

How Eritrean refugees in Pretoria give meaning to their refugee
identity in conversation:
An interpretive study of salient interpretative repertoires

by

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Key words

Eritrean refugees; South Africa; Pretoria; refugee identity; interpretative repertoires; subject positions; Potter & Whetherell; discourse analysis; migration studies

Abstract

This research study explores how ten Eritrean refugees living in Pretoria, South Africa, make sense of their refugee identity in individual interviews. Discursive analysis was employed as a methodology to capture the different ways of talking (interpretative repertoires) about their institutionally-ascribed refugee identity, their experiences as refugees and alternative identities which the refugees discursively constructed in their interaction with the researcher. The study was motivated to provide the refugees, as a marginalized social group, a platform for expressing their agency. Six men and four women were recruited for the study using a convenience sampling technique. Analysis resulted in the identification of five dominant and two less dominant interpretative repertoires. The dominant interpretative repertoires were as follows: 'we have rights' repertoire; 'accept who you are' repertoire; 'they target you' repertoire; 'I am secure: they can't deport me' repertoire and 'we are misunderstood as criminals' repertoire. The two less dominant repertoires were: 'our refugee identity is transient' repertoire and 'I am lost; I don't have a country any more' repertoire. The findings of such varied, contradictory and inconsistent ways of talking by the participants about their refugee identity demonstrate a challenge to previous empirical studies conducted on the experiences and identities of Eritrean refugees in different settings which treated participant accounts as consistent and coherent. Furthermore, the results of the study defy dominant discourses about refugees which describe them as voiceless and without agency.

Chapter One: Introduction

The research study focuses on Eritrean refugees living in Pretoria, South Africa. Undertaking the study was motivated due to the increasing number of Eritrean refugees in South Africa and the dearth of empirical research studies on such refugees. Such paucity of empirical research surrounding the experiences of Eritrean refugees in South Africa renders Eritrean refugees invisible and their discourses left unaccounted for. This study, therefore, has been prompted to provide visibility and agency to the Eritrean refugees using a discursive method. The study also seeks to contribute more generally to scholarship on refugees and migration studies.

1.1 Refugees and forced migration: Contextual background to the study¹

In this section, I provide a concise contextual background to my study by highlighting the history, current trends and other facts such as the influence of powerful institutions predominantly the state and the United Nations in producing and reproducing the refugee label.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (2013c), refugees can be described as a distinct category of people displaced from their home countries due to a plethora of reasons such as human rights violations and political persecutions by their own governments and other factors that give rise to the phenomenon of forced migration of people from their own countries of origin to destination countries of asylum. As such refugees are defined as people who leave their countries of origin involuntarily unlike economic migrants who voluntarily leave their habitual domicile for economic reasons (UNHCR 2012).

Historically, according to (UNHCR 2013b), the refugee identity came into being as a response by the United Nations in 1951 to manage the unprecedented displacement of over a million refugees in Europe due to WWII. As a result, the elements within the definition of what a refugee constitutes largely reflected the conditions and

¹ As indicated in my theoretical framework, institutions such as the UNHCR are producers of institutional discourses on refugees, but in this section, while I have predominantly relied on UNHCR reports, I do so for statistical and factual purposes only.

circumstances that produced refugees in those times. As argued by Zetter (1991), generally, the refugee label was designed to capture the experience of a particular social group characterized by displacement, flight and in need of protection by institutions.

At present, the UNHCR Global Trends report (UNHCR 2012b) notes that the majority of displaced refugees come from less developed countries with either failed governments or highly centralized and authoritarian states characterized by gross human rights abuses and general intolerance towards dissent of opinion such as Eritrea. Other less developed countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia, have been ravaged by ceaseless episodes of fierce and bloody civil wars and violence which have given rise to the migration of thousands of refugees from such countries to relatively less hostile and peaceful countries in search of asylum and protection (UNHCR 2012b). In other words, the general direction of refugee migration is directed from hostile and poorer countries to relatively stable and richer developed countries.

The number of refugees continues to exponentially multiply as levels of hostility and social strife as well as human rights violations in refugees' home countries escalate (UNHCR 2012b). Currently, according to an updated UN updated report, there are over 43 million persons worldwide who are displaced as a result of conflict and persecution in their own countries and out of this number, 15.2 million are officially recognized by the UN as refugees (UNHCR 2012). The refugee crisis continues to rise creating unprecedented economic, social and political burden on the receiving countries and at present the issue of migration is one of the most influential national agendas worldwide (UNHCR 2012b).

South Africa is one of the countries most affected by the unprecedented increase in the number of refugees (UNHCR 2012b). In 2011 alone, South Africa was identified by the UNHCR as one of the countries with the highest number of asylum applications (UNHCR 2012b) and the country, to date, hosts 57,899 recognized refugees that come from, predominantly, African countries such as Somalia, DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe (Keogh 2010: 8). The reason for the predominance of African refugees in South Africa is cited to be, in part, the proximity

of the country to countries in Africa and its relative social, economic and political stability that attracts thousands of displaced refugees from poorer and destabilized countries (Keogh 2010: 8). Compared to other source countries, the number of Eritrean refugees in South Africa is small. Worldwide, though, there are approximately 222,460 recognized Eritrean refugees (Sedghi & Rogers 2011).

The state of South Africa's interpretation of a 'refugee' is based on the legal definitions provided by UN conventions (Republic of South Africa 1998). According to the UN convention (UN 1967) a refugee is defined as

A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

The determination of granting or denying a refugee status to an asylum seeker, therefore, in South Africa is based on the above definition. In other words, according to the UNHCR (1967), the UN clause that defines what a refugee is determines the granting or rejection of a refugee status to an applicant. Therefore, any applicant whose stories, at the time of an application, does not reflect or coincide with the contents of the clause is therefore deemed a non-refugee, which eventually results in the applicant not being recognized as a refugee. Hence, from such logic, I extrapolate that to be able to acquire a refugee status an applicant has to present stories of suffering, helplessness, persecution, crisis, damage, hopelessness and other related negative experiences in order to convince refugee status determination officers to grant them a refugee status. I also infer, alongside Zetter (1991: 40), that by strictly defining the criteria for deciding whether a person should be recognized as a refugee or not, the UN refugee clause effectively creates refugees, but its own version of refugees.

From the above assessment, it can be noted that refugees, as a social category, find themselves rigidly defined by larger and dominant institutions such as the state and supranational organizations such as the United Nations.

1.2 Statement of the problem

As marginalized social groups, the discourses of Eritrean refugees in South Africa remain unexplored. Therefore, this study addresses this lacuna by exploring discourses deployed by Eritrean refugees in Pretoria about their refugee status and by doing so provide a platform for such refugees to exercise their agency in constructing meanings around their refugee identities.

There have been studies conducted on Eritrean refugees in other settings outside South Africa, such as those by Sorenson (1990); Kibreab (2000); Abraha (2011); Lijnders (2012) and Noronha (2013). However, in those studies, the ‘refugee identity’ is approached as a natural identity and not as a problematized label. For instance, in a study by Kibreab (2000), refugees were asked, in a questionnaire instrument, whether they identified themselves, among other options, as ‘Eritrean nationals’ or ‘refugees’ which effectively constructed *refugee identity* as a self-evident category. This study considers such essentializing conceptions as fundamentally problematic and instead interrogates the concept of ‘refugee’ as a contested construct and prone to multitudes of meanings and interpretations by the objects of the label: refugees.

In order to address the identified gap, a discursive analysis methodology was employed to problematize the *refugee label* by exploring the variation of meanings and interpretations given by Eritrean refugees. Therefore, the research problem was approached with the researcher’s assumption that there exist competing, contradictory and varied meanings and discourses surrounding the otherwise taken for granted concept of ‘refugee’.

1.3 Purpose and significance of the study

The prime purpose of this research study was to explore the meanings refugees give to their refugee identity – an identity that is state-imposed and which further influences the social representations of refugees by the host South African society. Following from this, the study further explored questions such as: How do Eritrean refugees in South Africa talk about their state-designated refugee identity and what discursive resources (interpretative repertoires) do they draw upon to make sense of

their refugee identity?; In doing so, how do they maintain, resist, or negotiate their refugee identity or/and, conversely, how do they construct alternative identities in talk? In other words the study explored how Eritrean refugees self-identify themselves in relation to the given refugee identity. The study also explored whether there are contestations between the self-identifications of Eritrean refugees and what (Ege 2008) describes as a state-distributed, hegemonic refugee identity. This study provides the Eritrean refugees the opportunity to discursively express their agency in making sense of their refugee identity.

Sociologically, this research study is expected to contribute to the understanding of refugee communities not as passive or silent social groups but as active social actors who are able to construct different accounts about their refugee identity. This research study challenges perceptions toward refugees as passive and voiceless social groups. Instead it constructs refugees as active social actors that are able to construct discourses and meanings about their refugee experiences and identities.

1.4 Scope and limitations of the study²

There were some limitations to the study. First, geographically, the study was limited to interviewing refugees residing in Sunnyside³. This was decided because the majority of Eritrean refugees in Pretoria reside in the area as the researcher himself. Limiting the research setting to this part of the city further minimized transportation costs and other inconveniences that would have been unavoidable for the researcher.

The study was also constrained in terms of the number of respondents, which was limited to ten. This was done due to the fact that the prime purpose of the research project wasn't to make generalizations to other Eritrean refugees residing in South Africa or even other Eritrean refugees residing in Pretoria, but to investigate at a micro-level the context-specific production of meanings and discourses in a limited setting and conversational situation. Furthermore, it was not feasible for the study to

² Even if my insider position in relation to my research participants was generally advantageous, it nonetheless was difficult to recruit and interview married Eritrean women refugees due to some cultural barriers.

³ Sunnyside is both a residential and commercial district in Pretoria populated both by locals and foreigners

recruit more than ten respondents, due to the time limit on completing the study and the difficulty in getting hold of respondents and recruiting them as potential participants were either busy or felt uneasy for interviews. Especially recruiting Eritrean women was a very difficult endeavour, as most of the Eritrean women refugees in Pretoria are either engaged or married, holding a one-on-one interview session with them becomes very difficult. This is because their Eritrean husbands, mostly, may feel suspicious about intimate conversation situations between the male researcher and their wives. Therefore, the researcher managed to recruit only female Eritrean refugees that were not formally committed at the time of the interviews. The female respondents were cooperative and free to converse with the researcher during the interview sessions.

Finally, the research study only focused on adult Eritrea refugees, excluding children, with the assumption that adult Eritrean refugees possess rich linguistic resources and communicative capabilities and consequently deployed a variety of linguistic/discursive resources in giving meanings to their refugee identities.

1.5 A short summary of the dissertation structure and chapter organisation

Chapter two consists of an overview of the historical, social and political contexts that Eritrean refugees inhabit as well as a literature review of previous empirical studies conducted on Eritrean refugees in different parts of the world. It also includes a general theoretical review of refugees' discourses about their refugee identity, institutional and public discourses about refugees.

Chapter three contains a detailed description of the discourse analysis methodology and the analytical concept of interpretative repertoires underpinning this study. Chapter three deals with particular aspects of the research design employed in the study. This includes a description of the selection criteria; recruitment plan; demographic characteristics of the research participants; as well as a justification for employing the interview method as a data collection instrument; a discussion of the mode of transcription and data analysis employed in the study; notes on the relevance of context in doing discourse analysis study; a section on the researcher's

reflexivity; a detailed section on aspects of ethics and a final part on possible criticisms and limitations of the research study methodology.

Chapter five entails an analysis and discussion of the research materials: five dominant and two less dominant interpretative repertoires have been identified and each of the interpretative repertoires are discussed in relation to selected sample extracts.

Finally, chapter six draws together the main conclusions of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The first aim of reviewing literature, in this research study, is to familiarize the researcher with the key concepts used in the research field in order to best design the research process. The second important aim of carrying out a literature review is to explore theories and empirical studies conducted on refugee identities in order to situate the study within the larger body of knowledge by identifying a gap. Included within this heading are aspects of the social, historical and political contexts within which the research participants are embedded.

2.1 Social, historical and political contexts of Eritrean refugees

This section will briefly describe the social, political and historical contexts which Eritrean refugees inhabit. The reason for including this section is to understand the milieu within which the Eritrean refugees reside and try to make sense of the accounts of the research participants taking into consideration their context. Discourse analysis' principal requirement is the understanding of the nature of context within which talk or interaction takes place and the interpretation of the data with such milieu in mind (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 88).

Historically, according to Dirar (2007: 257), the notion of an Eritrean identity came into being with the arrival of the Italian colonialists and the subsequent demarcation of physical borders. Eritrea as a nation-state was constructed in the late 19th century following the delimitation of physical territories which effectively created Eritrea as a formal colony of Italy (Dirar 2007: 257). The Eritrean identity consciousness, then, was manufactured as a direct result of this demarcation and subsequent narratives propagated by the Italian colonial state to entrench the newly crafted Eritrean identity (Dirar 2007: 258). Before the arrival of the Italians, however, Eritreans, generally, considered themselves as Ethiopians and there was no sense of a definite Eritrean identity prior to the official demarcation of the borders (Dirar 2007: 259).

After the Italians left Eritrea in the middle of the 20th century, the time the British took over Eritrea in 1941 and administered the country for ten years. This time the

Eritrean identity crafted by the Italians had already solidified among Eritreans (Trevaskis 1960 cited in Sorenson 1990: 299). Subsequently, after the British left, Eritrea was federated with its neighbouring Ethiopia in 1950 by a UN resolution, however when, in 1962, emperor Hailesselasie unilaterally annexed Eritrea to Ethiopia (Sorenson 1990: 299), opposition flourished within Eritrea. The opposition against the annexation of Eritrea was based on an independent Eritrea narrative. The non-violent opposition, spearheaded by nationalist groups, eventually evolved into the thirty-year war for independence in order to claim an independent Eritrean state (Petras & Morley 1984 cited in Sorenson 1990: 299).

The start of the war for independence in 1961 against Ethiopia, then, set in motion the phenomenon of displacements of local populations and subsequent exodus of Eritreans into neighbouring countries, especially, the massive wave of Eritreans into Sudan increased (Kibreab 2002: 253).

Therefore, the phenomenon of the migration of Eritreans from the 1970s until the independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1991 can be seen in light of the history of the construction of Eritrean identity, the forced federation of the country with Ethiopia and the resultant war for independence which produced a massive and sequential wave of Eritrean refugees.

After independence, in 1991, former Eritrean refugees and exiles started returning home and the outmigration of Eritreans dramatically subsided. A trend of return was visible (Conrad 2006: 1). However, according to Conrad (2006: 2), as a result of the large-scale border war that erupted between Eritrea and Ethiopia from 1998-2000, large numbers of Eritreans fled the war. The demographic characteristics of Eritrean refugees who fled the war were predominantly adult males and marginally females (UNHCR 2013a).

Even after the border war ended in 2000, the wave of refugees continued to increase. Instead it increased and this time refugees started crossing borders to seek asylum in Sudanese refugee camps (UNHCR 2001). The reason for such a resurgence of Eritreans into Sudan and Ethiopia was reported to be the stringent government policies forcing all adults to stay in the military indefinitely, general

political intolerance, the repression of freedom of expression and massive religious persecutions (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

The three nearest main destinations of Eritrean refugees have been Sudan, Djibouti and Ethiopia (UNHCR 2013a). Presently there are 114,500 Eritrean refugees in Sudan in total and another 71,833 Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia (UNHCR 2013a). Furthermore, the UNHCR (2013a) states that the rate of Eritrean refugees crossing borders into Sudan was 2000 persons per month in 2012; however, in 2013 the rate has dwindled to “400 and 600 per month”; an average of 110 Eritrean refugees also enter Djibouti on a monthly basis.

Those fleeing into Ethiopia and Sudan are mostly comprised of predominantly skilled and educated men and an insignificant number of women, unaccompanied minors and an increasing number of families. The UNHCR (2013a) reports the scenario in this way:

What is unusual is that most of the Eritrean refugees fleeing to Ethiopia are young educated men from cities, unlike most refugee situations where the majority of refugees are women and children.

According to the UNHCR (2013a) the reason provided by the fleeing Eritrean women and men is the forced conscription of adults into the military and the hopeless situation of the country in general.

A report by the UN News and Media (UN 2013b) states that a large number of the Eritrean refugees who live in Sudan and Ethiopia resort to crossing through the Sahara desert into Libya with the help of human traffickers and from Libya they pay fees to another set of human traffickers and cross into Italy across the Mediterranean Sea. However, a number of them drown along the journey (UN 2013b).

There are plenty of Eritrean refugees in Kenya and Egypt (UN 2013a). There are also those who cross into Israel through Egypt. However, due to the high level of kidnappings for purposes of body-organ extraction, extortions and rape of Eritrean women along the borders between Egypt and Israel and, quite recently the erection

of border fences along the Israeli borders, the number of Eritreans using such routes has dramatically decreased (Human Rights Watch 2012).

The immigration of Eritrean refugees to South Africa is a recent phenomenon - less than ten years (UN 2013a). In 2004 there was only one recognized refugee in South Africa, however for the year 2012 the number of Eritrean refugees stood at 660 refugees (UN 2013a)

The majority of Eritrean refugees in South Africa are engaged in business. They are known to run grocery and clothing shops. Most of them prefer living in major towns and cities. There are also other Eritrean refugees living and running tuck shops in 'locations' or 'townships' that are predominantly populated by Black South Africans. In the major cities, Eritrean refugees prefer living in busy commercial areas such as Sunnyside in Pretoria, where the research participants reside.

Eritrean refugees find themselves in a country which is claimed to have one of the most advanced constitutions in the world (Crush 2001), which guarantees a number of important rights to every person residing within its borders – this includes refugees and asylum seekers. Kolegh (2011: 8-9) notes that migrants in South Africa live side by side bleak social realities of high unemployment rate and a wide rift between the haves and the have-nots. Crush (2001: 117) argues that even if refugees in the country are, constitutionally-speaking, secure, local South Africans have been reported to have shown considerable resentment towards immigrants in general, especially after 1994. Crush (2001) further states that, the level of intolerance towards refugees and asylum seekers in the country has escalated giving rise to frequent attacks on foreigners by members of the host community.

The negative discourse about non-citizens in the country is rampant and continues to expand and deepen by the day (Crush 2001). Another aspect that systematically excludes refugees in South Africa, according to Peberdy (2001), is the state-citizenship nexus which suggests a deep relationship between the state apparatus with all its agencies and its citizens which automatically relegates refugees into peripheral positions (Peberdy 2001). According to Peberdy (2001:20) a disproportionate number of rights and privileges are awarded, compared to refugees

and asylum seekers, to South African citizens in political, economic and social spheres. Handmaker & Parsley (2001) also note that Apartheid's history of segregationist and highly regulatory policies have morphed into similar patterns when dealing with aspects of immigration and refugees in post-1994 systems of governance. Parsley (2001) furthermore states that such exclusionist policies of the state combined with ubiquitous xenophobia expressed by local South Africans positions refugees in a precarious situation. Parsley (2001) and Keoghs (2011: 8-9) also argues that the systematic exclusion and profiling of refugees by the law enforcement personnel and the civil servants tend to be reflections of the general public's animosity towards refugees. Such a synchronicity of various state agencies and the public in excluding and estranging refugees greatly affect both the wellbeing and the security of refugees in South Africa (Handmaker & Parsley 2001: 42).

