The flipside of this is that the demand for public ambulance facilities is so big that calls for ambulance services are often left unheeded for several days. It is quite common that referrals from one biomedical institution to another take place when an individual looks for help within the institutionalized Western medical

Naomi Yvonne Mbelekani, Amanda M. Young-Hauser & Jan K. Coetzee

The *Sangoma* or the Healthcare Center? Health-Seeking Practices of Women Living in the Mangaung Township (Bloemfontein, South Africa)

services of clinics and hospitals. Khetiwe recalls her experience:

> The clinic gave me a referral letter to go to the hospital. The hospital didn't admit them, they just gave them medication. If someone is sick in this house, I take them to the hospital. I start at the clinic, and if they don't help them, then I go to the hospital. I go to National or Pelonomi Hospital, I hire a car, I don't take an ambulance.

The next excerpt summarizes the process that many of the research participants follow when deciding on medical treatment.

> I first look at what is bothering them [meaning symptoms], and find out whether the illness is serious. When I have something in the house, I would first try and mix it around and give to the child. Sometimes we buy Disprin. Even though sometimes you give them Disprin, you can see when the child needs a doctor. So I would then try and see where to go. Traditional healers don't fail. But, if a traditional healer can't treat the illness, that's when I see I need to go to a Western doctor. When it fails, then I go and see a traditional healer. It's not every time that a traditional healer may fail on healing, but you will change them so often [try several different healers]. You would hear another person saying: "I was helped by this other traditional healer." And then I would take them to that traditional healer. There is always a traditional healer who will be able to heal that illness. [Lerato]

In the quotation above, Lerato discusses a familiar sequence in the decision-making process: an initial

assessment of the symptoms, dispensing medication at home, consulting a traditional healer, and, finally, going to Western doctors if the illness persists. Using Disprin is akin to acting in trial and error. If Disprin and home remedies fail to ease the illness, the research participant moves to a professional. Sometimes she needs to see a doctor, in which case she then makes a decision as to where to go (to a Western practitioner or a traditional healer). In the case of Lerato, she first seeks help from a traditional healer, and this selection of the traditional healer is influenced by other people's opinion, namely, those from her social network groups. Lerato's belief in the power of indigenous medicine is profound:

> There is always a traditional healer who will be able to heal that illness. [Lerato]

This is also expressed in her determination to move from one healer to another to find help.

The Cultural Meaning of Illness

Another reason for seeking help from traditional healers rather than biomedical practitioners is related to the cause of the illness. If the illness is believed to be the result of supernatural intervention, then individuals are more likely to seek a traditional healer's help than that of a biomedical practitioner.

> With my previous husband who passed away, the first thing he used to do is go to a traditional healer. Yes, I remember during those times when we were still at his family home in the 1990s. We used to go to this other women, who told him that he has *sejeso*

[food poisoning: witchcraft] and that he has pimples in his stomach. She told him he has *sejeso* and it's been there for a long time, even before me and him met. [Dineo]

Some people only prefer traditional medication when they feel that the illness is not too serious, but for severe illnesses they prefer a biomedical practitioner. In most cases, if the illness is experienced as being normal and even minor, then the caregiver prepares the remedy for the illness.

> I go to the Batho chemist if I want those. They have traditional remedies available. I just go there and say I want this type of medication. I don't even know what it is, but I go looking for it. They give it to me, and tell me how to prepare it. You see, Bongani, he had a colic problem when he was still an infant. I told his mother to dab a little medication on top of his head, his palms, under his armpits, and just below his legs, before you take him anywhere with you. [Khomotso]

In most cases, the illness definition plays a big part in negotiating medical treatment. Traditional medication is often used to prevent bad spirits and to suppress supernatural causes of illness. Some research participants prefer mixing both traditional and biomedical treatments to heal illness. If an illness is considered to be normal and minor, then the research participants often revert to self-healing.

> If they have stomach ache, as the mother, I am old now, so I will go to the chemist or mix vinegar, bicarbonate of soda, and sugar and give it to them to drink. [Ledisi]

I go to the hospital, when a child is really sick and I see he really needs a hospital. I go to a traditional healer, when a child is not sick. I do this so that when a child is walking outside, he's not attacked by bad spirits. But, if he is really sick, then I take him to the hospital. But, I don't like going to Pelonomi [Hospital] or the clinic. I usually go to a private doctor in town. [Khomotso]

> Another thing is what type of illness is it. What was I crying about? Looking for the right medication for that illness and which corresponds with my beliefs. [Lerato]

As we can see from Lerato's remark, belief systems and past experiences, which reflect culture and tradition, often guide the treatment choice. Nomasonto explains in the following quotation how she comes from a household where the cause of an illness was always assigned to the supernatural (witchcraft).

> My culture and medicine [laugh]…I grew up in a house of…if you are sick. My father is going to think: It's like Siphesihle crying at night: *Bamthakathile*! [Bewitched] *Abathakathi*! [Witches], you know [laughing]. But, I'm just ignoring it. I will just say: "Maybe it's something wrong. It's something. It's just a child, he cannot say where is the pain." My culture is witchcraft [laughing]. [Nomasonto]

Culture plays a prominent role in the research participants' treatment decisions. *Lengana* (Sagewood, see: http://www.bioafrica.co.za/oils/artemisia.htm) is known by African people as a cultural and traditional herbal plant that is used to treat many

Naomi Yvonne Mbelekani, Amanda M. Young-Hauser & Jan K. Coetzee

The *Sangoma* or the Healthcare Center? Health-Seeking Practices of Women Living in the Mangaung
Township (Bloemfontein, South Africa)

illnesses. Drinking a liquid mixed with this plant is believed to have healing properties. Most of the research participants plant *lengana* in their backyards or collect it in the forest.

> As I am a Sesotho parent. Any of my children, whatever illness they have, I take *lengana* and mix it with something and they will be healed. There are those that I can see that they are very serious. They need a doctor. [Dineo]

Medical Knowledge, Decisions, and Practices

To negotiate illness in a household that is already seriously constrained by poverty and deprivation adds a substantial burden on caregivers. From the narratives, it is clear that several research participants are driven by sheer desperation when having to deal with illness in the household. In many cases, a hit-or-miss strategy is inevitable.

> I first look at the child. I look at the illness. It's so that when I have looked at the child, I have identified what is wrong with her. What is the illness and what would treat it. That is when I take a step. [Dineo]

> It's like sometimes, when a child says he has a headache, I will just go to the shops and buy a Panado [pain relief], or Disprin [pain relief]. When they have flu, buy a flu medication. During those days, I would take Bostol [pain relief] and honey and mix them. It's flu medication. [Teboho]

Decisions are based on the interpretation of the illness, as well as on the meaning that the caregiver constructs about what the symptoms of the illness represent. For some caregivers, the presence of blood is indicative of serious illness, and without blood an illness is often regarded as minor, and treatable by the touch of a traditional healer.

> You see, right now the person...I take a person to the doctor who has been stabbed or when there is blood. And you don't know where the blood is coming from, right. So you have to take them to the doctor. Because these days blood is diseases, so you can be able to protect yourself. But, Itumeleng was just sick. But her, I took her to a traditional healer. I saw that she was…she had that devil's worshipper spirit. And that man prayed for her, and said I should get holy water and oil and make her drink it. So when we pray in this house, we pray every day, and now she is fine. [Khetiwe]

Khetiwe alludes here to another aspect of the health spectrum: violence and accidents. In terms of her criteria, the presence of blood means and represents the need for biomedical intervention. Something is wrong with the body. She also speaks of the need for extra care and protection when blood is involved because, "these days blood is diseases": this is a clear reference to HIV. After a caregiver has constructed the illness meaning, the next step is often to consult her social networks or therapy reference networks known as *dirati*, which are family, friends, church, neighbors, or community members. This is illustrated by Dineo and Teboho:

> Yes! I do. The lady next door and my daughter are the people I usually exchange advices with. "Have you ever given her this?" "Have you done this to her?" "Take this and give to her." [Dineo]

> Yes! When my child is ill, I would go next door and the person would tell me to give them this. It will help them. [Teboho]

The advice that research participants might receive from their network groups is based on personal testimonials, knowledge, and understanding. The input from these social networks impacts on the health-seeking practices and decision-making processes of an individual as the members of the social networks might combine their individual experiences of illness and remedies and advise on treatment. The importance of social networks is illustrated in the following:

> Well, the first person I call is my mom. Like she will know what to do. She will tell me to do this and to do that. [Lebohang]

> Yo! I get very scared when someone is sick in the house. If they cry, I cry with them. Then I think: Let me call my neighbor. I ask my neighbors to come and help me because someone is sick. Then they come. Zuki is the person I usually call and she helps me. She comes with medication or whatever she thinks will work. Then she will give it to the child. [Khomotso]

> I panic. But, luckily enough, my mother is here. That's why I'm saying we are starting to bond. That anger, I think it is decreasing. I see her importance because I didn't see it before as I focused on my grandmother. I rely on her that much. So I do feel like: Wow, we are starting to bond! [Phaphama]

Like when I take them [children] to doctors, but they don't get well. I go to *dirati* [therapy reference groups]. People would come and tell you that this person once had this very illness. So, go buy such a thing. [Mampho]

Experiencing a feeling of helplessness and desperation in the face of a loved one being ill opens a caregiver to asking for help, advice, and support. By sharing the anxiety and powerlessness when confronted by the suffering of someone in one's inner circle, a mother manages to pull through. Survival of an illness is not only the effect of medical care—often also the result of support.

The research participants consider the advice given by their network group when deciding on the treatment, indicating the essential role of these networks. In some cases, as illustrated by Dineo, participants attempt to cure an illness first by drawing on their own knowledge and remedies:

> Yes! Certainly…But, the illness is the first thing I look at, before I ask for help. I look first at the illness and then I treat her/him with my own stuff…But, when I see it is persisting, I then ask for advice from them. [Dineo]

For some research participants, their choice of treatment is based on what they know and what they have seen as working for others and for themselves. The research participants' previous experiences also influence the decision-making process. The following quotations point to some of the factors they take into account when deciding on medical treatment:

Naomi Yvonne Mbelekani, Amanda M. Young-Hauser & Jan K. Coetzee

The *Sangoma* or the Healthcare Center? Health-Seeking Practices of Women Living in the Mangaung Township (Bloemfontein, South Africa)

You know, with me, when someone teaches me on which one [medication] works for which illness, that is how I decide.

When I was growing up, someone back home, or me, was ill. And I would be healed accordingly…I was healed by this type of medication. [Lerato]

Participants often experiment with medication in a process of trial and error. For example, if the *lengana* mixture does not help, the next remedy is tried.

I would go see a doctor, even though my spirit doesn't allow it…and my going to see a doctor is when traditional healers have failed. [Teboho]

If an illness persists, some individuals who use traditional medication might switch to biomedical treatment, and those who use biomedical treatment might revert to traditional healing practices or remedies. The following quotations illustrate some of the research participants' treatment approaches:

It's to know that this type of medication helps with that. So I am not a person who usually changes medication. I drink the medication that is given to me by a doctor that I know. That when I use their medication, I will see results. [Dimpho]

I first start by healing myself, and if I see that the illness still persists, I then go see a *sangoma*, and say: "Can you please help me here. I have this kind of problem. I have tried, but I can't treat it." When the *sangoma*…because traditional healers know the way traditional healers know. Because these medications

do not work the same. The traditional healer will give me the way the traditional healer gives me. And when the traditional healer has given me, I will try using them like that and see whether they can heal me and get well. If I don't get well, the traditional healer does not know how to heal. Maybe I should go see a doctor [Western doctor]. [Teboho]

I choose medication that I see and know [through her upbringing]. [Lerato]

It's because you believe it will help you. Right now, if my child had flu and I had *krustunent* [a plant known to the African women, and it is used as a form of herbal medicine], and if I believe it will help my child, then the child will be healed. I used to heal my children with it. [Teboho]

You know what makes you decide? You know…it's like it's the time there was an ill person. You once saw what cured Happy [her grandchild]. So it comes back in your head, that thought comes back. You are going to buy that to help this person, yes…Someone once had this illness, and they drank such a thing. So let me go to find it for them because that other person: when they were ill, things were like this and that. So it helps. [Mampho]

The research participants' lived experiences, amidst different healthcare options, explain the fact that they encounter various barriers when negotiating medical treatment. Some of these barriers include: socio-economic status, the location where they live, their limited finances, their knowledge of health, and their cultural beliefs. On the practical level, the participants express a need to self-

treat because of the fact that medical care is often unattainable. The most prominent problems that research participants experience are therefore related to affordability, availability, accessibility, service, time, as well as the perceived quality of medical treatment.

Conclusion

Reality is experienced as being subjective, contextual, and temporal. The experience of illness is also subjective, contextual, and temporal. In addition, it also has an emotional impact leading to caregiver burden because of the uncertainty of the direction that the illness will take, the unpredictability of the implications of the illness, and the financial strain usually associated with sickness. Most research participants' narratives contain feelings of panic, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty related to the onset of an illness. This is a manifestation of the consequences that illness brings: cost of treatment, loss of income, and fear of harm and death. Findings from this study indicate that family, friends, social networks, and strong cultural beliefs influence women's explanations of and attitudes towards illness. Illness is constructed through particular lenses and, with the odd exception, few of

the participants' accounts reflect on accidents, violence, and physical injuries as part of their illness narratives.

