

Identities under threat:
A study of experiences of adult homelessness

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the lives and narrative counts of five homeless people in contemporary South Africa: a post-apartheid context characterized by a rapidly emerging globalized consumer culture and an internal tension in the government commitment to social welfare and while simultaneously following less benevolent neoliberal economic models. The primary concern of the study is the ways in which these marginalized individuals talk about themselves, the stories of their lives and represent themselves through narratives. Their lives, identities and stories are constructed from marginal and socially neglected spaces. The study grapples with what makes us human and the human consequences of global capitalism and consumerism. The study explores the connections homelessness and 'home'; and between homelessness and economic agency. Here homeless identities are constructed outside of the socially valued place of the home and defined by their jobless status and by their lack of economic agency. This means that homeless people have to constantly negotiate their socially 'threatened' and 'threatening' identities from the margins of society. The narratives of the participants reveal gendered and economic factors that precipitate the choice of a street existence as well as structural factors that keep homeless people 'the other'. The narratives further reveal contested meanings of home as connoting security and as a space for identity construction but also as the site for risk, exploitation, violence, and abuse, especially against women. The study suggests that homeless people can be thought of as displaced people in search for 'home' and for positive social identities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to explore the lives and narrative accounts of five homeless people in contemporary South Africa: a post-apartheid context characterized by a rapidly emerging globalized consumer culture and an internal tension in the government commitment to social welfare and while simultaneously following less benevolent neoliberal economic models. The primary concern of the study is the ways in which these marginalized individuals talk about themselves, tell the stories of their lives and construct themselves in narratives. Their 'stories of identity' are critical in that they are constructed from a politically marginalized position and told within a socially estranged, alienated context of homelessness.

Much has been written on homelessness within the South African context - from poverty, which is considered the primary cause of homelessness (Grinspun, 2001; May, 2001); to the historical dimensions of homelessness, which derive from racial domination of apartheid (Dixon, Foster, Durkheim and Wilbraham, 1994; Harvey, 1999) that subjugated black people into poverty; to the impact of homelessness on cognitive development and mental health (Berthoud, 1976; Richter, 1994). In addition, South Africa has produced an impressive body of literature and research on the 'street child phenomenon', which examine the needs, coping styles, challenges and developmental implications of the street child (Berthoud, 1976; Richter, 1994; Swartz-Kruger and Donald, 1994).

This study is an attempt to go beyond the conventional research methodology and conceptualizations of homelessness, to examine the personal meanings attached to the experience of being homeless. The study is also an attempt to interrogate the socio-political and economic contexts that perpetuate and maintain homelessness. In other words, the study poses a different question about the implications of homelessness for

identity, and the resources that homeless people use to construct and tell narratives about 'the self' and the economic context in which they live and are neglected. Homelessness is a socially devalued position as well as a critical space for identity that serves as a site of resistance against social institutions like 'the home' (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001), while at the same time posing real threats to the physical and psychological integrity of the homeless individuals.

The exploration of the narrative accounts of homeless people offers us entry into their personal and psychological lives as well as critique of the social, material and structural context that shape and forge these identities. The study aims to explore the construction of homeless identities in relation to place/home (or the absence of home) and to interrogate the links between identity and economic systems, including the culture of consumerism. This study therefore explores homeless identities through two trajectories and themes:

- 1) Identities as constructed in relation to the space and place that we call 'home'. In this light, homelessness can be thought of as a lack of home in a 'home-based society' (Mathiti, 2004). Homeless identities are therefore constructed outside of this socially valued and politically regulated place.

- 2) Identities as economically structured in a capitalist, consumer society. Homelessness can also be thought of as a failure to participate meaningfully in economic life, either as a worker or producer or consumer of goods and services. Consumption defines a socially and economically valued identity. However, homeless identities are constructed and forged outside this position. Homeless identities are therefore socially threatened and threatening identities as they operate in the margins of society rather than within the

dominant economic ideologies of identity and identity construction. Narrative analysis allow for the dual examination of personal meanings of homelessness as well as the interrogation of social, political and economic realities that create and maintain homelessness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores theoretical, methodological, political and historical dimensions in the conceptualization of homelessness and identity. The chapter will examine popular representations of homelessness in the media, academic literature and social policy debates, in order to make a case for the social construction of homelessness and identity. The exploration of the theoretical framework for this study will open space for the interrogation of the socio-political contexts of globalisation, capitalism and consumption that are critical for understanding homelessness. The study argues for the links between homelessness and 'home'; and between homelessness and economic agency, in order to explore homelessness as a 'threat' to identity in a home-based (Mathiti, 2004) and consumer society.

2.1 Defining and Conceptualizing Homelessness

Homelessness is an elusive concept, and a difficult experience to define. This is evident in the multiplicity of its definitions. The difficulty in defining homelessness partly lies in the fact that it is a relative and subjective state of being. This is further complicated by the fact that there are no accurate figures recorded of homeless people in South Africa. As a result, this 'marginalized group' of people goes undocumented, unregulated and neglected.

The lack of consensus in the definitions of homelessness reflects different ideologies, discourses, interests and political agendas underlying the construct of homelessness (Daly, 1996). Jacobs, Kenedy and Manzi (1999) argue that the study of homelessness does not only raise political issues but also methodological concerns. For instance, the question of who is homeless cannot be measured objectively in absolute terms. Homelessness is a historically changing socio-political construct. It is not static but a

dynamic state of being, characterized by shifts and movements of homeless people in-and-out, and between 'homeless shelters', 'the streets' and 'their home' of origin. These movements highlight the dynamic nature of homelessness, which makes researching it elusive, and at times difficult.

The question is: who are homeless? In their study, Baer, Singer and Susser (1997) suggest that 'the homeless' can refer to poor people without shelter; and/or people who sleep on the streets and public places. 'The homeless' can also refer to displaced communities, refugees, and exiles as a result of forced removals, war and natural disasters (Baer et al, 1997). Furthermore, the informal settlements or 'squatter camps' in South Africa further complicate our formulations of homelessness. Although such communities are not usually referred to as 'homeless', they can, however, be regarded as such (Mathiti, 2004). In this light, defining homelessness, either narrowly or broadly, is a political project, which serves particular political interests and agendas.

This study acknowledges the tensions and obscurities in attempting to neatly define homelessness. It is for this reason that the study adopts 'an explicitly political' methodology that seeks to reveal the ideological constructed nature of homelessness. This study therefore takes as its framework a social constructionist lens in the exploration of 'homeless identities' and the interrogation of different discourses (Daly, 1996) that construct homelessness as a particular problem or experience. Social constructionism seeks to reveal and lay bare the different systems of meaning and ideas that construct homelessness as a particular problem for academic and socio-political enquiry. Social constructionism views the historicity and multiplicity of the definitions and experiences of homelessness as central to and constitutive of the phenomenon itself. It is precisely the politics and ideologies underlying homelessness from which social constructionist

approaches find their value and point of departure.

2.2 Theoretical Underpinnings: Constructing Homelessness

In order to illustrate and justify the theoretical relevance of social constructionism in exploring homeless identities, it is necessary to initially consider the two dominant representations of homelessness in academic literature and public policy debates. The examination of these dominant representations of homelessness will serve to reveal different systems of meaning that construct homelessness as a particular ‘political’ or ‘personal’ problem. Historically, homelessness has been and continues to be defined and constructed within two discourses that operate to prioritize either ‘the individual’ or ‘the social’. This means that homelessness tends to be constructed primarily as ‘an individual problem’ or primarily as a ‘structural/societal concern’, which respectively explain homelessness in terms of individual or social responsibility.

2.2.1 Self-Help Discourse: The ‘Lazy’ and ‘Undeserving’ Poor

Homelessness is generally constructed as ‘an individual problem’ – pointing to some intrinsic biological, cognitive, or personality deficit - of the homeless person. Jacobs et al (1999) call this explanation the ‘minimalist discourse’. Within this discourse, the responsibility for both cause and resolution of ‘the problem’ resides within the homeless persons themselves.

This discourse conceptualizes ‘the individual’ as central and primary to social processes. ‘The individual’ is abstracted and devoid of his/her social, political and material conditions. Put differently, ‘the individual’ and ‘society’ are seen as ontologically separate and distinct realities from each other. ‘The individual’ is thus accorded primacy over society and is further explained in individualistic and in most cases, in essentialist

terms. This conceptualization of 'the individual' is based on the idea that:

...the person is a unified, coherent and rational agent who is the author of his or her own experience and its meaning. Humanism is essentialist; it assumes that there is an essence at the core of an individual, which is unique, coherent and unchanging (Burr, 1995: 40).

In this way, the minimalist discourse emphasizes rationality, individual autonomy and agency, in a manner that negates the material, social, political and cultural roots of 'the individual'. The homeless person is therefore constructed as a free-acting and autonomous agent, whose identity and agency are independent of their social, political and material realities. Constructing homelessness in individualistic and essentialist terms tends to lead to 'blaming the person' and making moral assumptions about the character of the homeless person - such as, 'they are homeless as a consequence of alcoholism, destitution, pauperism', and their unwillingness to work (Jacobs, et al, 1999). For Harvey (1999) the minimalist discourse is an old-age explanation that accounts for social problems, like homelessness, in individualistic, intra-personal and pathological ways that find fault with the individual and functions to absorb society's responsibility, which further negates the more subtle and structural processes at play.

Murray (1984) ingenuously suggests that the minimalist discourse claims that homelessness derives from:

...an underclass of ... poor people who chronically live off mainstream society (directly through welfare or indirectly through crime) without participating in it (cited in Daly, 1996: 3).

The minimalist discourse is a fallacious conceptualization of the relationship between 'the individual' and 'society' as it fails to account for the social and cultural basis of experience and identity. We cannot understand homelessness or homeless people independently of their social, cultural and material conditions. For instance, homelessness in South Africa has roots in and is given expression by the political and historical context of apartheid (Dixon et al, 1994; Harvey, 1999). Thus, homelessness can be conceptualized within its socio-historical and socio-economic imperatives such as high levels of unemployment; poverty, the disinvestments by the national government in housing people with low income (Daly, 1996); the lack of income support systems; and family fragmentation (Harvey, 1999). Understanding homelessness cannot be reduced to the understanding of internal dynamics of the homeless persons but rather broader social and political – local and global – contexts.

2.2.2 Material and Social Explanation: 'Made and kept homeless'

In opposition to the minimalist discourse is the 'state welfare' or 'structural discourse' on homelessness. Within this discourse, homelessness is constructed as a societal and structural problem requiring social responsibility and large-scale state interventions (Daly, 1996; Jacobs et al, 1999). Contrary to the minimalist discourse, the structural discourse locates the cause and resolution of homelessness within structural, social, historical, political and economic forces and institutions in society. For instance, homelessness may be a result of 'loss of community' as a consequence of macro-political and economic changes like privatization, deregulation, free trade, which blur and obscure the lines between our lives, public policy and private interests (Daly, 1996).

Furthermore, the economic and political contexts of globalization and global capitalism, where private interests shape public policy (Daly, 1996; Klein, 2000), create new

possibilities for interconnections of transnational knowledge, capital and skills. But at the same time lead to processes such as increased immigration, unemployment, commodification and privatization of social services (Daly, 1996). This engenders and perpetuates widening gaps between the rich and the poor (Daly, 1996) and creates 'critical spaces' for identities to be forged in conditions of social conflict, poverty, displacement and homelessness.

The structural discourse constructs homelessness as a social product. In this way, the society and culture in which individuals live 'produce' and 'determine' the individual, action, and identity. Society is thus constructed as shaping and constraining the lives of its members (Billington, Hockey and Strawbridge, 1998) and determining who we are and what our place is in it. Although the structural discourse goes beyond individualistic and essentialist explanations of homelessness, it nonetheless produces what Billington et al (1998) call 'an oversocialised view of man' or what Miller (1984) terms a 'mechanistic determinism', in accounting for the social construction of identity and experience that leaves little for individual agency.

2.2.3 The Value of Social Constructionism: Revealing Theoretical and Political limitations in Homelessness Discourses

The two completing discourses on homelessness – the minimalist and structural discourses – produce particular conceptions about 'the individual' and 'society'. The two discourses theoretically treat 'the individual' and 'society' as separate and oppositional realities that determine and create each other. These discourses either take 'the individual' as central in determining social processes and identity. Or, they accentuate the power of society or social structure (Giddens, 1984) in producing the individual, experience and identity.

Both these discourses fail to account for the incredible ability that individuals possess - to actively construct their identities within political, social and material confinements and parameters not chosen by them. Individuals are at once agents of change as well as socially produced and culturally embedded actors. This means that individuals are simultaneously constrained and enabled by the very same material, social and political conditions that they construct, which further define and mark their lives, identity and social location. Marx and Engles (1975) eloquently expressed this duality, as opposed to a dualism, between individuals and social structure, in that:

Men (sic) make history but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past (cited in Callinicos, 1999: 94).

Besides their theoretical limitations, the two discourses each present a particular version of homelessness, while at the same time function to conceal certain ideas. The fact that homelessness is historically constructed within two competing discourses suggests that homelessness is itself a socially constituted and politically contested unstable reality (Daly, 1996). Social constructionism recognizes that different literature, government policies, theories and explanations of homelessness are politically motivated in serving particular purposes. This means that deciding to define homelessness as either 'an individual' or 'structural problem' functions to attribute or locate blame and responsibility within the individual or society, which reveal concealed theoretical and political conceptions of 'the individual', 'society' and 'responsibility'.

Therefore, conceptualising homelessness within a social constructionist frame is a strategic move that allows for the deconstruction of socially constituted political ideas and discourses that construct homelessness as a particular problem. Rather than locating homelessness within the individual or society, social constructionism interrogates the linguistic, cultural and political meanings and processes that define homelessness in a certain way but conceal other aspects and versions of the problem. Micheal (1996) suggests that social constructionism does not attempt to integrate the dualism between the individual and the social but rather examine the ways in which linguistic and discursive political practices produce the individual and society as certain entities rather than others.

Social constructionism allows us to interrogate the different ways in which homelessness is constructed in public policy and ways that homeless individuals construct themselves and their experiences. This study will analyse the ways that homeless people talk about their homelessness in order to interrogate their broader social and political contexts that entrench their talk, lives, experiences and identities. This study is about identities and understanding how homeless individuals define and speak about themselves in the telling of their 'stories of the self'. It is therefore important to explore the different conceptions and understandings of identity.

2.3 Understanding and Talking Identity: Who am I?

The topic of identity has generated much philosophical and psychological debate. Sarup (1994) suggests that the question of identity and the self - personal identity, social identity, national identity, ethnic identity, multiple self, divided self, contradictory self - has pervasively dominated contemporary debate about our conceptualisations of 'the individual' and 'the social world'. Our general and taken-for-granted understanding of the individual or the self as central, autonomous, rational, unique, bounded, and self-

contained has come under fire in the light of post-structuralist critique. Post-structuralism has made it difficult, if not impossible, to talk about an individualized, coherent, unified self or subject, who has inherent qualities that enable action on the world (Archer, 2000; Burr, 1995; Craib, 1998; Sampson, 1989; Woodward, 2000). Within post-structuralist theorization, there is talk of a decentred self, a multiple self, and even a contradictory self.

This study on homeless identities is informed by social constructionism and narrative psychology. Social constructionism and narrative psychology take identity as inherently social and constructed in and through language. Within these approaches, language is not merely expressive but rather the site of meaning and social construction. Specifically narrative psychology assumes that identity is 'storied' in nature and that humans are 'storied selves'¹ (Roberts, 2002; Andrews, Sclater, Squire and Tamboukou, 2004). This means that our identities are constructed in and through the stories we tell about ourselves. Identities are therefore formulated, mediated and reproduced in and through language (Micheal, 1996). In line with this view, social constructionism is premised on a decentred self that is constructed through cultural and linguistic practices of its context.

Woodward (2000) argues that identities are formed through interaction between people and their 'positioning' in the social world. Therefore personal dimensions of identity involve an interrogation of the relations and connections to the social world in which the person is embedded. Put differently, identity involves an inter-relationship, or as Miller (1984) suggests an interpenetration, between the personal/individual/agency and the social/cultural/structure. In this way, identity provides a link between the individual and the social world: between internal subjective realities and external material conditions.

¹ Refer to the methodology chapter for an in-depth theoretical exploration of self and identity as 'storied'.

While individuals have agency, i.e. control in exerting who they are and who they become, this agency exists within socially constrained, mediated and structured realities. We therefore need to think about identity in ways that allow for agency and action within the constraints of social structure, language, material and cultural conditions.

Although people actively take up identities, those identities are products of the society in which they live. Woodward (2000) suggests that constraints lie in the external world; in the material and social conditions such as our bodies; in the lack of resources that limit opportunities we have and limit the kinds of people we are and what we can become. It is in this sense that homeless identities are particularly interesting. Homelessness entails a redefinition of identities as these are explicitly and gravely constrained in a home-based (Mathiti, 2004) and capitalist consumer society. Such a society creates different possibilities and constrains for such identities.

Therefore identities are not untouched by social and material realities. People are socially positioned in different ways (Craib, 1998), which shapes experiences and makes certain identities possible and renders others inaccessible and impossible (Woodward, 2000). Homeless people experience the world in particular ways as their identities are constructed in ways that position them differently psychologically, socially and economically. Homeless people are 'forced' to forge their identities from the margins of society – from the position of the 'Other'. Homeless identities are particularly constrained in relation to place and economics.

2.4 Conceptualizing Homeless Identities In Context

Given the difficulty in defining the concept of homelessness, this study will conceptualise homelessness in broader terms, as a lack of place/home. In this sense, homelessness can be understood as a form of displacement and dislocation.