It is, therefore, against the abovementioned historical and current backgrounds that the phenomenon of the Eritrean refugee experience can be sensibly conceptualized. The researcher further contends that the above-mentioned social, historical and political realities in South Africa shape how Eritrean refugees experience and give meaning to their refugee identity when in conversation.

2.2 Identity-focused empirical studies on Eritrean refugees

There are a fair number of empirical studies carried out on Eritrean refugees who lived in different historical times and settings. Given the high concentrations and prolonged stay of Eritrean refugees in Sudan, most of the studies took place in Sudan, but there are, also, other important studies conducted in North America and Europe. Most of the studies about Eritrean refugees are a bit dated: two to three decades ago, hence excluded. Arguably, this could be due to the fact that there was a high number of Eritreans fleeing their country during this period as a result of the protracted wars. However, after independence and due to the massive number of Eritrean refugees returning to their homeland, research on Eritrean refugees could have become relatively silent. However, recently, with the re-emergence of the huge number of refugees fleeing persecution, research is flourishing around Eritrean refugees. The new waves of Eritrean refugees into Israel, Egypt, Libya, Sudan and Ethiopia have attracted empirical studies. I have selected for discussion two older

(Smock 1982; Sorenson 1990) and six more recent (Abraha 2011; Kibreab 2000; Kibreab 2006; Lijnders 2012; Noronha 2013; Woldemikael 2013) empirical studies conducted on Eritrean refugees identities and experiences. The studies took place in settings such as: Canada, Sudan, Israel, Italy and Ethiopia. Apart from the eight previous studies I selected, there were other researches done about Eritrean refugees; however these studies have been excluded from consideration because their themes were irrelevant to the theme of this research study. In selecting the literature review for this study, I have included as a selection criterion only those studies that covered the topic of Eritrean refugees' experience and identities.

Most of the research studies on Eritrean refugees touched upon dimensions of experience and identity and were approached through both quantitative qualitative methodologies. According to the majority of the findings of the studies, refugees' accounts were aggregated into a homogenous voice: contradictions, variations and inconsistencies both within and across accounts were glossed over except for a very few findings which exhibited ambivalence.

In terms of existing research on Eritrean refugee experiences, Kibreab (2000) explored, through questionnaires, how the phenomenon of displacement from their country of origin shaped the experiences and meaning for Eritrean refugees living in Sudan. According to his findings, none of the Eritrean refugees self-identified themselves as refugees and they resisted the refugee label. The majority of his respondents self-identified themselves as "Eritreans" and showed strong association with this national identity. Furthermore, the Eritrean refugees expressed strong attachment to the homeland which they left behind. His respondents further exhibited weak attachments to the very place where they lived: Sudan. The respondents defined their refugee identity as a temporary identity that would soon be irrelevant once they have returned to their home land. Kibreab's findings further demonstrates that even if some of the Eritrean refugees had lived in Sudan for over thirty years, none of the refugees identified themselves as *Sudanese* or expressed any strong attachment to the land and people of Sudan.

The findings by Kibreab regarding Eritrean refugees' strong identification with their national identity and resistance to their refugee identity, is further corroborated by

Sorenson's (1990) research findings. Sorensen employed interview data collection techniques to investigate to what extent Eritrean refugees in Canada still embraced their national identity as a dominant identity over other identities. He found that Eritrean refugees exhibited a much stronger identification with their national identity as Eritreans than as refugees. The Eritrean refugees only embraced their refugee identity as a tactic to remain in Canada, but regarded their national identity as an authentic identity.

Noronha (2013) investigates, through qualitative interviews the level of attachment Eritrean refugees residing in Sudan exhibited both to their refugee identity in Sudan and their national identity. The results showed that Eritrean refugees in Sudan described their condition as refugees in Sudan as temporary and marginalized. Noronha (2013) claims that the Eritrean refugees' attachment to their national identity over their refugee identity was due to the exclusionary practices of the state of Sudan and the feeling of alienation felt on the part of the Eritrean refugees, hence their eventual attachment to their national identity and the disenchantment with their state-ascribed refugee identity. The aspect of Eritrean refugees' strong attachment to their national identity has been demonstrated in other research findings such as those by (Kibreab 2000; Sorenson 1990).

In another empirical study of Eritrean refugees, Woldemikael (2013) employs interviews and observation methods to examine the experience and identities of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia fleeing camp life to live in urban centres. His findings disclose that Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia described living as a refugee in camps as a negative and dehumanizing experience and preferred living in cities hiding. Such results corroborate Kibreab's (2006) findings in terms of refugees' preference of living in urban centres as opposed to the camps or isolated settings even if it is illegal to leave camp.

In his latest empirical study, Kibreab (2006) carried out a comparative study between urban and rural Eritrean refugees in Sudan. His findings concluded that those Eritrean refugees who remained in rural reception centres initially described their experiences in such settings as negative, hence their decision to move into urban

centres. Such refugees find their new life in urban Khartoum comparatively better. Kibreab's study therefore generally agrees with the study by Woldemikael (2013).

An older empirical study, conducted through the interview method in the 1980s by Smock (1982) investigated the experiences of Eritrean refugees in Sudan living under two different circumstances. His findings showed that those Eritreans who lived in urban centres and were self-sufficient described their refugee identities and experiences as positive but didn't express interest to continue living in the Sudan as refugees but described their refugee identity as transient and impermanent and constantly contemplated returning back to their home land. Those whose economic situation was difficult, such as women and the disabled, however, described their refugee identity as negative and resented the day they left their home country. His findings, therefore, argues that the socio-economic status of refugees determine how they evaluate their wellbeing as refugees. The findings, pertaining the temporary nature of their refugee identity, reflects Kibreab's (2000) findings of refugees in Sudan who considered their refugee identity as ephemeral and always contemplated returning back home.

Lijnders (2012) employed the life story method to investigate how Eritrean refugees in Israel reflected on their dehumanizing experiences while on their way to Israel and how anti-refugee discourses prevalent in Israel are linked to continued violence against the refugees. The refugees who were interviewed described their life in Israel as one of an excluded and demonized social group and described their refugee identity as an identity of victimhood, endless harassment and constant fear. The interviewees further characterized their suffering in Israel as an extension of the unbearable psychological and corporeal suffering which they underwent on their journey to Israel. Such findings demonstrate that the meanings which refugees give to their refugee experiences and identities are largely predicated upon the level of tolerance and general attitude of the political actors and the society at large. In this case, the findings corroborate findings by Woldemikael (2013) whose participants described their refugee experience as extremely negative as a result of state's harsh policies towards refugees such as restrictive laws in regard to refugees' freedom of movement. However, his results markedly differ from those of other findings such as those by Kibreab's (2000); Sorenson's (1990) because even if the Eritrean refugees

in their studies expressed detachment from their state-ascribed refugee label they did so not because of harsh state policies as was evident in Woldemikael's (2013) and Lijnders's (2012) studies, but due to their strong attachment with their homeland and national identity.

Abraha (2011) conducted her qualitative study on what meanings Eritrean refugees in Italy give to their situation as marginalized social groups. The findings discovered that the position of Eritrean refugees in Italy was precarious as they find themselves systematically controlled, restricted and marginalized both by the Italian state, other institutions and the host society, hence their continuous aspiration to leave Italy to seek asylum in other refugee-friendly countries such as the Scandinavian countries. However, their aspiration is thwarted because since almost all EU-member countries shares data on personal details of refugees such as finger prints, they could be detected once they try to seek asylum in those countries. The Eritrean refugees therefore find themselves stranded in a system and society without hope. As a result, they give meaning to their refugee experiences in Italy as extremely hopeless and bleak. The Eritrean refugees further characterize Italy and the host society at large as unfriendly and racist and their current situation as refugees is interpreted as transitional. Abraha's (2011) findings demonstrate that the political and social conditions and the type of regulations governing refugee affairs greatly influence how refugees in particular contexts give meaning to their experiences as refugees. The research results by Abraha (2011) complements the empirical findings by Lijnders (2012), whose research participants cited their negative experiences as refugees, and among other things, the negative attitudes the host community has towards refugees.

Respondents in the majority of the reviewed empirical studies on Eritrean refugees⁴ generally resisted their refugee identity except for a few of the respondents by (Sorenson 1990) who embraced their refugee identity for strategic reasons. However, different circumstances in such different settings shaped the nature of respondent's accounts. In other words the aspect of 'context' was found to be the

⁴ The findings by studies done on Eritrean refugees may or may not pertain to other refugee groups, but this falls outside the scope of my study.

most principal factor in the contents of the Eritrean refugees' accounts about their refugee experience.

However, despite the illuminating contribution of such findings to our general understanding of Eritrean refugees experiences in different time periods and settings, all the findings share one common weakness, gap, in their treatment of the data collected and the interpretations reached. One common characteristic was the tendency to homogenize accounts into singular interpretations by masking the possibilities of embedded contradictions and inconsistencies in research participant accounts. Such methodological inclinations have been criticized by Potter and Wetherell (1987) as superficial and sloppy analysis.

The other gap is context. All the empirical studies about Eritrean refugees were carried out in different geographical settings with their attendant varied political, social, cultural, economic and experiential spheres. I have therefore, conducted the research study in South Africa to see what meanings would be produced within such a different context.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

It is also important to locate this study within a broader theoretical framework namely those understandings that situate refugees as subjectivities of institutional discourses and representations and those that see refugees as active social agents. I will discuss briefly the two theoretical perspectives in the following sections. However, my work is located within the theoretical understanding that views refugees as active social agents as opposed to subjects of institutional representations and labels.

2.3.1 Theories of refugees as subjects of external discourses

There are a wide variety of influential entities in the political, social and other spheres that hold particular perceptions and produce particular kinds of discourses about refugees. For instance, Zetter (1991: 40) and Soguk (1999) argue that states define and construct refugees as objects of their administrative bureaucracies; non-

governmental organizations (NGOs) conceptualize refugees in terms of damaged social groups that need organizational interventions such a relief; and the media, in all its forms, construct refugees usually in negative terms. Therefore, Institutional and public representations of refugees is motivated, in large part, by the respective interests of the institutional entities concerned (Zetter 1991: 40; Soguk 1999). According to Zetter, (1991), the discourses of institutions about refugees tend to influence how refugees are perceived by the general public and eventually affect how refugees define themselves.

Furthermore, according to Easey and Moloney (2009: 510), in some cases, refugees are stereotyped as a burden to host states and their societies and in extreme cases as carriers of communicable diseases and other unwanted elements feared by host communities.

Soguk (1999) argues that refugees normally are structurally inhibited from telling their subjective experiences; instead stories of refugees are narrated by professional experts that represent particular institutions that administer or manage refugee affairs. Such experts, Soguk (1999) argues, frequently depict refugees as social groups with destroyed and abnormal lives in need of reconstruction and a return to normalcy. Soguk (1999), alongside similar arguments by Zetter (1991) and Soguk (1999) further contends that the state has been the main actor in the institutionalized segregationist practices against refugees. The direct and exclusive relationship between states and the citizen effectively excludes refugees as *strangers* and pushes them outside the intimate state-citizen relationship (Noronha (2013). In the current state-of-affairs, where nation-states are defined by, among other things, their territoriality and citizenry, the refugee is seen as a threat, a burden, an infiltrator and an alien at worst (Soguk 1999).

For Soguk (1999: 44), the hegemonic discourses about refugees disseminated by nation-states leads to the problematization of refugees as troublesome, wounded, and restless and therefore requiring institutional treatment and control. Such conceptualization of refugees by nation-states reduces refugees to voiceless and pathologic peripheral social groups (Soguk 1999; Zetter 1991).

Philips & Hardy (1997) note that, at an institutional level, refugees tend to be a product of discursive acts of a variety of institutions and organizations whose interest rested upon the administration of refugee matters. The entities are comprised of government agencies and non-governmental organizations. Philips & Hardy (1997) argues that the different entities construct refugees in accordance to their agenda. In other words, refugees, are defined differently at different times both within and across the different institutions and agencies as a result of their changing institutional agendas (Philips & Hardy 1997).

An empirical study by Easey and Moloney (2009) regarding social understandings of refugees who originated from Africa explored if social representations of refugees by host communities were based on the stereotypes host communities held about the very places from which resettled refugees hailed. The findings of their research study discovered that there was a link between the refugees from Africa and their social construction by host communities as poor, war ravaged and disease ridden social groups. According to Easey and Moloney (2009) such social/public discourse of host communities about African refugees resulted from the negative stereotypes with which Africa as a continent is internationally associated. The study of Easey and Moloney (2009) further demonstrated that media representations/discourses of refugees as social groups that are desperate greatly influence the discourses circulating in the host society at large. This linking of refugees with their place of origin, according to the study, is a characteristic feature of most of host communities within which refugees are located (Easey and Moloney 2009).

Another research study by Vicsek (2008:90) investigated the media representation of refugees in the Hungarian press by examining two major Hungarian dailies using content analytic technique. The results showed that refugees are represented in the print media as the products of political discourses and interests. Such representations of refugees as topics of political discourse markedly moves away from painting a picture of refugees as social groups needing genuine humanitarian intervention.

Khosravinik (2008) set out to explore the manner in which refugees and asylum seekers were represented in British newspapers for an extended period of time. The

study discovered that refugees were represented both positively as people deserving protection and negatively as social groups who posed a threat to the security and economy of the British society in the media depending on the issue under discussion. The study further revealed that political discourses of refugees at the highest level of government greatly affected the social representations of refugees and asylum seekers in media outlets. Such findings reflected another finding of a study by Vicsek (2008) carried out to establish the links between political and media discourses of refugees.

Another aspect of the social representation of refugees is also evident in the sphere of humanitarian agencies. Rajaram (2002: 250) argues that many humanitarian organizations project images of refugees as helpless and weak in need of humanitarian assistance. Such organizational entities achieve this portrayal by presenting refugees as voiceless and passive recipients of institutional relief. In such discourses, refugees are systematically denied the opportunity to produce their own discourses and stories. Rajaram (2002) further contends that the stories and accounts of refugees are told by non-refugee professional experts as spokes persons of refugees that employ highly technical language and institutional jargons that purport to reflect refugee realities and experiences. Such a study corroborates theories by Zetter (1991) and Soguk (1999) about the power of social representations refugees by relief/humanitarian entities in silencing the voice of refugees.

2.3.2 Theories of refugees as active agents

This section reflects the assumptions of my study, which is focused on analysing aspects of agency of refugees rather than studying refugees as subjectivities of institutional discourses. This section, therefore, highlights different perspectives about the agency of refugees. Furthermore, my methodology of identifying interpretative repertoires is linked to such perspectives that depict refugees as active social agents.

A number of studies on refugees have observed refugees demonstrating agency in terms of actively constructing meanings around their refugee experiences and

identities. Such studies have challenged popular discourses that perceive refugees as mute social groups. The label 'refugee' has been problematized and contested on numerous occasions by refugees themselves (Zetter 1991: 40). Such observations have given rise to understandings of refugees as active social actors as opposed to people devoid of voice.

According to Hiruy (2009), under certain circumstances, refugees may resist their state-ascribed refugee identity (see also Kibreab 2000; Sorenson 1990). For instance, Hiruy (2009) argues that refugees who constantly miss their homeland tend to resist and even resent their refugee identity due to nostalgia. Refugees develop strong emotional attachment to the homeland land they left behind and see their physical separation from their homeland as unbearable. Such refugees perceive their refugee identity as the main reason for their separation from their homeland. They also express homesickness, according to Hiruy (2009:93-100) and exhibit strong attachment to their past and tend to resent their refugee identity. Kibreab (2000) and Sorenson (1990) also corroborate Hiruy's position that refugees, in most cases, find themselves constantly attached to their homeland and see their refugee identity as meaningless. Hiruy (2009) notes that refugees employ different strategies as a means to remind them of their past and familiar experiences in their homeland such as by opening traditional restaurants, observing homeland holidays and other cultural rituals and habits. Such strategies, Hiruy (2009) argues, are used in order to resist their refugee identity which defines them as people who no more have a country.

For some other refugees, to be a refugee means a confusing experience. According to Phelps and Nadim (2010), more often, refugees give ambivalent meanings to their refugee experiences and identities under different circumstances. At times refugees accept their refugee identities as a positive identity, however, this positive orientation towards their refugee identity is, at the same time, resisted and opposed as an alien and externally imposed identity that doesn't describe who they are (Kebede 2010; Phelps and Nadim 2010). When such refugees resist their refugee identity, they tend to produce a set of different self-identifications in opposition to their refugee identity (Phelps and Nadim 2010; Kebede 2010; Chacko 2005; Qasmiyeh and Fiddian 2012). Age as a variable is seen to reinforce levels of ambivalence observed in

refugees' narratives. Kebede (2010) notes that young refugees who migrated to the receiving country as a child are more prone to experience contradictions about their refugee identity. In such cases, young refugees resist their new refugee identity due to the homesickness they experience in the country of refuge (Hiruy 2009; Kebede 2010). However, such groups of refugees simultaneously accept their refugee identity due to their socialization into the culture of the host community (Kebede 2010). The identity dilemma experienced by such refugees offers them the flexibility to be in both worlds at the same time. According to Chacko (2005); Qasmiyeh and Fiddian (2012) such ambivalence is exhibited by refugees across different settings.

Under other circumstances, refugees are observed distancing themselves from their refugee identity. According to Qasmiyeh and Fiddian (2012) such refugees strategically dissociate themselves from identifying themselves with their refugee identity; instead they self-identify themselves as belonging to the host community. Such type of refugees prefer to self-represent themselves as members of the host society in order to avoid backlashes by host communities such as xenophobia and prejudice (Fiddian and Qasmiyeh 2012; Vanderhurst (2007).

Refugees have, therefore, different ways of giving meaning to their refugee identities and experiences depending on a number of factors influencing their discourses. The refugee identity, thus, becomes a site of contesting versions of meanings and constructions of different discourses.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Discourse analysis methodology

The study is broadly located within a discourse analytic methodology and more specifically a discursive technique. Discourse analysis emerged with the 'linguistic turn' (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 2003; Wetherell and Potter, 1992) that embedded the social world within language, arguing against the traditional positivist orientation of approaching reality as objective and existing outside human construction waiting to be discovered. Discourse analysis as a methodology falls within the social constructionist paradigm and contends that the social world we inhabit is the product of discourses.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1967: 5), the position of social constructionism is that predominantly our experiences of the social world and the identities of ourselves and others which we take for granted as natural and permanent are in fact the results of human constructions and such constructions are made with the use of the building blocks of language. This is meant to say that our diverse social categories, labels and identities, which seem natural and timeless are in reality the consequences of the human language and that nothing is to be treated as objectively existing independent of the human language and meaning (Burr, 2003; Cromby and Nightingale, 1999).

