

CHAPTER FIVE

DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCES CONTINUALLY INFORMED BY TRADITIONS OF INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The contextualised experiences of homeless people are continually informed by traditions. Traditions are not necessarily limited to the rituals and practices of a community or a group of persons. Tradition is something more than that which finds its meaning in society, culture, spirituality and so on. Defining and redefining meaning from time to time is related to traditions which continually inform the particular life situation of a person. The do's and don'ts of society are dictated by such traditions. Human beings are inescapably social beings, thus they cannot avoid the influence of these traditions in their life world and in their concepts and attitudes.

5.2 TRADITIONS OF INTERPRETATION

5.2.1 Definition of traditions

Traditions can be defined and interpreted in different ways. Most definitions mention a set of values, rituals, customs and practices used and formed in the past which are handed over from generation to generation. When people say they are 'traditional', however, they cannot negate the fact that they exist in the present. Thus, however old the tradition from which they come, these people are

actually part of the present. “Tradition in its real sense means the continuation of faith in eternal truth and values. True tradition is therefore a continuous re-experiencing of the original breakthrough from inner worlds of other realities, a re-experiencing today of a dynamic aliveness, no matter how long ago the tradition may have been formed” (Tradition 2006). In one sense story telling is a re-envisioning and re-experiencing of the inner worlds formed and continually informing the dynamic aliveness today. It is an ever-moving, ever-reconstructing process. Those inner worlds themselves are formed by the influence of various traditions. Intentional transmission of historical facts can be found in legends, proverbs, ballads and sagas. These traditions may be oral or written, but they usually begin as oral testimony handed down from one generation to the next. Story telling is an irreducible method of transmitting traditions. Each occasion of story telling conveys some sort of tradition to the listeners, the next generation.

Retelling stories is part of a dynamic, that of life experience moving forward. It may be influenced by various traditions such as social, cultural, religious and political traditions. It is difficult to separate these traditions and analyze their impact on a person’s experience. Traditions, like discourses, are intertwined and they influence a person’s life stories in multiple ways, each of which must be attended to, since it opens a unique possibility. Traditions are not to be considered as rigid things, but rather as part of society’s processes of change and growth. The homeless youth in Pretoria with whom I interacted understand this. In their stories they never negated traditions and their impact, either directly or indirectly. Their stories are saturated with such influences. However, often the story tellers are not consciously aware of the traditions that influence their experiences or how this influence works. It is the task of the facilitator to listen to the stories and their interpretations of life experiences. Through such patient listening the facilitator can read the influences of different traditions in the stories. Thus relatively good knowledge and understanding of various traditions and their expressions, especially in a particular life setting, are essential for a facilitator. Studies in the fields of cultural, political, social and spiritual traditions can help

the facilitator as co-researcher to co-author the stories continually informed by traditions.

5.2.2 Criteria for detecting traditions

A person's history is not negated by the experiences of his/her present life. This history has validity for interpretations of the present. The past continuously informs the process of finding meaning in present experiences. Traditions can be understood as beliefs, rituals and practices informed by past experiences which now inform present experience and form part of a person's life story, or inform alternate stories. "A genuine understanding of the past lies always before us as a task for the future. It is a mark of shifts in the epochs of thinking that they arrive, sometimes over centuries, sometimes over decades, but always as if they were already here, so that it becomes near impossible to turn back into their origins and what lies behind them without finding them already everywhere" (Hemming 2005:12). The past enlightens the present and gives light for the future. When the homeless youth share their stories, the trace of various different traditions is visible. For example, traditions of modernity influence the stories told by Andre. He views the goal of his life as to 'be independent'. The basic trend of modernity is that of individuality. Modernity affirms the human being as the creator of his/her own destiny. Modernity upholds the power of human beings. Andre believes in his own power and he wants to be independent. This attitude helps him to make plans for his future. Another influence on Andre's stories is that of religion. He was born in a Christian family and learned the lessons of Christianity in his childhood. He now interprets Christian teachings according to the assumptions that best fit his present condition. When he listened to the Bible classes at the Street Centre and the ideas presented there, he began to experience confusion. He now tries to retell his story, informed by this new religious tradition and affirming his present experiences and his continuing interpretations of them. Andre's telling and retelling of his story is an example which reveals the implications of informing traditions. Newly experienced realities are more

accessible than the past, yet these new realities continuously interact with past experiences to create new experiences. These new experiences, their interpretations and the meaning these reveal together all become clearer if we identify the traditions influencing the particular experiences.

5.2.3 How the traditions are chosen

Different traditions continuously inform story tellers in their lives and in their story telling. All interpretations are made in light of these traditions. Thus identifying these traditions will help us to understand the story tellers' interpretations. Traditions can come from society, peer groups or churches, amongst others. The discourses of the homeless youth are also continually informed by various traditions. "When engaging in language, we are not engaging in neutral activity. There exists a stock of culturally available discourses that are considered appropriate and relevant to the expression or representation of particular aspects of experience" (White & Epston 1990:27). Through analysing the discourses that emerged during my conversations with the young people, we can identify the traditions that inform them and so enter wider discussion with these discourses. Further discussion about the impact of such traditions in the life experiences of the researchers also helps. Inviting them to investigate their previous experiences will reveal their inner concepts about the various traditions that inform these experiences. Deconstructive questioning is also essential at this stage. By examining the discourses using questions like: How has this discourse influenced you in the past? How does it influence you in the present? How do you think it will influence you in the future? How does it affect your relationship with yourself? How does it affect your relationship with other people? The answers to questions like these can illuminate the different traditions present in the stories, and the story teller can begin to converse with them.

5.2.4 Traditions relevant in this study

Traditions are essential ingredients of culture, and descriptive sources of human diversity. This diversity allows human experiences to be rich, varied and transcendent. Discourses and traditions are handed over from generation to generation mainly through cultural artefacts. Such discourses may not have had a global setting in the past, but nowadays are mostly entangled with global issues. Different traditions cannot be examined without looking into the global issues related to those traditions.

Thus we have to identify the traditions that are relevant to the experiences of the homeless youth, because in so doing we discover a world of meaning-making. This is a part of narrative therapy and research in the narrative paradigm. Here the experience of the person is important, since his/her story of this experience gives direct messages, sometimes insights, about the traditions that informed these experiences. “Narrative psychology can be considered an extension of cultural psychology that connects culture, identity, and human experience” (Hoshmand 2006:9). The connections between culture, identity and human experience make the role of traditions in the meaning-making process highly relevant to this project. The dynamics of traditions in human experiences are complex and intertwined. Nobody can directly detect the traditions in a person’s life experiences, but through the narrative way of listening and interaction the facilitator can read glimpses of various traditions and discourses in his/her story. The facilitator may detect many cultural and traditional aspects in the stories shared by the story teller. Searching out the relevant traditions that influence and inform the experiences is a shared task of the facilitator and the researcher. Without the arena created by the counselling interaction, such research is impossible.