We are increasingly living in a global world that is interconnected politically, socially and economically. There is increased global contact between nations, spaces and economics (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001). Craib (1998) argues that with global capitalism comes a need to understand the self or identity through the way in which the development of the market in the last 30 years has created and centred on the process of individualization, competition and survival. With globalisation and capitalism, comes increased technological development; changes in economic division of labour - i.e. the decline in long term employment (Klein, 2000); weakened civil and social institutions; the creation of a larger working class community; and increased consumption and production, which invents 'new ways' of being-in-the-world. Globalisation brings changes in, and structures new relationships between individuals but more profoundly creates new spaces for identity.

This study thus conceptualises homelessness as the effect of, and one of the consequences of globalisation and capitalism. There is a need to understand such effects on identities and how people can forge positive identities in such spaces. One of the critical effects, at least for this study, of globalisation and capitalism is the creation of consumption as a central way of being-in-the-world, which structures and patterns social relationships and personal identity. Homelessness is therefore by implication failure to consume and participate meaningfully in economic activity.

Like Ina and Rosaldo (2002), Gupta and Ferguson (2002) suggest that global capitalism has profoundly dislocating effects on communities and individuals. Globalisation forces us to think differently about 'the notion of place and home', as more and more people live on the borders and margins of society, but some more than others: consider the following groupings - transnational business and professional elite, tourists, immigrants, migrant workers, nomads, refugees, exiles, displaced and homeless people. It is in this context of global insertion that Edward Said (1979) suggests that we live in 'a generalized condition of homelessness' (cited in Gupta and Ferguson, 2002: 68). 'The general condition of homelessness' refers to the context where identities are increasingly becoming deterritorialized, where markers of place and home are blurred, a world of diasporas. However, unlike tourists, homeless people, refugees, and the displaced live out these realities in their complete form.

We can therefore think of homelessness as a form of displacement and a kind of exile from home and significant interpersonal relationships. Homeless identities are uprooted, dislocated and socially threatened identities located and constructed from the margins of society.

2.5 Homelessness as Displaced Identities: Thinking Metaphorically

The concept of home is critical in theorising about homelessness and the 'lack of home'. 'Being at home' can be juxtaposed to being homeless or displaced from 'home'. The concept and experience of displacement is useful here as a metaphor for thinking about homelessness, as it allows us to connect identity to 'home'; to think about home as a space for identity construction and to consider being homeless as a 'problem' for identity or as an identity crisis. Absence of, loss of or movement from home, either by choice or force, can be thought of as displacement and/or homelessness. We can therefore think of

homeless people as displaced people. Bammer (1994) argues that displacement implicates being pushed forcefully and/or permanently out of 'home'. Homelessness, in this way, is about 'separation' from home; a kind of exile, which entails 'outsiderness' and 'alienation' (Bammer, 1994).

It has been suggested that homeless people can also be thought of as 'nomads', whose lives are characterized by estrangement, alienation and disconnection from home. However, Bauman (1998) argues that the term 'nomads' is fashionable nowadays and tends to be "...applied indiscriminately to all contemporaries of the postmodern era; [which] is grossly misleading, as it glosses over the profound differences" (pg. 87) between people like tourists and people that are forced out of 'home' and displaced onto the margins. Homeless people are significantly locked outside of 'home', which is a meaningful and socially valued context for socialization, as a point for political regulation and space for identity construction.

2.5.1 Placed and Rooted: At Home and the Absence of Home

This study aims to show how our identities are fundamentally constructed in relation to place (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001; Relph, 1976; Woodward, 2000). Some authors argue that people have emotional attachments attached to specific places such as home (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001; Relph, 1976; Sennett, 1999). Homelessness can be thought of as the lack of attachment to 'place' and others. Relph (1976) sees our attachment to place as being about *rootedness*: in that it is a human need to be attached to places; to have profound emotional ties to places. Weil (1955) writes about our need to be rooted in a place:

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of the community, which preserves in living shape certain particular expectations for the future (cited in Relph, 1976: 38).

Being rooted in place connotes our need for security and our sense of belonging. The home is socially constructed as a place for security, as our sense of belonging and the context for our identity construction. By implication, homelessness is a 'nowhere' place, which is characterized by alienation, marginalization, loss and neglect.

'Home' is socially constructed as the source of our identity construction, as a profound place for our social existence; the dwelling place of being (Relph, 1976). It is impossible to theorize and talk about homelessness without thinking about the connections to the idea and the place called 'home'. Relph (1976) refers to 'home' as the foundations for our identities as individuals and as members of a community. Homeless people are thus like exiles, nomads and the displaced, whose lives are marked by movements and negotiation between home and different places - Minh-ha (1994) calls this a negotiation between a 'here', a 'there' and, an 'elsewhere'.

For Havel (1992) home defines our 'humanity' and it is what makes human beings social beings:

Our homes are an inseparable element of our human identity. Deprived of all the aspects of his home, man (sic) would be deprived of himself, of his humanity (cited in Daly, 1996: 149).

By implication homeless people are 'non human' in that they are displaced and uprooted from home. In addition, Relph (1976) suggests that home is 'particular'; it is not 'anywhere' or 'everywhere' but 'somewhere'. Daly (1996) suggests that homeless people lack the social, emotional and psychological attributes of a real home. Thus we can, in this light, talk about homeless identities as 'identities in crisis'. This crisis entails a lack of belonging, a lack of attachment to place. Notwithstanding that this is an ideological representation of home as it underscores the conflict, violence and abuse, which are endemic in homes. Holloway and Hubbard (2001) argue that a home is not only a place where meaningful relationships are constructed, forged and maintained but also a context where forms of violence, abuse, aggression and exploitation are rampant.

'The home' nonetheless embodies our lives and provides the socially valued context for our identities. 'Home' offers a space from and through which identities are constructed and performed. It is an invisible, intangible idea (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001) that is fundamental to selfhood and identity. Rybczynski (1986) argues that 'home' brings together:

...the meanings of house and household, of dwelling, and of refuge, of ownership, and of affection...This wonderful word 'home'...connotes a physical 'place' but also has the more abstract sense of a 'state of being' (cited in Daly, 1996: 149).

Rybczynski's (1986) definition of home captures the multifaceted dimensions of home as a physical, social, economic, ideological, historical and psychological space and construct. 'Home' provides a mode of being in world; it is a locus for identities of those who live there (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001). With this in mind, being displaced and

being homeless can produce emotional responses such as grief, longing and idealization of the lost place (Bammer, 1994; Relph, 1976). There are therefore inherent links between identity and home. It is legitimate to look at the implications of being homeless on identity. What does it mean to be uprooted from home? If home connotes psychological identity, then being located and defined outside it must have implications for how one defines themselves. Thus we can think of homeless identities as 'threatened' and 'threatening' identities or 'identities in crisis'. If home embodies and constructs identities, then the lack of and movement from home must also have implications for identity. Thus this study is an exploration of how homeless people negotiate and reconstruct their identities without a space they call home.

The exploration of homelessness cannot be reduced to the relation of a physical, psychological or social space called home. While there are many reasons why someone may choose, or be forced, to leave a home, the reasons for sustained homelessness are overwhelmingly economic. People become trapped in homelessness primarily because they lack the financial resources to establish an acceptable home for themselves. Here, there is a clear link between homelessness and chronic unemployment, or serious underemployment. Thus the experience of homelessness is closely tied in with economic marginalization, and if we are to investigate homelessness we must also explore the consequences of joblessness and lack of economic agency.

2.6 Identity and Economic Activity

Who we are, what we do and our ability to consume are intricately linked. Mackintosh and Mooney (2000) argue that paid work assumes a relationship between our economic activity, as producers or consumers or workers and our identity. Work and the ability to consume are critical ways in which people can significantly participate in economic and

social opportunities (Turok, 2000) that are made available in a capitalist-consumer society. Therefore paid work and consumption are sources of a socially valued identity.

Sharon Beder (2000) in her groundbreaking book, *Selling the Work Ethic*, is critical of the capitalist culture, which treats work and consumption as ends in themselves regardless of environmental degradation and 'psychological costs' to individuals. Capitalism and consumerism exploits people's need to work, thus giving impetus to the need to consume.

Work and our need to work have become pandemic in our society, penetrating and touching every aspect of our lives:

Few people today can imagine a society that does not revolve around work. They never stop to consider why they work and whether they want to work. How did paid work come to be so central to our lives? Why is it that so many people wouldn't know what to do with themselves or who there were if they did not have their jobs? (Beder, 2000: 1).

These questions are critical in demonstrating how constitutive and inherent work is to our lives and identities. Work is constructed as a natural and necessary feature of our human nature, to the extent that we cannot see or imagine a conceivable identity outside of work and consumption:

.... there is no social identity outside of employment; the unemployed are stigmatized. They tend to be portrayed in the media as either frauds; hopeless cases or layabouts who are living it up at taxpayers' expense. Work is seen as essential characteristic of being human. No matter how tedious it is, any work is generally considered to be better than no work (Beder, 2000: 2).

Beder (2000) traces the historical emergence and evolution of paid work as the determinant of personal value and identity; and argues that such ideas are socially constructed and only take explicit form in the emergence of modern capitalism, which is supported by Protestant teachings. Historically work was regarded as virtue and a task set by God and unemployment as indicative of vice, sin and wickedness. Capitalism 'capitalized' on these ideas of work and profit making. Beder (2000) suggests that Protestantism provided a conducive context for capitalism to flourish. However, capitalism no longer needs Protestantism to support it or give it a moral base, because consumerism has replaced it and now drives capitalism. Put differently, the 'work ethic' has been replaced by the 'consumer ethic' (Beder, 2000; Featherstone, 1995).

The 'consumer ethic' has become the most effective tool for motivating people to work. Beder (2000) argues that in a consumer society, social status is expressed in terms of consumer goods and people are judged by the goods they consume and possess. This means that our society values and nurtures people's capacity and ability to consume. In this light, work has become the means for consumption. Bauman (1998) suggests that the question whether people consume in order to live, or they live so that they can consume, is critical. However, we cannot distinguish between living and consuming as these experiences are enmeshed in our human condition.

In this context, being poor and homeless has critical implications on how one defines oneself outside of a socially valued context of work and consumption. Work and consumption shape identities in determining lifestyle, social class and ways-of-being-in-the-world (Mackintosh and Mooney, 2000). In the context of global capitalism, a system driven by private capital in pursuit of private profit, failure to undertake in paid work and the inability to consume suggests that one's identity is constantly under threat and socially devalued.

2.6.1 Consuming identities, consuming desires

Statt (1997) argues that consumption and the consumer ethic are pervasive, penetrating every aspect of society, regulating what we eat, wear, read, watch, buy and our very being and identities. Consumption has become central and provides the primary mode of being in the world. Consumption guarantees a 'pre-defined' and socially valued identity. Within the global consumer discourse, we are cast and constructed as (potential) consumers of new and (presumably) better identities (Simonds, 1996). Consumption is based on the desire for new identities, which are determined by the products that one consumes. Identity through consumption allows individuals to construct and experience the world and themselves in fundamentally different ways, which are otherwise not possible outside of consumption.

In a consumer society masquerades and effective ways of being in the world are sold. For Simonds (1996) consumption is about the buying and selling of identities and selves:

Through consumption we take action; we buy ourselves better selves (pg. 25).

Featherstone (1995) argues that products and commodities in the new global order offer the possibility of psychological benefits in identifying with socially valued groups, thus allow for escaping the reality of one's life and marginalized position. The consumption of the 'good life' is based on the processes of identification and idealization of a different life and lifestyle. Consumption is not about the goods and products themselves but rather how goods are used to draw lines of social relationships, in defining social status and identity (Featherstone, 1995). Homeless people are locked outside of this realm, out of this dynamic space and out of the opportunity to buy and acquire socially valued identities for themselves.

Homelessness is thus 'failure' to meaningfully partake in global capitalism and consumerism in one form or the other. This study is thus an exploration of how homeless people construct and negotiate their identities from the margins of a consumer culture. The central question is how it is possible for people - without the buying power of 'the good life' - to continue to exist and function in a context that alienates, stigmatises and relegates them to the 'living dead' (Daly, 1996) because of their lack of economic agency and their jobless status.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized an increasingly popular research method in the social sciences known as narrative research (Andrews, Sclater, Rustin, Squire and Treacher, 2000; Crossley, 2000; Denzin, 2000; MacAdams, Josselson and Lieblich, 2001; Squire, 2004). This method is primarily concerned with individuals' personal stories or stories of identity and the self. There are various 'storied' research approaches, all of which accord primacy to individual's personal stories: such as (auto) biographical methods; life story or life history; life course research; and narrative research. Miller (2000) suggests that biographical and narrative research approaches are 'revolutionary' in social science practice, as they require paradigm shifts in thinking differently about the nature of social scientific research. Biographical and narrative methodologies take the individuals' personal and social experience as their primary base and foci of interest (Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf, 2000). The theoretical power and practical value of these story-based methodologies lie in their linking of 'the personal' and 'the social' in exploring and studying self, identity and society. Therefore narrative research is concerned with the connections of the psychological realities of 'the individual' or 'the personal' with 'the social' and 'cultural' dimensions of experience.

Narrative methodologies are qualitative research strategies that are an alternative to traditional scientific social understandings of self and society (Roberts, 2002). This chapter is divided into two primary sections. The first section will broadly explore the theoretical basis of narratives within the social sciences. The second section of the chapter will provide a detailed account of the research participants; the ways in which the data was collected and analyzed; and finally it will explore some ethical concerns that arose during the study.

3.1 SECTION 1

3.1.1 Narratives: Theoretical Considerations

The turn to narrative in the social sciences assumes that people are constructed in and by the stories they tell (Crossley, 2000; Denzin, 2000). The turn to narrative is a theoretically strategic move in the interrogation of self and identity as well as the border social, cultural, historical realities. For instance, Wengraf (2000) reads narratives and life histories of individuals as potentially symptomatic expressions or manifestations of history, society and social ideology of their context. This means that historical, cultural and social changes impact on personal narratives and how they are told and lived out. This section of the methodological chapter will explore the founding premise of the turn to narrative methodology and explore the theoretical and practical value of narrative research.

3.1.2 *Human Nature as Storied*

We live in stories, and do things because of the characters we become in our tales of self (Denzin, 2000: xiii).

Narrative psychology assumes that we live in a 'story-shaped world' (Sarbin, 1994), where who we are can be and is immersed and constructed in narratives: our dreams, hopes, fears and all that is human is potentially storied (Sarbin, 1994). Similarly Berger (1997) argues that narratives pervade our lives: from the time we are born to the time we die - we are constantly swimming in a sea of 'stories' and potential stories. White (1980) suggests that narratives are a 'human universal', in that the ability to narrate one's life is not culture specific but rather transhistorical and transcultural. Like White (1980), Riessman (1993) also argues that telling stories about past events, experiences about one's life is a 'human universal'. Human beings, universally, tell stories about who they

are. However, it is the telling of these stories that may take different forms in history and cross-culturally. White (1980) argues that the nature of narrative is perhaps the very 'nature of our culture' and 'humanity':

So natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report of the way things really happened, that narrativity could appear problematic only in a culture in which it was absent or.... refused (White, 1980: 1).

Underlying the narrative research approach is a fundamental belief that humans are essentially 'storied selves' and that human experience is storied (Roberts, 2002; Andrews, Sclater, Squire and Tamboukou, 2004). Elms (1994) argues that human beings differ from other creatures in their capacity and ability to review and recount their personal pasts in narrative form. In addition and correspondingly, humans differ from other creatures in their fascination with the personal pasts and life stories of others (Elms, 1994). In this way researchers are also storytellers, telling stories about other people's stories (Denzin, 2000). Therefore, according to Elms (1994) the ability for humans to construct their lives in narrative distinguishes them from other living things.

Crossley (2000) argues that the distinguishing human characteristic is our 'reflective capacity'. This makes human beings essentially interpretive creatures, who constantly reflect on their experiences, on themselves and on their social world. Like Crossley (2000), Stephenson (2000) argues that humans are involved in an ongoing process of making sense and giving meaning to their experience. Thus humans organize their experiences in and through the construction of narratives. Narratives are therefore 'complex cognitive schemes' that organize individual human actions and events into a

coherent whole (Stephenson, 2000). Narratives are a strategy in organizing and making sense of our lives and experiences:

In telling stories about ourselves we are endeavouring to make sense of experience by putting together the often disjointed and fragmented pieces of everyday life" (Woodward, 2002).

Stories are the means to organize experience in ways that construct who we are. In this way identity is constructed in stories, and some might argue, even by stories. According to Andrews, et al (2003) there is a close relationship between the stories we tell and who we are.

3.1.3 Defining Narratives

A narrative study of lives is a qualitative research strategy that deals with personal stories told to describe human action and to make sense of events surrounding an individual (Roberts, 2002). There is great conceptual diversity in literature about narrative (Riessman, 1993) and its definitions. Like most elusive concepts, the definitions of narrative tend to be either too broad and inclusive or too narrow and strict. However, Roberts (2002) argues for loosely formulated definitions of narratives, which can be tailored by an individual researcher for different studies and objectives.

Put simply, a narrative is a story about a life. Structurally, a story is generally identifiable by a beginning, middle and an ending. Narratives are primarily characterized by a sequence of events that take place in time. Berger (1997) defines a narrative as a story that contains an ordered sequence of events temporally organized. According to Sarbin (1994) narratives are plotted or sequentially organized accounts. In his earlier work,

Sarbin (1986) provides an adequate definition that suffices for the objectives and concerns of this study:

"A story is a symbolized account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension. The story has a beginning, middle and an ending...The story is held together by recognizable patterns of events called plots. Central to the plot structure are human predicaments and attempted resolutions" (cited in Crossley, 2000: 46).