Illness experiences and the accompanying anxiety and stress often bring cohesion and solidarity. One of the key findings of this study is that most participants move between Western and traditional healing practices. All research participants experience deprivation and financial hardship. They have to deal with poverty in the household and they also face poor health facilities. Accounts of poverty and hardship are mixed as the narratives deal with illness, their lived suffering, and their struggle to survive from day to day.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the decision to engage with a particular medical remedy is influenced by a variety of socio-economic variables: the social status of women as caregivers; the type of illness; access to services; perceived quality of the service; the time of the day the illness occurs; seriousness of the illness; past experiences of illness; distrust in clinics; therapeutic/social networks (*dirati*); and their definition of illness. Women as caregivers often consult with one another in order to decide on what to do when experiencing illness.

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The *Sangoma* or the Healthcare Center? Health-Seeking Practices of Women Living in the Mangaung Township (Bloemfontein, South Africa)

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Mother-Daughter Communication on Intimate Relationships: Voices from a Township in Bloemfontein, South Africa

Abstract   Sex education and conversations about intimate relationships are generally regarded to be important and can contribute to young women's positive or negative reproductive health development and general well-being. The findings contained in this article suggest that in a resource poor South African township, mothers and their daughters struggle to initiate and conduct meaningful discussions about sex. These discussions are often framed in terms of possible negative consequences of intimate relationships, such as unplanned pregnancy, dropping out of school, or possible Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection. However, these discussions are clearly not altogether effective as several young research participants had an unplanned baby. Emotional aspects that are normally associated with intimate relationships are missing from the mother-daughter conversations.

Keywords   Communication; Intimate Relationships; Parents; Sex Education; South Africa

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Introducing the Topic

Gender-based violence and coercive sex in heterosexual relationships are widespread in South Africa. The control and coercion of a sexual partner is often accepted as a normal aspect of masculinity (Wood and Jewkes 1998; Stern, Rau, and Cooper 2014) and young women frequently are considered easy targets and fair game. Unwanted and often unprotected sexual intercourse can result in a high teenage pregnancy rate, rampant HIV infection—with one in five pregnant teenagers in South Africa infected (Shisana et al. 2014), and an increase in other sexually transmitted diseases. Studies have demonstrated the influence of the family in the development of sexual understandings and practices among adolescents and young adults (Hutchinson and Cederbaum 2010:550). Parent-child communication on sex and sexuality has been identified as an instrumental process associated with positive or negative intimate relationships (Hutchinson and Cederbaum 2010:550). Thus, understanding processes of sexual socialization is important, the aim of which is the development of healthy intimate relationships and prevention of negative consequences. In particular, the communicative interactions between mothers and their daughters help to establish and foster healthy sexual practices that can contribute to the daughters' overall physical and psychological well-being. Parents and caretakers are in a unique position to guide and educate, and to pass on responsible decision-making skills to their children; this includes decisions on intimate relationships. Passing on knowledge from one generation to the next is also imbued with the older generation's own values (Wilson and Koo 2010:2; Stone, Ingham, and Gibbins 2013:228-229). These values might, of course, not necessarily reflect or match the younger generation's values. Differences in values and expectations have the potential to create frictions, as we go on to demonstrate.

Over the recent past, general debates on sex and intimate relationships have become intrinsically linked to the dangers of being exposed to the HIV virus and safe sex practices. This is particularly relevant in South Africa, a country with the fourth highest HIV prevalence globally (CIA 2015). Sexual and reproductive health problems remain more common among women living in resource poor and historically disadvantaged communities (Lesch and Kruger 2005:1072; UNAIDS 2016). In South Africa, prevalence among young women aged 15-24 is estimated to be 14.8% (UNAIDS 2014). This high proportion is in part attributed to relationships between young females and older males known as the "sugar daddy phenomenon" (Besant 2013), or, more formally—age disparate relationships—hallmarks of which are sexual and material transactions considered beneficial to both parties. South Africa's most recent demographic survey found that 33.6% of adolescent females aged 15-19 had sexual partners who were 5 or more years older than them (Shisana et al. 2014:67-69). Moreover, 22.4% of youngsters aged 15-24 report another high-risk behavior—having multiple sexual partners (Shisana et al. 2014:67-69). A positive trend is that condom use at the last sexual intercourse was highest among 15-24 year olds, although only just over one quarter (27.4%) said they use condoms *consistently* (Shisana et al. 2014:71-81). Less encouraging is that an estimated 10% of all females report sexual debut before the age of 15 (Shisana et al. 2014:65). In addition, an estimated 33% of all women give birth before they reach the age of 18, which decreases their ability to progress in terms of education and financial independence (Lesch and Kruger 2005:1072; Makiwane and Mokomane 2010:18). Informal forms of intimate relationships that involve material exchange for sex (such as the sugar daddy phenomenon), alongside multiple and concurrent sexual partners, are of concern because these relationships can contribute to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (Stoebenau et al. 2011:5; Fehringer et al. 2013:207) and are often marred by unequal distribution of power where intimate partner violence (IPV) becomes a significant public health concern (Jewkes et al. 2011:4).

Despite the benefits of parent-adolescent conversations on intimate relationships, many parents find it difficult to discuss sex and sexuality with their children (Jaccard, Dittus, and Gordon 2000:188). Research from developed countries suggest that open discussions about sex between mothers and their daughters, family closeness and support, cordial communication patterns not related to sex, and a generally authoritative parenting style, including co-parenting and monitoring of children's activities, are often the basis of mother-daughter communication (Elliot 2010:311). However, an overview of parenting and communication practices as reflected in studies from developing countries, including South Africa, shows that good mother-daughter communication on intimate relationships is rare (Iliyasu et al. 2012:139). In sub-Saharan Africa, socio-cultural norms influence parent-child conversations about sex and sexuality (Bastien, Kajula, and Muhwezi 2011:2) and discussions on these topics are often taboo (Chikovore et al. 2013:2). Sexual socialization has historically been considered the responsibility of the extended family and not necessarily a topic of discussion between mothers and their daughters (Bastien, Kajula, and Muhwezi 2011:2). But, with changing family constellations, this responsibility has shifted to mothers and caregivers who often are ill-equipped to provide adequate sex education. This has ripple effects on the decisions young people take (Chikovore et al. 2013:2). In South Africa, Phetla and colleagues (2008:506) find that "mothers are often themselves sexually and socially disempowered and thus unable to assist their children in constructing positive and responsible sexual identities."

The traditional—mainly Western—nuclear family consisting of a breadwinner and homemaker at the helm resembles little of the African family, which historically is mostly characterized by patriarchal traditions, polygamy, social and cultural patterns of kinship, and strong emphasis on fertility and lineage (Therborn 2006:13). A traditional African family is usually extended and includes the head of the family (male), his wives, children, grandchildren, and sometimes also the head of family's siblings with their partners and offspring. Traditional life revolves around the community, which plays an important role in the care of everyone, and appropriate social behavior, obligations, and responsibilities within the family and society are clearly delineated (Siqwana-Ndulo 1998:411). Over time these traditional family constellations have been eroded, with poverty and inequality being significant outcomes of systematic racial segregation, exclusion, and sexual discrimination in the past (Statistics South Africa 2008:21). As a result, the majority of Black Africans live in poverty (Shisana et al. 2014:51). This has impacted on the life within families and households, which struggle to achieve and maintain a basic standard of living. Many face problems such as income insecurity, unemployment, inadequate and poor housing, constrained access to education, poor sexual and reproductive health, and lack of or limited access to social capital (Statistics South Africa 2012:15).

Its colonial and apartheid history, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, an ongoing migrant labor system, increased unemployment, modified gender roles, changing sexual and nuptial norms, high divorce rates, and weakened intergenerational relations are some of the significant factors shaping the contemporary South African family constellation. Key structural changes can be seen in the increase in female-headed households, an increased number of older persons obliged to take positions of parental oversight, and—on the other extreme—child-headed households (Takyi 2011:1). It is against this backdrop that the current study was undertaken in the resource poor township of Batho, in the Bloemfontein metropolitan area.

This study examines the willingness for, and the extent and content of, mothers and daughters' conversations on intimate relationships. It explores whether the mothers and daughters feel at ease during these conversations and how they understand and frame intimate relationships. It also seeks to understand how mother-daughter communication on intimate relationships potentially influences the daughters' views on sexual relationships and their decision-making processes in this regard. The quality of the mother-daughter relationship and the communication between them impacts on how the daughters approach and formulate intimate relationships over their lifespan (Miller and Hoicowitz 2004:192). Considering the vulnerability of young daughters to sexually risky behavior, the role of mother-daughter communication needs to be looked at in terms of the factors that foster and hinder effective communication, and also in terms of the quality of the information imparted by the mothers. It is against this background that the current study attempts to understand communication within the family and aims to identify how those who share their experiences with us portray and assess parental knowledge and its influence on the choices and decisions made by daughters in their sexual and intimate relationships.

An Outline of the Study

This study is situated within the context of the interpretivist paradigm, which aims to understand the *everyday lives* of individuals. Its focus is on the human experience and how people create and maintain meanings of their actions and experiences (Brinkmann 2012:18). The interpretivist paradigm takes into consideration the social, cultural, and individual dimensions and contexts that influence people's lives, and attempts to question, clarify, and understand aspects of social reality.

The mothers' own understanding, interpretations, and expectations of intimate relationships are regarded as pivotal to the content, extent, and frequency of their communication with their daughters. To do justice to the complexities and sensitivities of this study, a qualitative approach has been followed because it allows us to interact with research participants within their natural settings and to engage with participants' views and realities as captured in their own words (Flick, von Kardorff, and Steinke 2004:5). A qualitative approach allows exploring and understanding how both mothers and their daughters' belief systems, emotions, desires, and everyday realities influence their conversations on sexually related issues.

This study received ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State's Humanities Faculty (UFS – HUM – 2013 – 004) and was conducted in a resource poor area of Batho in

the Mangaung Municipality of Bloemfontein. Four Black African mothers and five daughters were recruited with the assistance of a social worker from a non-governmental organization working with women in this area. Other than having a daughter (biological, adopted, or foster) there were no other inclusion criteria for the mothers. The daughters had to be between the ages of 18-22 years, and living in the same household as their mothers. The age restriction is for two reasons: One, to avoid the need for parental consent for daughters under the age of 18; and two, it was assumed that daughters over the age of 18 had experienced more communication exposure than those younger than 18 years.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in isiZulu, isiXhosa, or English, depending on a participant's language proficiency. Individual interviews were conducted in a location selected by the participant. The mothers and their daughters were interviewed in separate conversations. To allow for honest conversation and to protect their privacy, care was taken that none of the participants could overhear the individual interviews with the researcher. Follow up phone calls or face-to-face conversations were carried out where any clarifications were needed. The first author transcribed the interviews verbatim in the language in which the interview was conducted before translating the transcripts into English. It is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate on linguistic nuances and issues of translation and its complexities other than to say that some passages have been cross-translated to check for accuracy. Words and expressions with ambiguous meanings were dis-

cussed in a team of multilingual researchers in order to find the best and most meaningful English translation.

The interviews are thematically analyzed. Following multiple readings of all transcripts, themes and subthemes within and across the transcripts—first read separately for the mothers and their daughters and then across the mothers and their daughters—emerged, which allowed us to uncover issues and interpret what is happening in relation to the phenomena under investigation; this approach offers in-depth understandings of participants' social realities and everyday experiences (Braun and Clarke 2006:80). Subsequent analytical processes involve the interpretation of identified themes, examining the differences and commonalities between themes and between the participants' responses, and linking interpretations to the literature. To protect the identity of our research participants, we have used pseudonyms throughout the article.

Sex Talk between Mothers and Their Daughters

As in any relationship, mothers and their daughters converse frequently about inconsequential, mundane topics, but as indicated in the literature (Miller and Hoicowitz 2004; Phetla et al. 2008; Bastien, Kajula, and Muhwezi 2011; Iliyasu et al. 2012; Chikovore et al. 2013) there are often barriers to initiating a conversation about sex and intimacy. Veiled in secrecy, embarrassment, shame, guilt, and awkwardness, a conversation on sex is often triggered only after watching an episode of a popular television program where sex was topical, as

a consequence of an event such as the first menstrual bleeding, a pregnancy, a diagnosis of sexually transmitted disease (STD), or in the context of the HIV pandemic. From the interviews with mothers and their daughters, we glean that the flow of their conversations about intimacy is hampered, resembling a monologue with little reciprocal, conversational qualities, and best described as didactical efforts in as far as the mothers talking at rather than with their daughters. Delius and Glaser (2002:30) aptly describe it as much more of a contemporary "awkward inter-generational silence on issues of sexuality" rather than a constructive discussion.

As we pointed out earlier, sexual coercion, violence, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and STDs are serious concerns, and a mother fears that her own history (for example, unwanted pregnancy at a young age) will repeat itself. This often shapes the content of the conversations and the focus is on partner choice, HIV/AIDS, and pregnancy. These conversations, however, often remain superficial and frame sex and intimate relationships in a particular way—highlighting the perils of having sex and the possible negative consequences thereof. The absence of discussing emotions, and the meanings of love and commitment in relationships, is very noticeable.