Discursive research contends that the positivist paradigm is only focused on discovering objective truth and this assumption is based on the perception of language as a transparent instrument through which 'objective' social reality is described and reflected (Potter and Wetherell 1987). This assumption, according to discursive theorists Potter and Wetherell (1987) is faulty and sloppy. Discursive constructivists contend that positivist researchers and theorists habitually overlook the performative, constructive and the variable nature of language (Potter and Wetherell 1987). According to Potter and Wetherell (1987), positivist and quantitative research methodologies are too restrictive, in a sense that such methodologies restrict respondents' responses to very limited and predetermined options. Such

restrictions, they contend, block respondents from freely and naturally interacting and from producing naturally flowing accounts. The other criticism levelled against quantitative researchers is the overshadowing of important nuances and varied details of discourse by creating arbitrary general categories such as content analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1987:44). Such general categorizing of respondents' complex stories and accounts, they argue, obscure otherwise nuanced and at times contradictory and variable accounts and their significance is further watered down through homogenizing quantitative analytical procedures such as statistical analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1987:44) .

An additional challenge directed at the positivist research and predominantly other qualitative researches by such discursive tradition is the dangers of selectivity in carrying out the analysis of data. There is an inclination, argue the discursive researchers (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:47), for both quantitative and the majority of qualitative researchers to focus on sections of a text or any other material that seem important and representative of the overall material. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987:47) such selectivity of material for analysis may be done according to the subjective judgments of the researcher as to selecting one theme/themes over others effectively prejudicing against the marginalized themes in the text by favouring other materials. Furthermore, in quantitative studies the analysis is more bent on reaching generalizations and providing an overarching image of the findings and this effectively submerges and excludes variations and contradictions in the respondents' talk or written texts (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:47).

Discursive researchers, on the other hand, conduct the analysis by, firstly, selecting excerpts from transcribed material and placing the original excerpt alongside an analysis by the researcher in order for readers to judge for themselves (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; 164) whether the analysis of the text was done in a reasonable and systematic manner. In other words, by placing the original excerpt right next to the discourse analyst's interpretations, readers of the analysed text may reach conclusions about whether the analysed material needs to be criticized, commented or accepted as rigorous (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 164). Significant details are ignored by non-discourse analytic methods when working on the analysis of a transcribed material (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). According to the proponents of

discursive research the positivist/quantitative research methodologies which look for consistencies, uniformities and stable patterns in the 'objective' world see contradictions, variations and fluctuations in language or the way people talk as problematic and unreliable accounts.

Such traditions, therefore, fail to see such contradictions of talk or accounts as common denominators of the human language and as worthy of investigation (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The other problem with positivist orientation is that language/talk is seen as lucid representations of the objective world. In other words language is seen as a means or a gateway through which we can have access to the "discoverable" and "objective" world (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 30). To put it succinctly: talk/language represents the social world (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 30). Theorists in the traditions of discursive research (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 30) challenge this view of talk/language as having a taken-for-granted status as a representative of social reality. They contend that language doesn't necessarily reflect or represent an objective social world out there as if the so-called 'objective' world has existence prior to language; instead they argue that language is the means by which social reality is created and constructed.

According to Edwards and Potter (1992) and Coyle (2001), the objective world asserted to have existence prior to language is the by-product of our discursive constructions. For Potter (2003), the social world doesn't have prior existence to language, instead the otherwise taken-for-granted elements of the social world are brought into existence through our constructions, labelling and organizations of the human language. To put it another way: discourse fashions the social world (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 50). Potter and Wetherell (1987: 50) further argue that the conceptualization of language as representing a stable and describable social reality is challenged when, for example, variations in or contradictory accounts are produced to describe the 'objective world'; under such conditions the 'objective' world becomes problematized and loses its ontological status.

From a discursive perspective, however, the variability of accounts are treated as an object for investigation: the discursive investigator, therefore, delves into uncovering the conditions/contexts that gave rise to the variations and contradictions of

stories/accounts rather than treating them as problematic, the ways in which the variable accounts are constructed and what actions social actors perform when they fluctuate between differing versions of their stories/accounts (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Potter, 2008). According to such discursive theorists, language constructs diverse accounts of the social world. The reason behind the diversity of accounts when describing or characterizing a particular phenomenon is because different social actions are actively performed by research respondents when engaging in talk. Furthermore, the possibility of constructions of different accounts is made possible by mobilizing already available cultural resources or interpretative repertoires that are readily available for respondents to build a particular discourse (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Such interpretative repertoires are therefore mobilized or ignored by participants depending on the decision by the research participants whether or not to invoke a particular set of interpretative resources (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 40). The preoccupation with the discursive paradigm is therefore not only to identify and investigate how language/talk is used by participants to represent the social world, but also to understand the diversity of accounts, their contextual use and the social functions and/or communicative/interactional purposes realized when they mobilize particular discursive resources in characterizing/ giving meaning to a particular event or phenomenon (Edwards and Potter 1992: 40).

Discourse analysis, however, isn't a single assumption or methodology. There are varieties of discourse research with varying respective assumptions on how knowledge is produced. They focus on different aspects of language use and functions of language in interaction. According to Wetherell (1998) there are two general techniques of discourse analysis, on the one hand are the discourse analysts with ethno-methodological inclinations and on the other hand are discourse analysts with a conversational analysis bent, such as those by Potter and Edwards (1992) that focus on the function and performative aspects of talk/language in situated and concrete social interactions.

However such traditions markedly distance themselves from linking their study of discourse to power which is a typical focus of Foucauldian discourse analysis or

critical discourse analysis which, among other things, focus on the workings of ideologies (Van Dijk 1993:). In other words, it is to be noted that there are varieties of discourse analysis hence a study that selects discourse analysis as a methodology needs to decide, beforehand, which strand of discourse analysis one decides to employ in addressing a particular research question or problem.

This study adopts a discursive approach, one form of discourse analysis methodology, proposed by Potter and Wetherell (1987: 43), which focuses on the identification of interpretative repertoires or culturally available discursive resources. Such culturally available linguistic resources are readily available during any social interaction and social actors are expected to mobilize such resources when describing a topic, event, object or phenomenon.

Discursive approach proponents such as (Edwards, 1991) contend that researchers should collect their data from naturally occurring interactions such as between family members during meal times, counselling sessions and many other interactions that involve parties engaged in natural conversations. The justification given to this recommendation is that, researchers tend to capture reliable data as opposed to data collected by other methods such as focus groups and interviews which could question the reliability of data as a result of for example participant reactivity. Potter and Whetherell (1987:46), however criticize such positions by arguing that interview data collection methods are useful for data collection because of the unfeasibility of capturing naturally occurring interactional conversations and ethical considerations surrounding capturing naturally occurring interactions through the use of, for example, hidden video cameras. They contend that interview-focused interactions should be treated as one form of normal human interactions and shouldn't be interpreted as data collection techniques that produce artificial and unrepresentative data. In addition to that Potter and Whetherell (1987) have used extensive interviews in their field work in discourse analysis and have found out the instrument to be useful in identifying interpretative repertoires or cultural resources that are mobilized in normal human interactional conversations.

Because the research study's methodological assumption is based on Potter and Whetherell (1987), the researcher, therefore has seen it fit to make use of interviews

in collecting data, in line with the nature of my research question and the recommendation proposed by Potter and Wetherell (1987). For this study, it has been found to be relevant to use open-ended interview questions to identify the interpretative repertoires mobilized during conversations with the respondents⁵. The discursive method therefore is particularly concerned with the ways in which research participants construct their world and identities actively and the strategies of mobilizing available unassailable discursive resources or commonly called 'interpretative repertoires' in order to make their versions of events and identities more convincing and believable (Potter and Wetherell 1987:90)). In the following section, the study elaborates on the nature and function of the analytic tool of interpretative repertoires in greater detail largely using a framework provided by Edley (2001).

3.1.1 Interpretative repertoires

This section starts with an outline of the historical development of the concept of interpretative repertoires. This section then moves to a critical discussion of this concept, drawing on the distinction between various understandings of discourse analysis and that of interpretative repertoires deployed by Potter and Wetherell amongst others. It is also indicated how this approach was deployed in this study. In the discussion below, three important and related concepts by Edley (2001): are discussed namely, (1) interpretative repertoires; (2) subject positions; and (3) ideological dilemmas.

According to Potter and Wetherell (1987), the concept 'interpretative repertoire' was first introduced into social science research in the 1980s by two British sociologists named Gilbert and Mulkey (1984). They set out to investigate, using discourse analytic methodology, the meanings scientists who spent much of their time in chemistry laboratories give to the outcomes of their laboratory experiments. Previously research studies had treated scientists' accounts as consistent and uniform. Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) challenged this generalizing assumption and designed their research study with a purpose to identify and rigorously analyse the

⁵ I have dedicated a larger section in the methods chapter to the reasons for employing open-ended interviews as a relevant data collection instrument.

scientists' accounts for variability, contradictions and inconsistencies. Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) argue that such a study proved to be a turning point in how stories and accounts are to be analysed. The study's findings proved that scientists talked not in a consistent and uniform manner but, instead, mobilized differing and at times competing interpretative repertoires to give meaning to their experimental outcomes (Gilbert and Mulkay 1984).

Their study further elucidated that the variation of meanings were predicated upon the context in which the 'interpretative repertoires' were mobilized to justify and buttress the scientists accounts. For instance, under informal interactions or conversations between the scientists and other persons the scientists spoke of 'science' as imperfect and prone to miscalculations and errors due to human imperfections (Gilbert and Mulkay (1984). In such accounts the majority of scientists characterized the field of 'science' as an undertaking whose experimental processes and outcomes depended upon the circumstances and the competence of scientists performing such experiments: Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) labelled such accounts as "contingent" discourses. On the other hand, when the scientists found themselves in formal conversations and interactions with critical institutions and personalities such as when interviewed by the media personnel or presented papers at conferences, the scientists characterized and talked about the quality of their laboratory experiments and findings as reliable, scientifically sound, logical and methodically rigorous. Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) labelled such accounts as "objective" discourses. The study further discovered that the scientists didn't talk in predictable ways in particular contexts. To the contrary, the scientists were observed mobilizing two seemingly mutually exclusive and opposing discourses or accounts simultaneously and put forward justifying rhetorical devices to resolve the contradictions behind the mobilization of the two competing accounts (Gilbert and Mulkay 1984: 56). Such results contributed to social scientific research that gives meaning to variations and contradictions in participant accounts.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) adopted the concept of interpretative repertoires and used it to analyse talk. Potter and Wetherell (1987: 203) define interpretative repertoires as "recurrently used systems of terms [readily provided by culture] used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena". In other

words, interpretative repertoires are popular ways of talking about certain topics or phenomena and are shared by those in interaction (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 203). The concept of interpretative repertoire assumes that when participants talk, they are not describing an external reality but they are adopting particular ways of talking to construct social reality actively such as producing particular identities (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 205). The concept of interpretative repertoire further presupposes that when people interact in particular social situations, in this case interacting in interview contexts, the participants are aware of the culturally shared ways of talking about a phenomenon, thereby establishing smooth interaction between/among the participants of a conversation (Wetherell et al. 2001). The types of expressions, metaphors and figures of speech employed by interviewees, in order to characterize and evaluate a phenomenon, are commonly understood by the parties that interact because they are both situated in the same culture or society where the interpretative repertoires are widely shared (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Therefore, from the above argument it can be noted that interpretative repertoires act as discursive resources and offer participants a plethora of possibilities to talk about a phenomenon in different ways but participants are not necessarily rigidly conditioned to talk in a predefined and restricted way in particular situations (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 206). This is because participants as free social actors are predisposed to strategically mobilize whatever set of repertoires that suit the situation (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 206). It is the study's assumption that when people engage in talk they tend to, on an on-going basis, fluctuate between different interpretative repertoires in order to justify their accounts. When research participants describe or interpret a phenomenon they do not necessarily adopt one way of describing or interpreting the phenomenon but, instead, they move between different, even contradictory, interpretative repertoire. The study argues, therefore, that we can use the conceptual framework of interpretative repertoires to capture this fluctuation.

Following Whetherell and Potters' (1992) accommodation and repeated use of this analytical concept, the use of interpretative repertoires in qualitative research studies and in other discourse analytic research studies, especially those involving interaction, has been popular. In particular the concept of 'interpretative repertoires' was used by Whetherell & Potter (1992) in understanding the different and

contradictory ways in which White New Zealanders talked about Maori minority racial groups living amongst them. The researchers set out to investigate if there were internal contradictions in the accounts of their respondents and the functions such interpretative repertoires performed in characterizing the Maori minority racial group in diverse ways. The study findings discovered that White people in New Zealand mobilized different and contradictory discourses in their talk about the Maori people and performed corresponding social functions such as justifying their racist discourses towards the minority social group (Wetherell & Potter 1992: 88).

According to Edley (2001:198), interpretative repertoires have also been described as the 'building blocks' of an interactional in any conversational situations. They are widely accepted and commonly shared characterizations and interpretations of the social world from which actors in interaction actively mobilize as a way of reinforcing one's account as believable and trustworthy (Edley 2001: 198). According to Edley (2001), any culture possesses multitudes of interpretative repertoires which are readily available for the members of the particular society or culture. In other words, for every topic or area of knowledge there are corresponding linguistic resources available for participants to draw upon and justify their accounts as unassailable and believable (Edley 2001). Other prominent defenders of this concept label interpretative repertoires as though they were items placed on the shelf from which social actors pick in order to construct the social reality they want to build and construct (Potter 2003:35). Moreover, according to Potter (2003) interpretative repertoires are mobilized by social actors, depending on the context in which the actors are situated and using available linguistic resources.

Furthermore, Potter and Wetherell (1987: 44) argue that such cultural and discursive resources are not only interpretative repertoires mobilized to perform a social action or to strengthen and buttress one's version or account, but also pose particular dilemmas. Potter and Wetherell (1987: 44) note that interpretative repertoires are at times characterized by paradoxes and participants tend to mobilize two or more contesting and contradictory interpretative repertoires in the same account. In such circumstances, social actors tend to reconcile such a crisis by putting forward other interpretative repertoires or rhetorical strategies.

Some authors contend that there is no substantial difference between the concept of interpretative repertoires and its related concept of discourse analysis (Edley 2001). Such theorists argue that all interpretative repertoires are forms of discourses or ideologies that exist as dominant and popular cultural stories and narratives in a particular society or social groups (Edley 2001: 224).

However, critics of this position contend that the concept 'interpretative repertoires' is commonly and wrongly confused with the concept of 'discourse analysis' in many discourse analytic research studies and articles and that such connotations are erroneous. Critics of such interpretations, such as Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue that the term 'discourse analysis' is largely associated with Foucauldian forms of knowledge and power that are tied together to produce corresponding subjectivities or passive identities and subjects. Or to put it another way, such discourses do not confer agency on the subjects of Foucauldian discourses. The term 'interpretative repertoires', however, is associated with the agency and flexibility of social actors in actively and consciously deploying particular versions and accounts of the social world. Through the use of the concept of interpretative repertoires, therefore, researchers are able to make sense of the agency of social actors in actively mobilizing such discursive resources and doing various types of social activities as a result of such active mobilization of widely accepted forms of characterizing the social world or interpretative repertoires (Wetherell and Potter 1992:88).

3.1.2 Subject positions

Interpretative repertoires are also related, in the first place, to the concept of 'subject positions' that go hand in hand whenever interpretative repertoires are mobilized and invoked in interactional conversation (Wetherell and Potter 1992). Wetherell and Potter (1992) and Wetherell (1998) make a link between the mobilization of interpretative repertoires and the subject positions which the interpretative repertoires suggest for social actors in interactional episodes. According to them, subject positions or identities follow interpretative repertoires mobilized in a conversation. In other words, interpretative repertoires readily make available the corresponding subject positions/identities for social actors (Wetherell 2006: 66). According to Wetherell (2006: 67), subject positions or identities are not permanent

and consistent, but they are always created and recreated, resisted, and/or accommodated by social actors in on-going interactions: subject positions, therefore, aren't stable but are prone to fluctuations lacking in permanence and uniformity. (Wetherell 2006: 67) argues that the interpretative repertoires version of subject positions, in which social actors deliberately and actively move between them, stand in contrast to the Foucauldian version of subjectivities or passive identities which fix social subject to corresponding discourses. The social actors of the discursive approach are, therefore, conceptualized as actors who actively and consciously choose to adopt a particular identity or subject position to perform a particular social action.

The concept of 'subject position' has been adopted in this research study to capture the identities taken up by the study participants when mobilizing particular or a combination of interpretative repertoires (see results chapter for how particular subject positions were juxtaposed alongside corresponding interpretative repertoires invoked).

3.1.3 Ideological dilemmas

The third important concept related to the concept of 'interpretative repertoires', for Wetherell and Potter (1992), is the idea of 'ideological dilemmas'. Such a concept accounts for paradoxes and contradictions evident in conversation. Wetherell and Potter (1992) extended the concept from Billig *et al.* (1988). According to Billig *et al.* (1988), everyday conversations are characterized by dilemmas and paradoxes so there is no consistent way of talking in any interactional episode. Billig *et al.* (1988), argue that no conversation or talk is free from dilemmas. Contradictory versions of reality characterize talk and they are typical characteristics of how we talk about social reality. The existence of 'ideological dilemmas' prompts social actors to try to resolve such contradictions and mobilize justifications after justification in order to resolve the inconsistencies and make the dilemmas seem normal (Wetherell and Potter 1992)

Billig *et al.* (1988) contend that there are two domains of discourses or ideologies from which social actors draw to make sense of their everyday life. On one side of

the discourses, are those that are a product of intellectual knowledge and on the other side are those that are the workings the day-to-day lived experience or experiential knowledge. The discourses that are by products of the intellectual domain are highly systematic and structured forms of knowledge such as those found in “scientific”, “political”, “religious/theological” and “philosophical” dimensions (Billig *et al.* 1988: 27). In contradistinction, the day-to-day lived discourses/ideologies are those that are embedded in a particular culture or society that govern the day-to-day values, belief systems, customs and habits of social subjects (Edley, 2001:202-203). In other words, the discourses that are the by-products of the daily experiences of members of a particular culture or society can be associated with the common-sense knowledge base of members of a particular society. Billig *et al.* (1988: 27) challenge the simplistic argument and assumption that the highly formal and systematic knowledge forms/discourses trickle down into the daily experiential knowledge forms/ideologies which presumably reinforce stable, consistent and authoritative discourses (Billig *et al.* 1988).

Such assumption proposes that when people give accounts of a particular topic they do so by mobilizing existing knowledge/discourses in order to give their version of accounts more credibility and believability. Such simplistic arguments, therefore, state that such accounts presumed to be consistent, coherent and non-contradictory. Billig *et al.* (1988) challenge such an assumption by arguing that discourses located in any place and time periods are inherently characterized by arguments and positionings that are contradictory, competing and inconsistent. Therefore, when people mobilize discourses to make sense of their social world they tend to do so accommodating such contradictory and incoherent discourses in their accounts. For example when talking about aspects of racism, speakers were observed mobilizing discourses that challenge racist practices and those that justify racism (Edley, 2001: 200-203). Since ‘ideological dilemmas’ or paradoxical discourses are characterized by contradictions and competition, social actors’ accounts reflect such inconsistencies and speakers are locked into on-going strategies to resolve such inherently antagonistic discourses/ideologies (Edley, 2001: 202-203).