Sarbin's (1986) definition of a narrative or story incorporates the main characteristics of narratives: sequenced and interrelated events (plot); foregrounded individuals; and crises and resolutions (Toolan, 2001). The most crucial aspect of narrative is the plot or the structure that the story takes. A narrative is only meaningful because of the plot in the story. Leitch (1986) defines the plot as the 'dynamic, sequential' element in narratives. Through the plot the events are sequentially timed and organized, making the story meaningful and an intelligible whole (Ricoeur, 1980). The plot of the narrative also plays a critical role in the analysis of the narrative, as the plot is a common thread that ties the different parts of the narrative together (Crossley, 2000).

In spite of the different elusive definitions of a narrative, the most interesting aspect about narratives is what they enable us to do and see. An analysis of narratives can tell us about the complexity of human experience, how individuals give meaning and how they forge their identities in significant ways. Analysis of narratives allows us to simultaneously interrogate the 'private' or personal lives as well as the broader social context that makes those lives possible. Narratives also allow us to insert politics as Squire (2004) suggests, in 'broadcasting' and documenting marginalized voices that are

neglected and excluded within dominant and mainstream political discourses and structures. In this case, it is the 'voices' and experiences of homeless people that are explored and inserted in academic and psychological investigation.

3.1.4 Why narrative?: Value of Narrative Research and Analysis

Narrative research is an attempt to understand the specific experiences undergone by an individual (Crossley, 2000). My investigation and analysis of the stories of homeless identities is going to take place within this framework. Narratives offer a way of entering the multiple, diverse, complex and sometimes contradictory experiences of the other.

Stephenson (2000) suggests that our understandings of the present are contingent on our recollections of the past and aspirations of the future. Narratives are useful in their focus on people's complete lives and, as narrated by them, rather than being limited to an aspect or portion of an individual's life (Miller, 2000). In this way, narrative research is primarily concerned with people's re-collection of their past and present; and their anticipation of the future (Miller, 2000). Narratives therefore offer us as researchers an advantage to pay attention to the specificity of lived human experience, while also disclosing the variety and complexity of human experience and social realities (Stephenson, 2000).

3.1.5 Telling oneself: Stories of the Self

...our sense of self is achieved through our capacity to tell the story of our lives (Stephenson, 2000: 117).

Narratives are stories of the self and of identity. Narratives are the search for meaning-making and identity construction. Identities are not pre-given biological entities but rather

constructed and re-constructed differently (Crossley, 2000) in different telling situations:

Individuals do not have their readily narrated life stories in their back pockets of their minds, waiting for a researcher to collect them (Alasuutari, 1997: 6).

The narration of ones life is a performative act (Denzin, 2000), which presents a site for self-production and construction. Denzin (2000) suggests that in order for experience to be remembered or represented, it has to be contained in a story, which is then narrated. Narration is critical for making sense of the happenings and events surrounding an individual life. Individuals, as storytellers, have agency (Denzin, 2000), in that they can self-reflect in ways that demonstrate their own thinking about and negotiation of meaning in their lives. Similarly Toolan (2001: 3) suggests that "to narrate is to bid for power" in the sense that the narrator chooses how to tell his/her story. The narrator can assert their "authority to tell, to take up the role of knower, or entertainer or producer in relation to the addressee's adapted role of learner or consumer" (Toolan, 2001: 3) or listener of the narrative.

Furthermore narration requires individuals to critically reflect on their lives rather than simply create fictional stories:

...Because we conceive of identity as a life story, identity exists as a product of imagination. But life stories are not imagined out of thin air. Instead, they are based on reality as personally known...There exists, therefore a complex relationship between what 'really happens' in a person's life and how the person chooses to remember and understand it (McAdams and Bowman, 2001: 28).

The relationship between 'what really happens' and 'how a person chooses to remember' depicts agency and personal choice in a biographical and narrative episode. An individual may choose and select different events from their past that signify important aspects in their lives; and choose to frame their narrative in a particular way and draw conclusions from it as they will (McAdams and Bowman, 2001), in perhaps presenting a more desirable image or account of themselves. Craib (2000) argues that sometimes people construct myths or myth-based stories for themselves. However, the question is not about the distinction between 'a true' or 'less true' story but rather about its structure and 'psychological' function it performs for the individual. Riessman (1993) argues that the 'idea of truth' - the extent to which researchers should accept what participants say - is a problem in narrative research. The issue of truth is approached differently: some assume that narrative constitute reality; which means in that the telling people construct their reality (Riessman, 1993). Despite this problem, narratives are a representation, which require and are open to interpretation (Riessman, 1993).

In addition, narration provides insights for the individual teller. In this way, as Manning and Cullum-Swan (1974) argue narratives can "empower people by giving more intimate understandings of their lives and contexts" (cited in Roberts, 2002: 116). However the true value of narratives lies in the fact that narratives always have a larger social, cultural, political and historical locus (Denzin, 2000). This means that narratives are not only personal but anchored in a culture, history and society in which the individual exists. Thus narrative research methodology is concerned with the connections of individual/personal and social levels of analysis.

3.2 SECTION 2

3.2.1 Research Procedure

This second section of this chapter provides a detailed account of the research participants and methodological techniques used to collect and analyze data. Ethical concerns raised during the study are also explored.

3.2.2 *Research Participants*

Five adult homeless people, between the ages of 24 and 62 years, were interviewed. Three of the participants were male and the two female. Three of the participants were sourced through a homeless shelter that I regularly visit. The two other participants were accessed through a family member, who periodically employs them. To ensure anonymity of the participants, their names have been changed. Presented below is some biographical information of each participant:

John (62) is a white man, born in Cape Town. He comes from a stable working family. He is a divorced father of three. He is a highly qualified boilermaker and construction worker. He has worked all over South Africa and has also traveled the world: from the United States to London and Europe. He recently become homeless, at age 60, and now works as a car guard in South Beach, Durban in order to survive and pay for his shelter accommodation. His surviving family, i.e. his ex-wife and two daughters also live in Durban and he visits them regularly.

Ann (44) is a white woman born in Johannesburg. She is a former sex worker and former drug addict. She has lived most of her life on the streets of South Africa: Cape Town, Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth, and Bloemfontein. She comes from a disrupted and an abusive family. Her mother abandoned her at two-weeks old. She was raped and fell

pregnant at the age of fifteen. She also served a 6-year jail sentence for drug use and possession. She is in regular contact with her daughter, who is now married and lives in Pretoria. She too now works as a car guard in Durban Central and has recently become a devoted Christian.

Angela (42) is a coloured woman born in Cape Town. She is also a former 'high class' sex worker and a former drug addict. She is a divorced mother of one. She comes from a poor family. As the eldest of her four siblings, she was forced to leave school and take on the role of breadwinner for her family. She was sexually abused in her childhood. She too has lived and worked throughout South Africa's major streets and even some parts of Africa. She is a highly religious and outspoken woman. She too works as a car guard and lives in a shelter with an abusive boyfriend of five years.

Vikash (36) is a coloured man born in Cape Town. He comes from a disrupted and poor family. He has spent almost all his life in places of safety; reformatory schools, prison and the streets of Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg and Durban. He admits that his homelessness is out of choice but now desperately wants out. He now lives on the streets in Durban with his older brother.

Victor (24) is a coloured man, born in Durban. He comes from a poor family and has been on the streets most all his life – he was a 'runaway child'. He has been continuously victimized and harassed on the streets. He has also been arrested numerous times. Unfortunately, he was arrested during the course of the study and as a result he was only interviewed once.

3.2.3 Data Collection

The data was collected in two research phases. In the initial phase – the narrative interview - the data was collected by means of a life-story approach or narrative interview frame adapted from Crossley (2000). The objective of this data-gathering phase was to allow participants to narrate their lives within a narrative framework (refer to Appendix 1 for this adapted interview frame). The narrative interviews were initially open-ended, but progressed to take a semi-structured format, which meant that the questions were only set as a guide rather than a strict and rigid structure to be adhered to (Crossley, 2000).

Having explored each participant's personal narrative, the second phase of data collection utilized an in-depth interview, which specifically explored research questions and key concerns for the study (refer to Appendix 2 for the interview schedule). The second interview explored the participants' meanings of the concept of 'home'; the meanings of work and consumption; and the broader socio-economic and political issues around their homelessness.

The open nature of the interview context revealed the dynamics of homelessness as it is personally lived and experienced by each participant. Furthermore the interview context allows for the examination and investigation of the fluid, multiple, and sometimes contradictory experiences of poverty, marginalization, homelessness and identity politics.

When participants tell their stories and researchers listen, they are all simultaneously constructing and co-constructing their identity and experiences. The theoretical significance of narratives lies in the fact that the interview context allows for the situational, fluid and joint construction of identity. Miller (2000) argues that the interview context mediates how participants choose to represent themselves; to actively construct

their lives and to recount significant events in their lives. Therefore the present (i.e. the point of narration during the interview) is a lens through which the past and the future can be seen, remembered and foretold (Miller, 2000).

All participants were interviewed twice except for Victor, who disappeared shortly after his initial narrative interview due to his arrest for possession of dagga. Three of the interviews were conducted in my flat, which offered a 'safe' and private context for the participants to freely talk. This choice of the interview venue was not without its problems and concerns. These concerns are tackled in the *ethical considerations* section below. Two of the interviews took place in a pub, where the two of the participants work as car guards.

Interviews varied in duration depending on how much each participant was willing to disclose as well as their 'busy schedules', in their constant search for money and odd jobs, which they find on the streets. Interviews generally lasted between an hour to an hour-and-a-half, and were tape-recorded.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

It is commonly acknowledged that there are no 'recipes' and 'step-by-step' guidelines for data analysis in qualitative research (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998); and narrative data analysis is no exception (Andrews et al, 2003; Riessman, 1993; Roberts, 2002). There are no prescriptions or standard procedures for conducting narrative data analysis. Roberts (2002) argues that in the absence of a single method of narrative analysis, the researcher can loosely formulate their 'almost intuitive' terms for analysis. Riessman (1993) suggests that narratives can rather be read for the patterns or the plot and the 'kinds' of selves that participants claim for themselves in their narratives. Reading narratives for

patterns and the plot involve reading beyond the content and looking for the structure of the narrative - how a narrative is organized and plotted (Crossley, 2000; Riessman, 1993) to tell a particular story:

...through narrative, we come in contact with our participants as people engaged in the process of interpreting themselves. We work then with *what is said* and *what is not said*, within the context in which life is lived and the context of the interview in which words are spoken to represent that life. We then must decode, recognize, recontextualize or abstract that life in the interest of reaching new interpretation of the raw data of the experience before us (Josselson and Lieblich, 1995 cited in Roberts, 2002: 199-120).

The primary aim of narrative data analysis is to see how participants create order in making sense and giving meaning to their experiences and to events in their lives (Riessman, 1993). Narrative analysis is an attempt at interrogating the different 'kinds of selves' participants construct for themselves in the telling of their lives. It is for this reason that narrative research is appropriate and well suited in studying identity and experience because narratives give priority to human agency and imagination (Riessman, 1993). The structure of a narrative or the plot can reveal the underlying mechanisms and the means through which identities are constructed:

Human agency and imagination determine what gets included and excluded in narrativization, how events are plotted, and what they are supposed to mean. Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct their lives (Riessman,

1993: 2).

This means that narratives are not simply an account about one's life but rather the means through which identities are forged and constructed. Therefore analyzing the plot or the structure of the narrative can reveal the kind of 'self' the participant is constructing for themselves.

Furthermore qualitative research methodologies and particularly narrative research allow the researcher to insert their own narratives and locate themselves in relation to the participants and the data. In the search for an appropriate qualitative data analysis method, I was introduced to the Voice-Centred Relational method, which has been reformulated by Mauthner and Doucet (1998). This method allows for the duality of the participants' voices and my own. In addition, this method is both theoretically grounded and practically useful method, with clearly articulated guidelines and examples for data analysis.

Mauthner and Doucet's (1998) main contention is the process of transforming and translating the private lives of research participants into public discourse for public articulation and consumption in the form of texts and theories. Specifically, the critical question is the balancing of participants' voices and life experiences while simultaneously acknowledging and making explicit the researchers own biography, reflexivity and theoretical commitments (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998).

The Voice-Centred relational method takes seriously the researcher's reflexivity and what the researcher brings into the research process. Mauthner and Doucet (1998) define reflexivity as:

... reflecting upon and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual autobiographies as researchers and making explicit where we are located in relation to our research respondents. Reflexivity also means acknowledging the critical role we play in creating, interpreting and theorizing research data (pg. 121).

Reflexivity allows researchers to situate themselves, their assumptions, their biases, their social location, their personal and political interests and theoretical commitments in the research process. Qualitative research is 'subjective' and 'interpretive' in nature in that the researchers are immersed in the process. Therefore researchers shape research the process and its outcomes (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). Knowledge and research are never neutral but historically and contextually grounded and linguistically constituted (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). My interpretation and analysis of homeless narratives and identities are by no means exclusive and exhaustive of other possible and alternative interpretations. My interpretations of the data are social constructs, which are both informed my theoretical commitments and personal biases and assumptions.

The narratives are analyzed using the Voice-Centred Relational method as reformulated by Mauthner and Doucet (1998), which involves four close readings of interview transcripts:

Reading 1: reading for the plot and researcher response to the narrative

The first reading includes two elements. Firstly, the narrative transcript is read for the overall plot, which is the underlying thread or theme that ties the different aspects of the narrative together. Reading for the plot entails identifying the main events, characters in the story, recurrent images, words, metaphors and contradictions. Reading for the plot or

the structure of the narrative entails reading and listening to what is said or the content as well as how it is said, the form of the narrative (Crossley, 2000).

Secondly, the researcher is required to read for him/herself and their emotional and intellectual responses to the data and the participants. The researcher has to identify and situate his/her own narrative, history, experiences and theoretical commitments in the research process:

This [reading] allows the researcher to examine how and where some of her own assumptions and views - whether personal, political or theoretical - might affect her interpretation of the respondent's words, or how she later writes about the person (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998: 127).

The researcher has to identify and acknowledge the different dimensions that might impact and influence their interpretations of the research data. This makes qualitative data analysis explicitly 'subjective', 'reflective', critical' as well as 'theoretically grounded'.

Reading 2: reading for the voice of 'I'

The second reading pays more critical attention to the ways in which the research participants experience and talk about themselves. This reading is labour intensive in that I had to physically trace every instance when the research participants shift between the personal pronouns of 'I', 'you' and 'we' in talking about themselves. Shifts in the usages of these personal pronouns are indicative of how the participants see, experience and talk about themselves. This is a powerful and an invaluable technique that may reveal subtleties in ways that participants talk about who they are and about their lives. Reading

for the voice of 'I' is an attempt to read for the participants' sense of agency in their talk about their lives and in their constructions of self in narratives.

Reading 3: reading for interpersonal relationships.

The third reading entails reading for interpersonal relationships, and how these relationships impact on the participants' stories of identity and homelessness. This involves looking at and linking participants to their social relations. This link to social networks and interpersonal relationships is critical, as 'the self' is fundamentally social in nature existing in a web of social and intimate relationships and networks.

Reading 4: placing people within their cultural contexts and social structures.

The last reading entails reading for and identifying instances where participants allude to social structures and broader socio-cultural realities and resources in their narratives of the self. This means that participants are placed in their broader social, political, economic and structural contexts. It is at this point where narratives allow for the dual interrogation of personal/subjective experience as well as social structures that enable and constrain experience.

3.2.5 Methodological Ethical Considerations

Researching homelessness is not only difficult but also raises important ethical questions. Swart-Kruger and Donald (1994) suggest that the fundamental difficulty in researching homelessness lies in defining a research sample. This is because the lives and location of the participants are very fluid and flexible, in that the participants may simply disappear due to arrest (as one of my research participant was) or out of choice before they study is completed (Swart-Kruger and Donald, 1994). This difficulty is unavoidable but is part of the elusive nature of homelessness.

The study raised two fundamental ethical problems. The first issue pertains to securing and recruiting participants for the study. I spent long hours in the streets, walking and talking to homeless people about the study. I eventually accessed three participants through a homeless shelter. Money and food incentives were offered to participants per interview conducted. Offering these incentives and listening to the participants' stories set me up as a resource that they continually relied on. This created an enormous, though understandable, expectation for me to continue providing food, money, clothing or even my time to listen to their problems, even after the data collection process of the study had been completed.

Swart-Kruger and Donald (1994) argue that offering money and food incentives remain the only viable solution for this kind of research work. I had expected the worst to happen, however, four of the participants came to understand my limited financial position as a student. They were grateful at the money they received, as this went towards their accommodation payment for the night. The four participants treated the interviews as a unique opportunity to have their stories, lives and experiences told, documented and heard. They were moved at the thought that someone was interested in their stories and lives. I think they treated the interview sessions as a 'therapeutic context' to some extent. However, one of the participants had huge expectations of me. He continued to ask me for money, food, clothing and shelter. This meant that I had to re-state my research commitments, objectives and what I am able and not able to provide and give him. While this brought very little comfort to him, it nonetheless reflects the complex nature of homelessness in terms of how society treats homelessness as problem and how homeless people are positioned in society.

The second interconnected ethical problem has to do with conducting data collection in my own home. Different people can read this close proximity differently and perhaps negatively. However, it worked in the sense that the participants felt like 'normal' people that I would invite into my house for a chat and tea. Inviting them to my home can be conceived as a 'humane gesture' as well as a 'logistical one'. It could have been impossible to collect data on the streets. The interviews had to take place in my flat, as it provided a safe and private context for the interview. However, it left me somewhat vulnerable, in the sense that the three participants I interviewed in my home know where I stay. Inviting them into my house could send a message that they are welcome to visit when they feel like it. However, I still maintain a good, ongoing relationship with the participants.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This study is an examination of psychological and social identities of homeless people through two specific trajectories:

1. Identities as constructed in relation to place and the meanings of 'home'. This is a psychological question that explores the significance of home and what it means 'not to have a home' and 'not to be at home'; and
2. Identities as constructed in relation to economics and economic agency. This question interrogates the psychological costs of falling outside a socially valued position of consumption.