Hormonal Changes or Don't Eat Eggs or Peanuts and Don't Drink Milk

Most of the young research participants were ill-prepared for hormonal changes, their first menstrual bleeding, or for understanding the implications of

these changes. Lizzy was shocked to discover blood on her underwear:

> I was fifteen. I was in the streets playing; when I got to the toilet, I saw this red thing on my underwear. "Mom, what the hell is this?" She was like: "No, man, you are getting older, you are growing up. It shows that you are becoming a woman. So, do this, do that, don't play with boys, don't eat eggs, don't drink milk." Because they say, when you eat eggs, you will become stronger [points to her tummy], like when you drink milk, it makes you fertile and peanuts too. [Lizzy, daughter]

Phaphama also recalls her mother's words: "Do not drink milk and don't eat eggs when I have my periods." African folk wisdom considers milk, eggs, and peanuts fertility-boosting foods and its consumption should be avoided during menstruation. The advice given to Lizzy and Phaphama contributes little to their understanding of what is happening to their bodies and how or why this should alter their interactions with boys, which is left unexplained. The transition to womanhood is explained in simple terms without elaborating on what becoming a woman might mean and what it is to be a woman in personal, relational, cultural, or societal terms. Instead, warnings are uttered, restrictions put in place, and abstinence from sex urged. The onset of the first menstruation is frequently described as a confusing, frightening, distressing, and awkward experience because these young women's understanding of normal physical developments is vague. Not all participants reveal to their mothers that they started menstruating because they were unsure what their mothers

would think or how they would react. Instead, they confide in their peers.

A reference to fertility and conception is frequently used in association with the onset of menstruation:

> She [mother] would say there will come a time when you will see blood, and when you see blood, you must know that you will be able to conceive. [Thato, daughter]

"Growing up" is the ambiguous term for the transition to womanhood—a time that also has significant cultural markers. It indicates a new status in the young woman's life and, traditionally, she is ready for marriage. The mothers' messages to their daughters following menarche are dichotomous: from innocence to corruption, from purity to impurity. It is also strongly associated with danger and risk, such as pregnancy or HIV infection. The mothers' stance is often strongly rooted in their own, often negative intimate relationship experiences. The mothers fear that their daughters will mimic their life with little or no education, few opportunities to improve their socio-economic position, and an inability to move forward because of getting caught up in abusive and coercive relationships.

Boyfriends and Sex

The conversations about boyfriends are mostly characterized by tension between the mothers and daughters. Particularly contentious is the selection of a boyfriend and the meaning of the term boyfriend. The meaning of the latter is often loose and a mother and daughter's understanding is often incongruent. The mothers associate "boyfriend" with a more permanent relationship, while the daughters do not seem to have clear frameworks for the concept of a boyfriend.

Despite the fact that during adolescence relationships are often less permanent, the mothers envisage an ideal and more permanent partner for their daughters. They consider specific criteria, which include a good education to offer economic security, politeness, respect, and the capacity to make the daughter happy. A good education is rightfully linked to employment opportunities, independence, improved living conditions, and elevated social status. But, the daughters' boyfriends rarely match these ideals and so their relationships cause tension between mothers and daughters. Caroline (mother) says:

> I wish they [referring to young girls] could find someone who is educated, who is working, a quiet person, who doesn't drink, who doesn't smoke nyaope [South African street drug: a mixture of marijuana, heroin, antiretroviral drugs, and Ratex (rat poison)]. He must be a respectable man.

Caroline lists the desired and undesired traits, which are likely to be based on past experiences with her daughter's or her daughter's peers' boyfriends. A man who respects his elders, and especially his partner's mother, is considered worthy of the daughter's affection and it is assumed that he will treat the daughter with the same respect. Qualities of an ideal partner for their daughters reflect notions of goodness, success, a non-user of substances, respectfulness, and good manners.

These idealistic visions coexist and clash with their daughters' current relationships, often deemed less desirable by the mother. Rachel makes her sentiments clear in the following excerpt:

> I don't like that one [daughter's current boyfriend]. First impressions are important, especially if you are not known to the girlfriend's family members. It is expected that your boyfriend be respectful when he sees your mother. Now if he disrespects her in her own yard; if he comes here drunk, doesn't speak in a proper manner to your mother, do you think your mother would like him? Do you think she will like him? [Rachel, mother]

Rachel disapproves of her daughter's current boyfriend because he turned up drunk, unruly, and disrespectful. A substance abuser is considered an unsuitable partner for her daughter and such a relationship is met with strong disapproval. Letty (daughter) demonstrates how her mother initiated the meeting with Letty's boyfriend:

> "Letty, this Tsepho, is he your boyfriend?" At first I was too shy to admit it. Like: "Aah...ya he is my boyfriend." Then she was like: "I want to meet him."

Letty did not volunteer information about her boyfriend because she felt shy, and perhaps unsure and embarrassed because she knows that she acts against her mother's wish for her to desist from or at least delay dating. Although Letty uses the word "shy," this may conceal another reason why she was not comfortable to share with her mother that she has a boyfriend. Letty fears her mother's judgment and disappointment and resorts to de-

ceit in order to maintain the relationships with her boyfriend and keep her mother happy. Another young research participant, Thato, recounts how she initiated a conversation to tell her mother[1] of her previous boyfriend (her baby's father):

> She [mother] was coming back from work and I said to her: "Do you know I'm in a relationship? He is my classmate, but I don't know what kind of person he is because he is quiet." My mother said: "I want to see him, it seems like you love him." [Thato, daughter]

Here, too, the young woman is invited to introduce the boyfriend. Approval seems to be an important process in legitimizing the relationships. In both Thato and Letty's cases, the mother expresses a wish to meet the boyfriends to assess their suitability and worthiness. Thato, perhaps, hopes for some guidance from her mother because her boyfriend is quiet, or she might consider this as a desirable attribute that could please her aunt. Mothers and their daughters' values and viewpoints do not always match. Although the mothers attempt to impose their values on their daughters, this may not be regarded to be the best outcome for the daughter, as Thato illustrates:

> I keep telling her that I found someone, but she [mother] gets angry! She says: "What about Bongani's [her baby's] father? I don't dispute that he did you wrong, but you must forgive him. I like Bongani's father and I will tell on you." [Thato, daughter]

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[1] Thato's mother is in fact her aunt, who is sister to her late mother. However, in some African cultures, like the Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Swati cultures, your sisters' children are said to be also yours. The use of *aunt* is restricted to your brother's children.

And this is confirmed by the mother about her thoughts on the daughter's ex-boyfriend.

> I like him [previous boyfriend who is the baby's father]. When they had him [the baby], they had a fall-out. When she had to come home, she gave herself to that *tsotsi* [thug, dodgy, untrustworthy character—the current boyfriend]. He's a drunk even, that *vukuvuku* [dirty looking thug]. Bongani's father comes here in fact. He knows how to greet, ask about your health, he even asks to speak to Thato [daughter]...now you see a person like that. [Rachel, mother]

The mother compares the two boyfriends, and juxtaposes the qualities of the current with those of the ex-boyfriend. Rachel has the baby's well-being and upbringing in mind, and she considers the father's involvement in the baby's development, including the benefits of financial and emotional support. The mother is explicit that she does not want her grandchild to have a *tsotsi* as a father figure. Bongani, the ex-boyfriend, fits the ideal notion of a partner and father because of the way he conducts himself. The notion of partner choice and the daughter's agency is illustrated here. Even though the mother did not approve of the daughter's choice of partner, the daughter decided to date him anyway because of her negative feelings towards the father of the baby after he initially denied paternity. People are guided by emotions and feelings in decision-making processes (Douglas and Johnson 1977:vii), and this is particularly true in relationships and partner choice. Regardless of what the mother says about the daughter's current boyfriend, she continues to date him, forsaking

all reasoning because of her feelings for him. Parental advice is rejected, contributing to tensions within the household that are brought about by the complex relationship between the mother and her daughter.

Understanding Intimate Relationships and the Danger of HIV Infection

The conversations between the mothers and their daughters contained hints at sex, but frank discussions about sex are avoided or remain rudimentary and limited to cautioning about risky behavior and its possible negative consequences. Sex is portrayed in negative terms and the mothers tend to talk down to their daughters rather than to engage in a mutual conversation that involves both parties. Thato says that her mother:

> …talked to me about sex, that I shouldn't open my thighs. This would happen [gestures with hands at imaginary protruding tummy].

Thato's mother uses "thighs" as a reference to sexual intercourse; she is vague in her wording and explanation. Not heeding her mother's advice, Thato had an intimate relationship and fell pregnant.

Letty had her first sexual experience and her mother is displeased, annoyed, and exasperated. Letty recounts the moment she reveals her first intimate experience:

> The first time I had sex, she was angry at me: "Don't you ever do it, don't you ever!" She was shouting at me!

This reaction does not invite a conversation and alienates Letty from her mother. Questions remain unasked and unanswered and assumptions end in anger and frustration, preventing the opportunity to have an open conversation on intimacy and loving relationships. Vague and euphemistic messages are unhelpful, unsettling, and alienating. Letty recounts that later her mother went to the boy's home to scream at him for deflowering her child, portraying her daughter as a victim and the boy as a perpetrator. In her interview, Letty tells that the decision to have sex was mutual, she was curious and wanted to have sex for fun.

HIV and AIDS are prevalent, widespread, and devastating conditions in South Africa and affect individuals, families, and their communities. Thus, preventing their children from becoming HIV-infected is foremost on every parent's mind. All research participants experience fear of becoming infected and most participants share a story of a close relative's HIV status. HIV is mostly discussed in the context of having unprotected sex, but the use of a condom to prevent HIV and STDs is rarely stressed. Ithuteng tells of the fear-instilling words from her mother Caroline:

> *Ousie*[2] [respectable word used for a female adult] Caroline told me that if you have sex at a young age, you will get pregnant. You will be positive [HIV], *Ousie* Caroline[3] tells us.

In Caroline's mind, there is little doubt that a sexual relationship will have negative consequences, resulting in either an unwanted pregnancy, becoming HIV infected, or worse still, both. A conversation about condoms, the availability of condoms, for example, in public places such as taverns, truck stops, or clubs where high-risk behavior is prevalent (Society for Family Health 2015) is avoided.

Rachel, a mother, highlights the importance of testing for HIV when entering a relationship and stresses that in order to prevent deception, both parties should be present when the results are received. These concerns speak to broader issues of trust within relationships, and how people can be deceived into thinking their partners are HIV negative, while in fact they are in the window period phase of the HIV life cycle.[4]

> Go and test and make sure that you go in [consultation room] together. People don't trust each other, we go in together to get tested, but when the results come, a person goes in alone, and you don't know what was said, right? When he goes in, they tell him he is HIV positive, and you are sitting outside. Then you go in, and they tell you: "You are OK." When he comes to you, he won't tell you the truth, he will ask you first. If you say you are OK, he will say the same thing. So you enter the relationship with that thing [that both tested negative], then that's it when you relax. So I tell them that when they go test, they must enter the room together, and when the results come out, if the sister asks, if she should disclose the

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[2] The word *Ousie* is part of South African usage and originally refers to a Black woman who usually works as a maid. However, as time has evolved, the word is now used as a title of respect for women.

[3] *Ousie* Caroline is Ithuteng's foster mother.

[4] After being infected, HIV tests usually detect HIV antibodies 3 to 12 weeks after the infection (AIDs Foundation of South Africa 2014).

results, say: "Yes, we are together." Don't sit outside. [Rachel, mother]

This concerns broader issues and boundaries within relationships, which in turn are culturally embedded. It also addresses the protocols and processes of clinics, ethical issues, and the rights of an individual. Such complex considerations may challenge and test young people's communication skills, but are important and warrant transparent conversations and the caliber of mentoring that makes such conversations possible.

All research participants tell of family tragedies involving HIV/AIDS. April, for instance, talks about the burden, pain, and loss associated with HIV/AIDS:

I like sitting my daughter down and tell her about these issues. I tell her that two of my daughters—her sisters—died because of HIV and they left their children behind. These children are left behind by their mothers because of their death from HIV. I tell her these things and I also tell her that when she has a boyfriend, they must use a condom at all times and never spend the night without. [April, mother]

Grief, loss, sadness, and financial burdens are some of the consequences of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, of which April has first-hand experience. She also expands on the burden of care on grandparents because of the death of a child or children and the effects this has on the well-being of other family members, in particular children. Embedded in this narrative is the goal to teach her daughter to take responsibility and precautionary measures when

engaging in sexual intercourse. She also endeavors to teach her that every action has consequences beyond the individual, affecting also the extended family—in particular grandmothers who then become heads of extended households.

Pregnancy

In keeping with findings in the literature (cf. Jewkes et al. 2001), mothers are also worried about the implications of falling pregnant at a young age. They are in particular concerned that their daughters miss educational opportunities and that a baby adds to financial burdens experienced in already cash-poor households.

I tell them that if you are in a hurry to be in a relationship, you must know that you will get pregnant. And when you give birth, you must know wherever you go, even when you have to go to the toilet, you will take your child along. I told you that I want you to finish school. I don't want a child. [Caroline, mother]

Caroline makes her stance explicit. Her ominous words spell out the realities of having a baby at a young age. Her words speak to various issues: that a sexual relationship is associated with falling pregnant; that having a baby means around-the-clock commitments with the added burden of responsibilities, and that school is interrupted, possibly discontinued, resulting in the forfeiting of further educational opportunities. The last comment, "I don't want a child," is ambiguous: it can be interpreted that Caroline considers a baby a liability for her daughter, but it could also mean

that she is worried that she, as the grandmother, would find herself in a position of child minding or rearing. Despite the ubiquitous warning words by all mothers/caregivers about falling pregnant at a young age, four out of the five daughters interviewed had babies. Three managed to continue with their education. From Thato's excerpt, we glean the difficult decisions teenage mothers have to make:

I got pregnant in May and during May we were busy with exams. I wrote and finished my exams. When I finished, I went to Botshabelo. I had not told anyone [about the pregnancy], but other people kept saying things, like my teacher said: "What is wrong with you?" Things like that, and I would say: "There is nothing wrong." I left when I finished my exams. When the schools opened...I didn't go back to school for a whole week. The following week my friend called me and told me we were writing [exams], I must come. So I went. Then I wrote. We were writing the final exams in December. My report came back and I had failed Math. In January, I gave birth. After I gave birth, I went back to school. The lady social worker said I shouldn't be back at school because my child is still an infant, therefore I can't be enrolled for grade 12. I have to repeat grade 11 because I was not attending my classes properly. So I said: "I will see when I come back to school." Because she was talking about my child, I will still decide when I will go back to school. [Thato, daughter]

Thato's experience does not speak of a particularly supportive education system for teenage girls with a baby, and this has implications for Thato's fu-

ture. Her ambition to become an engineer has been squashed following her pregnancy. She is 20-years-old, failed in grade 11, has a child, her friends are ahead of her in school, and she is currently not attending school. These are some of the consequences of being a teenage mother.