The stories told by homeless youth in their particular context of Pretoria clearly reveal the influence of socio-political traditions, traditions informed by cultural

stories and spiritual traditions. Identifying these traditions in the course of narrative interactions opens wider possibilities of creating meaning and promotes the telling of alternate stories. “Human beings are culture bearing and at the same time capable of self-creating. The notion that we can appropriate from culture what we desire for our identity may seem to suggest endless human potentials” (Hoshmand 2006:11). The cultural traditions that inform Michael’s stories, for example, are easily read in his narrations. The cultural traditions of traditional religion are deep rooted in his experiences and influence him in his present day activities. Even though he is a Christian, he believes in ancestor worship. He believes that all the trouble now being experienced by his family is because of the displeasure of his deceased father. Michael performs the rituals traditionally believed to please the ancestors, but because he is also now influenced by more modern traditions, he wants to leave traditional tribal beliefs behind. He is not able to untangle the discourses related to these conflicting traditions. This example affirms the importance of the traditions that inform the stories of homeless people.

5.2.5 Informing traditions and life experiences

Most of the homeless youth in Pretoria are products of apartheid South Africa, and its strict social controls. This social control was part of an exploitative capitalist system. Thus social, economic and personal factors intertwine in the homeless people’s experience. Education, training, the mobilization of certain social sentiments (the work ethic, company loyalty, national or local pride), and psychological propensities (the search for identity through work, individual initiative, or social solidarity) all play a role in the experience of homelessness. In urban families, the conditions created by the parents’ work hours often result in young people growing up in an uncontrolled and unprotected way. Migrant labour, also, which forced the males of the community to leave their homes to work in the mines, alienated many men from their home societies and left their families desolate. Many of these families broke down, leaving the children to be

brought up only under the care of their mother or grandmother. Children brought up in such unstable social settings experience insecurity, which can lead to lawless behaviour. Post 1994, many of these children ended up on the streets, as explained above, where they often lose the last remaining traces of stable family or cultural traditions, and are left unprotected against present day social evils. All the young people to whom I spoke showed negative discourses in their stories of their life experiences, which must be identified so that the tellers can be helped to retell their stories.

Many of the psychological problems for which people go to therapists – problems like depression, anxiety, family strife, addictions, criminal behaviour, a sense of meaninglessness and low self-confidence – are much less likely to occur, or are simply ruled out, in people who live by the Christian virtues. The psychological value of these traits should be obvious not only to Christians, but to virtually everybody. Now psychological problems are very common among the homeless. They have their own discourses about such problems which are often traditionally informed. Sometimes a tradition's informing of their experiences may be negative. The psychological traditions on which they draw to construct their self concept have great influence on their experiences. For example, many show vivid influence of negative concepts when they lament that 'I am unworthy'. Other labels that affect their self concept include 'homeless', 'lower class' or 'under class'. All these labels become part of the socio-political traditions that inform their stories. "Regardless of how we label them, their troubles play a central role in homelessness. Because they cannot find steady jobs, they cannot afford to internalize the work ethic or link their self respect to their job performance" (Jencks 1995:114). As long as these young people are homeless they are imprisoned by the different traditions which are part of their discourses.

5.3 HOW TRADITIONS INFORM EXPERIENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF HOMELESSNESS

In this study, the assumed paradigm is postfoundationalism, which “in theology and the sciences wants to...affirm the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience and the way that tradition shapes the epistemic and non-epistemic values that inform our reflection about both God and our world” (Van Huyssteen 1998:23, 24). The role of such traditions in the life world and life expectations of homeless people cannot be avoided. An identification of such traditions in this particular context and an assessment of such traditions are necessary for a better understanding of the particular context of homeless people coming to the Street Centre in Pretoria.

5.3.1 Assessment of traditions

Homeless people in Pretoria, as mentioned above, come from various cultural, social and economic backgrounds. Thus the traditions that inform their values and ideas are also varied. Because of their young age, the people to whom I spoke are very sensitive to the influence of traditions. “Traditions are not innate in the human mind, although the capacity to assimilate traditions and to adhere to them is innate. Without that capacity, no infant could become a human being, a recipient and carrier of cultural traditions, and hence could not become a member of society” (Shils 1988:111). It is thus difficult to identify and assess the particular traditions informing the discourses of these homeless people. Each storyteller has his/her own particular ideas about the values and attitudes of society, ideas which were formed by the traditions which influenced him/her in childhood. The facilitator of course also has a particular set of values informed by traditions which may be different from those of the story teller. A third story will evolve through continuous interaction between all these traditions and their concepts.

For the purposes of this study, the traditions that continually inform the experiences of the homeless young people in the particular context of Pretoria are divided into socio-political, cultural and spiritual. There may be other traditions, but these did not appear prominently in my conversations with the homeless youth, and so are not included here. The chosen traditions were identified in the youth's responses to their life situations. As they articulate their life stories, they knowingly or unknowingly present their attitudes and responses to socio-political issues and their impact on their lives, try to share their cultural values, and formulate questions or clarify points about their God experiences. Through all these means the young people create a new story of their God experience and a new understanding of their future.

Assessing how these traditions inform the experiences of the youth begins with simply investigating these life experiences. As the story unfolds the facilitator begins to identify particular traditions. This must not be a deliberate attempt to twist the attention of the story teller to a particular direction desired by the facilitator. Instead the facilitator carefully listens to the meanings created through the words used by the story teller in the casual flow of the story. In some cases the facilitator may ask questions or make comments, to clarify the emerging concepts, but intervention must not exceed this. Thus it is essential to read between the lines and in effect reinterpret of some parts of the story with the intention of identifying and assessing the traditions contained within it. In this study, the genuineness of the results of this process was tested as far as possible by checking these interpretations with the story teller in later sessions, which are not included in this research report.

5.3.2 Socio-political discourses

Socio-political discourses continually inform the experience of homelessness and its economic impact. Many of the homeless persons in Pretoria migrated there from other provinces, and quite a number of them from other countries. All came

to Pretoria seeking jobs and better living standards than in their original village or country. This migration pattern can be seen all over the world. Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General, tries to see the positive side of such migration to cities., saying that the migrants can be more useful for the country in the new city or country than they ever were to their original area: “Yes, migration can have its downside-though ironically some of the worst effects arise from efforts to control it: it is irregular or undocumented migrants who are most vulnerable to smugglers, traffickers and other forms of exploitation” (Annan 2006:9). However, urban society, especially the permanent residents of the city, views such migrants as a nuisance, a disturbance in their peaceful life. In poor countries such migration creates fear in the residents that they will lose many job opportunities because of the influx of migrants. This widespread social attitude creates negative feelings in homeless people and helps push them down into non-creativity. When they say ‘I am helpless’, ‘I am powerless’, and ‘I have no other option’, they reveal negative feelings about their social role and participation, which disempowers them.