This study has adopted the notion of ‘ideological dilemma’ in spotting the contradictions characterizing the accounts of the study participants.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Sampling criteria, recruitment plan and demographic features of interviewees

Before identifying prospective research participants, it was decided to recruit only 10 Eritrean refugees. Even if more participants were sought to participate in the study, most of the potential participants were too busy for the interviews

In order to locate the prospective participants, the study used a convenience non-probability sampling: the majority of participants who were known to the researcher including acquaintances were requested to participate in the study and those who accepted the invitation were selected. After initially speaking both over the phone and in person with prospective participants, a meeting was arranged individually and they were willing to participate in the research study.

It was decided to recruit a heterogeneous group of participants, such as men and women in order to see if the aspect of heterogeneity affects the types of interpretative repertoires mobilized. Eventually 6 males and 4 females were recruited.

All the Eritrean females were single and 2 of the males were married at the time of the recruitment stage and the remainder 4 males were single. All 10 research participants were self-employed and economically fairly independent. Their ages ranged from 23 to 38 years. All were Christians belonging to the Tigrinya ethnic group (there are 9 officially recognized ethnic groups in Eritrea). Moreover, all the research participants were first-generation refugees at the time of their recruitment and have lived in the Republic of South Africa for at least five years.

Table (1): Demographic features of interviewees

Fictitious name	Sex	Age	Ethnicity (Eritrea)	Employment status	Marital status	Duration of stay in SA
Elsa	Female	25	Tigrinya	Self-employed	Single	5 years
Lemlem	Female	28	Tigrinya	Self-employed	single	8 years
Buzu	Male	23	Tigrinya	Self-employed	single	6 years
Letay	Female	26	Tigrinya	Self-employed	single	5 years
Abel	Male	24	Tigrinya	Self-employed	married	9 years
Vo	Female	34	Tigrinya	Self-employed	single	7 years
Ata	Male	38	Tigrinya	Self-employed	married	7 years
Mo	Male	32	Tigrinya	Self-employed	single	7 years
Ba	Male	29	Tigrinya	Self-employed	single	8 years
Pol	Male	31	Tigrinya	Self-employed	single	6 years

All the interviews took place in Sunnyside, Pretoria, because there is a high concentration of Eritreans in this neighbourhood. It was therefore convenient for me to identify and recruit the prospective participants in this location, which was also very familiar to the researcher.

The interviews were taken place settings that were familiar to the respondents and in which the interviewees felt comfortable talking to the researcher. The interviews were carried out at two Eritrean restaurants and at the participants' homes. In order to build rapport with the interviewees, the researcher had dinner with 7 of the male respondents but this proved difficult to arrange with the female respondents because having lunch or dinner with the opposite sex is normally interpreted as a date or being in intimate relationship therefore the researcher abandoned this plan and instead proceeded with interviewing the female respondents in the yard of their residences.

Conducting interviews in environments familiar to the interviewees created an atmosphere of rapport in the interaction, because the respondents felt relaxed to freely talk about their refugee identity.

The interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks and each interview episode, on average lasted 35-40 minutes. There were no visible and observable problems that occurred in the in the interview process and as such no obstacles

blocked or delayed unnecessarily the flow of the interview. Instead, all the interviewees were willing to devote their time for the interview and were cooperative.

Before interviews began, the researcher provided the participants with information about aspects of the research study, such as the objectives of the study and the importance of their participation in the research study. The interviewees were informed that participation in the study was completely consensual and that their identity and privacy would be protected and that the research study is only interested in their accounts and not in their personal identities. Furthermore, the research participants were assured that they can, at any time, withdraw from the interview proceedings at any stage of the interview. The researcher further guaranteed the interviewees that in order to protect their privacy they would be represented by other names: their personal names would be changed. Finally participants were handed consent forms to sign voluntarily before the commencement of the interviews.

3.2.2 Data collection instrument: interviews

Seven semi-structured interview questions were posed touching upon aspects of refugee identity in order to identify and gather the 'interpretative repertoires', which is the objective of the main data gathering instrument of this research study. Most of the main questions asked were accompanied by follow-up questions in order to encourage the production of rich data.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) note that in conducting a discursive analysis research study, naturally occurring interactions such as common routine family member interactions, doctor/patient consultations, secondary data sources such as archival materials, documents and transcription materials transcribed from natural interaction are preferred instruments. However, according to Potter and Wetherell (1987: 84) qualitative interviews can also be advantageous when gathering data for analysis or interactional episodes hence its employment in research studies is paramount and relatively preferred instrument over other qualitative data gathering instruments.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) contend that by using an interview instrument, a researcher can navigate issues and themes in a relatively structured and guided

mode: a theme or issue is explored by posing the same interview questions to research respondents and subsequently coding can be meaningfully done both within and across participant accounts. In naturally occurring conversations, however, the researcher may not control the flow of conversations because surprising and new themes and topics tend to emerge in such interactions. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) state that, qualitative interview is practically instrumental when a social scientist sets out to make sense of the social world. They further argue that by using interviews as a data gathering instrument, social science researchers may be able to accumulate ample data relating to the topic of interest which they are investigating. Interviews, according to Holstein and Gubrium (2003: 23), have the effect of extracting more data by challenging and prodding research participants to talk about issues and topics that are of interest.

Moreover, Holstein and Gubrium (2003) assert that naturally occurring conversations do not have the same value and weight as conversations occurring in interview situations. Using interviews researchers may effectively achieve the purpose of exploring and identifying the interpretative repertoires/linguistic resources mobilized during such interview episodes that are related to the issue or topic under investigation (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Furthermore, during interview conversations, the parties, in this case, the interviewer and the interviewee actively participate in the production of meanings and jointly construct accounts and versions in the interview session (Holstein and Gubrium 2003). The two parties collaboratively produce meanings under such circumstances (Holstein and Gubrium 2003).

The other advantage of using interview instruments in discursive analytic research, according to Holstein and Gubrium (2003), is that the interviewer/researcher may deliberately invoke particular themes and topic and observe how such issues and themes are given meanings by the interviewees. As a result, the interviewer has the opportunity to observe how the topic of interest gets constructed during the conversational episode. Such guided approach to particular topics and themes are hardly explored and identified during naturally occurring interactional episodes because naturally occurring conversations tend to veer off focused topics and normally jump from one issue onto another and such disorganized and uncontrolled

episodes pose a challenge for the researcher whose sole interest is to navigate issues and topics that are narrow in scope (Holstein and Gubrium 2003).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue that interviewing can be a useful instrument to systematically approach a particular issue by navigating the theme from diverse angles/questions in order to establish under what conditions particular interpretative repertoires get invoked and meanings produced. This strategic tactic and flexibility is relatively rare in naturally occurring interactions and conversations.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) further argued that through interviews, researchers can readily observe the rhetorical strategies and social actions performed in a particular conversation episode.

Therefore, due to the abovementioned reasons, it was deemed justified to employ semi-structured interviews as the appropriate method of gathering discursive data. In this research study, the question of how Eritrean refugees in Pretoria give meaning to their refugee identities was posed in relation to a variety of topical/thematic contexts such as: their feelings towards their ascribed refugee identity, comparisons between being a refugee and a non-refugee, their experiences as refugees with local South Africans and their positive and/or negative experiences as refugees in South Africa. The interviewer touched upon such areas in investigating the topic of sense-making in regard of their refugee identities in order to see the types of meanings produced within such topics.

Before main questions were asked, the interview proceedings started with a general question phrased: how is it like to live in South Africa generally? This question was posed in order to establish rapport and let the respondent warm-up with their description of life in South Africa in general. The interview questions were asked according to the order decided beforehand but mixed with other follow-up questions.

All the main interview questions were deployed across the 10 study participants in order to establish a sense of uniformity and eventually be able to meaningfully compare data (See Appendix 2 for the list of interview items).

The advantages of the interview method, in discursive analytic studies, become clearer when compared to other data collection instruments such as the focus groups techniques, according to Potter and Wetherell (1992: 98). It is evident that data collection methods such as focus groups provide an opportunity for research participants to naturally interact in conversational interactions, Morgan (1996: 130-31). However, some Eritrean refugees, such as the women research study participants, might have difficulty interacting freely in the presence of other fellow male Eritrean refugees and their accounts silenced and this may compromise the effectiveness of the focus group discussion methods (Morgan 1996: 132). In other words, the accounts of male participants may effectively overshadow their women counterparts. Therefore, employing individual interviews was found to be an appropriate and justified data collection method because during individual interviews respondents generally feel at ease (Morgan 1996: 131). For example, women may, without inhibition and reservation, voice their accounts during individual interview sessions.

Moreover, the use of an interview technique has proved beneficial for this research study in identifying salient interpretative repertoires in the conversation with the interviewees (Potter and Wetherell 1992: 101). The style of interviewing was interactive and informal and the interviewer didn't resort to structured interviews because this technique may hamper participants from freely interacting with the researcher and subsequently limit the identification of interpretative repertoires (Potter and Wetherell 1992: 102). In utilizing the interview technique, the study wasn't not interested in understanding or locating stable events or phenomena, in this case 'stable meanings given about refugees' identities' but the researcher was interested in using the interview questions to navigate how the respondents flexibly mobilized a variety of salient interpretative repertoires (Wetherell & Potter 1992: 120) in order to perform particular social actions and assumed corresponding subject positions.

During the data collection interview episode, the interviewer also noted non-verbal observations such as body movements. This was done in order to capture what was visually observed during the interaction process because such observations couldn't be captured by tape-recording.

Further it is to be emphasized that doing discursive analysis (identifying interpretative repertoires) is highly predicated upon the requirements that the interviewer and interviewee need to speak the same language. This is because the task of identifying interpretative repertoires is dependent upon understanding the language deployed by respondents (Roth and Hsu 2010: 10). Hence the study was conducted in Tigrinya – the mother tongue of both the researcher and the interviewees. Being conversant in the language spoken by research participant facilitates smooth interaction between the parties (Roth and Hsu 2010: 10). This subsequently made the identification of in interpretative repertoires becomes fairly easier (Roth and Hsu 2010: 10).

More importantly, given the academic level of the research participants, the interview questions were constructed in simple language in order to facilitate easy comprehension. No difficult and unfamiliar words or phrases were employed (Driscoll 2011: 163-165). Sentences were short and no double-barrelled questions were used because such line of questioning would confuse interviewees and eventually hamper the flow of the conversation (Driscoll 2011: 163-165).

3.2.3 Interview transcription and analysis of data

All 10 interviews recorded on the digital device were transcribed. Real names were changed and replaced by fictitious names. The analysis of the data followed the analytic principle of Potter and Wetherell (1987: 159) to identify the interpretative repertoires/themes in the data. The analysis focused on the common discourses mobilized in the data and what functions such discursive resources performed in such situations. The analysis also investigated how participants gave meaning to their refugee identities and under what contextual conditions such meanings were produced (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 159).

The analysis involved the close-up analysis of the transcribed data to identify the linguistic resources invoked to give meaning to participants' refugee identity. The researcher went through the transcribed material several times to spot recurrent interpretative repertoires/mobilized discourses across the 10 interviews. The

researcher, especially paid attention to the variability, inconsistencies and possible contradictions featured both within and across accounts. In addition to identifying the different interpretative repertoires the researcher also located argumentative/rhetorical devices employed by the participants to reinforce their versions (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 161).

Potter and Wetherell (1987: 160) suggest that in doing analysis of a discursive nature, researchers should look for variability and inconsistencies in the accounts and at the same time see how such variability of accounts are evidently visible across accounts and most importantly the social functions performed as particular discourses are mobilized.

Therefore, in line with the prescriptions of Potter and Wetherell (1987: 159), the researcher went through the material several times to identify the similarity of accounts across the 10 interviews, the variability and inconsistencies of versions both within individual and across accounts, the objectives and subject positions achieved by the participants in mobilizing particular interpretative repertoires in giving meaning to their refugee identities (Potter and Wetherell; 1987: 146).

The interpretative repertoires identified were coded or given names reflecting the corresponding accounts in the data. For example, a particular way of talking that emerged recurrently in the data was identified as an interpretative repertoires by coding the manner of talk in terms of phrases that summarize the type of talk identified in the data (Potter and Wetherell: 1987: 146-147).

Due to space limitation, however, the researcher didn't include all the accounts that reflect the repertoires identified, instead it was decided to use excerpts from the data that represent the accounts bearing particular repertoires and such representative excerpts were used for analysis.

3.2.4 Reflexivity

In conducting a study of this nature the researcher is expected to engage in a continuous discursive analysis in particular and qualitative research in general the

role of the researcher is both as a researcher and an active participant. The very fact that the researcher becomes part and parcel of the research process renders the research process dilemmatic because the researcher acts both as a person who manages the research process and at the same time is a component of the details of the research process. Such a dilemma needs, therefore, to be minimized and reconciled through reflexivity (Parahoo 1997: 14). Reflexivity can generally be described as a process in which the researcher is engaged in an on-going awareness, in the research process, of how the researcher's idiosyncratic beliefs, values and tastes influence how the research process is shaped (Parahoo 1997: 14). The researcher, moreover, reflects how the research participants' perception of the researcher tends to influence the accounts produced by the research interviewees (Parahoo 1997: 16). Furthermore, the researcher should also actively and continuously reflect upon the moment by moment influence of emotions, behaviour and other elements that can have an effect on the research process and include such observations of the elements during the analysis and the discussion stage (Parahoo 1997: 16). The researcher of this research study has done so in the discussion part by interjecting some of the observations made in the interview sessions (Williams 2005). Therefore, in order to minimize the effect of intervening factors the researcher has engaged in a continuous reflection, in the research process, of how the preconceptions, values and perceptions of both the interviewer and the interviewees could affect the content and direction of the research process.

According to Parahoo (1997: 16), the process of reflexivity, however, is a complex and difficult process to perform due to the fact that it is realistically difficult to be able to perform introspection and self-examination of one's assumptions and to be able to establish the link between one's assumptions and the effects they might create in the research process. However, through reflexivity some aspects of the subjective assumptions of the researcher could be minimized or accounted for in the discussion component (Parahoo 1997: 15).

During the analysis stage the researcher was careful not to be biased in identifying the interpretative repertoires from the data. The analysis only relied on the objective data in identifying patterns and selected the dominant themes without resorting to selecting themes that suit the expectations of the researcher. The interpretation of

the data was, therefore, carried out according to the presented data and was objectively guided by the principles of identifying interpretative repertoires proposed by (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 159). Such reflexive position, on the part of the researcher, was meant to establish objectivity and reduce the extent of bias in the research process.

3.2.5 Ethics

During the research undertaking the researcher strictly observed principles of ethical standards that should be adhered to when conducting a research study with human subjects (Haggerty 2004: 40). After the Pretoria University's postgraduate committee and Research Ethics Committee granted the researcher permission to proceed with the research study, the researcher proceeded to distribute the letter of consent for the interviewees to sign. The letter of consent was designed in Tigrinya and after carefully going through the contents the interviewees signed their consent to participate in the research study. The participants were not manipulated or coerced, in any manner, in deciding to put their signature on the consent letter.

The researcher determined that the study shouldn't cause any physical harm whatsoever, furthermore, given the vulnerable position of the refugees, the researcher took into consideration the sensitivity of carrying out the research with the interviewees and was gentle and understanding while the interview process progressed (Haggerty & Winter 2004: 41). Especially the researcher was careful not to ask questions or suggest issues that cause emotional discomfort or general inconvenience on the part of the refugee interviewees. Therefore, questions were posed carefully not to offend or cause harm to the participants.

The researcher further assured interviewees that in case they felt uncomfortable, unbearable stressed as a result of the interview process or unexpectedly ill in the process, they were allowed to discontinue their participation at any point of the interview episode and withdraw from the proceedings altogether. Moreover, the researcher adopted one of the important principles of ethics that participants of the research study must be shielded from any form of harmful consequences as a result of the interview process. The participants were assured that the accounts they freely

shared with the researcher will not be employed to expose them to harm them any way (Kobus 2007: 146). Another important ethical principle which the researcher considered during the interview episode was the idea that the researcher shouldn't take advantage of the unequal power relation between the interviewer and the interviewees (Haggerty 2004: 42). The researcher determined that the interview session should proceed, endeavouring to his level best, with the establishment of an egalitarian relationship between the parties in the conversation. The interviewer assumed an equal status to his interviewees by acting casual, informal and simple in the conversation.

Most of the interviewees told the researcher that they felt important in voicing their stories in the interviews. They further told the interviewer that they felt they got ample visibility in the study in being able to disclose their experiences as refugees in South Africa because their voices have always been ignored and they were invisible social groups. The researcher interpreted this feedback from the participants as meaning that the research study proved ethically beneficial for the research participants and therefore the study must have been a successful undertaking.

The interviewer decided, as required by ethical considerations, to disclose to the interviewees the purpose and the significance of the research undertaking (Haggerty 2004). In doing so the researcher didn't hide from his interviewees as to the full extent of the objective of the study instead he was transparent enough to let his research participants know the nature of the study.

Furthermore, the research participants were given the autonomy to make unilateral decisions in the interview process. Interviewees were not forced or manipulated, in any conceivable manner, to participate in the study and interviewees were explained their rights to stop the proceedings without bearing any form of consequences for doing so (Haggerty 2004: 41). The researcher, moreover, didn't try to secure the consent and participation of the interviewees through, for example, monetary compensation instead the interviewer determined that the decision to participate in the research process rested on the subjective motivation of the interviewees without external manipulative influences. Out of all the participants approached to participate

in the study no person refused to take part in the study and in the process of the interview proceedings no person decided to withdraw from the interview session.

The researcher carefully adhered to the paramount principle of the ethical principle of privacy. The research participants' identifying names, features and other cues linked to the interviewees were omitted. This was done to protect, at any cost, the privacy and anonymity of the research participants (Haggerty 2004: 43). No real identifying features were displayed either in the digital recording device, the interview note or in the transcribed material. Finally the researcher has stored safely the digitally recorded interview material and the transcribed version of the interview.

Finally the researcher reflected on his positionality vis-à-vis the research participants specifically his position as an insider in the research study (Ganga & Scott 2006: 14; Zinn, 1979). In carrying out a social scientific research in general and qualitative research specifically the aspect of the researcher's position in relation the interviewees should be accounted for. The researcher, in this study, shares certain social characteristics with the respondents such as: language, nationality, religion, legal status and other elements that reflect commonality between the researcher and the researcher (Ganga & Scott 2006: 14).

The researcher's social proximity to his research participants, in terms of common characteristics, means the level of mistrust and uncooperativeness on the part of the interviewees is greatly minimized and instead the research participant are generally believed to feel at home in the presence such a researcher and tend to be willing to open up in telling their stories. In other words, in the presence of the researcher, the aspect of fear of the unknown is displaced from the thinking of the research participants (Ganga & Scott 2006: 15). In the interview, such commonality between the researcher and the interviewees gave rise to the atmosphere of rapport and trust in the conversation and the smooth flow of the interview session in general. Most often, research participants tend to be conservative and reserved to tell their stories in the presence of a researcher whom they perceive to be an outsider/alien and such perceptions may subsequently create a climate of awkwardness and tension in the researcher-participant interactions and eventually give rise to limited and distorted data (Ganga & Scott 2006: 14).