In order to investigate identities as constructed in relation to place and economic agency, the study analyzed the personal narratives of homeless people. The narratives were analyzed using the Voice-Centred Relational method reformulated by Mauthner and Doucet (1998). This method entails four readings of each of the participants' narratives: for the plot; for the researcher's own social, emotional and intellectual responses; for the voice of 'I'; for interpersonal relationships and for the social and cultural contexts of narratives.

This chapter is thus divided into two parts. The first part analyses each participant's narrative in detail in order to explore participants' experiences of homelessness and the construction of identity. This part is specifically analyzed in terms of the Voice-Centred relational method. The second part analyses the participants' narratives as well as the in-depth interviews in order to specifically interrogate the participants' personal meanings of

'home', and the consequences of homelessness as the 'lack' or 'absence' of 'economic agency' in the post-apartheid, capitalist and consumer South African context.

4.1 Part 1

4.1.1 Confronting Myself: Reader-Response

Mauthner and Doucet (1998) suggest that the researcher's reflexivity is critical, as it requires the researcher to read for his/her own history, biography, experiences, theoretical commitments and emotional and intellectual responses to the research participants. Rather than concealing, this particular reading acknowledges and reveals the researcher's influence and 'subjectivity' on the research process. Reading for my responses to the participants and research material was uncomfortable and unsettling. I found myself attempting to steer away from my own emotions and those of the participants. I suppose I do not know how to theorize such strong emotions. During data analysis, I tended to focus on the objectives of the study and the urgency of completing my thesis; rather than dealing with or theorizing my emotions.

But the more I read and re-read for myself, I began to think back to and reflect on the interviewing process and recalled the number of times when the participants literally burst out crying or at the very least had tears in their eyes. I was left feeling sad after each interview. No person should live such a life. I was also angry with myself, at society and at the government for letting people like Ann, Angela, Victor, Vikash and John, live such marginalized lives. My participants represent mounts of voices that are silenced and politically neglected. How can we stand by and let such human suffering continue in the back doors of our democratic society?

Researching homelessness is difficult as it forces you to look at your own economic position in particular ways. In situating myself in terms of my 'middle-class status', which I consciously rebuke and distance myself from, I began to appreciate the complex nature of social research as well as the political and human side of homelessness. In asking the question of 'identity effects' and costs of homelessness, I was placed in a strategic and compromising position. The fact that I am a 'middle-class', black male, whose life is explicitly, shaped by economics and consumption created contrasts between my life and my participants.

Furthermore, I struggled to make sense of the fact that all of the participants have families that they can go to for help and shelter, but they choose not to. My struggle to understand the participants' ideas about home and the role of the family clash with my own socio-cultural positioning as my identity is fundamentally constructed in extended notions of family and community. I come from a close-knit community, have extended family networks and we are kept together by social obligations to one another. I simply cannot understand why the participants could not go back home for support, help and financial assistance.

I was confronted with issues of race, racism and our apartheid history when I was analyzing Ann and John's narratives. It was hard having to think about and locate where these issues came from. Was I reading too much into nothing? Or were there real, but concealed racial issues in these narratives? Their narratives were explicitly dated and located during apartheid in South Africa. In addition, these were two white South Africans that had indirectly benefited from the system that oppressed my people. In reading some parts of their narratives, I sensed some 'racist' ideas about black people. But, at some point, I began to see Ann in a different light. I felt that she had taken

responsibility for her life and the choices she had made. However, it was extremely difficult reading John's narrative as 'racist' ideas were much more pronounced in his story. Having implicitly labeled John as (potentially) racist, I run the risk of being racist myself.

In reading John's narrative, I become highly critical of him to the point of disliking him. I disliked him for his 'arrogance', which I acknowledge as a judgment on my part. I disliked him for the ways he represented and spoke of the old and the new South Africa. I disliked him for his representation of white South Africans during apartheid building this country for 'us'. I disliked him for his racism. However, I soon realized that my dislike for John emerged from his failure to accept responsibility for his life and his external attribution of blame to others, particularly the new 'black' government. My dislike for John almost hindered me from seeing his suffering and pain. Yes, he is a white South African, who lost everything, but he is also a human being that is now socially marginalized and stigmatized because he is poor. Poverty and homelessness are not a license for stigmatization and political neglect.

Reflecting on the whole experience, thinking about the hugs I shared with all my participants made me realize that in a small way I had humanized them to myself.

4.1.2 Reading 1: Reading for the Plot

Mauthner and Doucet (1998) suggest that reading for the overall plot is common to most qualitative methods of data analysis. The plot, according to Crossley (2000), is the underlying thread that ties the different aspects of the narrative together. Reading for the plot entails identifying the story that the participant is telling; and this includes identifying the main events, characters, recurrent images, words, metaphors and

contradictions in narratives (Crossley, 2000; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). Riessman (1993) suggests that reading for the plot in narratives goes beyond the content of the story but examines how the story is put together, and examines the linguistic and cultural resources the story draws upon.

The five participants' narratives were individually different and ingeniously tailored in the construction of their identities. However, I could not help but be amazed at the similarities and continuities of these five participants' lives. While the nature of this study was not comparative, it was nonetheless interesting to see the different 'kinds' of self that participants claimed and constructed for themselves. Angela and Ann told their stories in a similar structure of *redemption*. Victor and Vikash's narratives expressed *regret*; and finally John's narrative structure was that of *'contamination'* expressing a 'victim identity' and decline.

4.1.2.1 Ann and Angela: Stories of Redemption and Hope

Ann and Angela's lives and narratives are similar in many respects: their reasons for leaving home, experiences on the streets and their pronounced belief in God. Ann and Angela claim 'survivor' stories and identities in reflecting on their lives on the streets. In addition their similarities largely point to gendered ways of being marginalized, which precipitated their lives on the streets. For instance, Angela was sexually abused by her uncle and Ann was raped. They both became sex workers, though for totally different reasons, which significantly shapes who they are to become. Given the similar trajectories in their lives, I will explore Ann and Angela's narrative structure together. Both these narratives are told in a highly religious tone, in that their talk of God and their belief in God impacts the ways they construct their narratives and identities and give meaning to their homelessness and street life.

Their early life is characterized by hardships and a series of traumatic events. But they both reach pivotal moments where they decide to change their lives and create an alternate reality and future for themselves. This enables them to see themselves and construct their lives differently. Their belief in God serves 'identity functions' (O'Dea, 1966) and psychological purposes in the construction of their identities, which enables them to give particular meaning to their homelessness. Their belief in God 'redeems' them from 'identity threats' posed by their homeless existence and gives them 'hope' for an imagined better future, even if that life is on the streets.

Both Ann and Angela told their narrative and constructed their identities in a similar structure or sequence of *redemption*. McAdams and Bowman (2001) suggest that redemption narrative structures or sequences can be thought of as bad scenes or threatening situations redeemed by positive outcomes. The plot and sequence of redemption is the movement in a narrative, from negative or bad scenes to emotionally positive or good outcomes. This is an upward movement, which is indicative of progressive understanding of self as growing and moving forward (McAdams and Bowman, 2001). Both Ann and Angela's lives and narratives tend to reflect such a pattern, which increasingly moves away from their previously disrupted lives to a point where their belief in God enables them to integrate and understand their lives differently, thus producing 'survivor', 'religious' and 'redeemed' accounts of self.

4.1.2.1.1. On the streets: Reasons for leaving home

Ann's life is characterized by a series of traumatic events and disruptions she suffered from childhood. Her traumatic start to life contributed to and precipitated her life on the streets. Ann's childhood is specifically marked by neglect and abandonment:

I was ... I never met or known my mother ... never ... I was two weeks old when she threwed me away, you know. And somehow my late father's mother, my granny and grandfather, they brought me up. I went through a very hard time, a very poor, poor life. There wasn't everyday luxuries and that but they brought me up in a Christian way.

Ann's abandonment is a significant event in her life, which she recalls vividly and emotionally in her adulthood as a fully-grown woman:

... and all I actually wanted in life when I see the people so happy you know, is ... I wanted also from a small child of two weeks old ... [is to] have real love from my mother and the father's side. And life, it is very, very hard. It is hard because why ... you got no one you can go to and say see here.... I want to sit down I got a problem I want to discuss it with you. No, I never had that and how can I say ... It is still in me I am forty-four years old but it is still in me, it's a nightmare for me, why did my mother throw me away you know, when I was a baby of two weeks old.

Swart-Kruger and Donald (1994) argue that there 'structural' and 'individual' factors that can explain homelessness and the initial entry into a street existence. Understanding the 'pre-street lives' of homeless people is crucial, in that it can reveal structural and/or individual factors that either force or precipitate the choice of a street life (Swart-Kruger and Donald, 1994). There are several 'individual' factors that could account for why people, particularly children, leave their homes for the streets: i) *neglect in the home* is the most common feature emphasized in the case histories of homeless people; ii) *the lack of support from parents* - whereby the parents are construed as being rejecting,

hostile, overly punitive and disorganized; iii) disruptive *family relationships* that are characterized by pain, hurt, rejection or aggression (Swart-Kruger and Donald, 1994). Ann was 'pushed out' of home, in that her decision to leave home was due to neglect, hostility and rejection by her family. Ann recalls the point at which she leaves and 'breaks away' from her family:

My auntie and uncle called me and they said, 'Ann, come and stay by us', they helped me a lot. But as soon as the other family come, there is always that gap, you know ... you can feel the atmosphere, it is so thick you can cut it with a knife. So I just broke away. I left Joburg; I went to Cape Town, there I just threw my life away with drugs. I didn't care about anything. I didn't care about family, nothing.

Unlike Ann's 'forced' homelessness, Angela's entry into a street life, can be better explained by the structural context of poverty that confronted her otherwise relatively stable home environment:

I come from a nice, good, happy family... like very warm; you know ... not a rich family ... very poor but humble, very, very humble. But there was always respect and discipline in our family. We grew up like that ... I am the eldest in our family.... There were hard times at that time when my father did not work and my mum did not work ... I was eleven at that time, they had to take me out of school and [I had to] work for school holidays and December ... and then thirteen years old, they took me out completely. I wanted to finish standard seven ... I was very pissed off; for two months I

never spoke to my parents because of that ... I still wanted to go to school;
I couldn't. I had to go work for ... that was it...

According to Swart-Kruger and Donald (1994) poverty is the single most important underlying factor of the street child phenomenon and homelessness. In the context of poverty, a thirteen-year-old Angela absorbs her parents' responsibility and becomes the primary breadwinner for the family. Both Ann and Angela are 'pushed' and 'driven out' of home, for different material, economic and psychological reasons, into the streets.

4.1.2.1.2 In the home and on the streets: Gendered Marginalization

Ann and Angela have both been sexually exploited. Angela was sexually abused, while Ann's rape resulted in the birth of her only child. Violence against and sexual exploitation of women within the home are so rampant that Hamilton (1989) characterizes gender violence as every woman's 'normative developmental crisis' (cited in Salasin and Rich, 1993: 948), one which every woman encounters, or can expect to encounter. Similarly, Smith (1999) argues that 'the home' is a potentially 'deadly' and 'dangerous' place for women to live in, and girls to grow up in.

Women's exploitation is exacerbated in the context of poverty, and homelessness. Being a woman in such a context is economically, socially and psychologically threatening to the self. Unlike Ann, who is unable to recall a single happy childhood memory, Angela has lots of happy memories of herself with her family, until her sexual abuse:

Siyanda: ... so you really had a very good life ... growing up?

Angela: Yes as a child yes ... only until me and my sister got abused and then everything went down.... my father's brother [uncle]... [It] was at that point that things changed, yes.

Angela's abuse and Ann's rape were their initial insidious and traumatic experiences of being women. Once on the streets, they soon found themselves alone, poor, unemployed, unqualified to work, and homeless but in dire need for survival and economic well-being. Both these young women turned to sex work as their last resort. However, Ann's entry into sex work was catalyzed by her newly acquired, expensive drug addiction:

And [I] met up with the wrong friends; I went into the drug world. I was in the drug world for twenty-four years my friend, twenty-four years. You name the drugs I used it ... I even went so low, now I haven't got money for drugs, I became like a prostitute, do you understand? I just went into the drugs and I got shot already, I got stabbed ... Ja ... and that all through the way I went into prostitution, not for this or that, just for the money to buy the drugs.

Angela's entry into sex work was, unlike Ann's drug addiction, for supporting her parents, daughter and young siblings:

My life ... It was not like easy for my family to like come from there and come down here. But I had to help ... I was the one, the breadwinner, I had to go out even ... let me tell you the truth I went to Durban; PE; Cape

Town, not Cape Town; Joburg, East London, South West Africa ... because I saw this ad in the paper like you know ... it was like a massage parlour, you know as a prostitute, I had to go at that time. So for twelve years I worked as a prostitute. And then I owned my own massage parlour eventually.... I brought my sisters up, my brothers; there is four or five of us...but four of them. I helped them through schooling because I couldn't make it.

Poverty not only pushed these two females out of home but it also forced them into sex work. For the majority of poor and homeless women, sex work is the only option for survival. Homelessness poses physical threats, like the risk of HIV infection, as well as psychological threats to identity. These threats are made worse if the person in question is a woman. Gimenez (1994) argues that women are more vulnerable, than men, to poverty and thus exploitation. The vulnerability of women lies in their marginalized and devalued social position. Poverty is a structural problem that plays on and mirrors already existing social inequalities like sexism and racism (Gimenez, 1994). Ann and Angela's narrative reflect the gendered ways of marginalization.

4.1.2.1.3 In search for home: The Street Nomads

The lives of homeless people can be thought of as nomadic lives, in the sense that their lives are marked by fluid and flexible movement from place to place; and from shelter to shelter. Harvey (1992) argues that our identities are intricately linked to our home places. Being displaced, dislocated and uprooted from our home places, by implication, creates and constitutes 'crises' for our identity. Alienated, estranged and displaced from home, homeless people move from place to place in search for employment or the space to create a new life for themselves. These movements from home are evident in Ann's life

trajectory, as she has lived on the streets of the major cities in South Africa. At seventeen Ann left home and her family in Johannesburg and moved to Cape Town, where she got involved with drugs and sex work:

And then I got involved with drugs in Cape Town, I got caught and I went to jail. I did the jail sentence for six years for drugs... And say two years before I was released from my sentence, my auntie and uncle came all then way from Joburg to Cape Town, I was in Pollsmoor prison there ... So they came to see me, they said, they never wanted me to have contact with my child, you know. They said, 'No', I will be a very bad influence on her.

Having lost her daughter and spent six years in prison, Ann moved from Cape Town to Durban, with the hope of starting a new life for herself. But the streets of Durban were just as harsh as Cape Town:

.... I left Cape Town and I came to Durban. Here I struggled a lot, I used to sleep outside here on the pier ... I used to sleep on the subway, I had nowhere to go, no money and then I started to smoke drugs again. And ...they caught me, on my birthday, on the fourteen of February [she was arrested].

While Ann moved from place to place in search for a 'new home' and sense of belonging, Angela moved in search for employment and financial/economic agency in order to support her family:

But I had to help... I was the one, the breadwinner; I had to go out even...let me tell you the truth I went to Durban; PE; Cape Town, not Cape Town; Joburg, East London, South West Africa...

Angela's ultimate relocation or 'exile' and 'displacement' to Durban was not out of personal choice or but rather necessity. Given socio-political implications and stigma attached to her job as a sex worker, Angela had to leave her hometown:

I never wanted my mum and dad to worry about anything because I was like I am going out there. They didn't even what I am doing. They think I got a normal job that is why I could not do it in Cape Town; so I had to come to Durban.

There are many reasons why homeless people move from place to place – due to arrest, or in search for a 'new home' or employment, or to escape the reality of poverty. Homeless people generally do not have emotional attachments to a particular place – they move out of necessity rather than leisure. They are in constant search for a 'better life', a new home and better job opportunities. The link of home/place and identity is critical for this study and is addressed specifically later in the chapter.

4.1.2.1.4 'Meeting God, Finding the Self: Religious stories of Redemption

Both Ann and Angela were confronted by a similar series of hardships and traumatic events: both were sexually assaulted; had teenage pregnancies; were sex workers and drug addicts and now share their belief in God. In the terms of the plot, these 'bad or negative scenes' are redeemed by positive experiences. Both Ann and Angela had moments in their lives, which they regard as pivotal and critical in that they knew they

had to change their lives. In her narrative, Ann alludes to these moments several times. Listed below are three clearly articulated moments that Ann wants to change her life:

1. And until...just one day I said, 'no man, it can't go on like this'
2. And in that six years [in prison] I realized I must change my life.
3. ...And on Monday, I went to court but that made me realize that, 'Ann, you can't go on with this life'.

These moments, for Ann, signal the beginnings of her salvation and faith in God; and thus constituting a 'redemption sequence' or upward movement in her narration. Ann has a clearly defined moment where, she meets God. Ann was invited to church and, this becomes a significant turning point in her life and narrative:

And you know, I went in there and they prayed with me and it was like I was seeing a white angel. And the angel's arms were open... I was standing next to the angel and after they prayed and spoke to me I told them. She said to me, "Ann that is God" and that is why I said now that I know Him, it is still hard for me but that is my biggest wish, is for God to help me to build a future and a straight life.