As the path to homelessness can take several routes, so too the effect of homelessness can differ. Reasons for homelessness may be personal irresponsibility, shortage of low-income housing, the impact of changing technology on work, globalization, alcoholism, extreme poverty and so on. Its effects may be lack of self-responsibility, lack of self worth, living in shelters or streets, inaccessibility to resources and living in utter poverty. “The growth of the homeless population swamped the social welfare system and changed the public’s viewpoint. ...By making every homeless person a messenger and every passer-by a witness, homelessness triggered a crisis of visibility that scratched the psychological armor of even those citizens who insisted that all those people on the street were still the unworthy poor” (Blau 1992:175). When these attitudes become part of the discourses of the homeless youth, this can have both negative and positive effects. The young people may develop an attitude of avoiding responsibility for their homelessness, rather blaming dysfunctional

social, economic and political systems. Or they might think about supporting the government and non-governmental organizations in their efforts to help the poor. Both these effects can be seen in the young people's stories.

Interestingly, the stories not only reveal awareness of discrimination and social injustice, but also a readiness to react to such social scenarios. This means the youth are ready to have a new relationship with socio-political traditions. "The political behaviour of youth conforms to the overall pattern of life among young people. Crises, injustices, and patterns of discrimination are strongly felt by them, but they are also more apt to try to do something about these problems than are other age groups" (Allardt 1988:142). The economically poor condition of the homeless people lessens or even eliminates any opportunities to participate in social change, but despite this their willingness to change motivates them to use any remaining opportunities.

The post-apartheid government in South Africa has attempted several policies to improve the economic conditions of its people especially those who are alienated from the educational sector. Higher education being expensive in South Africa, many turn to seeking a job after completing their basic education. The government knows that education should be available to all for economic growth in South Africa. "Post-1994 South Africa saw a number of progressive higher education policies developing, aimed at eliminating apartheid backlogs and enabling higher education to serve as the engine of economic growth (Capital accumulation) and a source of social mobility (economic and social equity)" (Cele 2005:11). However, a particular socio-political discourse about higher education, namely that "Higher education is for the rich" strongly influences the poor majority in South Africa. The result is that many of them have no ambition to learn more. However, some homeless people whom I met are interested in obtaining degrees and eager for higher studies, even after they became homeless. This shows that they are ready to re-tell their stories for a better future. Many homeless people do get jobs, because they are ready to learn, and take advantage of the computer

literacy and technical skills which are offered by PCM. A PCM newsletter from 2005 reports that the Tshepo Community Economic Development, one of the projects run by PCM, helped place more than 40 people into sustainable employment in a few months, and that many more people benefited from computer, small business, security and hospitality training programmes (2005:6). Projects like this help people to change their relationship with existing socio-political discourses of educational alienation, economic disempowerment and political exploitation. This leads them to a better understanding of their situation and helps them to create alternate stories of their lives.

5.3.3 Discourses informed by literature

Studies and articles published on homelessness, unemployment, lack of education and poverty in newspapers and other types of literature greatly influence the discourses of people who live under these conditions and are exposed to this literature. This type of information affects the homeless in different ways: sometimes they feel affirmed in their social status, sometimes they gain hope for change, and sometimes they feel more negative reactions. A 15 year old girl Felicia, from a severely economically and disadvantaged background, wrote a poem on her status of abandonment (Leggett, Møller & Richards 1997:34):

Where do I go?
I have no home
I just have to find a place
That's warm enough
To make me survive

This poem gives a glimpse of hope and change, but also affirms her status of abandonment. We cannot neglect and be deaf towards such cries for survival.

Current management theories confirm the empowerment of the rich and the powerlessness of the poor. Salin, a homeless man involved in this research, is very aware about his powerlessness. He is not explicitly aware that his understanding has been informed by traditions from literature, but because of his schooling and a continuing reading habit, he shows the effects of such information. He understands and believes that his poverty makes him powerless, that “hierarchies are there to help the rich and powerful become richer and more powerful” (Leavitt 2005:29). Salin is not skilled and so cannot apply for good jobs. He thinks that rich people will not help him, but will only choose those with a better level of achievement. He believes that “human hierarchies...are psychological magnets that attract achievement-driven men and women” (Leavitt 2005:49). Such information disempowers the poor and homeless and tempts them to believe that they are in an inescapable trap of powerlessness and poverty.

Alienation from higher education and the resulting lack of education teaches unskilled people that they are not worthy of or eligible for jobs. Thus they often end up jobless, on the streets, depending on the charity of generous people. They also tend to fall into socially deviant patterns of behaviour, such as crime, rape and drug trafficking. As a 16 year old homeless girl puts it, “education is very important in the youth because if you are looking for a job the employer will want to see your certificate and if you don’t have it you can’t get a job and that how the crime start but if we going to school we can stop if once and for all that why education is important to us as youth” (Leggett, Møller & Richards 1997:83).

Traditional African literature is another kind of literature that affects homeless people, a treasure of stories that has a great impact on their life stories. Their inner discourses often have some roots in the stories they have learned or heard. These stories do not always have a good influence, as one story, reported by Munroe, illustrates. This story is called “The Story-Teller”, and features an aunt, her three nieces and nephews, and a stranger, a bachelor, all on a train journey

together. The Aunt tells the children stories about good children, filled with good values and moral lessons. She considers this the proper way of story telling, not realising that it is thoroughly boring for the children. The bachelor then tells a different kind of story, which the children find much more interesting. The aunt, shocked, says to him, “That was a most improper story to tell to young children”. The only result of her admonition, so the story goes, is that “for the next six months or so those children will assail her in public with demands for an improper story” (Munroe 1994:43). The point of this fable is that attempts to preach, moralise or idealise in stories never work. The genuineness of a story excites the interest of hearers.

This I found very true in listening to the homeless community, who each have stories to tell, not fictions but stories of their experiences. The eyes and tones of the story tellers testified to the integrity of their stories, which of course interested me and encouraged me to listen more. In continuing conversations the young people highlight or explain the discourses involved in their experiences, and this often involves telling the stories they learned at school or elsewhere. These stories can be seen as stories within the story.