Lastly, it is to be noted that even if the insider position of the researcher was generally advantageous in gaining access to mostly men and a few single Eritrean women, it was difficult to recruit married Eritrean women, due to resistance by their respective spouses. Therefore my insider position was proved to be only partially advantageous.

3.2.6 Criticisms and limitations of study methodology

A hypothetical criticism that could be launched against the interview method is the argument that accounts would dramatically differ from the interview if focus group discussions were employed to collect data. It is probable that if focus group discussion were to be used, a different set of interpretative repertoires would have been mobilized when participants talked with each other. This could be due to the fact that speakers could tailor their stories differently as a result of the presence of other fellow Eritrean refugees in the discussion group. Therefore the interview method can only provide us with a fragment or a partial picture of the discourses of Eritrean refugees about their refugee identities. The other alternative possibility could be the assumption that if a combination of individual interviews and focus group discussions had been used another different set of interpretative repertoires could be identified. Therefore, the researcher would like to concede that the identification of the interpretative repertoires in this research study was predicated, *inter alia*, on the method of data collection employed, in this case the interview technique.

The other limitation of the methodology employed in this study is the aspect of unequal power in the analysis and interpretation stages of the research process (Nunokoosing 2005). There is disproportionate power assumed by the researcher, for example, in unilaterally deciding how the data is to be analysed and which parts of the data are to be selected from the material and subsequently how the data is to be interpreted. In this processes the research participants are not consulted to co-analyse and co-interpret the material with the researcher and they might not agree, had they been consulted, with how the way their accounts are undergoing analyses and interpretations (Nunokoosing 2005). For example, according to Coyle (2001), since the focus of discursive analysis is on the performative or action aspect of

accounts/talk rather than treating it as representing social reality, the researcher's interpretation of a particular talk as performing a particular social action might be protested by a particular interviewee, if they were to give their opinion on how their talk was interpreted as performing a particular action. Such manner of treating participants' accounts paints a picture of the researcher as an authoritarian researcher (Coyle 2001). Such unilateral treatment of the data, therefore, discouraged an egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the research participants when it comes to the analysis and interpretation stages of the research process. The argument therefore states that in such instances the objective of the discourse analytic study which was to empower and give voice to the silenced groups runs counterproductive to such initial intentions due to the disproportionate authority vested on the researcher to analyse and interpret data irrespective of the intentions and opinions of the research participants. Nunkoosing's (2005) characterizes such dilemmatic position of the discursive methodology as paradoxical and inconsistent.

However, Nunkoosing's (2005) concedes that, despite such limitations, the placing of raw data in the analysis alongside the researchers interpretations means that the analysis is transparent enough to allow independent readers and researchers to evaluate for themselves whether the analyses were valid or not.

Despite such methodological limitations discursive methodology proves to be an effective approach in extracting hidden voices of repressed and underrepresented social groups such as refugees.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of data has been guided by the principle of analysis suggested by Potter and Wetherell (1987: 159) and Potter and Wetherell (1992). The main focus of the analysis is on the identification of interpretative repertoires that were used by 10 participants to give meaning to their refugee identity. Furthermore, the researcher has paid special attention to the subject positions assumed by interviewees in relation to particular interpretative repertoires invoked and the distinctive discursive devices employed by participants in order to, among other things, strengthen their accounts as valid and believable.

It is, however, to be noted that for analysis purposes and due to limitation of space, only representative extracts were nominated. Therefore, it wasn't feasible to deploy the whole transcribed data for analysis. Across the 10 interview transcripts, 5 dominant and 2 less dominant interpretative repertoires were identified. The respective interpretative repertoires were named or coded in terms of phrases reflecting interviewee accounts. The interpretative repertoires were divided between two sections: the dominant interpretative repertoires, which were mobilized numerous times quantitatively speaking and the less dominant repertoires which were invoked by a few respondents occasionally. The identified interpretative repertoires are varied. Some are complementary and others are extremely contradictory and competing.

When an interviewee talked about their refugee identity they were not observed consistently invoking the same interpretative repertoires. To the contrary, all of the participants invoked complementary and contradictory repertoires alternately. The accounts, therefore, were characterized by inconsistencies, paradoxes and discontinuities. The interviewees were moving across different interpretative repertoires when they were talking about their refugee identity while conversing with their fellow refugee researcher. It is to be noted, however, that apart from the dominant and relatively less dominant interpretative repertoires, other interpretative repertoires were mobilized by the interviewees. However, due to their extremely

scarce frequency the researcher decided to discard them. The list of the identified 5 dominant and 2 less dominant repertoires are as follows:

Table (2): The dominant and less dominant interpretative repertoires

	Dominant repertoires		Less dominant repertoires
1.	We have rights repertoire	6.	Our refugee identity is transient repertoire
2.	Accept who you are repertoire	7.	I am lost: I don't have a country any more repertoire
3.	They target you repertoire		
4.	I am secure: they can't deport me repertoire		
5.	We are misunderstood as criminals repertoire		

4.1 The dominant repertoires

4.1.1 *We have rights repertoire*

Most of the interviewees invoked this type of talk to argue that living in South Africa as a refugee has been advantageous in terms of enjoying certain rights and privileges such as being able to live without fear of arbitrary arrest and incarceration without due process of law; the right to movement; and the right to education and work. Such interviewees mobilized these repertoires by making use of what Hutchby and Wooffit (1998) describe as *contrast structures*, comparing the absence of rights in the country from which they fled to the presence of rights in the country in which they are living now, South Africa. By seeing their future as optimistic, they are according to Potter and Whetherell (1992), using a discursive device that depicts their past as negative and their present and future as optimistic. Using such devices, the respondents describe their future in South Africa as ideal and bright. The way in which the idealization of the future and the condemnation of the past functions, according to Potter and Whetherell (1992: 89) is by describing the past as full of injustices and violence, which by comparison automatically idealizes the present as glorious. In this interpretative repertoire, therefore, South Africa is constructed as a country which distributes rights and freedoms to all refugees living in the country. The following extract from lines [10-19] explicitly constructs refugees as beneficiaries of a number of rights in South Africa:

Extract 1: Elsa (female) – Lines 10-19

Interviewer: Tell me Elsa, what does it mean to be a refugee to you?

Elsa:

[10] One thing that really makes me feel great about my
[11] refugee-ness(.) is that you are provided with equal access to all sorts of services such as medical
[12] care and education. I mean as a refugee I am treated the same as the local South Africans. I
[13] think I am really grateful for the South African government for offering me (.) I mean all of us
[14] refugees protection you know. The government has been like a mother. Where would we be if
[15] countries such as South Africa didn't receive us and pamper us, we would definitely be in
[16] prisons or serving like slaves in our home country you know. Our own government has
[17] already treated us like slaves and aliens in our own country. We (.) were treated like second-
[18] class citizens in our country by our criminal government but here in South Africa we are
[19] treated the same as the local people. I am really happy without any exaggeration

Elsa begins her talk by characterizing her refugee identity as an identity that offers her rights in lines [10-12] 'One thing also that really makes me feel great about my [11] refugee-ness(.) is that you are provided with equal access to all sorts of services such as medical [12] care and education'. Elsa demonstrates this privilege by using what Pomerantz (1996) refers to as an *extreme case formulation* using "great" in line [10]. According to Pomerantz (1996), extreme case formulations, in talk, are formulated to reinforce one's account or argument as very important. Elsa summons two examples, that of 'medical care, and 'education', in order to substantiate her position as factual and verifiable. Furthermore, Elsa mobilizes the discourse of equality in order to position herself as a person who has equal rights and privileges as other local South Africans in line [12] by staying, 'I mean as a refugee I am treated the same as the local South Africans'. In line [14] Elsa mobilizes the metaphor of a mother to equate the South African government as offering care and privileges, and acting as a mother to refugees. In line [17-18], Elsa further reinforces her discourse of rights by employing a *contrast structure* comparing her life in South Africa as a refugee with rights and freedom with a dictatorship in Eritrea where such freedoms are absent and, instead, imprisonment is rampant by saying, 'we would definitely be in [16] prisons or serving like slaves in our home country you know'. Elsa uses *extreme negative case formulation* in terms of a metaphor 'slaves and aliens' in line [17] to construct and position the Eritrean government as a cruel master which, in contrast, positions the South African government as a caring entity offering refugees rights and freedoms. Elsa, by doing so, paints her past as negative and, by contrast, her present and future in South Africa as positive using discursive

devices that depict their past as negative and their present and future as optimistic. Elsa in line [19] further justifies her account by putting forward what Potter and Whetherell (1992: 92) describe as a *disclaimer*: 'I am really happy without any exaggeration'. Elsa does this in order to position herself as a neutral person who is able to judge things fairly without taking sides. Elsa, in the above extract, mobilizes a number of discursive devices to authenticate her discourse of rights as factual believable.

However, Elsa doesn't consistently mobilize the interpretative repertoire of rights throughout her interview. Instead, she was observed contradicting her rights repertoires by invoking a relatively competing repertoire of 'a hated refugee' in line [42] 'they hate us (.) I mean too [43] much hatred here'. However, such contradicting repertoires were short-lived and the respondent only mentioned it in a line. This competing interpretative repertoire was later overshadowed, by again mobilizing the rights repertoires in lines [278]: 'you can freely move around I mean even work and study and do business you know'. The rights repertoire is dominant in Elsa's accounts and it forms a large part of her talk.

In yet another extract from another interviewee, the repertoires of rights is also invoked in an almost similar manner as in Elsa's version of rights:

Extract 2: Lemlem (female) – Lines 319-322

Interviewer: Tell me Lemlem, what does it mean to be a refugee to you?

Lemlem:

[319] I was in a refugee camp in Kenya for almost a year and it is like living in hell. It
[320] is a very terrible place, to be in Kenya. But here in south Africa we are free I mean
[321] they will issue you a refugee document then it is up to you I mean they leave you free rather
[322] than confining you in stressful refugee (.) camps you know so it is alright here.

Predominantly, Lemlem's account is overwhelmed by the rights repertoire as is Elsa's. In this extract, Lemlem mobilizes the 'right to movement' repertoires in line [321] '...they leave you free rather [322] than confining you in stressful refugee (.) camps...' Lemlem reinforces this repertoire by using, as does Elsa, contrasting versions or a *contrast structure* contrasting her experiences in Kenya as a refugee to that of her present state as a refugee in South Africa. She constructs the Kenyan refugee system as unbearable and extremely negative by using *an extreme negative*

case formulation in terms of a metaphor ‘hell’ in line [319]. Lemlem is observed also mobilizing another *extreme negative case formulation* ‘very terrible place’ in line [320] to construct Kenya as an unfavourable place for refugees. At the same time, by constructing Kenya as a hostile place for refugee to live and, by contrast, South Africa as a favourable place for refugee Lemlem condemns her past life as a refugee as miserable but she glorifies her present life as a refugee in South Africa as positive. Lemlem therefore positions her present life as a happy and privileged refugee as opposed to her past self which she positions as miserable and devoid of freedom and rights. Lemlem, moreover, uses a device that Potter and Whetherell (1987) refer to as *category membership*, by invoking the first person plural ‘we’ in line [320] aligning herself with other, absent, Eritrean refugees in order to argue that her experiences is also the experiences of other fellow Eritrean refugees. By using this discursive device, Lemlem positions herself as an embodiment of Eritrean refugees living in South Africa.

Like Elsa, Lemlem isn’t consistent with the ‘rights’ repertoire across her account. She at times invoked contradictory interpretative repertoires, though marginally, which somehow compromised her discourse of ‘rights’. In lines [459-460], Lemlem simultaneously mobilizes two complementary interpretative repertoires ‘the humiliated and criminalized’ repertoire that, jointly, confronted the ‘rights repertoires’. Lemlem marshals such repertoires in this way: ‘[459] you feel a little (.) bit uneasy about this refugee thing because people look down upon you [460]; sometimes people associate you with criminals you know’. In this extract, Lemlem just mentions the two repertoires as if they were trivial when compared to the rights repertoires because she doesn’t dwell too much on the ‘humiliated’ and criminalized ‘repertoires. By doing so, she confirms the non-importance and insignificance of such repertoires in her account. To justify this, Lemlem reverts back to her rights repertoires in line [531], ‘I mean when you are a refugee you have a guarantee that you are [531] a recognized refugee therefore you have rights’. In this ‘rights’ extract, Lemlem reinforces her ‘rights discourse’ by reiterating that to be a refugee in South Africa guarantees you rights.

From the above extracts, it has been observed that the rights repertoire doesn’t monopolize a whole account; instead it is tempered by other opposing and

competing discourses. We see therefore a confrontation among the repertoires and, in this instance, a victorious dominant interpretative repertoire standing out as salient by effectively submerging the others into the background.

In the following extract the rights repertoires is mobilized by Abel to make sense of his refugee identity.

Extract 3: Abel (male) – Lines 1211-1217

Interviewer: I see. Tell me Abel, what does it mean to be a refugee to you?

Abel:

[1211] We don't have freedom back home you know. Back home you don't own your own
[1212] life; your own life is controlled by the dictator government so we cannot go back you know.
[1213] it is really sad isn't it? I mean I cannot deny that I have freedom here, that I have all the
[1214] rights a human being needs I mean as a refugee in this country; not only as a refugee but as
[1215] long as you are in this country I think whether you are a refugee or not you do have plenty
[1216] of rights of course; because these rights that we have in this country no one can give you
[1217] back home you know.

According to this extract, Abel mobilizes the rights repertoire using a *contrasting discursive device*, comparing lack of rights in Eritrea and an abundance of rights bestowed to refugees in South Africa. Abel provides images of dictatorship and enslavement back in his home country using phrases, 'Back home you don't own your own life' in line [1212] and by contrast he projects images of freedom and agency living in South Africa. Abel begins his statement by characterizing the lack of freedom in his country of origin using the *category membership indicator* 'we' effectively including all Eritreans living in the country as living under authoritarianism. By doing so, he paints a gloomy picture of the human rights situation in his country of origin, and he immediately invokes South Africa as a country of freedom and rights. By extension, Abel characterizes his life in South Africa as privileged using the extreme case phrase 'all the [1214] rights a human being needs'. By using such an extreme term 'all the rights', Abel describes South Africa as an ideal place where every conceivable right is distributed to refugees in the country. Abel mobilizes the rights discourse to position himself as a privileged refugee who, unlike those remaining in the 'authoritarian system', is exercising the rights and freedom in South Africa. At the same time, he is invoking the discursive techniques that depict their past as negative and their present and future as optimistic to describe his past in his country of origin as hopeless and his present life in South Africa as glorious using two contrasting expressions, 'back home' and 'here'.

Abel, however, doesn't prove to be a consistent social actor, because he doesn't reiterate his rights discourse throughout the interview session. Even though he stayed predominantly within rights discourse, Abel also shifted to other contradictory discourses. In the following abstract, Abel invokes the 'targeted refugee' discourse, as a competing repertoire:

Extract 4: Abel (male) – Lines 1211-1217

Abel:

[1419] I suppose, I mean some of them
[1420] even kill you just because you are a foreigner and they want to rob you. But not all of them,
[1421] as I have told you just a few of them you know. In other words I mean when people realize
[1422] that you are a refugee then they just take advantage of you'.

In the above extract, Abel invokes the 'targeted refugee' repertoire while the interview proceeded. The invocation of such a repertoire was a sharp shift from Abel's dominant 'rights' interpretative repertoire. Abel constructs a targeted refugee repertoire using a phrase, 'when people realize [1422] that you are a refugee then they just take advantage of you.' However this construction is subsequently overshadowed by the persistent mobilization of the 'rights repertoire' in Abel's accounts.

The rights repertoire was most salient across seven of the ten interviews and has been mobilized numerous times at different stages of the interviews. Below I provide three further extracts from some of the other respondents' accounts that demonstrate how this rights repertoire was mobilized. For reasons of space, I do not analyse these extracts:

Example 1: Ba (male) – Lines 2213- 2218

So yeah, I am
[2213] doing well in this country and I don't have a problem with my being a refugee. I think to be
[2214] honest South Africa is a very (.) democratic country, because here refugees and citizens are
[2215] treated the same way under the law. I mean they don't discriminate you based on whether or
not you
[2216] are from South Africa. I mean they treat you equally. Everyone in this country is
[2217] equal under the law and that (.) is very good because there is no discrimination and no
[2218].

Example 2: Pol (male) – Lines 2848-2855

[2848] We Eritreans living in this country for example have been
[2849] living in this country peacefully and without anybody infringing on our right to move freely

[2850] and without fear of being arrested for no other reason. I mean I think relatively speaking tis
[2851] a nice place to live as a refugee in this(.) country. I think we have to appreciate the freedom
[2852] and democracy side of living in this country you know. I mean we know how we were
[2853] treated back home; we were treated like slaves by our own government so I think even if we
[2854] are struggling as refugees we should also give thanks to the government of this country for
[2855] allowing us to live freely and to (.) work and study as well.

Example 3: Ata (male) – Lines 1517-1528

Ata:

[1517] No one forces you to join the military as in my (.) country; no one throws you to prison
[1518] without going to court and no one abuses you here as in my country where anyone can do
[1519] harm to you anytime and anywhere. To be a refugee to me means yeah to live in peace in
[1520] this country and to have no fear of abuse by authorities such as what is happening in Eritrea
[1521] where any stupid member of the military can abuse you anyhow they want. Anyone who
[1522] says to be a refugee in (.) this country is a wholly negative experience is not telling you the
truth.

[1524] I mean I am looking at it from my experience you know. I know where I come from
[1525] and the extent of human rights violations I have encountered in my own country ever since
[1526] the stupid president assumed power in the country. I mean (.) we lived in agony in our
[1527] countries but now, relatively speaking, we are living in peace and serenity I mean compared
[1528] to my own country you know.

4.1.2 *Accept who you are repertoire*

This interpretative repertoire also featured as one of the dominant repertoires both within and across interviewee accounts. The interviewees mobilized this discursive resource in order to naturalize their refugee identity as an uncontested and unalterable fact, hence their argument to accept the refugee label as part of the refugee's identity and essence. The interviewees mobilized a variety of discursive devices to substantiate their argument that the refugee identity must be accepted as one's own identity and endeavours to contest the identity are constructed as unrealistic and fruitless. They reinforce their arguments by invoking what Potter and Whetherell (1992) named the practical/principle rhetorical device: interviewees argue, for example, that even if one ideally desires to remain a non-refugee, the concrete realities of the refugee experience in South Africa will always reduce them to their refugee identity. In other words, a refugee will remain a refugee whether or not the refugee desires to be otherwise.

In the following extract, Letay essentializes her refugee identity as natural and uncontested personal identity and she does that by drawing on a number of discursive devices.