These pregnancy narratives also include accounts of paternity disputes. The relationships are often casual with the father refusing responsibilities, resulting in absent fathers—perpetuating the pattern of the daughters, who also told of absent fathers.

When I was pregnant, he didn't want to talk about the baby, so I decided to stop dating him. He wasn't happy. Have you seen when you tell a person that: "Hey, I'm pregnant." He was like acting up...He used to rent a place around here, right now I don't know [where the father is]. He's never seen her [baby], she's three. [Diteboho, daughter]

Thato recounts that she and her boyfriend had made a decision to have a baby only to be abandoned by the very same boyfriend after she told him she was pregnant.

I would say, yes [the pregnancy was planned]. He wanted a child and I also wanted one...But, when I told him about it, he said: "It was not my child." [Thato, daughter]

These accounts testify to the tenuous, vulnerable, and fragile nature of the relationships. The responsibilities of caring and providing for a baby often fall exclusively on the mother and her family. The mother-daughter narratives are imbued with fears

of this added burden and this highlights and lo-
cates the difficulties between mothers and daugh-
ters within their relationship. It also points to the
external social factors within which individuals
and families exist and the ways in which histor-
ically difficult socio-economic factors shape their
lives.

Mothers Lack Experience to Talk about Sex

As we alluded earlier, the mothers' understanding
of sex and sexuality is permeated with their own
history, upbringing, and socialization. In their
conversations, the mothers frequently juxtapose
the past and the present—their own experienc-
es of sexual socialization and the task of educat-
ing their daughters. From the mothers' accounts,
we can see that the conversations between them
and their own mothers did not educate them well
in terms of sex and intimacy. Friends, sisters, and
grandparents had always been more likely to be
sex educators. Talking about sex was, and partial-
ly remains—as we demonstrate—a topic that is not
freely discussed.

> It's how we were raised. You see, this thing about
> a person being pregnant. You never knew that when
> we were growing up. When someone was going to
> give birth, they would send her far away…You didn't
> know. [Terry, mother]

> You know how things were when we were growing
> up...You would never speak about such things to your
> mother. They [elder sisters] were responsible for us
> because they were constantly vigilant in regulating
> our behaviors. They saw the slightest changes in our

behaviors and bodies. And when one got pregnant,
they would know. And only then would they talk to
us. [Lorraine, mother]

Sex is shrouded in secrets and mystery. An edu-
cational conversation takes place post-event and
many mothers (research participants) fell pregnant
at a young age. The pattern of silence and teenage
pregnancy is repeated, as the young research partic-
ipants (daughters) attest. The mothers' stories show
resentment towards their own parents because of
the veil of silence and secrecy, and the resultant un-
planned pregnancies.

> It's not the same with us. I did not know that when
> you start menstruations, you can fall pregnant. And
> that is the reason why I had a child at a young age.
> [Dolly, mother]

> During our days, our parents never told us such
> things; we couldn't talk to them about such things.
> Only until you get raped and you don't know what
> you are supposed to do, or you get pregnant with an
> older man and you don't say anything. I used to hide
> these things from her. My mother never taught me
> what I was supposed to do in those situations. That
> is why I say: "It is important to attend the course in
> family matters, so that I can educate my children
> while they are still young." [Dineo, mother]

Dineo paints a grim picture of sexual violation
accompanied by little understanding or support,
which motivates her to acquire tools to be better
prepared to educate her daughter. However, she still
finds it difficult to engage with her daughter on the
topic of sex: she describes male genitalia as "bags

of potatoes and a stick" and uses other evasive and
vague terms. Uncertainties and confusion remain,
and indicate a deep uneasiness when discussing sex
and sexuality. Another mother talks about her be-
wilderment:

> When I was young, they used to say to us: "When
> you meet a boy, or when you sleep with a boy," in-
> stead of saying: "When you have sex." This left us
> confused as we thought by sleep it means just shar-
> ing a bed. We conceived children and nobody told us
> about these things. My father used to say to us: "Men
> carry babies." And we would ask ourselves: "How
> and what does my father mean by saying that?" We
> saw men walking around, but they did not carry ba-
> bies. We only got to understand what he meant as we
> were growing up and experiencing things: he meant
> that when you have sex with a man, then you will
> fall pregnant. [February, mother]

Concealing knowledge, misinformation about sex,
or the use of fear tactics cause confusion and em-
barrassment, prevent open conversations, fail to
prevent pregnancies, and have the potential to im-
pede healthy sexual relationships. Questions about
sex and sexual experiences were more commonly
shared with friends and peers who continue to be
important sources of information.

In Conclusion

Talking about sex and intimate relationships with
young adults is important for a myriad of reasons.
However, just talking is not enough: in the moth-
er-daughter conversations, we scrutinized, com-
munication was often lacking depth, clarity, and

focus. All participants experienced levels of embar-
rassment and unease, which stall the conversation
flow between mothers and daughters. Conversa-
tions are not spontaneous and age-appropriate and
tend to occur only following a trigger such as the
onset of the first menstruation, dating, or pregnan-
cy. The daughters react with apprehension, suspi-
cion, resentment, and at times hostility, when their
mothers initiate a conversation about sex. Both
parties are motivated by their own set of reasons
for having these talks. The mothers consider their
daughters' well-being, safety, health, educational
and employment opportunities, while the daugh-
ters focus mainly on dating and having fun. These
are unequal starting points for conducive talks on
sex and sexuality. Regardless, the daughters say
they would prefer being educated by their moth-
ers because they are more trustworthy than peers
and friends. Talking about sex with their peers
and friends is more comfortable, but has a coercive
component: to engage in sexual activities.

Set in the context of impulsiveness, coercive be-
havior, and reaction against risk taking, the moth-
ers and caregivers are apprehensive about their
daughters' interest in sex and sexuality. The po-
tential for negative consequences of unprotected
sex is serious and the prospect of a precarious life
is real. The conversations between the two gen-
erations are inhibited, unidirectional, and often
didactic. Warnings of negative consequences of
having an intimate relationship are issued in the
hope of deterring the young women from having
sex. Research on African mothers indicates that
they tend to take up the discourse of instilling fear
and emphasize negative consequences as an in-

tervention strategy to curb sexual activity (Pluhar and Kuriloff 2004:316; Lesch and Kruger 2005:1077). Pregnancies and HIV/AIDS are often the mothers' preferred conversation topics. Pleasure, love, desire, and emotional aspects of relationships were rarely considered. This reduces an intimate relationship to an act devoid of meaning beyond sexual gratification. Sex, then, is associated with fear of being discovered, of falling pregnant, of becoming infected, and is reduced to something dirty, unspoken, and clandestine—restricting women's attempts to explore and develop their sexuality in a positive way.

The mothers and their daughters are challenged to conduct open discussions on intimate relationships. The mothers' own upbringing bears the marks of outdated cultural frames, discomfort, lack of knowledge, as well as silence and jokes about sexual matters. And these issues are reflected in the communication with their daughters. History, race, class, gender, age, education, and so-

cio-economic status influence these conversations and model sexuality and sexual agency (Pluhar and Kuriloff 2004:318; Lesch and Kruger 2005:1078). Mothers and their daughters recognize the value of discussing sex and intimate relationships in a society that experiences high rates of HIV and AIDS, teenage pregnancy, and sexual violence. Their attempts, however, are awkward and, considering that four out of five daughters had an unplanned baby, the outcome of these conversations is not favorable. Mothers' efforts to discourage their daughters from having a boyfriend were in vain and safe dating was not promoted (see: Wood and Jewkes 1998). The young women frame relationships in terms of companionship, trust, understanding, and love, regardless of bad experiences, and the mothers' prevailing perception is that relationships lead inevitably to pregnancy, lost opportunities, and financial burdens. It would be advisable, then, for mothers to rather start conversations with their daughters from these more positive perceptions and desires.

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On the Nature of an Integral Sociology: An Exploration in Theory and Practice

Abstract　This article is the first in a series of three installments representing a doctoral project carried out at the University of the Free State in South Africa. The aim of this article is to establish an apodictic ontic and epistemic foundation for the construction of an integral framework for sociological practice. To this end, manifest reality is meditated upon in a realist phenomenological manner, thus yielding an etiological framework aimed at reflecting reality in itself, and not as the object of a specific scientific paradigm. Situated against the backdrop of the ontological turn in the social sciences, the argument is developed that contemporary science represents an ill-founded attempt at empirically describing a reality that is fundamentally trans-empirical. It is posited that any scientific enterprise which is founded exclusively on an empirical analysis of "objective" reality can ultimately yield only partial truths. To remedy this situation, the role of intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks and subjectively constituted qualia of manifestation during the generation of reality are acknowledged, facilitating an account thereof that enlivens the positivistic "world-as-described" by integrating it with the hermeneutically navigable "world-as-agreed-upon" and the individually encountered/embodied "world-as-witnessed." The resulting etiological framework facilitates a grasp of the higher order unity of these "worlds" by facilitating the emergence of an aperspectival mode of being that transcends the empirico-perspectival mental consciousness structure characteristic of modern and postmodern epistemologies. In so doing, a universally valid layer of knowledge is laid bare which can serve as a contextualizing point of reference for the continued perspectival exploration of particular conditioned aspects of reality.

Keywords　Phenomenology; Transcendental Subjectivity; Aperspectivism; Etiology; Ontology; Epistemology; Integral Sociology; Consciousness Structures

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Preliminary Considerations

This article constitutes the first segment of a Doctoral thesis in three parts. The thesis is intended to investigate the nature of a social scientific practice which takes into account all aspects of social reality in its analysis. This first article serves as an introduction to the guiding ideas that are at the foundation of the work carried out in the overarching thesis. It will specifically situate the ontological and epistemological foundation of the work relative to the ecology of contemporary science and philosophy. This article primarily encompasses an attempt to illustrate that the epistemic modes[1] utilized by various internally coherent epistemologies throughout the ages are in essence reconcilable with each other, as are the various paradigms of our science, though they often seem to be exclusive in their assumptions and conclusions regarding the nature of social reality. It will be argued that this apparent incompatibility of paradigms is rooted in a common impasse, namely, that of confounding a whole with one or more of its parts. The whole in this case is "social reality" and the various parts refer to those aspects or dimensions thereof which have variably been dealt with in isolation by sociological schools of either the "micro," "meso," or "macro" variety; analytical approaches rooted either in subjectivism or objectivism and theoretico-methodological frameworks aimed either at investigating social structure, action, or meaning in relative isolation.

The first section of this article explores the incapacity of contemporary science as a vehicle for exploring the fundamentally trans-empirical Kosmos[2] within/as which we exist, and reaches the conclusion that at the root of this incapacity there lies a crisis of consciousness. It also demarcates the area of enquiry fleshed out by the rest of the article. In the second section, mindfulness of the perspective of "Transcendental Subjectivity" is proposed as the only foundation upon which a re-invigorated and contextualized scientific program can be founded. The relation of this unconditioned state of being to the "Empirical Subject" operating from within the natural attitude is then explored in detail. In the third section, an integral etiological framework is discussed that is argued to represent the simplest, yet most complete and general, model of manifest reality that can currently be generated on the basis of available knowledge. An important characteristic of this first part of the thesis is its meta-scientific and, in comparison to contemporary standards within the scientific community, "radically" phenomenological character. This is because the description of reality encountered in this article is not limited by any scientific paradigm or philosophical school of thought, but is the result of an existential union with reality, one that has resulted in "self-acquired knowledge tending toward universality" (Husserl 1960:2). Thus, there are no sacred cows to be found here, no dogmas, and no overarching guiding precepts, save those of reality itself and my own meaningful interpretation thereof, which is, of course, systematically supported by the findings of other thinkers starting from

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[1] The term "epistemic modes" refers to the three clearly distinguishable means by which knowledge is generated, namely, subjective witnessing, intersubjective understanding, and objective description (Kotze et al. 2015). All human epistemologies necessarily make use of one or more of these epistemic modes.

[2] I use the word "Kosmos" in line with its usage by Ken Wilber, the American philosopher who employs it in the classical Greek sense of referring not only to the empirically measurable "external" cosmos, but also the "internal" universe of meaningful symbols and intuitive experience (Visser 2003).

a similar realist phenomenological point of departure. As such, the various ideas referred to throughout the following sections do not represent any indication of the "situatedness" of the stream of thought reflected in this article within or in relation to any given tradition, but simply the inclusion of complementary fragments of the Perennial Philosophy[3] that have been presented by various thinkers over the ages. Edmund Husserl (1960) summed up the spirit of this thesis when he said:

> I, the solitary individual philosophizer, owe much to others; but what they accept as true, what they offer me as allegedly established by their insight, is for me at first only something they claim. If I am to accept it, I must justify it by a perfect insight on my own part. Therein consists my autonomy – mine and that of every genuine scientist. [p. 2]

The starting point of this thesis is thus a position of universal doubt (similar to but more complete than that of René Descartes[4]) which has as its aim the generation of a stock of absolutely self-evident knowledge. All that I know, even that part of my

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[3] The term "Perennial Philosophy" denotes that universally traceable subsection of human thought that, upon contemplation, is found to be in harmony with absolute reality (Quinn 1997; Nagler 2007). It refers especially to the singular ontic truth that gave rise to humanity's various wisdom traditions and which, when isolated from historical and cultural particularities, is seen to transcend the ritualistic doctrines of any specific school (Huxley 1947).