Sometimes traditional stories can also suggest some sort of hopelessness to the youth, particularly some of the stories they learned at school. One of the homeless youths said to me that the government is like a white ant. I asked him why he used this image. He explained that the government exploits us and leaves us no hope for the future, and that he got the image from a story he learned at school. When I searched the book and found the story, I understood what he meant. The story is about Jan Theron, who has a wooden leg because of an accident. Then one day the white ants hollow out the whole wooden leg while he lies asleep. Thus he loses his only support for survival. So people approach the school master, asking him out of his learning to tell them how to eradicate white ants. The schoolmasters answers that there is a chapter in his book on the destruction of termites which can help. “It was the last chapter in the

book. But he had unfortunately left the book lying on his desk in the school room over one week-end. And when he had got back on Monday morning there was a little tunnel running up his desk. And the pages dealing with how to exterminate the white ant had been eaten away” (Bosman 1991:91). The homeless youth took this story to symbolise how the government has eaten up the people’s last hope of eradicating evil, yet remains firm in its destructive policies. This reveals a negative discourse about the government and the role of government in this young man’s particular life context.

In this way, literature, daily newspapers, oral stories and poems continually inform the discourses of homelessness and its economic factors. The negative or positive nature of this influence is a question that can be variously answered.

5.3.4 Cultural stories

Cultural stories create various meanings in the concepts of homeless persons. Some theorists say that people see their lives only through the values and attitudes formulated and given to them by the culture around them. Zimmerman however argues people produce meaning in relation with culture. “The ‘discourse’ we have been focusing on is how the culture created a way of seeing the individual as the sole producer of meaning, rather than the culture as the creator of meaning” (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996:19). Culture includes stories suggesting the role of youth in society, about the hopes and hopelessness of jobless, homeless people; and the economic power of the person in the streets. The homeless person normally takes in these cultural stories and uses them in his/her own definitions and interpretations in daily economic and social matters.

Narrative therapy involves a process of externalizing, which aims to reveal how a problem influences the client’s daily life and relationships. Through this it is easy to identify the influence of cultural discourses in the life of the homeless person. “By carefully mapping the influence of the problem on people’s lives and

relationships, the therapist and each client can notice, how much of the client's experience has been affected by the problem (and the cultural discourse that supports it)" (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996:55). The impact of cultural stories on the discourses of homeless people cannot be neglected.

The stories told by Michael disclose that he is still haunted by the values of cultural stories. As mentioned above, he still believes in the cultural value systems of his traditional culture, and the basis for his fear and anxiety is his cultural artefacts. Telling and retelling his story will help him to find new meanings. This story always pushes him to go back to his home to save his mother and sisters, but other stories, his stories of homelessness, prevent this. Economic poverty defines his strategies. The cultural stories he learnt as a child taught him to fear the wrath and displeasure of his ancestors. "In most cases, going against the will of the ancestors makes the individual incur their displeasure, and this leads to mental problems. Essentially, in African thought, the individual is protected against afflictions by the ancestors" (Bodibe 1992:151). In the South African context, indigenous and traditional African healing systems coexist with modern, western forms of counselling and psychotherapy. Because Michael is informed by the cultural stories of his context, I as the facilitator must also be informed about these cultural values and the stories which propagate these values. With such understanding and awareness of traditional healing systems I can effectively help Michael as story teller to retell his story so that it avoids the negative values and focus on the positive values of his particular culture.

5.3.5 Tradition and modernity

Modernity is the child of industrialization and enlightenment. A modern paradigm believes in the power of human reason and places human beings at the centre of the universe. The advancement of science and technology gave momentum and meaning for the concept of modernity. "Though its roots may be traced further

back, the modern world is marked by its unprecedented dynamism, its dismissal or marginalizing of tradition, and its global consequences” (Lyon 1994:19). Tradition can be viewed as a set of values and customs practiced from generation to generation. Modernity set aside such traditions and redefines society to stress technological advancement, progress, integration and rationalism. Such an approach of course contributed to the rise of oppressive governments in different parts of the world, including South Africa. Economically, technologically powerful nations dictated the socio-political destinies of other countries. Socio-political traditions and cultural discourses lost their grip on the everyday life of common people.

However, the modern era has arguably come to an end. In South Africa, with the passing of the apartheid regime society became open to post-modern possibilities. “When South Africans eventually become participants in democratic political institutions, they are bound to be sensitive to all forms of power relations- especially those outside the traditional political institutions, such as power relations in prisons, hospitals, mental institutions and educational settings” (Lötter 1995:58). This new paradigm changes the relationship between traditions and human life experiences.

The homeless people to whom I spoke still hold the values of modernity. Some of them believe that powerful social organizations or political parties will bring them freedom and progress, and so do not believe in searching for other opportunities. They blame the government for their poor economic and social status, because they think the government is responsible for providing food, shelter and jobs. Of course there is a role for the government in supplying the basic needs of citizens, but this does not minimize the responsibility of the individual in social change and progress. A narrative approach in dealing with the homeless people can help them realise their responsibility, to see their problems differently and to admit their role in the development of society.

5.3.6 Traditions in transition

We have discussed how socio-political traditions, discourses from literature and cultural stories continuously influence the experiences of the homeless people in their individual contexts. We have seen that the traditions of modernity inform their concepts of survival with ideas like self sufficiency, self employment and more individualistic approaches. These homeless people tend to seek the meanings for their lives dictated by literature and development classes. But they can change their attitudes and become open to other possibilities. Many of them do not want to limit their options for type of job or skill. They are open to various economic possibilities. “Discourse analysis of economic theory, at least in post-modern thought, is not a question of ascertaining the scientific core of concepts and methods; rather it is a question of seeing how language and other discursive forms can produce the meanings that determine partly our cognitive experiences of economic reality” (Amariglio 1990:16). Their economic and social activities can be liberated from the bondage of tradition and reach for experiential realities constructed through discursive interactions.

5.4 OWNERSHIP OF THE PROBLEM BY THE RESEARCHER

5.4.1 My power is inside

Some people define youth as the fullness of potentialities, and others as the power of the future. These definitions may or may not be true, according to the attitudes of the youth to society and to their lives. In the urbanization process many youth become hopeless. They move from their villages to the cities seeking jobs and shelter. The cities are not big enough or structured enough to offer accommodation for the hundreds arriving everyday. Thus many of those arriving become homeless. Most of the people coming to the cities are not skilled or trained which makes it difficult for them to get a job. Homelessness and

unemployment together make the young sometimes turn to socially deviant behaviour or end up depressed. Building up a right attitude to society and to their experiences is a great task.