Extract 5: Letay (female) – Lines 958- 967

Interviewer: Umm, I see. And tell me Letay, how do you feel or react whenever the label ‘refugee’ is ascribed to you?

Letay:

[958] You have to be proud of who you are, I
[959] mean your identity is your identity you cannot just deny it. For example you are studying
[960] now and if I call you a ‘student’ would you feel uncomfortable? I don’t think so, because that
[961] is your identity and you cannot (.) run away from it (chuckles). I am not in my country any
[962] more, and I have to accept it that I am now having another name (laughter) I don’t have a
[963] country anymore because I cannot go back anytime I want and this makes me a refugee and I
[964] have to accept it you know. Let’s not live in denial, instead let’s be realistic and accept who
[965] we are. Some delusional refugees just want to be something else by denying(.) their refugee
[966] identity and they usually are full of self-hate you know; I mean they are not happy or
[967] comfortable with their identity and with who they are. They are just delusional these people.

In this extract Letay essentializes the refugee identity as any other identities with which people identify themselves positively such as a ‘student’ in line [961]. Letay normalizes her refugee identity by mobilizing a rhetorical device that Edwards (1999) refers to as a *script formulation* to naturalize and characterize her refugee identity as any other identity by using the phrase, ‘you have to be proud of who you are.’ This normalizing strategy is especially evident in her characterization of her refugee identity: ‘your identity is your identity you cannot just deny it’ in line [959]. Letay uses the phrase ‘your identity’ emphasizing that the refugee identity and one’s personal identity aren’t separate, instead they are intertwined. Letay further establishes the normalizing work of her refugee identity in line [964]: ‘I cannot go back anytime I want and this makes me a refugee and I have to accept it you know.’ In this section, Letay justifies that she feels compelled to embrace her refugee identity, because of the fact that she couldn’t go back to her country of origin. Letay, in stating ‘cannot go back anytime...’, which implicitly refers to her country of origin, is suggesting that the reason why she chose to accept her refugee identity as natural wasn’t that she essentially or unconditionally identifies with the identity, but that she was forced to do so under compelling circumstances such as not being able to return back to her country. Hence she resorted to embracing her present refugee identity, because she doesn’t have any other choice. In lines [965-967], Letay mobilizes a *contrasting device* by comparing herself, as an advocate of the refugee identity, with those of other “delusional” refugees who reject their refugee identity. Letay positions those who deny their refugee identity as people who live in denial and as unrealistic, but constructs her position as realistic.

Letay, however, wasn't consistent with the discourse of 'realism' across her accounts, because she was observed crossing over to other interpretative repertoires which positions her as an inconsistent actor. For example, in lines [1083-1084], Letay mobilizes a discourse that constructs her refugee identity as temporary, which effectively displaces the essentialized version which she gave in her interpretative repertoire that naturalizes her refugee identity. Her ephemeral version of her refugee identity reads as follows:

Extract 6: Letay (female) – Lines 1083- 1084

[1083] So just because I am a refugee now doesn't mean that I will end up being a refugee
[1084] forevermore you know, I know there are limits to being a refugee.

In this version of her contradictory, non-essentialized version of her refugee identity, Letay doesn't construct her refugee identity as permanent. Instead Letay renders her refugee identity as ephemeral and prone to change. However, this competing interpretative repertoire is effectively muted due to overwhelming accounts of the essentialized identity evident in Letay's versions.

Extract 7 Ba (male) – Lines 2257- 2263

Interviewer: So are you proud of your refugee identity?

Ba:

[2257] as long as I am in this country with this
[2258] refugee document (displays his refugee identity) then I will always remain a refugee and I
[2259] shouldn't feel be any negative about that because I should learn to live with this new
[2260] identity of mine (smiles) I mean I should live with (.) what works for me. Facts are facts and
[2261] we can't deny them. Furthermore it should be remembered that this refugee identity that I
[2262] have is a safe haven for me and in fact I have I have to be proud of it and there is nothing to
[2263] be embarrassed about it you know.

As observed also in Letay's account, Ba accepts his refugee identity as obvious and indisputable. He does this by mobilizing a *script formulation device as a normalizing and naturalizing device*, by using the expression, 'as long as I am in this country with this [2258] refugee document (displays his refugee identity) then I will always remain a refugee'. Ba argues that as long as a refugee has a refugee status document which officially defines who he/she is, they have to accept the official identity offered by the state. Ba does that by displaying his refugee identity document to the interviewer as evidence that his identity is reduced to the refugee document. In other words, Ba is arguing that his refugee identity is closely entwined with his refugee status paper. Ba uses the *extreme case formulation* 'always' to justify the continuity

and eternity of his refugee identity. Ba further gives his refugee identity an essentialized status by using a *script formulation* expression, ‘facts are facts and [2261] we can’t deny them.’ Ba in this line equates his refugee identity with unalterable and uncontested ‘facts’. By constructing his refugee identity as part and parcel of facts, Ba unproblematizes his refugee identity and accepts it as normal and natural. In line [2262-2263], Ba challenges the popular humiliation discourse that comes with being a refugee by emphatically saying that he is not embarrassed by his refugee identity.

Paradoxically, Ba adamantly resists his refugee identity as the interview proceeded. This dramatic shift from his position as someone who advocates his identity to a position of antagonism makes Ba a speaker inundated with dilemmas. Ba rejects his refugee identity in the following extract:

Extract 8 Ba (male) – Lines 2290- 2296

[2289] Honestly speaking specially in
[2291] public places I don’t want people to see me I mean to identify me as a refugee because it
[2292] can be embarrassing you know. I mean people ask you all kinds of stupid questions such as,
[2293] “why did you leave your country of origin? When are you going back to your country of
[2294] origin” and annoying questions from people you know. I mean it all depends on the
[2295] situation you know. I mean as I told you I mean in public places I don’t want to be
[2296] identified as a refugee you know.

In this extract, Ba constructs public places as spaces where his refugee identity undergoes experiences of “embarrassment” in line [2291-2292]. Ba further reinforces his resistance by claiming that the reason why he decides to hide his identity is because people ask him irrational questions about his origin and the circumstances around his refugee identity by describing such unreasonable questions as “stupid”. However, Ba discredits his rejection of his refugee identity by reversing back to his essentializing version of his refugee identity in the following lines:

Extract 9: Ba (male) – Lines 2375- 2380

Interviewer: Oh I see. I have another question Ba, when you interact with local South Africans to what extent do you self-identify yourself as a refugee?

Ba:

[2375] Well if they want to know about me I don't have any reservations to disclose about my
[2376] refugee identity to them. I mean I am a free person and I interact freely with the people of
[2377] this country and I don't have a problem with letting them know about my refugee identity
[2378] you know. I do have so many South African acquaintances in Pretoria and they all know
[2379] who I am; I mean they all know that I am a refugee and how long I have lived in this
[2380] country so there is no problem with that.

In the extract, when the interviewer asked Ba if he has any reservations self-identifying himself as a refugee when he interacts with South Africans, Ba resists the implicit intention of the questioning which has the effect of positioning Ba as a person who hides his refugee identity. Ba challenges the intention of the question by reverting back to his dominant normalizing repertoire with the line 'I don't have any reservations to disclose about my [2376] refugee identity to them'. He further buttresses his position by constructing himself as a person without reservations in line [2376- 2377]: 'I mean I am a free person and I interact freely with the people of [2377] this country and I don't have a problem with letting them know about my refugee identity'. He justifies his version of an open-minded person by claiming that he has 'South African acquaintances' in line [2378] and such fact gives him the confidence to disclose who he is and he sees such disclosure as normal and a routine.

The repertoire that accepts the refugee identity as one's own identity has also been discovered in other accounts, such as in the following extract:

Extract 10: Vo (male) – Lines 2374-2380

Interviewer: Umm, I see. And tell me Vo, how do you feel or react whenever the label 'refugee' is ascribed to you?

[2612] So when people identify you as a refugee you have to (.) be really comfortable with that and be
[2613] proud of who you are you shouldn't feel less than anybody because no one has in fact the
[2614] right to mistreat you or look (.) down upon you simply because you are a refugee, I mean you
[2615] should teach people to respect you, you know because the problem arises if you are not
[2616] confident about yourself and always feel self-hate whenever people identify you as a
[2617] refugee then people even(.) won't respect you, you know, so it all starts from you. I mean as
[2618] long as you have a sense of self-respect and you are happy and comfortable with who you
[2619] are then people will sense the self-respect you have about yourself and begin also to respect
[2620] you for who you are

In the above extract, Vo constructs his refugee identity as his own respectful identity and as even worthy of unequivocal acceptance and due respect. Vo begins his construction by using an *extreme case formulation discursive device* 'be really comfortable' to add emphasis to his construction of his refugee identity as one's own

identity to be accepted and worthy of respect. By constructing his refugee identity as a respectable identity, by using phrases such as ‘no one has in fact the [2614] right to mistreat you or look (.) down upon you simply because you are a refugee,’ Vo challenges discourses that construct refugees as humiliated and marginalized social groups and effectively constructs such disparaging discourses as illegitimate. Vo, furthermore argues that refugee identity should be accepted and defended when one exercises self-respect and pride as a refugee rather than feeling humiliation. He demonstrates the relationship between demonstrating pride in one’s refugee identity and subsequent respect that refugees could command through such strategies using the phrase, ‘I mean you [2615] should teach people to respect you, you know because the problem arises if you are not [2616] confident about yourself and always feel self-hate whenever people identify you as a [2617] refugee...’

In line [2615] Vo suggests a course of action to anonymous refugees using *modal forms* ‘you [2615] should teach people to respect you’. In using such a discursive device, Vo acts as an active advocate of the acceptance of the refugee identity as an identity that deserves recognition and respect. In his construction of refugee identity as an accepted identity, Vo positions himself as a proud refugee and at the same time an active advocate of refugee identity by making use of modal verbs as directives that suggest for refugees to accept their refugee identity and be proud of it.

Despite the overwhelming naturalizing discourse in Vo’s entire account, he dramatically and paradoxically shifted to a ‘targeted refugee’ discourse in lines [2689-2692] by temporarily abandoning his position as an advocate of the naturalizing interpretative repertoire. He exhibits this dilemma in the following extract:

Extract 11: Vo (male) – Lines 2374-2380

[2689] I usually even
[2690] do not associate myself a lot with such people because they can be very aggressive and hurt
[2691] you I mean because they see your refugee identity as a weakness and target you, you know.
[2692] Because these people (.) are killing people I mean killing (.) foreigners just like that you know.

Here Vo dismounts, briefly though, from the repertoires that construct refugee identity as an accepted identity and construct his refugee identity as under attack by using a vague word ‘people’. He is not explicit as to whom he is referring to by

deploying the term 'people'. However, Vo's construction of the targeted refugee repertoire is short-lived due to the dominant 'accept who you are repertoire' throughout his account.

The 'accept who you are' repertoire was also mobilized numerous times both within and across accounts. Below I provide three further extracts from some of the other respondents' accounts that demonstrate how this 'accept who you are' repertoire was mobilized. For reasons of space, I do not analyse these extracts:

Example 4: Lemlem (female) – Lines 368-373

Lemlem:

[368] well am I not a refugee (laughs) if (.) they address me as a refugee I will accept it as
[369] normal of course. You have to know that to be a refugee I mean a refugee isn't an insult I
[370] mean it is a name like everything else. For example if a person is working in the military we
[371] call them we call that person a soldier isn't it there for if you are a refugee (.) in this country
[372] people will say you are a refugee I mean people will address you as a refugee it is the truth.
[373] How would you like to be addressed then? Me I (.) don't have a problem with that for example.

Example 5: Elsa (female) – Lines 91-97

Elsa:

[91] but also when I think of it you (.) don't have control over your being called a refugee
[92] because once you have left your own country and started seeking asylum, of course you will
[93] always be named a refugee, I mean you lose your identity as an Eritrean (.) or a Somali for
[94] example and you started identifying with refugee because you do not have any choice at all
[95] you know. I mean (.) what other name would you expect? I mean once you have left your own
[96] country your identity will remain a refugee whether you like it or not and you should live with
[97] it; you should actually start becoming (.) accustomed to it (laughter).

Example 6: Ata (male) – Lines 1560-1564

[1560] we have to be realistic
[1561] as refugees and we shouldn't live in a fantasy world you know because it is reasonable to be
[1562] reasonable because as long as you are a refugee you should take it for granted that you
[1563] cannot be treated the same as the local South Africans and you should take it as unchanging
[1564] fact and learn to live with this reality.

In the above examples the respondents mobilized the 'accept who you are' repertoire in talking about their refugee identity.

4.1.3 *They target you repertoire*

Most of the respondents mobilized the 'targeted refugee' repertoires in their accounts using examples and a variety of discursive resources to substantiate their accounts as believable and real and not a fictitious creation of their accounts. The mobilization

of this repertoire was affected by the gender of the interviewees. Mostly this repertoire was mobilized by males rather than females. The researcher concluded that the reason for such a difference was that because it was males who frequently interact with local South Africans (usually with Black South Africans) such as in the small towns and 'locations', as a result of this interaction the male respondents tended to produce such repertoires emerging from their daily experience with local South Africans. By contrast, the female interviewees scarcely marshalled this repertoire to construct their experiences as refugees in South Africa. Male respondents, especially, used the discursive device of *contrasting versions* comparing local Black South Africans with those who live in smaller towns and 'locations'. Specifically, those South Africans that are deemed family to refugees, such as acquaintances, are seen as unproblematic, while those that are strangers are constructed as suspicious and hence as possibly hostile. In the following extract, Buzu positions himself as a possible target of Black South Africans living in the 'locations', hence he constructs the 'locations' in South Africa as inaccessible and dangerous spaces for refugees. Nonetheless, at the same time, he was lenient towards those South Africans that are familiar to him due to the confidence he feels around them.

Extract 12: Buzu (male) – Lines 790-796

Interviewer: Umm, Oh I see, I have another question Buzu, when you interact with local South Africans to what extent do you self-identify yourself as a refugee?

[790] Therefore as I have told you, to people that I know, or to people that are
[791] very close to me yes I let them know and they know a lot about me yes. I think specially it
[792] isn't safe to disclose who you are when you happen to be in one of the locations where there
[793] are a lot of Black South Africans, I mean almost all the locations are dominantly populated
[794] by Blacks and I think they are very hostile to people of other nationalities such as us
[795] refugees. Therefore I don't feel safe to let the people in those places to know who I am, I
[796] mean to let them know that I am a refugee from outside this country.

Buzu uses the *extreme case* discursive device 'people that are very close' to legitimize his feeling of being secure around those South Africans that are familiar to him. However, he proceeds to describe those unknown to him – Black people living in 'the locations' – as hostile, hence his justification to not disclose his refugee identity in line [796]. Buzu states that his safety is predicated upon where he finds himself: he constructs the 'locations' as unsafe places while, implicitly, he presumes those spaces that are non-locations as safer. Buzu further clearly demonstrates that he positions South Africans, using a *category membership* discursive device

'Blacks', living in those locations as aggressive towards other nationalities and refugees, in line [794] and himself as a victim of such "racial" group living in such spaces.

In another extract Buzu again constructs Black South Africans living in the locations as hostile groups towards refugees while those who live in larger cities in South Africa as less hostile and relatively friendly groups:

Extract 13: Buzu (male) – Lines 812-821

Interviewer: So are you saying, at times, it can be risky to identify yourself as a refugee to male South Africans?

[812] You can say so yes, I mean but not in large cities or in larger towns I guess, because in
[813] such big cities, there are people from all countries I mean from different countries; there are,
[814] for example, refugees and other foreigners living in those quarters and even foreigners and
[815] refugees share flats and live together in big cities such as Pretoria and Johannesburg. Yes,
[816] therefore, I don't worry about my refugee identity in such big cities you know because
[817] people live together there and people are used to each other.
[818] But I cannot trust Black people living
[819] in the smaller towns or locations; because they are very hostile people there and I am too
[820] scared to disclose my identity to those people because I don't know what they are going to do
[821] to me you know.

In this extract Buzu constructs a version of his refugee identity as a victim of hostility. However he doesn't describe every South African as a perpetrator of such hostility towards people of foreign origin. Instead he qualifies his accounts using a discursive device of *contrasting versions* by dividing South Africans into two mutually exclusive contrasting categories. Buzu constructs those who live in larger cities such as Pretoria and Johannesburg as friendly and as people who are willing to mingle with foreign nationals in lines [813-817]. However, he immediately shifts his construction to those of South Africans who live in 'smaller towns or locations', line [818], as groups who target refugees by employing an *extreme case formulation* discursive device 'very hostile' in line [819]. Buzu uses a *category membership* discursive device 'Black people' to specifically describe the type of social group he constructs as hostile towards refugees. In doing so, Buzu explicitly describes Black South Africans in smaller towns and locations as hostile towards refugees while, at the same time, implicitly, exonerating other "racial" groups as neutral or friendly. Buzu, in line [818], constructs small towns and locations in South Africa as sites of violence against refugees. By doing so, Buzu is discursively positioning all inhabitants of those smaller towns and locations as hostile. Buzu positions himself, in relation to

Black people in smaller towns and locations as a possible victim of hostility, while in relation to South Africans living in large cities, he positions himself as fearless. In line [820], Buzu employs the *extreme case formulation* discursive device ‘too scared’ to justify his explanation of why those who live in smaller towns and locations are hostile: ‘I am too [820] scared to disclose my identity to those people because I don’t know what they are going to do [821] to me you know.’ In lines [820-821] here, it is evident that Buzu further buttresses his claim of fear of the unknown by stating that Black people living in such spaces are unpredictable and dangerous.

However, Buzu didn’t include all genders and age groups in characterizing those who live in the locations as hostile. He positions himself as reasonable and accurate in his accounts of describing the characteristics of those that are hostile and those that aren’t by compartmentalizing Black South Africans living in the locations into three distinct categories. In the following extract Buzu engages in reasoning by saying:

Extract 14 Buzu (male) – Lines 799-803

[799] I am talking about young male Black people I am not talking about the women there.
[801] Because the women I mean I can say the majority of South African women are not hostile
[802] towards foreigners in fact they are very understanding and friendly. And also older South
[803] Africans are very friendly.

In this extract, young Black males are constructed as a hostile category and Black female South Africans and elderly Black South Africans as friendly.

Buzu, however wasn’t a consistent speaker because he was observed shifting to other competing interpretative repertoires when he spoke about his refugee identity. Such shifting of his discourse characterizes him as a speaker positioned in an ideological dilemma (Potter and Whetherell 1987). The following alternative repertoire was spotted in his account:

Extract 15: Buzu (male) – Lines 812-821

[855] But we cannot always have negative experiences you know, because at times we can
[856] be beneficiaries of so many good things as a result of our refugee identity you know. For
[857] example if there are refugees resettlement opportunities in this country who do you think will
[858] be the prime beneficiary of such programs? It is the refugee of course.

Buzu alternatively invokes the rights repertoire, claiming that being a refugee positions one to be a beneficiary of some rights such as the rights for possible resettlement opportunities. However, this repertoire is superseded by a subsequent overwhelming targeted refugee repertoire.