[4] Whereas Descartes maintained certain pre-reflexive assumptions throughout his doubting (which contributed to the development of the materialistic worldview that much of this article critiques), the culmination of the method of which he traced the outlines consists in radically embracing the spirit in which his experiment of doubting reality was acted out. This is done not in order to "adopt [the meditations'] content, but in not doing so, to renew with greater intensity the radicalness of their spirit, the radicalness of self-responsibility, to make that radicalness true for the first time by enhancing it to the last degree" (Husserl 1960:6).

stock of knowledge which is regarded as founded on scientific "fact," is encountered by me from within in a perspective that is radically my own, reflecting my existential embeddedness in a Holon[5] without which scientific, religious, philosophical, cultural, and social symbols have no meaning to me. In as far as this internalized orienting matrix of perception is based in truth (the singular truth of being existing beyond all relativity and conditioning), it is universal.[6] Science itself is erected on this imminent nexus of intellectual intuition[7] (which is by no means subjective in the currently prevalent sense of the word, as it serves both to reify intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks and facilitate the existence of objectivity as a mutually understood notion), and if we "wish to think science rigorously, to appreciate precisely its sense and its scope, we must first awaken that experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression" (Merleau-Ponty 2012:lxxii). In order to "know about" the world, we thus must first "know" the

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[5] A "Holon" is a whole that simultaneously includes and transcends its parts. In classical Greek philosophy, the term was often used as a synonym for "Kosmos," thus referring to the universe as an essentially ordered whole (Clay 2014).

[6] Husserl refers to this orienting matrix as "universal intersubjectivity" and describes it as the pre-socio-cultural collective of which human subjectivity is the individual case. This trans-individual subjectivity is both that "into which all objectivity, everything that exists at all, is resolved" and "undeniably a component part of the world" (Husserl 1960:183).

[7] The "intuition" referred to here is not to be confused with either "pre-rational" forms of knowledge (that are rooted in "superstition" and "ignorance" from a mental-rational perspective) or Bergsonian intuition (which similarly refers to a pre-rational mode of consciousness characterized by pre-reflexive reaction to sensory inputs) (Guénon 2004a). The term rather signifies a continuum between subject and object that is thoroughly beyond description by means of our current scientific vocabulary, which is pre-reflexively founded on the dualism it inherited from Descartes. The second section and the third section explore this phenomenon in greater detail.

world. The development of modern science has, however, unfolded in such a way that this inherent connection to truth has largely been obscured, due to various factors that are explored in greater detail throughout the rest of this article. This impasse has landed humanity in the precarious position of knowing more and more, while understanding less and less. The following section entails an account of that trans-empirical, orienting knowledge of reality as a whole that should serve as a springboard for the various descriptive investigations that constitute science. As the reflexive possession of this knowledge is, however, dependent on "the suitability of the cognitive equipment to its task" (Nagler 2007:306), the following sections will deal not only with knowledge, but also explicitly with the knower. Before the subject is discussed, however, there is a need to evaluate contemporary science and the role it has come to play in our everyday lives.

The Incapacity of Contemporary Science to Engage a Trans-Empirical Reality

With scientific studies, like most human processes, we tend to focus disproportionately on the destination, to the neglect of both the point of departure and the process itself. In the special case of science, this finalizing tendency focuses on the generation of practically applicable data, on reaching pragmatic conclusions, and profitably applying these. Rarely do we thoroughly consider the starting point of investigation, the often unconscious assumptions that underlie the topics we choose to investigate, the way we choose to investigate them, and the conclusions we tend to make upon analyzing the results of our investigations. This is a tragic im-

passe, as it renders much of contemporary thought impotent as to a criticism of its own underlying assumptions, which is a criticism that it is in dire need of in this day and age. Allow me, then, to describe in advance the position from which we will set out on this journey and the route that I intend to follow in order to avoid similar confusion. The starting point is a thorough disenchantment with contemporary science and the globally standardizing patterns of interpretation, expression, and social organization increasingly founded upon its various applications. Along with a growing group of contemporary thinkers (cf. Phipps 2012; Eisenstein 2013), I have witnessed the devolution of the scientific program into a caricature stunted by the troubling proliferation of cults of personality and limited to a significant degree by the agenda of those fortunate few who find themselves behind the two-way glass wall of contemporary consumer society (a development that mirrors the unfolding of the global capitalist society). Science, in fact, has become every bit as dogmatic and prejudiced as the superstitions it once hoped to transcend (Sheldrake 2013) and, as a result, the time for its own transcending, or at least re-evaluation, is upon us. Indeed, time is running out. As the gap between our technological reach and philosophical grasp widens exponentially, we are eroding not only our own physical and mental health and undermining the cohesion of our social relationships and civil societies (Eisenstein 2013); we are threatening the very balance that has allowed life to flourish on this planet, in relationship to which we have taken on the role of a virus (Barnosky et al. 2011; Lewis and Maslin 2015). Our starting point, then, is the acknowledgement of a general malaise experienced

in relation to the state of the world we live in and our relationship to this world, with a particular focus on the incapacity of our systems of knowledge to meaningfully interpret this world and our place in it. This phenomenon has come to permeate our existence and can be traced psychologically, socially, politically, ecologically, and economically. It is reflected in and fed by the growing degree of destruction, alienation and negation of truth, beauty, and justice that we witness daily, no matter where on Earth we find ourselves.

It can be argued that the underlying reason for this dire planetary situation is the practically universal implementation of a worldview that is out of touch with reality (Phipps 2012). This worldview, which is characterized by an unswerving faith in technology as an omnipotent tool of control over the forces of nature and human nature, a hard-line materialism that reduces life to dust and the illogical claim of science to represent the one and only path to valid knowledge,[8] is a direct result of the historical trajectory of modern science (Phipps 2012; Sheldrake 2013). In ascribing to itself a monopoly on knowledge, science raised its peculiar methodology, namely, the positivistic collection of empirically measurable "facts" concerning reality, to the status of the sole valid epistemic mode. Not only are alternative research methods frowned upon, but many inexplicable phenomena are simply ignored or swept aside during the construction of a view of reality that has become so entrenched in modern

consciousness that questioning thereof risks exclusion from the in-crowd of mainstream science and banishment to the fringes of academia, and even of society at large. One reaction to this state of affairs by those who choose not to ignore certain experiences that do not fit the dominant model of reality is that belief in the scientific project has begun to falter among many of the most promising contemporary thinkers, just as religious belief faded among the generations before them. This is due to the fact that, ungrounded by any guiding precepts, science has splintered into a cacophony of egoistically or politically driven and paradigmatically biased pseudo-reporting and criticizing, with minimal awareness of social or ecological responsibility and no orienting context.

Science, divided into numerous mutually exclusive specialist fields, lacks "the unity of a mental space in which [the various scientific disciplines] might exist for and act on one another" (Husserl 1960:5). There are various historical reasons for this proliferation of epistemologies. The first is the developmental trajectory of science itself. American systems theorist, Gregory Bateson (2000:274), approaching the topic from the perspective of the "natural" sciences, furnished us with the following description of adaptive change, which may also be seen as a description of the development of modern science:

> There is needed not only that first-order change which suits the immediate environmental (or physiological) demand but also second-order changes which will reduce the amount of trial and error needed to achieve the first-order change…By super-

posing and interconnecting many feedback loops, we (and all other biological systems) not only solve particular problems but also form habits which we apply to the solution of classes of problems.

This process of "learning to learn" that underlies all method, and especially the scientific method as its most "refined" exemplar, is thus rooted in the natural evolutionary process. German philosopher, Jean Gebser, shed light on this evolutionary process by identifying various "structures of consciousness" that had historically informed the subjective life of *Homo sapiens*. The "mental" structure of consciousness that underlies the development of the scientific worldview is merely another temporarily ascendant emergent that builds on the structures preceding it, each of which historically generated the worldview of entire human populations (Gebser 1985). The emergence of this "mental" consciousness structure, becoming locally widespread starting about three centuries ago, is characterized by an increasing fixation on "space" and perspective and ever increasing individuation, or existential separation of the subject from the object(s) of its perception. This peculiar conscious orientation underlies the fixation with matter, or objectivity, which is characteristic of contemporary science. In turn, positivism as an epistemic orientation has led to the continuing diversification of science reflecting the increasingly perceived diversity of physical universe.

Originally the concept "physics" referred to the investigation of nature as a unity, without the qualifications made by the various contemporary scientific disciplines (Guénon 2004a). The earliest natural

philosophers in the West understood this word to refer simply to the study of "becoming," which was understood to be synonymous with "nature." Reality was viewed as a whole, with the awareness that any differentiation and classification of its constituents originated in the discriminatory faculties of consciousness, and not in the given manifestation of nature. This unitary view of reality was echoed in the epistemologies of other cultures. The Upanishads,[9] for instance, remind us time and again that all differentiation, even on empirical bases, has "speech alone" as its support (*Katha* I.3.15; *Brihadaranyaka* IV.4.5; *Chandogya* VI.1.6; *Shvetashvatara* II.16; *Mundaka* II.1.2; *Mandukya* 2; Kena I.2; *Prashna* VI.5; *Taittiriya* II.1.1; *Aitareya* III.1.3; *Tejobindu* 1; *Atma* 3; *Amritabindu* 12; *Paramahamsa* 4 [in Easwaran 2007; Rangaswami 2012]), a statement that many social constructivists would readily agree with. In the philosophies of various classical civilizations, the exact nature of phenomenal reality was thus explicitly known to be determined by the perspective of the perceiving subject. The "One," Plotinus's term for Transcendental Subjectivity, thus perceives/is the whole of potential reality in itself, while each

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[8] This attitude, which holds that we should not understand science as merely representing one form of possible knowledge, but rather as identical to valid knowledge as such, is commonly referred to as "scientism" (Habermas 1972).

[9] References to existing epistemological traditions are not intended to somehow align this article to a given doctrine. What is corroborated here and in other places by referring to specific schools of thought is rather the existence of a stock of knowledge which transcends any given doctrine. In this case, the same insight can, for instance, be corroborated by Wittgenstein (2001:89), who saw that "what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence," or any number of thinkers who have come to the same conclusion. Nowhere in this article, is a specific doctrine given primary importance, the aim is rather to transcend the need for dogma by unflinchingly analyzing, understanding, and manifesting reality. To avoid completely reinventing the wheel, however, emphatic reference is made throughout this article to various schools of thought that have already eloquently dealt with the various issues at hand, but have been neglected, ignored, or misunderstood by modern thinkers operating on the basis of an empirico-perspectival worldview.

individual constituent of the "Many" (individualized, Empirical Subjects) perceives a relative reality conditioned by time and space, name and form (Atkinson 1985). The non-dualism of these classical ontologies, being in accordance with reality, historically gave rise to various practices by means of which this "great chain of being" may be traversed by the subject (cf. Phillips [2009] for a decent scholarly discussion of Yoga, which is one such practical philosophy). The ready availability of such practical knowledge tended to the development of an attitude towards reality that was occupied with issues of "being" more than it was with issues of "knowing." With the subject at the center of analysis, there is little incentive to analyze the objects of perception in any greater detail than is necessary to understand their relative relationship to the Holon and their corollary role in the process of "Self-realization."

This all changed relatively recently, when humanity, due to fundamental shifts in consciousness, began looking to the sensible world primarily as a depot of resources useful to a sensible being. The unavoidable result of this paradigm shift has been the differentiation of matter into various classes, along with the development of an increasing number of specialist fields of knowledge oriented towards each classification in turn. Scientists have responded to this diversification in the object of analysis by becoming "specialists," extraordinarily knowledgeable in increasingly narrow fields of investigation. It was taken-for-granted that the scope of reality was simply too vast for any individual to analyze in its entirety. The integral knowledge of the ancients was thus cast

aside, while in its stead there arose a plethora of parallel enterprises aimed at uncovering detailed descriptive information about abstracted parts of reality. Eventually, this tendency towards separation of the individual subject from the Kosmos as a whole led to the contemporary scientific conception of the self, the ego, to be increasingly conceptualized as a distinct object with empirically identifiable characteristics. This relatively recently acquired ability to extricate the subject from descriptions of reality has brought about immense changes in self-conception and social structure. Losing sight of the whole also meant that the various sciences were usurped by modern humanity's technological program. Now that the world had been bereft of its context, the only value uncovered knowledge had was in its utility. This mutation of empiricism from a method into a worldview underlies the increasingly anomic character of an increasingly glocalized way of life which is economically reflected in the currently culminating "monetization of life," a process through which social, psychological, spiritual, and creative spheres of life are increasingly violated by the capitalist economy through commodification, further accelerating that depletion of non-empirical sources of value-orientation which seems to have become a distinguishing mark of late modern societies (Eisenstein 2013). Indeed, with industry increasingly serving as the fundamental justification for science instead of a largely coincidental field of its application, modern humans have not only "limited their intellectual ambition…to inventing and constructing machines, but they have ended by becoming in fact machines themselves" (Guénon 2004a:87).