Ann's story telling has a highly religious and is laden and layered with religious language about God and her new life. This newly found belief in God allows Ann to construct and imagine a better future for herself and an honest, 'straight' life, as she calls it:

For the future, I met God now and I am trying my best to come completely off the drugs.... my future plan is to build up and with the straight life. The

past, I can never say take it out my mind, do you understand? The past is the past.... and all I do is just ask God to help me to follow now a straight life, because I am getting old you know ... And then one day when I opened the bible on Psalm 91 [*Abiding in the Shadow of the Almighty*], it is a very good Psalm, then I realized even if you are the worst dog or the worst criminal, God is still there for you.

Belief in God allows for the acceptance of the situation. It provides systems of explanation and 'rationalization' of being homeless. While Angela acknowledges the pain of being homeless and socially marginalized, she is able to rationalize her life on the streets as God's 'greater' plan for humanity:

It is sore.... sometimes it is unfair because you think you don't deserve it, you did so much for everybody you know. And then you have too.... maybe God wants it and God tests us because He loves us and He put us here on this earth for a purpose. We are all here for a purpose. You don't even know what your purpose is yet. I don't even know what my purpose is yet. But we are all here for a purpose, do you understand me? Maybe God knows best, like why I am here in this situation.

Furthermore God allows for the integration, Ann powerfully express this a metaphor of 'breaking and mending':

... If you break a saucer it splits and my life was like that the saucer that broke, that split and all the time I was trying to put the pieces together.

And I couldn't never ever actually fit the pieces together. But now that I met God, I know God is going to help me.

Ann's newly acquired and constructed identity provides her with a different perspective and lens through which she makes sense of her. God as an institution gives her the language, through which she can construct her identity. Ann and Angela's narratives have a religious tone and reveal the 'identity work' that belief in God performs. O'Dea (1966) suggests that belief in God performs 'identity functions' as it serves as a source of rescue from powerlessness uncertainty, guilt and alienation (O'Dea, 1966).

Ann and Angela's belief in God allows them to make sense of their lives and provides them with coping mechanisms. This is important because homelessness presents a threat to identity and reveals the limited human capacity to control the conditions of our lives. Belief in God functions as a source of support, consolation and reconciliation as people need:

... emotional support in the face of uncertainty, consolation when confronted with disappointment and reconciliation with society when alienated from its goals and norms (O'Dea, 1966: 14).

Ann and Angela's belief in God also provides a positive identity that enables them to give particular meaning to their homeless existence. Put differently, their belief in God allows them to be 'human' again as their humanity is constantly under threat as a result of their homelessness and marginalization. Ann and Angela's belief in God allows for the construction of positive and socially valued identities in the face of economic marginalization, poverty and political neglect.

4.1.2.2 Victor and Vikash: Stories of Regret

Victor and Vikash told their narratives within a similar structure and tone – that of regret. These two men's lives are similar in that they both chose their life on the streets and run away from home when still young. Their narrative structure reveals their deep sense of regret as a result of hardships and social stigmatization faced on the streets. Their story makes explicit their desire for different lives and desire for employment and economic agency in order to participate in society like everyone else.

4.1.2.2.1 'Run-aways': Breaking free from home

Both Victor and Vikash come from disrupted poor homes. Their familial economic status contributed to their decision to run away from home. In their narratives, the streets are constructed as a better alternative (Swart-Kruger and Donald, 1994) for making easy money. The home, on the other hand, is constructed as disabling, restrictive and limiting (Townsend, 1999). Therefore running away from home is seen as an escape from poverty to the world of opportunities and freedom. For instance, the streets meant easy money for a young Victor:

... I used to come to town; run away from home in Wentworth ... I used to come to another place here in Stanley Street. It was called Monte Carlo ... because of the Chinese guys that used to come there ... It was like three or four of us, every day we come, they are there, we beg for money. To them coins was nothing. They used to just like give us coins. Every night we used to like make like hundreds, each of us, from the Chinese guys. So that drew me into town.... because you see, at that time my father had

passed away, [and] my mother wasn't working ... She wasn't collecting her grants or anything for me. If I wanted pants, I had to get it on my own.

Vikash also run away from home as a result of material and emotional conditions faced at home. Vikash admits that his homelessness was out of personal choice:

Yes, yes it [his homelessness] is out of choice ... Ehyi ...to you it is hard to say ... it is very hard to say, you know. But that is how it set out to be. I can't change it ... that is how it set out to be. But I can't change it.... I can't change that.

Their choice to live home was not freely chosen, as it was poverty that drove these young men away from home and into the streets. Underlying 'their choice' to leave home, are deeply structural economic factors that precipitated that choice. Having made the choice to leave home, young Victor and Vikash move from place to place: from places of safety, to reformatory schools and prison. Their nomadic movements signal their search for employment and economic agency as means of escaping chronic poverty and homelessness they now find themselves.

4.1.2.2.2 'Unmarked Gendered Territory': Growing boys on the streets

The streets and street life were constructed as a better alternative to home; but soon Victor and Vikash realized that the streets are far from being the 'promised land' they had imagined. Victor and Vikash needed money to survive the streets. Swart-Kruger and Donald (1994) suggest that money plays a critical role in the homeless people's lives, even though they themselves lack this basic necessity for survival. This lack of economic agency can led to a life of crime or worse, it can create a life of begging and beggars.

This is critical because a begging man is simply 'not a man'. Victor and Vikash are forced to beg for money on the streets. Having to beg for money, as a 'man', is a difficult challenge for Victor. Victor has come to regret his choice for leaving home:

... I wouldn't be on the streets. I would have rather obeyed the rules and stayed at home. *Instead of asking another man for food....* It was good for that time when I just started it... It [the streets] was like magnet... you know a magnet that draws you.... That's what I thought that time, when I was still a youngster, I am still only twenty-three, I know I am grown up but then I was about eleven.

Similarly, Vikash's regret for his 'chosen homelessness, is intimately and profoundly connected to his family, hard life on the streets as well as his aspirations for the future:

Sometimes I just regret it, why, you see.... I was...I never listened to my mother and father, you see. And it says in the bible, *you must honour your mother and your father ...* Ja. It is hard for me to say how I am feeling, you know...I am feeling like so, why must I live like this here...I was not supposed to live like this. I was supposed to...like I explained to you, I was supposed to have my car, to have my house, to have my kids, do you what I mean? But I see things are not working out ... I can't tell you...what is gonna happen in the future.

There are specific psychological difficulties in being a homeless male. Experiences like begging and asking for help produce feelings of shame and humiliation particularly for men. Vikash express his feelings of shame and embarrassment:

What I...what I really hate is asking people for money. It is not my style, you know. I feel bad. Really I feel very much embarrassed, like I am feeling shy. I rather ask my friends than to ask other people...that I do not know.

Being homeless, unemployed and male threatens masculinity and contravenes ideas about being a man and what constitutes manhood. It threatens the status of men and their position in society. Homeless women, like Ann and Angela, can work or are more willing, than men, to take up very low paying work and even socially stigmatized jobs like sex work, placing their lives at risk in order to survive. This aspect of gendered marginalization is powerfully and eloquently captured by a woman in Jamaica interviewed in global study on poverty commissioned by the World Bank:

We women will work for what no man would work for. Women will come down to get better or to keep the home going but the man stands on his pride (Narayan, Chambers, Meera and Petesch, 1999: 111).

Victor and Vikash reported feelings of humiliation, powerlessness and shame in accounting for their lives on the streets. On one basic level, homelessness poses physical threats to the individual: no shelter, no food and, lack of medical care, which have serious and sometimes fatal consequences. Listen as Vikash describes his life on the streets and the lack of basic needs:

... You take it as it comes; you know you got no choice... Asshi, it is very hard... It's ... you know.... sometimes it is raining, you know, sometimes you get robbed ... you are sleeping people come and they rob you, they

take your shoes ... you wake next morning you have got no shoes, your money is gone.... your clothes are gone. No, no, I don't see this life anymore.

On a different level, homelessness has threatening social and psychological implications for identity. Swart-Kruger and Donald (1994) suggest that homeless people are marginalized, stereotyped, criminalized and victimized by different sections of the community. Acts of marginalisation and victimization can take overt forms such as from sexual exploitation to police harassments and from the inadequacy of state welfare intervention to more covert forms (Swart-Kruger and Donald, 1994). Victor talks about the social stigmatization he has suffered, particularly the naming calling and being labeled, a '*hobo*':

... [When] I ask people for money I am already down. I am down and crossed [classed] as a hobo ... a street child is still classed better because he is still a child. Once you are over twenty-one, you are ... they start calling... you are hobo and it's not a good.

The social stigmatization that Victor has encountered has been so endemic that he has, for the lack of a better word, 'internalized' it. This allows him to 'almost' accept his life as 'fate'. However, his internalization locks him in the position of 'the marginalized other, without any conceivable means of escape'. The following quote suggests that Victor has 'accepted his fate' and is almost consigned permanently to the point of 'no return', 'no hope', of 'no change', and 'no agency':

See once you are crossed [classed] as a street child, you are a hobo. You are a hobo. In this world I have seen there is people that are situated.... meant ... people that are meant to live the way they are living ... Like there is you ... in a flat; that is staying in a flat. You are meant to be situated this way and I am on the streets. I was meant to be situated that way ... there is a meaning for everything.

This is a powerful statement that almost suggests that homelessness is a 'naturalized' reality that cannot be changed. This naturalization of homelessness undermines and conceals the social and economic creation of homelessness and of homeless people. This leads us to a common theme underlying most lives and narratives of homeless people; i.e. the experience of powerlessness. Angela and Ann have been able to overcome this sense of powerlessness, as a result of their belief in God. Victor, Vikash (and John as we will see shortly) are locked in and kept 'captive' by strong feelings of powerlessness. Powerlessness or the lack of agency or action is a psychological experience that is intense and painful, and can be likened to slavery (Narayan et al, 1999). Poverty and homelessness are a kind of 'bondage', 'prison' and 'captivity' from which there is no escape.

Being homeless essentially means a precarious lack of material conditions, social stigma, rejection, exclusion, political neglect and vulnerability. Homelessness entails the "inability to control what happens; the inability to plan for the future and imperative of focusing on the present" (Narayan et al, 1999: 36). Victor and Vikash have come to the point where they want out of the streets, but do not have plans or the means of escape. Their site of escape is located in their language and talk of a better future and life. Minh-ha (1994) argues that when people are displaced or homeless "...language is the site of

return, the warm fabric of a memory, and the insisting call afar, back home" (pg. 10). Victor and Vikash speak at great length about their regret for leaving home as well as their desire for employment and economic agency, which provides a positive and socially valued identity.

4.1.2.2.3 'I want out!': Positive Identities given by Economic Agency

Daly (1996) characterizes homelessness as a form of social death that precedes physical death because it entails isolation, invisibility, powerlessness and social alienation. Lifton (1992) argues, "homeless people are victimized by being treated as outcasts. Society relegates them symbolically at least to the living dead" (cited in Daly, 1996: 12). In a society shaped by economics and consumption, 'economic agency' provides the means and resources for a socially valued and positive identity. To be homeless fundamentally contravenes mainstream society, because it entails the lack of economic agency and thus failure to participate and contribute to society in a meaningful way. It is for this reason that society relegates and separates itself from 'the homeless other'.

Considering the stigma they are confronted with, it is not surprising that Victor and Vikash 'want out' of the streets. Victor 'wants out' of the streets because he sees life on the streets as '*not a life*':

... the life that I am now living is all a lie.... it is not life for anyone... for me to wake up every morning and ask someone for R2 just to buy something to eat and that person just starts swearing you. *This is not a life I'm living. This is no life.* That's why I want, a better life because this is not a life, waking up [and] asking people for money, for food.... It's not worth living.... [I have] tried to kill myself, quite a few times and not once...

“Wanting out’ of this ‘no life’ creates and produces desire for access into mainstream society, in order to participate in it economically. Victor and Vikash share similar dreams of leaving the streets, of acquiring positive and socially valued identities that are only made possible by employment and economic agency. Vikash explicitly articulates his desire for economic agency so that ‘*be like other people*’:

I want to go somewhere else, where I can make use of my life. You know, work, put away money, have a house on my own and my children, a car, that is what I would like to have.... one day.... I would like to live nicely *like other people*, you know. But work, work for it and earn it...you must earn it the hard way, ja...

Victor has similar desires to gain economic agency so that he can participate in economic life of society:

... I just wanted a house, a family, a house for life, a child.... just a job, a permanent job where I can, everyday come home, put a plate of food on the table and my child and my wife would be happy.... My dreams are to get a job ...get married ... earn money, you know, honest living...buy my own clothes and earn every month....

Interestingly, the very measure in which they are marginalized and alienated is the very ‘thing’ that Victor and Vikash aspire to: ‘ a good life’, a ‘normal life’ characterized by employment and greater economic agency and thus a positive social identity. Featherstone (1995) suggests employment, economic agency and consumption represent the centre or mainstream society, and to those on "the periphery, it offers the possibility

of the psychological benefits of identifying with the powerful" (pg. 8) and the socially valued group of workers and consumers. Victor and Vikash do not merely desire to consumer but rather desire positive identities that employment, economic agency and consumption make possible. The link between economic agency and homeless identities is specifically discussed later on in the chapter.

4.1.2.3 John: The Story of Loss and Decline

John's life and narrative is fascinating, for me, on different levels. For instance, John's narrative can be read as devoid of 'authorship' and agency, as he fails to take responsibility for his life generally. In another sense, John's narrative can be argued to be devoid of emotion particularly when he talks about his divorce, separation from his four children and the passing of his parents; all of which happened when John was out of town working and traveling. However, on a different level analysis, John's narrative is saturated with highly emotive language, particularly when he recounts his life at the present moment as a white homeless man. John's story has a pessimistic and almost racist tone laden with 'bitterness' and 'hatred' directed at the 'system' and at the new 'black' government, which he blames for his homelessness.

On another level and despite his old age, as John is the oldest of the participants at age sixty-two, his narrative is told in great detail and precise dating of different events and experiences. John firmly locates his life and narrative in time, which he remembers with such vivid recollection. Furthermore and critically, John's life and narrative told from and centred on his 'work identity': his accumulation of wealth and the 'tragic' loss of all his wealth and skills and the his retrenchment at the age of fifty-eight. His story is essentially one of loss and stagnation: from being economically secured to being stripped of his class status and reduced to homelessness. McAdams and Bowman (2001) call such a narrative

structure or sequence, 'contamination', which they describe as emotionally positive and good experiences spoiled or ruined by negative and bad outcomes. Contrary to 'redemption' sequences, 'contamination' sequences express decline or stagnation in the plot of a narrative.

4.1.2.3.1 Work: *Being a Man*

To become a fully functional adult male, one prerequisite is essential: a job. (US President's Commission Report, 1964 cited in Beder, 2000: 114).

The substance this quote is embodied in John's life and his narration of that life, which indeed epitomizes most men's lives. John only tells his narrative from the perspective of work and employment. There is an intricate link between who we are and the work that we do. This means that work has become essential and the sole measure in defining masculine identity. Masculinity is, for men, about being the breadwinner and providing the means to consume for their dependents. John illustrates the effects of 'work' in providing a positive and socially valued identity.

John comes from a financially secure middle-class family. He is a qualified boilermaker who spent most of his life working, accumulating wealth and developing his skills. After John got married at the age of twenty-three in 1965, he had his four children and then focused on advancing his career as a boilermaker and construction worker, which involved lots of traveling away from his family:

At the time when I was doing my apprenticeship and while I was working in the Dock Yard in Cape Town, the Suez Canal was closed at the time ... The only shipping used to come via ... via Cape Town around the bottom

of Africa ... we had abundance of work in Cape Town Dock Yard. I used to work two whole nights a week plus a weekend ... Hey man I was making very good money ... And when the Suez Canal reopened, the work in Cape Town really shrunk. This was 1975 and I went up to build the Saldhana Bay line so that the... steel could go to Saldhana Bay... And that was a two-year construction period. When I came when I got back to Cape Town I was already divorced, which I didn't even know about cause I went away on construction for these two years... So what did I do? *I never complained about it*, I just packed my things what I had there, climbed in my car and then we were to go Secunda Sasol (emphasis added).

John's narration of his life is primarily and solely told around his work identity: career achievement and making money. His divorce is overtaken by his work and he 'never complained about it'. John's life is essentially about work and employment. His masculine identity is constructed and fueled by his ability to work and gain economic agency. After his divorce, John received a four-year contract with Sanlam in 1980, which presented him with an opportunity to further his career development and social status as an employed man with economic agency that defines who he is and all that he does.

4.1.2.3.2 Living Large: Economic Agency Buys Identity

Deserted by his wife and children, John went to Durban and decided to travel South Africa with two American sisters, not knowing that his mother was dying:

They [the two sisters] came from New Orleans in America. So I thought how lovely, I got nothing to do I just finished a four-year contract with

enough money in the bank lets go, so we.... toured the whole of South Africa. I showed them everything, Kruger National Park I showed them Kango Caves, I showed them Afridge bank, I showed them right all over South Africa.... So you see we landed back up in Cape Town so I could see my parents again. *I haven't seen my parents ... in years you know. So I got there and found out that my mother had passed away in the time I was away and my father was still alive.... I [was] I'm a qualified stainless steel boilermaker now and I'm a foreman*, know what I mean, I worked my self up right to the business... two days later I started [work] the Koeberg Nuclear Power station.... I stay as a supervisor there (emphasis added).

Pay attention to how he does not acknowledge his mother's death in any detail and emotion. John simply skips this otherwise critical moment in life to talk about his other employment opportunity. This is the point about his working masculine identity. The fact that John only sees himself as a worker epitomizes what it means to be a man – that is, to work, to consume, and to provide the means to consume for their dependants. John worked at the power station until 1986, accumulating and saving his money in order to travel the world with his American friends:

... The end of 1986 I finished the contract with Koeberg power station I decided, because I had a lot of money now, saved up - I decided "I showed you the whole of South Africa, will you show me where you came from?" We caught a plane and went London, we backpacked over London for I say for eight months, the whole of England we back-packed right over the whole of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales ... backpacked all over that, me and her...