Ata too invoked the *targeted refugee repertoire*. In the following extract, Ata constructs his refugee identity as a magnet that attracts local South Africans who target foreign nationals. He elaborates this construction as follows:

Extract 16: Ata (male) – Lines 1713-1721

Interviewer: Yeah. And tell me, when you interact with local South Africans to what extent do you self-identify yourself as a refugee?

Ata:

[1713] I sometimes self-identify myself (.) to the right people not just anyone else because I
[1714] always would like to identify myself as a refugee if the person I am interacting with is not
[1715] hostile (laughter) I mean there are some local people who want to know who you are just because
[1716] they want to take advantage (.) of you and as soon as they know that you are a refugee then
[1717] they will try to act different you know. For example I mean they would immediately think that
[1718] you are naïve and they can easily take advantage of you, you know. I mean you have to be
[1719] cautious with these people, I mean I am not characterizing them all of them I mean as bad
[1720] people but there are some crooks who (.) want to take advantage you know so you should
[1721] beware of such bad apples you know.

In the above extract, Ata constructs his refugee identity as a prey that is under threat by local South Africans. He justifies this position by employing what Edwards (1991) refers to as a *categorization discursive device*, ‘they’ – referring to anonymous local South Africans as a particular category of people that target refugees. At the same time, Ata invokes the ‘you’ *categorization* to refer to refugees constructing themselves as victims of the ‘they’, pointing to local South Africans as agents of the targeting. In line [1715], Ata uses the qualifying word ‘some’ to depict that not all local South Africans are hostile towards refugees. Instead, only some of them are aggressive towards refugees. In line [1716], Ata constructs local South Africans as constantly looking for an opportune moment to target refugees by saying, ‘[1716] they want to take advantage (.) of you and as soon as they know that you are a refugee...’ Furthermore, Ata characterizes local South Africans as people who view refugees as soft targets by employing the following phrase: ‘for example, I mean they would immediately think that [1718] you are naïve and they can easily take advantage of you.’ By contrast, Ata, in the beginning of his discourse, describes ‘the right’ local South Africans as unproblematic and his willingness to interact with such

‘right’ local South Africans regularly and without fear by mobilizing the discursive device of *extreme case formulation* ‘always’. However, such discourse is abruptly superseded by the overshadowing discourse of ‘the targeted refugee’ in the following lines [1715] all the way up to line [1721].

Unlike other interviewees’ accounts, Ata’s discourse is almost monopolized by negative experiences of his refugee identity. However, in his accounts he qualifies the ‘targeted refugee’ interpretative repertoire by stating that not all South Africans target refugees, in the following extract he elaborates on the qualifying discourse:

Extract 17: Ata (male) – Lines 1822-1826

[1822] some people are very (.) friendly you know specially those mature ones you know I mean
[1823] those in their forties and above are very friendly I think and I have encountered this positive
[1824] experience you know. They are very mature people you know. So we cannot generalize that
[1825] all South Africans are hostile I mean that isn’t true and there are very friendly and very
[1826] good people too.

According to the above extract, Ata qualifies his characterization of local South Africans as hostile by talking in terms of categories. Ata equates older South Africans with maturity and empathy and categorizes such groups as friendly to refugees unlike, implicitly, the younger local South Africans that target refugees. Ata specifically, in line [1825], reinforces his qualification in terms of an *extreme case formulation* discursive device ‘so we cannot generalize that [1825] all South Africans are hostile’. In this line, Ata also employs the *category membership* discursive device of ‘we’, which effectively assumes all refugees to have the same position as him.

In another extract, the ‘targeted refugee’ interpretative repertoire was identified and the repertoire was mobilized to perform an almost similar social action, as those performed by Buzu and Ata in positioning refugees as victims of violent criminals but the identity of the violent “criminals” isn’t clear in Pol’s discourse and he doesn’t specifically refer to local South Africans as perpetrators of such violence. In the following extract Pol mobilizes different discursive devices to strengthen this repertoire:

Extract 18 Pol (male) – Lines 3068-3072

Interviewer: (follow up question) Oh really? But why did you misinform them? (Laughter)
[3068] generally speaking I wouldn't count it safer to disclose to
[3069] especially stranger who you are because there are a lot of thieves in this country and a lot of
[3070] criminals and you don't know who they are (.) until they have robbed you I mean it is better
[3071] for people in this country to not know who you are; instead it is much better for people to
[3072] remain confused about you so that they can't do any harm to you, you understand?

Pol establishes the relation between the disclosure of his refugee identity to anonymous people, who are constructed as dangerous, and possible victimization by such people. Pol uses a modal verb 'wouldn't' in line [3068] to argue that even if the possibility arises for him to disclose his refugee identity to a "stranger" in line [3069], he prefers to remain invisible for fear of possible violence. Pol, in contrast to Buzu's and Ata's discourse, doesn't describe specifically who the possible strangers could be. Instead, he provides a vague description of the "stranger" in line [3069]. In other words, Pol is saying that he could be a target of possible "criminals" in line [3070] but he doesn't state the possible identity of such criminals: it could be local South Africans, it could also be other foreigners living in the country. Pol, therefore, employs the discursive device of *vague formulation* (Potter and Whetherell 1992), deploying terms such as 'stranger', 'a lot of thieves', 'people', and 'they' in lines [3068 – 3072] to describe the impossibility of identifying who the possible perpetrators of violence could be. In his account, Pol exhibits fear of the unknown, hence his on-going paranoia about possibly being targeted by unknown people if he discloses his refugee identity. Pol furthermore employs the discursive device of *extreme case formulation*, using 'a lot of' twice in lines [3069-3070] to emphasize the abundance of "thieves" and "criminals" in South Africa who allegedly perceive refugee as soft targets of their criminal activities such as stealing. In line [3070-3071] Pol asserts his position to remain invisible to people due to his fear of being targeted by such unknown people: "it is better [3071] for people in this country to not know who you are". Pol further reinforces his account of invisibility in the following phrase, 'instead it is much better for people to [3072] remain confused about you so that they can't do any harm to you'. Notice the *extreme case formulation* 'much better' that Pol mobilizes to strengthen his position of remaining invisible, by hiding his refugee identity to the unknown criminals in order to avoid possible targeting by such people.

However, Pol's discourse of 'the targeted refugee' is compromised briefly by another competing 'rights discourse'. Even if Pol's dominant discourse is the targeted refugee discourse his targeted refugee interpretative repertoire is tempered by the following rights interpretative repertoire in lines [2850 – 2852]: 'I mean, I think relatively speaking this is [2851] a nice place to live as a refugee, I mean in this (.) country. I think we have to appreciate the freedom [2852] and democracy side of living in this country you know.' In the above extract pol mobilizes the rights discourse effectively challenging his targeted refugee interpretative repertoire; however, in Pol's entire account the rights discourse is insignificant.

Below I provide three further extracts from some of the other respondents' accounts that demonstrate how the targeted refugee repertoire was mobilized. For reasons of space, I do not analyse these extracts:

Example 7: Mo (male) – Lines 1970-1973

[1970] I regret the day I
[1971] came to this country I mean I should have sought asylum somewhere else I mean in another
[1972] country rather than in this xenophobic place. (.) People are very lethal and hostile here. They
[1973] enjoy killing foreigners and I don't understand why they do so you know.

Example 8: Abel (male) – Lines 1292 - 1299

Abel:

[1292] But(.) there are times of course when I wouldn't like to be called a refugee or to be
[1293] identified as a refugee when let's say xenophobic attacks re-emerge again; in such occasions
[1294] I definitely would by all means try to pass as a South African or hide myself let alone let the
[1295] local South Africans know that I am a refugee; I think it would be wise to hide oneself in
[1296] such circumstances and not be foolish enough to let people know that you are a refugee and
[1297] become a victim of attacks even you(.) may be killed just for being a refugee you know. So
[1298] yeah I would never ever let other people recognize me as a refugee or a foreign national in
[1299] such a climate.

Example 9: Letay (female) – 1111-1117

Letay:

[1111] In my encounters with local South Africans they would then talk to me in Africans
[1112] thinking that I am colored but as soon as they realize that I couldn't speak Africans they
[1112] would ask me if I am a Somali or a Pakistani and I would tell them I am an Eritrean then
[1113] sometimes (.) they can take advantage of this and in fact try to rob me on some unfortunate
[1114] occasions you know; it is really bad I am telling you. So my advice to other refugees is even
[1115] to say that never disclose who you are to any stranger in this country and make sure you
[1116] know the type of person and the motive of the person you are talking to because you may
[1117] end up falling into a trap by being (.) too honest with people that you even don't know you know.

4.1.4 *I am secure: they can't deport me repertoire*

This interpretative repertoire was spotted across most of the interviewees' accounts. The interviewees mobilized this discourse to position themselves as secure refugees in terms of their legality in South Africa and by doing so they dispel the fear of a possible arrest and eventual deportation by the South African state. The respondents special mobilized this interpretative resource by comparing themselves to other illegal immigrants and holders of asylum permit and positioning themselves as more safer than illegal immigrants and asylum seekers in South Africa due to their refugee status. By mobilizing the discursive strategy of *contrasting versions* by comparing refugees and their counterparts, such as asylum seekers and other illegal immigrants, the interviewees constructed themselves as a privileged group.

In the following extract, Lemlem produces the 'secure refugee' interpretative repertoire by employing *contrasting discursive devices* comparing her advantageous refugee status with that of asylum seekers whom Lemlem positions as a group in a precarious position in their legal status in South Africa.

Extract 19: Lemlem (female) – Lines 540-546

Interviewer: So, in comparison, how did you feel about your status as a refugee?

Lemlem:

[540] that day I realized how lucky I was because at least I am not on asylum paper you
[541] know. It isn't certain when you will be asked to leave the country or to be deported at any
[542] time if you have an asylum document as (.) opposed to a refugee status document you know.
[543] Therefore for me it is guarantee to have this refugee status document. I mean I can now be
[544] sure that I have at least. I mean I am at least privileged to (.) be a refugee because I can live
[545] freely; I can sleep peacefully and wake up peacefully without having an ounce of fear of being
sent [546] back home you know.

In this abstract constructs her refugee identity as an identity that affords her the security of living in South Africa as a legal resident without fear of possible arrest and deportation, which, according to her construction, is the lot of most asylum seekers which do not have guarantee in the country. Lemlem employs the conditional expression 'if', claiming in lines [542-543] that 'you will be asked to leave the country or to be deported at any [542] time if you have an asylum document'. In this argument Lemlem mobilizes *categorization discursive device* implicitly creating a dichotomy between 'them' (the asylum seekers) and 'us' (the refugees). Through employing this dichotomy Lemlem glorifies her group (refugees) as privileged while,

in contrast, she constructs the other group (asylum seekers) as a group that is legally insecure and prone to possible eventual deportation. By employing both such discursive devices such as *contrasting versions* and categorization Lemlem is constructing her refugee identity as superior to other lesser legal documents such as asylum seekers. Lemlem specifically employs the phrase in line [543] ‘Therefore for me it is guarantee to have this refugee status document’ to further reinforce her discourse of ‘the secure refugee’ by emphasizing her account using stronger terms such as ‘guarantee’. In lines [545-546] Lemlem substantiates her interpretative repertoire mobilizing the *extreme case formulation*, ‘an ounce of fear’, to emphasize her construction of a secure and fearless refugee as a result of her refugee status which shields her from deportation: ‘I can sleep peacefully and wake up peacefully without having an ounce of fear of being sent [546] back home.’ Furthermore, by using the expressions ‘I can sleep peacefully and wake up peacefully’ in line [545] Lemlem is implicitly suggesting that people with asylum seekers papers do not enjoy the amount of peace and confidence Lemlem experiences due to her refugee identity.

Lemlem juxtaposes this interpretative repertoire with her equally dominant ‘we have rights’ discourse throughout her account. The two interpretative repertoires complementarily support each other to construct a larger discourse that produces the refugee identity as a positive experience.

In the following extract the ‘secure refugee’ discourse is further reinforced in Abel’s account. In Abel’s account, he imagines a hypothetical unfortunate future where the government of South Africa would decide to deport all non-refugees which would place Abel in an advantageous position due to his refugee identity.

Extract 20: Abel (male) – Lines 1281 – 1289

Interviewer: tell me please how do you feel or react whenever the label ‘refugee’ is ascribed to you?

Abel:

[1281] So you have to accept it you know, I mean you don't have to be ashamed of it or try
[1282] to deny it as if you weren't that you know. And there are times when your refugee identity
[1283] become very important you (.) know, such as let's say south African government decides to
[1284] arrest all the illegal immigrants in this country, I suppose there are thousands of illegal
[1285] immigrants in this country and I am sure I would count myself to be a refugee in such a
[1286] situation because I would be(.) on the safe side and I would even be more vocal about my
[1287] refugee identity in order to let others know that I am in this country legally and that I wasn't
[1288] an illegal immigrant; and of course as a refugee the government would spare me from
[1289] arresting and deporting me you know.

In this fragment, Abel constructs his refugee identity as a source of security and assurance in case deportations occur in the unknown future. In this account, Abel mobilizes quite a number of discursive strategies to buttress his argument of a 'secure refugee'. Abel begins his construction of a 'secure refugee' by stating that the refugee identity should be received with pleasure due to the privileges and security it affords to refugees in line [1281- 1282]. By using a conditional expression 'let's say' and following it with the possible decision of the South African government to arrest all illegal immigrants, Abel is imagining an exaggerated bleak future where the government conducts a mass arrest of illegal immigrants for eventual deportation and positioning himself as a privileged and secure member of the refugee cohort using 'refugee' as a *membership category* discursive device in line [1285]. As was the case with Lemlem, Abel also employs a *contrasting discursive device* – 'illegal' immigrants' vs. 'refugees', thereby positioning all illegal immigrants in South Africa as insecure while positioning himself as a secure refugee. In lines [1288-1289] Abel states the security his refugee identity affords him in the eyes of government authorities by describing that his refugee identity is well-respected and recognized in the eyes of government officials in the following lines: 'as a refugee the government would spare me from [1289] arresting and deporting me you know.' The extract generally demonstrates that Abel's construction of his refugee identity as a privileged identity in terms of possibilities of mass arrests and deportations is predicated upon a completely, at best imaginary, and at worst pessimistic probabilities.

Abel's 'secured refugee' however was mobilized alongside his 'rights discourse. That is ubiquitous across his account. The two interpretative repertoires worked in tandem to build a discourse that constructs the refugee identity that provides rights and privileges to refugees in South Africa. In the following lines [1327-1328], Abel invokes his 'rights discourse' to reinforce his 'secure refugee' discourse: '[1327] here

in South Africa our rights are protected and [13281] (.) have all the freedom I need to live’

In the following extract Ba engages in a discourse of the ‘secure refugee’ similar to that of Lemlem and Abel. Likewise, Ba constructs his discourse in terms of what Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) calls contrasting versions, by creating two mutually exclusive and contrasting groups such as ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘refugees’

Extract 21: Ba (male) – Lines 2189 – 2193

Interviewer: I see. Tell me Ba, what does it mean to be a refugee to you?

[2189] if you are living on asylum then your life will always be uncertain because

[2190] living on asylum document is no guarantee (.) and you may, at any day timed, be deported to [2191] where you came from I mean you may any deported at time so having a valid refugee

[2192] document offers me a guarantee to live in this country legally and without any fear of being

[2193] deported so yeah it can be a guarantee to be a (.) refugee when it comes to security.

Ba, in this extract, constructs his refugee identity as a source of protection against possible future deportation in case such action takes place. Ba reinforces his position of a secure and protected refugee deploying a *contrasting versions device*, ‘holders of an asylum document’, in line [2190] and those who are in possession of ‘a valid refugee document’ in line [2192]. Ba constructs the group who lives in South Africa on an asylum permit as having fewer guarantees than those who live in the same country on ‘a valid refugee document’. Ba, therefore, positions those who have asylum permits as in danger of possible deportation and those who have refugee status documents as in a secure position and in no fear of possible deportation scenarios. In line [2189], Ba reinforces his construction of people with asylum permits as living in precarious circumstances using an *extreme case formulation* discursive device ‘always be uncertain’. Ba’s assessment of those who hold asylum permits, however, is faulty, especially in the following utterance: ‘living on asylum document is no guarantee (.) and you may, at any day timed, be deported to [2191] where you came from’. Ba is playing an expert who has knowledge of who gets deported and who gets spared, however his evaluation of what an asylum permit means is sloppy: the fact is that those who are at risk of deportation are not asylum seekers but illegal immigrants, but Ba seems to mistake an asylum seeker for an illegal immigrant. This misevaluation is also characteristic of Lemlem’s and Abel’s discourse of the ‘secure refugee’.

Ba's discourse of the 'secure refugee' aligns with another reinforcing discourse in the same account of the 'accept your refugee identity' discourse. He reinforces the 'secure refugee' with the 'accept who you are' refugee in the following utterance in lines [2270-2271]: [2270] 'therefore we [2271] should be proud of who we are you know because as refugees we are free in this place'. In this short extract, Ba strengthens his 'secure refugee' repertoire with the interpretative repertoires that call on refugees to accept who they are as refugees, because there are advantages that come with being a refugee.

Below I provide three further extracts from some of the other respondents' accounts that demonstrate how the 'secure refugee repertoire' was mobilized. For reasons of space, I do not analyse these extracts:

Example 10: Ata (male) – Lines 1509-1514

Ata:

[1509] to me to be a refugee is a positive experience in general because I have peace in this
[1510] country and I thank God every single day because he has brought me to a safe and good
[1511] country. I am thankful to God for every good thing he has done for me ever since I left my
[1512] country. I have (.) what I need in this country you know. The first thing I needed in this
[1513] country was a refugee document because it lets you to live without fear of possible forced
[1514] return to your country of origin.

Example 11: Elsa (female) – Lines 276- 277

[276] You know. I mean on the other hand having a refugee document also can save (.) you from
being
[277] arrested as an illegal immigrant you know therefore it saves you from such dangers.

Example 12: Letay (female) – Lines 932-934

[932] My friends who live in other places tell me how they wish to come to South Africa. They say that
because I always
[933] tell them how protected we refugees are here and the plenty of rights we have in this country as
[934] refugees and here, unlike other countries they don't just (.) deport you j because refugees have
rights here.

According to the above examples, respondents mobilize the *secure refugee* interpretative repertoire to give meaning to their refugee identity. In doing so, the respondents employed different discursive strategies to reinforce their claim.

4.1.5 *We are misunderstood as criminals repertoire*

In this interpretative repertoire the actors constructed their refugee identity in terms of a negatively stereotyped identity. The interviewees draw upon the tropes of the *criminalized refugee* and the *negatively stereotyped refugee* when they talked about the meanings they give to their refugee identity. The respondents mobilized various discursive strategies and devices to reinforce their argument. The salient discursive strategy they used in order to make their description of the criminalized refugee was the use of the *categorization discursive device*, talking in terms of the refugee social group as a category perceived by local South Africans as a suspicious group with regards to criminal activities. In the following extract Letay constructs his refugee identity as a criminalized category in the following utterances:

Extract 22: Letay (male) – Lines 2189- 2193

Interviewer: So you are both comfortable and uncomfortable at the same time with the refugee label yeah?