Thus, the downside to this historical process of differentiation rests on the fact that, in line with the tenets of the neo-Darwinian perspective on evolution, this streamlined process of enquiry was, and continues to be, geared rather narrowly towards economy of scope and means, as well as utility in application. This arbitrary narrowing down of reality leads to the formation of unquestioned assumptions that, though based on a biased understanding of arbitrarily isolated parts of the object of analysis, are unproblematically taken to represent the nature of the whole, while truth and usefulness have been confounded to the extent that the former risks being devoid of any meaning unless it is reflexively redefined by contemporary thinkers. Interestingly, but quite unsurprisingly, this development of increasing specialization in science is mirrored by the ongoing process of individuation in the psychological realm. As our sciences identify/generate ever more minute details of objective reality, the perceiving subject itself is being extensively cordoned off from both its increasingly alien life-worldly consociates and the Transcendental Subject. In the social sciences, this process is currently generating artifacts such as the various theories of embodiment that include the vast sweep of gender and culture specific streams that have seen an increasingly frantic development since the turn of the millennium. These theories, though shedding light on topics that unquestionably play a role in the constitution of social reality, simultaneously fracture the Holon of reality by focusing exclusively on the most conditioned aspects of existence. Socially speaking, such a compartmentalization of the human experience tends to widen existing gaps between socio-economic, cultural, racial, re-

ligious, and gender-based collectivities, instead of facilitating conciliation (Taylor 2011).

A further way in which specialization and individuation have impacted science is through the gradual rise of the now almost taken-for-granted idea of "intellectual property." Having one's name attached to a given idea has become at least as important as the progress of science itself. This is another result of the estrangement from the truth of ontic unity which, in the same way that it allows utility to become the primary factor in the evaluation of knowledge, gives rise to the possibility of so-called "original" thought which may or may not in fact correspond with reality. This pervasive emphasis on ownership has given rise to a global scientific community in which a thinker's "renown is increased more by inventing a new error than by repeating a truth that has already been expressed" (Guénon 2004a:56). The materialistic worldview that underlies these phenomena, and is in turn reified by their development, now so completely pervades the scientific community that even those scientists who would not claim themselves to be "materialists" nonetheless accept its tenets unquestionably, at least when they are going about scientific enquiry. Materialism, which was coined as a term as recently as the eighteenth century and was originally meant to indicate the possible existence of any "objective" reality removed from the subject whatsoever, has come to dominate our institutionalized epistemological projects in the form of a conception which denies the reality of anything but classically defined matter, and even nominally "religious" or "spiritual" scientists further this philosophy in most of their official work (Guénon 2004a:56).

Along with the splintering and ossification of science, the resulting lack of any meaningful integration of knowledge generated by these isolated scientific fields, and the dogmatic imposition of a crude materialism over all theorization, another pressing problem that has arisen is the exclusion of vast areas of reality from any scientific consideration whatsoever. Apart from the splintering of science resulting in an overload of meaningless information, its narrow view means that serious investigation is only geared towards those aspects of reality that can be empirically measured. As the aim of all science is to generate, by means of methodical experimentation and analysis, a widely generalizable model of supposedly objective reality (Braaten 1991), an undue emphasis is placed on those aspects of reality that are held to be "objective." This modus operandi explicitly excludes the bulk of reality, which is informed by subjective experience and intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks, from consideration, simply because these phenomena cannot be made the object of empirical investigation by means of any currently accepted method. Thus, by "promoting their methodological ineptitude to the rank of a criterion of truth" (Huxley 1947:36), empiricists tend to label any and all phenomena that cannot be subjected to their limited brand of investigation as unreal, or even impossible. In this way, many phenomena, though they may be widely attested to anecdotally, are summarily cast aside as illusory because of the simple fact that they are not readily describable by modern science (Sheldrake 2013). However, many of these phenomena which our contemporary scientific paradigms are not capable of explaining, though they have become

quite adept at explaining them away, historically "boasted a science sui generis, of which many, although fragmentary, traces still remain" (Evola 1996:183). These phenomena are often situated in the realms of intersubjective meaning and subjective experience which, though concrete in their implications for everyday life, are neither physically locatable in the material world nor able to be subjected to the techniques of measurement which evolved into the scientific method over the course of time. They represent the objects comprising the subjectively constituted "world-as-witnessed" and the intersubjectively constructed "world-as-agreed-upon," those closely intertwined realms which are the primary field of meaningful experience and of which the empirical "world-as-described" is but a momentarily useful snapshot or spatio-temporally specific shadow. These existentially significant and hermeneutically decipherable ontic dimensions are completely ignored by the materialistic paradigm during its deconstruction of reality, and what is worse, they are often diminished in the process. This can clearly be seen in the fact that though the materialistic paradigm has generated vast amounts of information, it has simultaneously greatly eroded our ability to meaningfully interpret all this information. The result has been a world over which we (supposedly) have greater technical control, but that we understand and relate to less and less.

People living in pre-"mental" societies, on the other hand, are limited in the degree of control they exert over their environments (measured by empirical standards), but functionally "know" their place within the Kosmos, as well as the not

necessarily empirical laws that govern it (Radin 2002). The "value freedom" which is often touted as the hallmark of science signifies the expunging from the modern stock of knowledge of any such non-empirical aspects of, and means towards grasping, reality. This historical dissociation of value from fact has resulted in the displacement of pure "being" by an abstract "ought" as the object of scientific descriptions of the Kosmos (Habermas 1972). The resulting fracture of the Holon of reality into "fact" and "fiction" represents a historical impasse generated by the ascendancy of the mental structure of consciousness. The construction of the illusion of pure theory was a necessary step in the evolution of consciousness which allowed for the development of discursive thought and freed humanity from many of the irrationalities and instincts characteristic of preceding consciousness structures (Habermas 1972). The potential of this development was, however, largely missed, as the meaningfully experienced realm of the subject ontologically devolved into playing an increasingly marginalized role in relationship to the abstracted world of reality as described when severed from interpretation. Science thus more or less accidentally replaced the real world of our direct experience with an abstract model that does not even exist in any meaningful sense, and what is worse, it has claimed pontifical authority in maintaining that the former be ordered on the basis of the latter. This development has led us to the present position, in which we are saturated by meaningless information on a daily basis, with no foundation to make sense of it all, because "only as cosmology was theoria capable of orienting human action" (Habermas 1972).

After "freeing" knowledge from interest, the former has little to no cultural value. Increasingly schoolchildren and students do not learn anything meaningful, but are trained from an ever younger age to carry out mechanistically defined roles. What is worse is that this course of events seems to be irreversible by any existing societal factor because of the fact that the forgotten "world of traditional meaning discloses itself to the interpreter only to the extent that his own world becomes clarified" (Habermas 1972:309-310), while the contemporary interpreter has been born into a world largely devoid of the means by which valid self-knowledge can readily be gained. The societal structures that served to carry out this role (self-organizing conglomerates reflecting existential and teleological relatedness, such as the ideal types of "family," "church," and "community") have all but vanished from the West, and the result is all-out Durkheimian anomie hidden behind a thin veneer of meaningless distractions. This orienting knowledge has been lost in modern societies largely due to the effect that the scientific revolution has had on the human psyche. The internalization of this historical process, the tyranny of the mental structure of consciousness, has had the effect of transforming modern Western culture, which is exerting an increasingly global influence, into "a monstrous accumulation of facts and details incapable of proving or signifying anything" (Guénon 2004a:39). Indeed, the loss or neglect of knowledge of principles that characterizes modern science has resulted in both an epistemological and an axiological impasse. Epistemologically science, through its striving after value-freedom, is now completely incapable of rendering anything but relative truths, while

axiologically our culture has insincerely promoted a single relatively valid stock of knowledge, namely, that of positivistic scientism, to the status of an absolute truth.

As noted earlier, this objectification of reality has been psychologically reflected by an increasing ontic isolation of the subject. This "unavoidable hypertrophy of the 'I,' which is in confrontation with the external world" (Gebser 1985:22) has likewise had an impact on societal structure. Since the time of the European Enlightenment, most individuals living in Western societies (and, more recently, worldwide) have been undergoing an increasingly intensifying process of conscious individuation, as what Gebser (1985) called the "mental" structure historically emerged as a factor in human consciousness. Describing the historical evolution of human consciousness, Gebser identified four major "structures of consciousness" through which our species has developed. These structures of consciousness determine the worldview of the people operating within them, giving rise to powerful pre-reflexive onto-epistemological assumptions. These assumptions are intersubjectively reified to a degree that coagulates a specific manifestation of reality itself. In this way, the subject-object relationship between human consciousness and the world it perceives has seen extraordinary changes throughout history. The oldest consciousness structures, the "archaic" and the "magic," reflect an unperspectival world where the unity of nature is a lived experience, while there is little awareness of a separate, individuated self. The "mythic" worldview, arising during the so-called axial age (cf. Black 2008; Jaspers 2014), brought about the be-

ginnings of a reality experienced as perspectival. One's perspective of reality in mythic cultures depends on one's position within a highly polarized mythological system of symbols which coordinate the material world with subjectively constituted and intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks. From this seed of perspectivism sprouted the mental structure which prides itself on analyzing reality objectively, thus attaining the supreme perspective of absolute truth.

This venture, however, negates its own situatedness within a given cultural context by severing from admitted reality all that is not empirically measurable. The very nexus of subjective insight and intersubjective understanding that could alone give rise to and contextualize the search for "value-free" knowledge is cast aside in favor of a hermeneutically ungrounded abstraction. Yet this abstracted worldview, though supposedly isolated from mythological (that is meaningful) accounts of reality, does not itself represent a higher order of cognition, but merely the reactionary intensification of the perspectival world-experience that originated with the mythic structure of consciousness. By fabricating measurement and succession, causation and reciprocity, and introducing "this world of symbols into things and ming[ling] it with them as though the symbol world were an 'in itself'" (Nietzsche 2014:33), we have accomplished nothing more than creating another mythos, one which has rendered described (and increasingly lived) reality meaningless.

The etiological framework discussed in the third section is not intended to merely supplant em-

pirical science in the same way that positivism once replaced the mythological systems that held currency before it through an essentially political process of change. As the current ontological reevaluation of the sciences takes place, our current state of consciousness, the very matrix of interpretation through which we interact with the objectified, is also evolving. Thus, an integral approach to scientific practice does not simply rest on the acceptance of a new conception or image of reality rooted in the logic of the mental structure of consciousness. Such a development would do nothing but replace the current worldview with one characterized by radically different contents and orientations, but an equally limited perspective which could only produce equally partial insights leading to equally dysfunctional implementations. A new interpretation of the same perspectival reality would, as all previous perspectival interpretations, be "no more than the creation of a myth, since all imagery has a predominantly mythical nature" (Gebser 1985:7).

The historical impasse of science, which has resulted in the reification of a meaningless myth with catastrophic social, ecological, and psychological consequences, can be summed up as the failure to integrate previously existing latent consciousness structures characterized by epistemic modes aimed at exploring the constant aspects of reality (i.e., the ever-present "ground" of consciousness itself, as well as the eternally valid hermeneutic truths encapsulated in mythological frameworks) with the new realm of "value-free" knowledge made accessible by the mental consciousness structure. As the resulting worldview has, howev-

er, outlived its relevance and threatens to self-destruct on an unprecedented scale, any attempt at formally reintegrating the various contextually valid epistemic modes that still largely underlie our everyday experience needs to be founded on a higher order of consciousness, which various thinkers have identified as currently emerging in our world (cf. Lazslo 2007; Wilber 2007; Nietzsche 2012a; Phipps 2012; Eisenstein 2013; Jaspers 2014). This thesis thus represents an attempt to transcend this incapacity of empirical science as an analytical tool applied to a trans-empirical reality, not by developing a new dualistically perspectival myth, but through highlighting the relative reality of the experienced duality of everyday life. It also serves as an instrument for the development of an onto-epistemological framework that is congruent with the "integral" structure of consciousness which is currently emerging in our collective experience of reality. Contributing to the current debate regarding the "ontological turn" in the sciences, the following sections explore the characteristics of an epistemological endeavor suitable to an aperspectival experience of reality, where "ego-consciousness" is replaced by "Itself-consciousness," which is related to the former as waking is to dreaming (Gebser 1985). The new worldview reflected in such an integral approach retains the insights generated by our collective historical foray into objectivity, while reclaiming the meaningful knowledge of ourselves and our relationship to the Kosmos that has systemically been neglected over the last few centuries. Given the centrality of consciousness in such an endeavor, the next section explores the subject in greater detail.

The Nature of the Subject

In order to meet the requirements of accountability and reflexivity laid down earlier, it is necessary that I thoroughly describe the position from which I (the subject within the context of this thesis) myself departed upon carrying out this work. In doing so, it becomes necessary to clarify certain ideas pertaining to the notion of levels, or states of consciousness open to experience by human beings, which is what this section is intended to accomplish. During my own investigations into reality I have always felt it is most natural to adopt a "phenomenological" attitude; that is, to analyze experienced reality as removed from any "outside" judgments regarding the ontic status thereof. This is the monadic starting point for all the arguments developed throughout the body of this thesis and, as such, it would be illogical to claim their generalizability in the empirical sense. A crucial point to keep in mind, however, is that the perceptions conveyed throughout this article are rooted in what Husserl (1960) referred to as "Transcendental Subjectivity" and, as such, do not represent the perspective of *a* monad, but of *the* monad.[10] The experiential data on which my conclusions are based are thus in principle accessible to any who would confirm or deny these conclusions, and therefore quite straightforwardly verifiable. I do not put forth the framework discussed in the fourth section as a phantasm generated by the isolated daydreaming of a single ego, but as the result of an analysis of the Transcendental Object of awareness (the Kosmos, or reality as a whole) from the aperspective[11] of the Transcendental Subject, which represents a verifiable step on the true phenomenological road to "the real positive outcome of the philosophical efforts of the centuries" (Farber 1968:3).