Young people always have to face challenges, including the physical challenges of their maturation, the social challenges of becoming adult and the financial challenges of self sufficiency. In independent South Africa, people expect more from social structures and interactions, but their life experience all too often does not meet these expectations. Amazingly, in the midst of these struggles the young people of South Africa do not lose all hope for the future. “Many young people in South Africa were highly positive in their outlook even though many felt that they would not be able to fulfil their potential. The main reason for this feeling was indicated as a lack of financial resources; there may of course be a range of other reasons such as the lack of facilities” (Steering Committee 1994:20). This study shows the positive attitude of young people in South Africa in the post-apartheid era. They are more enthusiastic about building up the nation. But as explored above, social forces put many of them in illegal and hopeless situations. After 12 years of freedom, though many improvements have been made in South Africa, the rising numbers of homeless and jobless people and of those involved in drugs are jeopardising the future of South Africa.

The homeless youth in Pretoria differ in their attitudes towards society and their own experiences. These attitudes are formed by their adverse life experiences. Their narrative conversations vividly reveal that they all have the potential to be positive and constructive. They are ready to construct new, alternate hopeful stories for their lives. Joy characterises his experiences of homelessness and its economic adversities using the word ‘powerlessness’. Financial nothingness, lack of job opportunities, absence of friends and loss of self confidence supplement his feeling and experience of powerlessness. Through narrative intervention Joy can be aided in retelling his life story and exchanging powerlessness for power. When he acknowledges powerlessness as his problem

he empowers himself to view his problem from outside. Through making an alternate story, he affirms that his power is inside his mind and his experiences and that he can uncover this power and brings it into his life.

This is not an isolated example; all the storytellers show potential for empowerment. This supports the findings of a study by HSRC about the youth of South Africa, that “in so far as the majority of youth, including black youth, want to participate actively in the process of transformation and to contribute to a ‘new’ South Africa, their role is constructive” (Steering Committee 1994:19). However, we should be cautious about generalizing this finding.

5.4.2 Economic factors involved

The descriptions in the stories of the homeless people give insight into the history of South Africa as well as into the country’s current cultural and economic conditions. Ultimately the lost dignity of many of the homeless people can be traced back to the negative economic factors that influenced the development of African countries adversely. The homeless people at the Street Centre are from various provinces of South Africa, and various neighbouring countries including Burundi, the Congo, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. In all these countries tribal war and economic exploitation have devalued people’s quality of life especially that of youth. This situation pushes young people to leave their homes to seek better life situations, and results in large numbers of refugees and migrants. “Impediments to human development include: apartheid, ‘cross-border conflicts, ethnic upheavals and civil strife’. All of these result in six million refugees and 50 million disabled people, whilst a further 35 million people are displaced through natural disasters and ‘difficult economic conditions’ ” (Griffiths 2001:32). These displaced people mostly come to urban centres seeking jobs, but lack of job opportunities and accommodation leave them homeless and jobless.

The young people arriving on the streets of Pretoria have nothing with them for survival. Their stories show the depth of the economic adversity they face. Government policies and social action groups' interventions are not enough to free the homeless people from their economic trap. Even though the selected story tellers did not share any experiences with alcohol and drug abuse, many young people do live as drug users. They use drugs to forget about their homelessness, but this habit of course only worsens their poverty.

Because of economic deprivation and lack of employment, most of the young people struggle to establish a firm identity for themselves. "Adolescents are barred from the economic sector by the inability to find full-time employment" (Scarpitti & Datesman (eds) 1980:19). This gives them a feeling that they are not worthy to be members of society, and they struggle to find meaning in life. The stories they tell about economic disempowerment show that they often lack awareness of their self worth. They do not seem to feel that they have any power to transform their own economic situation or that of society. They use the word 'powerlessness' to describe their hopelessness about the future. Theological explorations or exhortations about hope will not have much impact on their concept of hope. A meaningful narrative interaction leads them to deconstruct their meanings and retell alternate stories of hope for their lives.

Trends show that the global economy is growing at a moderate pace, an improvement on the slowing growth in recent years. However, "irrespective of [this] moderately fast growth of output, growth of employment has been lagging, and high rates of unemployment and underemployment threaten the goal of poverty reduction in much of the third world" (Thomas 2006:14). These economic trends offer no hope for the unemployed youth in the villages and cities. Those in African countries are particularly vulnerable. The homeless people in Pretoria are not aware of global economic growth, though growth in some of the businesses around them is visible to them. They feel angry towards the economic system because it helps the rich grow richer and leaves the poor to suffer.

Unemployment and survival in the streets are themes that often interact in the social and economic discourses of the homeless people. If proper dialogue between these discourses is not maintained this can contribute towards the creation of new discourses of anti-social attitudes. A narrative approach to such interactions can help the young people explore all the implications of these discourses. This manner of story telling leads them to better awareness. The deconstructive questioning of the facilitator and the formulation of unique outcomes helps the story teller move forward to new alternate stories.

5.4.3 Religious outlooks

Some people define religion as a person's opinion about metaphysical matters, and others as the guiding force for a good practical life. Religious interactions, whether metaphysical or practical, are essential and unavoidable in human life. Every country in the world has a variety of religious and spiritual concepts and outlooks. Christians in various cultures create their own Jesus from their particular life situations and experiences. Unique forms of worship have developed from specific social experiences and interpretations. Since they live in South Africa, with its history of oppression, many of the young people I spoke to understand Jesus as their political liberator. Apartheid taught them great lessons of suffering and they are in dire need of liberation. Even after gaining political freedom they suffer from social and economic oppression. "The struggle against apartheid in South Africa affected the images of Jesus in ordinary people's minds.... In South Africa, the interpretation that Jesus was also a political liberator, and that he is in solidarity with the oppressed and those who revolt against the white government, came as a shock to many Christians, especially white ones" (Pieterse, Dreyer & Vander Ven 2000:53,54). When they accept Jesus as their liberator, black people often also see him as their political and social saviour.

The hardships of life in the streets confuse some homeless youth. If Jesus is the liberator why are we still economically oppressed and marginalized? This confusion arises from the realities of their practical lives. In the discussion sessions after the Bible devotions I lead at the Street Centre, heated talk always arises if I interpret Jesus as the provider of food and material things and caregiver for the sick. The young people know that the Bible says this, but their life experiences teach them the opposite.

Through narrative counselling the young people come to understand these religious teachings in a different way, and so these traditions can be integrated into their discourses of homelessness and economic matters. In other words, they re-tell their stories and reframe their religious outlooks, in the process coming to a new awareness of their quality of life. When people evaluate life on only the basis of material benefits and wealth, using a quantitative approach, they do not judge wisely. Quality of life depends on more than material and physical wellbeing. It lies more in relationships, unconditional love and affection. “Christians, of course, know that affluence does not guarantee love, beauty, acceptance, and joy. Our deepest joy comes from right relationships-with God, neighbour, and the earth” (Sider 1997:24). This does not mean that only without material things we can enjoy quality life. For daily living, we need money and material things, but money is not the factor that decides life satisfaction.