Siyanda: Wow

Then we took a ferry over to France; we backpacked over the whole of Europe for eighteen months. We came back to London to Heathrow airport. We caught a plane from there to America...to Washington D.C...

John's economic agency allows him to travel the world. His economic agency buys and provides a positive identity as a tourist, whose identity is less constrained by boundaries and borders. John lived in America for four years. He eventually came back home to Cape Town, where his father shortly died of cancer. John then moved to Durban to reunite with his family. At the time he was working for Calvary Steel and this is the turning point in his life and the 'contamination' in his story. John was retrenched in 2001 and could not find employment 'due to affirmative action'. He lost his economic agency and became homeless.

4.1.2.3.3. Losing it all: Identity and Life without Economic Agency.

John's life and narrative now express 'decline', 'stagnation' and contamination. He could not find employment because, as he suggests 'of affirmative action', which threatens the very means of his existence – a job. Work provides a positive identity for men, in particular. Thus affirmative action has significant meaning and consequences for John – as a white working man, who now cannot find work and formal employment:

I was still here in Durban I was working until 199...(stuttering) till the year 2001 for Calvary Steel, earning two thousand rands a week, cash money, two thousand rands a week, as a stainless steel boiler maker. I was the only stainless boilermaker they had so I used to clock the money. *I was*

working for them until of course affirmative action came in. I turned 60 years they start talking about, listen sorry you can't work anymore.... affirmative action, I got paid off since then I became a car guard I couldn't get work as a boilermaker ... I tried the refineries here, and everything, I couldn't get in. What I, 60 years of age so I became a car guard I've been a car guard now for the past two years. I make my money everyday ... about 40 to 50 rand a day... I live down in the shelter here in Point road by the PRM shelter... I find absolutely terrible, a terrible place to live in; you know what I mean... (Emphasis added).

John became homeless at the age of sixty. This is significant because it means that being homeless is a relatively 'new experience' for him, whereas the other participants have been on the streets for a while and are more adjusted to the situation they find themselves. John still struggles to integrate and make sense of his homeless existence and new identity, without economic agency. Thus his anger and powerlessness are connected to the fact that he fails to negotiate his new identity as a white homeless man. John's life has taken a turn for the worst: he has lost all his accumulated wealth. Out of all the participants, John is the only one, whose early life was economically secure. Now, John finds himself, in his old age, poor and homeless and he does not know how to cope with his homelessness:

It [my life] is worse, it is worse, it is deteriorating right down to nothing my friend ... Living in these shelters in Durban my brother, truth God. You know what listen, praise the Lord I still have a roof over my head, I do not have to sleep on the beach front, or sleep in the streets.... but this is the lowest point in my life I've ever come down to.

John sees his life and South Africa as ‘deteriorating’, ‘declining’ and hopeless. He is locked into hopelessness and powerlessness. He sees no escape from ‘this prison’, not unless he wins ‘the lottery’, which then he plans to leave this country:

If I could win the lotto that would change my life (laughter)... I would leave this country with a speed cause this country is just deteriorating, I don't see no future for this country my brother...

John's hopelessness is accompanied by a sense of bitterness, which feels, to me, as connoting 'racist ideas' about South Africa, our past and the role he play in ‘building this country for us’:

When we still had the apartheid regime, I say that time I was brought up okay the laws were very, very strict, but look what we done to this country, we built this country, know what I mean, look how much we done for this country, the nuclear power stations, the Sasol, Secunda ... I built this country my friend, I've built places in this country, like I said we built the railway line I worked in 90 percent of the power stations ...

Siyanda: You built this country?

Even in Swaziland, on the Mabal sugar mill there. Also Botswana, South West Africa, I've all over this country, I've built this country on construction.

John sees his homelessness as a direct result of government's policies of affirmative action. He sees and constructs himself as the victim of a 'cruel system' of 'black capitalism'. It is in this context that John has lost hope and cannot conceive of any possible means of escape. John explicitly and blatantly blames the 'system' for his homelessness. He does not only rebuke the system but actively takes himself out of it. John has to constantly affirm his 'past identity' – as a 'working man' - in the attempt to construct a positive identity for himself. He distances himself from his 'new identity' – as a homeless, unemployed white man – to hold on to his more positive 'previous identity', which is characterized by greater economic agency. His 'new homeless identity', in the 'new South Africa', threatens who he is as a white man. He therefore attempts to negotiate this identity by blaming the government and by affirming what his 'past identity', which is marked by greater economic agency.

4.1.2.4 Ann, Angela, Victor, Vikash, John: In a Nutshell

The five stories reveal complex economic and gendered dynamics in poverty, homelessness and ways of constructing positive identities in such contexts. Ann and Angela constructed essentially 'survivor' stories, pronouncing hope in a context of disruption, sexual exploitation, social stigma and political neglect. Interestingly, it seems that it is only these two women that have constructed positive identities for themselves, without any bitterness or resentment directed to others. Their belief in God seems to play a critical role in coping with their powerlessness. Their belief in God expresses their 'liberation' from powerlessness and constructs 'survivor stories. It thus produces their sense of agency in their self-understanding and self- definition (O'Dea, 1966).

Victor and Vikash constructed stories of regret at the choice they have made for leaving home. In their struggle and in the context of social stigmatization, they 'want out' of the

streets. They envy and desire 'a better life', an economically viable life marked by economic agency. They desire new and positive identities, which are made possible by employment and economic agency.

John's life and narrative present a 'victim' story, a story of loss and shattered expectations. John's life is a story of a man who had all but finds himself in a different economic and political order. John struggles with his new identity as a homeless man in South Africa. His 'strong' identity comes from asserting 'who he was' and 'what he had' and 'how it was all taken away from him'.

The participants are negotiating and counteracting a negative identity posed by their homelessness: Women negotiate their negative identity through their belief in God, whereas the male participants blame external circumstances in an attempt to construct positive and socially valued identities. Understanding the participants' narratives will help us explore in detail and interrogate the significance of home, work and economic agency for identity.

4.1.3 Reading 2: Reading for the voice of "I"

Reading for the voice of 'I' pays particular attention to the ways in which participants speak about and experience themselves. This reading entails tracing participants' shifts and slippages in their usage of personal pronouns such as 'I', 'we' and 'you'. Mauthner and Doucet (1998) argues that reading for the voice of 'I' is a valuable technique that interrogates and listens for the person's sense of agency in their social and cultural contexts. The shifts and slippages into the 'second person' reflect the idea of self as multiple selves – rather than a fixed singular idea of self- having more or less agency in different and particular situations and contexts. Reading for the voice of 'I' in the

narratives of homeless people is a powerful way of demonstrating the human capacity to adapt and give meaning to difficult and threatening socio-economic realities. Contrary to my assumptions, all of the participants use the first person pronoun of 'I' in recounting their experiences on the streets.

Angela presents herself consistently within the first person pronoun, with seldom shifts into the second person. Angela's self-presentation, as having agency to change her life, points to the fact that she has taken accountability or 'authorship' of her life because she has 'got that personality':

I am proud of who I am. I am so proud of myself ... I am a very hard person because what I went through made me like this today. I was very soft but not anymore ... [I am] very hard, very harsh, very stand-up ... I can make it because I can go with the good, bad and the ugly ... I got that personality ... I learnt, I learnt that to say that I am number one in my life now ... this is my life. Before I destroyed my life, you understand me? So, I had to think very, very hard. And I came to the conclusion that, this is it my friend, this how far I go and no further than that (Emphasis added).

Angela refers to an almost 'internal' idea of the self, where her agency is located. Ann also presents herself in terms of 'high internal' agency. Her agency resides in the fact that she too has taken responsibility and accountability for her life and her choices. Unlike John, who explicitly and blatantly blames the government and affirmative-action policies for his homelessness, Ann does not blame anyone for her choices in her life, but recognizes her own agency:

... when I was raped I needed the family, they all, you know, turned their back on me and instead of them to stand with me, I don't blame my family for my drug problem, no I don't. It's my own.... you see.

Although Ann acknowledges that her family abandoned her and that the government could do more for homeless people, she nonetheless takes ownership for her life. Ann and Angela's ability to take responsibility and their agency are intricately connected to their belief in God, which allows them to give particular meaning to their lives and their homelessness.

Reading for the voice of 'I' was a valuable and useful technique that directed me to the subtleties and the different ways in which Ann in particular, constructs her narrative. At critical points in her life and narrative Ann affirms strongly who she is in shifting from the first person to the third person to use her name in referring to herself:

...And on Monday, I went to court but that made me realize that,
'Ann, you can't go on with this life'.

Talking about herself in this way, points to her agency and indeed the fact that she is reflective in who she is and where she comes from:

... I sit still and I think back it hurts me, it hurts me so much, sometimes you feel like somebody stabbed with a knife, you know, if I sit and think what I had to go through; how I used to sleep...in the fields, under trees, under subway's roofs and I always thought but no harm came over me

when I was sleeping outside like that ... then I realized ... God is still there for you.

Ann and Angela's strong 'self-concept' is borne out of their belief in God. It is this belief in God that enables them to give meaning to their lives on the streets and see themselves, not as worthless or socially devalued, but rather as 'children of God' with a purpose. This is in line with what Kurtz (1995) argues that belief in God offers (psychological) security, in that 'it helps people feel secured, especially at society's margins, and most notably in times of crisis and death' (pg. 109). Thus Kurtz (1995) suggests that belief in God is a system of meaning and security especially when things fall apart. Ann and Angela are therefore able to construct positive identities for themselves.

There is, however, a critical moment in Ann's narrative where she shifts out of the first person into the second person. This shift happens when Ann distances herself in recalling her drug addition and sex work experiences:

... in the past when **you** was in the drug world and drugged up, it buggers up your life, you understand. **You** are drugged up. **You** sleep with this one and that one. And in the eyes of God, it was the biggest sin that **I** ever lived in my life. God took all dirt out of me and now **I** want to carry on. And now that God is going to take all my past, everything out of my mind. He is going to give me a solid life and a clean life (emphasis added).

This distance is a hallmark of sexually exploited women. This distance is a shield in Ann's attempt to separate her 'new' identity – as a child of God - from the 'abused',

‘exploited’, ‘prostitute²’ self. In addition, Ann's failure to locate and situate herself in this part of her narrative is perhaps borne out of the fact that her motivation for sex work was her drug problem, which produces feelings of shame for her. Now contrast Ann's failure to locate herself in her sex work experiences to Angela's affirmation of who she is in her sex work episode:

And I did it (prostitution) for the good purpose I do not feel bad about it. And I kept it from my family. I am proud today ... they finished schooling [and] they are married now. I helped them (her siblings) with their children. I brought up their children for them, with them and gave a chance, do you understand? But lucky for me, I did it (prostitution) for my daughter.

Unlike Ann, Angela does not distance herself at all in recounting her sex work experiences. This is because her reasons for her induction into sex work were to provide for her family therefore she feels pride that she has 'accomplished her mission' in supporting her family.

John also strongly affirms 'his identity' by never reverting into the second or third person. John strongly puts forward his identity as a 'victim' of the system. His identity is firmly located in 'who he was' and 'what he did'. John has 'built this country' – his identity is intricately linked to his masculine work identity. John expresses tension between his 'new' identity – as a homeless man and his 'previous' or 'old' identity as a 'working man', with economic agency. Perhaps John has not resolved and reconciled his new and old identities and hence the need to hold on tightly to the 'old'. John may feel the need to

² I recognize that the term 'prostitute' is politically incorrect but it nonetheless works in this instance as it

constantly and strongly re-affirm what he did and what he had before he become homeless.

Beder (2000) argues that work provides a positive identity, in terms of class and status. Thus the value of paid work goes beyond and deeper than just receiving an income. Work is regarded as 'natural' and fundamental to human nature and necessary for human dignity (Beder, 2000). Work is essentially about a sense of place in the social and economic order; about identity, self-respect and self-worth (Beder, 2000). It is in this context that John's constant assertion of what he did in terms of work and profession as a boilermaker and a construction worker and foreman is important. It is also in this regard that poverty; unemployment and homelessness are critical psychological states of being. The participants' sense of self is expressed in and negotiation of the tension between 'new' and 'old' identities.

4.1.4 Reading 3: Reading for interpersonal relationships

Reading for interpersonal relationships is critical if we take seriously the social and material conditions in which identities are forged, constructed and lived out. Woodward (2002) argues that understanding identity entails understanding the different relationships and connections between 'the personal' and 'the social', between 'self' and 'others'. The 'social self construct' is a conceptual idea that is in opposition to individualism, where the self is taken as a central, unique, rational, and self-directing entity. This self-contained individual is profoundly 'asocial', 'acultural' and 'ahistorical'; and whose constitution lies in its own subjective realm and mental life (Bakhurst and Sypnowich, 1995), and constructed outside of, prior to and independent of the social and material world.

conveys the social stigma attached to this identity.

The thesis of this study is that identities are embodied and constructed in social relationships with others; and rooted in the material and socio-cultural realities. What struck me as odd and interesting at the same time is the common theme of the participants' regular contact with their families. All of the participants are in frequent physical and/or telephonic contact with their families - their parents, siblings and children. Nonetheless they choose to stay homeless and wander the streets³. Their relationships with their families radically clash with my own subjective and cultural understandings of family and social obligations. My family and extended family networks act as a buffer in times of need. If I were to become homeless, it is no question that my family would 'take me in' and look after me. We are kept together by ancestral links and obligations to each other.

However, the participants suggest that they cannot 'return home' because of economic reasons. While families can be support structures, they are however not immune from the economic ideology and political order of their context. Furthermore, not all families are support structures. Ann exemplifies this in that she was actively 'pushed out' of home as a result of fractured family relationships. Ann characterizes her family as 'trouble' and 'the enemy' and thus characterizes being homeless as 'peaceful' for her psychological integrity and identity:

[Being] away from the family ... for me it feels like ... I got peace, you know. Here in Durban where I stay now, I have got peace. I don't have to worry about the family that is talking you know, bringing all the time up

³ Ann is in frequent communication with her daughter in Pretoria and brother in Namibia. Angela has all her family in Cape Town, which she visits every year. John visits his three daughters every week because they all live in the Berea, Durban. Vikash has his parents in Pietermaritzburg and Victor has an aunt in Durban.

my past, throw remarks [like calling her a 'whore child'] ... and for me now I have got peace, I am away from family.

Siyanda: So your family for you is like trouble?

Trouble, ja. I am honest with you, *my family is like an enemy towards me and when I am far away from them, I feel safe*. But when I am close to my family, there is a fear in me that I can't describe to you (emphasis added).

For Ann home and family and entail mean conflict and abuse. She therefore constructs being away from home and being homeless as a space of 'safety'. She is autonomous and protected from insults and emotional abuse of her family on the streets. Ann only considers her brother and daughter as her family. However, she cannot stay with them because she perceives herself as a financial burden on her daughter:

Okay, they [the daughter and her husband] want me to come stay by them, you see but they are not married yet. And they just recently bought a house and they still young, you know ... I just feel, I do not want to go and stay by them now ... I feel at the moment I do not want to be a burden for them, you know; because I am not working, I have not got a permanent job.

Angela shares the same sentiment: she cannot go back 'home' to her family for help and support. Angela is 'proud' and at the same time she does not want her daughter to take care of her:

No I don't want that. I am too proud of myself, do you understand me? I wanna do it myself ... She [her daughter] is still young, I do not wanna put pressure on her that I went through, you understand me? I went through a lot of pressure in my teenage years ... I would not like my daughter to go through the same thing that I went through, my friend I am so sorry. So if she misses me, it is fine, I phone her. If I go once a year to Cape Town for a month or two that is fine, then I come back again.

Likewise, John describes himself as 'an independent man' and does not want to rely on his daughters for material support:

I do not ask them for nothing my family; there are no 'buts' with me. I'm very independent I look after myself ... And like I said every weekend I visit my daughter, I go see their house. I'm much welcome ... I use the bathroom, they make me a bed, I sleep there, I get my meals, they give me good meals, until Sunday night I leave them and I come back to town, my brother.

Family and home is invested with economic meanings that Ann, Angela and John cannot find shelter because they do not have employment and the economic agency to contribute to and sustain a home. However, Victor and Vikash have a different, but connected economic story about family and interpersonal relationships. Their criminal past coupled with the fact that they ran away from home, creates problems for their attempts at rebuilding their familial relationships or asking for help. Victor cannot ask for help from his aunt:

I don't know my family ... I haven't seen them for years, just because I don't want to see them. I have got a rich family also ... my aunt in Marianridge, that I go there one night and I'm even too scared to stay there for the next night because she gave me a plate of food the first night, she gave me a bed to sleep the night, now she is like now feeling ... like she must be saying 'how long is this guy gonna stay here now?' ... Cause he is like not even working and he just eats and sleeps here for free.

Vikash's family does not trust him and fear that he might steal from them:

I got family over here in Durban, rich families I have got. But I won't ask them for nothing... now they don't trust me. You see, when you were coming in their house, their purses are lying anywhere ... But now soon as they see you like, they just take it and they duck it, you know, not knowing that you have changed. You see, that is why for me it is very hard to go to my people's place, you know because they are gonna come and say no, eyi you gonna come and do something wrong there by their house ... that is why I do not feel like going there....

The participants' narratives reveal economic and cultural notions of family as a space of support and a source of help and comfort in times of need. While the notions of home and family represent emotional and psychological support structures for many, they are nonetheless rooted in conflict and economic ideology as reflected by participants.