Letay:

[990] Well it is something like that, I mean (.) depending on the situation I tend to, I tend to
[991] react to the label you know. If somebody is talking about refugees in general in a negative
[992] way I mean I would definitely get uncomfortable you know because since I am a refugee
[993] myself it makes me uncomfortable and uneasy. Because every negative comments spoken of
[994] refugees such as crimes also affect me because people eventually will perceive me in that
[995] way you know. Because all refugees are not (.) the same and we have a lot of differences and
[996] people should see us as individuals I mean as unique individuals rather than as people who
[997] share the same behaviour or something, I don't know this is just my opinion, I mean this is just
[998] how I see it. This (.) is how I look at it.

In this fragment, Letay builds a discourse of 'a criminalized refugee' by mobilizing particular discursive devices to substantiate her argument as reasonable and believable. She begins her discourse by arguing that her refugee identity is associated with negative qualities in general and suspicious criminal activities specifically and she characterizes such criminalizing public discourses as unreasonable and too generalizing in lines [995-998] and especially in lines [995-997]: '[995] Because all refugees are not (.) the same and we have a lot of differences and [996] people should see us as individuals I mean as unique individuals rather than as people who [997] share the same behaviour or something'. In these utterances Letay exonerates herself from the criminal refugee discourse, by identifying herself as a person who is not involved in any criminal activities and

arguing that including her as part and parcel of those other refugees who are involved in criminal activities is outrageous. She specifically mobilizes an *extreme case formulation* discursive device ‘we have a lot of differences’ to denote that ‘all refugees are not the same’ in lines [995]. Note how Letay internalizes the negative attributes such as criminality attached to refugees in South Africa in the following utterances in lines [993-995]: ‘Because every negative comments spoken of [994] refugees such as crimes also affect me because people eventually will perceive me in that [995] way you know.’ Here Letay is expressing concern as a result of her positioning by people in South Africa as one possibly involved in crimes as a result of her refugee identity.

In the last lines [997-998], Letay mobilizes a *disclaimer discursive device* to let the interviewer know that her assessment of the criminalized refugee is just her subjective interpretation. She further states that she was doing the analysis in her personal capacity and not necessarily acting as a spokesperson of all refugees in South Africa. She utters her disclaimer in the following words: ‘I don’t know this is just my opinion, I mean this is just [998] how I see it. This (.) is how I look at it.’

Letay’s ‘criminalized refugee’ discourse is, however, difficult to articulate with another dominant antagonistic discourse, ‘accept who you are’. Letay, therefore, finds herself in what Billig et al (1988) refers to as a *dilemmatic scenario* as a result of her mobilization of two rival discourses in her evaluation of her refugee identity in her account. (Please refer to Extract 4 to see Letay’s ‘accept who you are’ interpretative repertoire).

In the following extract Ata constructs his refugee identity as a stereotyped identity by mobilizing a ‘criminalized refugee’ interpretative repertoire. Ata makes use of a variety of discursive mechanisms, such as examples from experience, to reinforce his discourse as factual and believable. Ata further narrates that he prefers to remain invisible to avoid being detected as a refugee in order to avoid being stereotyped as a criminal by other non-refugee people.

Extract 23: Ata (male) – Lines 1632-1637

Interviewer: (main question) Umm, how do you feel or react whenever the label ‘refugee’ is ascribed to you?

Ata:

[1632] Because they will judge you, you know. Especially when they talk
[1633] about refugees I try to hide my identity because I hear at some cafes sometimes people I
[1634] mean I overhear people talking about refugees(.) negatively I mean they say, “They are the
[1635] cause of all the crimes; the government should do something about these people”. When
[1636] they say such things I really feel like hiding you know because if they realize that there is a
[1637] refugee somewhere sitting next to them then I won’t feel comfortable you know.

In this extract Ata gives meaning to his refugee identity by describing it as an object of negative stereotyping. Ata present his argument of a ‘criminalized refugee’ discourse by, implicitly, presenting two categories of people using a *categorization discursive device* ‘South Africans’ vs. ‘refugees’. In Ata’s discourse, South Africans are constructed as people who do the stereotyping and criminalizing, while refugees living in South Africa are positioned as the objects of such a negative stereotype in lines [1631-1635]. In lines [1632-1635], Ata employs the discursive device of *active voicing* (Wooffitt, 1992) ‘they say, ‘they are the [1635] cause of all the crimes; the government should do something about these people.’ Through active voicing, Ata is reporting someone else’s speech by quoting actual speech which he remembers in his past as uttered by South Africans in public places. The reason Ata is using this device, is in order to make his account look credible and authentic and by doing so establish his discourse of the ‘criminalized refugee’ as based on real facts than a figment of his imagination. Furthermore, Ata presents his refugee identity as an identity that should be made invisible in the face of such criminalization in order to evade stereotyping by local South Africans in times of interaction. The tactic of invisibility is particularly evident in Ata’s phrase in lines [1632-1632]: ‘[1632] especially when they talk [1633] about refugees, I try to hide my identity.’ Ata, however, is vague when it comes to what strategies he employs to render his refugee identity invisible and shielded from being recognized by local South Africans.

Ata’s discourse of the ‘criminalized refugee’ complements his other dominant discourse of the ‘the targeted refugee’ that is rampant in his account. The two complementary interpretative repertoires in Ata’s account perform the work of projecting images of a stereotyped refugee identity. (Please refer to Extract 16 to see Ata’s ‘they target you’ interpretative repertoire).

In the next extract, Buzu constructs his refugee identity as an identity subject to criminalizing stereotypes. Buzu presents his account using concrete real world examples in order to reinforce his discourse as credible and factual. As was observed in Ata's accounts, Buzu is engaged in a similar form of discourse of the 'criminalized refugee' using discursive devices of examples from experience and hypothetical conditions.

Extract 24: Buzu (male) – Lines 681-690

Interviewer: (main question) I see, and please tell me how do you feel or react whenever the label 'refugee' is ascribed to you?

Buzu:

[681] But we are I mean but two of us are called refugees but one of us is involved in crime
[682] while another (.) is not. So just because you were caught for example in one criminal incident
[683] and the police established your refugee identity doesn't mean that all of us refugees are
[684] involved in crime. Even they cannot generalize that most of us in criminal activities refugees
[685] are involved in the same thing you know. So (.) if you I mean if someone else labels me a
[686] refugee I have to ask first in what way I am labelled a refugee? Or what connotation is hidden
[687] in calling me a refugee. I mean what that person is assuming by calling me a refugee. I mean
[688] this thing is very tricky sometimes, yes, I mean if you are calling me a refugee and talking
[689] about me in a way that makes me look suspicious say for instance of some crime simply
[690] because I am a refugee or a (.) foreigner, then this is foolish and discriminatory you know.

Here Buzu constructs his refugee identity as an object of negative criminalizing public stereotypes. In lines [681-684], Buzu is presenting a hypothetical scenario in which two refugees are involved in two different ways of living: one is involved in criminal activities while the other is earning their living through legal means but after the arrest of the one refugee with a history of crime a generalization is made about 'all' refugees. Buzu here mobilizes an *extreme case formulation* 'all of us refugees' to argue that as a result of an involvement of a few refugees in criminal activities, all refugees' identity, i.e. everyone with a refugee identity is characterized as a criminal. Buzu assesses such a sweeping generalization as an unreasonable formulation. Furthermore, Buzu is mobilizing a what Edwards (1991) refers to as a *categorization discursive device* in line [684] 'us' vs. 'they' to position him and all other refugees as objects of the act of criminalization, while local South Africans are portrayed as authors of the criminalizing act. Buzu, here, is constructing himself both as a member and an active spokesperson of all refugees in South Africa by talking on their behalf.

Buzu establishes a direct relationship between the label ‘refugee’ and a criminalizing tendency by non-refugees in South Africa in the lines [688-690] ‘I mean if you are calling me a refugee and talking [689] about me in a way that makes me look suspicious say for instance of some crime simply [690] because I am a refugee or a (.) foreigner, then this is foolish and discriminatory you know.’ In this statement, Buzu is implicitly making a case that whenever people identify a person as a refugee they have the tendency to associate that particular person with some criminal tendencies. In this construction, Buzu is positioning a person, who happens to be a refugee, as a victim of arbitrary stereotyping such as criminalizing the person without even having to judge the refugee in terms of their individuality and peculiar character. Furthermore, Buzu assesses such generalization as ‘foolish’ and ‘discriminatory’. By using such descriptions, Buzu is positioning himself as a reasonable and enlightened person at the same as an adjudicator who judges such generalizations as normatively wrong.

Buzu’s discourse is relatively similar to Letay’s and Ata’s discourses in his account of a ‘criminalized refugee’. Furthermore, Buzu’s discourse of the ‘criminalized refugee’ reinforces the dominant ‘targeted refugee’ interpretative repertoire in his account. These interpretative repertoires jointly perform the function of characterizing a refugee identity as an object of victimhood and negative stereotyping. (Please refer to Extract 10 to see Buzu’s ‘they target you’ interpretative repertoire).

Below I provide three further extracts from some of the other respondents’ accounts that demonstrate how this ‘criminalized repertoire’ was mobilized. For reasons of space, I do not analyse these extracts:

Example 13: Abel (male) – Lines 1304-1310

[1304] Sometimes also when people
[1305] identify me as a refugee I may feel a little (.) uncomfortable because at times some people
[1306] wrongly assume that being a refugee means a person who earns their living through
[1307] criminal (.) means and this may affect how people see me as a person you know; I mean they
[1308] may quickly judge me as a person inclined to criminal activities such as dealing in drugs or
[1309] fraud or anything else which a refugee in this country is allegedly stereotyped to be
[1310] involved in to earn their income you know.

Example 14: Lemlem (female) – Lines 473-476

[472] for example I always hear that as a result of uncontrolled
[473] and unmonitored inflow of refugees in this (.) country crime levels have increased. I mean I
[474] sometimes hear also people saying that the crime levels in this country are increasing because
[475] the government isn't doing anything to curb immigration. So I think such generalizations
[476] make you uncomfortable you know. So I think to be (.) a refugee can sometimes be a stressful
experience.

Example 15 Pol (male) – Lines 2880-2884

[2880] yeah some people deliberately ascribe this refugee label to you because they want to
[2881] associate you with some bad things such as crime (.) characterizing all refugees you know. I
mean I don't
[2882] understand why some people think we refugees are this or that you know. I mean they don't
[2883] want to see anything good in us. It really irritating sometimes when people ascribe all kinds
[2884] of bad things to refugees I mean to all refugees. (.)

4.2 The less dominant repertoires:

The two less dominant interpretative repertoires were minimally mobilized by the interviewees and they were rarely reflected across the 10 interviewee accounts. For that reason, the researcher has decided to allot a very limited space in describing them.

4.2.1 *Our refugee identity is transient repertoire*

The transient repertoire constructs refugee identity as temporary and looks forward to transformations into other identities such as obtaining citizenship.

Extract 25: Letay (female) – Lines 1083-1086

[1083] Letay: So just because I am a refugee now doesn't mean that I will end up being a refugee
[1084] forevermore you know, I know there are limits to being a refugee because according to
[1085] what I have read and what a Home Affairs official told me a refugee becomes a permanent
[1086] resident or a citizen at the end of the five years you know.

In the above extract, Letay constructs her refugee identity as an ephemeral identity subject to being superseded by more powerful identities such as 'citizenships'. Letay uses in line [1084] the *extreme case formulation* clause 'forevermore' to emphasize the fact that a refugee is not expected to remain a refugee indefinitely. Letay furthermore buttresses her conviction by marshalling written materials and authority figures in line [1085]. This construction, implicitly, constructs the refugee identity as

undesirable. This interpretative repertoire, however, is very short lived for it is immediately dwarfed by inundations of the ‘accept who you are’ interpretative repertoire, which is ubiquitous in Letay’s discourse.

4.2.2 I am lost; I don’t have a country any more repertoire

This repertoire is characterized by nostalgia and glorifies the past and the country of origin as an ideal scenario. Such an interpretative repertoire constructs the refugee identity as a source of the feeling of loss and disorientation. The interviewee is overwhelmed with feelings of regret for leaving their country of origin, and has fond memories of the past in their country of origin:

Extract 26: Elsa (female) – Lines 28-31

[28] But sometimes I feel empty I mean being away from my homeland. Being a refugee can be a
[29] very torturing experience. (.)I mean you always feel you don’t have a home. This is just a
temporary
[30] home. I miss home a lot and think to myself “If it wasn’t for my persecution back home I
[31] wouldn’t have decided to leave my homeland” you know

In this extract Elsa constructs her refugee identity as a source of occasional grief in line (28). Elsa’s account is flooded with her search for a permanent home and she resents her present condition living as a refugee. Elsa employs a negative *extreme case formulation* in line (29) ‘a very torturing experience’ to emphasize the fact that living as a refugee isn’t a happy experience. She again uses an *extreme case formulation* ‘I miss home a lot’ in line (30) to strengthen her subject position as someone who is, at present, devoid of a permanent home. However, Elsa’s mobilization of ‘a refugee without permanent home’ interpretative repertoire is mentioned scarcely. Elsa’s dominant account is the ‘rights’ repertoire.

The analysis of the dominant and the less dominant interpretative repertoires demonstrated that in most of the accounts of the research participants there were more than one interpretative repertoire identified but the difference rested on the relative dominance or salience of one interpretative repertoire over another. Such results corroborate Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) theoretical assertion that people’s accounts are characterized by multiplicity and dilemma. Respondents mobilized a number of discursive strategies to reinforce, justify and authenticate their versions.

Respondents give meaning to their refugee identity by mobilizing different interpretative repertoires, to position themselves in a variety of ways. In the discourses constructed, it was noticed that gender differences didn't have substantial influence on the types of interpretative repertoires mobilized. However, the socio-economic standing of all the respondents (self-employed) did have an effect on the nature of discourses they constructed. For instance, there was no discourse of 'a needy refugee' or any other discourse drawing on the 'economic need' repertoire possibly due to the financial independence of all the interviewees.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The research study set out to investigate how ten Eritrean refugees living in Pretoria, South Africa, give meaning to their refugee identities. In order to explore the meanings produced during interview episodes, the researcher posed seven semi-structured interview questions that touched upon aspects of refugee meaning-making and experience in South Africa. The individual interview data collection instrument was chosen in order to explore the production of meaning in conversational interaction. The study's interest was identifying the different ways in which participants described their refugee identities and experiences and this was accomplished by identifying varied interpretative repertoires mobilized.

The research study was embedded within a paradigm of social-constructionist assumptions, which emphasized the socially constructed nature of the social world in general and identity in particular. The discursive approach was employed to explore variability of accounts in conversational situations and the kind of meaning-making this produces. The parties in the conversation were Eritrean refugee research participants and the researcher, who is also an Eritrean refugee. The nature of the conversation was fairly casual and took place in settings with which the study participants were familiar and comfortable. Analysis of the interview data was guided by the discursive data analysis principle, which focuses on the identification of varied interpretative repertoires and how participants justify their choice of such repertoires through numerous discursive devices.

The study identified seven interpretative repertoires that stood out across the interview data. Five of the interpretative repertoires were dominant across the majority of the interview transcripts while two were mobilized minimally. The five dominant interpretative repertoires were: 'we have rights' repertoire; 'accept who you are' repertoire; 'they target you' repertoire; 'I am secure: they can't deport me' repertoire and 'we are misunderstood as criminals' repertoire. The two less dominant were: 'our refugee identity is transient' repertoire and 'I am lost: I don't have a country any more' repertoire.

According to the findings, the ten Eritrean refugees talked about their refugee identity in a variety of ways by mobilizing different interpretative devices in order to reinforce their versions as believable and justified. The respondents, however, were not consistent in their versions. Instead, the majority of them found themselves in dilemmatic position as a result of their contradictory discourses (Potter and Whetherell 1987: 78)

The findings of this research study have challenged the findings of previous empirical studies on Eritrean refugees such as those conducted by Kibreab (2000); Noronha (2013); Sorenson's (1990); Smock (1982) and Lijnders (2012). Such previous studies employed methodologies that focused on consistent, coherent and singular accounts of respondents which obscured constitutive contradictions and inconsistencies in research participant accounts. My research study, in contradistinction to such previous studies, resulted in the identification of variable and at times contradictory versions of respondent accounts. Contradictions have been identified in this study both within and across participant accounts. This study found that participants gave meaning to their refugee identity not in terms of consistent accounts but at times challenged their own versions by producing accounts that antagonized their previous versions. Participants moved between different ways of talking about their refugee identities; they also employed a variety of linguistic devices to make their accounts look reliable. This study, however, corroborates and reflects a theoretical position held by Phelps and Nadim (2010), which postulates that refugees can be observed exhibiting ambivalent versions when talking about their refugee experiences.

All interviewees positioned themselves and other groups and institutions in a variety of ways when giving meaning to their refugee identities. For example, participants, across the interviews, identified themselves as free, criminalized, lost, targeted and secure. All the subject positions taken up by the respondents can be seen as self-identifications that emerged following particular interpretative repertoires mobilized when characterizing their refugee identities. The participants, furthermore, presented varied and at times contradictory self-identifications and were not consistent as in positioning themselves in a uniform manner.

The intuitional label 'refugee' was seen both challenged and accepted and at times a site of dilemmatic positions. To the research participants to be a refugee was interpreted in varied ways, hence their discourses did not reflect the contents of the state-accorded refugee identity.

I argue that, broadly speaking, the respondents' social, economic, and political location could have influenced the meanings given to their refugee identities. Furthermore, the immediate context within which the conversation occurred could also have shaped the meanings produced. Therefore, the aspect of context is an important dimension in relation to which the research findings should be understood.

This research study, however, relied on a small sample size of ten Eritrean refugees, a limited geographical space and a non-generalizable methodological frame work, hence the findings could not reflect the discourses mobilised by Eritrean refugees residing in different parts of South Africa. The interest of the research was to produce context-specific findings and not a generalizable one.

Finally, it is to be noted that the researcher doesn't claim monopoly over the interpretations of the data. This is because due to the qualitative nature of the data, differing interpretations of the interview data might arise which would either corroborate or even challenge the interpretations of the raw data in this study. Furthermore, the researcher has been transparent enough in placing the unedited raw data alongside the analyses that followed in order for readers to evaluate the reliability of the interpretations.

Lastly, further research is recommended, using a discursive approach, in other settings with different social, economic and political contexts in order to see what kinds of interpretative repertoires get produced in such settings.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Transcription notation (Jefferson Transcript Notation)

(.) A brief pause

Appendix 2: Main unstructured interviews questions (follow up questions not included)

1. How is it like to live in South Africa generally?
2. Tell me please, what does it mean to be a refugee to you?
3. How do you feel or react whenever the label 'refugee' is ascribed to you?
4. You have once lived in your own country but now you are here as a refugee in South Africa how do you feel about the difference?
5. Tell me please; when you interact with local South Africans to what extent do you self-identify yourself as a refugee?
6. Could you please tell me if you have had any negative or positive experiences due to your refugee identity?
7. To what extent can you describe yourself as a refugee?