I speak here of "true" phenomenology due to the simple fact that the process of *epoché*, or "bracketing," that leads one to the state of Transcendental Subjectivity can never merely be "subsumed under the genus of method" (Farber 1968:VI), as most "phenomenological sociologists" have attempted to do (cf. Dreher 2012a; 2012b), thus replacing Husserl's lofty aim of true objectivity with a kind of half-hearted detachment. Simply put, even though phenomenology has historically been used as a scientific (and specifically sociological) paradigm and a procedure for qualitative research, the fact of the matter is that phenomenological analysis begins before the constitution of empirical data (Eberle 2014). Phenomenological analysis therefore occupies an epistemological position of preceding order to that of empirical analysis, due to the fact that the former is occupied with an investigation of the pre-reflexive constitution of objects that are taken-for-granted as given by the latter. I use the word "preceding" instead of "higher" in order to avoid creating the mistaken impression that I mean phenomenological analysis to be somehow "superior" to empirical analysis. We are, in fact, confronted on a daily basis with a phenomenal field[12] populated by objects that appear to exist independently of the perceiving subject (Habermas 1972), and denying this would necessitate the expounding of a dogmatically monistic theory of reality that would make little sense from the perspective of the natural attitude.

The phenomenal field to which science (and the social sciences in particular) is applied is that of naively lived everyday life, and this realm is experienced as inherently dualistic due to the seeming existence of multiple ontically isolated subjects. That this multiplicity of subjects is rooted in a unitary source, as becomes obvious during meditation,[13] is currently of little consequence to their continued existence as individual nodes of consciousness on the plane of their everyday experience. Whether this pre-reflexive experience of the multiplicity of subjects and the resulting dualistic nature of everyday life is seen to be a result of ignorance concerning absolute reality, the outcome of a more or less conscious will towards individuation, or simply the median conscious experience correlating to the contemporary evolutionary state of *Homo sapiens* changes little to the fact that it represents, at least at this point in time and space, the universal human experience of paramount, or conventional, reality. The relationship between this specifically human reality (being paramount due to the fact that it is shared by, or accessible to, all human beings) and absolute (or unconditioned) reality, and more specifically the repercussions thereof for the practice of social scientific research, constitutes the subject matter of the rest of this section.

Wherever physical, psychological, socio-cultural, and historical conditioning of the subject comes into play, the experiencing datum should aptly be referred to as Empirical Subjectivity, as the experience of the subject is then in some way conditioned by readily identifiable pre-reflexively existing factors which give rise to the possibility of approaching this order of subjectivity as an "object" of analysis.[14] This powerful nexus of self-experience constitutes the paramount experience of "I" in everyday life and stands in stark contrast to the universal experience of the unconditioned Transcendental Subject. Its nature is, in fact, so total that the Empirical Subject very rarely has access to the pre-conditioned point of view, and most people struggle to even make logical sense of the concept of Transcendental Subjectivity (an I that is not me?!). The perspective of Transcendental Subjectivity is, however, attainable by any human being,

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[10] Though this statement may seem understandably contentious to some, it is not meant to invoke an ungrounded metaphysical ideal, but represents the fundamental fact of the universal unity of unconditioned consciousness, a topic explored in greater detail throughout this section and the next.

[11] The relationship "between" the Transcendental Subject and the phenomenal world is one not easily translated into any current language. However, the doctrines of the Perennial Philosophy, the tenets of quantum physics, and direct experience serve to shed light on the fact that it is not describable in terms of "perspectivism," as we generally understand the concept, nor is it simply "unperspectival" (Mohrhoff 2008).

[12] The term "phenomenal field" is used to indicate especially the contents of awareness, in contrast to the more frequently used term "states of consciousness," in cases where the inherent characteristics of consciousness itself do not seem to be affected (Rock and Krippner 2007).

[13] Meditation as used here should not be confused with any trademarked or codified method of mind expansion, but simply refers to the natural penetration of ever more subtle and universal phenomenal fields by means of stillness, awareness, and acceptance.

[14] The "ontological discontinuity" that arises when one subject's "world-as-experienced" is reflexively translated into a "world-as-described" by a second subject makes clearly visible to the latter certain phenomena that go unnoticed by the former, while conditioning his/her experience of reality (Kotze et al. 2015). A similar process of uncovering the latent constituents of one's own being underlies the initial stages of the emancipatory process of self-realization (the gradual shift in self-identification from ego-consciousness to Itself-consciousness, or from existence primarily as an Empirical Subject to existence as the Transcendental Subject).

and in theory, by any consciously experiencing being, although it is a few orders removed from the "I" that experiences itself as a skin-encapsulated ego. It is also necessary to note that the attainment of this perspective requires a negation of physical, psychological, and socio-historical conditioning and the cultivation of a sustained level of awareness that is usually only permanently attained after years of meditative practice[15] (Böhme 2014). Regardless of the specific characteristics of these orders of subjectivity, it is clear that various loci of "I" exist and are readily available to perceptual experience (Wilber 2007). An integral ontology that incorporates this fact posits the only viable alternative to the dichotomy of idealistic disembodied consciousness, on the one hand, and the overly reductionist position of the new materialists (and others who see agency as purely residing in matter, and by social implication the body [cf. Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012]), on the other hand. The fact is that both extremes are true, verifiable aspects of reality; their relative validity merely depends on the momentary perspective of the subject.

Thus, the following section does not conceptualize the subject as the object of a given science, or even as the object of a holistically constructed multi-scientific epistemological nexus, but as the absolute "source" of reality. As the experiencing subject's existence "does not come from [its] antecedents,

nor from [its] physical and social surroundings [but] moves out toward them and sustains them" (Merleau-Ponty 2012:lxxii), we will not limit the possibilities of our investigation with scientifically specific signifiers, but depart from the kernel of the subject, that nucleus which claims to be "I," and label the encountered phenomena in ways that conform to the experience that "I" have of them. Of course, given that the term "I" can signify various loci of consciousness, we will have to deal separately with the two clearly differentiated perspectives defined in this thesis, namely, Empirical Subjectivity and Transcendental Subjectivity. The former represents, in the present context, the individuated experience of life as a member of the species *Homo sapiens* and the latter the undifferentiated state of being underlying and enfolding all manifestation and experience. The realities reflected by each differ quite markedly from that experienced by the other and, as such, each of these types of subjectivity, as representing ontically differentiated loci of self-identification along a continuum available to subjective experience, needs to be treated in detail. We will start off with Empirical Subjectivity, as this form of "I" has been most widely explored by contemporary science and also represents the everyday experience of reality from within the natural attitude.

The term "Empirical Subject" is used throughout this thesis to refer to any conditioned subject in general, and specifically to that state of consciousness which corresponds to the natural attitude, that pre-reflexive mode of going about our daily lives that characterizes the everyday experience of paramount reality (Schütz and Luckmann 1974). It

refers to the default experience of "myself" as an embodied subject, or what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls a "body-subject" (Keat 1982). In contrast to the undifferentiated state of Transcendental Subjectivity, the Empirical Subject's experience of the world in which it lives is mediated by individual psychological and biographical factors, as well as socio-culturally and historically contextualized meaning-frameworks that are intersubjectively constructed, maintained, and transformed (Dillon 1997). The realm of Empirical Subjectivity is thus the intersubjective realm of everyday life, of the lifeworld in so far as it comprises the "foundational structures of what is prescientific" (Schütz and Luckmann 1974:3) or the self-evident shared reality of our existence in the waking state. It is thus fundamentally the realm of "We," the intersubjectively constructed "world-as-agreed-upon," and as such that aspect of reality towards which sociology as a science is oriented, that is the abode of the Empirical Subject. It is important to keep in mind that the term Empirical Subject does not refer to a fixed class of differentiated subjectivity, but to any conditioned subject in general. As such, the concepts dealt with in this section (especially the terms of body and environment as fixed signifiers of meaning) do not rigidly represent the same phenomena in all cases of Empirical Subjectivity. As stated earlier, from a dualistic perspective, there exists a continuum of possible self-identification from the transcendent to the immanent, which means that what is experienced as "body" by a given subject, may well be experienced as "environment" by another, what is obviously "interior" to one, may be experienced as "exterior" by a second, and so forth. Because we are to look at

the constitution of the Empirical Subject in a phenomenological way, or in a manner that radiates outward from the central point of "I-amness," it would be a mistake to conceive of the various parts of the embodied human being in terms of multiple intertwining causalities (Merleau-Ponty 2012), as this would result in the digressing dissection of an illogically conceived object by means of the tools of various, often mutually exclusive, scientific frameworks, such as psychology, biology, and so forth. Thus, we do not analyze phenomena such as the human body and mind as objects of biology or psychology, but as pre-scientific constituents of the "world-as-witnessed," or the subjectively constituted aspects of reality. This fundamentally phenomenological turn "to the things themselves" represents the only way in which we can move beyond a scientific paradigm that tends to isolate a certain aspect of being, towards a mode of enquiry that, in lieu of investigating being qua being, transcends these limited perspectives and embeds them within an aperspectival matrix of universally valid "self"-knowledge (Atkinson 1985).

For most people, the default experience of I is that of being conflated with the physical body.[16] "I" experiences myself as being somehow situated in a certain part of a specific physical object over which I seems to have a certain degree of control and which seems to be surrounded by various other more or less similar objects and able to act upon, and be acted upon by, these other objects. This thesis

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[15] Interestingly, various studies indicate that similar modifications of consciousness and phenomenal fields may be temporarily facilitated by near death experiences, certain kinetic techniques, and the incorporation of a multitude of naturally occurring substances and synthesized analogues (Stolaroff 1999; Strassman 2001; Walsh 2001; Sessa 2005).

[16] While it is quite possible to consciously transfer one's locus of consciousness to "subtler bodies," the physical sheath remains the one in which, as human beings operating from within the natural attitude, "our 'I-feeling' throbs" (Salagame 2013:377).

argues, in agreement with *Sanatana Dharma*,[17] that, apart from the physical body, there exist increasingly subtle "sheaths" that enclose the Transcendental Subject and in effect give rise to Empirical Subjectivity (Rao 1970; Ashok and Thimmappa 2006). In order to make sense to the contemporary scientific reader, these bodies may be illustrated (from gross to subtle/individual to universal) as follows (Salagame 2013)[18]:

1. Body of matter: The bio-physical body.

2. Body of energy: The matrix of vitality which is emotionally experienced, and which links the out-

er sheaths (oriented towards sensing the "outer" world of manifestation) with the inner sheaths (oriented towards sensing the "inner" world of meaning).

3. Body of mind: The various potentia enclosed within consciousness and its more or less conscious and individuated vortices of recollection and intentionality.

4. Body of knowledge: The universal instrumental matrix of wisdom, the activation of which engenders insight into the relationships of causality and correlation underlying the operation of the previous sheathes.

5. Body of bliss: The most subtly dualistic state of being in which the Transcendental Subject is conscious of itself as aperspectival totality. In *Vedanta*, this state of being is indicated by the linguistic conglomerate *saccidānanda*, or "being-knowing-bliss" (Rangaswami 2012).

The subjectively constituted aspects of my experience thus arise primarily within the context of an existentially unique intertwining of these various modalities. The default orientation of the Empirical Subject to its world is thus an exclusively personal one. My earliest experiences of reality generate a concept of the world as "mine," as the various phenomena encountered are made sense of primarily in terms of their relationship to "me." Soon it becomes apparent that certain experienced phenomena resist simple categorization in this highly subjective way. Experience teaches us that certain aspects of the world lie beyond our control, and some

even seem to delimit our existential possibilities (Guénon 2004b). Thus, the "world-as-described," a relatively "objective" reality that stands as exterior to and unaffected by my directing mind, gradually comes to be as a complementary source of orientation and meaning-making made use of during my everyday existence. While the earliest years of my experience as an embodied being are characterized by a certain fluidity, or absence, of discrete self-identification as consciousness is focused on the "world-as-witnessed," by the time adulthood is reached, I have usually been socialized into accepting a certain interpretation of the relationship between "I," me,[19] my body, and the world around me. The socially shared "world-as-agreed-upon" thus starts to take the ontological precedence over both the subjectively unique "world-as-witnessed" and the objectively universal "world-as-described" that it necessarily would in the experience of a fundamentally social being. Indeed, in everyday life, intersubjectively constructed meaning-frameworks tend to play a foundational role in our understanding of ourselves and our world. As these socially agreed upon interpretations of reality tend to trump both individual interpretation and factual data when it comes to the social construction of reality on an everyday basis, there is a pressing need to include a hermeneutic understanding of the lifeworlds one traverses when engaged in social research. The fostering of such understanding, along with an acknowledgement of the empirical

quanta present during the manifestation of any phenomenon and a reflexive awareness of one's own agential role during the research process, is only possible by generating an integral etiological framework that makes explicit reference to all the modes of interplay between reality and the observing subject. The next section explores such a framework in greater detail.