The story tellers participating in this study shared their struggles and strife in the streets. Theology must not try to present their poverty and homelessness as ideal. The preachers can preach that the poor are blessed (Lk. 6:20), but this is no comfort for those suffering the effects of poverty, nor will it help them change their situation. Rather we should teach about a God who always challenges the jobless and homeless to work for change, in themselves and in the living out of biblical truths. There are tensions between cultural discourses and religious outlooks in some storytellers, between tribal and biblical values. Because of language problems these tensions are not always easy to trace, but by listening

carefully and patiently to the unique outcomes that emerge from the stories of struggle, the facilitator can help the story teller to retell the story and gain a new and better understanding.

5.4.4 Experiences of the story tellers

The way in which the story tellers describe their experiences show that various traditions inform their discourses and influence their problems, though this influence can vary from person to person. In all cases therefore we cannot neglect the impact of one or more traditions.

An example is Andre, who repeatedly mentions his habits. He wants to be a fruitarian, and links this desire with his homelessness and joblessness: because of his situation he does not always have money to buy fruit. He hopes to have a small house with a garden in which he can plant fruit trees and have fruit always. Thus he feels the lack of a home and its facilities. Andre is sometimes confused about spiritual traditions. The Bible says you do not have to think about tomorrow, that God will provide everything, yet his practical experience is that God does not provide. Yet the biblical tradition predominates, so that Andre is lazy, uncreative and unproductive. This worsens the effects of homelessness.

Others of the youth have the same perception of God's providence, but it does not make them lethargic, but pushes them forward to seek and find God. Thus both negative and positive influences of spiritual tradition are visible in stories of the homeless youth.

One of the young people has a concept of 'being independent'. This comes from the social discourses he grew up in, especially those formed during the transition from apartheid to freedom. Before 1994, black people could not be independent. Their tribal culture also lacked this concept, instead stressing togetherness as a family, clan or tribe. Self identity in this tradition is defined only in relation to the

community. In the new South Africa, however, independence becomes valued, because of varying other discourses and influences, such as the influence of western individualistic approaches, wider job opportunities, of the decay of the family system and the availability of more housing. All these shifted focus to the worth and dignity of the individual. Also, many of the organizations working to uplift the human dignity of South Africa's poor stress this individuality. The objectives of the Pretoria Upliftment Project (POPUP) include "to empower the homeless and unemployed in Tshwane; to restore the human dignity of the people" (The Objectives of Pretoria Upliftment Project 2006). This suggests the possibility of individuals' being independent, which is impossible for the homeless youth.

Independence has both positive and negative implications as well. It is a good thing to be independent and work hard to earn a livelihood and contribute to the development of the nation. However, extreme consciousness of the worth of independence can cause negative effects such as young people leaving or running away from home, families breaking apart and work situations being disrupted. "Independent living does not mean that we want to do everything by ourselves and do not need anybody or that we want to live in isolation" (Ratzka 2003). This can be seen in the young man with whom I spoke. He had such a strong belief in 'independence' that he left his home and came to the city. How, however, his experience of homelessness has helped him develop a more positive understanding of the concept. He wishes to plan for the future and work independently to better his life and society.

5.4.5 Evaluation of my experiences

My experiences as a person and as a researcher are also influenced by various traditions, such as spiritual traditions with cultural implications and practices. My biblical interpretations and moral values may sometimes differ from those of the homeless youth with whom I converse. This can cause me uneasiness

sometimes. There is always a temptation to ‘correct’ their interpretations and the discourses evolved through such interpretations. But I have to remember that I am on a narrative journey with the homeless youth, that I must move with them, listening to their interpretations and their meanings and discovering the discourses in their stories and the impacts of various factors in it.

Listening to the experiences of the homeless youth also gave me deeper insight into the possibilities of language and of using my own language basics for discursive interaction. The seeming disadvantage of using a second language, English, became an advantage, since it forced me and the young homeless people to correct every point through further interactions and feedback, a process which heightened our consciousness of the discourses and traditions involved in our experiences. “By entwining raised consciousness into already existing language, discourse can exceed the prevailing ways of imagining ourselves and our world” (Devine & Irwin 2006:22). My experiences in interactive conversation with the homeless youth led me to new awareness of myself and the world. I discovered new possibilities of imagining life experiences with hopeful alternatives. It gave me immense joy and pleasure to move to new findings, realities and its meanings with the story tellers.

5.5 RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

Almost all the homeless people have some sort of spiritual traditions which continually influence them in their daily activities. Some of these traditions are fundamentalist and some are revolutionary. “As research has documented repeatedly, increasingly large numbers of young people, leaving their villages to live in overcrowded cities which offer them limited prospects of meaningful participation in the global economy, are prime candidates for fundamentalistic religion and revolutionary ideology” (Stackhouse & Browning 2001:41). Because of the modern trends such as individualism and the profit-making motives of globalization many youth are confused about spiritual ideas and biblical

teachings, as mentioned above. Through discussion and patient interaction I try to guide the young people to develop their own spirituality. “Religious tradition is seen as dogma, is whereas spirituality is seen as a universal free spirit of discovery related to meaning and values” (Ross 1999:38). The counselling process offers the youth a chance to reflect upon the Bible and religious traditions in light of their particular contexts. This leads them to discover new meanings. Thus as researcher I am part of the wider spiritual tradition as I listen to a particular person speaking from a specific faith tradition. Listening to the stories of the young people with their own specific personal religious contexts and interpretations leads me to new insights, since every religious faith offers hope and salvation though its interpretations may vary. The value of spirituality is its power to reveal God as provider, as participator in the salvific act, God who helps us to survive the harsh experiences of life, God who inspires us to help each other. These are some of the interpretations of the young people with whom I spoke. “We access that religious dimension of our being that enables us to ask questions of meaning in relation to our experience. We are enabled to answer these questions in the context of pastoral counselling through the experience of revelation which is made possible by the pastoral counselling relationship” (Ross 1999:40).

5.5.1 Language that leads to the God experience

Language has a special role in communication. The peculiarity of the words selected, the arrangement of words and the construction of a sentence with specified meanings all have a role in communication. Also, the socio-political and cultural background of the story teller and facilitator is important, as is the setting in which the conversation occurs.