4.1.5 Reading 4: Placing people within cultural contexts and social structures

I will use this section as a way of concluding and summarizing the participants' lives and narratives. Homelessness has critical social, psychological as well as physical implications for the individual. The participants revealed serious physical consequences of homelessness. Wright (1986) suggests:

Among the good reasons to 'do something' about homelessness is that homelessness makes people ill - it is unhealthy for children, for their parents and for other living things. In the extreme it is a fatal condition (cited in Daly, 1996: 111).

As a consequence of the absence of a supportive physical 'home base', homelessness increases exposure to physical elements resulting in diseases such as skin disease, nutritional deficiencies, T.B., sleep deprivation, mental illness, HIV/AIDS, alcohol and drug abuse (Daly, 1996). Exposure to physical elements is exacerbated in the context of limited access to health care, shelter, laundry and bathing facilities. Such a lack of these critical resources makes it impossible for homeless people to maintain personal hygiene and thus gives leeway to social stigma due to their physical appearance. This lack of resources points to the limited and inadequate welfare and state interventions. All of the participants painted an explicitly 'sickening picture' of life on the streets and in homeless shelters. This is Angela's account of her living conditions:

Companies support the shelters, send money ... [but] there is fraud thing ek se ... they [shelter authorities] take all that money and they never support the shelter ... we have to pay. It is a money-making business ... they get sponsored by Shoprite, Woolworths and things ... all the food that

comes from there, is free for the people but they still want the people to pay for that food, do you understand me? ... Which is not fair for people ... *the toilets in the shelter, there is rats, there is cockroaches so big, there is like ... even in our shelter there is rats and it is infested, it is sickening ... there is no clean bedding; they don't even change your blanket once a month. So there people get scabies, sickness and disease and all that lice and everything like that ... cause you come you got sores and sleep in the same bed and other one must sleep on the same bed and NO ... You actually should go around to the shelter, which I suggest and just see the people...* (Emphasis added).

Siyanda: I tried they won't let me...

Angela: (cuts me off) They won't let you in (placing emphasis) ... They should be very health conscious because everything comes from there is not healthy, it's not healthy. IT IS NOT HEALTHY AT ALL (placing emphasis)...

The other participants' accounts also reveal the same inhumane conditions that homeless people have to live under. The lack and inadequacy of state interventions and the absence of social responsibility to homeless people renders and locates homelessness as an 'individual problem'; and therefore perpetuates victim blaming, and constructs homeless people as the abject 'other'. Homeless people are readily classified as the 'undeserving poor', who simply do not want to work. Beder (2000) argues that there are different forms of discriminations that invariably ensure that there is no desirable social identity outside of home, work and employment. The Harvard Law Review (1997) argued that:

As a result of their jobless status, they [the poor/the homeless] are subject to a range of economic and social discriminations, including stigmatization, economic and social invisibility, stereotyping, denial of authority and exclusion from the job market (cited in Beder, 2000: 161).

Ironically, as Beder (2000) eloquently argues that this form of discrimination on the basis of work status or unemployment and poverty:

...is not treated seriously as a form of discrimination in the way that discrimination on the basis of gender, race and disability are, but it is just as real (pg. 161).

Being homeless does not only pose 'identity threats' to the homeless individual but also to our capitalist-consumer society itself. Homeless people are defined on the basis of their "otherness" as a consequence of their unemployment status, of their perceived unwillingness to work and their dependence on state resources. Society 'others' or distances itself from homeless people, thus creating socio-economic divisions between "us" and "them". Daly (1996) argues that we, in mainstream society - consumers, producers, capitalists, workers, working and middle-classes - deal with homeless people by 'dissociation' or separating or by:

... distancing ourselves to minimize or displace feelings of resentment, fear, contempt, guilt, shame, or conflict.... allowing us to shun collective responsibility. We compartmentalize and place barriers between "us" and "them" (Daly, 1996: 8).

This dissociation is a dehumanizing process that according to Daly (1996) that is expressed in the terminology used to describe homeless people. For instance, we talk of 'the homeless' instead of 'homeless people' or 'people without houses'. This distancing functions to symbolically relegate homeless people into the 'world of the living dead' and render them socially invisible. The homeless people are therefore socially constructed and represented as 'the other'. According to Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) the 'other' is constructed as 'different' and 'dangerous' in posing a threat to the integrity and identity of society. In this sense, homeless people are solely defined by their difference, lack of home, and lack of economic agency because threaten society and our existence. We therefore deal with homeless people by distancing ourselves from them as they represent 'that which is not us,' but perhaps 'that which we could become', if we were to lose our socio-economic status and economic agency.

The aim of the analyses of the narrative of homeless people was to demonstrate that homelessness poses physical as well as psychological threats identity. In addition, it was to argue that homeless people are placed at social margins as a result of their lack of 'home' spaces as well as their jobless status. The following section will specifically interrogate the meanings of home and the social effects of the lack of economic agency in the participants' lives.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.2 Part 2

This second analysis section interrogates the intersections of identities and home; and of identities and economic agency, by using narratives of homeless people.

4.2.1 Interrogating Meanings of 'Home'

Research suggests that our identities are socially constructed in relation to place, and in particular the 'home' (Bammer, 1994; Daly, 1996; Harvey, 1992; Hirsch, 1994; Holloway and Hubbard; 2001; Massey, 1994; Minh-ha, 1994; Relph, 1976; Sarup, 1994).

Sarup (1994) demonstrates the connections between identity and place/home in that:

... the concept of home seems to be tied in some way with the notion of identity - *the story we tell of ourselves and which is also the story others tell of us* ... identities are not free-floating, they are limited by borders and boundaries (pg 95, original emphasis).

Different theorists argue for different connections between identity and home: Relph (1976) sees 'home' as the source for our humanity and social existence. Minh-ha (1994) suggests that we find 'stability' and 'happiness' at home. Sarup (1994) argues that 'home' represents our sense of and need for belonging. Hirsch (1994) considers 'home' as a cultural place of origin. Daly (1996) sees the home as a 'critical space' that provides physical and psychological security.

These dominant representations and social constructions of home imply that being located outside of home – like being homeless - is a 'kind of exile' (Hirsch, 1994); 'a displacement' (Bammer, 1994) or 'nomadic existence' (Daly, 1996; Tamboukou, 2003).

Therefore homelessness entails social alienation, invisibility, estrangement, exile, isolation, and 'outsiderness'. We can think of homeless people as having free-floating identities, uprooted from place and relocated on the borders and margins of society. Does this mean that 'homeless identities' are 'fractured identities' or 'threatened' identities or 'identities in crisis' that are constructed outside of the meaningful and socially valued space of home? To explore the connections of identity and home, I analyzed narratives of homeless people. Different themes emerged: home as 'dangerous' spaces for women in particular; the intersections of home and consumption; and homelessness as a site for resistance. This section will explore different meanings of home as well as the participants' personal and social meaning of home and the streets.

4.2.1.1 What is HOME: A Geographical and Relational Space

The participants were asked about their 'place in the world', their home, their space of belonging. Research suggests that home is a significant place of being. The participants acknowledged this notion of home. The participants⁴, except for Ann, 'remembered' where home was – their place of significance:

Siyanda: Where is home for you?

Angela: Cape Town. Home is where my family is, that's my home.

Ann: Durban is home for me. The shelter is home for me. My room I got at the shelter I [have] made it like a home: a little bedroom, a kitchen and a little lounge. I feel very comfortable.

Vikash: Maritzburg is my home.

John: That is Cape Town. I have been all over the world, but I still came back to Cape Town.

Pay attention to the participants' meanings of home: For the male participants – Vikash and John – home is a particular geographical and physical location. Home for them, is Cape Town, it is Pietermaritzburg. Their meanings of what home is does not refer to social relationships but to physical space. However, for Angela, home is 'where her family is. Angela attaches social and relational meanings to home. Ann is however the only participant that actively distances herself from home – she redefines what home is and what it means. Home, for Ann, is where she finds herself as the present moment, in Durban in a shelter. Ann's attribution of Durban and the shelter as home is important as her family and her place of origin represent trauma, emotional pain, abandonment, neglect and conflictual interpersonal relationships. Home is both a geographical location as well as a social relational space. Although the participants are displaced from home – for different economic and interpersonal reasons – home, nonetheless retains some symbolic significance in the construction of their identities. Home retains significance for Ann, who has been 'pushed out' of it.

Homelessness involves a dislocation between spaces and places: between the streets – where the participants are presently located and emotional meanings attached to the place once lived (Woodward, 2002). The participants' recollection of home signals that home is a place of origin, the place of belonging and identity.

⁴ 'The participants' refer to Ann, Angela, John and Vikash who were interviewed twice. Victor was

4.2.1.2 Contested Meaning: Home as site for Trauma

Home is commonly constructed as a site of identity construction and meaningful relationships. In this sense home is associated with:

... pleasant memories, intimate situations, [as] a place of warmth and protective security amongst parents, brothers, sisters and loved people (Sarup, 1994: 94).

This characterization of home, however, is a socio-historical construct (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001) that ideologically and pervasively invade our lives. Holloway and Hubbard (2001) see the home as reflecting a western heterosexual domain, which is vertically defined along power relations (Bammer, 1994) between 'man and wife' and between parent and child. Home is not merely a place for meaningful relationships, it is also the site of trauma marked by violence, abuse and sexual exploitation (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001) commonly instigated by men and directed against women and children. Feminist approaches see the home and family as systems marked by inequality, conflict, and male dominance (Stark and Hitcraft, 1994).

Ann and Angela's narratives and their sexual exploitation in the home provide evidence that the home may not be as safe as it is constructed to be. For many women the home is a place of risk, violence, abuse and sexual exploitation. Although the idea of home is a particular socio-historical construct, a point for socialization and for political regulation, it nonetheless defines who we are and provides a positive socially valued identity. If we look at the home as a site for identity construction, or as set against that which is 'alien', 'abroad', foreign' or indeed 'homeless' (Woodward, 2002), we can think of homelessness

unfortunately arrested after his initial interview and therefore I could not explore issues with him in-depth.

as a creative space connoting a new mode of being in the world. We can look at Ann's homelessness and her ability to re-define home as a site for resistance against this taken-for-granted social and economic construct of home. Homelessness may be a different mode of 'being-in-the-world' and 'being human' in the postmodern context. However, do homeless people see their socially devalued position as resistance? Or, do they want access to the very same system that alienates and marginalizes them? These ideas are explored in the following subsequent sections.

4.2.2 Having and Owning a Home: Economic and Consumer Imperatives

Daly (1996) argues that the home is a social construct, rooted in economic, political and ideological practices of its context. Specifically the home is:

... rooted in economic ideology and made possible (*for those who can afford it*) by political and legal institutions (Daly, 1996: 150, emphasis added).

This means that the home is no longer, if it was ever, a private space but rather it is imbued with, and manifests, the politics and ideologies of its context. Putnam (1993) suggests that the home is the territory of consumption, in that the process of 'making' a home involves issues of identity, consumption and ownership. Economic agency, expressed through consumption and ownership, is the critical formative and normative feature of a consumer society. Consumption and ownership are the primary activities through which members of a consumer society can effectively participate in. Angela expresses her need of owning a 'home' as a 'normal life' that would give her 'peace of mind' and allow her to 'be comfortable':

I want my life back. I want what I always had, like my flat and things like that. I wanna live a normal life, I just wanna *be comfortable* and have things like that, you understand me. It means big for me, it will give me the *peace of mind* that I have always wanted and I think I deserve for all the hard work and all I did for people and things like that.... (Emphasis added).

A home for Angela means 'peace of mind' and 'being comfortable' in having and owning material possessions. Angela wants a normal life. The question is what is a 'normal life' in capitalist consumer society? In a consumer society, Bauman (2000) suggests that individuals express themselves through their (material) possessions. Similarly Beder (2000) suggests that in a consumer society, social status is expressed in terms of consumer goods; and people are judged by the goods they possess, own and consume. Economic agency as expressed in ownership and consumption entails a socially valued way-of-being-in-the-world that defines positive identities in a consumer society. In this context, a 'normal life' is primarily shaped by economic agency, consumption and ownership.

Ownership and consumption provide a socially valued identity - a shared identity with other 'consuming selves' - in terms of their 'economic contribution' to society through their consumption. Consumption and ownership offer access to mainstream society; thus can provide homeless people with the means of escape from the margins of society into socially valued positions. In this sense, Angela desires a life defined by economic agency, ownership and consumption. Angela wants such a life in order to socially identify with the dominant group or mainstream society to escape the marginalized position defined by homelessness:

Yes that is the honest truth yes; I also want what they [other people] have.

Like Angela, Victor expresses his desires to consume and own a home in order to gain access to mainstream society and live a ‘normal life’ defined by material possessions, work and marriage:

I just wanted a house, a family, a house for life, *a child*, a small house... a job, a *permanent job* where I can, everyday come home, put a plate of food on the table and my child and my wife would be happy ... Now, uh my dreams are to get a job... *Get married* ... work, earn money, you know, *honest living, buy my own clothes earn every month* ... (Emphasis added).

Victor’s desire for his own home and family would mean that he is a ‘man’ again. It would mean that he does not have to beg. It would mean that he is not ‘home-less’ – not the ‘other’ but like everyone else in society. Economic agency, consumption and ownership provide the means of participation in society as well as a positive identity. However, homelessness is located outside of this – it relegates identities to the periphery and the margins of society.

The participants’ desire for economic agency – to own a home – can be read as their desire to ‘stabilize their identities’ (Woodward, 2002), as their need to secure a sense of who they are, their need to belong. Our need to belong is fundamentally expressed and defined by our economic agency, which is linked to employment and our economic activity. Interestingly, our need for a home is intricately linked to our economic agency, our ‘buying power’, which invariably defines a positive and socially valued identity. The

participants lack economic agency however, their desire to own a home is their search for belonging, the means to escape the marginal and threatening position provided by their homeless and jobless status.

4.2.3 'Re-defining Home': Homelessness as site of resistance?

People have undoubtedly always been more mobile and [their] identities less fixed ... (Gupta and Ferguson, 2002: 68).

If the construction of identities in relation to place/home is a socio-historical construct, can homelessness represent a new mode of being in world? Historically and culturally human beings evolved from being nomadic in nature, with less fixed identities, to developing emotional attachments to places. Is it possible that homeless people - who are less constrained within 'closed identity boundaries' (Tamboukou, 2003) - challenge the assumptions that we all aspire to settle down (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001). Tamboukou (2003) suggests that nomadism is an alternative space of social existence in the world that redefines ways of being at home without being rooted in a particular place. Furthermore, and like Azaldva (1987), Holloway and Hubbard (2001) suggest that nomadic behaviour and homelessness can be thought of as a site for resistance, challenging the notions and assumptions that all human beings aspire to 'settle down' in a place, they can call home:

... the very mobility of the homeless may itself become a form of resistance as they seek to challenge attempts as ordering, separating and excluding them... (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001: 271).

Is it possible that socially marginalized homeless identities actually represent our identities as sites of becoming rather than being? Sarup (1994) argues that identity is

about becoming rather than being, which highlights the fluidity and multiplicity in identities in the postmodern world. How can homelessness be a creative space, a site for transfiguration as much as it is a social affliction (Sarup, 1994)?

This leads us to the central question: can the streets be home? Sarup (1994) suggests that humans have the ability to be or feel at home anywhere they are. Can living on the margins of society be 'liberating', an attempt to redefine identity and home? Azaldva (1987) suggests so, in that:

Living on the borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting multiple identity and integrity is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element...not comfortable but home (cited in Hirsch, 1994: 71).

Angela also suggests so, in that she has the ability to re-create and re-define 'home, wherever she goes'. She sees her life in shelters as 'a home away from home'. Interestingly, Angela does not consider herself homeless precisely because she can make and recreate home wherever she is in the world:

Angela: Yes, you still have roots you come from a family. I come from a family. I also got a home. I also can go home.

Siyanda: So are you homeless? Hmmm staying in a shelter does that make you homeless or...?

Angela: No, it is like home away from home. At least there is a roof... over your head...

Siyanda: So, do you consider the shelter your home?

Angela: At the moment yes, that is totally my home...totally my home. And I go once a year to Cape Town to my family...

Siyanda: Do you consider yourself to be homeless?

Angela: Homeless?

Siyanda: Yes

Angela: (*very boldly*) No. I make home where I am.

Siyanda: You make home wherever you go.

Angela: Yes. I am a very, very person ... I can make it. Because I can go with the good, bad and the ugly ... I got that personality....

Interestingly, Angela has constructed her life on the streets and in shelters as 'home'. She is able to do this because, unlike literally living and sleeping on the streets, a shelter provides a 'roof-over her head. Furthermore she is able to work (as a car guard) to pay for her shelter accommodation. In one sense Angela can 'afford' to re-create and redefine home because she has economic agency and financial means to do so. Angela's ability to work and earn money allows her to consume, no matter how little money she was. Her ability to redefine home is enabled by her economic agency. Angela's homelessness is not about her resisting economic and consumption norms. She continues to participate in these ways.

While Angela can recreate home in the shelter, the participants express that the actual streets *can never be home*. The streets were constructed as 'dangerous' and rife with victimizations of different forms. Home for Vikash means a 'safe place' and the streets are precisely unsafe and unmarked, undefined places for social existence:

A home is where you stay...it is where you want to live for the rest of your life ... not on the streets ... They are not home, why, you see a lot of things on the streets ... people dying, getting poked, people getting robbed, you see.

On the other hand, a shelter can be home because it at least provides a roof. Like Vikash, the streets, for Angela, cannot be home, but a shelter can:

Siyanda: So, can a shelter be a home?

Angela: A shelter can.

Siyanda: Why?

Angela: At least there's a roof over your head. You are not sleeping outside on the streets. And when it rains you can go to sleep and wake up in the morning and say, 'Thank you Lord'. Your body feels good, you can have a shower. Not the streets. Look what the streets look like my friend.