Towards an Integral Framework for the Study of a Trans-Empirical Reality

Though the social sciences have managed to stem the prevailing tide of objectivism described in the second section significantly by highlighting the social construction of reality and the relative nature of certain "truths," for example (cf. Bourdieu 1990; Giddens 2011), the lack of both a clear situating of these sciences in relationship to other epistemological projects (such as the natural sciences, philosophy, and religion), along with an awareness of the modern social sciences themselves as being primarily European cultural artefacts, only causes further confusion. Even as the focus of social research has consistently shifted from structures to narratives in recent decades, its underlying onto-epistemological foundations have remained largely unchanged. The fact that the social sciences remain (or still strive to be) largely predictive and instrumental in nature[20] actually compounds the problems raised in the second section, as advocates of sweeping social change largely base their arguments on an approach that,

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[17] This is the name the Sanskrit-speaking Indo-Europeans gave to their worldview, which is rather misleadingly referred to as Hinduism in the English speaking world. The Sanskrit phrase is, however, of more value, as the directly translated "eternal law" emphasizes the trans-contextual, universal nature of the body of knowledge at its core (Rao 2009). The term should definitely not be understood as referring to a specific religion.

[18] Again, in this reference to "Hinduism," as to all epistemological systems referred to throughout this article, the aim is not to overlay a single culturally contextualized tradition onto a sphere that is beyond its legitimate scope. Contextualized analyses of the continuum of being, rendering it an object of the second order (as conditioned both by subjectively constituted and inter-subjectively constructed meaning-frameworks [Bourdieu 1990]), are found in a temporally, geographically, and ethno-culturally diverse range of wisdom traditions, the most well-known of which include Buddhism (from the individual, sensory *nirmanakaya* [body of manifestation] through the universal "Buddha-nature" of the *dharmakaya* [body of law]) (Williams 2007), Jewish Cabbala (the *sefiroth*, or continua of manifestation from the *en-sof* [the infinite] to the world of manifest action) (Scholem 1969), Taoism (from the "10 000 things" of manifest reality through the unity of the "unspeakable Tao") (Waley 1997), and Christianity (from "nature" to the "Godhead") (Colledge and McGinn 1981). Corollary phenomena have been empirically observed, described by some as "subtle energy fields" which vary significantly between individuals (Wilber 2006; Sheldrake 2013). The inclusion of these divergent perspectival accounts of the "object" of analysis is intended to facilitate an integral, aperspectival analysis of the phenomenon as an object of the first order (free from the molding impressions of personal opinion and social understanding [Wacquant 1992]), thus facilitating access to a store of knowledge that is fundamentally more "objective" than any provisional empirical conclusion, while simultaneously being universally communicable and existentially transparent.

[19] This article accepts the ego of Western psychology to be merely the product of pre-reflexive identification with an object of awareness, and not the source of consciousness itself (Rangaswami 2012). The unobjectifiable nature of "I" must never be lost sight of when interpreting the stream of thought reflected in this article.

[20] Hypotheses that are currently socially applied represent the full spectrum of paradigmatically limited sociological theories (cf. Zevallos 2009).

though being explicitly interventionist and manipulative in nature, does not take into consideration the full spectrum of human interests (Braaten 1991). Thus, the social sciences in general, and sociology in particular (especially due to the fact that at least some of its practitioners aim at impacting public policy), stand in even greater need of an integrated contextualization. This section aims to trace the outlines of such a holistic refunding of the social scientific project rooted in the phenomenological description discussed in the previous section by identifying certain essential principles that need to be taken into account wherever social reality is analyzed. By clearly identifying the principles on which the manifestation of social reality rests, it becomes possible to transcend the contemporary conflictual relationships between the various sociological paradigms. Knowledge of principles will finally allow sociologists to truly understand social reality, whereas most contemporary agreement, falling outside the realm of principles, are "unstable and precarious and much more like a diplomatic arrangement than a true understanding" (Guénon 2004a:30).

Conceptualized in order to facilitate access to the apodictic strata of reality represented by such principles, this framework does not represent a middle way or another dividing alternative to the various limited scientific paradigms, but instead is meant to draw together holistically any and all partially true theories that "in their very conflict, demonstrate the intimacy with which they belong together, the commonness of their underlying convictions, and an unswerving belief in a true philosophy" (Husserl 1960:5). This true philosophy is not to be haphazardly concocted from the limited paradigmatic

perspective of any isolated school of thought, but instead is to be distilled from the various sources that have reflected various aspects thereof during the history of human thought. As such, it is also not presented as being my "intellectual property," as this claim would deprive it of any validity. The integral etiological framework presented in this section is not "new" in the sense of being invented, but represents an utterly real and true idea that belongs to all who can understand/manifest it. It thus has an existence independent of contextualized interpretation, and is variously verifiable phenomenologically, hermeneutically, and empirically (Guénon 2004a). The project of uncovering this essential foundation of reality entails putting the sum total of our collective knowledge on the table, purging ourselves of any tendency towards arbitrary categorization and expunging from our minds any socio-cultural, psychological, historical, and physical conditioning, as well as all ungrounded biases rooted in egoism, ethnocentrism, and intellectual fundamentalism. The integral etiological framework discussed over the course of the following pages is thus argued to be trans-empirical, post-metaphysical, and beyond the misleading dichotomies of science and spirituality, East and West, male and female, objectivity and subjectivity, relativity and universality, and so forth, which have hindered the evolution of our understanding of ourselves, our world, and our relationship to it for centuries. Indeed, once the principles of reality are understood as independent of and prior to all relative contingencies, there will no longer be scientifically valid disagreement regarding the nature of the structures and processes that flow from them (Guénon 2004a). Indeed, reality grasped in-

tegrally "is the world's transparency, a perceiving of the world as truth; a mutual perceiving and imparting of truth of the world and of man and of all that transluces both" (Gebser 1985:7).

This is the case because absolute reality is non-dual, though any Empirical Subject necessarily perceives reality as relatively dualistic, as illustrated in the third section. The exact nature of the relationship between subject and object is thus provisionally informed by the momentary existential "distance" between the self and the other. As this variable may range from complete novelty and alienation to unity and various degrees of interpenetration, it becomes clear that the very nature of *ontos* and *episteme* is determined by the perspective of the subject, a cognition that is systemically relevant to the subject that enacts it. It now becomes atavistic (or at best *interesting*) to analyze a given object (or subject) as if they are ontically isolated things-in-themselves. In fact, their seeming polarity from within the perspectival worldview of the fundamentally dualistic mental consciousness structure, rather than giving rise to contesting explanations of what is evidently a harmonious whole, intimates the reality of a more fundamental unity observed from within the aperspectival integral consciousness structure. The only way to redefine the terms of our analysis of reality in a way that reflects the wider and deeper perception made possible by the ascendancy of the integral consciousness structure, and to move towards a truly aperspectival analysis of reality, is thus to recognize the fundamentally relative nature of all ontology and epistemology, and to transcend the now "primitive" perspectivism/dualism that was the hallmark of the mental consciousness structure

that came to fruition over the past few centuries. An aperspectival consciousness does not witness the world in the same dualistic way as its precursory structures. It does not stand apart from "objects of perception," but "is" itself the imminent process of becoming which was previously dissected into subject and object (Guénon 2004a; Cheng 2008). Ontology and epistemology are thus seen to be perspectivally relevant abstractions, and the core analytical process becomes etiology, or an integral knowledge of becoming, which includes origin, manifestation, and teleology (Gebser 1985).

We thus have to consider manifest reality as neither exclusively an object nor a state of consciousness, but as a teleologically unfolding "presentation," the contents, structure, and perspective of which are constantly regenerating in every etiologically unique moment, while retaining the singular origin of all phenomena "as an ineradicable present" (Gebser 1985:294). An integral framework for scientific practice thus needs to be sensitive to the relationship between subject and object rather than either the subject or object in isolation. When analyzed in such a way, everyday reality is seen to manifest as a Holon constituted of three interrelated etiological complexes, each characterized by the unique ontic, epistemic, and spatio-temporal character of its constituents. This Holon underlies the existence of various kinds of knowledge and means to knowledge, which are alternatingly pursued and perused based on whether the act of perception is "oriented toward technical control, toward mutual understanding in the conduct of life, [or] toward emancipation from seemingly 'natural' constraints" (Habermas 1972:311).

Figure 1: The three etiological complexes.
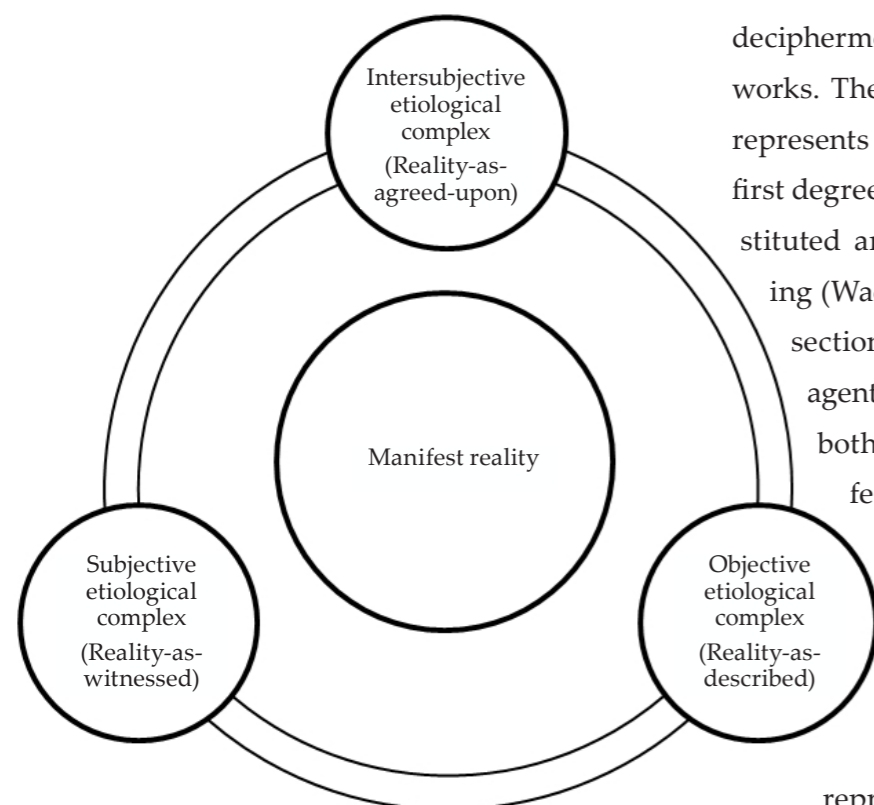
Source: Self-elaboration.

The reality that we, as Empirical Subjects, naively experience as a unitary stream of manifestation thus comprises three interrelated, but individually signifiable etiological complexes, or matrices of manifestation and perception, each of which gives rise to an experientially and ontically distinct dimension of reality. The subjective etiological complex is represented by the existentially constituted and biographically accumulated aspects of experience which make up the "I-feeling" of the Empirical Subject, and is alternatively referred to throughout this thesis as the "world-as-witnessed," that individually unique well of subjective perception from which an individual draws more or less consciously in daily life (Nietzsche 2012b). The intersubjective etiological complex represents that aspect of

reality that is intersubjectively constructed, and which is accessed by means of the interpretive decipherment of socially shared meaning-frameworks. The objective etiological complex, in turn, represents the empirical analysis of objects of the first degree, as isolated from both subjectively constituted and intersubjectively constructed meaning (Wacquant 1992). As mentioned in the third section, the Transcendental Subject does not agentially participate in this Holon, but is both the ground and the *telos* of its manifestation. As the singular "I" itself is empirically quite ungraspable, meaning that it is impossible to constitute an object that can serve as referent to the totality of what is meant by the word "I," the Transcendental Subject is represented in the figure above by the totality of the matrix and the medium in which the figure is rendered. Thus, an analysis of reality can only be an analysis of that which "encloses," is perceived by, and which is in varying degrees (based on the nature of momentary experience) partially conflatable with the Transcendental Subject, which act of conflation creates the relatively existent Empirical Subject and its experiential perspective, as described in the previous section.

In this way, reality can be grasped as an *ontos* of standpoints, with absolute reality (the "I" experience of the enfolding Transcendental Subject) being monistic, while the relative everyday reality (the "I" experience of the embedded Empirical Subject) is experienced as being dualistic. The relative reality of the dualistically perceived world thus remains the object of investigation of a scientific pursuit

that seeks progress and utilitarianism of a higher order than hitherto conceived of, while the apodictic knowledge of its principles, which can be conceived of as omnipresent etiological laws of nature of a different order than the spatio-temporally contingent empirical laws of physics (or any science), is kept in mind. In this way, any given phenomenon can be analyzed in terms of its most minutely specific empirical, hermeneutic, and existential quanta and qualia, situating it transparently against the continually unfolding meta-narrative represented by bio-physical manifestation, collective history, and personal biography, while simultaneously "all nature, every perception, every phenomenon, the entirety [of] 'internal experience', the 'content of the psyche', [is] freed from 'subjectivity', separated from what is 'human'" (Evola 1996:214). Thus, a truly integral analysis of reality furnishes us not only with

a deeply personal, socially relevant, and empirically sound account of specific phenomena, but simultaneously allows for insight into the same phenomena as free from subjective interpretation, socio-cultural bias, and the dogma of essentially arbitrary standards of measurement and description. One of the characteristics of this integral etiological framework is that its implementation is not dependent on the elaboration of new theoretical or methodological systems. Various schools of thought have produced such systems in abundance, albeit always operating exclusively within a single etiological complex. In the next article constituting this thesis, we will investigate the ways in which an integral sociological practice can be operationalized at the theoretical and methodological levels by making integrally reflexive use of the vast array of existing sociological theories and methods.

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For all sociologists for whom interpretative paradigm and qualitative research methodology are basic perspectives of studying social reality. In order to enable a free flow of information and to integrate the community of qualitative sociologists.

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