Deliberate use of biblical language does not necessarily promote a language for sharing the God-experiences of the story teller. In moving with the story teller, it is the duty of the facilitator to listen to the glimpses of religious experiences

revealed in the story. The experience of the story teller is more important than the biblical language used by the facilitator or his/her religious interpretations. “If there is a culture that belongs to the kingdom of God and transcends all other cultures, it is a culture of true humanity as the gracious power and presence of Christ in a structure of human social and personal relations. This culture of the kingdom of God has no other language and no other custom other than that of the particular people and society who become its manifestation” (Anderson 2001:170). Thus as facilitator I have to be sensitive to the language of the particular persons I deal with, which was formed and retained by their customs, beliefs and social experiences.

Because the people I deal with belong to different tribal settings and different social strata, this sensitivity requires that I understand them in their own social, political and spiritual context. They may share their stories in the language of hopelessness and powerlessness, and I as facilitator have to respond in the language of liberation. “When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, ate with publicans and sinners, and asked a Samaritan woman to minister to his thirst, he penetrated through all racial, sexual, social and cultural barriers to restore true humanity to others” (Anderson 2001:174). His very acts are the language that leads to the liberation of the people. Narrative interventions that emphasise social, political, and economic diversity will give the young people opportunity to externalize the negative facets of their experiences and ultimately lead them to liberation.

The homeless youth in Pretoria have differing spiritual traditions and beliefs, yet they are similar in that as they share their stories many of them want to tell about the work of God in their lives, against the background of their present experience. This is not surprising, since I met and engaged with these people after the Bible study sessions I lead at the Street Centre. Thus the specific context of our interactions predisposed the street people to ask questions about biblical

narratives and my interpretations of these, and to link their life stories to God and their God-experiences.

Empathetic listening is a primary motivation for story tellers to link their experiences with God. Their fear that nobody is there to listen to their stories of suffering is removed through my sympathetic presence, and they are able to externalize their problems and reach towards understanding God as provider in their economic crises. Narrative interventions lead story tellers to a better understanding of God and of their experiences. An illustrative example is a conversation I had with Andre, which shows a shift in his God experiences.

Renjan: Thus what are your future plans?

Andre: God will guide me.

Renjan: So you changed your position from God will provide you to God will guide you.

Andre: God will guide me to receive his provision.

Renjan: That is a good understanding. Why do you believe that God will guide you and provide you?

Andre: It is my experiences, even from my present situation. God guided me to start a business. People are buying sweets from me because God guides them.

Renjan: You are speaking like a good theologian.

Andre: My experiences make me to speak.

This conversation shows a development in the God experience of the story teller. He is interpreting his theological understanding and shifting from his previous position to a new understanding. Over-emphasizing the theological phrases used by the storyteller and neglecting his/her God experiences are two traps into which a narrative therapist may fall. This often happens when the facilitator compares his/her theological position with that of the story teller, rather than focussing on understanding the spiritual traditions informing the story teller's theological position, experiences and story. This does not mean that the facilitator should be a passive listener for the other person's God experiences, but rather that he/she must always be sensitive to difference when facilitating God talk.

5.5.2 Facilitating God talk

Is it necessary to talk about God in all counselling situations? If the story teller is not saying anything about God, is it relevant for the facilitator to instigate God talk? These are valid questions for facilitators engaged in narrative conversation, both when the story teller is silent about God and when he/she speaks eloquently about God. Both situations raise questions for the facilitator about facilitating God talk.

Facilitating God talk in a narrative conversation is a creative art. If the facilitator has a special research goal in mind, he/she may be tempted to prompt the story teller to such talk. This approach however goes against the real aim of narrative intervention. "A postfoundationalist notion of rationality thus creates a safe space where our different discourses and actions are seen at times to link up with one another, and at times to contrast or conflict with one another" (Van Huyssteen 1999:250). From a social constructivist perspective it is not fair to correct the experiences of the story teller, because he/she is the researcher who directs the realities emerging through the social interaction.

The constructivist perspective, then, proposes that meaning emerges from the shared interaction of individuals within human society. From this viewpoint human behaviour and understanding are seen to be an active process of construction and interpretation in which human beings together endeavor to define the nature of their particular social situations and encounters and in so doing make sense of and participate appropriately in their social, psychological, physical and spiritual environments. (Swinton & Mowat 2006:35-36)

Thus facilitating God talk is only permissible through participatory intervention, in the social constructivist paradigm.

Some homeless youth do not see any relevance of God in their lives, and others see him as a deciding factor. If they mention some interpretations of God or spiritual experience the facilitator can initiate conversation about these things without making judgmental comments. Through shared constructive conversation new theological understandings can emerge, which are not dictated by the facilitator. For example, when one of the homeless youth shared his negative attitude towards friendship, saying that God is his only friend, this was an opportunity for me to facilitate 'God talk'. In the ensuing conversation he came to realise that his interpretation of his God experiences as 'God is my only friend' was preventing his making friends with other people. He then saw that he should rather use his God experience to make more good friends. His first interpretation has evolved into a better understanding of his spiritual experience. He has been searching for friends with the same good qualities as those which he attributes to God, but he realizes that only God has these perfectly. Human friendship requires unconditional love. Thus he does not have to compromise his values, but only reinterpret human relationships and their possibilities.

5.5.3 My God experiences and narrative therapy

I attended Sunday school at a traditional Indian church. The church has its own way of interpreting theology and biblical teachings, which is not interactive, but rather dictated by century-old tradition. Though superficial reformation is possible, the church's basic spiritual practices and belief systems do not change. God is the God of hosts, powerful and mighty, who protects and cares the poor. This traditional theological understanding influenced me greatly in my youth. However, when I encountered the life realities of poor people in society, new thoughts challenged my theological understanding. There is another side to understanding God from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. This change in my understanding of God is reflected in my social relationships, especially my experiences with the poor. "Beliefs about God and the cosmic order have consequences for human social relationships" (Furniss 1995:5).

In my theological studies I was introduced to liberation theologies, in varied forms. Then I encountered narrative therapy and the narrative approach to interaction, which opened further possibilities, making me see that realities are socially constructed. All these developments nurtured my God experiences. I am strongly convinced that God called me for a special purpose, as the Church was sent into the world (Mt. 10:7). I have to be with the poor to work for their liberation. Christian ministry is a hope-giving ministry. A narrative approach to Christian ministry makes it a hope-evolving ministry. God created human beings with creativity to interact with himself and his meanings. "If creativity means 'to bring the new into being', man is creative in every direction-with respect to himself and his world, with respect to being and with respect to meaning" (Tillich 1988:256). This creativity enables us to change being and meaning. By taking a qualitative, narrative approach to understanding the discourses of the homeless youth in Pretoria, I was led to new realities of life and a wonderful world of interpretations. I discovered the impact of economic factors in the discourses of the homeless youth. Swinton and Mowat say that "conversion relates to a turning

to God in a way that decisively changes one's life from an old way to a new way of life. In our case this means qualitative research moving from a position where it is fragmented and without a specific telos or goal, to a position where it is grafted into God's redemptive intentions for the world" (Swinton & Mowat 2006:92). Thus my intention, to follow God's call, evolves into various opportunities for redemption through the diverse interactions and interpretations I encounter with the homeless youth.