Ann's story tells a different 'resistance' against the norm of 'being at home'. Ann's homelessness could be a site for resistance and agency following being actively pushed out of home. This agency is articulated in her determination to 'make it' in building her life outside, and independent, of her family. Home, for Ann, is a source of pain and is able to distance herself from and create a different 'home' on the streets:

Ahhh, I just decided at the age of seventeen that if my family don't want to know me I will understand. But I am just going to show them I can stand on my own feet. And I already went through very bad things, got shot; got stabbed; but I did survive. To my sisters and them I never went once to

their door and knocked and asked for a piece of food and that.... I moved away when I was...after my daughter was born. I just decided okay the family don't want me, let me go try to build a life somewhere else.

Ann is able to redefine home because she has been forced and pushed out of home. Home takes on a different meaning for Ann, Angela, John and Vikash. But the question remains: Are we able to make home everywhere we are? Is homelessness resistance against hegemonic constructs of home and economics? To engage this question it is important to acknowledge the fact that homelessness poses real physical and psychological threats. Being homeless seems to be a precarious space to exist in to be resistance. Homelessness can literally kill you – and not in a figurative sense. Homelessness is a fatal condition with serious physical implications. Homelessness is therefore a critical identity space, which can be thought of as a site for resistance, to an extent, but is also the very means of social alienation and stigmatization.

Although Victor and Vikash chose their homelessness, they now ‘want out’ of the streets. In addition, the participants express deep desires for and the need to belong; to consume; to own; and be at home. The participants’ need to belong and their attempts to redefine home are a ‘call back home’ – to be rooted in a place, to have meaningful interpersonal relationships and to ‘fit in’ society. Therefore our identities are essentially ‘place identities’ constructed in relation to home and meaningful relationships. It is for this reason that we cannot deny the fundamental link between identity and the places we inhabit. If there were no link, experiences such as relocations, homelessness, exile and displacements would not be experienced so personally and so emotionally distressing. Homelessness is fundamentally a marginalized, threatening, and politically neglected position to exist in. Homelessness defines a precarious identity, identities in crisis,

threatened and threatening identities. Homelessness is a 'no place' thus expresses the need to belong and to be anchored in a place called home. This means that home is not 'everywhere' or 'anywhere' but home is somewhere.

4.2.4 'To have' and 'Not to have': Homelessness as a paradox

Mathiti (2004: 1) suggests that homelessness is a paradox in that it "epitomizes destitution in the midst of opulence, alienation in the midst of social intimacy, and lack of a home in a home-based society". The marginalization of homeless people perpetuates the paradox as homeless people are relegated nonetheless they want access to the very life and system of capitalism and consumerism that keep them 'the marginalized other'. For Daly (1996) there is a direct link or 'causal' relationship between the system of capitalism and poverty and homelessness. In this light, the systems of consumerism and capitalism create and engender the widening gaps between the rich and the poor and the homeless; between 'the haves' and 'the have nots'. However, Seabrook (1998) sees poverty and homelessness, not as 'direct products', but rather as evidence of capitalism and consumerism:

Poverty [and homelessness] cannot be 'cured' for it is not a symptom of the diseases of capitalism. Quite the reverse: it is evidence of its robust, good health, its spur to even greater accumulation and effort ... (cited in Bauman, 1998: 79).

All the participants express the paradox of being poor and accepting that reality but at the same time wanting access to a 'normal', 'better' life. For instance, Angela seems to have accepted her life as a homeless woman but, at the same, time desires a 'normal life', marked by economic agency:

I am grateful that I got what I got today. It hurts a little bit [being surrounded by people who have it all] because you also want to be there, you also want to stay there but you can't have it ... Because there's things that you always want [like] a car, a house and you can't have them, you can't afford to buy....

Angela contradicts herself: on one hand she is 'grateful' or has accepted her homeless and jobless status. But, on the other hand she recognizes that being homeless 'prevents' access to the 'normal' and 'good life':

It is okay [being homeless] ... but you don't want to be there as I said but circumstances put you there. But you have to be grateful for the roof.... but it is not what I want.

Similarly Ann seems to accept the reality of her life by transcending a materialist life, while at the same time acknowledges its benefits and social value (and perhaps wants access to the same life that keeps her marginalized):

You know I always said I would rather stay poor and have nothing than live for an aimless life... Sometimes I feel that maybe I could have had all those things. But I know if I had everything but didn't go through a hard life and everything was easy. Then that thing means nothing to me... Well for me I actually can't say sometimes I wish I was in that situation, but I always say it's not people that got stuff that got real life in their life and happiness. And for me is, I feel satisfied the way I am living at the moment. But it is not a nice way to live really it's not. But what can I do at

the moment. There's no other way out.

The paradox is expressed by the tension between 'acceptance' and 'yet seeking strategies to escape' being homeless. Connected to this paradox is the function that belief in God performs for identity (particularly for Ann and Angela). Ann and Angela's belief in God 'keeps desires in check'. This means that their belief in God provides them with systems of meaning and explanation, which enable them to see the reality of their lives differently; and 'accept' their lack of economic agency. Ann's desire for a 'good life', for economic agency and envy of those with the consuming ability, are enmeshed and layered with 'religious' explanations:

It's hard sometimes; it is hard for me when... the people pass with groceries. I always think 'why can't it be me you know'. But I think "God, if this is the way you want me to live. I will live this way". But I believe that God will one day bring an outcome for me. For me, it is like if you have got something, you got it. If you haven't got something you don't... It's one God that made us, if you are rich, you are, if you are poor, you are poor. Maybe this is set up by God for you to live this way...

Homelessness within the global consumer discourse takes a contradictory and paradoxical form: the participants reflect their need and desires to consume while at the same time struggle to accept the reality of their lives. The experience of homelessness takes a paradoxical form of 'not having' but constantly seeking the means to 'have'. Homelessness implies, by definition, a failure to meaningfully participate in economic life – either as a consumer or producer. This failure to participate is as a result of homeless people's lack of economic agency and their jobless status. As a result homeless

people are relegated to the margins of society and economic life. The participants nonetheless express their need and search for economic agency in order to construct positive and socially valued identities. Economic agency as expressed in consumption and ownership provides positive individual and social identities and is the measure of individual self-worth that defines one's social place in economic realities. Simply put, positive and socially valued identities are sold and therefore can be purchased. Economic agency enables and makes such transactions possible. However, to be homeless precisely falls outside and locates people out of these socio-economic and psychological transactions.

To be human essentially entails ownership and consumption as accorded by one's economic agency and employment. Homeless people have to negotiate their jobless status and their need to survive, belong, and essentially their need to live. Homeless identities are therefore threatened identities that consume, even though very little, in order to survive in our society.

5. CONCLUSION

The study was an attempt to explore and theorize the effects of homelessness on identity. Homelessness and chronic poverty are powerful identity markers or subject positions that force people to construct and negotiate positive identities for themselves in the context of economic marginalization and social neglect. The study interrogates the ways homeless people experience and talk themselves through the telling of their own life stories or identity narratives.

The study theorizes homelessness in a dual form: firstly homelessness is, by implication, a 'lack of home' in a home-based society (Mathiti, 2004). In this sense, home is constructed as a source for identity construction, as a context for socialization and as the point for political regulation. This means that being homeless is a form of displacement; a kind of exile and relocation of identities to the margins of society. Homeless people have to construct identities outside of a socially valued space called home. Alienation and estrangement from home suggests that homeless identities are 'identities in crisis', threatened and threatening identities that are forged from the margins of society. The question is, where is home? What does home mean? Can people be at home without being necessarily rooted in a particular place?

Secondly, adult homelessness is fundamentally defined by a lack of economic agency, with underemployment or joblessness. This means that homelessness entails 'failure' to meaningfully participate in economic life. Participation in society is largely a function of employment and economic agency, which are expressed in consumption and ownership of material goods. Homeless identities contravene the relationship between identity and work/employment. Work and economic agency define and provide positive and socially

valued identities. However, homelessness is located outside of this and defines a negative and socially threatened identity.

Through analyzing homeless narratives, the study reveals political, social, historical, gendered and economical factors that create and maintain homelessness as a particular 'individual problem' that requires 'individual responsibility' and intervention. The study shows that reasons for chronic homelessness are overwhelmingly structural and economic thus requiring 'developmentally focused', multi-dimensional state interventions. Homelessness is a social creation and the product of economic/political contexts of globalization, capitalism and consumerism, while the individual experience of homelessness is also structured by the way the ideological defenses of this system tend to be victim-blaming, explaining the homelessness in terms of the personal inadequacies of individuals.

We can think of homeless people as travelers, tourists, exiles, and nomads (Minh-ha, 1994) as their identities are less constrained by boundaries and borders. However, unlike tourists, the homeless move out of necessity not leisure. In a different sense, the homeless are uprooted from home and thus are 'displaced'; 'estranged'; 'place-less'; 'home-less'. Homeless people find themselves and exist between critical spaces: between 'home' and the streets, which 'not home'; between 'not having' yet seeking the means 'to have', searching for home and longing for a place to belong. The participants' search for home and economic agency is their 'call back home', their attempt to belong in a society that is shaped and defined around 'home' and structured by economics. The participants expressed their longing for home and desire to create and own a home. But their homelessness and joblessness hinder these aspirations.

Having and owning a home is our primary modes of participation in our consumer society. The need of having and owning a home is socially and historically constructed. Saying that something is socially constructed is not to say that it is less real. What can be more real than our need to belong, to have material security and own our homes, which in turn shape our identities. While homelessness is located outside of this socially valued identity space, homeless people nonetheless want access to this mode of existence.

The findings show that the participants attempt to redefine their meanings of 'home' without being rooted in a particular place. However their meanings of home are vested with contradictions as they find themselves in between spaces. In a home-based society dislocation, displacement, nomadism and homelessness are constructed as the absence of order, coherence and unity (Featherstone, 1995). In this context home symbolizes order, coherence unity. Rushdie (1991) eloquently captures the sense of existing between spaces, in that:

The effects of mass migration [and homelessness] has been the creation of radically new types of human beings: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memory as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves – because they are so defined by others – by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves (cited in Norindr, 1994: 233).

Homeless people exist in a state of tension between their 'real homes' or places once lived and on the streets, where they now find themselves. This tension represents the fact that home has been socially constructed to be 'somewhere' and 'not anywhere' nor

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Homeless people exist in a state of tension between their 'real homes' or places once lived and on the streets, where they now find themselves. This tension represents the fact that home has been socially constructed to be 'somewhere' and 'not anywhere' nor

'everywhere'. Homelessness in a home-based society is a powerful identity space, which can be a site of resistance to an extent. But it is also the very means of marginalization, social exclusion and political neglect. Homelessness is therefore constitutes a threat to identity and to the individual and identity.

The narratives of homeless people reveal different understandings of home. But more significantly, they revealed people ability to negotiate who they are in the face and context of social stigmatization and political neglect. Homeless people can forge and construct positive identities: either like Ann and Angela by subscribing to religious discourse or, like John, Victor and Vikash by blaming external circumstances of their context.

The notion of home intricately implies and is tied to economics. Establishing and owning a home is a function of one's economic status and agency. Home and economics are inseparable realities, which suggests that homelessness identities are defined by their 'lack of economic agency'. Participants expressed different psychological and interpersonal reasons for leaving home. Furthermore, some participants can be said to have freely chosen their homeless, displaced and nomadic existence. However, their seemingly freely chosen homelessness is significantly and overwhelmingly economic. This means that homelessness is fundamentally a structural problem, even though it appears as an individually chosen way of life. Suggesting that homelessness is a structural problem neither absolves 'the individual' nor reinforce the binary distinction between 'the individual' and the social'. But it recognizes the underlying social, political, gender and economic structures that need to change, in order to allow the individual homeless person to also change.

Other key findings also suggest that homelessness is undeniably gendered as men and women experience it differently (Woodward, 2002). Homeless women are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation on the streets and invariably turn to sex work as means of survival. This is significant in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Women are generally unable to negotiate safer sex practices in normative heterosexual relationships. Homeless women are much more vulnerable and compromised as their marginal homeless existence renders them completely powerless in the negotiation of safer sex. On the other hand, homeless men face a different gendered, social and psychological threat to their masculine identity. Homeless women are physically and sexually vulnerable whereas homeless men are socially vulnerable facing serious identity threats like being labelled and rendered 'not men'. Homeless men are 'not men' in the sense that they lack economic agency and employment, which profoundly defines masculine identity.

The study demonstrates powerful intersections of identity, home, work and economic agency. Homeless identities are constructed from the margins but participants reveal the incredible human capacity to adapt and give meaning to difficult and threatening socio-economic realities. Homeless identities are constantly under threat. The study shows that the homeless use different resources in order to negotiate positive and socially valued identities from the margins of society. This study has been successful in at least showing the gendered, economic, contradictory and paradoxical experiences of homelessness.

For me, the study is an ethical exploration that interrogates the lived experiences of human beings in crisis. Although homeless people are economically marginalized and politically neglected, they are people, with stories and life. Human beings have an incredible capacity to cope in threatening situations like homelessness. We forget that homelessness is a serious ethical and moral problem that literally threatens many lives.

Jacobs et al (1999) suggest that the study on homelessness reveals different responses and reflects how we perceive homeless people. These responses include issues on family ideology, latent racism, resource constraints and of course the question of economics, which defines all aspects of lives.

Furthermore, homelessness is a form of social death that precedes physical death (Daly, 1996). We forget that homelessness can kill. While this study posed a psychological question, a questions about the effects on identity, it shows just how much of a social and economic creation homelessness is. We create homelessness and repress it out of society's consciousness and the political agendas.

The study raised many question on identity. There are critical gender questions that still need to be explored in greater detail. Future research on homelessness should perhaps be 'action-oriented', with specific developmental lens. There are different dimensions of homelessness – race, gender, and age. Age plays a critical role in intervention. Interventions tend to focus on street children and overlook that lots of people have actually lived all their lives on the streets. We need to cater for and structure different interventions aimed at different age groupings. We need medical interventions geared to addressing the physical aspects of homelessness. There also needs to be an effective social welfare system, whereby homeless people can assess disability grants and pension funds and facilities that assist homeless people with job creation and the maintenance of employment. Homeless people are not simply unwilling to work, as capitalist ideology would have us believe, and there is a need to not only challenge the material plight of the homeless, but the social stigma that is mobilized against them, and which they must continuously contest in order to maintain positive identities. These interventions should also be separated from those directed to homeless children, who have hitherto been the

primary research focus.

More broadly the investigation of the experience of homeless should give us pause to reflect on the nature of our society and the human situation of those who are marginalized. The homeless are caught between competing approaches: liberal sympathy which reduces them to incidental charity cases, the cynicism of the privileged which blames their plight on personal laziness and incompetence, and economic master plans which oppose immediate social welfare for the goal of future economic growth which will allegedly benefit everybody. But all of these lose sight of their starting point – the lived experience of homeless, and how a close attention to this issue can open up an understanding of the conditions that structure actual human lives. Perhaps it is here that this study can begin to map out a contribution.

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7. APPENDINCIES

7.1 APPENDIX 1

Tell me about your life-story from birth to the present moment.

Life as a book (as adapted from Crossley, 2000)

Think of your life as if it were a book. Each part of your life as a chapter in the book, give each chapter a name and describe the chapter.

Key Events - these are specific critical events that lie in the past for each individual.

I want you to describe in detail each event; what happened; where you were; who was involved; what you did; what you thought; what you felt. Furthermore, how did each event affect you and your life-story?

Peak experience - high point in your life

Nadir experience - low point in your life

Turning point - significant change in your life

Earliest memory - a detailed account of what you remember (setting, scene, characters, feelings and thoughts)

Important childhood memory - can be positive or negative (what stands out for you)

Important adolescent memory - can be positive or negative

Important adult memory - can be positive or negative

Other important memories

Significant people

Who are they?

What is the impact on you life and life story?

Future script

What are your plans and dreams for the future?

Stress and problems

Talk to me about the conflicts and problems you have experienced. Give a detailed account of this: the nature of the problem, source of the problem, developments and plans for dealing with problems in the future.

Personal Ideology

This includes people's beliefs in God and how God impacts on people's life narratives.

Life Theme

APPENDIX 2: Key Issues and Research Questions

Identity

1. What were your dreams and aspirations as a child?
 - a) Have those changed?
 - b) How have they changed? What changed them?
 - c) How has poverty changed your life?
 - d) What are your dreams now?
 - e) What are your dreams for the future?

2. Did you have friends growing up? Tell me about them.
 - a) Who was your best friend?
 - b) What made them special?
 - c) Are you still in touch with any of your friends? How is that like?

3. Have you been in love or married?
 - a) Tell me about that relationship?
 - b) What does a marriage or an intimate relationship mean for you?
 - c) Do you see yourself married or intimately involved one day? Why?

4. Did you go to school?
 - a) Tell me your that experience? How was it? Did you love it?
 - b) What does going to school mean for you?

Home and Family

1. Describe your relationships with your family
2. How does it 'feel' like not to have a family that you are close to?
3. Where is home for you?
 - a) What does home or being at home mean for you?
 - b) Where do you belong?
 - c) Can streets be home? Why or why not?

Consumption

1. What does having or owing (house/car/cell phone) mean for you?
2. What does having or not having these things means for you?
3. What does work mean for you?
4. How does it feel like not to have money or fixed assets and personal belongings?
5. How do you feel/perceive all the other people around you who have so much but you do not have?
6. What are kinds of things and products that you consume on daily basis?
7. Why do continue to live such a poor life? Is worth living? What helps you cope?

South Africa

1. Dou you identify as South African?
2. What makes you South African?
3. What does South African mean to you? How do you feel about it?
4. How do you feel about the government? Do you think they are responsible for your homelessness?