My experiences with the homeless community, my experiences as a pastor and my God experiences interact in continuous dialogue and allow the evolution of new realities. My theological position is continuously regenerated through these interactions. This is the basic idea of the narrative approach. "Narrative ways of working are based on the idea that people's lives, and relationships are shaped by the 'stories' which individuals and communities of people develop in order to give meaning to their experiences. These 'narratives of meaning' do not simply reflect or represent our lives – they actually shape and constitute our lives" (White & Denborough 1998:3). My God experiences and the God experiences of the story tellers also interact. My role is not to impose my interpretations of my God experiences on the young people, but to supplement and promote their interpretations of their God experiences.

5.5.4 The God experiences of the youth

Many of the homeless youth have lost their sense of self worth and dignity because of their harsh life experiences. Despite this, some of them basically still believe that God will help them towards a better future. Many of them do not know how to think of their experiences in a positive way, and many do not have a proper relationship with God. Their lack of God experiences leads them to the use of drugs and social misbehaviour. They are exploited by drug and alcohol sellers, whose concern is not the healing and survival of the street people, but only profit. This recalls the story from Acts in which Paul commands the evil spirit

to come out of a slave girl, whose owners used her as a fortune teller. With her liberation the spiritual and economic exploitation also comes to an end. The slave owners began to make false accusations against Paul and Silas (Ac. 16:16-23). As in Paul's day such exploitation must be conquered by God's freedom.

Some of the homeless youth suffer from a deep feeling of guilt, and want to repent before God of their trespasses. One of the homeless youth wrote a poem to declare and affirm that he is coming back from his evil ways and will live in the future as God wants. In the midst of joblessness some believes that God will open opportunities for them if they repent.

Another of the young men has been led through his God experience to believe that that God is guiding him to change his food habits and to start new ventures in his life. His confidence in God exemplifies his willingness to do something better, and helps him to move into new endeavours.

Even in the midst of the hardship of the streets, one homeless youth has discovered the possibility of practicing spiritual values such as peace, joy and sharing. In his narrative journey he began with negative feeling towards other people, arising from his particular context and experience. But his God experience has taught him new, alternative spiritual values which prompt him to work to make the street a better place.

Another of the homeless youth, as mentioned above, has learned through his experience of God's friendship to begin to move out of the loneliness of life on the street into new relationships with the people around him, especially other homeless people.

The young man mentioned above, who uses cultural stories to understand his situation, was lead by his God experience to give up his anger towards his uncle

and turn to a more gentle approach of caring his family, with the resources God provides.

5.5.5 God experiences in dialogue

God experiences vary from person to person. The spirituality of homeless people is closely related to their economic needs. They tend to focus on God as provider. Sometimes this is taken to excess, as when a person believes that God will provide everything he/she needs without any effort on his/her part. This is one interpretation of the biblical passages that suggest that we do not have to think about tomorrow, since God knows our needs, or that we must renounce everything and follow Jesus (e.g. Lk. 14:33). However, these texts must be interpreted in light of the context in which they were written. The economic conditions of first century Christians were particularly severe. Food was very costly and the tax structures of the Roman Empire were crippling. In addition, pious Jews had to pay a tithe for the priests, and a second tithe to support poor co-believers. It is easy to see why people living under these conditions had to be encouraged to trust in the protection of God. However, this does not imply that we do not have to work for our livings.

Another common religious discourse in the stories of the homeless youth is political; God is a liberator God, who liberated South Africa from oppression. God was powerful enough to liberate South Africa from the apartheid regime without war, so God is powerful enough to liberate the homeless people from oppression in the streets. This discourse can help the young people move from feelings of powerlessness to consciousness of empowerment. As the Archbishop of Cape Town, Njongonkulu Ndungane rightly points out of his prison experience, “that same Spirit (spirit of the Living God) developed in us an unshakeable faith in the God of Freedom, the God of Justice, the God of Hope who had touched our world of sad oppression with God’s healing breath” (Ndungane 2003:5). Nelson Mandela and other national leaders share the same spirit of freedom and

liberation. This spirituality helped them to work and even sacrifice their pleasures in the struggle for freedom. The spirituality of liberation is essential for freedom. Liberation theologians agree about the fullness of Jesus' liberation, and argue that theology has a primary commitment to human liberation. "The God of liberation theology is a Redeemer who intervenes in history to free the poor from social and political oppression. Just as God once had delivered the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt, God will liberate the poor today from bondage" (Batstone 1997:161).

The youth in the streets are aware that they have political freedom, but that in reality they are oppressed in so many other ways. Economic oppression keeps them on the streets, and unable to enjoy the fruits of national freedom. The hardships of the streets are as harsh as any under the apartheid regime. It is so ironic that these young people find themselves oppressed in a free country. But Lack of employment and housing keeps them jobless and on the streets. But their spirituality and the spirituality of the Bible are in dialogue and this gives them a new spirituality of hope in the midst of all their adversity. This is not primarily the hope of eschatological salvation, but a more practical hope experienced in a new way as they retell their stories as stories of hopeful alternatives for the immediate future. "As a pastoral relationship develops, the opportunity increases for exploration of alternative definitions of the situation" (Furniss 1995:5). Our narrative interviews and discussions helped them to externalize their negative spiritual discourses and see a hopeful future in a new spirituality. This rewriting of their spirituality was not a deliberate process; it happened spontaneously in the course of their narrative journey.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Various traditions influence the narratives of the homeless youth, and so with or without the knowledge of the young people decide the discourses that form these narratives. Such discourses inescapably influence the story tellers'

interpretations and their journey of discovery as they move towards understanding the meanings of their experiences. This three-way relationship between tradition, narrative and discourse means that all three factors must be considered in the description of experiences. Socio-political discourses, cultural traditions, traditions of modernity, spiritual traditions and so on all make the description of experiences more thick. Dominant discourses are revealed by tracing the impact of the traditions that continually inform these discourses. In this study this process involves tracing the informing patterns and strategies of those traditions which influence the young people's experience of homelessness and its discourses, especially economic discourses. More thickening of this description is provided by interdisciplinary investigation, as the next chapter will explore.